

ETC



Do You Know Your Way From San Jose? The 2nd Biennial OISJ Global Festival of *Art on the Edge*, San Jose, California. 4 — 8 June, 2008

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Numéro 84, décembre 2008, janvier–février 2009

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/34783ac>

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Éditeur(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (imprimé)

1923-3205 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Cook, S. (2008). Compte rendu de [Do You Know Your Way From San Jose? / The 2nd Biennial OISJ Global Festival of *Art on the Edge*, San Jose, California. 4 — 8 June, 2008]. *ETC*, (84), 53–60.

Actualités/Expositions

San Jose, California

Do You Know Your Way from San Jose?

The 2nd Biennial 01SJ
Global Festival of Art on the Edge,
San Jose, California. 4 – 8 June, 2008.

he difficulty of getting 'from A to B' was well demonstrated at the 2nd Biennial 01SJ Global Festival of Art on the Edge (or 01SJ Festival). Over at point A were artists Heiko Hansen and Helen Evans (known as HeHe) awarded the first ever 01SJ Green Prix Award for Environmental Art, for their public art project *Nuage Vert*, which drew a bright green outline on emissions clouds from a power plant above the city of Helsinki. At the opening ceremonies of the biennial, Hansen accepted his oversized cardboard cheque for \$10,000 with the charm only an artist could bring – doffing his black hat, being funny and a little glib about what money means to artists, clearly feeling slightly out of place – a Frenchman blinded by the harsh California sunlight. Over at point B was a very loosely-related event (i.e., not a programmed part of 01SJ, but mentioned in the marketing material anyway), the Silicon Valley Greenfair: a two-day trade show of businesses who want you to buy their solar panels, compostable toilets, electric scooters, and relentlessly pressed into your hands tote bags made from recycled plastic bottles emblazoned with their company logos. Appealing to the diverse audiences in San Jose – on one side, the mostly international media art cognoscenti, who trade in irony and aesthetics and were there specifically for the 01SJ Festival, and on the other, those mostly local, interested companies who are earnestly serious about their technology and weren't necessarily aware there was a festival going on – is the difficult route that Steve Dietz, Artistic Director, and Joel Slayton, incoming Executive Director of the 01SJ Festival, have to tread. Dietz's proposal, for this year, was to

suggest the theme 'Superlight' – tackle the big issues which matter to one and all alike, such as global warming, but with a gentle, and at times light-hearted, touch.

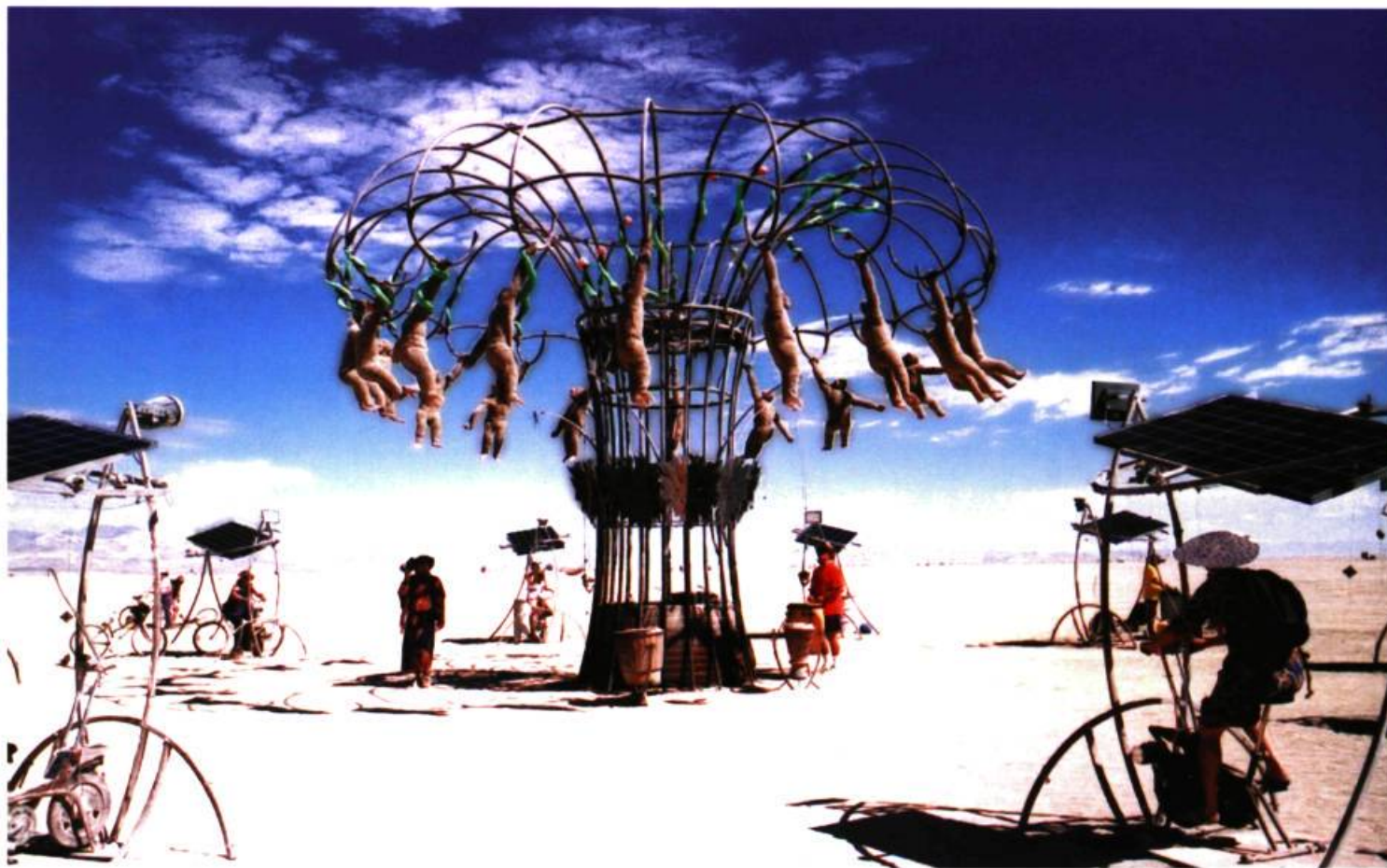
To that end, the 01SJ Festival was a tremendous success (evidenced in part by the fact that for the following four days as Hansen walked around downtown, passersby shouted out to him, "Hey man, you rock! Welcome to San Jose!"). A lasting example of the success of 01SJ was the educational program, directed by Liz Slagus of Eyebeam – a serious undertaking for the creation of fun projects. Slagus distributed her budget, provided by Adobe Systems Inc., in the form of 18 micro-grants, to artists, school groups and non-profit organisations around the world to work with children and teenagers (11-21 years old) on technology and art projects (literally, getting kids from B to A I'd say). The results, displayed in the *Global Youth Voices* exhibition at the Tech Museum of Innovation, were typically chaotic and exciting: shoes hacked with electronics to light up; mashups of video footage from local hang outs; performances, inter-generational storytelling archives, and lots of first-time digital photography projects.

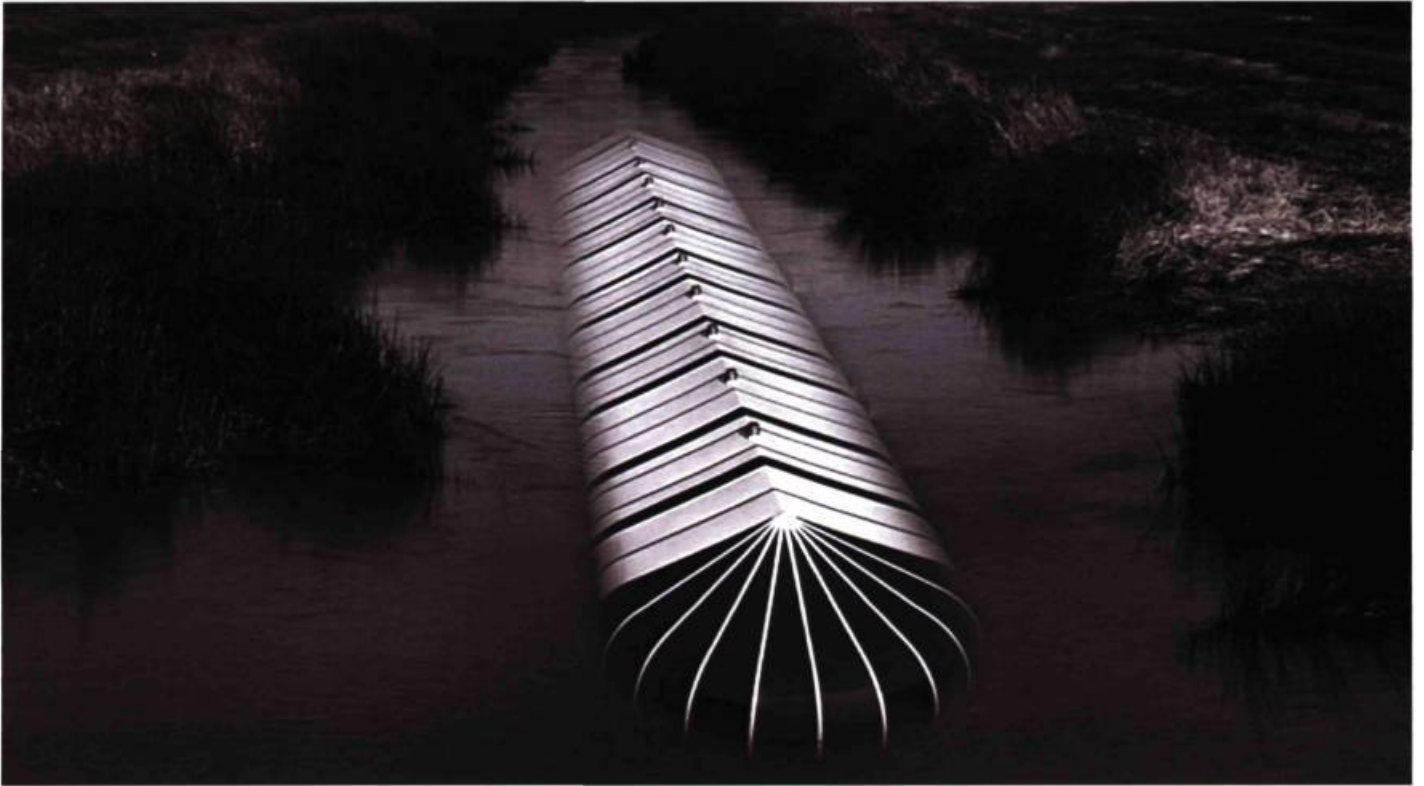
The program of the 01SJ Festival, while lacking a hefty academic conference element (which wasn't missed too much) and afternoon artists' talks (which were missed – both were part of the previous incarnation, ZeroOne San Jose, ISEA 2006 event, which was in partnership with the Inter-Society of Electronic Arts), had plenty of superlight for everyone. The local cinema was screening a curated selection of artists' shorts every day from 2 pm to 10 pm, including the works of Thomson & Craighead, Natalie Bookchin,





Bruce Charlesworth, *Love Disorder*, 2008. Interactive projection installation, dimensions variable. Concept drawing of Bruce Charlesworth (with Colleen Ludwig). Courtesy of the artist.





Marina Zurkow, *Paradoxical Sleep*, 2008. Video and animations, dimensions variable. Cinematography by Toshiaki Ozawa. Courtesy of the artist.

Eddo Stern and others, which provided a nice, dark respite from the hot sunny afternoons, allowing one to literally escape into other worlds created by artists. I was surprised by how much I enjoyed Douglas Gayeton's feature documentary film, *My Second Life: the Video Diaries of Molotov Alva*, having not myself spent much time in SL, it was a chance to be an armchair tourist with this fictitious character, and vicariously experience his questioning of the limits of existence.

Performances and screenings (such as those by DJ Spooky and Toni Dove, which I found disappointing and overblown) were scheduled from 4 pm onwards, leaving days free to take in the screenings, exhibitions and public art. Though, naturally, the public art installations which used video projection were best seen at night, such as Craig Walsh's tentacled generative video projection on the rotunda of City Hall (a great deal better in my opinion, than the project by Camille Utterback installed in the same location two years ago; indicating that future festivals will reap the benefits of the local organisers and commissioned artists getting to know the potential of local sites better, technically and aesthetically). JD Beltran's piece, in which images of airliners flying overhead, a common sight in downtown SJ, were animated and projected in a downtown alley, and their jet engine roar focused in a sound beam to just one spot in front of the projection, was a nicely sited example. San Jose has a great public art program director, and it shows.

Too many to mention here, other highlights of the distributed (or rather, openly scheduled rather than timed) programme included Peter Hudson's *Homourobos*, a huge fair-ground-carousel-like zoetrope of swinging monkeys that had to be seen to be believed; Ga-Ga/Jordan Geiger's inflatable architecture in an empty storefront, on which you could lounge night or day and, when the connection was working, watch concerts and programs beamed in from far flung locations such as Banff or Paris; Red 76's impromptu and loosely scheduled activities in which they hosted conversa-

tions with social activists at local Laundromats, or marched with veterans in anti-war demonstrations (theirs was a co-commission with CADRE at SJSU and Montalvo Arts Center). Many of the public or outdoor commissions, such as Marina Zurkow's video work, *Paradoxical Sleep*, installed on the network of screens in the humungous San Jose Convention Center, Piotr Szyhalski's machines which print and distribute political leaflets, fluttering to the ground from the heights of lamp-posts, and Robin Lasser and Arienne Pao's *Ice Queen: Glacial Retreat Dress Tent*, which is exactly as it sounds and was performed around town, had components which were also installed in the *Superlight* exhibition at the San Jose Museum of Art – a clever tactic to draw visitors to the projects from both directions, from the gallery to the street and vice versa.

And what a shame it would have been to have not seen the shows, either during the blue sky afternoons or at the Friday night street party on South 1st St, in which the San Jose locals came out in droves to hear their favourite acts and DJs play. The gallery-based exhibitions were generally all well curated and the works a good mix of heavy issues treated lightly. I particularly enjoyed the Digital Arts and New Media MFA show from the students of the University of California, Santa Cruz (Andrés Rojas's project compares revisions to news-stories on CNN.com, and prints out and shreds earlier copy; Will Justice's *The Human Morality Index* imagines what it would be like if you stacked your stock portfolio according to the seven deadly sins), the local San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art show, a project of artist Brendan Lott which included flicker-fond gross-out photos of drunken teenagers, sent to be painstakingly painted in true social-realist style at an art factory in China, and MACLA (Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana)'s show of Ruben Ortiz-Torres's souped-up robotic scissor-lift, the *High 'n' Low Rider*.

Trying to stand somewhere between points A and B, and wondering where to go from San Jose, I think that in fact Dietz's own



curated exhibition, *Superlight*, the cornerstone of the biennial (and a brilliant exhibition in its own right, which will tour to Cleveland later in the year), could in fact have been heavier than it was – museums being the place one goes to be challenged and to think, while the Festival rages outside. Many of the standout works demonstrating heavy issues in their content were surprisingly quiet, almost understated, such as Jane Marsching's 'video' installation, *Rising North*, in which colours and arias visualise the rising temperatures at the poles, and Genevieve Grieves' filmic portraits of the behind-the-scenes of stereotypical images of

aboriginal peoples and colonialist settlers. By contrast, the more obvious, seemingly loud works, such as Kota Ezawa's covetable light boxes depicting anime-like storyboards based on IKEA-styled family situations, or even Jennifer and Kevin McCoy's commission *Heaven and Hell*, featuring their trademark small-scale model figurines caught in the act (of what? I'm not sure either) by small webcams, felt to me too light on content, too playful and too concerned with surface aesthetics. Perfectly pitched, in my mind, was Harwood, Wright, Yokokoji's stunning installation of telephone switching exchanges networked to demonstrate the





start and stop of conversations between refugee Congeese communities in London, and in reference the number of Congeese who have died in the coltan wars in the Congo (coltan being the mineral used in the fabrication of cell phones).

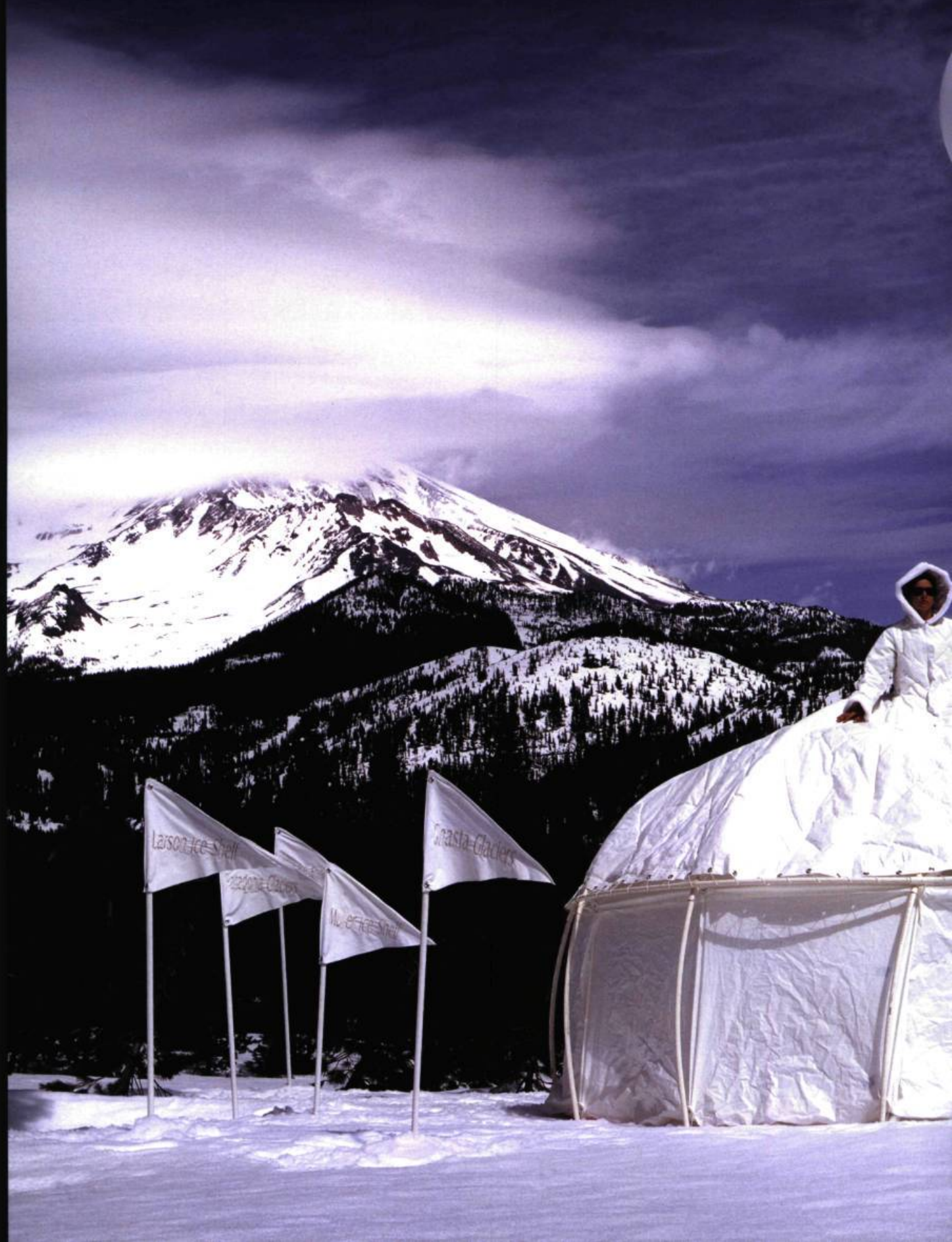
What was undeniable, about *Superlight* in particular, and about the 01SJ Festival in general, though, was that it looked great; the art works were, in an aesthetic and even technological sense, mostly beautiful, well-made, smart, just plain fun, or spectacular in an understated way. Like drawing a green line around a cloud

in the sky. Enough to make you leave San Jose with a smile on your face, glad that someone, somewhere, thought to do that so you could see it.

SARAH COOK

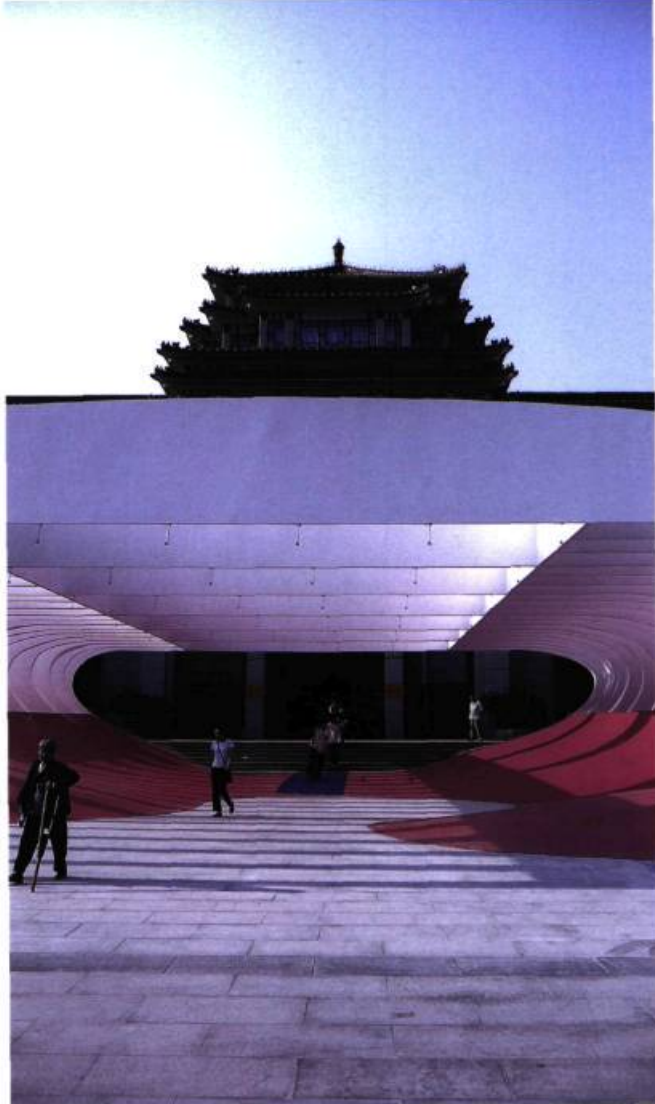
Sarah Cook is a post-doctoral research fellow at CRUMB (Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss) at the University of Sunderland, UK (www.crumbweb.org), currently working with Eyebeam Art & Technology Center in New York. A Canadian who has spent a lot of time at the Banff New Media Institute, Sarah Cook is looking forward to making San Jose another of her regular media art destinations when on this side of the Atlantic.







Adventure Poo and Robin Larzer, for Queen's Glass of Resent Dress Tent (Jabba), 2008. Installed at Mt. Shasta, CA. Photograph: 121.9.W.X.101. © cm. Lightbox print by Robin Larzer + Adrienne Poo, © 2008



The National Art Museum of China (NAMOC). Entrance.



Chico MacMurtrie, *Amorphic Robot Works*, 2006. Robotic Installation.