

arts

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SPRINGTIME ON THE FRINGE

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Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel have set out to create a near-impossible on-site fantasy that is nothing less than a solar system in miniature. The viewer approaches the site (Mott Street between Prince and Houston), which is no more than the facade of the Art Galaxy Gallery. Except that the gallery is closed, or rather it has become the stage for a kinetic light/sound/projection piece that is only visible from the street. Instead of entering, one steps up a baby-blue ramp that leads to a curtain in the wall, which in turn is just large enough for one spectator to put his/her head through. Three feet off the ground, one presses the start button and waits. First, the only sensation is the sound of a steady rivulet of splashing water. Then a flicker or two of light appears in the distance. Next a throbbing pulse of softer light begins in the corner, other pinlights flicker, and a metallic green glow bathes what seems to be a planet floor. Other lights come up very gradually, revealing distant striated red cliffs in the distance and a stretch of sea behind that. To the left, a shimmering silver waterfall begins to cascade down the entire vertical edge of one's viewing plane. Behind this waterfall, but in front of the cliffs, a milky blue pool comes into visibility. We are made aware that the cliffs look adobe (reminiscent of the Mesa Verde dwellings), when a violent churning in the seas becomes apparent. Suddenly lightning crackles across the midnight sky (the booth contains tiny fans which have begun to add a soundtrack, accentuated by distant booms and the occasional 'beep' of the mechanism). The storm is in full regalia.

The entire *Spheric Storm* cycle lasts about eight minutes, during which time it becomes evident that this narrative is about nothing less than the birth of a planet. Geysers and craters erupt; steam pours violently out of glowing fissures. At the peak of its cycle, the sea erupts into exquisite moiré patterns, and lightning bolts rip steadily over the proceedings. Because *Spheric Storm* functioned as a 2½-month, 24-hour portable spectacle, it also served as a private movie theater for those who cared to visit at chance moments. Jones and Ginzel—notwithstanding their multidisciplinary wizardry (architectural model-making, mechanical engineering, theatrical lighting, and robotics all had a hand in this piece)—also seem to have given a great deal of thought to how their opus fits conceptually into the spectrum of public art, which practically never allows the viewer an occasion to experience pleasure in private. Jones and Ginzel have created a portable epic, and they have done so with all the pioneering spirit of a Lumiere or an Edison. I wouldn't be surprised if they are already eyeing their next stage: permanence.