

Musicians 'caged' in 24-hour art

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New Brunswick's Alfa Art Gallery celebrated its second anniversary Friday with a 24-hour-long event featuring artists, musicians and dancers.

The performance, entitled "The Caged Bird Sings," continued into Saturday, where five musicians played improvised music through the night and day while sitting in cages.

Michael Durek, a musician inspired by Albert Einstein's claim that everything in life is a vibration, created the event.

"For each performance, we had a dancer collaborate with an artist and a musician, and the three of them are responding together," said Durek, who also was one of the night's performers.

Each musician sat in a separate cell of the cage, interacting only with the music they produced.

Durek said according to Einstein's theory, everything in the universe emits a unique frequency, but those frequencies, or vibrations, do not exist in isolation. Each vibration affects and is affected by every other vibration, even across great distances.

"It just came to me, to have to build a cage and to improvise in it," Durek said.

The event, located at 108 Church St., began with dancers responding to the artists' works while a musician played a composition written for the art.

There were six performances, each with a dancer interacting with a different artist's work. Following the performances, the improvisational marathon began.

"It's not something composed and rounded. The music to my ears seems very incoherent, but it's interesting to see how it's being produced ... I'm interested in how they respond to each other and the flow," said Leon Laureij, a Highland Park resident.

Michiko Mull, the museum's curator, said the museum had an experimental, interdisciplinary approach to art, therefore Durek's concept for the event was perfect.

One of the artists was Michelle Provenzano, whose shadow art was used in one of the dances, performed by Carla Menchinella.

"I made my shadow on this piece of satin and I gave it to Carla, hoping she would do something with care, but I didn't have any idea what she was going to do," Provenzano said. "It was interesting that she chose to wrap herself up in it and really related to it as a floor shadow, when, in fact, when I made it, I projected myself against a wall."

Provenzano is also interested in thinking of shadows as physical objects as opposed to a light phenomenon.

"It's kind of like she's picking up my body," she said.

Eric Clausen, another artist at the event, presented interactive art and sculptures that reflected the "aquatic ape hypothesis," an alternate theory of evolution that proposes early primates developed in an aquatic environment.

"There's no scientific evidence for it whatsoever, but it's a nice theory. I kind of want to believe in it,"

Clausen said.

Clausen said one could interpret his art as being about certainty, faith or the difference between belief and rationality.

Neither Clausen nor Provenzano had participated in an interdisciplinary event like this before, but both said they were excited to do so.

"What's really exciting is the collaborative improvisational aspects of musicians, dancers and artists working together. It's inspiring and makes me want to do more collaborative works," Provenzano said.

The organization of the event, from the musical interactions to the minimalist cage for the musicians, was a new experience, she said.

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“Coming from a visual arts background, to participate in a show that was organized by a musician has been a really interesting experience because he’s coming at it from a musician’s point of view,” Provenzano said.

Other featured artists in the exhibition include Sarah Granett, who created a spandex fabric sculpture, and Ian Trask, whose recycled cardboard sculptures are on display.

Provenzano also has three drawings and a watercolor painting displayed.

“I like that it’s a series of installations,” said Mike Dunican, a School of Arts and Sciences junior. “I like that there are a lot of people here, and a lot of people from town, not just college students — that’s awesome.”

All of the art in the exhibition will be on display until Feb. 17.

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