

A transforming experience

ARTS FLASH

By Anita Overcash

Brian Knep's exhibition *Per(MUTATIONS): Interactive Work by Brian Knep* mixes science and art to create some deep thoughts. Knep, who once worked at George Lucas' company Industrial Light and Magic to create special effects, now has a residency at Harvard Medical School, where he creates his own masterpieces from observations of various organisms, including frogs. His exhibition in Charlotte runs through March 7 at the McColl Center for Visual Art.

Creative Loafing: Can you tell me about your background? What were you doing before art?

Brian Knep: I studied math and computer science in college, and I went right into the film industry. I worked for George Lucas' company for four years. I did *Jurassic Park*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Star Trek* and all those kinds of big, high-end, special-effects movies. I was working on writing very specific software to create visuals. I got tired of that: As time went on, we were cranking out movies that I didn't really care about. They were fun movies, but they just didn't have a lot of soul to them. So what happened was I got really interested in using very simple mathematics and science to create beautiful, complex things. By chance, I happened to meet a scientist at Harvard Medical School

who was doing a very similar thing through science, and we connected and became friends. After that, we worked together. And so I created a residency at Harvard Medical School.

Why the exhibition title *Per(MUTATIONS)*?

Well, titles are always a strange thing. In the exhibition, there are three separate pieces and a lot of the work deals with emergence. You can think about schooling fish or flocking birds. Scientists call the way they move "emerging behavior."

Can you tell me about the frogs you've worked with?

I got these frogs from the lab at Harvard Medical School, and I worked with them for about a month to understand how they worked, how they swam, how to take care of them and how to photograph them. Then I spent about two months photographing them almost every day. I photographed them with a time-lapse camera for five to 10 minutes every day and at the end of this process, I ended up with several thousands of pictures of frogs. I went through them and found interesting ones, where the frogs had made a major growth change from a tadpole into a frog. After that, I put them all together into a movie and I made some prints as well. I made a movie of a frog swimming and changing from tadpole to frog and then changing back. I did some manipulations and used Photoshop. What happens is you see this tadpole and his legs grow and they pull up and they kick. As they are kicking, they are growing, and his tail shrinks and at the end of the kick it's an adult frog. Then



FROG TIME by Brian Knep

the legs come back and fuse together into a tail and he drops back into a tadpole. So, it's a cycle. It's a sort of metaphor for struggling to keep up with time and the way our lives cycle and keep repeating things over and over again.

What do you hope viewers will get out of your exhibition?

In all my work, I think it's important to me to create some kind of transformative experience for people, so that they think about the world in a different way maybe, or just open their minds up in some way. For me, that's what art is about, to try to give people shivers, to try to open them up to a new way of thinking or to revisit an old way of thinking that they've forgotten about.



ON THE WEB

To read a longer version of this interview, go to Arts at charlotte.creativeloafing.com.