

GUEST

ARTICLES WRITTEN BY GUEST BLOGGERS, AUTHORS, REPORTERS & DILETTANTES.

NOV 3, 2011

The Beauty of Gray: Scapes exhibit showcases video art that's not all black and white

The Beauty of Gray: Scapes exhibit showcases video art that's not all black and white
by Geoff Graser

If you don't "get it" right away, Debora and Jason Bernagozzi understand. When the couple tells people they do video art, most people say, "Oh, you do commercials." Nope. "Oh, you do those weird foreign movies." Not exactly. The Bernagozzis' art form is more like abstract art—abstract art that moves and talks and sometimes chirps.

The Bernagozzis' work is part of RoCo's "Scapes" exhibit on display until Sunday, November 13. On my first try, I didn't exactly "get it." And that's all right, Jason says, that's partly his point. He thinks Americans are spoon fed so many messages through the media and popular art that people believe what others want them to believe rather than making up their own minds. This echoes some of the work of Nam June Paik, considered the father of video art for his innovations in the 1960s. Paik would take footage of the Beatles and manipulate the waves so the Fab Four would disintegrate. He did this with politicians and other TV celebrities, hoping to convince viewers that the people on TV weren't indestructible gods.

So you're not alone if you stare in wonderment as a giant projection of Jason's lips (bigger than Mick Jagger's entire body) appears on the wall and then transforms into a colorful roaming grid that morphs into shapes resembling a double helix then a seismograph then rolling meadows and then waterfalls. Jason's piece "Form: Data: Form" reflects that life is not a linear "I get it" experience. Just when you think you've got everything under control, your company is bought out and you have two weeks to find another job, or your fiancé leaves you for your best friend, or the Buffalo Bills' fast start was an early-season tease. Life is unpredictable, confusing, and subjective. And the Bernagozzis' art happily reminds us of this.

Bleu Cease, RoCo's executive director, discovered Jason's video art online while looking for work that would fit a theme connecting the landscape with the human body. He saw Jason's "Data Speak" project first. This project displays four talking heads on monitors set on four platforms facing each other as if they were in conversation. The faces are approximately life-sized and a viewer naturally stands in the middle to get a good look, but it's hard to see all four faces at once. If feeling like you're chasing your tail is not discomfiting enough, wait until one of these friendly-enough faces tries to talk. Thanks to a

FOLLOWERS

[Join this site](#)
with Google Friend Connect



There are no members yet.
[Be the first!](#)

Already a member? [Sign in](#)



BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ 2011 (1)

▼ November (1)

The Beauty of Gray: Scapes exhibit showcases video...

▶ 2010 (2)



ABOUT ME

GUEST

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)



technique Jason and a fellow video artist discovered called compression pixel displacement or “datamoshing,” when a person talks his or her face decomposes into easily the most disturbing video I’ve encountered since the Pamela and Tommy Lee home movie. The color in their faces dissolves into a splotchy electronic mess that captures the often imposing barriers of language and social interaction.

Take, for instance, the story of how the Bernagozzis met. Jason approached Debora at a Goth Night at an Ithaca club called The Haunt, where she liked to dance because it wasn’t a meat market. “I blew him off,” she said and laughed. But he did get her number. And soon, he found out that she took the photos for the guidebook to “Vampire: The Masquerade,” a role-playing game he vamped out to in high school. “Goth teen,” Jason said and shrugged a little sheepishly, “what are you going to do?” And over the next several months, their common interest in experimental art—Jason in music and Debora in video—proved the start of something a lot deeper.

Jason already enjoyed the technical aspects of sound production but he soon began spending time with Debora at the Experimental Television Center in the small Southern Tier town of Owego, New York. On the third floor of an historic building next to the Susquehanna River, this cozy haven provided artists with cutting-edge equipment to use during short-term residencies. “You worked, and cooked, and slept there,” Debora said wistfully about the center that has recently closed. Jason decided to get serious and started going to college for video, culminating last year in an MFA from Alfred University, a program Debora had graduated from eight years earlier.

At Alfred, one of Jason’s classmates was Jamie Hahn. Hahn’s video “My Horizon” (along with its companion stills) is the first exhibit you see when entering RoCo. It’s dreamy, black and white footage of a hillside appears to have been shot by the wind, gently blowing over blades of grass. However, Hahn captured this scene in the unsettling moments before an oncoming storm and slowed it down in the editing process.

A painter and photographer first, Hahn’s subject has always been the landscape, and her mesmerizing piece alludes to one of the ways her lifestyle, perspective, and art changed when she moved to Upstate New York. The Indiana native who once thought she might spend her entire life on the plains of the Midwest was so taken by the landscape during her first visit to the region that she moved to Alfred before receiving official acceptance to the program. Once here, she spent a lot of her free time driving and getting “lost” in the rural areas without a map, happy to soak in her surroundings by using natural landmarks to find her way back. “My Horizon” replicates a journey in which the internal landscape is just as important as the external landscape. “There is no sound purposely,” she said. “When you look at this I hope you become more aware of your own breathing, of your heartbeat.”

While Hahn moved to Washington for a teaching job after graduation, the Bernagozzis have moved to Rochester and are now firmly entrenched in a region where video art has flourished for several decades. Surprisingly, the form’s success in Upstate New York has nothing to do with Kodak, but instead the progressive programs at the University of Buffalo and Syracuse University as well as the Experimental Television Center in Owego.

Jason and Debora are well-versed in the history of their art form’s

predecessors and talk excitedly about how they create their work. Debora's piece "Stream" employs nine monitors in a semi-circle showing continuous loops of video footage she took of branches in a stream. "At first, it was just me walking in the stream, trying not to drop the camera." Then she used an instrument to split the image into four copies of the same video but played at different speeds. The speeds are then finely tuned with oscillators. The rolling black and white images end up with a bit of a "Blair Witch Project" feel as you stand in the enclosed back section of RoCo, and it might be enough to creep you out if not for another effect Debora manipulated. She couldn't stand the natural sound of the cars rumbling by on the nearby street, so she deleted it and liked what she heard when she split the images. It's reminiscent of crickets chirping.

In the case of the morphing topographical grid in Jason's "Form: Data: Form," he said it took eight months to master how he could map the video signal from a Web cam into a customized video processing system that interprets his body movements in relationship to light, perspective and rhythm. "It's not like I'm the wizard and you can't see what's behind the curtain," Jason said in regard to his eagerness to talk about his techniques and process.

Sterz, on the other hand, is a Rochester artist who preferred to let the subjects of his two pieces on display remain a mystery. In "Red," a round globule slogs across an aluminum screen like a single-cell organism under the microscope. "If I tell people what it is," Sterz said. "then that's all they will see." In other words, you're not expected to "get it."

POSTED BY GUEST AT 1:27 AM 

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)