

Digital artist writes own code for endlessly changing images

DAN TRANBERG

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The possibilities are endless. We've been hearing that about digital art for decades. But only recently has emerging technology truly transformed the way new art is being made.

The work of New York artist John Simon makes this abundantly clear. Simon is one of an international group of artists featured in the major exhibition "All Digital," opening with a reception from 7 to 10 p.m. today at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.

Unlike many contemporary artists who use state-of-the-art digital printers or software programs as part of their process, Simon writes his own computer code, using it to create works that change endlessly.

"It'll never be exactly the same — ever," Simon said about one of his nine works in the exhibition, a digitally projected piece titled "Stack #1." Positioned right at the entrance to the show, it shows images of 100 digitally animated cubes, stacked to form a rotating



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New York artist John Simon is one of an international group of artists featured in the exhibit "All Digital," opening tonight at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland. Behind (and over) him is "Fountain," an 8-by-10-foot projected diptych from 2004.

column.

Among the variables written into the code that creates the ever-changing image are the size and color of each cube and the speed at which the column rotates. The results are mesmerizing. But visual spectacle is only

one aspect of Simon's work.

He started working with computer code while sketching on paper. "I would try to detach myself enough to observe my process, noticing the unspoken rules I was making as I was working. Then, if I could distill some of that, I would put it into code," he said.

Noticing the systems to which he was intuitively drawn, Simon joined a long list of modern and contemporary artists — from Paul Klee to Sol LeWitt — who generated imagery by exploiting discrete sets of principles. Using computers, Simon is able to push these ideas much further.

"Klee was embracing dynamism with his use of arrows and lines, but he had no dynamic medium to use," Simon said. "So, I thought, let's take what he's done, try to activate it, and see where it takes us."

Many other art-historical references can be found in Simon's glowing computerized images. One wall-mounted piece, for instance, includes an animated version of Mondrian's famous abstract painting "Broadway Boogie

Woogie." Seven of Simon's works in the show are mounted to the wall. The older of these are programs running on flat monitors. With the newer ones, Simon has actually incorporated flat screens into the work, forming sculptural objects made from reconfigured laptop computers and laser-cut plastic.

Observing the scope of Simon's work, it's apparent that he has tapped into an infinite range of creative opportunities — a start at fulfilling the promise that new technologies hold unlimited potential for artistic activity.

The museum is at 8501 Carnegie Ave., Cleveland. Call 216-421-8671 or go to www.mocacleveland.org.

Tranberg is an artist and writer living in Cleveland. Art Matters is a column that runs weekly in Friday covering the area art scene. To be considered for publication, items about shows or openings must be received three weeks in advance. Mail to Plain Dealer Art Critic, 1801 Superior Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114. Fax to 216-999-6269.

To reach Dan Tranberg: trandan@core.com

GALLERY SPOTLIGHT Opening

The first-ever major retrospective of the work of acclaimed Northeast Ohio artist Lillian Tyrrell opens with a reception from 5 to 9 p.m. today at Spaces gallery, 2220 Superior Viaduct, Cleveland. Titled "The Persistence of Conscience: Textiles and Drawings by Lillian Tyrrell," the exhibition includes works created over the past 30 years, exploring themes of social and political unrest. The show is up through Friday, March 10. Call 216-621-2314, or go to www.spacesgallery.org.

"On the Wall," an exhibition of site-specific wall drawings by local and internationally known artists, opens with a reception at 5 p.m. today at the Cleveland State University Art Gallery, 2307 Chester Ave. Curated by CSU art professor George Mauersberger, the show includes works by Sol LeWitt, William Kentridge, Amy Ross, George Kozmon, John Moore, Ken Nevadomi and Russ Revock. It's up through Saturday, March 11. Call 216-687-2103, or go to www.csuohio.edu/art/gallery.