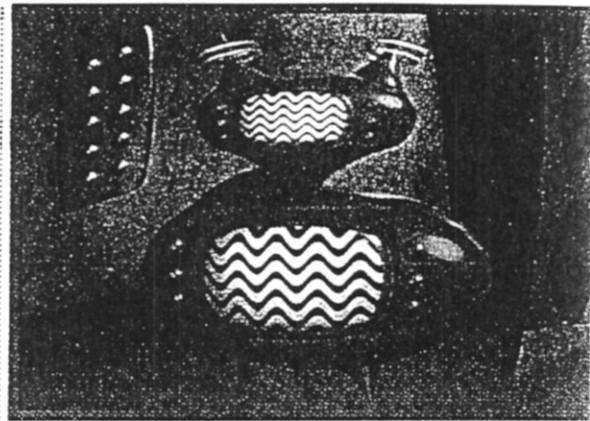


# Experimenta

## Electronic arts festival

Emma Miller catches a glimpse of the future, where cutting-edge technology gets a twist from avant garde artists.



Ian Haig

The Experimenta Media Arts Festival has kept Melbourne's lovers of mindbending experimental film, video and multi-media arts busy over the past couple of weeks.

In the post-industrial shell of the Lonsdale Street power station technoheads and technophobes alike weaved their way through a maze of technological creations.

Every nook and cranny of the building was used for ten days of continuous film screenings, interactive and multiple media installations, performances, concerts and link-ups with galleries around the world.

The 'Prince of Sleaze', New York's underground filmmaker and photographer, Richard Kern, wowed viewers at a film and video screening on 14 November.

Film buffs were also rewarded with retrospectives of the work of avant garde American filmmaker Stan Brakhage and Canadian director Guy Maddin.

The festival aims to give audiences a chance to experience cutting-edge innovations and, perhaps, get a glimpse of the future.

The festival's many and varied satellite exhibitions, open until early December, offer hi-tech food for thought.

The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art is exhibiting a range of work produced over 22 years by international media artist Jill Scott.

The exhibition, *The Body Remembers*, combines video, animation and digital manipulation with documentation of her performances. Scott's work dissects the relationships between the body, time, memory and the mass media, and confronts technology with an empowered female viewer.

One piece, 'Frontier of Utopia', allows the viewer to experience bits of women's lives from the 1900s, 1930s, 1960s and 1990s through personal diaries and photos via a touch screen.

Another exhibition, *Somatic Disturbances*, hones in on the notion of 'home' and explores domestic memory fragments and emotion through technology.

Curator Shiralee Saul initially decided to investigate the realms of domesticity because she wanted an issue that was not related to the hi-tech world. 'I thought the home was about as far away from it as you could get but then I realised that the home was packed with digital technology—the video, VCR, microwave, dishwasher, phone, fax, computer,' she said.

The intimacy of existence and the perceived impersonal nature of technology are themes the show explores with works including Sarah Waterson's 'Mapping E-motion'—nine latex robotic breasts which respond to the viewer's interest.

Other pieces include Martine Crompton's interactive work, 'The

Cute Machines', Ruth Frost's exploration of non-existent childhood memories called 'Safe House', and Alison Main's 'Prodigal', which teams 19th century-style pictures with perverse narratives.

'I think all of us have a kind of cosy stereotypical definition of home buried deep inside our brains and this exhibition gives artists' personal takes on it,' Ms Saul says. 'Some are funny, some are challenging and some will really offend people.'

When Ms Saul set out to choose pieces for *Domestic Disturbances* she found that the 'most appropriate' works were by women artists. 'What surprised me was how few men who worked in digital media were dealing with these kinds of very intimate yet universal themes,' she said.

'The women all use computers and it is intrinsic to their art, but none of them talked about RAM and the workings of the technology in the way that men talked about it—they talked about their ideas.'

**'It's not an activist show, it's not a social issue show, but social issues are raised and I think people will go away thinking differently and questioning things.'**

But *Domestic Disturbances* has no feminist agenda. According to Saul, 'It's not an activist show, it's not a social issue show, but social issues are raised and I think people will go away thinking differently and questioning things.'

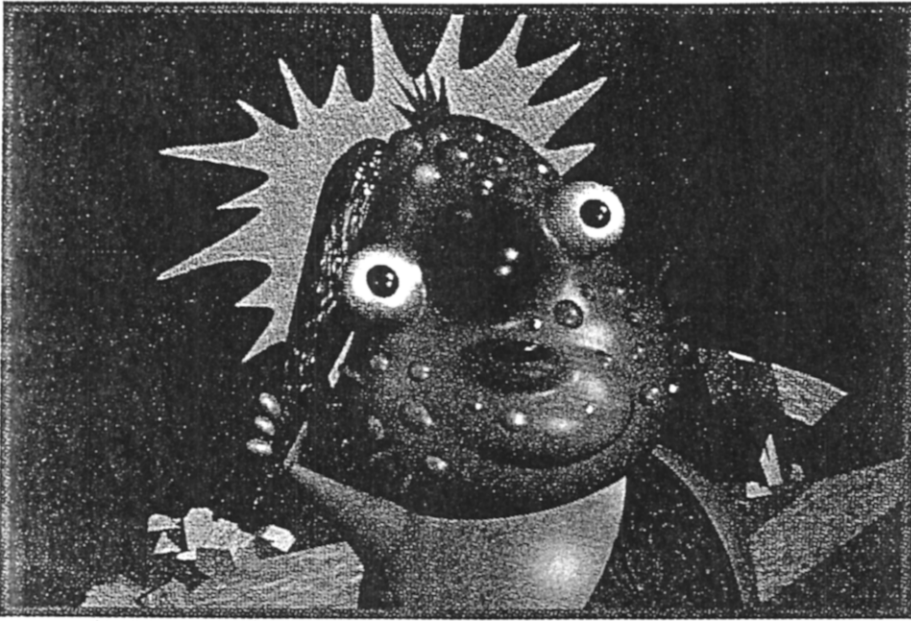
Ms Saul said the concept of 'home' was in constant flux although it was often synonymous with a haven, somewhere safe and comforting.

'But home can be the most dangerous place to be because things like rape, emotional and physical abuse and industrial accidents happen most commonly in the home.'

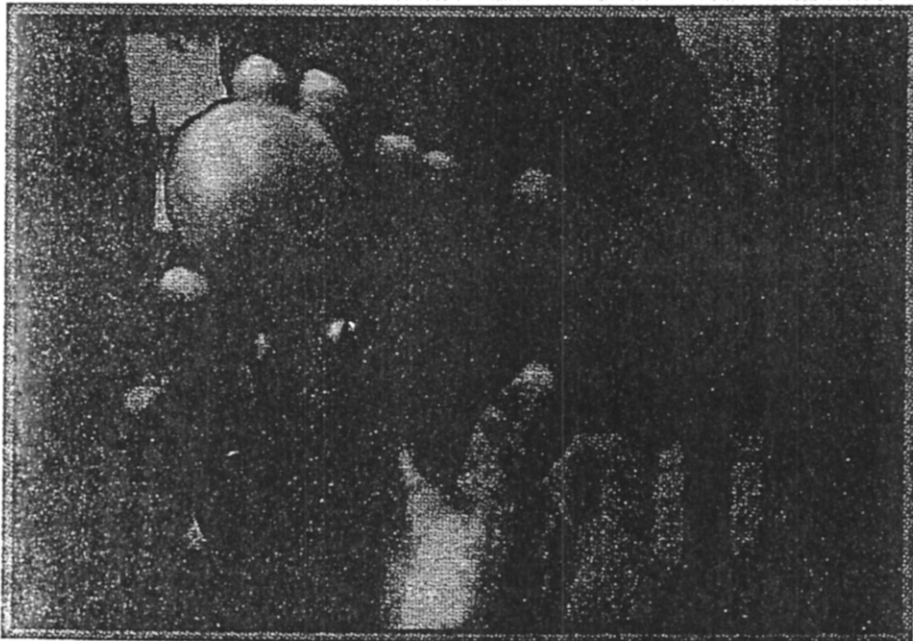
*Burning the Interface* is the first international exhibition of CD-Rom art in Australia. Despite claims by the new breed of Web site artists that the medium is obsolete, curator Mike Leggett insists CD-Rom is not dead. 'The Internet is useful for letting people know about things but it's really quite limited,' he said.

'CD-Rom has lots of mileage left because it is a medium which can deliver rich images and sound.'

The show features overseas and Australian artists including Michael Buckley, Linda Dement, and Troy Innocent—the comput



*Astroturf, Ian Haig*



*Reflections, Abstractions and Memory Structures...RAMs, Peter DeLorenzo*

er graphic artist behind many of the Psy Harmonics label's videos and CD sleeves.

*Burning and Interface* has work from 100 artists from 145 countries and almost every installation requires viewer interaction.

Mr Leggett said the Experimenta works encouraged people to explore and find different ways of interacting, as well as think about the interface between people and computers.

'Computers are becoming ubiquitous and people are now more open and relaxed about what appears on the screen and can appreciate it as artistic—even if it's not in a gilt frame on a wall,' he said.

Mr Leggett said art was 'not always about high art but also about funky places' and that's what made a CD-Rom exhibition both special and necessary.

He said he wanted to explore but also demystify the notion of the 'information superhighway' thrown around in the media but rarely explained.

And he wanted to give CD-Rom artists, who typically spend two to three years on a project, a forum to exhibit and share ideas.

Also part of Experimenta is an exhibition of winners and finalists' work in the ATOM Australian International Multimedia Awards.

Viewers can play on twelve computers and chat to the program designers of the best of the 300 entries to the competition.

Works range from leading designers on corporate projects to primary, secondary and tertiary student winners.

ATOM chairperson George Ciotti said the show includes Australian and international education, interactive entertainment and information multimedia products.

'We were mainly looking for things which led by example, which pushed boundaries and used the technology to tell a narrative,' he said.

'They had to be fully-fledged multimedia products and we were looking at the use of animation, dramatics and entertainment value.'

Mr Ciotti said computers were bringing people and professions together and it was important that children were initiated into the area early.

'It provides access to so many opportunities and is important to professional development,' he said.

'I just hope as technology continues to expand that we don't get a demarcation between rich and poor, with the poor unable to access the opportunities new technology brings.' ▲

*The Body Remembers* is on exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Dallas Brooks Drive, South Yarra, until 1 December.

*Domestic Disturbances* is at the VicHealth Access Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria, until 8 December.

*Burning the Interface* is at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, 205 Johnston Street, Fitzroy, until 23 November.

*ATOM* is at Linden Gallery, St Kilda, until 1 December.