The Columbian

Weekend *and beyond*

Friday, May 30, 2008

inanimatealice.com

Electrifying art

Evolving digital media on display in Vancouver

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Works of art a click away

Media Arts Show celebrates computer-age creations, artists

By MARY ANN ALBRIGHT
Columbian staff writer

In Donna Leishman's latest piece of electronic literature, "Contemplating Flight," viewers help shape the plot depending on where they click a mouse button or move their cursor.

Leishman fans who come to Clark College this weekend to explore the digital narrative will first see an image of a bird sitting on a branch. Using a mouse to navigate the screen, they can make the bird blink or tweet, or move fruit on the tree. Ultimately, how the mouse moves helps determine the story.

Electronic literature such as Leishman's narrative can't fully be appreciated in print. It's an art form that has expanded in scope along with computer technology, and its entire history spans just a few decades.

This weekend, Washington State University Vancouver, Clark College and North Bank Artists Gallery will team up to trace the evolution of media art. They'll present the art form's pioneering digital fiction from the mid-1980s that used hypertext to move readers sequentially through stories. The shows will also include pictorial Web fiction and avant-garde multimedia performance art created on the spot with dynamic combinations of sound and video.

The exhibits are being held in conjunction with the Electronic Literature Organization's 2008 conference. Hosted by WSU Vancouver, the event will bring 120 scholars and artists from the United States, Europe, Canada, Asia and South America to Vancouver to share their work and discuss the field. Artists will be on hand at the exhibits in the evenings on May 30 and 31 to talk about their work.

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If you go

■ **What:** Media Arts Show.

■ **When:** Exhibit hours 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. May 30 and 31 and multimedia performance 9 p.m. to midnight May 31 at North Bank Artists Gallery; artists' talks 7 p.m. May 30 and exhibit hours 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 31 at Clark College; and exhibit hours 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. May 30 and 31 and 9 a.m. to noon June 1 at Washington State University Vancouver.

■ **Where:** Fireside Room in the Penguin Union Building at Clark College, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver; North Bank Artists Gallery, 1005 Main St., Vancouver; and Firstenburg Student Commons at Washington State University Vancouver, 14204 N.E. Salmon Creek Ave., Vancouver.

■ **Cost:** Free except for the May 31 evening multimedia show, which costs $10.

■ **Information:** 360-546-9487, grigar@vancouver.wsu. edu, www. vancouver. wsu.edu/ programs/ dtc/elo08. html.

I try to recall winter. < As if it were yesterday? > she says, but I do not signify one way or another.

By five the sun sets and the afternoon melt freezes again across the blacktop into crystal octopi and palms of ice-- rivers and continents beset by fear, and we walk out to the car, the snow moaning beneath our boots and the oaks exploding in series along the fenceline on the horizon, the shrapnel settling like relics, the echoing thundering off far ice. This was the essence of wood, these fragments say. And this darkness is air.

< Poetry > she says, without emotion, one way or another.

Do you want to hear about it?

Macintosh Classic

"Afternoon, a Story" by hypertext fiction pioneer Michael Joyce will be shown on an older computer such as this Macintosh Classic in a display at Washington State University Vancouver. Written in 1987, "Afternoon" is the tale of a technical writer named Peter who thinks he saw his ex-wife's wrecked car.

On the cover: London-based digital fiction author Kate Pullinger's interactive multimedia story "Inanimate Alice" will be among the electronic literature displayed on new iMac computers at North Bank Artists Gallery in Vancouver.
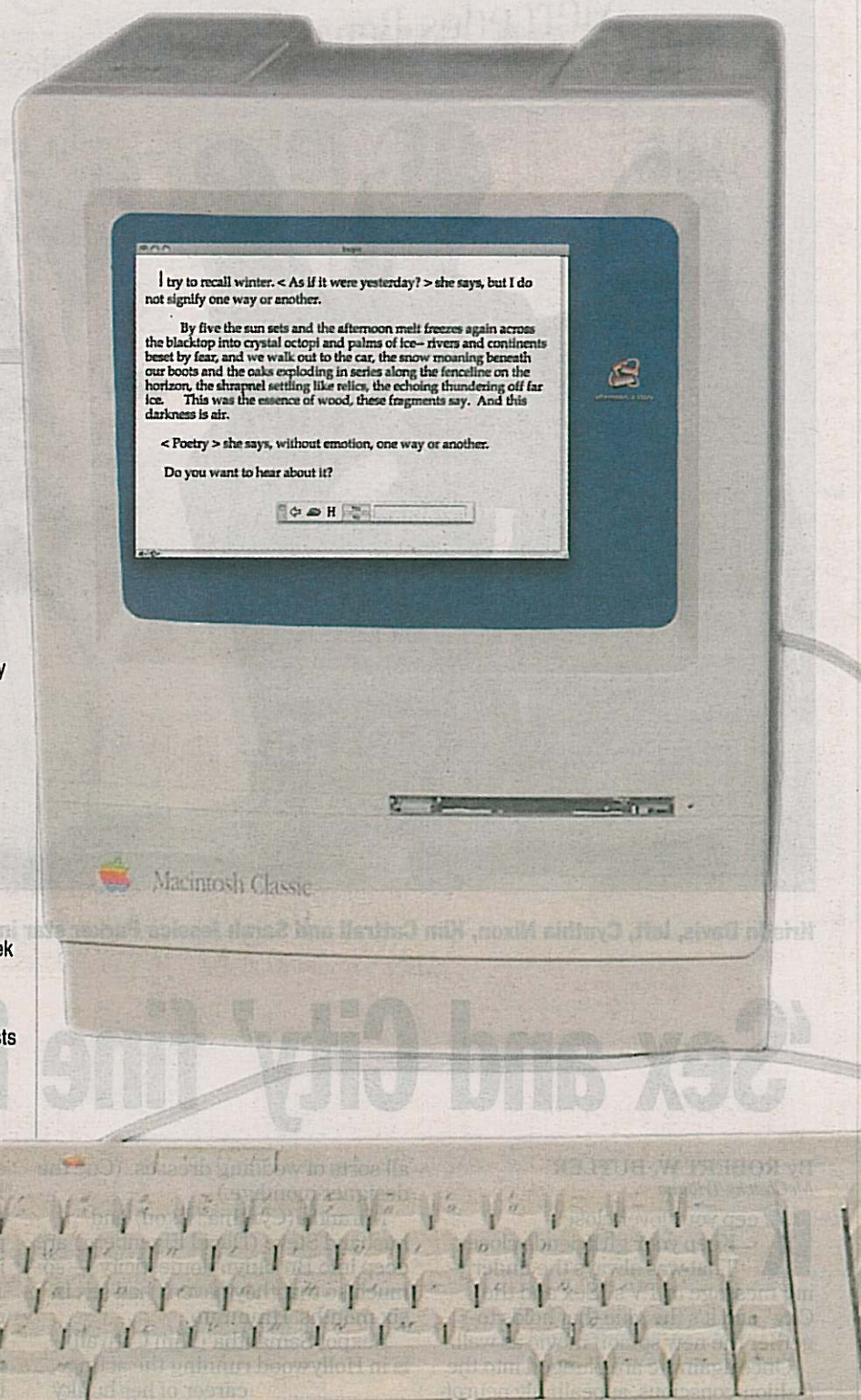
Seeing media art's progression from simple computer text to flashy colors, sounds and games will help drive home how dependent artists working in the genre are on evolving technology, said Dene Grigar, associate professor and program director of digital technology and culture at WSU Vancouver.

The advent of Web browsers and high-speed Internet connections, for example, allows color and sound to be used in ways that weren't possible for early media artists such as Michael Joyce, Grigar said.

Today's media art includes, among other things, Internet radio, story-driven online games and virtual environments such as Second Life.

Venues participating in this weekend's show will emphasize different aspects of media art past and present.

North Bank Artists Gallery will focus on current trends. It will spotlight such work as Kate Pullinger's complex multimedia story "Inanimate Alice" and an improvisational sound and video show, "Exploding Plastic and Inevitable Redux," by Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller. In Gibson and Müller's performance, notes on their instruments are programmed to correspond to certain images. As they play, these visuals will be projected onto overhead screens.

The Clark College exhibit also will showcase work by today's leaders in media art, including Leishman's "Contemplating Flight."

WSU Vancouver will take a step back, tracing the roots of media art. Scholars don't all agree on when the art form emerged. Some argue it was in the 1950s and '60s, when mainframe computers dominated the technology scene. Most say it was 1984, when Apple introduced the Macintosh desktop computer.

WSU Vancouver's exhibit will include examples of early electronic literature by media art pioneers such as Joyce, Judy Malloy and Jim Rosenberg.

Grigar hopes the show will help raise awareness about this relatively new type of art and way of reading.

"We want to introduce people to an art form not prevalent yet," she said.

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Apple Inc./Michael Joyce

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