

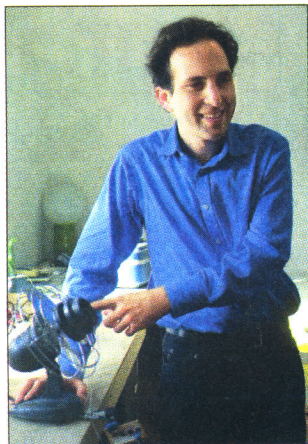
Better living through chemistry

Technology helps artist launch a philosophical journey

ARTSPEAK

ANNE CRUMP

Name: Scott Sona Snibbe
Age: 32
Neighborhood: Potrero Hill



KAREN VIBERT-KENNEDY/Examiner

Balancing act: Artist Scott Snibbe alternates between sculptural and screen-based work, saying the more mental, solitary and faster computer work balances the physical, time-consuming effort behind a piece like "Mirror" (pictured).

ents' shop equipment at an early age, which he says gave him a good creative foundation.

He set his sights on science and art as a child and in college channeled his interests into computer animation. He made several films, worked on a movie special-effects program and conducted professional research, but he decided to focus on what he calls "useless programs" — programs based on phenomena or ideas rather than productivity —

after showing one at a 1995 conference for computer graphics professionals and discovering the relatively small art and technology world.

On medium

Snibbe was drawn to art that incorporates technology because of its experiential qualities.

"The idea that you can perceive things directly with your body is really important to me, and with technology you can make ideas tangible — you can make an abstraction or a conceptual analysis of your body, or people, something tangible and physical or visible," he explains.

And by creating pieces that rely on interactivity, "the process is the product," he adds. "You don't have to think about it. It's an experience."

Snibbe says his ideas often lead him to projects he doesn't know how to realize — and which may or may not be technically possible. In these cases, he relies heavily on the expertise of a small network of friends who help him learn new skills and point him in the direction of the information he needs.

"That makes it really fun because it's really creative," he says.

On process

"I don't really trust ideas when they're new," Snibbe says. "I think only time tells you whether you have a good idea or not, so I usually will write things down and leave them for a while. If I'm still excited, then I'll know it's a good thing to follow through on."

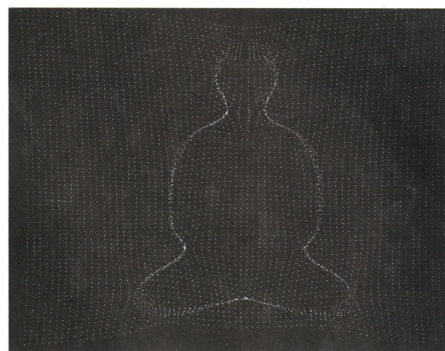
If an idea makes the cut, Snibbe then plans out the project in great detail, though he says his approach is much like an actor with a script.

"In the execution there's interpretation, which I learned when I was doing animation. You have to plan it so precisely because it's so much effort to do the work," he says. But there's still plenty of room for making creative decisions along the way, especially with screen-based work. "Up to the day that I'm showing, I'm changing things and changing shapes. There's a lot of creativity and inspiration in the details."

On artistic themes

Snibbe says most of his ideas for projects stem from basic philosophical or spiritual concepts, often Buddhist teachings. He tries to examine our relationship to the world and to our bodies, our minds, our breath — things we think of as belonging to us but which he believes have little to do with our true identity.

He's drawn to the idea of the self being il-



Top, Riddle me this:

Inspired by a Buddhist koan, or puzzle, the screen-based program "It's Out," 2001, solves the riddle of the goose in the bottle.

lucry and of existence being defined instead by interactions with our environment.

On communication

Snibbe says the ideas he hopes to communicate vary from piece to piece, but with each he wants the first experience to be visceral.

"I think there's different levels of experience with art. Kids come along and it's just a fun thing to do, and then a very intellectual person might like the intellectual end, or an emotional person might get a more spiritual message from it. I try to make the pieces work at a number of different levels.

"If people appreciate the work on any level, then I'm happy. Really, you're lucky if people are interested in what you're doing and you communicate something useful. Sometimes I get a little frustrated with myself because there are more philosophical or spiritual ideas that I'm trying to communicate in the work, and I'm not sure that always comes through." But some thoughts are difficult to communicate even by talking, he adds.

On the allure of art

"I think it's seeing something made tangible that's intangible. That's the number one satisfaction," Snibbe says. "When I first get something working, that's really exciting. When I conceptualize something, it's hard work."

Upon completing a piece to which he's dedicated hours and even years of thought and energy, he feels invigorated, he says. "Then I think there's a quieter satisfaction, because the point of making something is to have an audience and to share it with people. All the work is interactive, so people have to engage with it. ... The whole point is to be part of society and to be part of the loop with the audience."

Above, What am I?

"Emptiness Is Form," 2000, is a screen saver that explores the philosophical notion of identity in relation to the universe.

Left, Keep your hand to yourself:

"Boundary Functions," 1999, projects lines on the floor to keep viewers separated from each other, outlining their "personal space." Snibbe says people's behavior varies from culture to culture.

