

## Pay Attention!, "Exquisite Electric" demands you participate

by JUSTIN EDWARD COFFEY

OCWeekly August 5- 11, 2005

A gallery not only tells you you're looking at art (you're in a gallery, thou swell), but it also tells you what kind. Pick your gallery, and you pick your art: if you want it silent, passive and pretty, traipse down to the mall and decide which Kinkadean landscape reminds you most of the imaginary cabin you never spent winters in as a child. But if you want your humanity refracted by and filtered through our exponentially expanding techno-culture, jack into "Exquisite Electric" now at the Cal State Fullerton Grand Central Art Center. The exhibit consists of disparate works by six new-media artists, ostensibly linked by their common use of electronics to "straddle the gap between human and artificial constructs."

Consequently, several pieces expect more than just attention from visitors, requiring direct contact or participation in creating an ever-fluid, ever-affecting experience.

An entire room is occupied by Camille Utterback's interactive piece *Untitled* (2004), which initially appears as a muted, impressionistic video projection of what are perhaps flowers, a basic design of the sort that wouldn't look out of place as a busier swatch of wallpaper. On the floor is a surface, approximately the same size as the image, on which one is invited to stand. Immediately, the image catches the eye as the surface becomes dance floor, and the visitor begins to grasp the relationship between his own movement and the piece's mutation. The forms smear and bleed as an unseen computer translates motion into new shapes and colors, unpredictable yet directly controlled.

Other pieces mercifully ask for less coordination but evoke stronger emotions. One complaint: the exhibit's layout unfortunately presents the remaining works in an order that diminishes their respective effect, like an opening act whose ferocity blows the still-amazing headliner off the stage (think of Mahavishnu Orchestra setting the table for Led Zeppelin). At one point, you hear regular swells of breathing interspersed with an occasional cooing from Jim Slepian's *little\_one* (2005) but remain clueless as to what's actually generating the sound—a sort of half-watermelon with a small monitor where the meat and seeds would be that's resting inside a metal crib, swaddled in the sterility of white linen. On the monitor's screen, a fleshy, pulsing form sparsely covered with small hairs suggests a baby sent through Seth Brundle's telepod sometime following the baboon but prior to the trip with the titular fly. Pick it up, and it cries; suddenly, instinctually, you are moved to cradle it closer—maybe even gently bouncing it—and as it is calmed, you wonder what the hell you just did and to what. Straddling the gap, indeed. A gallery employee intimated she hates this piece; I found it only a few notches more disruptive to my psychological comfort than a real baby.

The exhibit also includes a trio of pieces from Adam Chapman's *Emotional Machines* series, two of which split the theme hands-down exemplified by the Slepian work. First is *Nothing (without you)* (2003-05), a roughly head-sized, smoked-glass cube reinforced by copper edging. Its title hints at the necessity of touch to illuminate the cube's interior and reveal its inhabitant, suspended and quivering. It reminded me of David Lynch's realization of the Third Stage Navigator from *Dune*, but without the overt human features to mitigate the revulsion. However, Chapman's *Cuddle/Coddle* (2003-05) is much friendlier and more pleasantly tactile: the plushest, purring larva that's ever nuzzled yours truly's armpit, that's for damn sure.

Also, don't simply whiz past Marianne Magne's *Transitory Conditions* (2005), a kaleidoscopic floor-to-ceiling AV presentation merging Rorschach's famous test, Lynch's industrial rumblings and Serrano's *Blood and Semen?* series.

Mind the gap.

"EXQUISITE ELECTRIC" at CAL STATE FULLERTON GRAND CENTRAL ART CENTER, 125 N. BROADWAY, SANTA ANA, (714) 567-7233. OPEN TUES.-THURS. & SUN., 11 A.M.-4 P.M.; FRI.-SAT., 11 A.M.-8 P.M. THROUGH SEPT. 18.