

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Gralin Hughes

Digital Motion

by Leslie Bush

Scrubbing, sensing, mixing. These are some of the words I heard during a self-titled Philly A|V show. The year-old [collective](#) brings experimental media and performance together, and recently gathered at Vox Populi to offer a sampling of their work—despite only having one “dance” piece, it was full of motion.

The program of six performances approached a wide range of visual aesthetics. Almost all the artists gave a short speech at the beginning of their piece to explain what technology they used and how they used it. In another setting, with another audience, this information might have gone over people’s heads, but I got the sense that most folks in the room were tech savvy. For me, the casual speeches added a sense of experimentation and emphasis on research over polished performance. The whole show reflected this sense of informality, with long breaks in between works, beers in the gallery lobby, and no curtain to hide the huge tables of equipment that each artist set up before their piece.

If there was any amount of polished performance in the room that evening, it was the opening ballet with interactive visuals and choreography by [Nora Gibson](#). The piece, which Gibson mentioned was the beginning stage of a larger work to eventually premiere at the Franklin Institute, used two [Kinect sensors](#) to translate ballet movement into interactive animations. These were projected behind the skillful dancers, José Raúl and Maddy Mikami, during the performance. Beginning in stillness, they quickly picked up the pace with angular arm gestures and weight sharing through their hips and legs. The two shifted smoothly through the small, dimly lit space with an awareness of the way their movement affected the visuals behind them. During one section, Raúl lifted Mikami off the floor and gently tilted her body on an angle while a cascade of projected cherry blossoms slowly rained down over both of them. The effect was stunning, and I craved more moments where their bodies were layered by the projections.

While the rest of the artists did not have physical bodies filling the space as Gibson’s work had, their work carried just as much visual momentum and kinetic excitement. Gralin Hughes used digital and analog processes to create abstract shifting lines of soft green light

and shadow on the screen. Off to the side, he quietly rearranged cords and adjusted knobs on a mixer, his motions mirroring the meditative feeling of the work, which was accompanied by an original soundscore. Jacob Weinberg's work created a sense of dynamic tension, with *almost* recognizable icons *almost* resolving into clear images on screen before stretching, morphing, and changing. It felt like watching the bouncing DVD icon *almost* hit the corner of the TV screen—like I couldn't look away or else I might miss the satisfying moment.

Shani Aviram presented her work, which combined audio recordings of voices that casually moved in and out of song with subtly animated cream sorbet orange dots, accented with bursts of glitchy 3D rounded shapes. Jeff Bethea's presentation was theatrical. He emerged from a backroom wearing a white, emotionless mask that hid a small microphone used to create audio feedback. It was layered over pre-recorded speeches by a variety of historical figures. Bethea mixed animated [particle systems](#), found footage, and recognizable big brand logos to make a point about technology and capitalism. To wrap the night up, Chris Baldys and John Bezark used entries from [scrubbed](#) Craigslist "Missed Connections" and visual manipulations of Google street views to explore intimacy in digital relationships. Their performance was slightly comical; a robotic voice read hilariously worded clips of missed connections that were sometimes even a little dark. The street view visuals gave the audio a sense of place in the performance.

As a new entity, Philly A|V seemed to have a strong group of artists and technologists dedicated to the collective mission of expanding the intersection of performance and experimental media. After an evening full of beautiful dancing and stunning visual work, I am excited to see how the collective evolves.

[Philly A|V](#), Vox Populi, November 5.

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