Festival of light, motion & sound

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By Jackie Jadrnak / Journal North Reporter

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"Cosmic Flower Unfolding" is a single-channel digital animation by Ben Ridgway. (Courtesy of Currents 2014)

Send a photo to the moon and see how it returns transformed.

Follow a former member of the Chilean army under the administration of Augusto Pinochet as he revisits the site of prisoners' executions.

Watch colorful Huichol yarn paintings come alive with motion and sound.

These experiences and a host of others are available over the next two weeks as part of Currents: the Santa Fe International New Media Festival.

And it's all free. Well, almost.

A new addition to the festival, now in its fifth year, is a major "live cinema performance" at the Lensic on June 20.

The Light Surgeons will bring "SuperEverything," described as a live cinema performance, to the Lensic on June 20. (Courtesy of Currents 2014)

The London-based group, The Light Surgeons, brings "SuperEverything," which its artistic director, Christopher Thomas Allen, says "attempts to survey our collective search for meaning, from our fascination with identity to the urbanization of the landscape to our cathedrals to consumer culture, in order to ask fundamental questions about our human condition in the 21st century."

Tickets are $15-$25 and can be obtained at the Lensic box office, ticketssantafe.org or by calling 988-1234.

"It's a really beautiful piece," said Mariannah Amster, co-founder of the Currents festival with Frank Ragano. "It's set in Malaysia. It's very lush. It's about globalization, in a way.

"It's so hard to mix politics and art and do it successfully," she added. "This really mixes the two in a beautiful way."

That event didn't make it into the Currents catalogue because the appearance was finalized too late, she said.

Human clay figures try to hold off a road grader in "Inevitable," a single-channel video by Gilles Dusube of Rwanda. (Courtesy of Currents 2014)

But a host of other offerings did make it. While the main set of exhibits is at El Museo Cultural – it will be closed on Mondays and Tuesdays during the June 13-29 run – two galleries in the Railyard have joined in hosting exhibits: Zane Bennett Contemporary Art and David Richard Gallery. The mobile Axle Contemporary also will present multi-media performances/installation in the Railyard.

Or you can head south for screenings in the Digital Dome at the Institute for American Indian Arts, 83 Avan Nu Po Road; head east to an exhibit opening at the Center for Contemporary Arts, 1050 Old Pecos Trail; or just walk a few extra steps to performance/installations at Warehouse 21, 1614 Paseo de Peralta, or experimental documentary shorts and a feature at the Jean Cocteau Cinema, 418 Montezuma Ave.

And for the first time this year, Arcos is going to contribute a multi-media dance performance in conjunction with Noisefold.

This just goes to show that it truly does take a village to create this festival.

Free and friendly

But, as opposed to many Santa Fe arts and music festivals that have established offices and full-time staffs, this one is pretty much put together by Amster and Ragano, working out of their homes, with additional temporary staff and interns – and a lot of volunteers – when the season heats up.

Asked how they could offer this wide range of events for free, Amster's answer is succinct: "We write a lot of grants."

"One of the reasons we want (it) to be free is we want everyone to come and check it out," she said. "We get families; we get older people; we get young people – kids love it!"

The festival grew organically since 2002 when Amster and Ragano, both artists who were increasingly using digital media, talked about how there was really no outlet to show such work, so, what the heck, they organized a show themselves at CCA.

They did other such shows on and off until 2010, when they worked out a deal with El Museo Cultural and "our fantasy of launching a real international new media event became realized," Amster said.

The irony is that she hasn't had time to do her own artwork since then.

But she doesn't express any regrets. "It's exciting that we can create a platform for so many wonderful artists," Amster said.

This year, the festival received about 350 submissions from around the world, and work of about 90 artists is included – some of them from the submissions and some as foundation artists who have been with the festival from the start, she said.

Currents is bringing in about 35-40 of the artists, many of them staying in dorms at the Santa Fe University of Art and Design.

The exhibits include 27 separate installations, defined as video or digital work integrated into a sculpture or environment, she said.

"This year we have an incredible range of work," Amster said.

Currents 2014
WHEN: Opening 6-10 p.m. today, exhibits and events continue through June 29
WHERE: Main exhibit hall, El Museo Cultural, 555 Camino de la Familia
COST: Free
OPENING NIGHT EVENTS

- Exhibition, "New Media Transforms Tradition," 5 p.m., Zane Bennett Contemporary Art Gallery, 435 S. Guadalupe St.
- Exhibition, "Blue Tara" by artists Max Almy and Teri Yarbrow, 5 p.m., David Richard Gallery, 544 S. Guadalupe St.
- Trombe Performance by Patrick Saint-Denis, multi-media, 7-10 p.m., repeated on the hour, in El Museo Cultural
- Flinching Eye Collective, pop-up performance, 7 p.m., El Museo
- The Human Avatar Project, multi-media performance, 7 p.m., Railyard Plaza
- Evaluation: Banal to Transcendent, multi-media performance, 8 p.m. Axle Contemporary on Railyard Plaza
- Breezy Night, Mara Leader and Jason Goodyear, audio-visual installation, 8 p.m., Railyard Plaza
- Outdoor Vision Fest, audio-visual installation from Santa Fe University of Art and Design, 8:30 p.m., Railyard Plaza
- Just Intoned Poem, Molly Bradbury, audio-visual installation, 8:30 p.m., Warehouse 21, 1614 Paseo de Peralta

MORE INFO: currentsnewmedia.org

Offbeat and sublime

Works range from whimsical to profound, realistic to abstract, colorfully lush to austere.

Some are solely video; some incorporate physical objects; some morph in response to an interaction with the viewer. Many challenge and give a subtle twist to the viewer's assumptions and perceptions of the world around us.

Perhaps a description on the Currents website says it best: "Our goal is to strike a balance between the offbeat and the sublime."

"Huichol Art Painting," a single-channel video/iPad by Tristan Love, brings movement to the traditional images. (Courtesy of Currents 2014)

Works include Alejandro Borsani of Argentina playing with light and the formation of artificial clouds in a chamber used for atmospheric research. Susanna Carlisle and Bruce Hamilton of Santa Fe project images of graffiti from the Berlin Wall onto serrated, rusted steel slats. William Mitchell of Santa Fe projects images of cities and nature onto suspended umbrellas.

Visitors can walk between screens where geographic shapes and textures are projected, changing the images with their bodies, in a work by German Jörg Staeger. Joseph Farbrook of Brookline, Mass., working with Micaela Gardner, brings a video of a "Guerrilla Dancer" breaking into dance in a variety of unexpected public places. Benjamin Ridgway of San Francisco shows "emerging and dissolving oceanic, futuristic and mandela forms."

And don't forget 222444, a live net performance by Dean Terry. You have to go online at 2:22 a.m. Saturday in order to catch it.

For a comprehensive look at artists and events, go to currentsnewmedia.org.