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# 'Gestures' exhibit points toward the edge

By **Kurt Shaw**

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Blink and it will be gone, but the 14th installment of the Gestures Exhibition Series is worth seeking out before it closes Sunday if you want to catch cutting-edge art by some of the more-proficient Pittsburgh-area artists.

As she has for Gestures past, independent curator Katherine Talcott invited 13 artists to re-imagine time, space and place, and to develop their ideas, processes and obsessions to create site-specific installations.

Although Gestures was originally introduced as a way for locals to create and exhibit small site-specific installations, the artists in this multimedia exhibition, "with subtle nuance, humorous 'tongue in cheek' and dramatic elegance," as Talcott puts it, have informed and expanded the original concept and have created installations that physically engage and visualize a range of experiences.

Although diverse in nature, the installations reveal common threads, exploring the merging of art practices and personal experiences.

"Dependent on this vision or practice, my hope is that I have challenged artists to freely pose their ideas and to realize a particular construct, environment or state of mind -- without reference to a theme," Talcott says. "As a curator who wants to be engaged by an artist's process and sees the artist's ideas and methods as the raw material to construct an exhibition, I am most appreciative."

The success of any site-specific installations can be measured by the extent to which the viewer becomes engaged with it. We get it in works like Paul Schifino's "TW1L1GHT T1ME," in which the viewer is asked to sit in a small room to watch the artist's anguished face on a vintage TV, or with the piece "Every Person a Pollock!" in which Heather Pinson and Matthew Conboy try to re-enact Jackson Pollock's steps in making one of his paintings through the placement of footprints like those in Arthur Murray's dance diagrams.

Other works ask more however. Connie Merriman's "Tree House," in which a living Dawn Redwood tree has been placed inside a large paper house-like construction, goads the viewer with notions of stewardship. A house for a tree• It causes one to think.

Environmental issues of a different kind are the focus of the unique architectural creations of Ryder Henry, who has been continually creating and adding to a fantastical futuristic city he calls "4 Lydia."

With an eye toward the future, Henry crafts futuristic miniature buildings and spaceships out of found cardboard, plastic and assorted electrical components. He works on a scale of 1: 213.333. This number is derived from standard 80-inch doorways being shrunk to a height of 3/8 of an inch.

The scale is the foundation for his miniature city, "4 Lydia," which has appeared in numerous exhibits. Part of it is on display here, and taking it further, several paintings on the walls surrounding it depict "4 Lydia" through paintings which began as still-life (direct observation of the model) and move toward landscape with life activities portrayed. We see people interacting with the space as if real -- driving cars, sitting on patios, even a man walking a horse.

It's interesting to note that Henry has added a contemporary element to his city. Scattered among his Jetsons-style models are models of real houses -- places he has lived and places where his friends live. Aside from being a valuable exercise in craft, this gives him a more accurate sense of the scale in which he works.

## About Kurt Shaw

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And in turn, makes Henry's world all the more believable.

In similar fashion, Robert Villamagna has created an installation that combines the real and imagined. Titled "Talk to Me: Real Words from Real People," it contains several dozen "people" crafted in Villamagna's signature assemblage style combining old junk with vintage signage, with added quotations coming from each, painted in cartoon bubbles. In his statement, Villamagna says these words have come out of the mouths of family, friends, students, acquaintances and complete strangers. Here they are matched with character types he created that make those words all the more believable.

The only video installation, Danny Bracken's "What You Can See From the Light," commands attention, which is surprising considering it is simply a high-definition video projection of two hands, hiding and revealing an overpowering light that glows behind them. The light is from a flashlight and the hands are Bracken's own and those of his girlfriend. As these hands interact, textures of sound envelop the viewer, and crescendo in relationship with these movements. The only other element in the space is a floor-to-ceiling piece of wood panel. The panel is cut in various places with thin meandering slivers. Step back and these slivers reveal the grains of an enlarged fingerprint, echoing the intricacies and imagery of the projection, whose light filters through it.

The remaining works are a bit more static;. Sculptor Dee Briggs installed two symmetrically opposed aluminum sculptures -- one in a gallery and one in an outdoor stairwell -- and Valerie Lueth and Paul Roden present two dozen wood-block prints from their Tugboat Printshop, which have been featured at a kiosk in the museum lobby for the past few months. But they are just as engaging as the other works on display, making for another very interesting installation of Gestures not to be missed if you have the time.

Additional Information:

## 'Gestures'

**What:** The 14th installment of the Gestures Exhibition Series, featuring small, site-specific works by Danny Bracken, Dee Briggs, Ryder Henry, Mary Mazziotti, Connie Merriman, Heather Pinson and Matthew Conboy, Ben Schachter, Paul Schifino, Valerie Lueth and Paul Roden, Robert Villamagna and Larkin Werner.

**When:** Through Sunday. Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 1-5 p.m. Sundays

**Admission:** \$10; \$8 for senior citizens; \$7 for students; free for age 5 and younger. Half-off admission Thursdays (except group tours)

**Where:** Mattress Factory, 500 Sampsonia Way, North Side

**Details:** 412-231-3169 or [website](#)

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