



EMBEDDED:

LIVING WITH TECHNOLOGY

Curated by Lizzie Zucker Saltz • April 9 — May 29, 2005

Participating Artists:

Bryan Cole & Jeff Young (Athens, GA), Gretchen Elsner (Vancouver, British Columbia) & Kevin Hoth (Athens, GA), Arthur Huang (Oakland, California), Martin Kakies (Bremen, Germany), Mike Klapthor (Athens, GA), Ron Lambert (Seattle, WA), Michael Lasater (South Bend, IN), Jeff Murphy (Charlotte, NC), Greg Pond (Sewanee, TN), Elena Tejada (Williamsburg, VA), Steven Trimmer (Athens, GA) and Jennifer Watts (Birmingham, Alabama)

The international, national and local artists and artist-teams participating in *Embedded: Living with Technology* reflect the inevitable intertwining of messy, fleshy, mortal humanity with digital-age images, concepts and approaches. To be alive almost anywhere on the globe today is to be acutely aware of the unprecedented impact rapid technological change has had on our everyday lives since the advent of the 'personal computer' in the early 1980's. From cell phones to internet surfing, email to ipods, gps locators to smart toasters, micro-computer chip technology and the ubiquitous legacy of 19th century mechanics are deeply embedded in our psyches. While new advances are still advertised employing the oddly pristine and sterile, stainless-steel interiors Madison Avenue favors, our lived reality is closer to the mess of mismatched parts depicted in the recent Hollywood animation *Robots*. All of the artists in *Embedded: Living with Technology* reflect these complex convergences, many of them informed by religious iconography and personal biography.

The exhibit is anchored by sixteen vividly colored large-scale digital images by Jeff Murphy, some of which are over six feet wide. They have been printed on canvas and paper and then framed in the same manner as the traditional oil paintings and prints they allude to. With a decade of national solo exhibitions under his belt, Murphy, an Associate Professor of Electronic Media since 1998 at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, brings ATHICA a range of work from several different series, Leap of Faith, Bible Stories and Mayan Landscapes, dating from 1999 to the present (examples may be seen at murtkingdom.com/Murphy). Before becoming an artist Murphy studied electrical engineering and computer science, the influence of which is keenly felt in his work, which "seeks to uncover how institutions such as religion and science present themselves as beyond questioning and how the faith that supports both is similar in its extremely fragile nature." His travels have taken him to sacred sites from Vatican City to temples in Mexico and Guatemala where he has captured images that he later manipulates in order to "examine the role of the spiritual in a technological culture," infesting the pre-digital with the resistors and circuit boards that are the hallmarks of our mechanized environs. Wires burst out of holy relics and church columns, capacitors wriggle across the grass in front of El Caracol. Holy figures from Renaissance paintings clutch fruit laced with chips and circuitry representing "an electronic colonization of the sublime." Sometimes the effect is quite humorous, as in *Lamentation*, which uses Botticelli's *Lamentation of the Death of Christ* as its basis, replacing Christ with a splayed banana studded with resistors and other electronic detritus held by a swooning Mother Mary. In others the effect is disturbingly orgiastic, as in *Sant Anastasia*, in

which it looks as if a surge of power just burst through wires surrounding embracing tomb figures, threatening to bring the couple back to life. All of Murphy's montages perfectly underscore the collision of new and old in an era of global communications.

Also exploiting the power of montage are the deeply, darkly and compellingly poetic digital videos of **Michael Lasater**, whose sophistication reflects his formidable background. Currently a Professor of Communication Arts and the Director of New Media at Indiana University South Bend's Ernestine M. Raclin School of the Arts, he was a professional orchestral musician for a decade after earning degrees in late 60's from Juilliard and Oberlin, which he followed up with a career as a documentarian with awards from the American Film Festival and the San Francisco International Film Festival among others. His recent video art has shown been exhibited internationally in solo and juried group venues including the California Museum of Photography, Art in General, Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art and many others. In it he mixes his rich sound scores with digitally manipulated images that powerfully evoke "issues and processes of personal psychology— perception, memory, the construction of meaning and personal narrative" which were significantly influenced by his doctoral studies in cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics.

The range and variety of his recent digitally-manipulated video works reflect an astonishing creativity at work—for instance in *Billboard*, a neon outline of a Teddy Roosevelt-ish character eats frenetically and continuously, dissolved again and again by a variety of video effects every time a word flies across the screen, heralded by a sarcastic drum roll. The pointed words allude to paradigmatic concepts belonging to American democracy in the post-colonialist era. Lasater intends "the rhetoric of *Billboard* (to be) that of mass advertising, vaudeville, and TV situation comedy," thus the whole is punctuated by a tinny laugh track, game-show style applause and the relentless accompaniment of a nervous snare drum riff that plays on you with the force of a pending deadline. A mere five minutes, *Billboard* is at once mesmerizing and horrifying. Lasater's *Flight* is an elegiac mixture of "family and archival photographs, sound and video from my earlier documentaries, footage from early film art, processed voices and sound, analog music samples, synthesized sound and music, and new video." It traces his southern lineage "from east Texas back to Mississippi and Louisiana on (his) mother's side, and from Arkansas back to Tennessee and North Carolina on (his) father's." *Flight*'s soundtrack haunts the solemn and surreal procession of slowly spinning cans, each of which bear old and young faces which float eerily above a river flowing through a dispirited industrial city. Similarly, in *Contrapunctus*, his newest work,

"Serpentine video strands move in slow counterpoint against one another, each strand carrying the fragment of a shared narrative. Voices speak in accents of the upland and tidewater south. The text fragments carried by the video strands in *Contrapunctus* paraphrase stories told by my parents—about their childhoods, their parents, how they met, their lives during World War II—a narrative web within which and out of which our family story proceeded." Lasater's works seduce you into thinking his memories are your own.

Dreamlike too are the bold kinetic sculptures of **Greg Pond**, who earned his M.F.A. in sculpture from UGA's Lamar Dodd School of Art in 1998 and is presently Assistant Professor of Art at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and a member of the Board of Directors of the Fugitive Art Center in Nashville, Tennessee. His sculptures have been shown widely regionally—most recently in a solo show at the Cheekwood Museum of Art in Tennessee—and on the west coast. Pond was deeply influenced by a 2003 trip to southwestern deserts and his work is informed by Lewis Mumford's critique of modernity, that "civilization has grown beyond the scale of that which it was built to support." In *Second Plan for the Third World* tiny motorized baby-doll mouths mime unheard words, motors whining, attached to a decorative cut-out derived from 19th century church décor, all balanced by large iron C-clamps as crude counterpoint. *Drunk on Your Ovaries* features a pale baby, reminiscent of a Renaissance cherub, which spins on a rugged iron structure between two large ornately framed mirrors. The spinning boy baby is reflected ad infinitum, along with the viewer, intermixing suggestions of medical fertility technologies with the notion of ancestral continuum. Below it, like two artificial limbs, are two round, flat trays of dried clay which function as stand-ins for eponymous ovaries. Large and beautifully crafted, Pond's sculptures motorize metaphors.

Elena Tejada's irreverent, playful motorized installations are made in reaction to the repressive Catholicism of her native Peru. The version of *Kinetic Landscape* created for the exhibit features eye-poppingly colored roboticized feather boas, pillows, and stuffed bunnies bearing custom genitalia, which vibrate in suggestive ways, triggered by motion sensors. By humorously combining domestic objects with robotics, Tejada seeks to remind us of continued sexism in the computer and robotic fields. "In a subtle and playful way I contradict the traditions involved in the social construction of gender." A truly international artist, Tejada received her MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University in Virginia in 2003 after completing painting studies in Peru where she also showed extensively. She participated in interactive art seminars there and in Barcelona, and has performed and shown in Ecuador, El Salvador, Madrid, Russia, New York and France, where she won a First Prize scholarship sponsored by the French Embassy. In 2004 she was awarded a Nexus full fellowship for Latin American Artists to be a resident at the Vermont Studio Center. She resides in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Local artist and musician **Steven Trimmer** has been a visible part of the Athens music scene in projects such as *The Leapyear*, *Green Lawns* and *The Currents*. But the Long Island, NY born and bred Trimmer, who earned his BFA in Digital Media at UGA's Lamar Dodd School of Art in 2004, also creates wonderfully child-like interactive artworks, which connect unlikely pre-technological objects to the current era through electronics. Trimmer's work tends towards the digital and musical; in *Tennis Harp* two badminton racquets equipped with piezo's are connected to a synthesizer and amplifier which allows visitors to create spontaneous music as they bat badminton birdies, *Electric Pineapple Banjo* invites viewers to

jam on an electronically revamped cookie tin and *Twelve Tone Teeth*, based on a friend's childhood memory, is an interactive graphic of a mouth that surprises and delights.

Also young and local is the team of **Bryan Cole** and **Jeff Young** who debut, *Human Error*, a series of digital videos housed in an evocatively minimalist custom-made LCD-screen cabinet. The videos feature a lone human figure donned in space-age gear and a gas mask manipulating two large, rounded and pock-marked stones in an all-white room reminiscent of the 'clean rooms' of Silicon Valley. The artists comment: "periodically, the figure is prompted, by a speaker, through indiscernible tones to react. The camera and speaker maintain an implied omnipotence, creating a fictitious scenario in which technology expresses a genuine interest in humans." The piece's oblique quality and minimal but clear soundtrack has a dry absurdist wit and a paranoid tone very reminiscent of the works of German playwright Peter Handke. Young is currently in the Digital Media program of UGA's Lamar Dodd School of Art and is expected to graduate in May, while Cole, who graduated from the same program in 2004, is currently working for a video production company.

A/Effects is a book art project by young artist **Jennifer Watts** who also graduated in 2004 with a BFA from the Digital Media program of UGA's Lamar Dodd School of Art and who currently resides in Birmingham, Alabama. She has exhibited at Exit Art in NYC. Her book combines the pre-digital techniques of moveable type letterpress printing and Coptic book binding technique with digital printing in order to address the concepts of "multiples, media inundation, and the effects of media (particularly television) on our everyday lives." Her montages mix images from the nightly news and from advertising, expressing a healthy anger at the damaging and dangerous effects of careless and manipulative mediation on our lives.

Athens resident **Kevin Hoth**—a sound, performance and video artist who has shown and performed at ATHICA numerous times—teamed up with former Athenian **Gretchen Elsner** to create *Suit Your Self*, an interactive garment. When visitors try it on, they are treated to sounds triggered by the movement of their body parts. Since 2003 Elsner has resided in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she has become the principal designer for The Whispres Project, a research team from The School of Interactive Arts at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver that develops wearable electronic garments and "soft ware"—soft circuitry made using conductive fabric substrates. We are thrilled that this new collaborative team saw fit to create a work for this exhibit.

Ron Lambert, an adjunct Professor of Art at the Cornish College of Art in Seattle, Washington received his M.F.A. from Alfred University in New York in 2004. He contributes *Daisy Drawings*; a digital video spread over three screens which features the decidedly pre-technological practice of creating daisy chains. Like many of his works, it reflects his interest in "the connection between electronic equipment, nostalgia and the experience of the sublime." In *Heartbeat Breath Swallow*, three small wall-mounted metal boxes with small windows cut into them reveal images spinning on a drum inside the box. To make them he recorded the sound of his own breathing, heartbeat, and swallowing, "the sounds that would show someone is alive," then printed out the wave image of those sounds and superimposed them over a transparency of the horizon. The sounds of his own vital signs complete the landscapes, merging digital technology's ability to render the non-visible visible with images that precede it. As Lambert points out "Culture moves at an exhausting pace yet it is difficult to make art

about flux, to make objects that ask the audience to remain still in a culture which constantly threatens to pass them by. As we leave our bodies to move at the pace of progress, we pass the physical parts of life, which reminds us that we take up space. It is in the moments of the sublime that life slows down if even for a second. ... Art can still mimic life physically; it can also mimic the experiences of life, adding interjections to remind us of the pace at which we live and how one perceives beauty and the sublime."

Nationally exhibiting conceptual artist **Arthur Huang** from Oakland, California last showed at ATHICA in the Product show in 2003, contributing *Life as a Consumer*, an obsessive notebook documenting all he had consumed for an entire year. For this exhibit we have a derivative of that project, *Consumer Verbs 10/5/2002*. An elegant diagram, Huang describes it as "a work on paper that resulted from the exploration of possible ways of visually presenting my consumer habits in order to reveal insights. It chronologically maps a single day in my life as a consumer as I move between eating, watching, spending, reading, Internet surfing, and listening. This and other projects taken together are my attempts to preserve, understand, and inform myself on possible meanings and implications of my personal consumption." Huang's visualization of the interchange between our bodily functions, represented by eating and listening, with their mediated activities, such as surfing, succinctly condenses how embedded technology is in just a single day of his life.

Martin Kakies graduated with a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Bremen in Germany this January. He has long been fascinated with the power of telephonic communications in our lives, and in particular how telephony bridges time and space, and the oddity that real contact with the person on the other end can't be achieved, despite the video-phone industry's desire to have us believe that a kiss goodnight from Daddy is just as satisfying via phone! Kakies' piece was inspired by a love of the background-sounds phones transmit, and the clues they provide us about the place and situation of each calling-partner. In *Haben Sie Telefon? (Do you have a phone?)* that which is normally background becomes foreground and telephone dialogue itself becomes background, creating a space for an awareness of the dialogue between two distant spaces—the specificity of a supermarket cash register is forever blended with the ambiance of a punk-electronic-club. Every telephone becomes in essence a digital microphone. *Haben Sie Telefon* functions as an interactive audio piece comprised of a collection of 120 actual telephone recordings received by an Internet answering machine or VoIP (Voice-over-I-P) during a two-month period, from January through March. Kakies asked friends, relatives and colleagues to call an Internet voicemail number and record atmospheric sounds from their everyday life. Using a mixer and two CD players, listeners can blend the recordings at will, creating an experience unique to each. A list of where the calls were placed is posted nearby, so listeners can tell if a given track came from a university, café, museum, donut store, etc. The sounds of footsteps and cars passing are given primacy over snippets of dialogue in German, French, Danish and English. This piece was recently part of an exhibition with WWW.DATAFUNK.DE at the Kunstfrühling Bremen.

Local artist and Good Dirt employee **Mike Klaphor** set his biting *Production Nativity*, a ceramic sculpture, in a decrepit factory featuring robot versions of Joseph, Mother Mary and Savior-in-a-box attended by three wise-men as business men. It brings us full circle back to a contemplation of the place of faith in a technological age. In his words:

This piece was made to combine the iconic status of a traditional Christian nativity scene with the setting of an aging factory, and to modernize the characters accordingly to fit into this updated situation. The outcome reflects both a commentary on modern religion as well as our current adoration of technology. Just as mass production works best when the lowest quality materials are used to create the highest quantity, so follows modern popular religion. Many attend religious functions with only vague notions of moral, traditional or even social obligations, filling its membership with misunderstanding and apathy. But religion in this country must adhere to economic Darwinism, and evolve or be doomed to nothing. Popularity today is not understood by quality but quantity, as in "how many sold," "how many attended," and so forth. The largest crowd must be accommodated, which compromises the integrity of the church. Thus Jesus, the cornerstone of the Christian faith, is seen here as a product to be made and sold according to our current economic model.

Klaphor received his BA in fine arts from Georgia College & State University in Milledgeville and has exhibited locally and throughout Middle Georgia.

We hope that NE Georgia viewers will find *Embedded: Living with Technology* a thought-provoking exploration of the profound nature of the changes in our everyday lives over the past 20 years.

Lizzie Zucker Saltz, Director

Much thanks to Caroline Cason, Board Member, for her editorial and curatorial assistance with this essay and exhibition.

Thank you to ...

The New Media Institute (NMI)
Ideas for Creative Exploration (ICE)
John Cason, Logo design
Radarmultimedia productions, inc.
Marti's atmidday
Leecepting catering
Film: Athens

The athica board
Athica 2005 interns:
Luani kammerer (cedarshoals.hs)
Alana archer (UGA)
Orangeman creative

Funding has been made possible by the Puffin Foundation

ATHICALUNRUMORUKAZONWIDENMARKTORNBDSHEDND
AREFRATYKODICE

GALLERY HOURS :
THURSDAY & FRIDAY- 3:00 - 9:00 P.M.
SATURDAY- 1:00 - 6:00 P.M.
SUNDAY- 3:00 - 6:00 P.M.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO GALLERY-SIT?
EMAIL VOLUNTEER@ATHICA.ORG

CHECKLIST FOR EMBEDDED: LIVING WITH TECHNOLOGY

BRYAN COLE AND JEFF YOUNG

Human Error (2005)
digital video, with custom LCD housing

GRETCHEN ELSNER AND KEVIN HOTH

Suit Your Self (2005)
audio, fabric, electronics, G4 cpu

ARTHUR HUANG

Consumer Verbs 10/5/2002 (2003)
ink/pencil/vinyl lettering on paper

MARTIN KAKES

Haben Sie Telefon (Do you have a phone?) (2004)
audio recordings, mixer, CD players

MIKE KLAPHOR

Production Nativity (2003)
ceramic

RON LAMBERT

Heatbeat Breath Swallow (2003)
custom metal boxes, electronics, wave images
Daisy Drawings (2003)
3 monitors, digital video, DVD player, splitter.

MICHAEL LASATER

Billboard (2004), 5:16 minutes
Flight (2000), 4:00 minutes
Five Modernist Essays (1998), 3:00 minutes
Contrapunctus, (2004), 6:30 minutes
digital video

JEFF MURPHY

Bosc Pear (2000)
Coba Version 2.8.4 (2004)
Crucifixion (2000)
El Caracol (2004)
Fiume Adige (2001)*
Golden Delicious (2000)
Gourd (2000)
View from Temple 4 (2003)
Lamentation (2000)
Pepper Version 3.1.5 (2005)
Sacrifice (1999)
San Pietro, Ver. 1 (2000)
San Pietro, Ver. 2.6.1 (2001)
Sant Anastasia (2002)
Siena (2001)
View Towards Campo Di Salute (2001)*
pigment inks on canvas, except stard items,
which are pigment inks on paper.

GREG POND

Second Plan for the Third World (2004)
wood, automotive paint, ink, doll mouths, brass,
motors, wire
Drunk on Your Ovaries (2004)
steel, foam, paint, mirrors, motor, clay

ELENA TEJADA

Kinetic Landscape (2002-2005)
motors, found objects, audio

STEVEN TRIMMER

Twelve Tone Teeth (2003-2005) (based on Nat Beall's childhood
memory)
Flash software

Tennis Harp (2003-2005)

racquets, piezo's, synthesizer, amplifier.

Tonette Patch (2004-2005)

Max software, recorder player, Elisa Dallas

Electric Pineapple Banjo (2005)

Cookie tin, wood, electronics

JENNIFER WATTS

A/Effects (2003)

Book art; letterpress and digital print on vellum and transparency

Affiliated Events:

- Saturday, April 9, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m, Opening Reception:
Corporate Striping Clean, performance piece by
Allison Rentz of Lawrenceville, GA
- Sunday, April 17th, 7:00 p.m.
Zizek!, preview screening of feature-length documentary film on
Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek, directed by former Athenian Astra
Taylor (<http://www.documentarycampaign.org/zizek.html>)
Presented in conjunction with film::Athens, filmathens.net.
Suggested Donation \$3.00 - \$9.00
- Friday, April 22nd, 8:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Electric Resonances by Athens musicians:
Sleeping Weather (Eli Queen) &
The Leapyear (Steven Trimmer & Elisa Dallas)
Suggested Donation \$3.00 - \$9.00
- Wednesday, April 27th, 8:00 - 9:30 p.m.
Gutbucket, Live electronic jazz-inspired musicians accompany animated
feature "Johnny the Giant Killer." NYC-based, internationally touring
group one night only! (See www.gutweb.com), in conjunction with
film::Athens
Suggested Donation \$6.00 - \$13.00
- Saturday, May 14th, 4:00 - 11:00 p.m.
New Music Series Spring Concert,
curated by Craig Lieske with
The Ether Frolic, Acquaviva, Martyr & Pistol, Thimble Circus with Bill Taft,
Jeff Chasteen. Paul Thomas, Big Eyed Beans From Venus, Kenosha Kid,
Garbage Island.
- Sunday, May 15th, 4:00 - 5:00 p.m.
Living with Technology Symposium, featuring a curator's tour, a
presentation by Ken Rufo and a panel discussion with exhibit artists led
by UGA's Mark Callahan of Ideas for Creative Exploration (ICE), an
interdisciplinary initiative for advanced research in the arts at the
University of Georgia. *Free!*

ATHICA: ATHENS INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

CHASE STREET WAREHOUSES, UNIT 3
P.O. BOX 1604
ATHENS, GA 30603-1613
706. 208.1613
INFO@ATHICA.ORG • WWW.ATHICA.ORG