



# SYNESTHETICS

By Felice Grodin

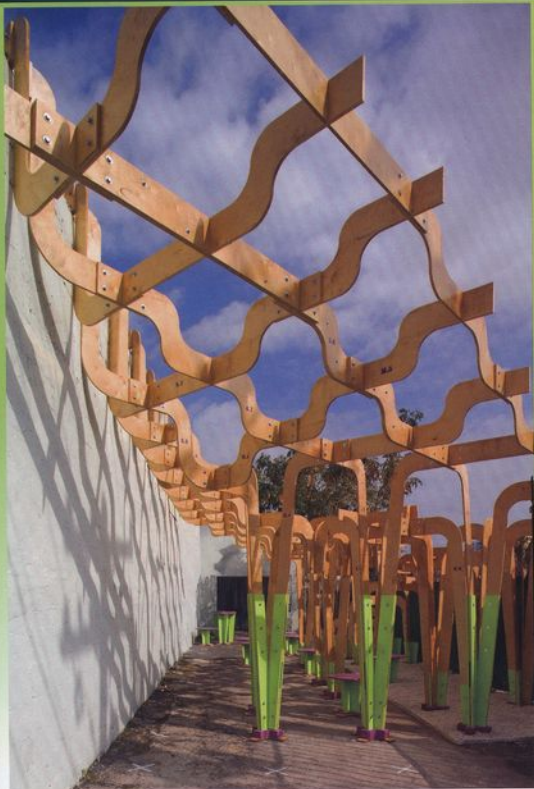
In his essay "This Will Kill That," Victor Hugo acknowledged that the new availability of the printed word would supplant the presence of architecture as the center of communal activity. Yet in our age, where synchronized technology, speed, and connectivity reign, it is no longer *this will kill that* but *this will be that*. We substitute, replace and exchange freely based on wants, needs and free association. To further this premise, new technologies foster the creative interface between things that were previously understood as distinct. As the printing press revolutionized knowledge and creativity by allowing for greater access to texts, our present forms of communication and technologies have created opportunities where text, image, sound and object have become fused into one. In lieu of this, a new sensibility has evolved, one of "Synesthetics."

In the mid 1980's when the personal computer debuted, it was intended merely as a device to assist the workplace. By the 1990's with the advanced graphic interface of software, as well as the dissemination of the Internet, the opportunities existed to both collect and promote one's own interests using multimedia websites, blogs and even phones. In addition, machinery evolved so that methods of fabrication such as ste-

reolithography literally could carve things three dimensionally by being linked to a digital drawing in a computer. However efficiency, availability and speed are not the only considerations for such progress.

The free exchange of dialogue from the opposite ends of the world is at the click of a button. Thus people, places and things are now brought together in ways that are immediate and sensory. Yet we still live our physical lives in homes, drive cars and go to work. How then can these devices be used to filter our perception and consequently be used as a means to impact our immediate environment? Therefore my interest for the show derived from the exploration of how the "synesthetic" condition can affect the creative process of both artists and architects who traditionally impact both virtual time and physical space.

The Greek translation of "synesthesia" translates to 'together + perception' or "joined sensation." In a literal sense, synesthesia is "joined sensation" or a neurological occurrence that mixes and matches different senses, i.e., numbers assigned in accordance with colors so that perceptual experience and



All images this spread:  
Graftworks/MoB with Aaron White, Lawrence Blough and Greg Merryweather  
Hothouse Lily - 2008  
Installation view at Locust Projects



information are one. Borrowing metaphorically from this occurrence, this exhibition explores the notion of blending phenomena in both a rigorous and visceral way. The artists combine notions inherent in their respective media that include site specific installation, sculpture, painting, photography and video to create five very different approaches utilizing processes that evolve simultaneously both in the digital and physical realm.

Graftworks/MoB, with Aaron White, was a finalist in the MoMA/PS.1 Young Architects Program in 2005 for their submission "Hothouse Lily." Because of the adaptability of computer-based prototyping, they were able to construct a full-scale exterior installation at a completely different location. The design brings together computer-based CNC milling technology with components formally derived from the botanical structure of the water lily, Victoria Regia. Although computer and laser prototyping has emerged as a speculative tool that embraces "pushing the envelope," in this case, the intent is also to develop an architectural installation from a limited set of milled prefabricated parts. Restricting material to standard plywood sheets, the interlocking pieces produce a patterning with a high degree of variability while still conforming to the economies of assembly and structure.

Monica Tiulescu's "Synesthetic Landscape" (2008) functions as a growing and responsive organism that is generated on a system of rules guided by animation software as well as the sitting of the physical work in space. The installation, constructed of generic PVC piping that varies in height, was all cut individually by hand. One object that is repeated incessantly is transformed and eventually loses itself to the greater surface texture. The software in this case provides the capability to insert rules internally, yet at same time the influences of actual site specificity enact upon the result of the piece(s) as well.

In a similar vein, Sylvan Lioni's painstaking paintings

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Above: Monica Tuleacu  
 Synthetic Landscape - 2008  
 870 PVC pipes for sculpture  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy of the artist

Below: Sylvain Lioret  
 Kaddish - 2008  
 Acrylic and latex on aluminum 60 x 360  
 Courtesy of the artist and Freight and Volume, NY



are generated digitally and executed by both machine and hand. In "Kaddish" (2008) there is also a notion of repetition. The piece is a series of 10 - 12" x 48" panels that hover between still geometric abstraction and transformational networks. The paintings are methodically studied with illustration software, yet chance enters the equation, whereupon the colors are randomly sequenced. Informed by the work of Frank Stella, canvas and painting are one. In this case, however, the panels/canvasses are laser cut by a CNC milling machine in the pattern of the painting and the pieces of each panel are assembled as components. Hand paint is applied as if it were a final piece of an industrial process.

Samantha Salzinger's photographic series "The Sixth Extinction" (2008) blends handcrafted miniatures with digital techniques, blurring the distinction between the real and the artificial. Each photograph consists of a hand-built miniature diorama, digitally photographed and enhanced by the computer, as if your eyes were looking out of a picture perfect window. By romanticizing nature as unspoiled, the irony is that what you see is entirely synthetic. Yet the underlying message of the work is interdependent upon the very procedural aspect of it. Starting with the camera itself as a technological device for recording what is "real" - it lies at the intersection between the hand crafted diorama - a model of sorts - and the postproduction of the computer.

Marcia Lyons' "Proof of Concept Series: Open\_Nature, Mawson Station, Antarctica" (2007) imports the environment of Antarctica by creating a live video feed connection via the Internet. From several cameras and microphones placed on site, she visually transforms both data and atmosphere by interfacing the level of the wind at Mawson Station with the sounds picked up within the gallery itself - two worlds meeting virtually through cyberspace. The audible phenomenon is made visible by translating a sensory pulse giving visual presence and thus awareness to the world(s) around you. The use of the Internet is a threshold that serves as a reminder of how everyone who uses the Web performs this function on a daily basis to some degree.

Unlike the endless linking of hypertext or excessive piling up of imagery and data often associated with the age of information, the work presented consists of studied and specific subject matter both in concept and execution. The author, artist or architect is not overtaken by technology. Quite the opposite - the mind and hand are also integral

Right 3 Images:  
Samantha Sabinger  
The Sixth Extinction - 2007  
Inkjet print 44 x 54  
Courtesy of the artist

Below Left:  
Marcia Lyons  
Proof of Concept Series:  
Open Nature: Motion Station,  
Anthica/EO Forensics  
Digital Projection - Processing, 'Live'  
Network Feed, Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist



to the discoveries of a chosen path that, in addition, take advantage of digital tools. Therefore, in synesthetics it is not merely the deploying of digital technology that can create meaningful work, but also the joining of things in a meaningful way. □

"Synesthetics", curated by Felice Grodin was exhibited at Locust Projects (105 NW 23rd Street, Miami, FL 33127. Wynwood Art District) March 8th – April 26th, 2008.

*Felice Grodin (Bologna, Italy) Lives and works in Miami Beach as an artist. She obtained her B.Arch. from Tulane University and her M.Arch. with Distinction from Harvard University. She is currently represented by Diana Lowenstein Fine Arts.*

