



The New Mexican's Weekly Magazine
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Pasatiempo

Currents 2011

Robert B. Ker ■ For The New Mexican

HIGH TIDE

Currents 2011 draws from world of talent

Mariannah Amster and Frank Ragano of Parallel Studios entered the world of multimedia art from much different backgrounds. Amster was a painter who came to the medium because, as she told *Pasatiempo*, she “needed to solve some problems and needed new tools.” Ragano was involved in the theater before moving on to installation work and eventually incorporating video into his pieces. With those backgrounds, the two artists make a fitting pair, as visual aesthetics and theatrical presentation are — along with technical proficiency — two of the three most important components necessary to craft multimedia — often called “new media” — art.

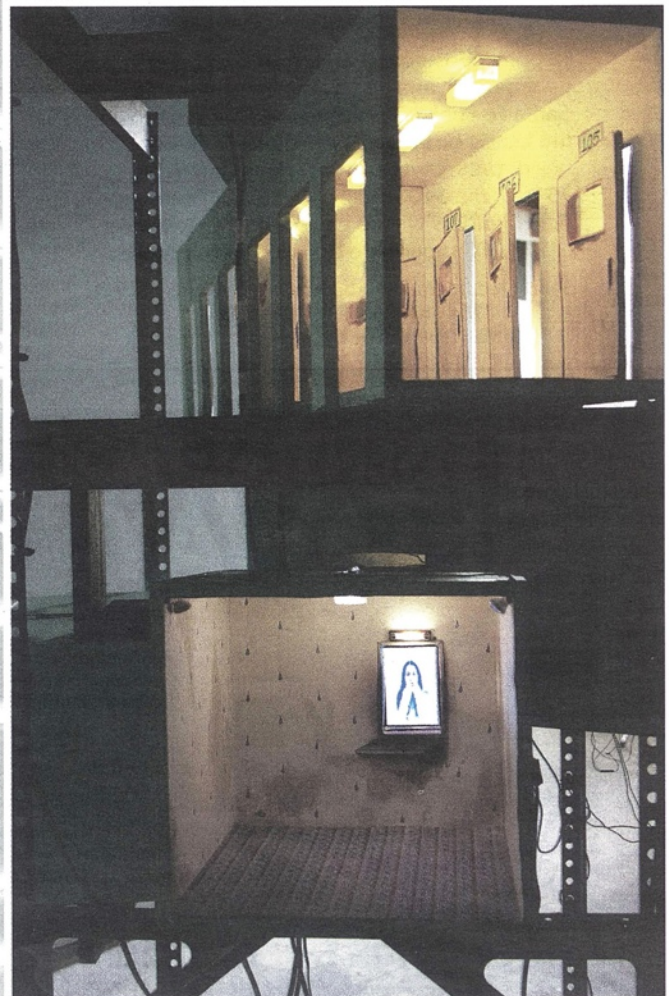
With *Currents 2011*, they bring together a host of local and international artists who approach this medium from many perspectives. The festival opens with a reception at El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe on Friday, June 10, and continues through June 19. Aside from the main exhibition at El Museo, the festival boasts a number of presentations, installations, performances, and panels at various venues.

Amster and Ragano wanted the event to be a broad community experience more than an insular group show aimed specifically at the medium’s audience. They wanted the main exhibit to be held in the Railyard, because it’s a central part of town that attracts a wide cross section of Santa Feans. In past years they have involved local high-school students. They are also adamant about keeping the show free (with the exception of a workshop presented by Timothy Weaver). “If you charge \$5, people who don’t know anything about the medium won’t even come in,” Ragano said.

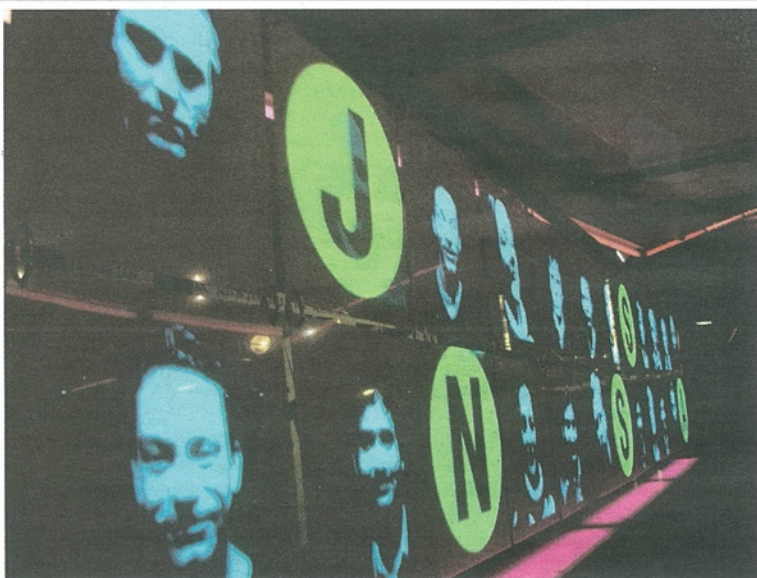
Most important, they designed the show to be inviting and inclusive, holding an open call online and then choosing work based simply on what appealed to them. “Part of our curation process is really looking for different ways that people use the medium,” Amster said. “And, of course, it’s stuff that is successful and that we like, but it’s important to us to look for the range of ways that people are using this relatively new form. And I think that playfulness and sense of experimentation contributes to making the atmosphere more open.”

“Our philosophy is that anybody off the street could come into an exhibition like this and experience something they’ve never experienced before and be able to be open to it,” Ragano added. “I think one of the keys to that is how you present the exhibition. If the environment they enter is wondrous and engaging, then they’re open to taking in work they’ve never experienced. Last year, we had people from all walks of life

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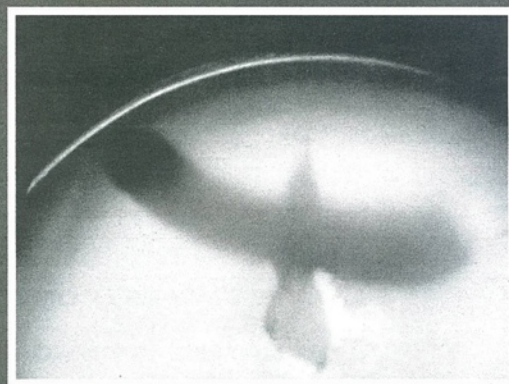
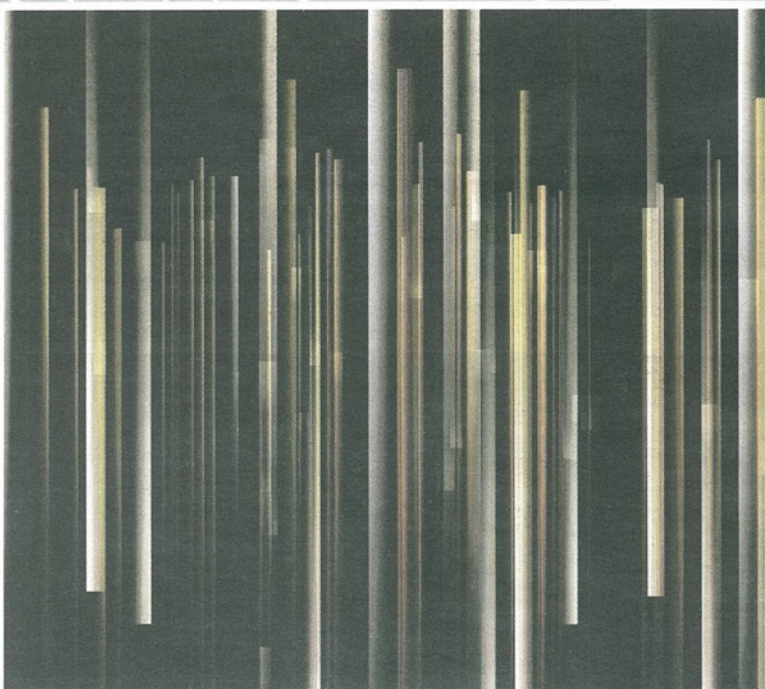
Sarah Stolar: *Hospital*, video installation from *Dollhouse* series, multichannel video, drawings, and sculpture



Above, Olga Mink, Carmin Karasic, Rolf van Geldern: *Sjansmachine* (Flirt Machine), interactive installation projections, 24 sanded plexiglass panels, computer, and face recognition software

Below, James Coker: *Harbor Trees*, multichannel video projection/installation

Right, G. Matthew Chase Daniel: *Birdcloud*, video sculpture/installation, video, water, and steam



Currents 2011

6 p.m.-midnight Friday, June 10 Festival opening, El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe, 555 Camino de la Familia, 992-0591

10:30 a.m.-noon Saturday, June 11 "Water Wars," a presentation and discussion of the digital media game developed by Tad Hirsch, Santa Fe Complex, 624 Agua Fria St., 216-7562

1-4 p.m. Saturday, June 11 Digital dome presentation, Institute of American Indian Arts, 83 Avan Nu Po Road, 424-2300

6-10 p.m. Saturday, June 11 Video installation opening of Robert Campbell's *Dreamers*, Center for Contemporary Arts, 1050 Old Pecos Trail, 982-1338

8 p.m. Saturday, June 11 Four video and sound performances, Center for Contemporary Arts

2-4 p.m. Sunday, June 12 "Iranian Art: Self-Exile, Self-Censorship," panel discussion moderated by Morehshin Allahyari, Zane Bennett Contemporary Art, 435 S. Guadalupe St., 982-8111

Noon-6 p.m. Wednesday, June 15, and 3-6 p.m. Thursday, June 16 "Data Sonification, Visualization and Bending with Max/MSP/Jitter Custom Tools and Applications," workshop led by Timothy Weaver, Center for Contemporary Arts Digital Media Lab; for fees, visit www.currents2011.com/timweaverworksho.html

7-8:30 p.m. Thursday, June 16 "The Re-Mindful App: Random Apps of Kindness," presentation by Haj Kahlisa, Santa Fe Complex

3-6 p.m. Friday, June 17 New Mexico Digital Media Forum, Santa Fe Complex

All events are free unless otherwise noted. For a complete schedule and more information, including links to artists' websites, see www.currents2011.com.

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come in even if they've never seen a video show before, and they enjoyed it."

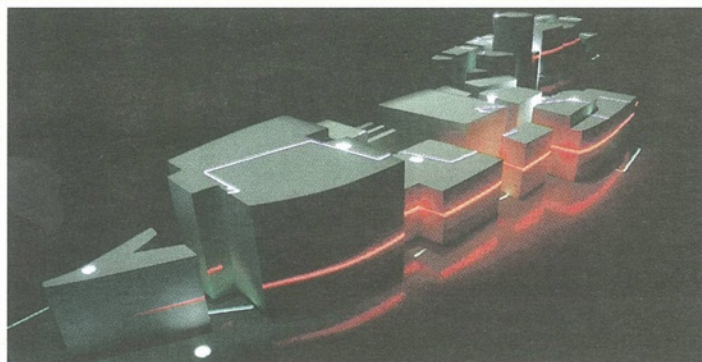
This year, they continue the playfulness in the show's entryway with several interactive installations, including *Sjansmachine* (Flirt Machine), a collaborative work by Olga Mink, Carmin Karasic, and Rolf van Gelder. In this piece, visitors can have pictures taken of various parts of their faces or bodies in a photo booth. Those pictures are projected in cubes of light that people can manipulate or stack any way they like. From this entryway, visitors then enter the main space, which Ragano said is more of a mix of "the playful and the profound."

The duo has been honing this mix since 2002, the year of the first *Currents*. The festival has not been an annual event, but the co-creators established a working blueprint that they returned to and fine-tuned. Ragano elaborated on this evolution. "When we started out with our first show, at the warehouse at CCA [Center for Contemporary Arts], we did it on a shoestring. It turned out to be an incredibly beautiful show, and people still talk about it. Because it was all local artists and we showed it at a warehouse, everyone pitched in and built their own work.

"One thing that I'm really happy about is that we've maintained that same thing even though it's gotten to the point where we're trying to create a globally recognized new-media festival. Still, the artists come in and do their own installations. They don't just give us the work and we put it up. They come in and build it. That allows them to improvise. And it becomes more site-specific in a certain way. I'm really happy that we've been able to maintain that even through our growth."

Beginning in 2010, with a *Currents* event co-sponsored by SITE Santa Fe and intended to coincide with that organization's biennial, Amster and Ragano expanded their vision beyond a handful of local artists in a warehouse to an international festival with several events beyond the exhibition itself. The collaborative effort led them to accept Iranian-born artist Morehshin Allahyari's suggestion of a panel discussion on issues of censorship and self-censorship.

Still, almost half of the artists represented in the festival live in New Mexico. And there's good reason to stage the event here. "New Mexico has always been a center for arts and sciences, and the new-media world is where they meet," Ragano explained. "And there's a tremendous amount of talent for that in New Mexico. Per capita, it's extreme. And more so with the whole digital industry that's moved in around the new film industry here. So it's the perfect place for it. And so far, the response from the city, the state, the local artists, the whole arts community, has been very good. And all the artists that have been coming in town are all very excited about it. It's got some momentum at this point." ◀



Robert Campbell and Yuki Nakamura: *Floating Plaster City*, multimedia installation, three-channel projection, cast Hydrocal sculpture