COLLISIONcollective and AXIOM present

COLLISION 101

superartificial

May 9 through May 25, 2008. Opening reception: Friday, May 9, 6-9pm

Works by

Joseph Farbrook
jackbackrack
Tim Murdoch
Dan Roe
Rob Gonsalves
Georgina Lewis
Dan Paluska
John Slepian
Andy Zimmermann
Chris Fitch
Jeff Lieberman
Roy Pardi
Mark Stock

Curated by

jackbackrack
William Tremblay

AXIOM

AXIOM Gallery for New and Experimental Media
141 Green Street
Boston MA, 02130

Introduction

In COLLISION1101:superartificial, the thirteenth COLLISIONcollective group show of new work, we explore the lingering role superstition plays in art and technology. In formal terms, superstition is the belief in powers or events that stand outside the "natural". Often pejoratively applied to the beliefs of others, the term has taken on a negative connotation in our culture. It evokes an irrational clinging to the past and a failure to embrace revealed truths. Far from being banished by the rationalism inherent in science and engineering, we observe that superstition is an innate coping mechanism of the human mind, one we bring with us to any circumstance. Superstition is a response to the unknown. As the sphere of human knowledge expands, its tangibility and comprehensibility to any one person diminishes.

We also observe that it is not so much superstition that is under attack by the advance of human knowledge as our once self-evident grasp of nature and the natural. Just as the supernatural depends upon the natural for its definition, so does the "super-artificial" depend upon the artifacts of culture. With this show, we aim to open a dialog on the possibility of superstition's survival of the death of the natural, hiding now in the shadow of the artificial.

As we assembled the show, common themes emerged: Mirrors and their associated curses to identity, the elusive pursuit of perfection, and the ongoing attempt to reconcile the disjointed worlds of the humanities and technology. We see this exhibition as a small part of the necessary process of teaching ourselves to live, as a society, with the technology we depend upon.

-William Tremblay and jackbackrack

About COLLISIONCollective

COLLISIONcollective (aka CC) was founded in 2002 as an offshoot of the MIT student art group, ATat (Arts and Technology at tech), whose charter was to host events showcasing art incorporating technology. Formed by artists and technologists, the COLLISIONcollective is premised on the sometimes abrupt intersection between art and technology. Its practitioners are drawn to this synthesis as the epicenter of forward-looking cultural adaptation.

COLLISIONcollective was formed to address several vital needs: the promotion of artists, the creation of events and venues for exhibition, and fostering the exchange of ideas, techniques, and enthusiasm for making art. CC brings together people of all ages and disciplines in a collective format, creating a supportive community.

COLLISIONcollective produces experimental shows, called COLLISIONs, engaging viewers with interactive and robotic art, inviting them to explore laser-lighted spaces, shake their heads at LED sculptures, listen and dance to live electronic music and generally have a good time — while being introduced to the future of art.

CC members meet semi-monthly in gatherings, dubbed COLLISIONCollusions, where a varying roster of local and visiting artists, scientists and engineers share their work and techniques.

COLLISIONcollective members' work can be found from the basements of MIT to exhibitions, galleries and museums throughout the world.

Exhibits

Underneath the Skin V.2 2008

Joseph Farbrook
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Computer, screen and matte
24 x 24 x 2"

Underneath the Skin challenges our personal suppositions of soul and what remains after the body is gone. Without a body, we are neither male, female, short, tall, pretty, frail, hungry, tired, cold, amorous, athletic, nor forgetful. As the body may be thought of as a temporary skin that houses the soul, then what is the nature of what lies underneath the skin? The multiplicity of meanings of the term "skin" and its psychological components are mirrored in de-familiarized skin imagery and abbreviated digitization. Forming meaning from the fast- moving text is similar to the activity that one engages in while trying to determine the nature of oneself by decoding and arranging the clues and events that occur over the time span of experience.

For more information, see:
http://farbrook.net/underneath

Falling 2007

Chris Fitch
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Wood, ball chain, mirrors,
electric motor, lights, hardware
34x18x70"

Falling is intended to be contemplative. Its gentle glow and movement draw the viewer away from the crowd. A viewing portal with a chin rest leads to an interior space where one is confronted with an image of oneself, framed and seen through a forest of constant downward flow and surrounded by light. But the image confronted is not the image one sees in one's own mirror at home. It is one's image as seen by others -- in effect a true image of oneself, not the usual reversal one is used to when looking in a mirror.

When I first conceived of this piece, I was imagining the strands of bead chain as tears, and the whole piece to somehow embody the regenerative power of mourning. Maybe that still works on some level, but now I imagine the falling chain more broadly to suggest the kind of fall from grace that inevitably results from confronting any truth about ourselves. The luminosity suggests that the process is cleansing and ultimately returns us to a state of grace that is, one hopes, more honest.

In the end, though, this piece provides a space for the viewer to take a moment for personal reflection, whatever that moment reveals to him or herself.

For more information, see:
http://www.chrisfitchsculpture.com/pages/Falling1.html

Masked Thoughts 2008

Rob Gonsalves
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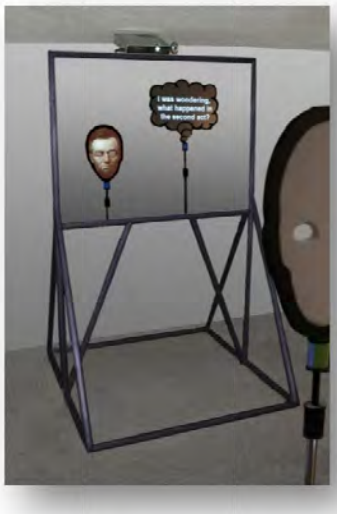

Wood, mirror, computer, custom software, webcam, video projector, foam board, mic. stands
4 x 8 x 7'

Masked Thoughts is an interactive video installation that allows viewers to try on virtual masks, and think virtual thoughts. The installation is comprised of the following components: a large mirror mounted in a wooden frame, a video projector and video camera mounted on top of the frame, and two projection surfaces mounted on mic stands in front of the mirror. One of the projection surfaces is a mask with eyeholes cut out. The other surface is a thought balloon - comic book style. Both surfaces are front/back symmetrical and can be swiveled around to face the other side. A webcam provides a video feed to the CPU, which scans the area and detects changes to the mask and thought balloon. Swiveling the surfaces cause the projected images to change in real-time. Turn the mask around, see a different face. Turn the thought balloon around, see a different thought. Note that the surfaces can be changed at any time, in any order. A variety of recognizable faces are available to try on: politicians, historical figures, entertainers, etc. The thoughts were created by visitors to the web site www.robgon.com. I would like to thank Jennifer Lim for her help with this installation.
For more information, see:
http://www.robgon.com/

consensus 2008

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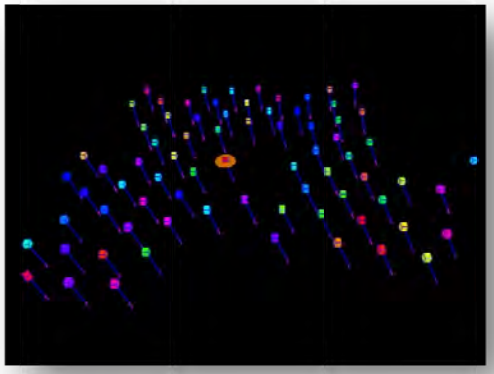

computer, lcd panel, speakers, custom software
20 x 15 x 2"

Attempted consensus formation based on two leaders across 75 simulated robots. Each robot runs an identical program and communicates only with nearby robots. Movement occurs through distributed and collective decision-making. Each robot emits a single tone corresponding to its direction and speed. This is the fourth in a series of social studies where collective behaviors are distilled and rendered within a dance framework.

The sound and the fury 2008

Georgina Lewis
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Black latex, zipper, grommets, hooks, monofilament wire, electrical fixture
7 x 8 x 3'

A large synthetic latex waveform of the sound of George W. Bush saying the word "war" (ripped from a video posted on YouTube). During the early stages of the "conflict", George W. Bush rarely used the word "war". He now uses it quite frequently. This war overhangs us like a black cloud.
The sound and the fury draws on several areas fundamental to my practice: sound, language, and technology. It also encapsulates a profound disgust at current American foreign policy and a belief in the necessity of citizen involvement for the enactment of change. The sound and the fury is one in an ongoing series of silent sound pieces, which began as an exercise in form and fascination. Having noted that no two iterations of the word "love" looked the same I crocheted a series of "love" waveforms (using Red Heart brand acrylic yarn). *The sound and the fury* is, literally and figuratively, a bit weightier. For those who chose to do so, undoing the zipper reveals the solution: "EXIT", in still legible form, unlike its host, which has been reduced to the terms of Shakespeare's Macbeth: "a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing." (Act 5, Scene 5). The light lives on inside.
For more information, see:
http://www.birdfur.com/sound_and_fury.html

Who's That 2008

Tim Murdoch
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Mirrors, springs, motors, motion sensor, wires, electricity, wood
Dimensions variable

Who's That is an interactive installation consisting of a series of 25 spring mounted 9" mirrors, arranged on a wall in a pattern that reflects the human form. Each mirror contains a vibrating motor, wired in parallel and attached to a motion sensor placed somewhere away from the installation.
The idea for this work came about from the simple fascination that a reflected image is "slippery" and seemingly detached from the surface plane of the mirror. A mirror reflects light and image from its surroundings while at the same time opens a perceptual hole through the surroundings. Mirrors do the same to people. When we gaze into a mirror, there is a sudden rush of self-consciousness, a feeling of disconnection with the image reflected, or a scramble for the mind to connect the interior self with the exterior image. It can be a very isolating moment. When the presence of another is detected this moment is disturbed and the image in the mirror changes, becoming less clear.
When I was working on this piece in my studio there was a lot of construction activity in my neighborhood. Lots of jack hammering, cranes lifting and dropping heavy objects, trucks dumping and bouncing on the ground, generally lots of vibrations shaking the building. This happened to be the ideal conditions for working with springs. The mirrors and other projects that I'm working on were activated without the use of motors and sensors. This connected the work in a very natural way to the environment. I'm hoping that the trains shaking the floors of Axiom Gallery act on the mirrors in the same way as the construction equipment did in my studio.
For more information, see:
http://www.timmurdoch.com/

Seeing the Future 2007

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Jeff Lieberman
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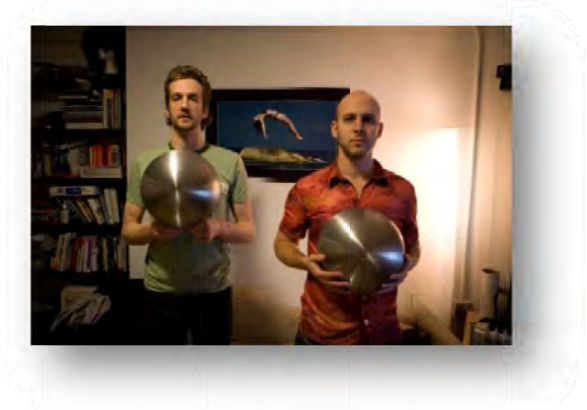

Photograph
24 x 36"

We carry little with us into the future. But we try to imagine... what if? Exercises in the prediction of the future are our prediction of the future. This is the first such exercise. We are pictured here together wearing impromptu Halloween costumes, which are a play on a not yet completed sculpture, a not even yet proposed sculpture. One that has no date of production. One that is not, yet.
Christo sells his preparation drawings for a piece. We will sell our predictions.
This one is ready to buy at a fixed price of $1,000,000.

Indicator 0x02 (Snake) 2008

Roy Pardi
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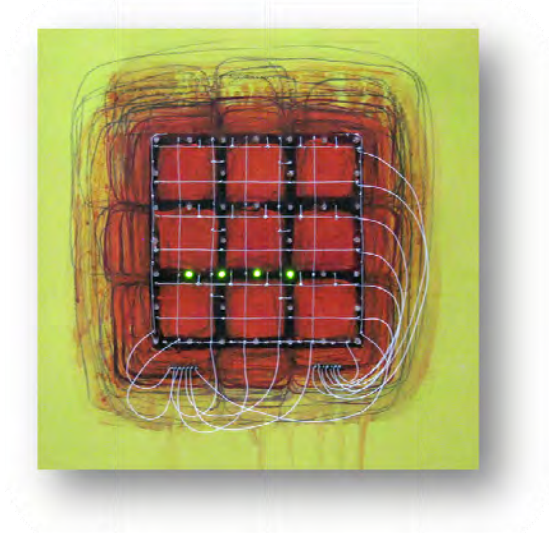

Paint + electronics on paper,
with embedded microcontroller
28 x 28"

Indicator 0x02 (Snake) is the second in a series of works exploring the integration of simple embedded electronics in paintings and drawings.
Drawings function aesthetically in ways which are not defined by rules external to the drawing; a drawing can set its own rules and "work" in complete and exclusive reference to itself – it has no dependencies. An electronic circuit, on the other hand, functions electronically in clearly delimited ways – the result of efficiencies, the laws of physics, and the process of production. The way in which a circuit is designed and the graphical patterns that result are not intended to mean anything aesthetically or visually – the visual aspect of a circuit is irrelevant to its electronic function.
In this series, I am exploring the visual aspects of simple electronic circuitry, using drawing to amplify certain forms and relationships within a circuit, and programmed light sequences to articulate the patterns of flow within these relationships.
For more information, see:
http://roypardi.com/

Trilobita Electronica 2008

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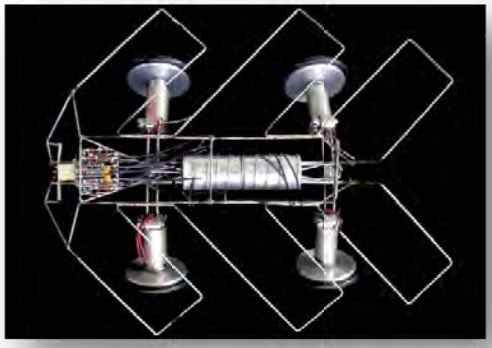

Solar engine, steel
11 x 8 x 3½"

Trilobita electronica is a solar-powered robot. It has a phototropic response, and it responds to feedback from its own body. It employs two compound eyes that detect light direction, and two separate brains that communicate through feedback from the environment. It was designed to test notions about how brains and bodies interact to produce goal-oriented behavior.
The exploration of artificial anatomies is a research program that I have followed, motivated by my desire to better understand control and communication in natural anatomies. *Trilobita electronica* is the result of a long evolutionary process in which I have created several dozen "artificial life forms." This specimen is finely tuned to its body and to its environment. Its brain and physical structure are carefully integrated, and its behavior is the product of its preflexive return-to-center design, its interactions with the environment, and feedback it receives through its springy body.
Some design components are little changed from previous generations, while others are significant leaps in the evolutionary process. It is therefore natural that this artificial life form is more complex than my previous creations.
It seems that, whatever the particular form my explorations have taken, behaviorally interesting

artificial anatomies naturally reflect design elements seen in natural anatomies. Common design elements such as the location of the eyes in the head and energy storage in the abdomen can be seen to be the result of constraints imposed by a wide variety of environments. Behavioral complexity often seems to arise when surprisingly simple variables interact. *Trilobita electronica* invites the viewer to think about their understanding of the mechanisms driving the behavioral complexity we observe in organisms across the biosphere, including ourselves.

cornered 2008

John Slepian
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Tree trunk, LCD panel, computer, custom electronics, mechanics and software
30 x 24 x 30"

Animals are "significant" others in our culture and their images play a wide variety of roles, from advertising icons to the anthropomorphized characters in popular films. They are also the subjects of extraordinary efforts in technological simulation, from the animatronics of the Disney theme parks to computer animation of Jurassic Park. My current work explores not what these images mean in context, but how they mean. In particular, it explores how images of animals represent an idealized other, one in which certain elements of ourselves are exaggerated and others diminished. *cornered* is an interactive sculpture in which a 3D animated, amorphous, groundhog-like creature on an LCD panel "hides" inside a real tree stump on the gallery floor. Sensitive to the presence of viewers and the direction of their movement, the creature on screen whimpers and shudders in fear if viewers move towards it and relaxes if they move away. As the creature trembles on screen, its simulated fur shaking back and forth, the fallen leaves inside the stump rustle as well—breaking the metaphorical "wall" that separates the real world from the world of the screen.

Conceptually, *cornered* is an exploration of our ideas about nature, the way that we engage with it, and the natural world's ambivalence to our presence. Though our curiosity about animals may be innocent, it is rarely interpreted that way by the objects of our gaze. Does this somewhat cuddly but apparently frightened creature need or want us? Why do we nonetheless desire to get closer? Formally, *cornered* combines several expressive aspects: natural materials, 3D computer animation, mechanical simulation, and behavior based on input from electronic sensors. Despite the disparity of these materials, we, as viewers, are able to synthesize a coherent whole, and negotiate these wildly different modes of expression. *cornered* is also an exploration of limits to which this process may be pushed.

Perpetuity? 2008

Mark J. Stock
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Digital archival print
48 x 30"

Perpetuity? is a digital image that questions the directionality of time and the inevitability of cultural friction using the interplay of historical perceptions of space and time. The lack of perspective is the same as in early cave paintings and medieval divine art — the products of periods during which time was perceived as non-sequential. The geometric perfection of light in the scene (done using modern computational tools) borrows from Renaissance to

pre-modern artists' rigid adherence to Euclidean space and linear time. Finally, the warped geometry represents the change of thought within science and art in the late 19th century toward curved space and its intimate relationship with time. In the image, multiple implied time dimensions (movement of the sun, translation and warping of the geometry) leave no clue to their future progression and add layers of complexity to even the modern perception of space and time. The weaving together with light of space, time, detail, and emptiness invite careful contemplation of the component interactions.

Flower in Ball in Floor 2008

Andy Zimmermann
andyzimm@rcn.com

Steel frame, wire mesh, digital projector, laptop, speakers, vidcam
6 x 6 x 3'

This piece imagines a state of weightlessness. It allies itself with those fairy-tale flowers that grow stronger when you believe in them.
For more information, see:
www.andyzimmermann.com

About AXIOM

AXIOM Gallery is the premiere gallery in the Metro-Boston area dedicated exclusively to showcasing emerging and established artists working in new media.
Founded as a collective in 2004, AXIOM has grown into an exhibition and performance space. AXIOM has had two locations, has seen hundreds of visitors and presented the work of local, national and international artists.
Exhibiting new and experimental media is a challenge for every contemporary art space- a challenge that AXIOM meets by providing space to foster the growth of new and experimental media through innovative exhibition and presentation of new media art and artists.
AXIOM strives to reach a wider audience of viewers through its support of new and experimental media and the artists who make it, in order to captivate and involve people of all ages in hopes for the growth of a bright future for art in years to come.

On the cover

The logo for COLLISION1101:superartificial is an homage to the Apollo 13 mission patch. Apollo 13 was the calamitous 1970 moon mission that nearly resulted in the deaths of all crew members but was ultimately dubbed a "successful failure" due to ingenuity under extreme circumstances.

Superstitious people have noted that mission began on April 11, 1970 (4/11/70, digits summing to 13) at 13:13 CST from Complex 39 (three times thirteen), and that the problems began on April 13.