

## Art Review: Center for Arts biennial mixes creativity with political commentary

Thursday, July 07, 2005  
By Terry Young

Despite -- or perhaps because -- the curators' statement reads somewhat like a Christmas card, good intentions sweeten the eclectic 2005 "Biennial" at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts.

Twelve artists were invited to participate by co-curators Laura Domencic, center assistant director, and Hilary Shames, an adjunct professor at the University of Pittsburgh and Carlow University.

Chris Craychee's cheerily awkward, low-tech installation features colorful wooden game wheels that spin, stopping on numbers that correlate to specific functions. Those instructions dictated the direction the artist's hand would take in creating a colorful series of drawing patterns. Craychee laments over the computer he never had and makes up for its high-tech facility with the chance wheels and with dice.

Viewers also have opportunity to participate in this random process. They're given the chance to "Win Free Art" on occasional wheel spinning days. The grade school-quality drawings pinned to the wall look more like math homework than framed masterpieces.

In effect, Craychee acknowledges the total pointlessness of the grand endeavor that is "contemporary art." Perhaps it's only located in the realm of the "haves" -- those with time, money, resources. The art world is all a big game, he suggests, full of chance and a random logic. The value of the object is always subjective.

The installation, Craychee states, would not have been possible without the help of the Dissociated Pseudo Collective, an honorable organization, it's explained, that existed before Craychee's time.

The DPC symbolizes a time and place missed -- a great time, we imagine, when politics and social change abounded with a collective, creative spirit. Craychee's cynicism hides a disillusioned romantic. The sentiment is that of waiting for the last Beatle to die, for the "Me Generation" to finally say "You." The attitude that nothing is really good enough because it has been done before confirms complacency; Craychee's obnoxious wheels spin to break it backhandedly.

Also on show are Will Giannotti's poetically calm, modernist wood sculptures. Human-scaled, crescent-shaped, spherical and abstract forms sit together quite traditionally in one room, complemented by Cassandra C. Jones' two-dimensional studies hanging on the walls. Giannotti's work -- in sharp contrast to Craychee's -- does not reveal the artist's hand or his self-consciousness. Instead, the viewer can indulge in something safe and comfortable that stems from the artist's preoccupation with form and material.

An installation of Thad Kellstadt's paintings upstairs continues the light-colored, illustrative style he contributed to "Roll Rampant and Free," the skateboard ramp installation at this summer's Three Rivers Arts Festival. Kellstadt's mode of street art is colorful, energetic and, at times, political.

Mimicking Kellstadt's paintings is Suzie Silver and Hilary Harp's video installation. Colorful motion and sound abounds but a point seems to be missing.

A group of socially conscious work is a welcome addition to this "Biennial." Although questionably executed, these works might score points with intent.

Wendy Osher explores the theme of the human body's natural state in opposition to the media's dictation of how we "should be" with the help of exercise machines and pharmaceuticals.

Fereshteh Toosi attacks Martha Stewart Inc. and the "evil" Apple iPod as symbols of global capital and sweatshop atrocities.



Pam Panchak, Post-Gazette

**Will Giannotti's wood sculpture "Poetic Object: Arc" is also part of the show.**

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### "Biennial"

• **Where:** Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Shadyside.

• **When:** Through Aug. 21. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. A closing party will be held the evening of Aug. 18 (\$4). An imaginative catalog designed by Brett Yasko is \$12.

• **Admission:** \$5 is requested.

• **Details:** Call 412-361-0873 or visit [www.pittsburgharts.org](http://www.pittsburgharts.org).

She creates an installation of the imagined, well-appointed jail cell of Martha Stewart. The setting is laden with clues alluding to corporate comfort at the expense of child labor. Unfortunately the effect is to enshrine rather than to erode Stewart's celebrity because it calls attention to her. If I were to write, for example, that I hate Tom Cruise in this publicly accessible and distributed newspaper, I would be giving his name even larger exposure, even if it's negative. This principle also applies within the context of a public art gallery.

Stephanie Flom's self-described "Matisse-like" cutouts cover the gallery stairs and window. She has developed a narrative relating them to a Jungian duality and the Kaballah, an early Jewish mystical text. Somewhere outside of the gallery she also planted a tree. Your guess is as good as mine, but the overall feeling is quite positive.

Also exhibiting in the "Biennial" are Jennifer Bechak, Adam Davies and Christina Labrise.

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