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Electric Fields brings media arts power surge

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Works by Donna Legault (left) and Andrew O'Malley are part of the 2010 Electric Fields festival

Technology + (creativity x art^{electro music}) = Electric Fields Festival

Post by Sanita Fejzic

Meet me at the intersection of digital art and sound at Electric Fields 2010, November 3 to 7. This year's eccentric line up includes more than 90 artists from across the country, including local talent as well as visitors from Montreal, the Yukon, Edmonton, and Toronto with installations, audio-visual presentations, and new music performances. Artists from France and the Netherlands will add an international dimension, further assuring quality and diversity enough for all tastes.

Ryan Stec, artistic director of artengine and also Electric Field's artistic director, says "this is a ripe time for digital arts to be brought to people in Ottawa." The city will find its mundane Rideau Centre walls come to life—literally. Or should I say artificially? "There is a work called *Philosopher Cube* which will be projected onto the side of the Rideau centre," explains Stec. "The cube will be at least 20 feet high, and using text, will ask passers-by basic life questions, like *what is love, what is fear?*"

In this installation created by Anthony Scavarelli the audience will interact by responding to the life questions through Twitter and/or text messages. Responses will be displayed and a computer will attempt to gather meaning amidst the responses by picking up key words.

"People expect digital art to be interactive," adds Stec. "This year they can also see screen-based technology and live 3D video." Here Stec refers to the 3D Frenzy party at Babylon nightclub (November 5 at 11 p.m.) where attendees will receive free 3D glasses upon entering! It will feature This Is Not Design from Montreal, Ottawa's Mathew Cameron, plus four turntables with DJ Illo and DJ Drastik.

I'm amazed at the line up of artists and am bewildered that a festival of this calibre is in a town such as ours.

"We are a small city," Stec concedes. "We don't have the depth to support the variety of festivals big towns have to offer and we don't have an audience that is used to seeing this kind of work."

"If you look at Montreal, it has seven different festivals that relate to what we're doing," responds Stec. "Montreal is in some ways a global leader and definitely a North-American leader in digital art."

Nevertheless, Electric Fields is in its eighth year and growing strong. Initiated in 2003 by SAW Gallery, the event became the purview of SAW Video before finally landing at artengine in 2008. It is, in the words of Stec "a huge collaborative effort," that includes participation from the Canadian Film Institute, Axe Néo7, the University of Ottawa, and The Ottawa Art Gallery among many other organizations and individuals.

A few of the many events that might blow your senses:

The living effect—curated by Caroline Seck-Langill and held at the Ottawa Art Gallery—features new media artist Norma White's quest at capturing what he refers to the "living effect." It's a beautiful homage to the subtle energies and forces inside every living creature and it marks the official opening of the festival.

Prototype at the Karsh-Masson Gallery on Sussex, featuring artists nichola feldman-kiss, Donna Legault, Gordon Monahan, Andrew O'Malley and Catherine Richards. "These are all local artists we approached in collaboration with the City of Ottawa," says Stec. "It's sort of half way between a contemporary art show and a non-traditional museum show."

This ensemble of artists will showcase works in progress or in their prototype phase. "It gives the audience a view into how artists are producing their work," Stec explains. In the case of Andrew O'Malley's work involving micro-processors, you'll see how he recycles them for different purposes. Stec's analogy enlightens me: "It's similar to sculptors and painters who master a specific technique and use it over and over again."

Quick profile: Gordon Monahan has been doing work since the 70s in Canada and his most notorious work is called *Speakers Swing*. It consists of three people literally swinging speakers. "He uses frequency modulation to change the sound," says Stec. "So as audio technology has evolved, so has the work." Monahan will present a video about this process.

Saturday night's Electric Fields finale puts a spotlight on Montreal's **Elektra** festival. This event will feature Trame 00, Dust, and A B C D Light. I'm particularly eager to see Dust's video performance, inspired by Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray's collaborative work, *Élevage de poussière* (Ray is one of my favourite photographers). "The work vibrates between the visible and invisible," said Stec. "In essence it's layers and layers X-ray photo; it's spectacular."

"The connection through all," says Stec of the entire festival, "is the idea of the cross over between sound and vision; the physicality and feeling to sound, of pure frequencies that are manipulated and the particular way of visualizing that."

\$15 for each night; \$10 if you buy in advance or if you are an artengine member or a student.

