

CONTINUING AND RECOMMENDED

"CYBORG MANIFESTO"

(Laguna Art Museum, Orange County) The hybridizing taking-off point of this gathering of twenty-six artists was inspired by author Donna Haraway. Its title, *Cyborg Manifesto, or the Joy of Artifice*, is directly lifted from her essay that advocates mental ambiguity as an adaptive tool. But this is less an organizing principle than a starting point from which works of art were chosen. The array of visual types are placed in the more obvious service of the fusion—or at least intimate relationship between—the human and the mechanical.

The feelings of horror connected to our fear of sacrificing some core element of our humanity to a soulless device is a key component in some of these selections. Tony Oursler's *Come to Me* is a video self-portrait projected onto a pole-mounted fiberglass skull that literally beckons you. But the tragic creature conveys that he knows that something is dreadfully wrong. Carlee Fernandez' *Peter* is a taxidermed rabbit with a viewing lens in which you can see the late furball's memory of having been chainsawed to bloody death by a monster. Well, a suburban housewife really, but for a few moments you may be compelled to suspend disbelief. Then in Alan Rath's *Couple* a man and woman silently speak, facing each other across the abyss of the two TV screens they occupy. The electronic tubes stand in convincingly for each conversant's vis-



S.E. Barnett, "Mary Shelley's Daughter," video installation, 1999.

cerac.

The opposite notion, that we have now entered a wonderful world of neatly integrated body circuitry, has no champions here. But there is some gorgeous work that strikes at least a less polarizing tone. Ken Gonzales-Day grafts details of the body's surface and details within lyrically irregular grids. The eye moves between the impulse to integrate these pieces into a new creature, and using a given rectangular "peep hole" to identify the particular body part or more. This exercise in tweaking the imagination is more fascinating than terrifying, and certainly more tiring than tiresome. Talk about old-fashioned, egg tempera is the medium of choice in Paul Paiement's tasty *Hybrids*, such as a fly and screw. There is a Sisyphusian quality in this backtracking to a medium dominant before the advent of oil paint over half a millenium ago. Why paint what could be imaged with a pair of photographs and the right program? That seems to be precisely the point.

The digital drawings of Jon Haddock draw on a computer gaming model for their point of view. These are not escapist fantasies, but real and familiar historical events that he depicts. You are compelled to compare the image presented, such as the assassination of Martin Luther King, to the recalled image held in memory. To the degree Haddock goes for this type of highly charged, often unpleasant association, the images undermine the initial expectation for entertainment, morphing it into a new query on factual or historical narrative.

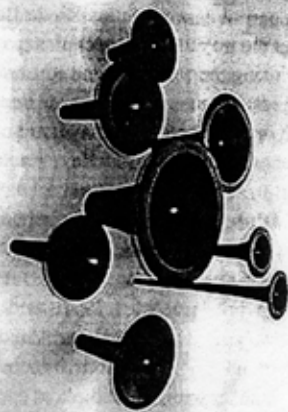
The distinction between the seri-

ous and the amusing is cut even more narrowly in S.E. Barnett's *Mary Shelley's Daughter*, which allows viewers to "build" their own figure by changing the images on any of eight monitors. The reference to Shelley's early 19th-century literary creation, the Frankenstein monster, a proto-cyborg constructed of dead body parts and brought to life with the then new force of electricity, is direct. But the charm of changing the eight visual components to construct new wholes is akin to children's flip books that in some ways touch the same impulse in all of us. This take also brings us to the realm of plastic surgery, the options we have to alter ourselves physically, to manipulate personal identity, while often overlooking who we really are.

The notion that modern technology has opened the door to expanded plasticity of personal identity is no longer a new one. In art, Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp created images of cyborg creatures more than eighty years ago. And the powerful whiff of pessimism surrounding the whole issue remains surprisingly strong. But the feeling that it is here with us, and here to stay, is more palpable. Like the computer-generated imaginary innards of H Shahani's *Flesh Pink* series of photographs that seem to wind us through shiny, plastic veins and stomachs, the means of envisioning are powerful enough to enable great clarity. But the increased clarity hardly erases our unease.

Bill Lasarow

The internet-based art installation exhibition **Telematic Connections: The Virtual Embrace** presents work which is pushing the envelope of how we can imagine artmaking in a cyberspace connected world. Drawn together by the Walker Art Center's curator of new media initiatives Steve Dietz, selections reflect both telematic connectedness (most works on exhibition draw continuously from the Net for activation) and global awareness (mostly for sensitivity to ecology and cyber-activist issues). The works on exhibit are at times visually stunning so as to render advanced knowledge of the technology unnecessary, but much is also less visual than technical. Of

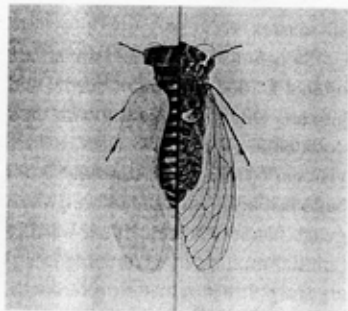


Jeff Colson, "Report," fiberglass/bondo/black primer, 48 x 32 x 11", 2000 is on view at Griffin Contemporary Art.

particular note are collaborative efforts which spawned the interactive installations. *Mori*, a collaboration by Ken Goldberg, Randall Packer, Gregory Kuhn, and Wojciech Matusik, is an Internet-based earthwork that both measures and reflects the earth's seismic movement. *Community of People with No Time*, by Victoria Vesna, David Baudry and Gerald de Jong, links informational movements with sounds and images (Art Center, Pasadena).

Jeff Colson's drawings and sculptures inform each other, and seeing them presented together makes each element resonate in its own way. Colson is a master at juxtaposing found and invented elements. For this exhibition he transformed images that represent announcements, a horn blowing, and a kiosk covered in posters into an abstract entity that still retains its original function. The works are still announcements—yet what they proclaim is the alluring message of the art (Griffin Contemporary Art, Venice).

Sue de Beer photographs impossible things. As a result of her interest in the artifice of photography, she constructs sets to be photographed. In photographing both the people and the architecture she sets up for the camera, she positions them as if they were outtakes from a horror movie. A girl has been cut in half. We see the bloody interior of her torso, yet her expression is one of ennui. A boy is covered in



Paul Paiement, "Hybrids B-Tettigia Screwini," egg tempera on panel, 25 1/2 x 23", 1999.