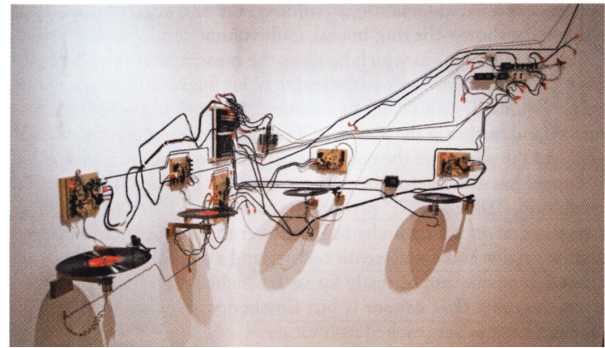Jeff Shore and John
Fisher, *Reel to
Reel* (detail), **2007**,
mixed media,
dimensions variable.

Jeff Shore and John Fisher
CLEMENTINE

We open on the view through a window, watching as the moon rises above a lake and is reflected in its dark, still surface. Dense foliage surrounds the water; the night sky is clear and empty. The image, a video projection, is in black-and-white, but this does not detract from its lush feel. Expansive music accompanies the scene; appropriate to a grand open space, it is also shadowed by a vague portentousness, a slight queasiness that hints that there is more here than meets the eye.

Slowly, as if moved by an unseen hand, the window closes and we find ourselves observing the landscape through a haze of frosted glass; then the music dies and the screen fades, momentarily, to white.

The fragment, while noirishly atmospheric, seems at first unremarkable—it could have come from any of a thousand movies or television dramas. The landscape is seductive but ultimately generic, the sound track a little odd in some indefinable way, but hardly extraordinary. Yet there is something unnervingly artificial about the overall effect, a profound airlessness that gives the lie to the image as representing any directly observable reality. While such an impression would now most often suggest the use of digital imaging, the video's makers, Jeff Shore and John Fisher, in fact marshal all manner of low- *and* high-tech trickery to generate what we see on-screen. And, crucially, they also not only refuse to hide this equipment in discreet boxes, but arrange and elaborate it into extraordinarily complex sculptural structures.

Reel to Reel, 2007, the Texas-based pair's recent multipart installation at Clementine, represented the first opportunity that the artists (who have collaborated since 2002) have had to orchestrate a truly immersive experience in a New York gallery. (Individual works have cropped up previously here and there, but their impact is hardly equivalent.) Here, an array of interconnected "electro-kinetic" devices arranged around the exhibition space not only generated the centrally located video's imagery and sound, but were fascinating in their own right, sending viewers shuttling back and forth between screen and wall as they attempted to divine which moving part or static circuit was responsible for which visual simulation or aural effect.

There's a likeable Rube Goldberg look to Shore and Fisher's devices, and a contagiously enjoyable sense that the artists take pleasure in getting carried away by the outrageous complexity of their inventions. Their ideal solution to representing a given site or event is rarely the most direct or efficient one; rather, they delight in turning the act of looking and listening into a game of hide-and-seek. What appears as a tiled floor in one segment of the video, for example, turns out to be a tiny piece of checkered plastic partially secreted inside a Plexiglas box. And what shows up as a watery landscape is in fact a large rotating metal drum to which pieces of textured material have been attached. As an illusion it's effective but not alienating; there's a genuine feeling of openness and improvisation about it.

Every time the roughly ten-minute sequence recommences, the music changes slightly. As the press release explains, it is itself semi-improvised, generated by "a combination of automated mechanical instruments, modified audio equipment, and a collection of digital audio samples that are sequenced and mixed in real-time according to custom algorithms." Even the machines' wiring is considered, never allowed to just trail away but always positioned, compulsively, as a multicolored labyrinth. Without its central focus, all of this might collapse into geeky tinkering, but *Reel to Reel*'s multifarious cultural associations—with the history and devices of cinema and music, with the nature of our interaction with technologies of different vintages and complexities, and with the construction of narrative through the willing suspension of disbelief—are, ultimately, strengthened rather than obscured by the eccentric techniques employed to produce them.

—*Michael Wilson*