

New art worlds

Enter the digital universe at augmented-reality exhibit



Using the EyeJack app to unlock Neon Mystic's kaleidoscopic vision.

PHOTO BY JASON CASSIDY

As nearly every aspect of our lives and interactions with our fellow Earthlings become infused with or dependent upon computer-based

“devices,” it’s not surprising that artists are exploring the seemingly endless possibilities of the digital world.

With

by
Garey Wilson

Review:
Augmented, on display
through Sept. 27

Chico Art Center
450 Orange St.
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chicoartcenter.com

Augmented, Chico Art Center’s gallery director, Cameron Kelly—with the aid of

Butte College art teacher/department chair and CAC board member Daniel Donnelly—has curated a beautiful and fascinating exhibition of works by artists on the cutting edge of melding art and virtual reality. By fusing two-dimensional visual art with computer-generated augmentations such as overlaid animations and audio soundtracks, the artists explore formerly flat and static imagery from varying perspectives and bring the viewer along for an interactive ride.

Happily, my visit to the gallery on Sunday (Sept. 8) coincided with Kelly being on-site, and I enjoyed the exhibition with her as my enthusiastic and articulate guide.

Being a smartphone novice and virtual-reality virgin, I felt a bit apprehensive about whether I would

even be savvy enough to properly manipulate the technology that the show depends on, but the gallery is set up to accommodate just such amateurs. Each section has its own iPad tablet anchored to cables that allow the viewer to examine most of the works in the show without having to download any apps to a personal device.

The exhibit’s entry point is faced by excerpts from artist/ animator Rob Shields’ aptly titled sci-fi comic book *Neon Wasteland*. The brightly colorful prints depict—according to the artist’s statement—“a psychedelic, post-apocalyptic cyberpunk future where most humans have abandoned their bodies in exchange for digital immortality inside the ‘Omniverse,’ a massive computer system that continues to spread across the galaxy.” Translated through the eye of the iPad, the beautifully drafted and colored drawings come alive with animation that complements their narrative impact.

A completely different approach to placing art in the virtual world is taken by Los Angeles-based artist Nancy Baker Cahill’s virtual studio tour. Using the 4th Wall augmented-reality app, Cahill created a 360-degree photographic, holographic-looking representation of her actual studio that one can virtually walk around to look at objects from all angles. Along with the tour,

the artist supplied four drawings that, when viewed on the screen, can be manipulated in size and perspective to overlay whatever else is within the camera’s field of vision as you move the tablet.

Representing the commercial art category are the “Living Wine” labels. Viewed on the screen, the zombie character from a bottle of *The Walking Dead* breaks out of his label and marches across the display pedestal to attack and be gorily vanquished by the axe-wielding cowboy who steps out of the bottle on the opposite side of the pedestal.

Dominating the gallery’s back wall is a large mandala-like black-and-white drawing by New Zealand artist Neon Mystic. The piece is eerily gorgeous in its own right, but when viewed through the EyeJack app it becomes kaleidoscopic, a mesmerizing multicolored animation of wheels within wheels, spinning globes and shifting constellations of stars with an accompanying soundtrack of contemplative New Age music.

For an exhibit that features so many applications, Chico Art Center has delivered a very cohesive, and immersive, experience. It’s both aesthetically marvelous and educationally enlightening. Well worth the visit. □

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