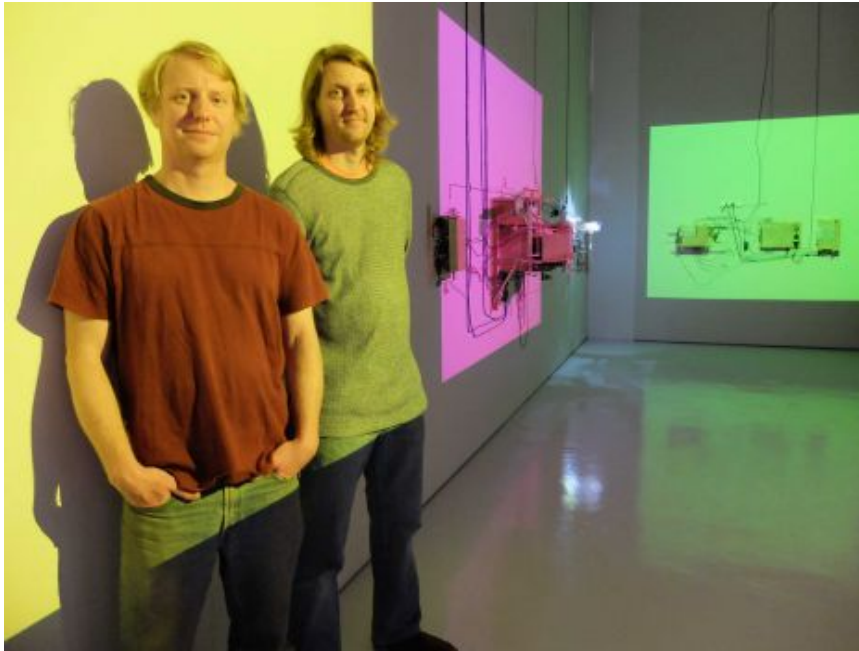




'Trailer' Takes viewers on a wild ride

By Molly Glentzer | February 14, 2014



Jeff Shore and Jon Fisher first thought about combining visual art and music in the late 1980s when they attended - or, rather, didn't attend - Clear Lake High School. "We met skipping school and doing garage music," Shore said recently.

He and Fisher were in the back space of McClain Gallery tweaking their room-size installation "Trailer," which incorporates a network of wall-mounted electro-kinetic sculptures, analog electronics and video sequencing. It's like a filmmaking device that's lip-synching, Shore explained.

Imagine entering a large circuit box-turned-movie theater.

Overhead projectors throw colorful rectangles onto the walls, engulfing electronic contraptions that are made with plywood boxes and miles of wire. Press the tiny red button near the door and a loud thwack on a snare drum starts the action.

More startling business ensues for the next 12 minutes as you're enveloped by poignant, sometimes ominous music and poetic black-and-white video that jumps from screen to screen: A whiff of narrative places you in a vintage camper in the woods, with a stage and musical instruments that appear to play themselves. Capable of producing anything from Euro-club beats to accordion-driven melodies, the instruments seem to be taking requests through an old-fashioned landline.

The electronic devices on the gallery walls, meanwhile, light up from inside; motors whir; parts move. Lo and behold, a peek through corners in the crude-looking gizmos reveal miniature sound stages, each containing a tiny kinetic sculpture whose movement is being captured, in real time, by a small surveillance camera - the video feed.

That drumstick? It's carved from a toothpick, and the drumhead it strikes is no bigger than a dime. One box holds an odd little tuba; another, a bellows with no keys. Their motion and the video sequences are controlled by a computer program that simultaneously generates the music.

"Nothing's recorded. It's always subtly different," Shore explained. "Jon writes a program that accesses single instrument sounds. He tells it to play a certain thing when a scene comes, but it has the ability to make some choices."

Almost as amazing is the friendship Shore and Fisher have maintained in spite of living miles apart with families and day jobs. (Shore is a conservator at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Fisher, who lives in Dripping Springs, is a freelance software developer.) After high school, they went to North Texas State University. Shore earned a painting degree and came home to Houston. Fisher earned a music degree, then a doctorate in music composition at Northwestern University in Chicago. They could have drifted apart. But Shore, bored with painting and wanting to engage viewers with "experiences," kept asking Fisher for technical help with projects that involved electronics.

"He'd call me saying something like, 'I want to make this piece with 99 metronomes, and I can't make them work independently,'" Fisher recalled.

At the same time, Fisher was wondering what to do with electronically generated music he created. He'd seen too many other experimental composers blow interesting work by presenting it in traditional concert venues.

"That didn't make sense to me," he said. "There was no context that made sense."

By 2002, Fisher and Shore were collaborating formally to create automated sound-producing sculpture that could be exhibited at art galleries.

Shore still handles most of the visuals and mechanics, while Fisher designs the electronics and composes the music.

"We've been married for a long time; we don't screw with each others' stuff," Shore said. "We trust that the other person will fill in the gaps."

Their reputation has grown along with the scale of their projects.

"Trailer," which debuted at New York's Derek Eller Gallery this past fall, follows the success of 2007's "Reel to Reel," which was shown at three museums as well as Houston's McClain Gallery and New York's Clementine Gallery.

Seeing "Trailer," you have to wonder why these brilliant guys still need day jobs. A central computer controls the whole thing from an adjacent room. We peeked inside, and it felt a little deflating, like seeing the Wizard of Oz behind his curtain. (Not that I'd have been able to read Fisher's program or make sense of the tangle of wires.)

Technical innovation aside, "Trailer" works because everything about it - the music, the film, the sculpture, the electronics - evokes curiosity. It's a curiosity best sated by pushing that little red button again and enjoying the mysterious ride.

<http://www.chron.com/entertainment/arts-theater/article/Trailer-takes-viewers-on-a-wild-ride-5236396.php>