



Maidens of the Cosmic Body Running

Changing minds at the CAC

MATT MORRIS // JUN 8, 2011

The Contemporary Arts Center's second-floor galleries are presently shared by a solo exhibition of sculptures by Matthew Monahan and *Majr Gazr*, a multimedia installation by the collaborative Maidens of the Cosmic Body Running.

Monahan's work will be on view until Oct. 30, which seems like a long time to spend with an exhibition consisting of so few points of interest. The Maidens' project, however, is only up until July 17.

Arranged as a series of “Relaxion Stations,” the Maidens have created a multi-part vision of Spaceship Earth, with coy undertones of cults, neo-feminism and science fiction. Employing videos, futuristic geometric architecture and various fiber-arts elements, *Majr Gazr* invites viewers to become physically involved in a series of installations as a metaphor for an inner psychological journey.

The Maidens is a collaborative project between Denise Burge, Lisa Siders and Jenny Ustick. All three artists are currently based in Cincinnati and balance their individual artistic practices, work with the Maidens and teaching positions at various local universities. With such ambitious careers, the Maidens project seems to be an informed method of escapism in which the collaborators are empowered to be artistically mischievous, witchy and ecstatic toward nature.

Before one even enters the exhibition, CAC staff direct you to take off your shoes and put on a pair of thick white slippers, as if entering a sacred space. This is the first of several steps viewers take to ritualistically reconfigure themselves by taking in video and sound pieces that are suggestive of hypnosis, even mental reprogramming.

A video of a dark forest is projected onto a set of curtains before one can proceed further. Occasionally other video clips are superimposed onto the trees. In one, a Maiden looks out at the trees in front of her, but only through the display screen of a small handheld device. This and other images throughout the exhibition show that, as a culture, we can't easily define what nature is anymore. More than a literal representation of the wooded outdoors, this forest symbolizes our psychic, complex selves and our remove from human intuition and impulse.

“Relaxion 1 — Mirror Stage (Prime Focus)” is a triangular video inset into a low platform. Occasional clips of what look like pasture collapse into hypnotic patterns of triangles within triangles, an oft-repeated motif throughout the exhibition. Peering into the portal is like water divination, looking for truth and mystery in the screen's reflection.

The best integration of handiwork and special effects, “Relaxion 2 — Encounter with the Extra Self,” invites viewers to stand behind a small white quilt. A mirror displayed opposite the quilt shows a reflection of your body as a video of another body is projected onto the fabric. Having already removed my shoes, this piece seemed to

substitute my body for one of the Maidens, and I moved onward thinking of these as initiation rituals at the end of which I would be a Maiden also.

The next several stations are set up similarly — viewers are invited to sit, recline or lay on the floor while taking in video and sound elements that are looped into chant-like, repetitive sequences.

The final “Relaxion 5 — Ethr (Energy Threshold)” is a triangular space formed from curtains glowing with projected videos of swimming, formless color. It’s outfitted by an enormous, handmade rug that is one of the visual marvels of the show. Viewers are invited to lay down on their backs, with their heads nearly touching one another, in order to peer up at the videos, as if stargazing. Occasionally, parts of the different Maidens’ faces float about in the videos, like Cheshire Cats with all-seeing eyes, checking in at the end of your journey.

The success of the installation relies largely on each viewer’s willingness to place their own state of mind into the Maidens’ control. It could be profound or profoundly hokey, relaxing or disquieting. Whatever direction in which the work is taken seems to be built into the Maidens’ intent. They are fully committed to these visions of Nature and states of mind, while tempering sincerity with sly skepticism.

MAJR GAZR is on view through July 17.

Visit www.contemporaryartscenter.org for hours and more information.

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13011709/majr-gazr-maidens-of-the-cosmic-body-running-review>