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arts & entertainment

Techno Renaissance

The Kitchen's Month-long Series Highlights the Next Wave of Collaboration Between Art and Technology
by Andy Battaglia

Rubbing nylon and chewing sounds courtesy of a restless and tactless back-row audience member during Seth Riskin's silent, meditative *Light Dance*, the first performance of Techno Pas-

ceeded in turning the wonders of light into poetry and the movements of dance into a holistic, kinetic environment. Most of all, he imbued technology — usually cold and unfeeling, detached and

initially recognize the abilities of calculated, cold-cased technology to appeal to the intuitive, ardent sentiments the arts evoke. The nascent dabbling in technologically enhanced artistic endeavors did little to encourage high expectations for the marriage of the two media. The questions raised from the possibilities of art embracing the surrounding hardwired world seem to lead to the one posed so succinctly by The Kitchen's performance curator, Anney Bonney: "How do you put the mind and the heart together in one place?"

This question weighs heavily over a large part of The Kitchen's March programming. And the answer, at least as postulated by the artists involved, lies in

events ranging from the experimental video acts of The Pool to Dennis O'Connor's explorations of the "theater of the body" inspired by Antonin Artaud's writings on acupuncture to the classical piano interpretations of Kraftwerk songs played by Terre Thaemlitz while dressed in drag.

Such a varied roster shows what is most intriguing about the integration of a new artistic medium: the absolute lack of already prescribed rules and ideas.

"As the technology develops, the new aesthetics develop alongside of it," said Ben Neill, music curator at The Kitchen. "All of these performances are important examples of artists pushing the envelope to make the new art less machine-like."

hopelessly postmodern — with soul. And a towering, earth-worn soul at that. The evening's program notes pointed out that Riskin had spent time in India studying Hindu ritual fire dances in relation to his work, which uses, in essence, only a more updated version of the flame.

Wired extrapolations on creative expression like this one are the subject of much of Techno Passion Month. While the series functions to showcase artists exploring new and unbridled (at least in artistic terms) technology, it also strives to humanize these same tools. In other words, to have technology serve the art and not the other way around.

It is no mistake that the series' title, "Techno Passion," appeals to two seemingly disparate regions of the human psyche. Few would

His choice of cliché speaks volumes about his subject, for as E-mail slowly replaces the increasingly archaic concept of "snail-mail," the envelope itself is going the way of the Edsel. Sure, that may be a bit of a stretch, but it illustrates how these new media are so young yet so revolutionary that even the envelope to be pushed is called into question.

That the envelope must be an increasingly interdisciplinary one, though, is clear. Troika Ranch, a dance and musical collective that performed at The Kitchen on March 5, blurs the lines traditionally drawn between dancer, performer, conductor and even the musical instruments themselves by using electronic sensors on the dancer's limbs which modify the musical score and accompanying video images with each movement. The dancer, Dawn Stoppello, quite literally sings the body electric. Still, the particular physicality of dance makes her more than the rhythmic cyborg this description might suggest.

"When the dancer in the video image moves in slow-motion, it's

ties of movement? No doubt about it.

This loyalty to qualities both human and mechanistic, and to ignoring the discipline that limits each discipline, will also be integral to The Pool's performance on March 12. This New York-based avant-garde troupe creates experimental videos by taping objects and actions performed live onstage and then simultaneously altering and re-mixing them to create kinetic abstractions in real time. As group member Benton Bainbridge said, The Pool plays with the "smoke and mirrors" of movie-making in a live setting in order to erase the lines separating cinema, theater, music and visual art. In performing the entire operation onstage, the camera becomes a more immediate tool, closer to the nature of a musical instrument. And with no time (or desire) to dwell solely on its photographic function, the camera takes on novel, less fully realized possibilities.

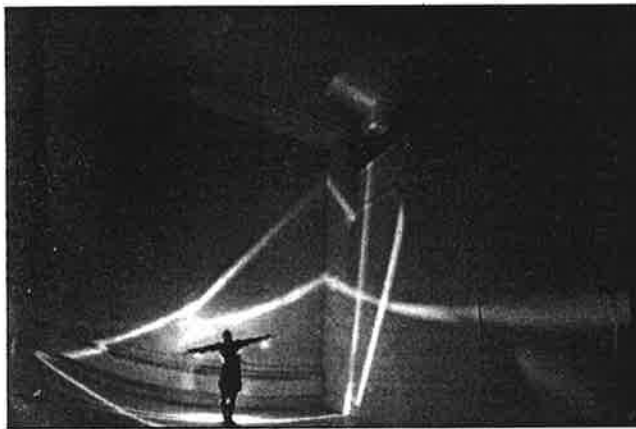
"It really demystifies the whole process," said Bainbridge, "but at the same time, just like seeing live music being made, there's a certain mystery that gets reintroduced."

That mystery, more often than not, is imbedded in none other than the artist — not in a beam of light nor in a video camera, and certainly not in the terminal of a computer. As the artists featured during Techno Passion Month seek to reveal, these new technologies can help uncover new questions and answers, failures and successes.

"Technology means one thing: tools," said Bainbridge. "It even includes the hammer, as far as I'm concerned."

While The Kitchen's featured artists have traded the hammer for microchips and labyrinthine circuitry, the vitality and purpose of art, out of necessity, will remain the same. Just so long as they mind their thumbs along the way. ■

Techno Passion Month continues through March 28 at The Kitchen (512 W. 19th St. at 10th Avenue, 255-5793).

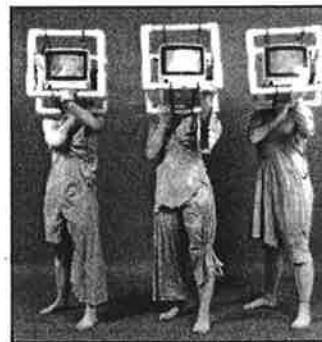


Light on His Feet: Seth Riskin, shown here performing his *Light Dance* at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for Advanced Visual Studies in 1990, spun his rays of digital fire at The Kitchen on March 5 for Techno Passion Month

sion Month at The Kitchen, said as much about technology as the performance itself. As technology was seemingly sanctified and the medium of dance made concrete by the physical realities of light waves and optical stimuli, one simple lesson became clear in relation to technology in the arts: people will *always* have the ability to muck it up.

Regardless of its defeatist message, though, this lesson proves to be a reassuring one. As art adopts technology as a new medium and fears of expression being reduced to the 1's and 0's of computer-speak appear increasingly justified, it reminds us of the people behind the technology more than the technology behind the people.

And in the end, minus the melodrama, Riskin's piece was in no way ruined. Instead, he suc-



Hard Hats: Troika Ranch confronts the modern landscape by donning video monitors and dancing to the composition of their synchronized bodies

totally luscious and very seductive," said Mark Coniglio, Troika Ranch's co-artistic director. "But there is something about the human body breathing really hard and panting that you just can't duplicate with a machine."

Duplicate? No. But augment in a way that celebrates both the visceral and the more ethereal quali-



Techno Act

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