

Exhibits at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum juxtapose generations of art

By Keith Powers Correspondent

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“Turn on. Tune in. Drop out.”

Not any more.

Timothy Leary’s nihilistic 60s maxim may have been the catch-phrase for a disaffected druggie generation, but tuning in seems to have very little to do with dropping out today.

The deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum juxtaposes two versions of tuning in—the 60s TV, and the millennial computer/phone—in new exhibitions that show how one generation tried to escape responsibility, and another is embracing its challenges.

That may be a generous overstatement in comparing “Cool Medium: Art, Television & Psychedelia,” the deCordova’s throw-back exhibition of pop art, television nostalgia and Boomer memorabilia, with “Screens: Virtual Material,” a decidedly more substantive exhibition of new works, which imaginatively takes the notion of screens—phones, computers, even room-dividing shojis—and makes various statements of purposeful social intent.

Room-enlivening installations by Liza Lou and Marta Chilindron are definitely the highlights—if you can use that phrase for such intensely provocative work—in “Screens: Virtual Material.” Their work, along with four other contemporary artists, is set on two levels of the main gallery.

Lou’s “Maximum Security” strays the farthest from the thematic topic. She has simply created an X-shaped chain-link fence, a narrow, tunnel-like enclosure, and covered it almost mockingly with sparkly silver beads.

There could be no way out of Lou’s prison. At the intersection of the X, there is another enclosure, formed by the juncture, pointing out that at the heart of this structure is yet a deeper form of incarceration.

The shimmery surface is a mis-direct. There is nothing pretty about “Maximum Security,” even though it looks pretty. It is ominous, angry, and strikes at our own inclination—Gitmo, anyone?—to incarcerate what we fear without attempting to engage or comprehend.

Chilindron’s meandering “Cube 48 Orange” works its way like a lazy accordion around the room. The label tells us that the folding screen—long, continuous, about waist-high—could wrap itself around a city block at its complete extension.

That hardly seems probable. But the structure, with its unstated ability to keep out, and to keep in, says much in its languid fashion. Stay alert, it implies, you could be on the wrong side of me.

Other installations take a more direct look at the ubiquitous screens that dominate our attention. Brian Bress’s “NOON NOON” comes closest to a video installation, although its comic characters, who appear to reach out of the screen and interact with presumed-to-be static images, nearly make it a live performance. Penelope Umbrico’s “Out of Order; Bad Display” collages discarded television, LED and computer screens into beautiful sense of haphazardness—in direct opposition to our portable swipe-and-achieve effectiveness.

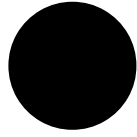
“Cool Medium” is a much less engaging exhibition, but as a trip back to an era when television was the screen in question, and artistic responses to the medium produced hilarious excesses, it’s worth the visit. It’s embarrassing how much art was inspired by test patterns.

Of the works in the small show, most taken from the deCordova permanent collection, David Akiba’s distorted prints of marathon runners—his “Faces” series—captures a real sense of photographic abstraction. Memorabilia—mostly magazines and journals of the era—invoke the poster children of the poster generation: Marshall McLuhan, Leary, Peter Max.

An unrelated exhibition of photographs in the Foster Galleries, “Bodies in Water,” thinly connects photographs of human subjects in water with various spiritual, ecological or social subjects. Organized around water themes of scarcity, ritual and leisure, the extensive labels draw parallels between the use of water and these concerns.

As a concept, the themes seem contrived. Some of the work is quite beautiful, though: Arno Rafael Minkinen’s arresting “Self-Portrait”; the urban images of Paul D’Amato and Charles “Teenie” Harris; Edward Weston’s striking “Nude Floating.”

“Screens: Virtual Material,” “Cool Medium,” and “Bodies in Water” all run through March 18 at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, 51 Sandy Pond Road, Lincoln. All are free with museum admission. Visit www.decordova.org or call 781-259-8355.



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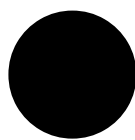
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