

# Microcosms jiggle and make us giggle

Light-generated 'interactive cyberart' moves in random ways that speak to us about science and humanity.

BY LINDA LUISE BROWN  
Special to the Observer

In an intriguing blend of art and technology, the light-generated microcosms of Brian Knep charm the viewer into play. One is apt to laugh or smile when engaging with "Per (MUTATIONS)," Knep's spectrum of "interactive cyberart" at McColl Center for Visual Art.

A modest level of hilarity hovers throughout this group of motion-driven installations.

Dancing within circles of projected light, one series of what appear to be tiny organisms undulate sporadically upon the gallery walls, their cartoon-like humanoid shapes skittering like microbes in a modern dance.

Originally modeled after the gestural drawings of a child, these light-projected animated life forms move in random patterns, resembling wriggling bacteria in a petri dish or office workers in their cubicles.

"These are playful parables about humanity," Knep said. He references the Greek myth of Sisyphus in one piece, "Erect," in which masses attempt to erect a tower, only to have it fall down again and again. Exploring the vanity and illusions that push human beings to achieve, the artist

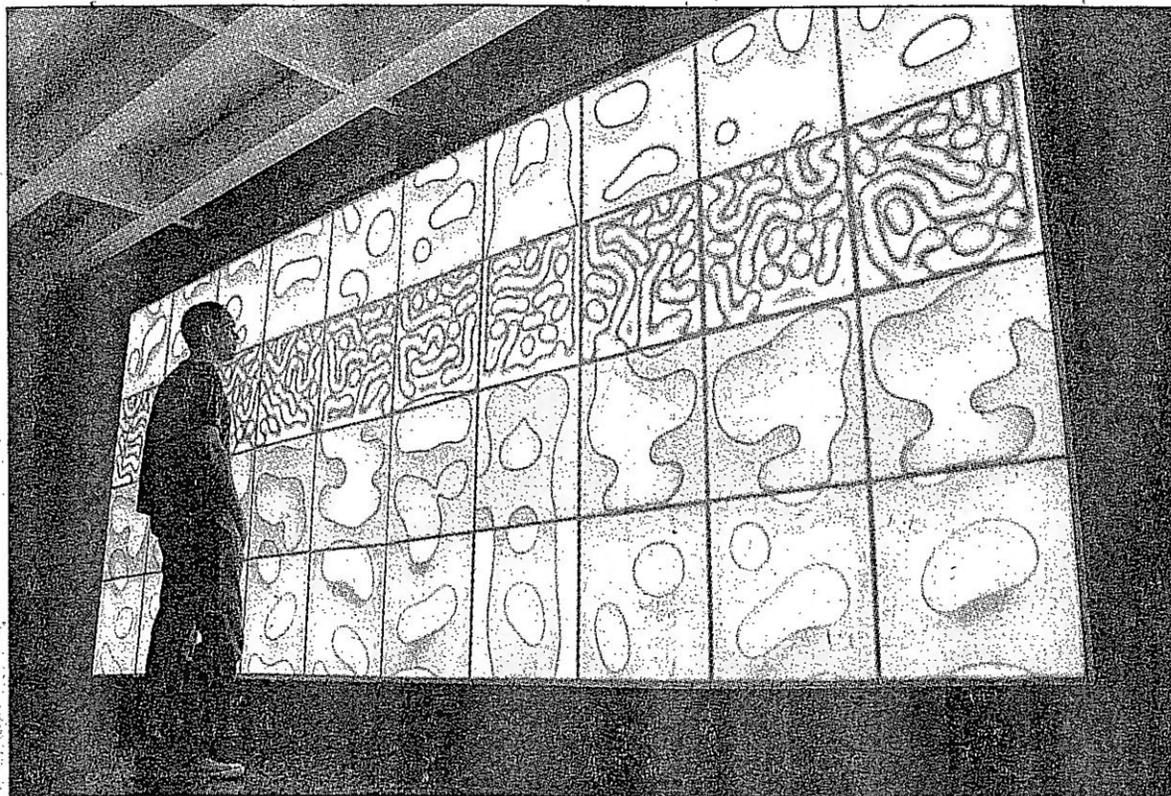


An overhead camera projects images on the floor in "Flower Umbilicus."

makes futility funny.

Viewers play with the knob or button beneath the circle of light, then stand back and watch as chaos moves to order, and back again, much like the flight of birds, the swimming motion of a school of fish ...or the chorus of frogs by a pond. These biological references enhance a strangely inverted anthropomorphism.

Knep of Boston works alongside scientists in Harvard Medical School biology labs, and his motion-direct-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN KNEP

The shapes in each column of "Drift Wall" drift upward, changing their look as they cross the panels.

## VISUAL ART REVIEW

### Per (MUTATIONS)

You can interact with Brian Knep's exhibit, sharing the floor, for example, as it changes form or color.

Where: McColl Center for Visual Art, 721 N. Tryon St.

When: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Saturday, through March 7.

Details: [www.mccollcenter.org](http://www.mccollcenter.org); 704-332-5535.

ed works simulate a version of "emergent behavior." The interac-

tive button in "Emerge" activates tiny wriggling figures that are programmed to move in simple patterns, toward light, like moths, and we don't know whether we are looking at an enlargement or a miniaturization.

More involvement and greater fun is part of "Flower Umbilicus" and "Flower Revealed," a synergistic pair of projected images on the gallery floor that come to life with human interaction. We step upon each circular pad of light and it becomes a stage where our movement leaves behind fleeting patterns.

"Drift Wall," an illuminated black-and-white rectangle, is as calm and mesmerizing as the first jittery figures are frenetic. More massive than other works in "Per (MUTATIONS)," this mural-sized piece has a convincing physicality for something that is actually made of light.

Though in large part science-based (the artist's bio reveals his background in math and computer technology,) Knep's proficient work is also defined by serendipity and spontaneity; and a dexterous use of chance reflects his ability to maintain a light touch.