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New Exhibit Links Art and Technology at Saint Mary's College

By Ryan McKinley



"Cloverdale" by Ron Hutt

"Delphi" by Ron Hutt

"Bandelier National Monument" by Ron Hutt

"Los Alamos" by Ron Hutt
Images courtesy Saint Mary's College Museum of Art

The Saint Mary's College Museum of Art's current multimedia artwork exhibition, "The Axis Mundi/ Open Portals," by Ron Hutt is a true combination of art and technology - and is unlike anything the museum has featured before.

On display in the Armistead Gallery, the exhibit showcases Hutt's digital paintings, as well as digital photographs that combine with Quick Response Codes (QR Codes) to provide sound clips. The codes are interactive and patrons will need to bring their smart phones in order to scan them. If viewers choose not to utilize the QR technology they will be missing part of the experience.

The title of the show, *Axis Mundi*, relates to a philosophical belief that finds a geographical midpoint between the earth and the sky, where all compass directions converge. It is also seen as the natural human instinct to create identity. The exhibit features a dozen photographs taken by Hutt as he traveled across the United States and Europe.

The locations range from as far as Amsterdam and Greece, to as close as Cloverdale, California. Each photo utilizes vertical and panoramic space, but all are obscured by a large QR barcode that holds the links to the sound clips. Interestingly, in order to scan the codes the viewer must get close up to the photos, which then makes the once obscured image come into focus.

Four sound files accompany every photo. They can be played in any order and as many times as the viewer would like. The files range in length from a second to five minutes, and feature everything from ambient noise (horses, traffic, children laughing) to music, and even a news segment documenting the reopening of the New York Stock Exchange after Hurricane Sandy. The sound of the wind plays throughout the space from overhead speakers.

If that were not enough, the photos and sound clips inspired Hutt to create digital works, which appear to be a mix of science fiction imagery and Japanese landscape paintings. To continue the theme of *Axis Mundi*, all the paintings are long columns that examine vertical space as well as a depth of field. There are a number of similarities between the digital images: they all feature a sphere seemingly representing a sun or moon, a series of geometric shapes flowing from top to bottom, a landscape, and all are devoid of people. The paintings make the statement that through technology society is more connected and at the same time equally isolated. They also point out that the current world is a new landscape or an open portal to a future society.

All the paintings are projected on the far wall of the gallery, and are also available as a free download, via QR code, for the viewer to keep and share. The exhibit is truly something to experience and is a sign of where art is heading in the future.

"The Axis Mundi/Open Portals" is currently on display through Dec. 6. Also on display are oil paintings by William Keith, artwork by Luis Guttierrez, and "The Dr. Maurice Alberti Print Collection of European and American Masters."

The Saint Mary's College Museum of Art is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 1928 Saint Mary's Road, Moraga.

For more information, visit <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/saint-marys-college-museum-of-art>.

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