

Interact With Art at Siggraph

By [Michael Stroud](#)

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SAN ANTONIO, Texas -- You don't have to go to the art gallery at this year's Siggraph, the world's leading computer graphics conference. If you hang out on the ground floor of the convention center for a while, the gallery will come to you.

Volunteers for "The Jackal Project" stride around the floor wearing wire mesh jackal noses, pointy ears, white jumpsuits and a strange contraption that films you and streams your image wirelessly to a panel on the chest of another jackal nearby.

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The "art" lies in the way the jackals have shamelessly scavenged thrown-away LCD screens, security cameras, batteries and wire from around San Antonio, strung them together with glue and styrene, and made working machines out of them.

"A lot of companies will try to sell you their idea of the future," said Dima Strakovsky, whose day job is at toy designer Lund & Co. in Chicago. "We're trying to take that vision of the future and hack it."

The five jackals are inviting show attendees (through Friday) to contribute their own spare parts, toys and ideas as they conduct "interactive tomfoolery" and "jackalicious collaborations" with little more than soldering irons and glue guns.

The jackals are one of seven groups of working artists whose mission is to create art on the fly at [Siggraph](#) -- allowing attendees to see and often participate in their creative process. More than 64 artists are displaying their work at the gallery, and much of it is interactive.

Once you actually make it to the gallery, for example, you walk right into the [NewYorkExitNewYork](#) exhibit, a 3-D virtual environment built from 6,000 photos and videos of New York City projected on a giant screen that you can surf with a joystick.

Ambient noise -- cars, people, chords of music -- are part of the experience, changing as you switch from Times Square to Wall Street to Greenwich Village or soar above the buildings in 2.5 square miles of virtual terrain that you observe but never feel part of.

New York isn't really that compact, but that doesn't matter. "It's not real, it's impressionistic," said Priam Givord, a designer from Paris who designed the project with a friend as a memento of time spent there. "It's New York in a dream."

Nearby, the genial creators of "ceremonial conflict suits" that react to shouting by inflating -- courtesy of microphones, modified hair dryers and plastic bags -- wander the floor looking like rubber chickens wearing backpacks and shower caps. The suit has both "aggressive" and "defensive" regions that inflate depending on whether the person wearing it is yelling or being yelled at.

"We took inspiration from animals such as lizards and frogs," co-creator Ralph Borland said.

Then there's an exhibit titled "After the Hunt," which somewhat incongruously features laundry hanging on

clotheslines. The half-translucent cloth acts as a screen for constantly changing images -- abstract designs, flocks of fish, scenes -- cast by digital projectors hooked to a PowerBook.

As you walk around, unseen sensors (some embedded in the sod grass the artists have strewn on the floor) change the images and sounds you hear. This experience may be somewhat puzzling to Generation Y, perhaps, but evocative to old-timers who remember hanging laundry. Their memory may be jogged to remember the sights and the sounds of those years, explains Bill Jenks, who designed the piece with other science and art faculty from Texas A&M.

Finally, there's [Bathsheba Grossman](#) of Santa Cruz, who actually is displaying something that looks vaguely like traditional art -- until you realize the earrings, pendants and sculptures she makes are twisted into geometric shapes that would be difficult or impossible for an unaided sculptor to produce.

She accomplishes the trick using CAD/CAM software and a prototyping machine that allows her to make wax prototypes of virtually any size -- from a thimble to garden sculptures -- and to reproduce the same shapes indefinitely.

The prototypes are dipped into wet plaster, creating molds that molten metal can be poured in.

And, in a gallery filled with the unconventional, it's somewhat comforting to know that you can buy her pendants for just \$70.

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