

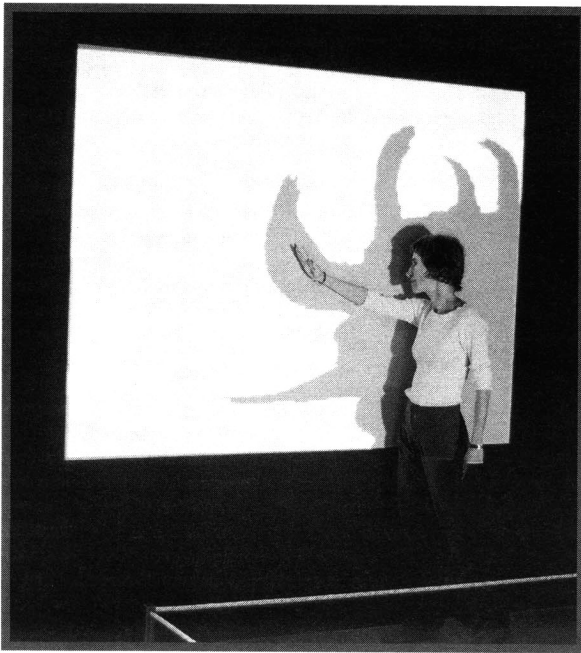
Southern California

Scott Snibbe at UC Irvine's Beall Center

Techno-wizard Scott Snibbe is a trickster in the grand tradition of Marcel Duchamp. Inviting visitors to a show that exists only when they arrive, Snibbe's exhibit profiled six interactive stations that became art when viewers passed in front of them. Most first-time gallery visitors had no idea what they were in for, but a few fervent admirers dropped by to play in Snibbe's art-exhibition-studio convinced they might learn something more about that mysterious thing

Scott Snibbe, *Shadow*, 2002, at the Beall Center for Art and Technology, University of California, Irvine. (Photo: Tavo Olmos.)





Scott Snibbe, *Depletion*, 2003, at the Beall Center for Art and Technology, University of California, Irvine.

called “art.” It’s almost impossible, of course, to pinpoint where Snibbe’s works exist for above all they are ephemeral, conceptual games that ruminate on the nature of reflection, mimesis or what is now fashionably called artifice.

Entering a darkened chamber viewers confront six glistening, monochromatic white screens that evoke the all-white paintings of Rauschenberg or Ryman. But rather than being merely reductive, rhetorical objects, these screen-fields designate different interactive game stations. After adjusting to the low lighting, it becomes apparent that the floor space also copies minimalist strategies. Using string, Snibbe has constructed a grid-like maze, dividing the space into six equal component parts that both define viewer walkways and mark as off-limits the installations’ “magic-making” boxes. In some ways it’s all a hilarious spoof on the austerity of 1970s conceptual art, though the reductive props establish that above all else Snibbe’s work is conceptual. His protected magic tool boxes, which function as the artist’s substitute hand and eye, each contain a projector and computer programmed video recorder that transcribes the movements of viewers who pass in front of them.

The first station, *Shadow*, baptizes viewers into Snibbe’s participation-art-making exhibition-process. As viewers walk into the stream of projected light, the recording video captures their silhouettes examining the screen’s nubby, pearlescent surface. It then promptly replays their brief or extensive visitation after they have passed from the image field. Doing traditional art one better, this work translates the real into flat, two-dimensional images and then

instantly represents the transcribed action as art. While ironically resembling instant Polaroid camera prints, these image-making stations also conversed with renaissance interests in mimesis.

The second station, *Impression*, translates human movement into geometric form, winking—as it were—at cubism, while the third station, captures arm and body movements as gestured

impressions, simultaneously conjuring and deconstructing abstract expressionism. The fourth station, by contrast, introduces the concept of visual rhythm introducing the concepts of visual movement and counter-movement.

Interjecting a non-objective box image onto the screen field that responds to viewer’s touch, *Impression* focuses on the inflectional tone of gestured movement. Viewer force shoves the box off the image field, but viewer nudging engenders a playful repartee between human and the almost comic box character. While alluding to performance art, this work also looks back to the studies and struggles of Perugino and Raphael, who wrestled with pose and counterpoise as related to the dramatization or enactment so critical to visual art, theater and dance.

The fifth station, *Aura*, whimsically addressed the taboo subject of the spiritual in art, pitting existential being and nothingness against fervent hopes of becoming more eternal than the human condition permits. Adding a nebulous outline of light to visitors’ shadowed

imminences, this Disney-esque station manages to be not only wacky, but quizzical and wry.

Studying human presence, gesture and movement, Snibbe’s works reconsider important premises of art—visual, dance, theater and film. Via new technology, Snibbe ironically offers a postmodern tour of centuries-old, academy sanctioned realms, celebrating the beguiling nature of art and echoing our enduring fascination with reflections of the real.

—Collette Chattopadhyay