

# High-tech works take their cue from computers

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*A Space, Interactive Artworks, 183 Bathurst St., 2nd Floor, until July 4.*

Do not be scared off by the aggressive high-tech lingo used in Guerilla Tactics, an exhibition described by its producers as the "premiere of seven new computer-controlled interactive artworks which challenge the role of the electronic marketplace in shaping mass culture."

The show, for all of its slick computer gear, has some of the makings of a high school science fair. In both cases, there is a three-step reaction when a viewer is confronted with the machines: an ini-

## ON SHOW

tial fear of the unknown, a sense of relief as the inventions become better understood (suddenly user-friendly) and, in some cases, the ultimate betrayal when the thing sputters, on its way to breaking down, and high hopes for high-tech suddenly fade away.

The difference here is that sometimes the faulty machinery reinforces the artist's message. In B. R. Formis: Perfect Bureaucrat by Maggie Dorning, an oversized, transparent ant (with a touch of E.T.) sits at his government desk in front of two television monitors.

One monitor flashes a series of television commercials, and excerpts from the House of Commons' Question Period. The robot ant works on the other screen, attending to bureaucratic duties that keep him from chatting for too long. But Dorning's installation is incapable of responding to surprise visits from viewers who arrive in the middle of a screening. Putting the visitor on hold — forcing the public to bow to the whims of high-tech — is one important message that repeats itself from one computer station to the next.

Similarly, Lorna, the complex videodisc programmed by Lynn Hershman, falls victim to the unpredictable nature of technology. At times, the machine refuses to process a command from a remote control available nearby. While Hershman's videodisc about Lorna requires a skilled commitment from the user (rather than allowing some idle viewing, it asks for constant direction to change the sequence of events in Lorna's story) other creations in the exhibition are variations on machines that we have come to accept and, sometimes, cherish.

Money, by D. Nile, is an electronic banking machine that dispenses free \$1-bills in an effort to subvert the economic system. But Niles openly admits his effort will result in little more than personal bankruptcy. The money, it seems, is not

entirely free. Before it can be accessed, the computer asks the user to type in some personal statistics: name, age, job description and ambition. What the user does not know is that a video camera is recording (à la Big Brother) the image of the person; information that will be stored on dozens of tapes and edited by Nile for use, perhaps, in a future project.

The work by David Rokeby, called Echoing Narcissus, is one of the most memorable in the show. Using a simple idea — placing a voice processor at the bottom of a barrel — Rokeby cleverly points out that not only are we familiar with the high-tech world, we have grown accustomed to using it to distort and perfect our image.

Using the media in art — U.S. artist Jenny Holzer has been creating her electronic billboards for years — is not a fresh idea. In Hair Salon TV, Nancy Paterson, curator of the show, chooses to screen images on three separate monitors mounted above three sit-down hair dryers, pointing a nasty, if not predictable, finger at male-dominated high-tech industry.

Elsewhere, Juan Geuer's installation Siglo Veinte poses an unexpected, and refreshing question about the status of art today: is art the flashing television images, the reconstructed shanty hut or the posted photographs and newspaper clippings?