



JULY 14  
TO AUGUST 12  
2006

# PRESS PLAY

CURATED BY  
TATIANA MELLEMA

6th Annual InterAccess Emerging Artists Exhibition  
featuring:

Alison S. M. Kobayashi  
Paula Jean Cowan  
John Smith  
Simone Charles  
Lorena Salomé  
Darsha Hewitt &  
Stéphanie Brodeur

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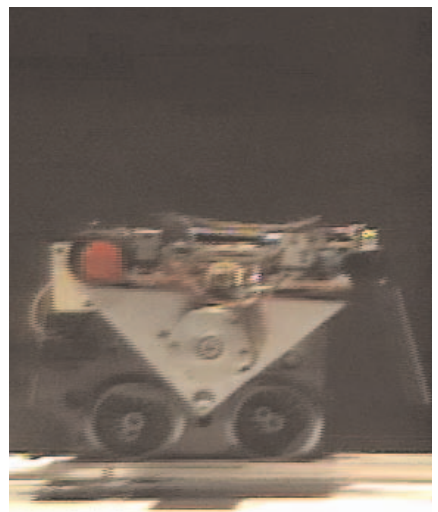
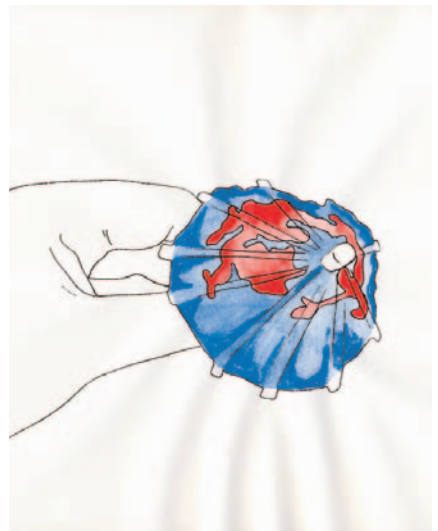
OPENING RECEPTION  
Friday July 14 from 8 to 11pm

INTERACCESS ELECTRONIC MEDIA ARTS CENTRE  
9 Ossington Avenue, Toronto

THE ARTISTS FEATURED IN *Press Play*, the 6th Annual InterAccess Emerging Artists Exhibition, exploit the liberating potentials of new media to reveal how we construct our identities in a world where technology is a common interface. Through performative play, Alison S. M. Kobayashi, Paula Cowan, Darsha Hewitt, Stéphanie Brodeur, John Smith, Lorena Salomé and Simone Charles use the body to investigate our interactions in the social world. Activating the body of the artist, the audience and the metaphorical, these technological performances reveal the absurd reality of our everyday.

Since the explosion of performance art in the 1960s, the body has been reclaimed as a site for investigation into social norms and signifiers of identity. Both performance and object-based works often seek to create a performative experience where the body is liberated, fluid and open to otherness through unmediated engagement. Attention to the physical can prompt audiences to examine their perceptions and recognize their identities as shaped through their interactions in the social world. By re-examining the body in electronic art, technology's effects of alienation are exploited to provide audiences with a potentially liberating experience. The artists in this exhibition use common technologies to fragment audiences' expected interactions so that they may gain insight into their own behaviours.

Kobayashi and Cowan create exaggerated performances through video and animation to disrupt accepted visual signifiers of projected stereotypes. Both artists use their bodies to masquerade in obviously staged scenarios. Kobayashi collects what she calls "identity memorabilia" — found objects that contain traces of a person, which are usually records of private experiences. In her piece *Dan Carter*, she has acted out her imaginings of people recorded on an old answering-machine tape once belonging to a Dan Carter. Kobayashi disrupts physical stereotypes by playing with signifiers of costume and physical gesture through humorous yet cutting exaggeration. In



*Front cover, from top:*

*Dan Carter*

video still

Alison S.M. Kobayashi, 2006

*Magnetic Identity Liberation Front*

(MILF) installation view

Stéphanie Brodeur & Darsha Hewitt,

2004-2005

*pixels+pitches*

screen capture

John Smith, 2006

*Opposite page, from top:*

*Merry-go-round*

detail

Simone Charles, 2006

*twirl*

animation cell sketch

Paula Cowan, 2005

*Untitled*

detail

Lorena Salomé, 2006

*stick/twirl*, Cowan uses rotoscoping to create animations of her videotaped performances. The first of these animations, *stick*, depicts Cowan as a large female character pulling her heart out and calmly stabbing it with sticks. A second video, *twirl*, records Cowan's hand spinning a paper drink umbrella that she uses to stab her heart. *stick/twirl* challenges stereotypes of large women, by allowing the central character to take control of her own body through the ironic gesture of mutilating her vital organ in a beautifully hypnotic manner.

Hewitt, Brodeur and Smith initiate audience performance through interactive installations that expose the significance of our routine behaviours. Hewitt and Brodeur satirically dub themselves the Magnetic Identity Liberation Front (MILF), promising to liberate visitors' consumer identities through the MILF Machine. Gallery-goers are asked to swipe any magnetic stripe card they may have into a machine that converts the information into abstract musical sequences. Far from liberated, viewers realize that their consumer habits actually do little to bring them closer to who they really want to be. Borrowing from a number of pop-culture references, including the MILF acronym, this duo reveals the absurdity of social norms that we literally buy into every day. Smith engages the audience through the familiar interface of the computer in his project *pixels+pitches*. Navigating through simple animated sci-fi scenes that use sounds of early video games, participants create their own scene sequences based on where they click the mouse on the screen. By engaging viewers in a visual game with no end, Smith exposes our paradoxical and dangerous relationship with technology. We often play with the virtual, but never ask how and why we are playing with it.

Using technologies as metaphors for the body, Charles and Salomé reveal the long-term effects of our interactions in the social world. In *Merry-Go-Round*, Charles presents a static merry-go-round that is activated only when gallery visitors turn their backs to the

device to read its accompanying plaque of nursery-rhyme musings. As the language of children's games, literature and songs fuels the merry-go-round's revolutions, the viewer is left out of the play. Visitors are meant to reflect on the rehearsal of logic and language that structures children's games and stories, while imagining their own bodies on Charles's socializing merry-go-round. Salomé's untitled work includes two trains on a singular track that bump into one another, move in different directions, stop and change speeds. These trains decide on their directions, speed and movements through a programmed code that varies according to specific physical conditions. In this work, Salome employs the technology of code to create dysfunctional trains that move chaotically, serving as a metaphor for the viewer's own existence. Humans vary their behaviours according to their interaction with the world around them, but remain bound by social structures that often prevent harmonious relationships with one another.

Fooling around with electronics, the artists in *Press Play* poke fun at the way audience members understand themselves. Though these artists use a variety of media and subject matter, they each remap the importance of the body through the technological. The body is the site where the private and public meet. Providing technologically mediated experiences of the body, works allow viewers to reflect on their daily negotiations of the private and public. In the tone of witty parody, artists simulate the fabricated structures and norms of the social world. The audience's perceptions become the centre point of each work, as meanings that viewers ordinarily construct are exposed as ridiculous. While playfully exposing human perception, the works do not provide audiences with any easy answers. Instead, they take part in a perpetual game that leaves gallery-goers with questions that are far from playful.

*Tatiana Mellema*

PRESS PLAY is curated by Tatiana Mellema, for the 6th Annual InterAccess Emerging Artists Exhibition. Each year, an emerging curator is selected to intern with InterAccess and be mentored through the curatorial process, resulting in this high-profile exhibition of recent graduates in new and electronic media arts. Contact InterAccess for more information on the annual curatorial internship.

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