Currents 2012

El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe
555 Camino de la Familia, Santa Fe

Currents 2012, the annual New Media Festival of Santa Fe that started as a CCA exhibit in the middle 1990s, has evolved ever further, and represents Santa Fe's contemporary art at its best. The festival is home-grown and international. The organizers are super smart and inclusive. Smart enough to include the best local digital artist and smart enough to put out an international call to new-media and video pioneers across the globe. They're also smart and insightful about how the show reads overall, about what pieces should be given prominence, and about how the darkened spaces of the exhibition are experienced as a whole. Today the show exists throughout town in multiple locations and, smartest of all, it's free, because the *Currents* crew is also smart enough to land enough philanthropic funding so that you, dear citizen never have to pay a dime. From the perspective of Santa Fe as a gift exchange economy, organizers Mariannah Amster, Frank Ragano, et al., hold all the wealth because of their incredible capacity to give.

Robert Campbell's *Pulchrior in Luce*, an eighty-seven-minute video-loop of collaged stills and video imagery, is an apt metaphor for the show itself in being technically accomplished, full of content, and with dreamlike glimpses of true beauty. Calvino-esque in conception, a series of slow pans across walls of still-shot windows reveal collaged-in moving images. Momentary glimpses of the private lives of others within what a final pan-out reveals to be a relatively large mountain town creates a voyeurism versus viewer-ism that elegantly sustains the piece's astounding length.

Sophie Clements' mesmerizing piece, *There, After*, is the runaway showstopper and an incredible work of art. Clements inhabits the largest wall in the smaller half of El Museo's interior with a gigantic, three-channel video triptych that is magical beyond belief, scientific in origins and execution, and almost impossible to take your eyes off of. Commissioned by a team of physicists, this tri-partite masterpiece of suspension and collapse is divided elementally into fire, water, and wood. On the far left screen, in a mostly empty warehouse space, an explosion dances in the center of a large room in a kind of suspended, upended time as the camera circles. It builds to a crescendo, explodes, and, after a stillness, a slow process of reassembly begins. How exactly an explosion is reassembled is part of the light and magic of the situation, and has to be seen. In the center of the space, as the camera continues to spin, the explosion crackles away, apparently gaining some kind of critical mass on the way to another crescendo. It explodes with a loud bang into real time, the smoke rises, and sans interruption the loop begins again. The other two screens are filled with similar incidents, though all take different lengths of time, as a volume of water hangs suspended in the space, wiggles, jiggles, and dances before finally falling to the floor with a loud splash. The third channel, on the right side, enacts the same phenomena with a big bunch of two-by-four planks. They appear to writhe on the floor, then rise upright into the air where they dance and collide loudly for some time before finally crashing back down to earth, where, after the sawdust settles, they begin their strange movement all over again.

Loops are to video what edges are to painting, a demarcation of the viewer's allotted spacetime in a created world. Susanna Carlisle and Bruce Hamilton's collaborative piece established an initial partial perimeter upon entry into what has become a hallmark of the *Currents* exhibitions, a large, dimly lit room of technology and sorcery, somewhere between an art-tech-Wonka-world and a super-chill nightclub, with few formal dividers between pieces. The wonder of this room is not only in the strong individual work on display, but also in the visual vignettes formed by the frisson of simultaneous broadcasting. *Sea Wall* is two simple, low, stacked blocks of recycled glass bricks. Two video projectors send imagery documenting ripples on the water of a bracken-laced shoreline. The imagery moves through the glass blocks, refracts and abstracts brilliantly like a moving Monet. Just behind it is Madelin Coit's *Tesuque: Day and Night*, a hypnotizing time-lapse record of her backyard garden peacefully, reassuringly, and somewhat jubilantly spinning the seasons.

Marion Wasserman's *Burnt* juxtaposes elements of Japanese-themed fashion shoots and altered digital footage in a lovely mélange accompanied by a soundtrack that asks hard questions about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The piece has a veneer of ironic detachment that covers a heart of gold, and presents issues of contemporaneity versus historicism in the face of a corporate global media culture obsessed with forced forgetting and dismissal of political critique. Perennial critics' pick for subtlety and style, Hsiao Ihara's evolving black-and-white binary divisions of a large vertical rectangle is surprisingly viewable, demonstrating that time can play a role in constructivist imagery and hard-edged abstraction. Move over, Frederick Hammersly. Here comes Hsiao.

—Jon Carver

Sophie Clements, There, After, video triptych, 2012