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Mad science

Collision Collective at Art Interactive and Urban Icons at the New Art Center

BY RANDI HOPKINS

It is part of the very definition of interactive art that we have to throw ourselves right into it — no armchair appreciation or passive gazing allowed. This may require an especially adventurous spirit when the artist is operating on the edge of known participatory technology, going out on a limb in his or her attempt to engage the viewer's heart and mind. And that may account for the fraught and raucous environment that's created when, twice a year, the always interactive Art Interactive turns over its exhibition space to members of the MIT Collision Collective, who gather to show off their latest interactive technology and art projects. Each show has a theme, and this year, opening April 1, the Collision Collective, whose members are staff, faculty and students at MIT, presents " **Collision Collective #7 — Chance.** " As Art Interactive's associate director, Catherine D'Ignazio, explains, " It's always a great time because the gallery space gets packed with projects and packed with artists and scientists troubleshooting the projects. I like to think of it as a sort of mad-science-fair atmosphere because the projects are wacky, inspired, fun, and often broken! There is almost always an artist or two in the space on hand to discuss their projects with the public or do a demo or two. "



Collision Collective, PS

But don't think the science outweighs the art — the projects here go far beyond mechanics and electronics to explore issues of existential and aesthetic weight. *PS* is a talking-mirror installation that hisses out " Pssst " to passers-by, encouraging us to lean in close to learn a whispered secret. Mirrors, of course, serve as framed stand-ins for our selves as well as embodiments of the alienation from self; they evoke portraiture, vanity, and fairy tales. This mirror's seductive offer of untold secrets ensures our own collusion in the Collision. Then in an example of interactive art that is indeed " hands-on, " artists William Tremblay and Rob Gonsalves address the expressive range and power of the human hand in their video installation *Janken*, which takes its name from the Japanese word for the game " Rock Paper Scissors. " *Janken* features a projection of an animated, skeletal hand that can either randomly run through unfamiliar " sign language " or actually play " Rock Paper Scissors " with viewers. The playfulness of the object — which gives a victorious " thumbs up " if it wins — belies the sophistication of its creation.

The gritty physical characteristics of the modern metropolis provide inspiration for the four artists of " **icograms**, " which opens April 1 at the New Art Center in Newton. Curated by artists Clay Hensley and Anthony Smith Jr., " *icograms* " is the third of three exhibitions presented this season as part of the New Art Center's Curatorial Opportunity Program, which gives inventive curators, first-time or established, a chance to try something new. For this exhibition, four New York-based artists —



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