



Scott Snibbe's "Make Like a Tree" invites you in.

Hanging by a thread



"Light Puddle" by Hayes Raffo reacts just to you.



Christina Ayala and John Morris make "Telepathy Drawings," such as "Sputnik."



John Stepien's "little one" demands your attention.

"Conceptually a thread is something that when pieced together makes a larger whole."

Joseph Smolinski says of the connective imagery

This hands-on exhibit makes you smile while you think about being connected

By Donna Duberly
Register Arts Editor

NEW HAVEN — Thread. We use it to "connect" our clothes together. We thread through a crowd or through cyberspace through hair-thin fiber-optics. We hang by a thread in an unresolved situation.

Threading, networking and communicating — how and why we do it — are the inspiration for an innovative, highly creative and fun exhibit, "Thread: a growing network," running through June 24 at untitled (space) gallery.

This exhibit, where touching and interactive participation are encouraged, has surprises literally around every corner, from a sewing machine which connects us to far-flung places, to a "telepathy drawing" table, where visitors can emulate the mind-reading drawings of Christina Ayala and John Morris, to a "cyberbaby."

The exhibit is the first original one curated by the New Haven-based Trifocal Projects, a group of three artists (Jessica Schwind, Joseph Smolinski and Todd Jokl) whose mission is to create "a collaborative environment where artists are able to explore ideas through artistic interventions with each other."

The plan was to have an exhibit which explores how people network and connect, using thematic physical art and installations, and taking it a step further by opening an online dialogue and connection between artists and their viewers.

"We've been working collaboratively for a while with the artists," said Smolinski of the eight seed artists, while demonstrating the online part of the exhibit. "Since we're a little network, we thought of the notion of networking on a broader network and looked for artists who we've been corresponding with about technological artwork for a while."

The idea was to connect artists in an almost "six degrees of separation" type visual web which would inform visitors about their medium and contact other artists with whom they or their work have an affinity, thereby creating a growing, almost living module.

"It seemed like a good match for us," said Helen Kauder, executive director of Artspace, where untitled is located. "It's a way to connect with people not necessarily

IF YOU GO

- **Event:** "Thread: a growing network"
- **When:** Through June 24, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Tuesdays, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays
- **Where:** untitled (space) gallery, 50 Orange St., New Haven
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** (203) 772-2700 or www.artspace.org/thread

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'Thread': We connect, we network, and it makes art

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devoted to visual arts. Plus, it gives (Trifocal) an opportunity to organize a show as curators. We don't have deep-enough pockets to pay them, but they get to try a show and then go on elsewhere and maybe get hired as independent curators. We love to be the guinea pigs for this sort of thing."

The online portion proved so successful in the week since the exhibit opened that it was temporarily shut down until Trifocal finds a company able to handle the volume. "We put out a really primitive call to artists and in 48 hours, 50 people were connected," said Smolinski. "... ultimately it will become completely automated and completely visual."

That slight success glitch virtually in no way casts a shadow over the "real" exhibit. The eight artists which Trifocal selected have all been dabbling in technological art or connecting, depicting it on paper or with high-tech works.

"It has a lot to do with the idea that on one hand we thought of the Web as a thread that would connect artists. Then, conceptually a thread is something that when pieced together makes a larger whole," says Smolinski of the connective imagery.

Smolinski calls New Haven's Eudald Lerga's "Data Sewing Machine," an icon of the exhibit. Visitors pump the machine pedal and a barcoded sheet of paper

comes out of a printer. Run the paper through the machine zipper foot like a piece of material, and its "threads" connect to Lerga's images of clothing production lines in Taiwan, Turkey, India and Peru — both a visual connection to foreign places and a political statement.

Hayes Raffle, a Yale School of Art graduate, is a Ph.D. candidate in the Tangible Media Group at the MIT Media Lab, where he is a practicing artist and designer "researching systems and devices that engage people's touch to improve communication, education, and artistic expression."

His "Light Puddle" depicts the movement of information from one person or area to another with a dialogue between a viewer-activated light panel and hand movement over it. The more complex "Topobo," created with colleague Amanda Parkes, is a 3-D assembly system using Lego Technics® connectors and robotic technology that allows users to make creations or creatures and then animate them by twisting or pulling them. The robotic technology "remembers" the movements and plays them back, "becoming a physical network of your motion," said Smolinski.

San Francisco artist Scott Snibbe's haunting "Make Like a Tree" is a computer-digital-video-camera work that takes viewers into the art. They walk in front of a screen where their captured silhouette plays across the project-

ed image of a foggy forest, regressing slowly into the background in layers of previous visitors.

The image disappears behind a tree each time in what

Snibbe calls "the essence of his work," which examines both the need for humans to connect and today's idea of connecting — often going technologically incognito — by hiding on things like the Internet or in chat rooms.

"Telepathy Drawings" by Baltimore's Ayala and Morris, is a series meant to blow your mind. Sitting across from each other at a table, Morris transmits a thought to Ayala, who has seven minutes to draw what she's receiving. Though Morris often uses a laptop, it shows how we still can connect without modern technology. The resulting 11 drawings are both surprising and surreal ("Princess Di").

Visitors can try their hand at it at a special table with a timer, pens, paper and a notebook with suggested image "thoughts."



Eva Lee

"Floating Vesicles," Eva Lee's ink on paper.

The final interactive work is John Slepian's "little_one," a blanket-swaddled box containing an amorphous baby sculpture lying in a crib, demanding our response in what the Wesleyan University professor calls his investigation into "humanness": how interaction makes us happy, sad or comforted.

The connectiveness of Ridgefield artist Eva Lee's drawings comes not from a computer or a video camera, but from a complex connection of dots and lines, growing, networking with each other to take on forms and shapes in her ink and paper works, the most striking, "Indelible Longing."

"Thread" is thought-provoking, family-friendly and fun.

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