

MIRROR AND MASK

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

By

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DEDICATION

For Dave, who's walked with me the whole way.

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My thanks go first to Jamey Laughlin, without whom this work would not have existed. He graciously let himself be videotaped, drawn, sculpted, plastered, miked, and videotaped yet again. Not passive as a subject, he brought his own ideas and energy to the project, making this a true collaboration, and providing me with enough rich material to feed my work for years. He's been a good sport, good coach, and good friend throughout this whole process.

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ABSTRACT

MIRROR AND MASK

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Figure 1: Installation view

This thesis documents the exhibition, "Mask Mirror", by Marnie M. Montgomery, which was presented in the Johnson Center Art Gallery, George Mason University, in March, 2000.

"Mask Mirror" combined video, sound, framed prints, and spin toys to explore image and identity through the creation of a multimedia portrait. This document includes a brief overview of the work of Edward Muybridge, Bill Viola, Gary Hill, Sam Taylor-Wood, Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik, Tony Oursler, and Shigeo Kubota.

INTRODUCTION

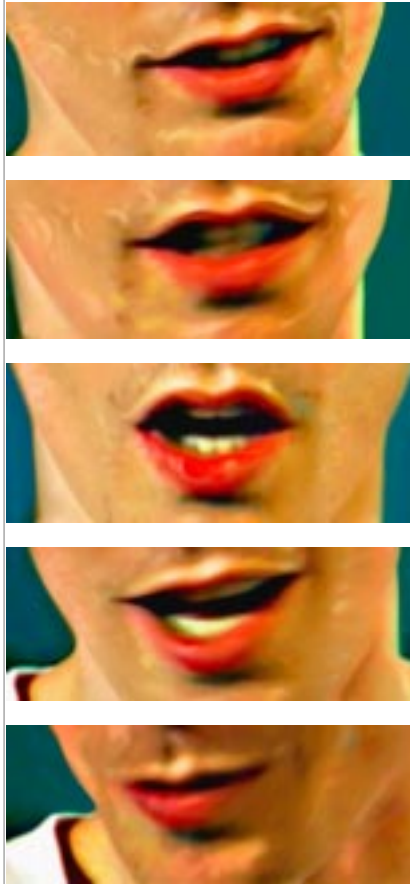


Figure 2: Five mouth frames from a video sequence used in a spin toy.

One of the most enduring human activities is the telling of stories. From colorful excuses for tardiness, through scholarly presentations of historical fact, we spin tales to instruct, inform, and entertain.

As a visual artist I have for years been engaged by the illustrated storybook as a form of narrative. The turn of the page replaces one image with another, advancing a plot by means of pictures.

In the best examples of this genre each image presents a meaningful moment through the counterpoint of characters, settings, actions, and (where included) text.

Such books as Josse Goffin's *OH!*, and David Wiesner's *Tuesday*, stand as recent examples of stories for children told with a richness of image and sparseness of words. At the same time, Nick Bantok's *Griffin and Sabine* series utilizes a similar format, yet is written for an older audience.

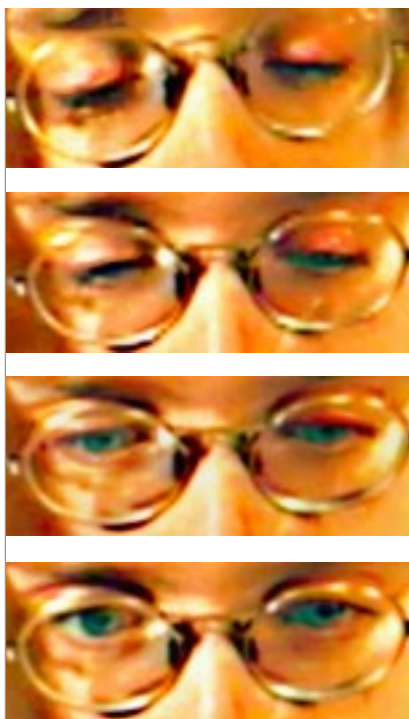


Figure 3: Four eye frames from a video sequence used in a spin toy.

Goffin's book for young children contains no text, but uses the folding and unfolding of pages to surprise his audience, as what seems to be a depiction of a familiar object or group of objects turns out to be a more unexpected image. *Tuesday* uses only sparse text, letting detailed images serve to move the story forward. Bantok uses the metaphor of a correspondence to present his story. Pages contain envelopes, folded paper, and postcards which one supposes to have been exchanged through the mail.

My exploration of technologically based tools during my recent course of study in Visual Information Technologies has expanded my excitement for visual series into the arenas of video imagery, animation, and the production sequences which go into the planning of such moving images. The subtle changes from one frame to another not only advance a story, but provide insights into the personalities, motivations, and emotions of the characters which populate these stories.

REVIEW OF RELATED WORK IN THE FIELD

EDWEARD MUYBRIDGE: MOVEMENT AND POSE

It would be impossible to discuss work in the field of video without paying at least brief homage to the motion studies of Edweard Muybridge. Drawn into this study by California governor Leland Stanford, in order to resolve debate about the position of trotting horses' hooves, Muybridge came to document the movements of humans and animals by devising technologies which forboded present day multiple camera special effects (Linder chapter 2).

The particular horse photographed in Muybridge's initial study was "Occident", Stanford's beloved racehorse. At issue was the possibility that a horse might, at some point in its stride, have all four feet off the ground (Haas 48).

The problem of exposing film quickly enough to capture the motion of a trotting horse was challenging. In the early 1870s, the time at which Muybridge performed this study, photographs were generally made by the simple removal of the lens cap, by which method the film was exposed. Needless to say there was a considerable lack of control, and exposures were no faster than an individual's ability to remove and replace the cap. As described in the April 7, 1873 San Francisco *Alta California*, Muybridge's first day's attempt left no result on the film. He achieved a shadow on the second day by opening and closing the camera more quickly. On the third day he "contrived to have two boards slip

past each other by touching a spring and in so doing to leave an eighth of an inch opening for the five-hundredth part of a second as the horse passed, and by an arrangement of double lenses, crossed, secured a negative that shows 'Occident' in full motion . . ." (Haas 48-49). The horse in passing before each of a row of cameras, broke a string connected with its shutter, exposing the plate. "This breaking of a string, opening of a shutter, and so on, took place before each camera." (Lutz 1)

In subsequent studies he used a more complex triggering system which relied on a tuning fork as a clock to simultaneously expose multiple sequences of cameras from differing points of view (Linder chapter 3).

Although the precipitating issue, the debate about the position of a trotting horse's hooves, has been described by some sources as a bet between Stanford and another—possibly Muybridge—it has also been described as a purely scholarly endeavor on the part of a horse enthusiast. Regardless, what is particularly intriguing is the fact that there is no record of publication of the definitive photo. There is, however, a Currier and Ives lithograph of Occident trotting, with all four feet off the ground. It may be that this is intended to document the photographic event, as well as its outcome. (Haas 49)

In their essay entitled "The Illusion of Illusion", Broadfoot and Butler assert that Muybridge did not set out to photograph a horse with its hooves in any particular position at all, either off or on the ground. Rather, he "sampled" a series of movements at regularly spaced intervals. One of those samples might have revealed a point in which all four hooves were off the ground, but the point of the endeavor is in the incremental sampling. It is a new conception of movement, according to Deleuze. (Broadfoot and Butler 264)

They describe a counterpoint between the movement and the pose. Move-

ment is not a series of poses, “of forms or Ideas put into motion”. (264) Rather movement gives rise to these forms or Ideas. The pose “not only results in motion but also *from* it.” (265)

Deleuze characterizes the drawn animation image as being not a “pose or completed figure, but the description of a figure which is always in the process of being formed or dissolving through the movement of lines and points taken at any-instant-whatevers of their course.” (Broadfoot and Butler 270) One pose must give way to another, must be destroyed, in order for the next to arise. At the same time a new pose must arise in order for the previous one to be destroyed. (270)

We are initially familiar with Muybridge’s work as series of stills, incrementally depicting various human or animal movements. While he did sell portfolios and bound volumes of printed series, the photographer came also to present his work as moving pictures. To that end he adapted a scientific toy called the zoetrope into a projecting viewer which he named the Zoöpraxiscope. Using two counterrotating disks, a projecting lantern, and the persistence of vision, Muybridge’s machine far exceeded other machines of the time for the delivery of a short (12 frame) motion sequence.

The photographer and his patron fell out over issues of ownership and authorship, as well as the value which Stanford placed on Muybridge’s work. This left Muybridge in search of a new sponsor to support his increasingly detailed studies. With the aid of art patron, horseman, and amateur photographer Fairman Rogers, and the advocacy of painter Thomas Eakins, he was brought to Philadelphia to “make an extensive series of new experiments for the University of Pennsylvania.” (Haas, 144) There he captured more than 100,000 images (Linder chapter 3).

Muybridge's books continue to be regarded as classic, definitive works in the area of human and animal locomotion.

SELECTIONS FROM CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

In his essay, "Maximizing indeterminacy", J. Ronald Green explores the role of film, video, and digital tools as "collage machines". The appropriation of image, the disassembly and reassembly of parts, have become key for video art. No longer are we limited to what can be cut, chiseled, chopped, and pasted. We can choose pieces of reality and recombine them. A direct example is Gary Hill's "Inasmuch as it Is Always Already Taking Place" (1990) which is composed of disassembled life-sized video body parts. Bill Viola's "Slowly Turning Narrative" (1995) takes the recombination further. Projecting two single-channel video image-streams onto a gigantic rotating mirror, it mixes them with images "gathered" by the mirror, redistributing them around the room. When the mirror captures spectators it incorporates them into the projected images.

Raising the question of whether video is just another element in an installation, Green answers it diversely, stating that it is on the one hand a resituated object, and yet is quite different in that it represents a discourse very like the installation itself.

Bill Viola

In writing of Viola's installation, "'Buried Secrets' (1995)", Deirdre Boyle speaks of disturbance and confusion. Observing that Viola "blur[s] the boundaries between self and other", she wonders whose nightmare she is experiencing. (Boyle 9ff) From his first video work in the 1970s, in the era of "body art", Viola has explored pain of both a physical and a psychic nature, as well as the

relationship between the “observer and observed”. Physical danger, the potential for pain or injury was a component of 1970's body art. As Viola's work developed he expanded the threat from the artist alone to include the viewer. He took the artist from isolation back into a greater cultural context expanding the "frame of reference in the imagery of the tapes and installations." In "Reasons For Knocking At An Empty House" the viewer and artist are brought together by the gaze, (Judson p30ff) and that nightmarish pain reaches out to the audience.

In “Reasons” Viola faces the viewer directly from a video monitor. As the artist is struck on the head, the spectator shares the experience through amplified sounds. For Boyle this creates a “disorientation of seemingly shared consciousness . . .” (Boyle) The installation 'demonstrates the controlled rage' that Boyle sees as a root of the Viola's art. According to Haenlein in his notes in the exhibition catalogue, 'trauma is the essence of Viola's art.' (Haenlein quoted by Boyle)

Viola is concerned with the integrity of the artist, of the artist's work as an integrated part of his whole life. For him it's a matter of ethics. As quoted by Judson , "Art has to be part of one's daily life, or else it is not honest." Viola terms this "living within the frame." (Judson)

It's important to note that Viola employs writing as a tool in the creation of his art. With extensive readings in eastern and western philosophy as a basis, Viola works out his concepts at a deep level within his written journals (Boyle). In fact the artistic execution is simply the the final step.

"Hall of Whispers", is one of the five "modules" within Viola's "Buried Secrets ". In a series of 10 video projections on facing walls of the corridor men

and women who are bound and gagged struggle futilely to speak. In "The Veiling" a man and a woman pick their way through dense foliage without ever connecting. (Boyle)

"The presence", originally presented in the U.S. pavilion of the 1995 Venice Biennale, body sounds such as hearts beating, and lungs breathing, combine with voices speaking guilty secrets. (Boyle)

"The Greeting", described by Boyle as popular with the press, is compositionally based on "The Visitation" painted by Jacopo Pontormo in the early 1500s. On the face of it this video is simply a contemporary re-enactment of the meeting between the Madonna and Elizabeth, both miraculously pregnant. Viola has woven plots and subplots however, raising many questions in the viewer. The work begins with two women "Talking in the courtyard of an industrial landscape. They are unexpectedly joined by a third woman who is clearly pregnant." The pregnant Madonna knows and embraces one of the two, whispering something in her ear. The other woman becomes the third point of a triangle, as the Madonna "breaches [her] exclusivity". In the background a man strikes a light, leaves and returns with a second light. (Boyle) The meeting is unclear, although reference to the original Renaissance painting suggests contemporary interpretations of biblical allusions. In her review of "Being and Time", a show of work by Viola, Hill, Nauman, Oursler, et al., Ellen Berkovitch asks the question "Can you believe?" and observes that "the camera has replaced the church painting . . . as the instigator of faith."

Gary Hill

Hill is not as haunting for me as are others, but I am struck by the particular spatial relationships he establishes between his viewer and his work. Michael

Duncan's 1995 article in *Art in America* presents some interesting snippets of Hill's work, and draws me to one piece in particular, "Crux".

Hill created *Crux*, between 1983 and 87, by strapping video cameras to each arm, leg, and in front of his head, in such a way that the resulting video shows his hands, bare feet, and face. He then "trekked" around Bannerman's Island. In the installation monitors are placed where one would expect to find head, hands, and feet, in a traditional depiction of the crucifixion. Duncan describes the viewer as beginning to imagine Hill's missing torso, and sees this as a "weirdly effective" parallel to Christian belief as one discovers the "absent presence" of Hill's body (Duncan). He observes that Hill's works are often "structured around arbitrary rules" as one imagines *Crux*, to name one, to be.

"In interviews, Hill acknowledges time as the key structural element of video, yet he continually attempts to subvert its power by interrupting the flow of narrative and speech." (Duncan) He plays with time, as when he recorded an entire dialogue phonetically, using reversed speech. The final video was played backwards. As a result the speech sounded correct, but with odd cadences and breaks. ["Why Do Things Get Into A Muddle? (Come On Petunia)"]

As Hill's work has developed, he's moved from single channel video into installations involving projection, multiple displays, built and found objects, and the occasional live animal. [Duncan's states that the installation, *War Zone* (1980) included a real white rabbit as a "Psychic cushion" according to Hill's accompanying text.] The relationship between mind and body, perhaps one might say organism and technology, underlies Hill's work. In the face of his platonic intellectualism he doesn't forget that the intellect is grounded in the physical body (Duncan).

Sam Taylor-Wood

Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, Tony Oursler, and Gary Hill . . . for these video artists and others who arose in the 60s and 70s the appurtenances of technologically-based art forms were as much a part of the installation as the content on screen or in projection. As Marshall MacLuhan was famous for saying, the medium was the message. (Judson) For a "younger generation" of video artists, however, the equipment which they use to produce their work is not a matter of philosophy. An image is simply an image. According to Larry Qualls, even sculptural work is primarily about the flat image, the surface. We see this flatness reflected in the work of Sam Taylor-Wood.

Trained in traditional sculpture in the U.K., Wood moved into photography and video by way of a post-university job costuming for an opera company. Her work is rich in color and complexity of action, but in physical structure is analogous to traditional, flat, paintings. In counterpoint to sound which may support or confound the development of the photographic montage or video, Taylor-Wood's production values are lush. "5 Revolutionary Seconds", which is perhaps Taylor-Wood's signature Series, is a rich panorama of interiors, populated with individuals who are generally unaware of one another. The artist has carefully scripted their actions, and has drawn upon friends, acquaintances, and paid performers for the execution. (Murphy)

Taylor-Wood's well-designed dramas often contain an element of poignancy or wryness, even occasionally a punchline, which draws us into her tableaux. In "Third Party" (1999) we attend a fête, and yet many are not celebrating. Marianne Faithfull, one of the guests, sits alone, engaged in vigilant chain-smoking. Nearby a young woman "gyrates maniacally to the music ". (Rush) There's an underlying plot to "Third Party", which is the "messy tension be-

tween a husband and his wife, who is flirting with another man." (Frankel)
 Characters move from one projection to another as the gallery audience is surrounded by motion and sound.

Taylor-Wood often explores the theme of tension and alienation, as in her 1997 installation at the Tate in London, "Atlantic ". A central screen was flanked by two other screens, reminiscent of the structure of Renaissance altar pieces. The center gave a view of the dining room in a crowded restaurant. The left had the "tearful face of a woman "; the right the "fidgeting hands of a man". The couple, present at a table in the panorama as well as in the closeups, is breaking up. We, the audience, are drawn by the poignancy of this event in such a crowded place. (Lewis) As with Wood's, other work there is a richness of color, sound, and complexity.

Taylor-Wood will sometimes use sound in counterpoint or contrast to image as when she filmed a friend, the dancing alone in a garret apartment. Although she anticipated presenting this as a comic work, she ultimately paired the slowed video with a minor key adagio, creating a haunting poignancy. (Taylor-Wood)

In contrast to these complex works, Taylor-Wood installation at the Hirshhorn, "Noli Me Tangere", is a one-trick pony. A floor to ceiling two-sided projection depicts a man apparently holding up the Hirshhorn's considerable ceiling. We watch for four and a half minutes while he strains, hearing him breathe and finally grunt as he can no longer bear the weight. As he let's go we "get it", as we see that he was in fact standing on his head during the taping and that the projection was inverted for the installation.

Green speaks of Rosalind Krauss's "Influential characterization of the video medium as essentially narcissistic in her 1978 essay 'Video : The Aesthetics Of

Narcissism ." notwithstanding the importance of her essay 20 years ago Green perceives that "the artist's body's fascination with itself in the 'mirror' of video space" is not just a fascination with itself, "but also with the way others see it; . . . with the body's objective relatedness to specific sites; and with the body's general situatedness."

We perhaps have few better examples of the narcissism of video, than with Taylor-Wood. Not only does she draw on the glitterati as subjects for her work, present day "gods" as she describes her photographic wrapping of Selfridges in London (Kydd), but her tableaux seem self conscious. It is as if actors are peeking surreptitiously through the fourth wall, reassuring themselves that there is an audience. (Green) At the same time, the place of the audience in space, particularly in relation to Taylor-Wood's multiple projection installations, is key to the success of the work.

Bruce Nauman

My first exposure to Nauman was at his retrospective at the Hirshhorn Gallery in Washington D.C. in 1996. At the time I was overwhelmed by the cacophony of sound and light. Much of the content was unsettling, in particular "Clown Torture", where the normally benign entertainer's face was twisted and screaming. For me Nauman's work is claustrophobic, a response consistent with his work creating confining or delimited spaces.

Nauman's early work involved a simple "straightforward recording of an activity". (Schimmel 70) One of his first works, entitled "Flour Arrangements" (1966), was a series of photographs of his daily activity of rearranging flour on the floor of his studio. In his first published interview he observed "I guess the film becomes our record of what went on. Maybe also because you tend to believe what is shown on a film is really true—you believe a film, or a photo-

graph, more than a painting." Nauman first used film as a documentary medium. If he did something, he filmed it. As his work developed, however, he began to manipulate time, angles, and framing, to more fully exploit the possibilities inherent in the medium. (Schimmel 73) His control derives in part by his adjustment of time through which he guides our perceptions. (Schimmel 76)

In his essay "beyond words" Robert Storr speaks of the way Nauman uses language both as written word and in the context of installations. Finding meaning in mismatched words and contexts (50) Nauman will also use words by "seeing dumb". By literally interpreting catch phrases, Nauman creates "new sense rather than non-sense" (54)

Nauman controls not only the subject, but also the viewer of his work. Setting up tests for himself and other subjects in his video, such as in "Clown Torture" (1987) which required the clowns to support themselves on one leg as the other was held crossed, until collapsing, he will often manipulate the audience's ability to progress through an exhibition by the construction of corridors, mazes, and other rooms. He uses the physical space which contains the viewer, along with manipulation of time, to control experience. His 1988 work, "Rats and Bats (Learned Helplessness in Rats 11)" seems to mock his audience by the inclusion of an actual rat-in-a-maze. (Schimmel 80)

Paik, Oursler, Kubota, and Cage

Although their work diverges in many ways, I want to focus particularly on one aspect which the work of Nam June Paik, Tony Oursler, and Shigeko Kubota has in common: the utilization of technological hardware itself as an artistic element.

In the IEEE's *Spectrum* article on art and technology, Paik is described as

"firmly" believing that "it is in the innovative convergence of found imagery and objects with the time lapse quality of video that an artist comes closest to the true nature of portraiture—the depiction not only of the physical likeness but also the intentions the desires and achievements of the individual." (35) In Paik's tribute to gallery owner Howard Wise, personal effects, along with videos by many of the artists whom Wise represented, creates a full portrait. The configuration of monitors, papers, and objects creates a whimsical allusion to a businessman sitting at his desk.

Spectrum includes Tony Oursler's "Getaway No. 2" (1994) which brings together "Mattress, cloth, video projector, laser disk player, and laser disk . . . " The video projector, concealed in no way, projects a threatening face onto the form of a woman trapped under a mattress. In this instance Oursler treats issues of domestic violence fusing "the roles of victim and aggressor". As Oursler puts it, "Our culture is obsessed with the whole horror-sex-violence thing. . . . We love to watch it, and I'm obsessed by the fact that we love to watch it." (36)

Particularly arresting for me is an exhibit of eyeball-like orbs which Oursler presented at Metro Pictures in 1996. This story here rests not only in the appearance of eyes but in what they reflect. Each work is individually conceived, although they are harmonious as a body. The eyes' response to the reflected stimulus, generally an artificial stimulus of some sort. "William Trembly's underlighted eye in 'Eye Witness' alternately squints and widens as he switches from one adrenalin pumping TV news reports of violence to another." (Holland)

When her husband Nam June Paik was recovering from a 1996 stroke, Kubota fully utilized the hardware of video, in combination with the hardware of

health care, to document his recovery. Set to the Marvin Gaye song of the same name, "Sexual Healing" was a tender presentation of his experience and a tribute to their 30 year marriage. Galvanized handrails, a video wheelchair, bed, and window, as well as a pair of life-size video stick figures, present not only the progress of Paik's therapy, but also prior scenes from their life together. The stick figures' "innards" are made up of multiple tiny monitors playing tapes of their younger years . . ." (Rush)

Paik and Kubota were brought together by their involvement in the Fluxus movement, a "loosely organized international association of artists deeply influenced by the theories of John Cage. Central to Fluxus activities was an effort to reframe musical composition and art-making in terms of simple and often perplexing actions." (Joselit) For Kubota, Fluxus and video art share the fact that both are "art of the moment".

"Cage excluded nothing from his work . . .", neither dissonance nor traditional tonality. Perhaps in reaction to the restrictions of European avant-garde, all sound was acceptable for Cage. His concern was to reflect reality, within which reality "he believed that all manner of approaches could coexist." (Smith) He often used chance or indeterminacy in developing his pieces, assembling them in such a way that many pieces were never the same, twice. Upon occasion the listener's operation of stereo equipment would be a key factor in the nature of the performance. On other occasions he would use the I Ching or similar method to determine the pattern for composing sound.

The I Ching is a Chinese method of divination which is based on "a binary system and chance operations." (Zweig) It is composed of 64 "signs", each of

which is made up of a combination of six broken and straight lines. The nature of each line is derived from the toss of three coins, or a more complicated manipulation of sticks, which ultimately determines whether a line is straight or broken. (Jacobi 290-291) Cage used this Chinese method of divination as a way of maximizing indeterminacy in his compositions. Bringing together audio elements, he would rely on the toss of coins, or counting of sticks, to determine the manner in which those preexisting elements would be assembled on any given occasion. (Zweig)

THE EXHIBITION

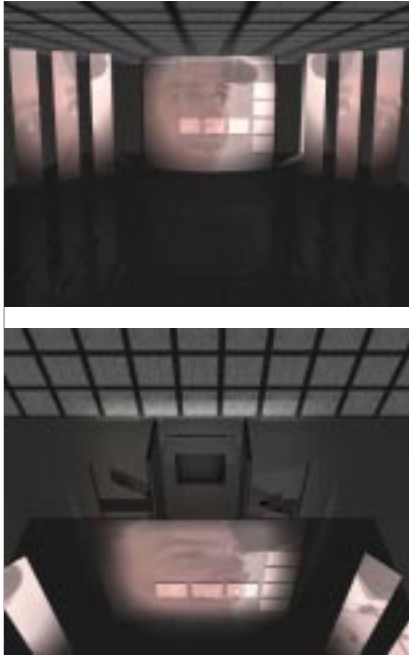


Figure 4: Two views of an alternative treatment of the Alcove Gallery.

INTRODUCTION

My creative process is an organic process. When I begin a new work I stand in a position of non-critical subjectivity, gathering tools, materials, and topics. Sifting through possibilities to see what emerges.

Once a work nears completion I will stand back to evaluate it and will adjust it from a more objective, critical, point of view.

The final result is a distillation, produced as much by what is discarded as by what is kept.

The “Mask Mirror” installation began with expansive, complex concepts. These concepts were honed as available resources, show dates, and the location of the installation developed. Acceleration of the show schedule and an unexpected change of venue made it desirable and possible to make conceptual and aesthetic decisions



Figure 5: Sequence of frames for a rotoscoped animation sequence.

with an unaccustomed (but very productive) dispatch.

ORIGINS

Character Study

“Mask Mirror” originated as a study undertaken in preparation for character development in an animated or print-based story sequence. A friend (who was also my ice skating coach) was injudicious enough to express a desire to “be a cartoon” at about the time I first began to think he would make a fine animation source.

I first videotaped my subject in staged interviews. With the help of an off-camera assistant posing increasingly outrageous questions, I captured a range of facial expressions, hand gestures, and upper body motions. I subsequently videotaped my coach while he was teaching ice skating to children and adults, in order to build a library of posture and motion.

Using Adobe® Premiere® software I digitized much of the videotape before examining it closely. Stepping through the digitized frames at artificially slow and fast speeds, I

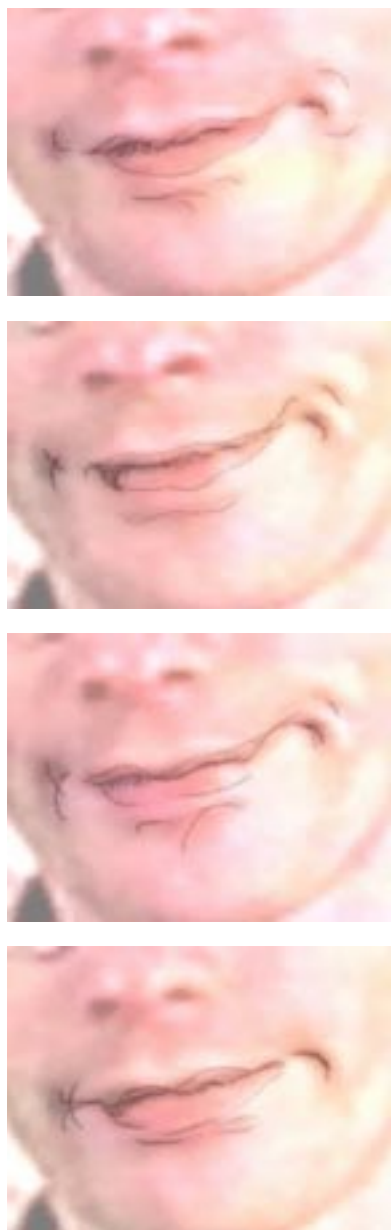


Figure 6: Sequence of frames with tracing overlay from a rotoscoped animation sequence.

became intrigued by the depiction of motion removed from its natural velocity. Gestures grew in clarity through acceleration while the previously unseen underlying structure of movement was revealed through slow and stop motion.

I selected segments of my raw video from which to create storyboard sequences, and exported them from Premiere® in timed increments as “filmstrips”. I first printed them out in long pages of serial images, then created line drawings of the progression using tissue and pencil. Additionally, I rotoscoped the filmstrip files in Adobe Photoshop® by tracing line drawing sequences using digital drawing tools. I imported the edited filmstrip file back into Premiere, creating animated video from the hand drawn frames. The process of disassembling and reassembling the image sequences, as well as the close attention required to select the proper edges for tracing, led to a level of observation which drew me from my initial task of using the video as source for animation, into a direct study of the unfolding gesture as expressed in frame by frame sequences. The timing involved in



*Figure 7: Sequence of drawn frames
from a rotoscoped animation
sequence.*

moving from one image to another became key, not only in the motion video, but also in the progression from one still image to another.

The printed output from the working stop frame video sequences became an artifact of linked frames, unfolding in overlong pages of frozen motion which echoed in a minor way the extensive motion studies of Muybridge. The frozen moment buried within movement often surprises by its contrast to the liminal content of the interview. Is a harshness of expression (for example) an accidental counterpoint to a gentle conversation, or is it an indication of the underlying content? I draw no conclusion, but present such questions of identity for consideration through the exploration of Mask Mirror.

This video portion of my work had initially been intended as nothing more than source material for the development of computer-based characters and animation. As a result of the rich output from my initial investigations it became the primary focus.

As a physical counterpoint to the video study, I made life masks in different combina-

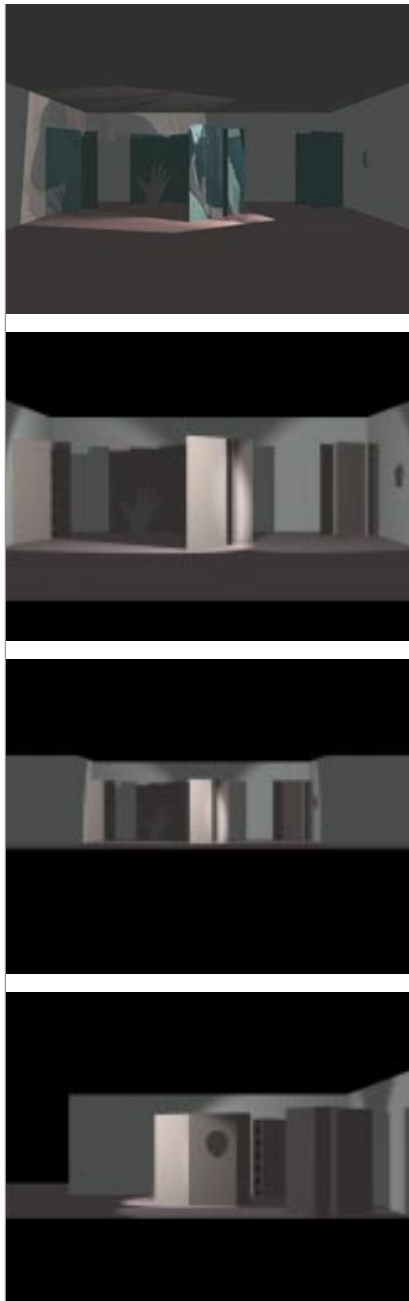


Figure 8: Initial Lightwave mockups of the Alcove Gallery.

tions of beeswax and paraffin, using plaster moulds pulled from my subject's face. I also developed a plastilene head, using the video and a studio session to help with accuracy.

This increasingly observant study evolved into a portrait which was on one hand a literal multimedia exposition of an individual, on another a metaphorical exploration of humanness.

Space Exploration

Reserving the space for the installation was a definitive point in the evolution of this work. Making decisions about a specific rather than an abstract location guided the creative direction. Virtual mockups of the space created with 3D software became my primary tool to work out aspects of placement, lighting, and size.

I knew early in the process that I wanted a tactile element within the work. Technologically-based media rely on eyes, ears, and intellect to the near exclusion of the body. Creating objects which viewers must touch would restore some balance.

The first space reserved was an alcove

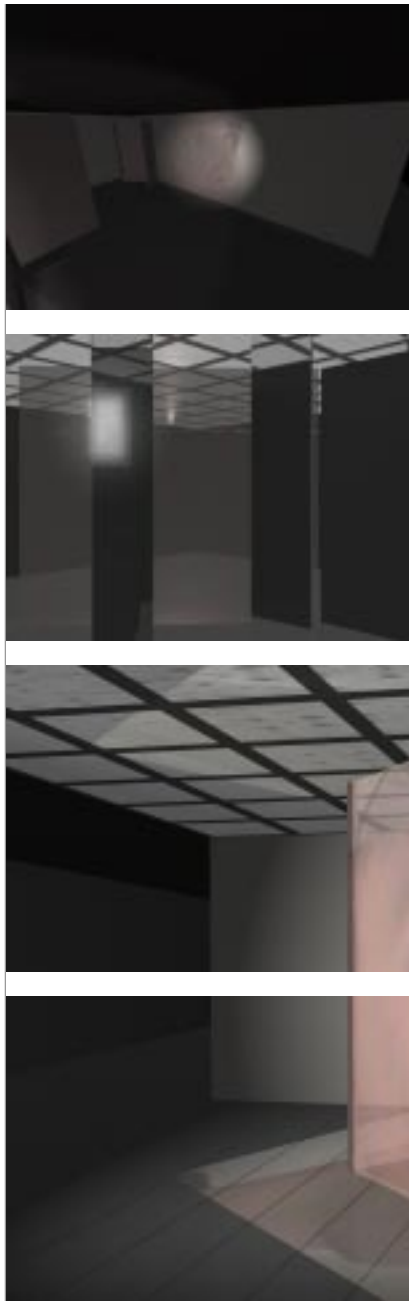


Figure 9: Projections in the virtual Alcove Gallery.

space in the Fine Arts building. I used NewTek® Lightwave 3D™ to create my virtual model of the alcove, and to populate it with a number of possible objects and effects including video projections, mirrors, figures, transparent scrim, assorted free-standing panels, a large book-like object, and spotlights. As the laws of physics didn't need to apply in my virtual mockup, I explored a variety of features and effects which would be not only costly, but difficult to achieve at all, in the real physical world.

As I continued to develop the mockup in Lightwave™ I began to home in on the physically possible: becoming specific in scale and placement within the space; exploring various lighting options and projection sources.

My computer equipment at the outset of this project had limitations as to the extent of images and reflections which could be rendered without failure. As a result the initial, Lightwave, mockups weren't sufficient for resolving subtleties of texture which I anticipated developing. Fortunately, Alias Wavefront™ Maya® modelling and animation software became available in the graduate

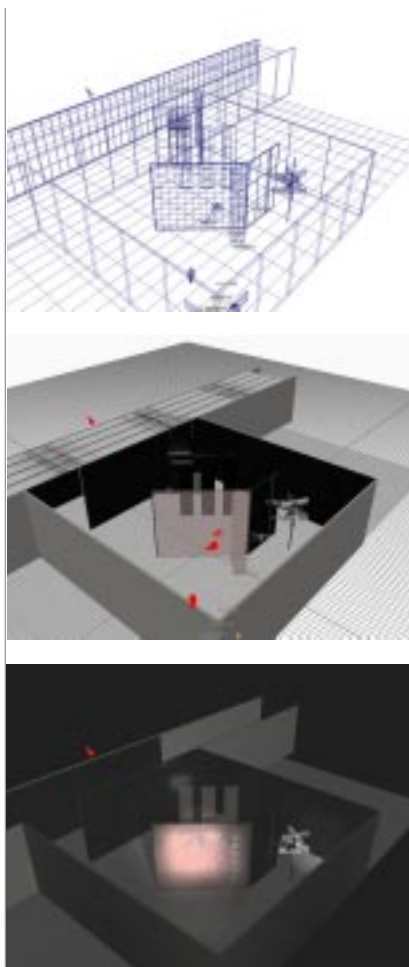


Figure 10: View of the virtual Alcove Gallery with projection onto scrim, showing different rendering options.

laboratory, and, for a time, on a workstation in my studio. The intuitive nature of the tool combined with its ability to handle complex textures and light sources, as well as the increased power of the workstations, expanded the potential for verisimilitude considerably. Where my initial mockups had been an open-ended exploration of aesthetic possibilities, further mockups developed concepts from the initial essays which I wanted to explore in the finished work.

Several elements became key in this virtual version of the installation: scaled texture patterns, scale models of human figures, projection and transparency, video, spin toys, hanging cards, masks.

Scale texture patterns

In order to build a reasonable likeness of an actual installation, within the virtual space, I revisited the alcove gallery, measuring not only its absolute dimensions, but also the size and properties of component materials such as floor and ceiling tiles. Through the employment of much arithmetic—and considerable trial and error—I created a working facsimile of the construction of the target space.



Figure 11: Masks and projections in the virtual space.

Figures

I populated the space with a number of human models from Metacreation's "Poser" software so as to get a sense of the relationship between physical human scale and the size of the gallery room and the objects within.

Projection

Technical questions having to do with the manner of applying images to large surfaces suggested video projection as a possible solution. Creating such a projection within the confines of the software required considerable trial and error with the lighting, texture, and materials modules to find a balance which would cast the desired image without either burning the image to white, or darkening the light to near invisibility. This foreboded similar issues with video projection in the physical world.

Scrim

The fall of the projected images onto a variety of surfaces increased the visual interest in the virtual space. Where projection involved one of the human figures, it extended the purview of the installation to

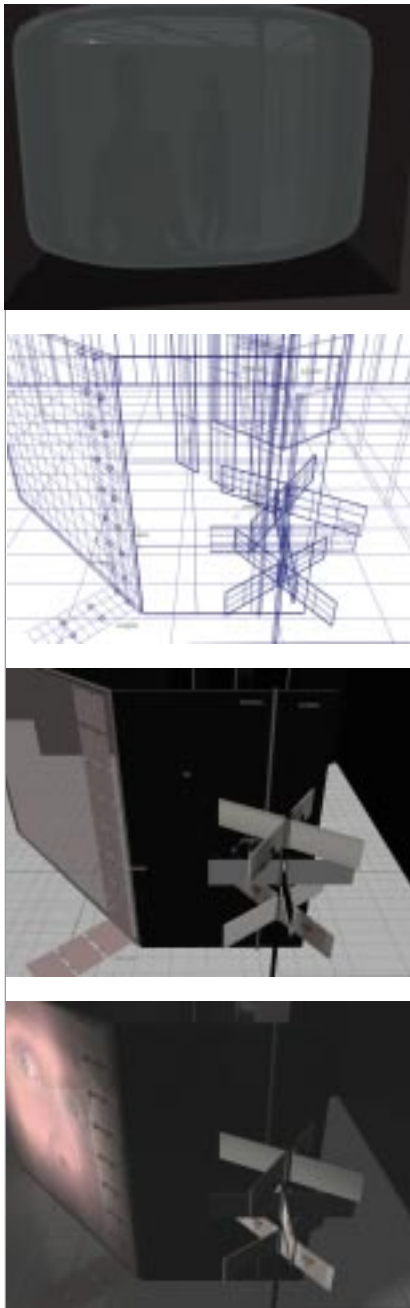


Figure 12: Scrim, hanging card sequence, and spin toy in virtual Alcove Gallery.

include the visiting figure as part of the show itself. Wanting to engage viewers more fully than as mere spectators I experimented with a variety of ways to physically involve the audience.

Combinations of reflecting materials with varying levels of transparency were placed around the virtual gallery, casting back images of visitors, as well as transmitting shadows of others through transparent scrim material.

Video screens

I added cathode screens to the space in order to transmit images of my videotaped subject. As the presentation for the screens evolved they became as much a mirror object (although presenting the viewer's reflection only off the surface of the screen) as a video presence. The video of my subject would be developed through the use of 3D animation and video into a "man in the mirror" for the audience. He would interact not only visually, but also by speaking to his viewers.

Additionally the screen came to stand as an icon of the technological environment in which this work was conceived, and in which



Figure 13: Spin toys.

it was realized.

Spin toys

The original Lightwave™ mockups included human-sized panels suggestive of book pages. Initially these were to be manipulable, but fearing an undesirable “amusement park” effect I sought other ways to cause viewers to interact with some physical aspect of the work. My own disassembling and reassembling of my subject through the unfolding series of video study images—with its accompanying embedded surprise frames—suggested that one might disassemble and reassemble my subject’s face through the use of cards. This interest could be enhanced by the use of rudimentary animation in spinning arrays of features.

Hanging Cards

The unfolding print version of the video sequence suggested an additional display of images which would mimic a strip of film in its presentation. The simple assembly of a series of images, one suspended from another, created this allusion without becoming overparticular about the details of film’s appearance.

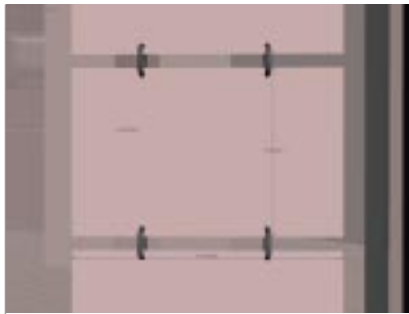


Figure 14: Hanging cards in various stages of rendering, displayed with scrim and projection.

Masks

With the exception of projections falling on visitors who happened to be present, everything in the virtual space was flat. The addition of the life masks to a wall installation would add some dimension, while reinforcing the exploration of the human subject.

COALESCING

Masked

I began this project with the intention of creating or interpreting a storybook, using technological tools for 3D modelling and animation, with video and image editing as secondary, supportive, activities. The process of executing this work took the project into an unexpected, but well focussed, byway—one which offers the opportunity to explore image and reflection through the mirror and mask provided by technological tools.

The turning point in this creative process occurred during a second video shoot with my subject. This taping was in a controlled studio setting, against a green screen. I had loosely scripted some key phrases to be spoken by the Man in the Mirror, as well as



Figure 15: Five frames from a working sequence.

some controlled movements. The planned verbiage and moves were quickly dispatched, but it seemed advisable to develop some more footage, just in case.

Through sheer happenstance the life masks which had been developed as a visual resource were in the studio. I decided to take one or two shots of the model removing a wax mask. The camera was running without break as he repeatedly put on and took off the mask, trying to create a smooth motion. The powerful image of a man masking and unmasking himself, with *his own likeness*, became the heart for this work. Verbal allusions to the mirror (while acting as the man in the mirror) coupled with mask interaction to give the name to the show.

New Venue

I had reserved the College Hall Alcove Gallery for installation March 30 through April 2, 2000, open to the public April 3 through 11. Late in December of 1999 the possibility of installing in the Johnson Center gallery arose, if I could get the work ready for installation beginning March 6. The change of venue

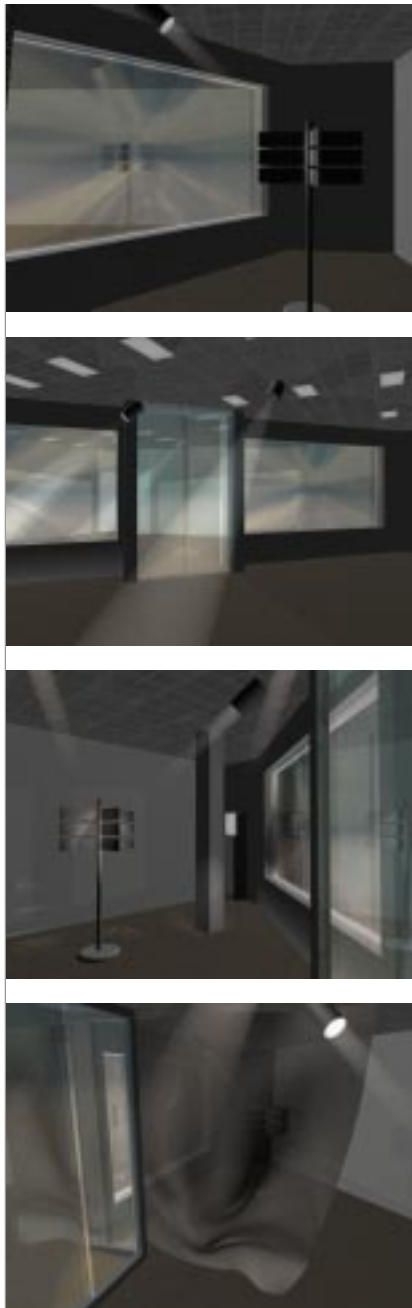


Figure 16: Mockups of the new venue, exploring the use of lighting, spin toys, and scrim in the new space, as well as the reflective effects of the wall of windows.

would result in substantially increased exposure for the work, but with nearly a month less time to prepare. The opportunity was too good to pass up, so I set aside all other plans for the intervening weeks, and immersed myself in the realization and completion of “Mask Mirror”.

The first step was to create a virtual mockup, again, as the new space was completely different from that which I’d used for planning.

Whereas the original space had been a rectangular room with one open wall the new space was more triangular, truncated at the corners and enclosed with a wall of glass. The new space enfolded the viewer differently, and held elements in a different balance from the original space. The light transmitted through the wall of glass would have to be blocked out in order to accomplish video projection onto scrim, or the projection would have to be altered to accommodate the new space. In addition the gallery contained several supporting columns which would have to be taken into consideration in any use of the space.

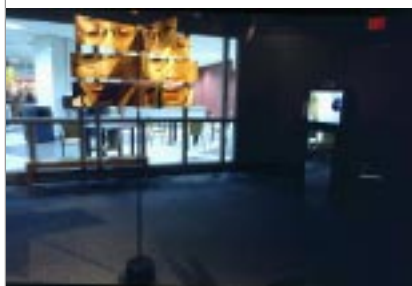


Figure 17: Virtual and actual explorations of lighting, spin toys, and video placement within the final space. Note the model of the vertically aligned television on the reflective sculpture stand.

I developed the contents of my gallery space in earnest. Video studies evolved into spin toys, the man in the mirror became two video monitors. Life masks and the film strip style image series became the focus upon entering the room. Not willing to abandon the scrim projection, even with the compressed deadline, I sought to reserve a video projector from the University and to obtain and fabricate structures to support scrim. Although it had been possible to reserve the projector for the initially scheduled date, they were unwilling to commit to a loan of the projector for the three weeks' duration of the show, at a point in this semester during which they were in particular demand. At the same time my efforts to obtain scrim with particular reflective properties were unsuccessful. As the deadline for installing the work moved closer, and as my efforts to obtain a projector and the appropriate scrim redoubled, I continued working to resolve the particulars of the installation within my virtual space. The scrim proved to be a particularly difficult item in virtuality as well. Although I was able to approximate a fabric drape, texture, and



Figure 18: Detail of working sequence which is "All About Appearances".

transparency, the effect within the virtual room was unsatisfactory. In this new environment the scrim tended to overpower the other elements, rather than adding to the whole effect. It was with a mixture of technological relief and artistic regret that I abandoned the concept of projection on to transparent scrim.

My Lightwave™ and Maya® mockups had become quite rich in texture and light, and yet the production of the work as described in the Maya® mockup, in the alcove Gallery, was clearly going to be prohibitively expensive. Although I had a will to give my all to my work, it seemed that the nature of the physicality was overtaking the underlying concept. The vision of my subject masking and unmasking himself, as well as the potential to assemble and reassemble a person's visage, albeit in a playful manner, needed to remain key.

Sound

Initially the recorded sound was intended to be used for lip sync with a three-dimensional model. In addition to sound recorded during the green screen session, with the

*It's
all about
appearances.*

*When you
look in the
mirror and
you see
your pretty
face . . .*

Figure 19: Quotes from the
white video.

intention that it would be spoken by the man in the mirror, I obtained sound clips from my subject by miking him while he was giving skating instruction. Because of the nature of his work his comments on the ice were much as a man in the mirror would be: "go to the left . . . the left . . . what are you doing?! . . . that's no good . . ."

At the same time, for reasons which seemed entirely sentimental, I recorded considerable ambient noise from the rink environment. Admittedly that is the soundtrack for the situation in which I primarily met and came to know my subject—my skating coach—yet there's something special in the sound of the ice rink which is as much self portrait as other portrait.

THE INSTALLATION—MASK MIRROR

Both can reveal and conceal. We show ourselves by the masks we wear. Mirrors can distort, or reflect back a true image.

Still Frames

The Johnson Center Gallery at George Mason University is roughly triangular, with small walls truncating the corners. One en-

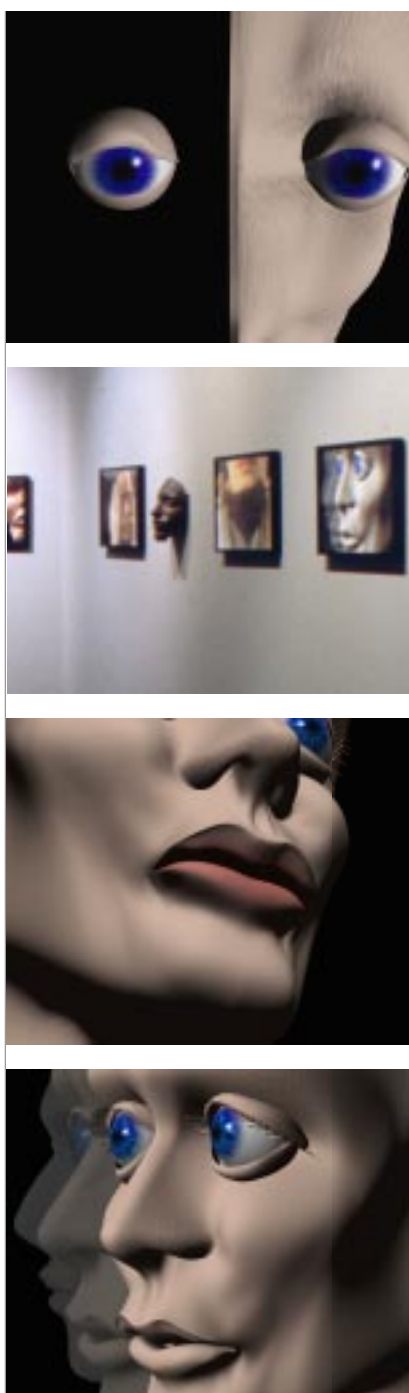


Figure 20: Installation photo of prints with masks. Closeups of two prints of Maya®-modeled heads.

ters via a door through a wall of windows, facing the largest of the corner walls. This wall contained prints—a series of images framed and presented so as to emulate a sequence of video or film frames. They were interspersed with the four wax life masks pulled from a plaster cast of my subject.

Hints of redundancy play with the viewer as the subject and his mask interact, and elements in the actual room appear in the virtual room as depicted in some of the frames.

Video

One of the two installation videos was intended as a scrim projection for most of the planning stages, yet the counterpoint between the two anthropomorphically proportioned TVs and mirrored stands seems more balanced, and yet also in greater tension, because of the similarity of presentation format, and the contrast between the video essences.

Beige

In the “beige video” he wrestles with the mask repeatedly—putting it on, or taking it off? Rather than answer that question the



Figure 21: Frames from the white video.

video is intended to raise that same question in viewers. The cuts to other masks emphasize the application and removal of the mask, and the dissolve of the mask to a room (a 3D version of the actual gallery room) with another mask donning/doffing suggests the mask as a passage elsewhere.

White

Across the gallery, in another of the triangle's corners is the white mask video. Its TV is set on end so that the screen will more closely resemble the proportions of an actual human head. The repeating theme is not a pitched struggle, but rather a repetitive minor adjustment of masks of various colors. They are suggestive of the various masks that we can wear—put one on, adjust it slightly—put another one on, adjust it slightly—but one can interpret them further as racial allusions, since the masks in question range from quite pale to quite dark. The white maskman reminds us verbally that it's all about appearances (the appearances of the media illusions, the appearances of the masks we choose to wear). He also tries to say a verse about looking into the mirror correctly, but



Figure 22: Three of many possible combinations of spin toy images.

can't quite remember the words.

Spin Toys

The disassembly and reassembly of my subject throughout the video study led me to involve my installation's audience in the manipulation of the character. The change in aspect caused by the replacement of a single feature led to a powerful form of play. As children play with Mr. Potato Head, moving nose, eyes, mouth, and ears at will, spectators became participants, choosing which combination of frozen moments to present at any time.

Creating the images for the spin toys presented particular problems because they were "grabbed" from video. Not only were scan lines an issue, but the amount of image data was marginal for printed output. Improving their quality led to the use of a combination of blurring and filtration in Photoshop® which added a slight level of abstraction and painterliness to the printed image.

Certain technical challenges required resolution in order for the final product to be manipulable. Printed images were mounted



Figure 23: The eye portion of a spin toy sequence.

on masonite, and laminated with a waterproof covering, so that the resulting cards could be handled safely. A craftsman devised a spindle arrangement which allowed arrays of cards to be rotated independently.

Three of the spin toys were based on close images of features. Spectators could align two or three arrays of four cards each to assemble the person's face as desired. The fourth spin toy used a repetition and variation of pattern for its design. In this repetition-variation the model was captured with his arm raised, hand on head. Sequential frames of his raising his hand are collaged here, with glimpses of the virtual model of the gallery room behind. The life mask is added to the mix in this toy, as it appears early in the sequence. Subtle color is added to the mask as it multiplies. I must confess to the injection of certain graphical puns, as the masks are colored in subtle shades of red, green, and blue, the "RGB" primaries for computer-based color. In addition I used a transparency feature known as a "mask" to combine the mask images with the posed model.

*The
camera
loves
you!*

Figure 24: A quote from the antiphonal speakers.

Sound

The element of sound was incorporated into the installation in three ways. First, ambient rink noise—combined with canned sounds of skating on a frozen lake—played continuously, serving to create a nearly subliminal audio environment. Second, the white video included intermittent speech on the part of the subject. As "mirror man", he tells us "it's all about appearances", and tries to remember rhymes having to do with mirrors.

The final use of sound involved antiphonal statements emanating from two hidden speakers. Such statements or questions as "What are you doing?" might be followed by fifteen minutes of silence until the voice suggests that "The camera loves you!"

In terms of hardware, the addition of sound used very simple techniques. The edited ambient noise was "burned" onto a compact disk which played in continuous loop on a boombox in the ceiling. The antiphonal sounds came through small battery-powered speakers which had been strapped underneath two unassuming benches. The video-



Figure 25: A single frame from the white video, produced by chance, by the compositing of video clips, resulting in a standalone image.

based sound simply played through the television's speaker, locating the speech with the human subject.

As a literal portrait Mask Mirror explored the subject as skater and coach not only in the source material which was gathered, but in the recorded sound which was presented in the gallery. Ambient rink noise coupled with the voices of skaters presented the subject's environment. Skating commands were spoken in his voice. The portrait video explored the subject "off ice", and "over the top", focusing on expansive gesture and vocal inflection.

As metaphor the subject's videotaped interaction with wax life masks symbolizes the masks we all wear and remove. The edited rink noise takes on a more universal white noise effect, and involves the audience in the rink world subliminally.

EVALUATION



Figure 26: The beige video as installed, with mirrored sculpture stand.

This work is a self portrait as choices made about the subject and its depiction reveal the artist's substance and stance in relation to the subject at hand.

Because my work is an evolutionary process, the use of hardware was not programmed in advance. The application of mirrors to sculpture stands, the rotation of the television screen to vertical, the execution and placement of spin toys, all developed as the growth of the concept demanded.

Mirror and mask, the core of this work, derive from the interaction of human with object, in particular my model in relation to a mask of his own face. The technological appurtenances are certainly part of the tools which I've used to create and present this work, yet I did not initially conceive of the relationship between cathode ray tube, sculpture stand, and streetsign-like spin toys, and human scale and position of the individual

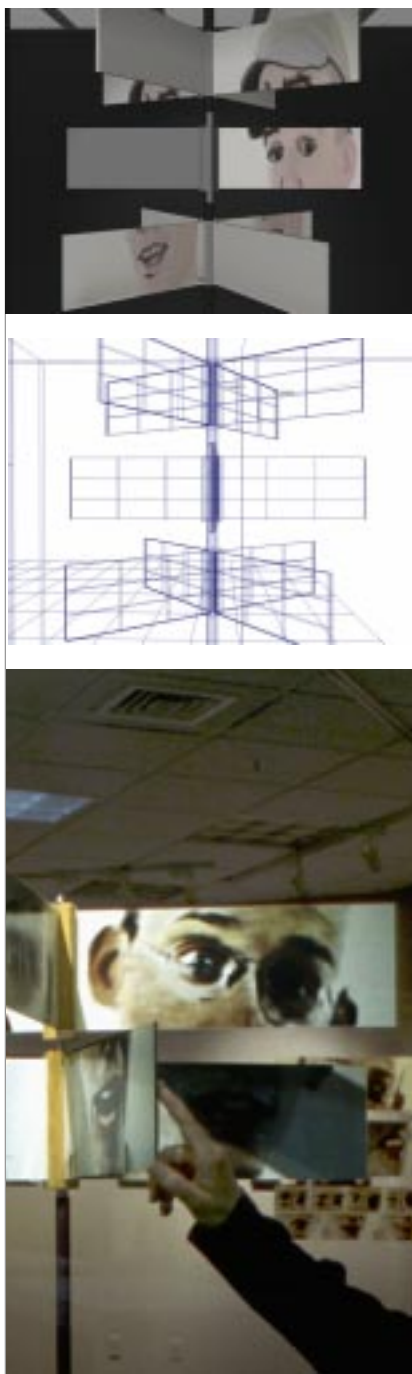


Figure 27: Spin toys rendered in Maya®, in wireframe, and as installed.

within this space. The final venue drove many choices about the inclusion of elements and their placement, making the balance of the installation specific to that location, even if composed of largely portable elements.

As I move on from the show into developing new work, two possibilities present themselves for its evolution. My conflicting feelings about technologically-based tools—the tension between their power and potential, and the coldness of many products which rely on the metal, plastic, and glass construction of technological devices—draw me to work either in a manner which explores the hard hardware object directly, or to continue to develop work which involves the viewer in a tactile manner, relying on the technology primarily as a hidden tool.

The spin toys required the viewer to touch them, and yet were hard flat objects. As such they may have evoked a more intellectual than organic response. Harking back to the book concept which sparked this work, they involved the audience in exploring possible combinations. While the potential for recombinant portraiture is exciting, I would like to

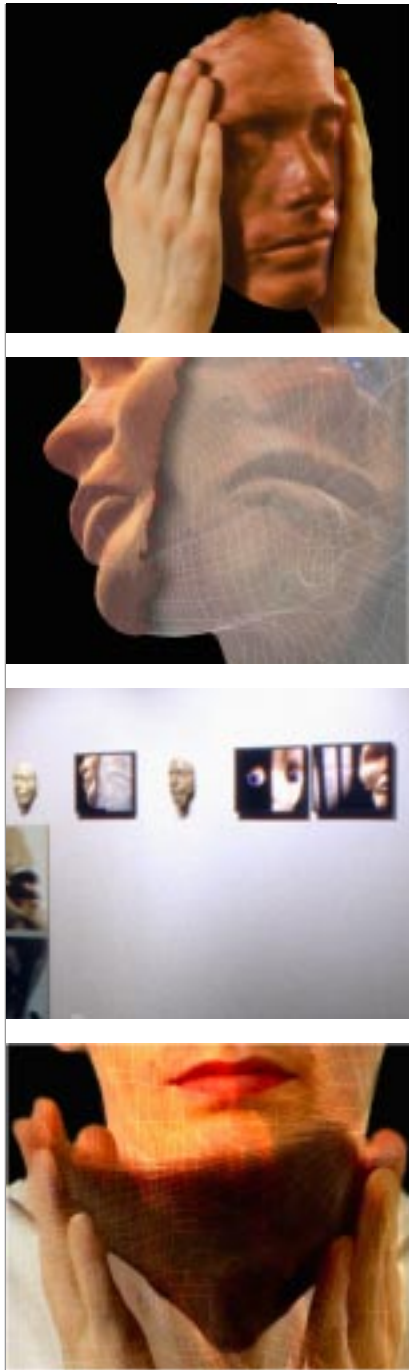


Figure 28: Prints involving interaction with the mask. Installed prints and life masks.

add an element of greater texture, or more open-ended possibilities for manipulation to future pieces.

The series of framed images suggest a film sequence by their shape, placement, and presentation. Displayed with the wax masks, using the same masks in their imagery, and including other elements which were in the gallery, these images used recursion to weave the installation together. Most images used a combination of 3D and image editing software, as well as a combination of photographic and virtual sources. I believe that their technical success is reflected in the fact that the tools and sources used to create them were not easily isolated by the audience.

Conceptually, I feel that two of the prints were strongest. The image of hands holding an empty mask in such a position that the head behind is implied, forms a simpler, better statement than I had envisioned when creating that work. We might place ourselves behind the mask, as the viewer would place oneself in Viola's Crux. The complexly layered "two faced" image, which combines 3D

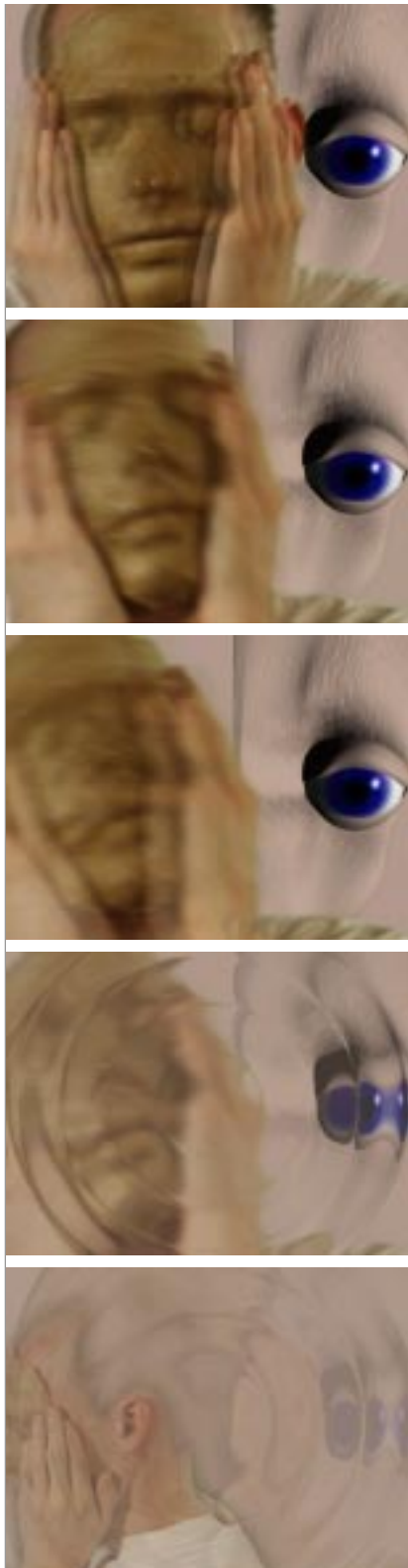


Figure 29: Frames from the beige video.

modeling, video editing, and Photoshop® compositing, involves the viewer in deciphering what is mask and what is portrait. A third print, in which the subject holds the mask like a Eucharistic cup is perhaps not as strong visually, but adds another layer of meaning to the imagery.

The beige video layers meaning as it layers mask within mask. Placed before a background of a half head or mask, the primary action is of the subject clutching his masked face, moving his head back and forth repeatedly. This repetition can become somewhat lulling, perhaps even boring, and yet just when the audience believes it has seen all that is to be seen, the image dissolves to a different, layered, interaction. The ambiguity in the repeated motion, combined with the duration of the repetition, caused at least one spectator to ask what it was about, and why it went on so long. To the extent to which the video causes the audience to question the interaction with the mask, it has met its mark.

The white video interacts more directly with the viewer, as the mirror man occasion-

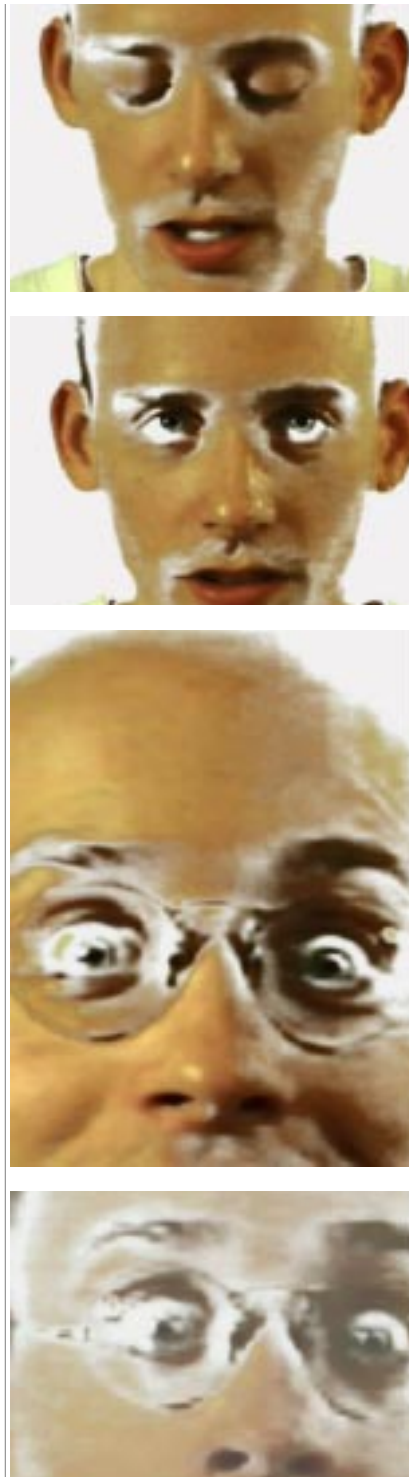


Figure 30: Frames from the white video. The model moves toward the camera while telling us that "it's all about appearances".

ally looks directly out from the screen and speaks. He is not always masked, but from time to time masks himself, or adjusts the fit. Long periods of blank white screen are interrupted by image and speech. Viewers were not always quite sure whether the blank television on mirrored sculpture stand was the complete work, or whether there would be "more". I take those occasions in which the appearance of the man in the mirror-monitor startled spectators as successful moments.

The newest area of exploration for me was the inclusion of sound. Although I studied classical piano for a time, with the thought of pursuing performance as a career, my work in the visual arts had been devoid of sound. At this writing the omission seems a startling oversight. Nonetheless my knowledge and predilections with regard to the use of this additional sense in my work are nearly untutored. I am fortunate to have been exposed to sound in relation to video and multimedia through the course of my studies, as well as being introduced to the work of John Cage, and video artists such as Paik and Nauman who incorporate sound into



Figure 31: Play of light in the virtual version of the final space.

installations. Even so, the use of sound in concert with my visual work is most open-ended, and holds great interest because there is so much room for exploration.

APPENDIX I: COLORPLATES



Figure 32: A composited print treating the mask as a cup.



Figure 33: The actual installation, showing spin toy, lighting, life masks, and framed prints.

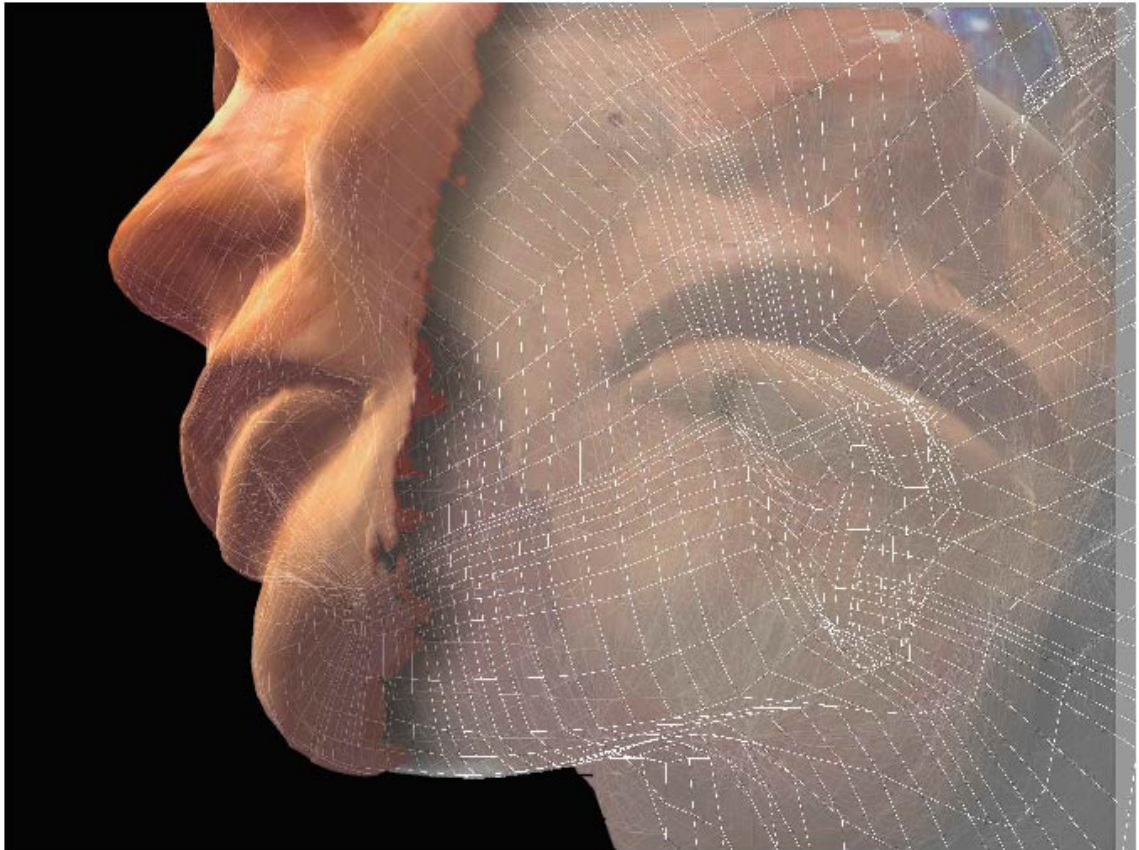


Figure 34: A multi-faced image composited using video, modelling, and two-dimensional techniques.



Figure 35: Wax mask and hands composited from video. The space behind the mask suggests the "absent presence" of Hill's Crux (Duncan).

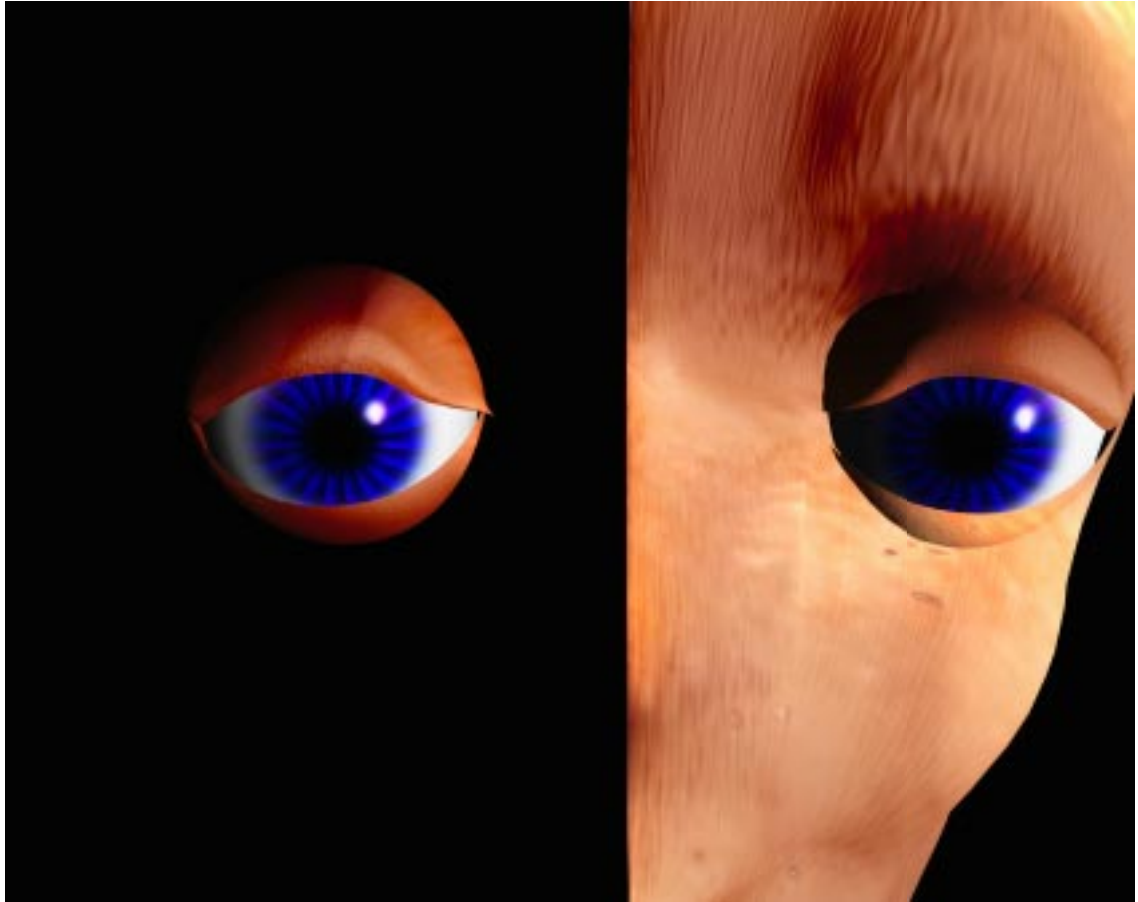


Figure 36: An early model created using Maya®, textured with a combination of photographic and virtual sources. Although not entirely realistic the use of negative space speaks to the concept of mask.

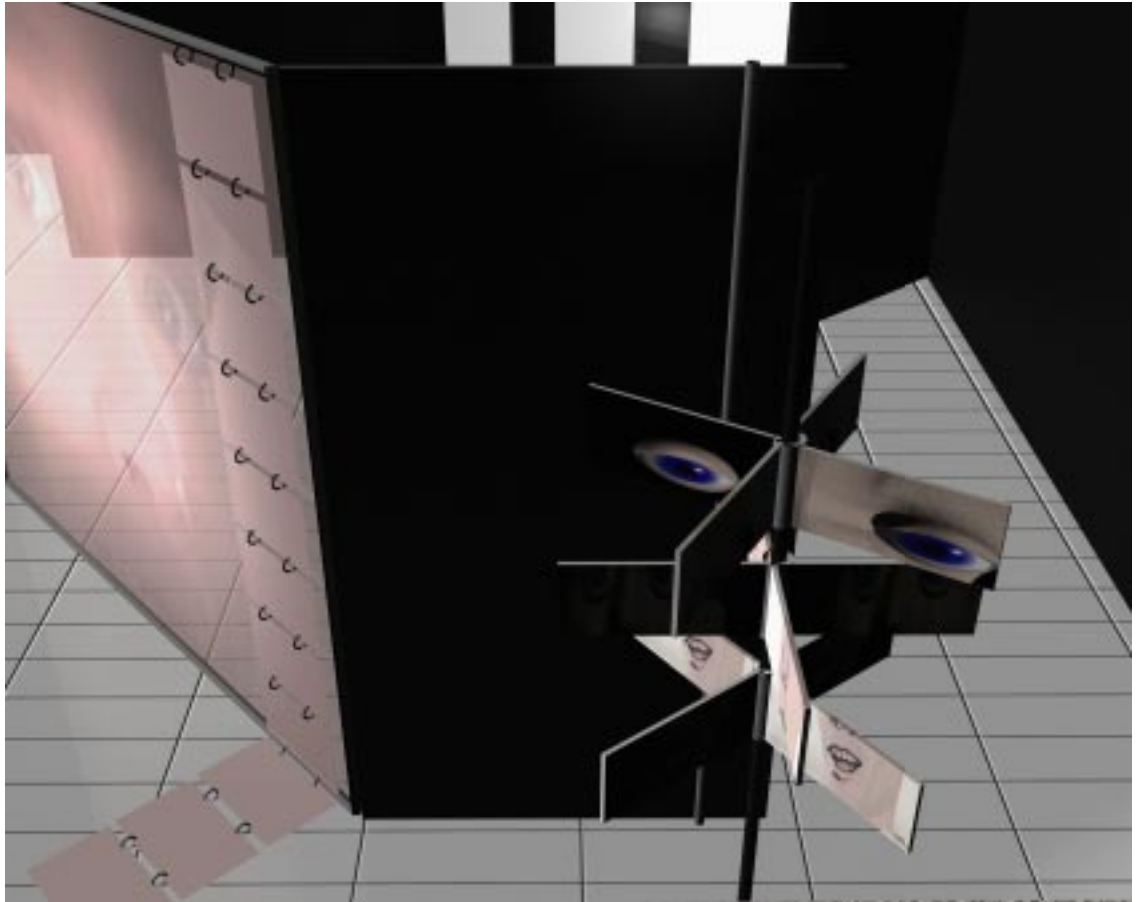


Figure 37: A Maya® rendering of the original Alcove Gallery space, with scrim projection and spin toy.

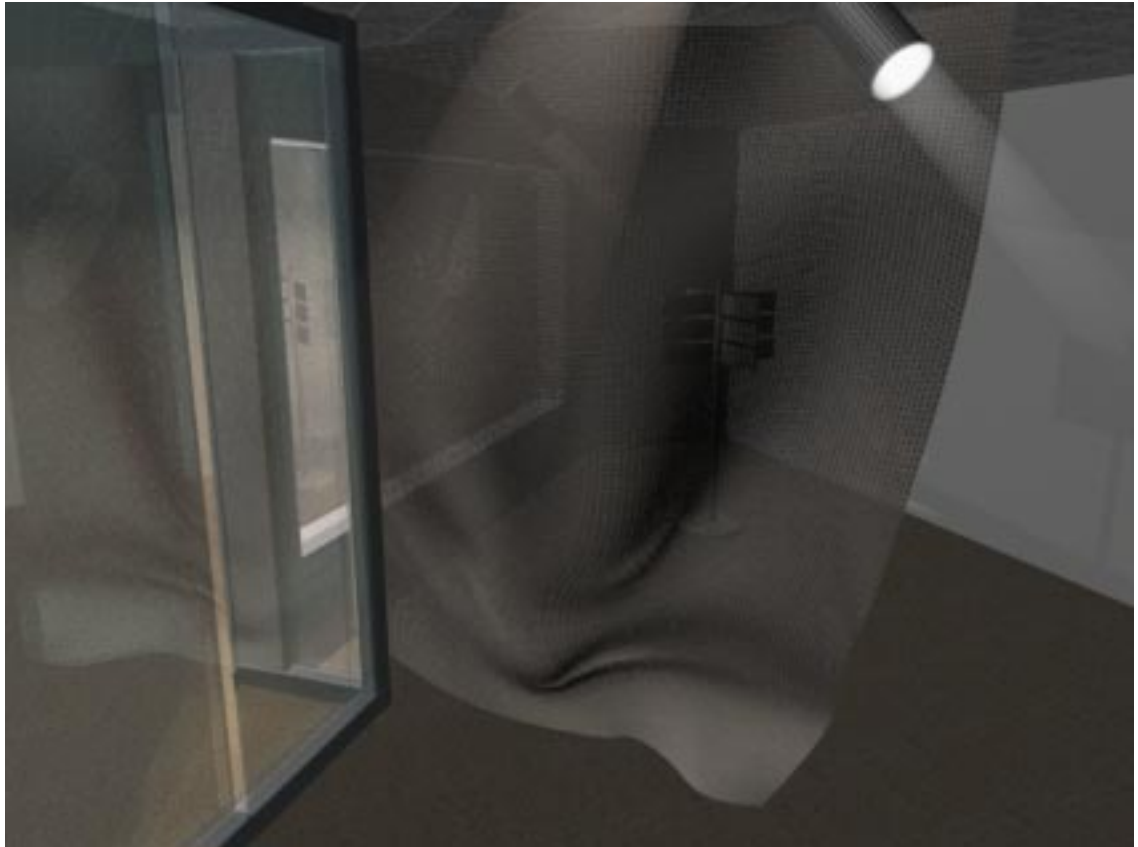


Figure 38: A Cinema 4D™ rendering of the final space, testing the appearance of scrim in the new venue.



Figure 39: Spin toys in the gallery setting, with one of the benches used to hide a stereo speaker.



Figure 40: Spin toys in the gallery setting, with one of the benches used to hide a stereo speaker, showing the beige video.



Figure 41: Spin toys in the gallery, showing scale.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Marion M. Montgomery was born on November 2, 1953, in Norfolk, Virginia, and is an American citizen. She received an *Artium Baccalauræum* in Fine Art from The College of William and Mary in Virginia in 1975, and a Master of Fine Arts in Visual Information Technologies from George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia in 2001.

Montgomery was a Crestar Scholarship recipient in the Division of Art and Visual Technologies at George Mason University in 2000.

Her solo shows include: "Mask Mirror" Master of Fine Arts thesis show, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, 2000; Carroll Reece Museum at East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 1993; Galerie Atelier, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1991; The Dadian Gallery, Washington, DC, 1991; The Art League, Alexandria, Virginia, 1989 and 1983.

Montgomery's recent group shows include: Print Matrix Exchange, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, 2001; Thought Pictures, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, 2000-2001; The Krasnow Institute, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, 2000-2001; Electric Eyes, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, 1999-2000; Ocular Interactive, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, 1998; Twentieth Century Gallery, (Duo Show.) Williamsburg, Virginia, 1993.

She has been published in: *Modern Liturgy*, National Visual Arts Competition issue, San Jose, California, 1990; *The Torpedo Factory Art Center Catalogue*, Alexandria, Virginia, 1993; *The William and Mary Review*, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1992; The Potter's House Press *Physics of Glory*, Washington, DC, 1989, and appeared on the *Bauman Telecasts*, WJLA-TV, Washington, DC, in 1988 and 1990.

Montgomery was a graduate assistant for the Internet Multimedia Center at George Mason University from 1997-1999 serving as a Project Manager, 3D and Graphics Designer, and in summer 1998 as Program Manager. She was Artist in Residence at the Center for the Arts And Religion, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC from 1986 through 1988.

Montgomery had a studio in the Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria, Virginia from 1986 through 1996.