

Yacine Sebti, of Morocco and Belgium, offered *Jump!* (2005), a video projection inducing audience members to do just that and then watch themselves onscreen with others. In *Eros-Thanatos* (2006), Erika Harrsch—a French-Mexican artist living in the U.S.—projected a wall video of swarming monarch butterflies above a floor covered with “dead” paper versions, each with a photo of a human vagina for its body. Visitors could walk on the winged casualties like fallen leaves and/or reanimate them by tossing the bright creatures into the air.

The section’s more static works of note included video stills from *Other People’s Feelings Are Also My Own* (2006), in which German artist Markus Hansen attempts to match the clothing and facial expressions of myriad subjects, young and old, male and female. Composite photographs

contributed by Seoungwon Won depict imaginary realms, such as a pink-castled fairyland where one little girl swims blithely with dolphins while another, dressed as a princess, rides on a hobbyhorse under the trees.

The “Time” section held one of the most engaging and impressive works of the entire exhibition. Mioon’s *Human Stream* (2005) features two bald, idol-like, 11½-foot-high busts upon which are projected looped videos of striding, steadily increasing crowds. At intervals, gusts of air blow across the feathery surfaces of the heads, enlivening them at the cost of innumerable walkers who vanish into the suddenly opened chasms—which soon close to accommodate new hordes. Time weighs heavily on the woman perpetually waiting for someone who never arrives in a 2008 black-and-white video by Teresa Serrano (Mexico). *Jiaer’s Livestock* (2002-08), a new video installation by China’s Yang Fudong, repeatedly fragments and reshuffles chronology, as a murder mystery plays out in two incompatible versions on separate screens.

Among the most striking “Light” pieces were *Reincarnation* (2007), a fog-enshrouded bed under a shower of red laser beams, by Li Hui (China), and Spanish artist Carlos Coronas’s utopia-themed *Nowhere* (2007), a hanging, multilayered installation of variously colored neon tubes. Taiwan’s Hung Tunglu went 3-D with a pink-toned environment in which animated consumer items appear and disappear with the solemnity of religious relics briefly displayed to the faithful. Paul Chan (U.S./China), Olafur Eliasson (Iceland/Denmark) and Kyota Takahashi (Japan)

all presented works that generate silhouettes of objects or people—none, sadly, with the narrative punch of Kara Walker’s vignettes.

Media\_City Seoul is a worthwhile and necessary event: the art world undeniably needs to see and discuss work using emergent technologies. (Indeed, given the current thrust of history, the day may well come when there are 10 electronic biennials for every one devoted to the old, unplugged arts.) But as the last few examples above suggest, the field today has some fundamental problems. The equipment that artists can afford tends to be several steps behind the commercial forefront, a fact especially evident in ultra-wired Korea, where cell phones are smarter than 2007’s HAL the Computer, and HD screens can loom up at any turn. Moreover, theoretic claims for new media’s ability to fundamentally reorder human consciousness have proved naive. Porn, blogs and adolescent chitchat still dominate cyberspace, attesting to the unregenerate nature of mass tastes, however digitally enhanced. Most troubling of all, from a critical perspective, media art tends far too often to marshal technically fantastic gizmos—known for great expense and iffy reliability—to produce artistically trifling effects. Half the high-tech wonders in any new-media roundup today could be matched—or bettered—with a candle and three shadow puppets, or by a bunch of kids twirling dime-store sparklers on a summer night. And as for meaningful content, well . . . There is as yet no algorithm for the anguish of the human heart.



ABOVE, CHRISTA SOMMERER AND LAURENT MIGNONNEAU: *LIFE WRITER*, 2006, INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION. PHOTOS THIS PAGE FROM THE SEOUL BIENNALE.

RIGHT, TERESA SERRANO: *BOCA DE TABLA*, 2008, VIDEO, 13 MINUTES.

