

Nestled against Grand Teton National Park, and adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, the Jackson Hole basin is a place of remarkable beauty and contrasts. Tourists, transplants and locals pursue and procure an elusive quixotic dematerialized Western experience. Framed by breathtaking mountain backdrops, pervasive wildlife, elk antler archways, and meticulously aligned and adorned Harleys in front of the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar; premeditated photo albums are frenetically staged on wooden sidewalks. These codified signs venerate a past that has long since been assimilated, and only exists as a disquieting artifice.

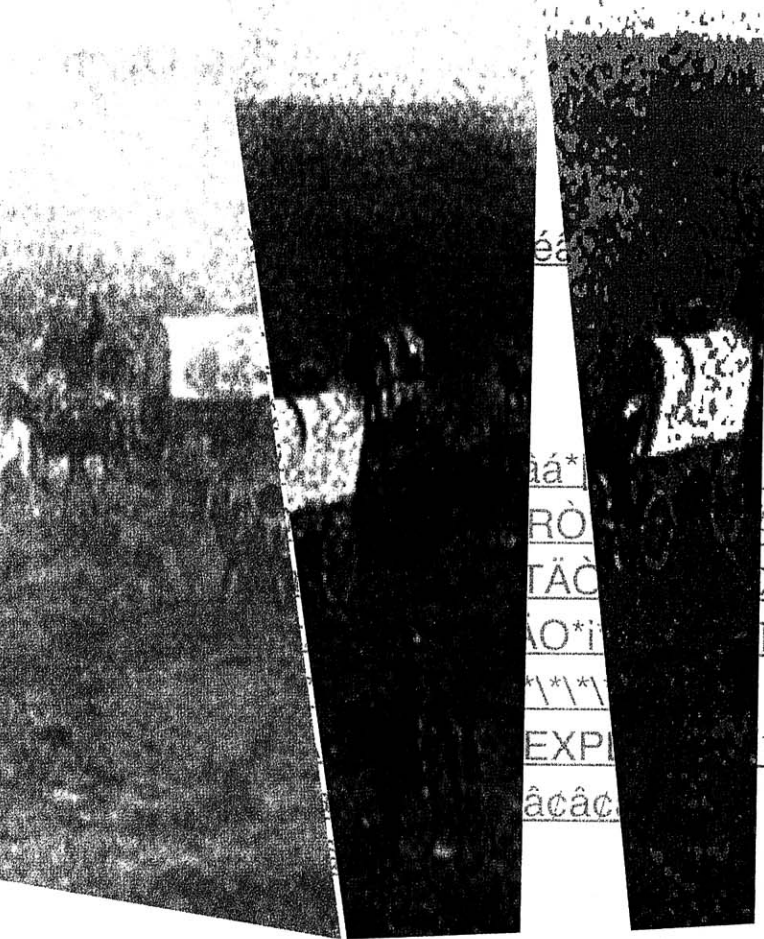
The New Frontiers exhibition opening January 11 at the Art Association Gallery on Pearl Street is equally antipodal, insurgent and timely. It dispels, or at least challenges, many of the sentimental Modernist myths about art, technology and authorship, which many of us cling to out of convenience or contrition. An unsettling juxtaposition of past, present and future is manifest in the technology-aided works of renowned New Media artists, Gary Hill, John Klima, Paul Kaiser, Scott Snibbe, and Lew Baldwin. In addition to presenting a progressive innovative exhibition, the artists, with the exception of Hill, will visit two local schools and give presentations about their overlapping work in technology and art. This educational programming provides a useful context for ensuing generations of teachers and students to (re)consider the creative possibilities of computers. The following interview challenges our perceptions of what art is, by measuring it against what it was and what it can be.

NEW FRONTIERS

The Art Association hosts an unprecedented exhibit of technology-based art

by **Bryon Clercx**

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What is new in America is the clash of the first level (primitive and wild) and the 'third kind' (the absolute simulacrum). There is no second level. This is a situation we find hard to grasp, since this is the one we have always privileged: the self-reflexive, self-mirroring level, the level of unhappy consciousness...

Jean Baudrillard - America

NEW FRONTIERS OPENS JANUARY 11, 2002 at ArtWest Gallery
Artists' Reception at Cafe 245: Friday, January 11 @ 5:30pm.

Q: How do you define the "New Media" art genre?

Paul Kaiser: New Media Art is anything that uses digital media. So, it could be in the form of purely electronic media using the computer, virtual reality, websites or multi media. It is the art of the computer.

Scott Snibbe: I think there are at least two types of "new media" art: There's time-based media involving technology that you still engage like traditional art. For example a lot of Bill Viola's work is like that, where it's new media but it's really in the classical tradition [employing] classical artistic themes and the way you engage it is to walk into a room and think about it. And then there's the interactive work, which I think is qualitatively different because it engages the viewer at a physical level. With interactive work you have to engage it on the playing field of the body, so one way or another you have to physically interact with a system. The body thinks differently than the mind, and there are whole fields of study on this like Phenomenology, [where] the things that you perceive directly are different than the things you perceive through conscious thought.

Lew Baldwin: New Media is a general term used for artists who are working with new tools and materials - including video, computers, networks - but not bound to any particular parameters. If I knew what direction everything was headed, I would probably be an art critic, not an artist.

John Klima: When I was working away in private, making art with the computer, before I had even heard the term "new media art," it seemed obvious to me that the tropes and memes that should be emulated were those of gaming, scientific computing, and data analysis. I mean, these are the things computers are good at! It seemed [senseless] to take a computer and try to make a painting. Painting is much better at painting than computers. It also seemed equally pointless to take a computer and make a photograph. Reality, and a camera, will always be richer than a computer trying to copy reality [or] a camera - To make a piece of computer art that doesn't have an interactive or real-time component seems pointless. Make a painting, make a video or make a sculpture. Make a reality that without the computer could never exist. Like Cory Archangel who has been reprogramming old Atari game cartridges. It's great. A unique artist made game cartridge you view on your TV.

Q: The title of the exhibition, *New Frontiers*, makes an ironic pun on the pioneering aspects of New Media arts and the settlement of the American Wild West. Describe your impression of the juxtaposition of your work, against the ubiquitous Western themes in Jackson, Wyoming.

Snibbe: Experiences of the natural world are dependent on the state of mind of the observer. I recently heard a radio program in which a New Yorker told of his attempt to deliberately experience "The West" with a six-month tour. He spoke at length on how at first he did not understand what was there - he literally could not understand what was interesting or what there was to do in such spaces for the first few months of his trip. The urban environment encouraged a mind engaged with culture, politics, and the social realm, but, at least in his case, one that could not perceive space and nature. In this sense, we can see the Western frontier tradition as one engaged with space.

Baldwin: I've actually never been to Wyoming. I grew up in Texas. So this juxtaposition of technology and the untamed wild has always been an interest of mine. I am very excited to be working away from a large city. It will be interesting to see how the surroundings bring new definition to the work. Connecting people across the continent via an art piece in a gallery [far removed from an urban center] could be phantasmal.

Klima: My piece uses robot bugs to make drawings, [and] on one level it is about nature, the missing trope of the Wild West. [Beyond] the elk antler and the O.K. Corral; it's a place of incredible natural beauty. My robots are autonomous, they are NOT radio-controlled cars, [like] Survival Research Laboratory. They have a behavior they ascribe to. In a sense they are natural. The viewer does not "control" the robots, just as we can not control nature. The viewer influences the robots' behavior. It's about reaching an understanding, a compromise, not about dominating. It's about influence not control.

Kaiser: Actually, I think that the old idea about what is great about America, is this kind of this relentless exploring of new frontiers, is still the case. There is a kind of energy that you see in the best American art, that akin to pioneering in the simplest way. Kind of a rough and ready improvisation that is not as codified as what you would find for example in Europe. So I think it is fortuitous it [the *New Frontiers* exhibit] will happen there [in Jackson, WY].

FIVE PIONEERS

and they ain't Ma and Pa Kettle



Paul Kaiser is a digital artist whose work has been exhibited at Lincoln Center, Mass, MoCA, the Barbican Center in London, the Pompidou Center, SIGGRAPH, the Wexner Center for the Arts and currently in the new media show "Bitstreams" at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Kaiser began experimenting with film and audio tape in 1975 and is currently creating multi-media pieces incorporating dance, digital/video and music. Recently Kaiser created the "virtual" dances *Hand-drawn Spaces* (1998) and *BIPED* (1999), both with choreographer, Merce Cunningham and Shelley Eshkar, and *Ghostcatching* (1999), with Bill T. Jones and Shelley Eshkar.

Lew Baldwin is a New York-based musician and artist whose innovative work in the medium of internet-based artwork will be included in the Whitney 2000 Biennial in New York City. His website redsmoke.com, an ongoing development of abstract design, was reviewed in I.D. Magazine and continues to receive accolades in the internet art community. Lew has also shown his work at the L.A. International Biennial Art Invitational and was a participant in *Surface*, one of the first online art exhibits, as a member of the artist collective HELL.COM. Lew collaborated with San Francisco designer Josh Lowman to create the film *Groove's* title design, and selections from Lew's upcoming music CD will appear on the soundtrack.



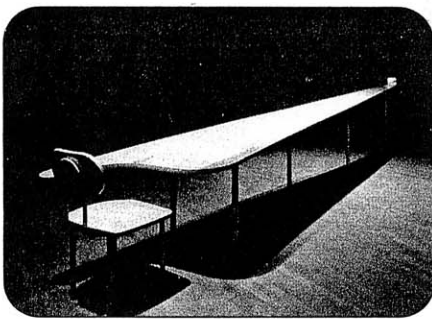
Gary Hill, recognized internationally as one of the most important artists of his generation, Hill has been working with video and sound since 1973. Hill creates complex installations and environments using sound, image and speech as a sculpting medium. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, most notably the prestigious *Leone diOrzo Prize for Sculpture* at the Venice Biennale in 1995 and the *John D. and Katherine T. MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant* in 1998. Among just a few of Mr. Hill's accomplishments include solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, School of the Museum of Fine Arts - Boston, the Barbara Gladstone Gallery and Donald Young Gallery. His work has been included in six Whitney Biennial exhibitions since 1983. His video, sound and performance work has been presented at museums and institutions throughout the world and is the focus of several retrospectives and surveys of contemporary art.

Scott Snibbe's background in computer science and animation came to a culmination after receiving degrees from both Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design. Snibbe's internet-based work is highly interactive and combines his expertise in computer programming and experimental animation. His work has appeared in group exhibitions at the Cantor Center for the Arts, the Berliner Filmfestspiele, the NTT Intercommunications Center in Tokyo, and in the Stuttgart Filmwinter 98 in Germany. He currently is involved with his own company, *Sonamo*, that facilitates collaborative media projects.

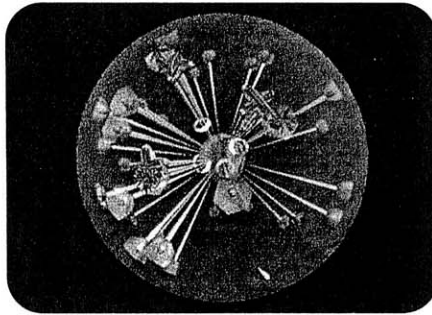


John Klima is drawn to "gaming" and the endless and random possibilities of manipulating and transferring data. After he graduated from the State University of New York in 1987, John began experimenting with more complex multi-media and computer works in the early 90s and was part of many group shows. Recent works are included in his first solo show at Postmasters Gallery titled *Go Fish, Go Fish* consists of two interactive media installations connecting computer gaming and real life consequences. John's work is currently included in the new media show, "BitStreams" at the Whitney Museum of American Art and a show at the National Library of Medicine called *Earth*.

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Gary Hill, *Learning Curve*
1993, single channel video installation.



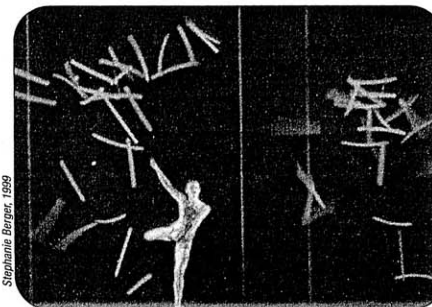
John Klima, *Glasbead* 1999



Scott Snibbe, *Boundary Functions* 1998



Lew Baldwin, *milkmlklemnade.net* 2001



Paul Kaiser, *BIPED* 1999

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Q: *On a personal level, SPLASH readers are likely to be interested in what path you followed to becoming a professional artist. Please describe your childhood art encounters and formal education and/or training?*

Baldwin: I wonder what the determining factor of professional [artist] might be? I was encouraged to create growing up. I started to seriously paint and sold my one and only painting when I was 16. [Then I received a] BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1992.

Snibbe: Both of my parents were sculptors who moved from Manhattan to a small town in Massachusetts on the ocean. [They] were both Jews who converted to being Christian Scientists, and [their] art consisted mostly of cut or cast acrylic mobiles, [in a] very recognizable 60s and 70s minimalist style with a strong sense of color. My parents' had studios [at home], with complete wood and plastics shops. They used to make everything for us on the holidays. My dad even made a plexi-glass Christmas tree for us once. We had free access [to the shops], so from about the time I was five years old we spent most of our free time making things. The rest of my time was spent wandering through the woods and daily walks along the beach. I tended to see the creative act of making things as a normal part of the day and a way of making meaning out of your life. The other interesting thing is that my parents were abstract artists, so I didn't really know art could be representational for a long time [and] only later did I start to learn about regular art history. Up through high school I maybe took one or two art classes because I never thought of it as something you do in a class. I thought of it as an activity you regularly do [as] a part of normal life, like cooking. When I got to college, [because] I always thought I would be a scientist or artist, I pursued dual degrees in Computer Science and Fine Arts. Most of my art degree was in traditional animation because I was really interested in time based media. Computer Science was [also] engaging because it integrated artists into a research lab. At that time there was no Photoshop, there weren't even computers with color screens and it was difficult to express myself as easily [as I could with drawing]. I realized that I had to be able to program, [if I wanted to] clearly express myself in this new medium. I took my first job at Adobe Systems and they were very encouraging about my previous work. A lot of my work after graduation was [spent] trying to integrate those two things, to make the computer express complex ideas and emotions rather than just something really shiny and beautiful.

Klima: My mother was a craftspersona weaver. She had looms in the basement and that kind of thing. And my father was a Professor of Anthropology at State University of New York at Albany and on the side he had an art collection, so he knew a lot about [art and] art history. When

I was a young child, I was constantly making things: puppets, stuffed animals, glueing bits of wood together in strange ways and painting them. We would do puppet shows at the local library. None of this was store bought stuff, it was always about making something with whatever was available. Oh, [and] I sucked at sports. As I got older I became more interested in tech stuff. I built radios, designed model airplanes, built them from scratch, attached firecrackers and blew them up. [I even built] a telescope, a six inch Newtonian [and] spent an entire summer grinding the mirror. Really tedious, really boring, really meditative. [But] I listened to the radio and as a result I pretty much know every rock song ever recorded. When personal computers first became available, I bought a TRS-80 with a whopping 4K Ram. I taught myself to program. [Then] I got interested in girls [and] went to art school [where] I studied photography. After college I worked as a grunt in some big-time galleries in New York. I hated it, so I left. I [wound up] in Seattle and started to program computers again. I did a stint with Microsoft and realized I could move back to New York and live high on the hog, so I did. I got a 20 hour a week job as a consultant with Dun & Bradstreet that paid handsomely and started making art on the computer. I didn't think anyone was interested in computer art, so I didn't really show any of it. But then I started to hear about people actually showing digital art seriously, and I said hell I can do that and I can do that better.

Kaiser: My path to the arts was rather round about. I was intent on being an artist since age twelve, but not necessarily a visual artist, [initially] a poet or a writer. Then when I was about sixteen or so, I discovered American Experimental Cinema and I was completely enthralled [and] started making my own super 8 films. I studied Art History and Film History at [Wesleyan] College but I avoided the Filmmaking Department, [because] I saw making films not in the model of the Hollywood team studio approach [they ascribed to]. Rather, I thought about making films in the way I would write a book, in a very solitary way. Then I left all that for about ten years...for a wonderful experience working as a teacher of severely disabled children in Washington, D.C. The interesting thing about the school is that it was taught primarily through the arts, figuring that children with severe dyslexia might learn better through sculpture, wood working, painting, music and dance I started to make creative work with children, collaborative plays, story telling and writing. Then I discovered computer multi-media when it was invented for the masses. I saw an early version of Apple computers Hypercard. I decided this was perfect for my students, very many of whom worked or thought in multimedia terms already. Some had incredible difficulty working on the page, but they could think in terms of moving images, sounds and vision. So, I started doing that with them and it's funny [because] it con-

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trasted with [the art] I was doing earlier. [Suddenly] my work became completely collaborative, [and] that has remained a major focus of mine ever since.

Q: Who or what do you consider most influential to your present work?

Kaiser: Innumerable, but one would be Etienne' Jules Marey, the French photographer. He did those stop motion studies. He was like the French equivalent to Muybridge, but much greater in my view. He has been a huge influence on me. He helped invent cinema and was an enormous influence on Duchamp and the Futurists and their studies of time, and even on the Cubists. So he's had a big influence on me that I keep coming back to. Not so much in the work I am showing [in Jackson] but in the work I have done in dance. Another big influence is the work of Robert Breer, the animator, a great experimental innovator who has been making films since the fifties, in this American experimental tradition. And is still making great ones today and a great inspiration to me. I remember seeing [his work] for the first time in the seventies. The idea of a totally different sense of duration of time and kind of non-linear stream of associations on the stage seemed pretty amazing.

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**- Scott Snibbe
artist**

Snibbe: People like Oscar Fishinger, and artists like Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy working with time based abstraction were [early influences]. My primary inspirations are James Turrell and Robert Irwin. Their artwork deals with perception - how our body is intimately tied to our environments. The only way we perceive anything is through the mental sensations that construct the world around us. There is no "real" world, but only the sense-impressions running through our minds. I hope that my work fits into this tradition - the difference with my work being that the objects or spaces are active. A viewer cannot be passive in my pieces, since all of the work only functions when a human being actively engages with the system. But the principle is the same - how do small changes to the environment change human behavior and perception? Some of my work also explores multi-person interaction, so that my art is best experienced with a group, and the artwork reflects and amplifies the constructed social situations.

Klima: It's hard defining one individual as being most influential. I suppose Steiglitz and other photo-secessionists are the most important influence on my work, in that they proclaimed that the new medium should be about the new medium, influenced by, but not a mimicry of, other mediums. A lot of the reason why I make "new media art" is exactly because I can do it without all the weight of art history, and I can draw on a culture that is at once pop, scientific, and high aesthetic. That's not to say that I don't appreciate and use art his-

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tory, but new media offers the artist something truly "new." There really isn't a whole lot of precedent to what I'm doing and there isn't really anyone else doing what I'm doing. There are others who have some similar concerns, but right now I'm pretty much on my own. I guess a while back there was an artist or group of artists who made drawings with robots but the similarity with my piece is only circumstantial. Until recently there has been no precedent for using real-time data streams as a medium. To my knowledge I'm the only artist using real-time 3D graphics. There are a few artists who make "skins" for various commercial game engines, but to the best of my knowledge there are none who make it all from scratch. Connect to the computer a physical component (what art has always had) and you really got something. Blur the lines between the real and the virtual, and the synapses start firing in all kinds of fun ways.

Q: Assuming that art can influence the world and world events influence the art produced in any era, what effect if any, do you foresee for artistic output in the wake of the events of 9.11 and the ongoing War on Terrorism?

Klima: It's not [something] I've really thought about very much, because it's all so new, the events are not two months old. [However] after the events of September 11th, which I watched from my window, it [kind of] made all art practice seem pointless. Then I thought about pieces I had done in the past, prior to the event, and used it as a tool to generate the next piece.¹¹ [A second version of] a piece titled Earth, will be in the forthcoming Whitney Biennial. It [features] a three dimensional graphic [image of the earth] projected onto sphere, [with] a number of interactive work stations [forming] an earth information browser.

Kaiser: I am making [several] works currently. One just premiered last month [titled] *Loops* and it was the third collaboration with Merce Cunningham. It is a portrait of Merce, in very abstract terms, in motion, captured by his hands and his fingers dancing, kind of a cat's cradle effect on the screen. For the narration, I wanted to have his voice as well. [He located] a diary entry from when he was seventeen years old, in the late thirties, when he was first visiting New York. On the sound track of the piece, of this portrait of him, he just reads, amazingly elegant for a seventeen year old, his impressions of the city; and it evokes the city in this most beautiful and fragile way. So I think to some degree we are going to start seeing things in a different light. Two other pieces are more directly related. *Trace* is opening at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It is about living in a surveillance society. I was thinking about the consequences of surveillance [on people living in a] Big Brother or Big Corporate Brother world, or even in a personal kind of world. It made me think back on my own childhood which was largely spent behind the Iron Curtain. My father was an American Diplomat posted there, so everything we ever did was bugged, or we were always trailed where we went. So I grew up in that [environment], and the piece evokes [memories], about a time long ago as well as more recent events. It was meant to hold a mirror to the increasing surveillance of our society through things like voice recognition and internet cookies and surveillance cameras. But obviously since September 11th, that implication has become much, much sharper in that particular work. I am [also] doing another collaborative piece called *Pedestrian* which is a simulation of crowd patterns [projected directly onto sidewalks from above] in three locations in Manhattan. One of the scenes we actually motion captured last spring has to do with a crowd panicking and running away. That becomes charged with meaning after September 11th. It's very strange and haunting, [and] has strengthened my desire to have my work connect, not only to the rather narrow world of art or theater or film traditions, but also engage with the wider world we live in.

Snibbe: Well, I can tell you what I hope, which I think is somewhat being validated in what I have learned, that there is basically a friction between selfishness and ego verses generosity and compassion. There has been a great deal of art, certainly in the last decade, or dealing more with the ego and the self. And [idiosyncratic] selfishness like look at me, this is what I am, these are my politics. And then I think events like this make people look outward. Of course some people still [internalize], but I think the greater response that we are seeing in our country, and other places too, is that we want to think about others. We want to do things for other people.

Q: What do you hope to convey to the school children of Jackson, many of whom are familiar with paste, glitter and safe scissors, as an art material, as say, a computer.

Klima: I am just going to do show and tell. These kids, I assume, are already on a level where they're quite familiar with computers. So I am sure they'll have no prob-

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lem digesting interface elements and understanding that they are doing something [artistic]. Just introducing people to the idea that they [computers] are art materials also. It always excites somebody, even if it's only one person. Ultimately what I want to convey to them is [that] if I can do it, you can do it, and you don't have to do it for ILM, Hollywood or the big game companies. You can just do it. Free yourself from that whole structure [and] invent your own.

Snibbe: I think kids are a lot easier, because with adults you have to jump to the punch line, [a lot of the time] too quickly. The thing that I love about kids is that you can tell a story and I think most works are better experienced as a narrative. And with kids I can start out with the phenomenon itself and say, [for example], this is a piece that I started out thinking how could you draw with stars. And then I created the program that uses the same equations that physicists use but I made some important changes so that a person could change it. So it's not like looking at real stars. It feels like stars, but it's something you can control with your body. And go through this type of process [because] with kids you can build a narrative. So you can take them from the conception of the idea, through the experience of the idea, and then the interpretation. You can actually connect it to your everyday experience and some of the ideas that they are learning or know.

Kaiser: The piece I [am showing], is actually about drawing, and how to think with drawing. That idea comes out of something I started working on with the learning disabled children. It is an idea that I call drawing-as-performance. If you watch a child draw, the act of drawing, in time, is a lot more interesting, at least to me, than the final picture you put up on your refrigerator. I believe that younger children, in particular, up to the age of about twelve, are actually making these amazing performances as they draw, accompanying their drawings with gestures, with voice-overs, with sound effects. They even move their heads [and] eyes, to far or close distances, as if they are moving a camera, almost to their [renderings]. The drawing itself keeps changing over time. I want to show them this is a wonderful thing you should not give up. They are dreaming through drawing. It's not trying to make a finished perfect picture, [but] trying to capture your thoughts on the fly. So there is a degree of abstraction to it that is perfectly good and fine. What happens in general with the kids [when they draw], is that they try and get more and more photo-realistic, and too often that kind of kills the mental energy of drawing. That's something I want to get across to them.

Byron Clercx is an arts educator, practitioner and writer, who resides in Moscow, Idaho where he coordinates the sculpture program at the University of Idaho. •