

Jean-Pierre Hébert: Drawing with the Mind

At Contemporary Arts Forum. Shows through November 9.

By Charles Donelan

Thursday, September 18, 2008

He's been programming computers to create art since 1959, but Jean-Pierre Hébert's *Drawing with the Mind* is the artist's first full-scale public exhibition of the wide range and formidable beauty of his recent work. There are several large drawings done by Inkjet printer on paper, a variety of paper sculptures, a computer-controlled ball for creating designs, works programmed for display on Mac computers, a sand table, and even a multimedia piece involving abstract patterns in containers of standing water that is driven by sound. Hébert has taken over the entire main space of the CAF with his meditative world of lines, and the result is one of the most stimulating and original shows of the year.

Recent work by Jean-Pierre Hébert.

The fundamental impulse behind all of Hébert's activities is the elaboration of the line as a metaphysical principle structuring not only representation, but thought. Like a mantra or a prayer, designing lines—for drawing them is only a small part of what he does—gives Hébert's work its *raison d'être*. The relationship between lines and equations that characterizes not only algebra and calculus but also the vector graphics behind most contemporary computer representation and animation stretches back at least as far as René Descartes, another contemplative Frenchman whose ideas changed the world. In "Line Field with Blacks and Payne's Grey" (2008), Hébert uses lines to weave a sinuous visual fabric layered with circles and wedges that overlap and filter one another. The effects are achieved in a programming language that allows Hébert to create visual worlds out of rigorously determined sequences of code, a technique that marries the highly predetermined with the gloriously fortuitous.

Recent work by Jean-Pierre Hébert.

Hébert has a well-deserved reputation as an exemplary collaborator, something he has earned through a number of high-level residencies, including the one he now holds at UCSB's Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics, a position he first took in 2003. This show exhibits several works that have involved other UCSB artists and scientists, including Victor Dinovi, David Bothman, MarkDavid Hosale, and others. In addition to his academic connections, Hébert has been particularly well served by his ongoing association with Elaine LeVasseur, the master printer who also curated the show. The

rich surfaces achieved by Hébert's trusty Epson Inkjet printer on large sheets of unframed paper clearly owe something to Levasseur's savvy guidance through the thicket of making successful impressions. The end results of this fascinating and innovative exhibit are like nothing else that's been seen before, and they leave the viewer yearning for more beautiful lines from this man's meditative mind.