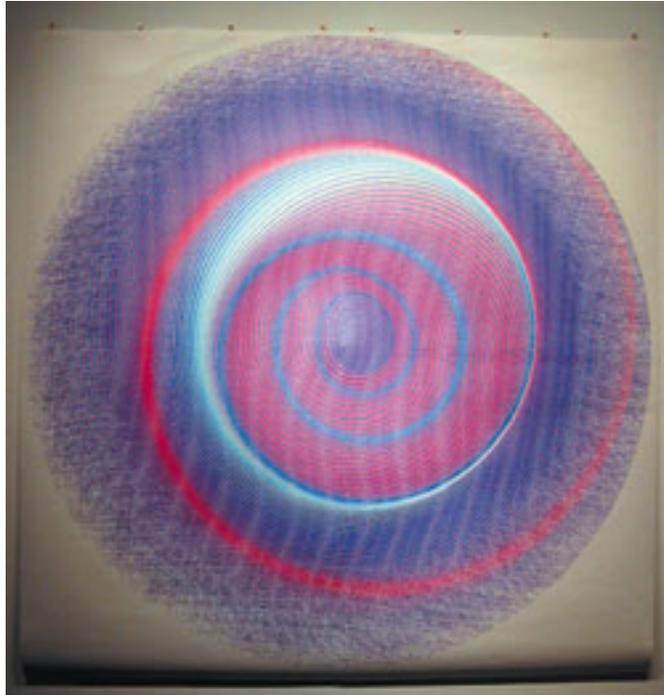


ART REVIEW : Hands-off, mind-on art - Jean-Pierre Hebert shows surprisingly sensuous, human side of computer- generated art

By Josef Woodard, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT



Above is Jean-Pierre Hebert's "Violet, Blue, and Pink Metagon."
COURTESY OF PEGGY GROSSMAN

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JEAN-PIERRE HEBERT, 'DRAWING WITH THE MIND'

When: through Nov. 9

Where: Contemporary Arts Forum, 630 Paseo Nuevo (upstairs)

Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; Noon to 5 p.m. Sunday

Information: 966-5373, www.sbcaf.org

Some five years back, in such spaces as the Karpeles Library and the former Monlleo Gallery, Santa Barbarans got an early taste of the intuitive and humane computer-generated artwork of Jean-Pierre Hebert. In 2003, the French artist had then just been made local through an artist-in-residence position at the Kavli Institute of Theoretical Physics, at UCSB.

Those early showings were teasing glimpses of what he is about. Suddenly, this season, Hebert is going locally public in a much grander and illuminating way, with a large one-person show at Contemporary Arts Forum and an ancillary show at Marcia Burt Studios.

If the idea of art made via computers triggers visions of the cold, cerebral and technocratic, rest assured. Hebert's work is, to the contrary, sensuous and visceral, abidingly meditative and grounded in aesthetic values extending much deeper than even this artist's own discovery of the creative potential of computer code, in 1959.

His personal challenge is to tap into the processing power of computers without succumbing to machinery fixation, and the CAF show handily manifests the fruits of his philosophical labor.

A show of large and elaborate vertical "drawings," contemplative computer animations and art involving manipulated sand and water, "Drawing With the Mind" is an exhibition of subtle first impressions that rapidly deepen when one considers Hebert's methods and his underlying aesthetic. His roots and range of influences include John Cage's ingenuity and chance-loving ways, Piet Mondrian's manifesto-minded work and Zen Buddhist thought.

A sense of the artist's attitude can be gained from an economical, Zen-like artist statement on the wall: "my interest is the line -- what creates it, how to render it, how to use it -- the line is a metaphor for motion, and hence for time and for music, my work is a reflection, a meditation on the line -- drawing is just a thought."

Hebert's thought-drawing notion results in a series of intricate paper print outs, using his Noo Series software and the industrial grade Epson 9600 inkjet printer. Remarkably fine detail and suggestions of depth, texture and optical sensations make their way into the finished prints, with allusions to tapestries and fabric.

In paper pieces such as the quietly dramatic variations, "Light Blue Eddies 1-4" and "Vermillion 1-5," or the Mandala-like "Violet, Blue, and Pink Metagon," Hebert fulfills his notion of drawing as process rather than product. His "Gutenspheres" -- in homage to printing press pioneer Johannes Gutenberg -- were made with Hebert's "Ulysses" software and involve handmade paper orbs suspended from the ceiling, constellation-like.

More directly from the heart of the computer drawing board, two computer monitors in the main gallery display his slowly morphing animated pieces, "Alogrithmic Metagons," commissioned by CAF for this occasion.

Tucked back in a darkened gallery are more examples of his motion and real time-based art ideas. The "Glass Ulysses," created with the help of UCSB colleagues David Bothman, Victor DiNovi and Mark David Hosale, is a computer-driven Japanese Zen Garden-inspired motorized sandbox, with a magnetized marble programmed to create designs. Videos screening in the gallery illustrate the art process in time lapse.

Even more intriguing, in a way, is the "Wet Light on Dry Paper," created in collaboration with Hosale. Here, ephemeral patterns are created in shallow beds of

water through vibrations, in sync with an ethereal electro-acoustic soundtrack that radiates its aptly spacey-lyrical presence throughout the gallery.

In the end, it might be wise to finish off a visit to the Hebert exhibition with his elemental experiments in sand and water. This art might be hands-off, in a strict sense, but it is very much about sensate experience in the real world, and an extension of art about environment.