

Poetry in virtual motion at cyberarts fest

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The Boston Cyberarts Festival has dubbed the Boston Architectural Center "CyberartCentral," headquarters of the computer art extravaganza that runs through this weekend. There's a handy information table, with computers and actual (as opposed to virtual) people available to answer questions. It's also the site of a variety of digital art installations, grouped under the title "Augmented Realities."

The standout of the group, not surprisingly, is the most interactive piece. "Text Rain" by Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv, features a large screen with stray letters floating from top to bottom, an alphabet blown to smithereens. Stand in front of the screen, and a camera catches your image and projects it before you, a grainy, black-and-white picture of yourself standing in the rain of text

The letters come to rest like snow on your shoulders, and a poem forms. "These are synonymous for your limbs," reads a verse snaking over outstretched arms. You can catch and hold letters until they dissolve, even bounce them in your hands. It's a delightful conflation of image and text, and the closest this viewer has come to actually being a poem. The other installations in "Augmented Realities" are, unfortunately, more virtual than "Text Rain." Sally Levine and Warren Wake's "V-Art" is a virtual tour of a digital fairground; I found it frustrat-

ing to navigate and marked by a visual razzmatazz that got in the way of smooth travel. It's hooked up to Dana Moser's "Internet Entity," a barometer of the world that keeps tabs on meteorological and census data. Nearby, view a projection of J. Michael James's virtual sculptures, creatures such as condors and cobras that multiply geometrically, projected on a wall. These works share the frustrating intangibility of virtual art: There's nothing to touch, no texture, nothing to walk around or measure against the size of your own body - unlike "Text Rain," where your body is part of the art. They're also visually jazzy (especially in the case of "V-Art" and James's work) without having any strong conceptual underpinning. Probably because the technology is still so new, the art is more likely to say "Look what fabulous things I can do on my computer" than to say anything substantive.

Fractured assemblages

Two other exhibitions have stronger visual art foundations. Mark Snyder's "Honey Apparatus" at the Little White Box shows photographic assemblages made with a digital camera and an inkjet printer. Snyder mounts the camera to a device that allows him to shoot a sequence of 56 contiguous photos, which he then prints and mounts on a grid. The resulting fractured assemblages abstract and contort the presumed "reality" of the original scene. So "Robe," a picture of a green velour robe stretched on a black linoleum

Augmented Realities

At: Boston Architectural Center, 320 Newbury St., through Sunday

Mark Snyder: Honey Apparatus

At: The Little White Box, 288-300A St., through Sunday

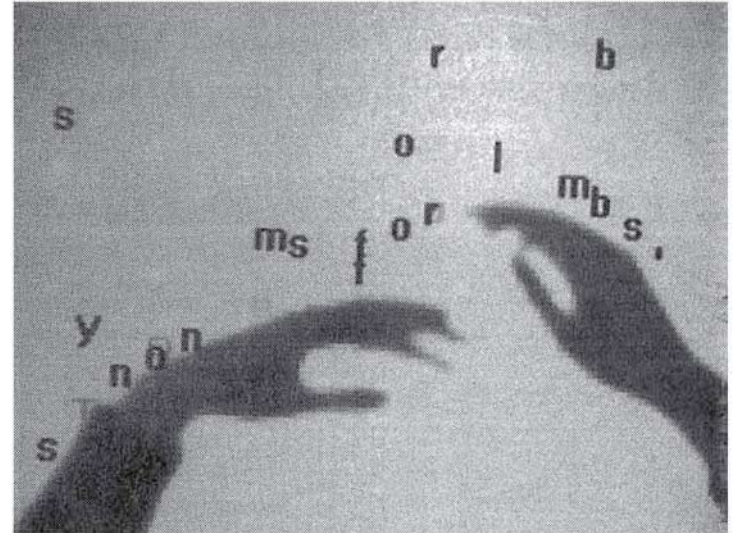
Internal Drive

At: Fort Point Arts Community Gallery, 300 Summer St., through Sunday

floor, ripples outward, its folds and contours repeating and expanding rhythmically until the garment almost comes to life. "Somnophilia" has a nude woman curled in a fetal position on a tiled floor. The grid here is on a diagonal, framing the angle of her body. The shapes not only repeat but appear to shrink into themselves: The curve of her back cradles a smaller echo of itself. This print has lovely, almost painterly skin tones, more delicate than you'd find in a traditional photograph. "Somnophilia" may suggest an ardor for sleep, but the image is more one of vulnerability than one of passion.

Tomorrow's art today

"Internal Drive," an exhibition of technologically influenced art at the Fort Point Arts Community Gallery, occasionally considers "cyberart" with a grain of salt. For instance, Anne Lilly used a calculator she bought in 1984 to make her windmill-like steel sculpture, "Differential with Petals." And Danny O's technology of choice is picking ink off a newspaper page



Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv's "Text Rain"

with Scotch tape. There are some lovely, higher-tech works here as well. Linda Leslie Brown's "Gene Pool" series features digital prints of faces layered over one another, topped off by shiny puddles of resin. Anne Beresford's Iris print "After the Bulrushes" transfers a drawing with watercolor into its negative, sketching in stark white lines against brick red the pivotal, pastoral moment of the baby Moses' discovery among the reeds. Bebe Beard's computer video poetics make succinct, powerful combinations of spoken word, sound, and image; the computer seems the perfect venue for her. Todd Gieg makes inkjet prints of his Polaroids for practicality's sake: He can make the images larger without losing their haunting, lush textures. His "Digits"

considers the eloquence of hands and feet, with fingers and ankles as graceful as dance. Exhibits like these demonstrate how versatile and common a tool the computer is in artmaking. The more integrated it becomes in the culture, the more it will shape how we think and what we make. Chances are, the Boston Cyberarts Festival will one day find itself redundant, because digital art will be everywhere and no longer need to be feted.