

museums & galleries

Computer-generated

The return of the Cyberarts Festival

Exactly what "cyberart" is remains a bit of a mystery to me, though as the third Boston Cyberarts Festival prepares for liftoff, with exhibitions, performances, conferences, Web-based projects, and public artwork all over town, I don't really have any excuse, except that the concept itself undergoes repeated re-examination, redefinition, and expansion as the world of digital technology and what it offers to the arts



Gretchen Skogerson, *lash*, from "The Ballad of Wires and Hands"

continues to shift and grow. The biennial Boston Cyberarts Festival made its debut in the spring of 1999, spearheaded by cyber-dynamo George Fifeild (who remains in charge), and it has given Boston a front-row seat on new developments in this realm. So if definition is difficult, that must go with the territory. Maybe it's even part of the thrill of the cyber.

One feature of the this year's edition, which runs from April 26 through May 11, follows from the open-ended quality of the subject matter: no fewer than *three* public conferences will wrestle with different aspects of cyber, including "Digital Art and Public Space: Expanding Definitions of Public Art," at Boston University on April 26 and 27, the first national conference on digital and interactive public art. Although the festival has tended to focus on the visual arts, experimental music and performance have also played a big role. This year, on April 26, we'll get the American premiere of the *Toy Symphony* by the MIT Media Lab's Tod Machover.

Sculptor Beth Galston, who's better known for her relationship with nature than with the flickering environment of the LED, fuses the organic with the digital in her installation "Luminous Garden," at the Groton School. "Cyber Lounge," at the Gallery @ Green Street in Jamaica Plain, will stage a cyber-marathon (72 hours, non-stop) of giant video projections by regional artists, with guest VJs hosting. MIT grad Kelly Heaton played 400 Furby toys and turned the skins into a red-and-white Santa Claus fur outfit she calls "Dead Pelt"; it'll be on view at Howard Yezerski Gallery. Curated by musician and multimedia artist Dana Moser, "The Ballad of Wires and Hand," at the New Art Center in Newton, explores the idea that many artists today serve as "their own engineers" in the sense that technology has been integrated into their creative process.

Internet-based animation videos are on the hip program at MIT, where the List Visual Arts Center has organized "Salon d'Arte Digitalia," a 24-hour ongoing series curated by Bottlecap Studios, in Whitaker Building #56. And in some cases, what's old really is new again: Bill Viola juxtaposes digital and early Renaissance in the Worcester Art Museum's mediæval gallery with "Bill Viola: Union," huge side-by-side display screens of male and female figures.

"Digital Art and Public Space: Expanding Definitions of Public Art," will take place at Boston University, 8 St. Mary's Street, April 26 and 27; call (617) 524-8495. Tod Machover's *Toy Symphony* will be performed at MIT's Kresge Auditorium on April 26 at 7 p.m.; call (617) 363-0396. "Luminous Garden" is at the Brodigan Gallery of the Groton School, in Groton, through April 29. "Cyber Lounge" will be at the Gallery @ Green Street, Green Street MBTA Station in Jamaica Plain, May 6 through 9; call (617) 522-0000. "Dead Pelt" will be at Howard Yezerski Gallery, 14 Newbury Street, April 25 through May 27; call (617) 262-0550. "The Ballad of Wires and Hands" will be at the New Art Center, 61 Washington Park in Newton, April 25 through May 23. "Salon d'Arte Digitalia" will be at MIT's Whitaker Building #56 beginning April 24. Call (617) 253-4680. "Bill Viola: Union" will be at the Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury Street, beginning April 26; call (508) 799-4406. For a full listing of Boston Cyberarts Festival events, visit www.bostoncyberarts.org, or call (617) 524-8495.

— Randi Hopkins