



Rethinking Art & Machine

Left and right sides of the brain uniting to create art

I have seen art that takes my breath away and I can't get enough of the neat gadgets technology has to offer. When you put the two together, however, you get a mind-blowing experience. My recent visit to the Rethinking Art & Machine (RAM) exhibit, featuring artists from the 1960s to present day who have combined art and electronic technology, provided this awesome experience.

Running from September 16, 2011 to January 22, 2012 at THEMUSEUM in downtown Kitchener, the RAM exhibit is one, I believe, all ages can enjoy. As I walked through the exhibit, I was intrigued by the ingenuity of these artists, who had created such interactive pieces of art exploring light, graphics and/or robotics. I was simultaneously mesmerized by one piece and eager to see what came next.

I was surprised by the beauty that Manfred Mohr, considered a pioneer of computer-generated art, found in the logical structure of cubes arranged in part through the rules of geometry. I saw a beautiful art piece that displayed the shadows of birds flying through a chandelier of light, all done through the programming of hundreds of tiny LCD lights. I heard an eerie whispering voice reciting a small part of the *King James Bible* letter by letter—at 3,186,313 characters in total, I am not sure how long I would have been standing there. Both of these pieces were produced by Jim Campbell, an engineer who uses custom-made electronics to explore the relationship between information and knowledge. As I continued to the next room,

I felt the glare of electronic eyes following me while I walked by the works of Alan Rath, who uses motion sensors in his sculptures, allowing for interaction between his art and the audience.

These are just a handful of examples from a wide range of intriguing, thought-provoking artworks combining age-old theoretical principals of art with modern technology. Along with the works of the other artists, who include George Legrady, David Rokeby, Daniel Rozin and Peter Vogel, a real learning experience can be had by students. This exhibit can especially be used as a teaching tool for secondary school courses in visual arts, science and technological education.

The educational programs offered are created by teachers on staff at THEMUSEUM. For each school group, whether it is for the RAM exhibit or any of the permanent and visiting exhibits, they include a pre-visit activity to activate prior knowledge and introduce new concepts; a timeline for THEMUSEUM visit so you know what to expect when you arrive; a post-visit activity that meets an overall expectation from the Ontario curriculum; and a list of curriculum expectations that are covered in your program.

The educational tours set up for the RAM specifically incorporate the Ontario curriculum expectations for grades 9-12 in visual arts. The activities developed for the students include, as its pre-visit activity, taking photos around your school and sending them to artist George Legrady's *Cell Tango*. *Cell Tango*, as explained by THEMUSEUM, opens

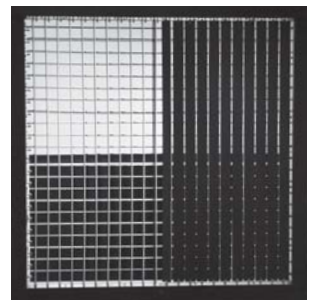
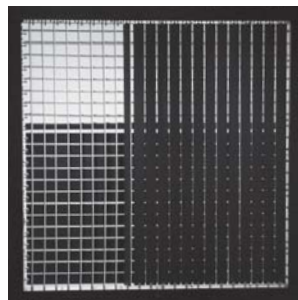
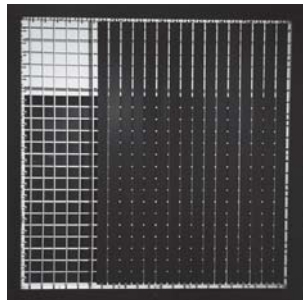
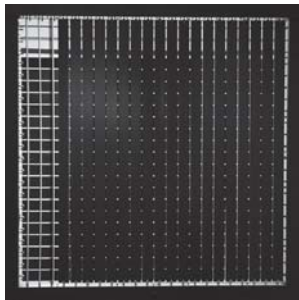
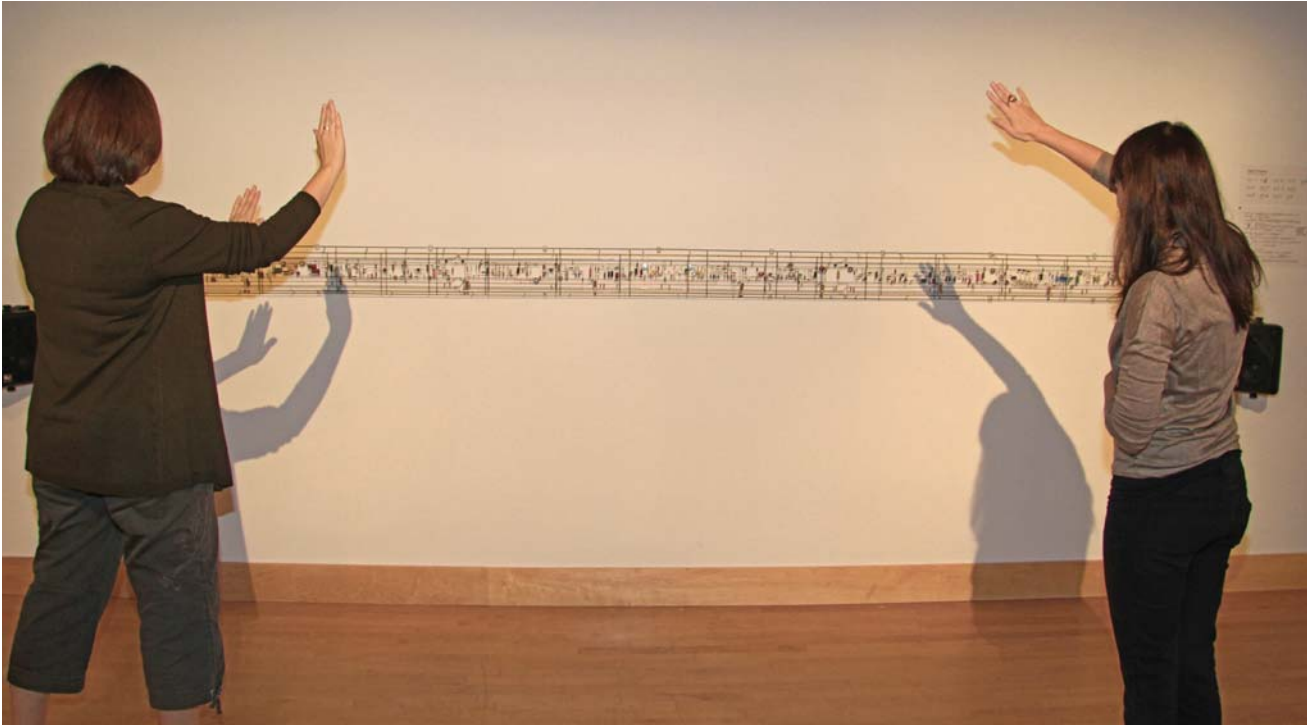
the contribution of content to the global scale as the public can send a cell phone image of their choice from anywhere in the world while the exhibition is running. The images are stored at the Flickr website and featured in the gallery through four different animations projected large scale on THEMUSEUM wall. The images are classified according to the labels added by the public, and the artwork's software juxtaposes found images from Flickr with those contributed by the audience. The artwork's content consists of the play between the public's contributions and the narrative that results from how the images play against each other.

The post-visit activity asks the students to visit the RAM exhibition website www.themuseum.ca/RAM and choose an artist of interest to research. With that research, teachers can arrange group discussions about what message each artist was trying to convey, what technology they used and, finally, have the student create a piece of art with a similar message using different media.

The RAM exhibit is one that shouldn't be missed. It is definitely a worthwhile tool to help teach and intrigue young and old audiences about the fascinating results you can experience combining art and electronic technology.

THEMUSEUM is located at 10 King Street West in Kitchener. Please visit www.themuseum.ca for details on hours and admission. For information on educational workshops, call 519-749-9387 ext. 233 or e-mail education@themuseum.ca. ☺





Top: Visitors can emit tones and music by triggering Peter Vogel's interactive musical structure, *Rhythms of Shadow*, with light and shadow

Middle: Four images showing the transformation of Daniel Rozin's, *X by Y*, as it interacts with the viewer

Bottom: Two views of Alan Rath's, *Voyeur III*, demonstrating the sculpture's motion sensors interacting with its audience

PHOTOS: RONDA ALLAN

