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Please, do touch the art

By Garrett Leahy



Photo provided

At the latest exhibit at the Museum of Art in Saint Mary's College, not only is touching the art encouraged, it is required to fully experience each piece. "Significance Machines and Purposeful Robots" is an exhibit of works by Kal Spelletich, a San Francisco-based artist who utilizes robotics and reclaimed materials to create sculptures that move when you touch them.

In a July interview between himself and Catharine Clark, the director and owner of the Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco which features a selection of his work, Spelletich explained his reasoning for creating moving art. "This interaction is the opposite of buying technology on 'smart' devices. These devices dictate how you interact with them ... I want to release technology from function . to let it be a poetical function."

Many of Spelletich's pieces at the exhibit feature robots making gestures reminiscent of those involved in religious practices. "Mark Pauline" is a headless robot that makes praying motions similar to bowing commonly practiced in Islam, and is clothed in the unwashed green jumpsuit of the piece's namesake, a close friend of Spelletich. The sculpture is paired with a photograph capturing celestial movements that occurred during the piece's construction. According to April Bojorquez, the museum's curator, Spelletich chose to use unwashed clothes to try and capture the "essence" of the person who inspired the piece in the first place. Spelletich creates human-like machines to evoke "experiences focused on the somatic and psychological aspects of being human."

Spelletich's most recent piece in the exhibition, completed earlier this year, is the "Strawberry Creek Harp," created in response to "Strawberry Creek" - a William Keith painting which is part of SMC's permanent collection of his work. The harp uses a pine cone attached to a string to "record" the motion of the water in the creek and translates that motion into music played by the harp.

Bojorquez explained how the addition of human input in the artist's work makes the exhibition well-suited for families in the area: "It's nice for parents who would otherwise have to worry about making sure that their kids don't touch the art."

"Kal's work requires the viewer to touch and interact with his work in order to activate the sculptures [and] the art is that moment when the robots spontaneously respond to the viewer with a unique gesture," Bojorquez said.

Bojorquez believes that the ways Spelletich's art questions the use of technology and the work it does make the exhibition unique. "The exhibition playfully, yet critically, invites the public to rethink and reimagine the presence of technology in our daily lives. . Can technology do spiritual work? And what would that look like?" Bojorquez said.

The exhibition is free, and is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with free guided tours by the curator or students at 11 a.m. on Thursdays and at 2 p.m. on Sundays. The exhibit will run through Dec. 8. An artist panel is scheduled for Oct. 10, where Spelletich will discuss whether machines can do spiritual work.

A catalog containing photographs of the exhibit's artwork and two essays by Anuradha Vikram, artistic director of 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, and Tanya Zimbardo, the assistant curator of Media Arts at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, will also be available for \$20 starting Sept. 5.

For details, visit the SMC Museum of Art website: www.stmarys-ca.edu/artist-dialogue-an-evening-with-spelletich-friends%C2%A0



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