

Italo Scanga, *Rabbit*, 2000. Bronze, 21 x 8 x 6 in.

cultural traditions of European and American art. In addition to these more widely shown four-to six-foot-tall wood assemblages of the last dozen years, he has made a variety of smaller works, including colorful drawings on large glass cylinders and paintings on labels from cans.

In this recent show, Scanga exhibited table-sized bronze columns formed of cast objects stacked on top of each other. The objects range from ashtrays and figurines to tools, models of houses, crushed crab traps, and candlesticks. In most cases, Scanga casts them in bronze and then welds them together. To say that they are stacked could be mis-

leading: they are stacked vertically like words are scattered horizontally. In both cases, elements are set in such a way that they relate to each other by making some kind of sense and meaning through their placement. And although initially Scanga's pieces are more secretive in disclosing their meanings to a quick reading than words usually are, nonetheless, their importance lies in how they make sense rather than in how they challenge it. Even when Scanga's phrases are incomplete, at least one or two definite relationships exist between the elements. In addition, on its own each element is always readable. Scanga is sensitive to the fact that somehow we are always reading one object in terms of another, and his best works exert a kind of

metaphoric or allegorical gravity between the separate elements.

In Happiness and Learning to Walk, two of the largest works, each of which is just short of a meter tall, the formal rhythm of the column on which an animal sits, a rabbit in the first one and a snail in the second, is regular but syncopated. Inverted candlesticks, not quite matching, make the rabbit sit in an almost musical state of suspension, Learning to Walk is a simple cartoon of a monument. It has references to evolution, parenthood, and childhood, all of which are given both concrete statement and symbolic import in the snail that sits on its top. Scanga's references to art history—from Picasso to Brancusi to Barry Flanagan—tie these works and the others in this exhibition, "Animal Surprise," to his earlier pieces.

Formal rhythms, metaphoric juxtapositions, inversion, and mirroring are the most frequent tropes of Scanga's poetic sculpture. Sabot, Music, and To JP all make different use of these strategies to fulfill and surprise the expectations of the viewer. Sabot's visual and etymological connections to shoe and to sabotage reverse and conflate animal legs, tree branches. and diagrammatic lines of word derivations. In a somewhat simpler manner, Music and To JP juxtapose the abstract and the narrative. In Music, one flea-market figurine plays upside down while a second plays on top: their joining and their positions in space relate the ordinary to the unusual, the prosodic to the lyrical, in a single composite three-dimensional image. As one moves around the piece, the forms are alternately clear and readable, then complex and elusive.

Some prevalent strains of early Modernism inflated the ordinary into mythic grandeur, while some varieties of late Postmodernism sought to reverse this, deflating the grand and the operatic into the everyday. In much of Modernism and Postmodernism, irony and objectification—and sometimes stressed emotional content—

distance the artist and viewer from the subject or topic portrayed. Scanga's sculpture stands in contrast to this attitude. Dada, Surrealism. Pop art. conceptualism. and appropriation art, to name a few, stressed the distance that their quotation of everyday life had from its source. The quotation marks were both present and part of the statement: the curtain came up and the show started through the use of art's ability to stage experience. Scanga's pieces quote from art history and everyday experience in a straightforward way that stresses their commonalties and similarities rather than their separation and disjunction: the quotation marks are removed and there is no curtain. His sculpture's references, whether based in language or art history, are always carefully translated into the visual. And they happily avoid ironic interpretations by way of their translated references and sincere pleasures.

---Tom Csaszar

Pittsburgh

"Interactive Domains"

Wood Street Galleries

Interactive electronic art exhibitions appear to be on the rise. As they proliferate, we as viewers must begin to rethink the definition of art and to question the idea of the visual. Undeniably, content and technology are no longer separate entities—ideas, images, forms, and techniques meld, generating a visual expression choreographed by electronic media and the multiplicity of everyday experience.

The exhibition "Interactive Domains" provided a sampling of high-technology art. Murray Horne invited Eduardo Kac, Luc Courchesne, Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv, and Claudia Hart to construct interactive installations that required viewer/user interchange. In this show, spectators could not be passive observers if they aspired to completely experience the multi-dimensional works. Sound, speech, music, images, and movement mixed and were to be experienced simulta-



In Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv's Text Rain, one encountered what appeared to be a random but continuous waterfall of colorful floating alphabets. Stepping before the projection, viewers were recorded in black and white by a projector placed in the center of the wall. A computer fused their likenesses and movements with the cascading text. In this participatory work there was no finite conclusion to be drawn despite the fact that the falling text had been excerpted from the poem "TALK YOU" by Evan Zimroth. These artists appear to acknowledge that the entertainment industry and media have conditioned a spectator's comprehension of visual culture—the TV glow of this environment was familiar and invited an exploration of self within the accompaniment of ambiguous language.

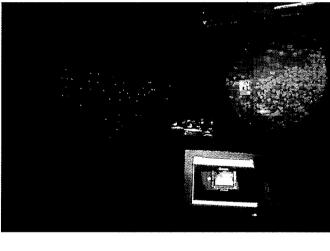
Above: Luc Courchesne, Landscape One/Paysage no. 1, 1997. Video installation, dimensions variable. Right: Eduardo Kac, Genesis, 1999. Transgenic artwork linked to the Internet.

neously. As with most group exhibitions, several works stood out.

"Interactive Domains" occupied both floors of the Wood Street Galleries. On the second floor, the ethereal installations of Eduardo Kac and Luc Courchesne required time to assimilate. Despite the resonating sounds infiltrating the gallery space, each piece required the full attention of the viewer and asked one to pause, to reflect, and to absorb the strategic maneuvers built into the work.

Courchesne's Landscape One/ Paysage no 1. (1997) was the most successful in augmenting one's perception. At the center of his art is an aspiration to rewrite the meaning of visual experience. In this panoramic video installation, a room within a room was created by four floating screens that surrounded a viewer-accessible center platform, each with a neighboring monitor placed before the projection. A day in a public garden unfolded on each panel. At first glance one assumed that there were four distinct activities. However, after a time, it became evident that this was a single drama and that the different characters were together despite their illusory separateness. Dialogue was invited among viewers and virtual characters through questions and statements projected onto the screen. Because of the time-based component of this work, images were layered and synthesized in a manner that parallels the fabric of contemporary life, unlike two-dimensional representations on a single plane. In this multi-user interactive panoramic video installation, composed of computers with touch pads, microphones, motion detectors, video projectors, and four laserdisc players, Courchesne harnessed technology to fabricate a poetic construct.

Kac's Rebuilding the Building Blocks addressed the programmable processes of genetics and biotechnology. Center-stage in the gallery was a wall projection of a petri dish containing a fictional gene that had been exposed to live bacteria. Kac electronically created it by translating a sentence from the Book of Genesis into Morse



code and then transforming the code into DNA pairs. Framing the organic image, on adjacent walls, was the Morse code, the actual sentence from the Bible, and a stream of letters representing DNA's molecular structure (A, C, G, T). Visitors to the space, as well as Internet users, could view the live mutating organic material and participate in exposing the enclosed bacteria to ultraviolet light by clicking on a symbol of the dish. While this clinical work raises our consciousness surrounding genetic engineering, it is hoped that Kac will push his ideas beyond cleverness and popular science trends.

Claudia Hart's Playworld was inspired by digital animation and video gaming: the viewer witnessed a projection of cartoon characters—half-man/half-pig. Brightly colored, chubby little creatures, seated in rows, appeared to be having a jolly time clapping and giggling. At the bottom of the screen the word "press" appears. Pushing the illusory button activated the sound of a woman's shrill cry that momentary filled the setting. It faded quickly-nothing changed—the little piglets were oblivious. No doubt the porkers were cute, but Hart's portrayal of the concurrent existence of "real

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life" comedy and tragedy is in this case a one-liner.

"Interactive Domains" demonstrated how rapidly things are changing. Is interactive entertainment a fantasy come true or a bad dream? The game is real—computers and video are the fastest-growing segment of the entertainment world, and artists are showing us what we might expect in the future.

-Elaine A. King

Toronto

An Whitlock

Christopher Cutts Gallery
Living as she does in the small
farming community of Paris,
Ontario, An Whitlock sees a lot of
crows. In winter they gather in the
fields to pick over the stubble,
probing beneath the snow for,
among other things, husks of corn
that were missed during fall harvest. The visual contrast of black
crows seen against the white
background of snow mirrors the

harsh juxtapositions of their world of either/or: holding on through the depths of winter or dying of starvation.

Whitlock's recent installation crow(d) included three separate but interrelated bodies of work she completed over the last three years, all of which center on the crow. For the installation in the two rooms of this downtown Toronto gallery, Whitlock advantageously worked the stark contrast between the gallery's ground of neutral white walls and the deep black of her wall and floor-mounted sculptures. The space echoed the disparity of the wintry fields near her home.

It all came to roost in a series she calls "clawvessels." Across the gallery floor of one room she placed eight small black plinths arranged in two rows. Set atop each plinth were four works, painted cast-plaster rocks, each held in the intransigent grip of a crow's foot—three lethally sharp talons

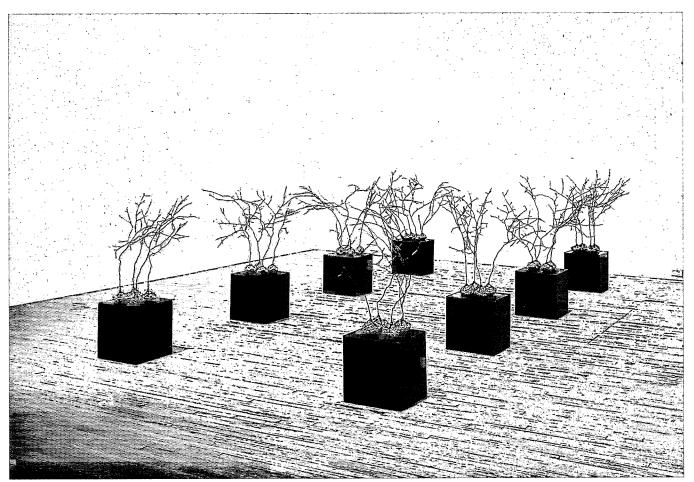
forward, one back for balance. Up from each foot grew not a crow's body but a small black twig, its tiny branches fanning out to form the complex shape of an embryonic tree.

A related body of work was set in an adjoining gallery space, 55 pieces collectively entitled "clawsticks." Whitlock continues with the theme of the crow foot metamorphosing into something small, black, and arboreal, but here the talons clutched nothing, and the works, rather than being freestanding, were instead pinned to two of the gallery walls in a ragged arc, rising and falling the height of the walls. Gallery lighting threw sharp shadows of talons and twigs, dramatically making flocks and forests of each of the pieces.

Back in the first gallery space, framing the environment of the floor-mounted "clawvessels," Whitlock again used adjoining walls for the pieces comprising "heads." Protruding from the stark white of the walls were 52 life-size crow heads, each individual and unique, some with murderous beaks open, others with heads tilted to one side, as if sizing us up. These pieces resist any obvious taxidermical contextualizing. They are, for example, composed of papier mâché and modeling compound and so have no material relationship to a taxidermist's stuffed specimen (though Whitlock does borrow from the world of taxidermy for her crow's eyes). But for that they are all the more powerful; we cannot fall back on, say, the feathered simulacrum of a museum or trophy carcass; instead we have the qualities of Whitlock's disturbingly true mimesis to carry the day.

— Gil McElroy

An Whitlock, crow(d), 1997– 2000. Mixed media, installation detail of "clawvessels with sticks."



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