

uniquely, they are bright objects that give off no light of their own, their dark masses illuminated by reflected light. Furthermore, through metaphorical characteristics that are almost corny when put into words-but work in the sculptures by being visually understated-Taplin merges characteristics of the planets with their mythological prototypes: Saturn, a large planet named for a deity who ate his children, is shown with an engorged, swollen belly; Neptune dives through space; and Jupiter with regal egotism turns around himself.

Easily overlooked in this show were two works related to The Five Outer Planets, Pluto Rising and Uranus Rising (both 2000). The latter, in particular, makes it clear that Taplin can evoke sculptural drama without the emotional flames and staged lighting of the other works-and this in turn makes it clear that the other pieces also work on broader levels. The hollow resin figure of a slumped Uranus, floating above the back of another man on all fours made of white plaster, depicts him as a prototypical human or god who eerily prefigures actions about to take place, but not yet deter-

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Taplin's latest works continue to present a sort of hybrid realism

whose impact depends on the emotional resonance between the viewer and the figures depicted. It's hard to know, on the one hand, if the works exhibited here are more accomplished than his earlier ones, which in some ways seem more complete. On the other hand, these works are interesting precisely because they are unresolved in this way or that-bringing together qualities that don't always fit or striving to blend astronomy and myth. But most importantly, Taplin addresses all this through particular qualities that evoke both humanity and its situations. Like Goya in his engravings, Taplin not only invents images of people but implies the worlds that they inhabit, sometimes nightmarish, at other times fantastic or allegorical.

—Tom Csaszar

Chapel Hill, NC

"Illuminations: Contemporary Film and Video Art"

Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The work presented in "Illuminations" takes time to absorb, even though some of it seems to move at the speed of light. It requires the viewer to stop and look for longer than a few seconds and, in some cases, to participate in order to complete the work's full cycle. Most of the pieces are mixed-media, sculptural installations that incorporate video and film to create multisensory experiences that extend far beyond a moving image depicted on a screen. Only two of the works appear in traditional film and video format: the animated black and white films of William Kentridge and the dream-like, enigmatic videos of Mariko Mori.

Pepón Osorio's installation, Canción de Cuna para una Madre (Lullaby for a Mother), consisted of a video of a teenage girl sleeping with her baby that was projected from the ceiling onto a carpet silk-screened with the black and white image of a crib filled with stuffed animals. In the darkened room, you could hear a woman singing a hypnotic lullaby in Spanish and periodically murmuring "sshhh, sshhh." The mother and child moved only slightly, cradled in their "crib"; caught asleep, they seemed vulnerable but protected by the soothing sounds of the singing grandmother. Although it depicts what is often seen as a huge societal problem-"babies having babies"-the work also presents a more positive

and humane view of a complex situation.

Another view of mother and child appeared in Peter Sarkisian's Hover, a three-foot-square cube covered with projections on all its visible surfaces. The video depicts the artist's wife and child moving around inside a clear cube. The woman and boy start out sitting still and then begin to move very slowly around the cube, feeling the interior walls with their hands and feet. During the 11 minutes and 30 seconds that the tape runs its full cycle, their movements become more and more frantic, as they try to escape from the cube. At the very end, the images whirl into a frenzied blur of speed, and then everything stops and the screens go blank before the cycle starts again. Accompanying the video is a soundtrack of moving water that begins as a quietly gurgling creek and becomes a torrential waterfall. At the very end, the rushing

Above left: Robert Taplin, *The Coals*, 1985. Forged steel and coal, 60 x 72 x 36 in. Below: Peter Sarkisian, *Hover*, 1999. Mixed media and video projection, 11:30 minutes, 35 x 35 x 30 in.

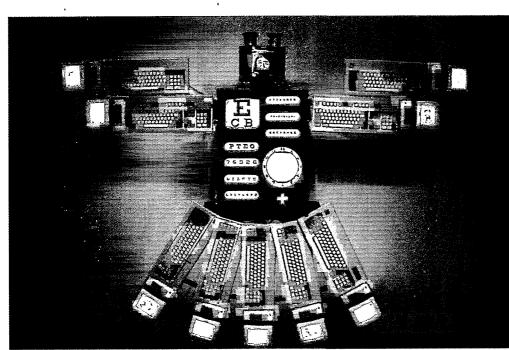


water sounds like a jet plane taking off, with a blast of noise that comes to an abrupt halt with complete silence. *Hover* was one of the most powerful works in this show, effectively combining sound, image, and form to transform a huge space with a relatively small object. The work created a total sensory environment that commented on the intertwined, interdependent relationship between mother and child.

shows flash across the eyeball. The sound accompanying the video documented the channel surfing of the disembodied eye with snippets of white noise, music, weather reports, and people talking.

Nam June Paik's *Eagle Eye* also incorporates television into a multi-media sculpture that combines computer keyboards and tiny televisions to form the wings and tail feathers of a gigantic eagle. The videos shown on the series of vignettes—a woman speaking French, a cello player, the ocean, and a walk through the woods. You activated the video by touching different parts of the screen, changing the color of the image and turning on the sounds that accompanied each image.

It is difficult to install a video exhibition and keep the various works from competing and interfering with each other, but "Illuminations" overcame all the



Nam June Paik, *Eagle Eye*, 1996. Antique slide projector, aluminum, 9 computer keyboards, eye chart, neon, and 11 TVs, 67 x 81 x 24.5 in.

Tony Oursler's *Eye in the Sky* projected the image of a single eye onto a fiberglass sphere. Hanging from the ceiling, the beachball-sized floating eyeball had a creepy presence—like someone watching you from whom you could not get away. The projected eye darted back and forth, scanning the screen of a television with constantly changing channels. The TV screen was reflected in the iris of the eyeball, so that you could see the fragments of the television TV monitors combine satellite photographs of the Earth and a solar eclipse, interspersed with images of launched missiles, Laurie Anderson, and the Guggenheim Museum. A still of Paik's face looks out at you from the eagle's slide-projector head. This kaleidoscopic installation—a psychedelic, robotic eagle filled with flickering motion and colored lights—combines technology and art with images of the past and the future.

Jim Campbell was represented by an interactive work, *Experiments in Touching Color*, which consisted of a rear-projection video screen mounted on top of a pedestal in a small, dark room. The projected video included a expected obstacles to present a show that provided an impressive international overview of the wide range of contemporary work being produced in film and video. --Linda Johnson Dougherty

Jenkintown, PA Mitch Messina

Abington Art Center

The ability to make and use tools has long been employed as a means of separating higher and lower life forms. The increasing sophistication of the design and functionality of various implements has, at least on the surface, presented evidence that human beings continue to advance along the evolutionary continuum.

For Mitch Messina, though, our technological advances may be more like technological retreats. In approaching his ceramic objects, we immediately need to duck the literal and figurative wrenches flying out at us. Taking aim at no less than our well-anchored stature as superior life forms, Messina takes obvious glee in deconstructing both the methods and the premises that allow us to build a society. Creating "tools" whose lineage superficially bears a relationship to that of the standard items found in a workman's tool bag, he assembles artifacts that belie any functionality with which they might otherwise be associated.

Presenting us with laconic titles such as Wrench, Clamp, and Sickle, Messina provides a context from which we have to actively extricate ourselves. These tools do not humbly submit to a larger purpose; instead, they establish themselves as the final product. With their molded and textured surfaces. Messina's powerful sculptures wear the marks of their maker, but they also appear as objects that give birth to themselves. Imbued with a sense of irrepressible force, the works strain to escape the limits of mass and gravity. In Gear, three heavily scored disk-forms are barely contained by a horizontal, bipartite, elongated form suggesting both legs and tongs. Attached to one end is a ceramic tube spewing forth stripped copper wires, which appear to both flow and ignite. We may want to read the work as industrial and geometrically derived, but its urgency is in the life force bursting forth.

In Wrench, bulbous red phallic forms loom above, with "arms" reaching down to squeeze three upright disks. While the disks retain edges that identify them as metal tools, the components surrounding them seem to have emerged from an amorphous mass and then solidified into biomorphic specimens. Barely suppressed tensions between



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