

*Automatic Speleology* (video still: vault), 2010

**EXHIBITION CHECKLIST**

All artworks are by Jesse Stiles unless noted otherwise.  
All artworks have been made available courtesy of the artist.

**Automatic Speleology, 2010**

Multi-channel video projections, LED lights, spotlights,  
Glass resonators, robotic drumming, and electronic sound  
Variable dimensions

**MAIN GALLERY:**

Three-channel generative HD video  
Four-channel generative sound  
Computer controlled LED installation

**VAULT:**

Generative HD video  
Two-channel generative sound  
Computer controlled LED installation

**WINDOW PROJECTS:**

Computer controlled robotics  
Color changing spotlights  
Glass resonators



*Automatic Speleology* (view of the vault), 2010

**THE WAREHOUSE GALLERY**

Syracuse University  
350 West Fayette Street  
Syracuse, NY 13202

The Warehouse Gallery is an international contemporary art venue of the SUArt Galleries at Syracuse University. The gallery's mission is to present exhibitions and programs by artists whose work engages the community in a dialogue regarding the role the arts can play in illuminating critical issues of our life and times.

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**JESSE STILES: AUTOMATIC SPELEOLOGY**

9 MARCH—29 MAY, 2010

**THE WAREHOUSE GALLERY**  
GUIDE#11

Stiles, an emerging new media artist, musician, and designer of electronic systems based in DeRuyter, NY, realized a computer based installation for his first solo museum exhibition at The Warehouse Gallery. In the vein of Nam June Paik, Stiles visualizes sound using computers, LED lights, and video projectors. The exhibition is divided into the main gallery, the vault, and the Window Projects that can be viewed as one single work or variations on a theme: visual music. The main gallery consists of four video projections and LED panels, while the vault shows a multi-media cinema light piece. Stiles extends his work idea into public space via the Window Projects where he uses glass resonators to transform each of the three windows into a large speaker.

Cover: *Automatic Speleology*, 2010



# AUTOMATIC PERFORMANCE

ANJA CHÁVEZ

*I think everybody should be a machine. ... The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do.*

Andy Warhol<sup>1</sup>

*Numerical coding of media (principle 1) and the modular structure of a media object (principle 2) allow for the automation of many operations involved in media creation, manipulation, and access. Thus human intentionality can be removed from the creative process, at least in part.*

Lev Manovich<sup>2</sup>

work is happening and being created in real-time as we perceive it; a live performance, as it were, yet without a performer and where the computer has replaced the conductor. *Automatic Speleology* is the result of a close collaboration between human (programming of the software) and technology (the computer 'running' the software). The show does not simply run on its own like a prerecorded video or sound installation. Rather, it creates itself, without repetition, presenting constantly changing sequences of images as long as the software and technical equipment continues to function. Today's digital artists can be engineers, and/or software programmers, as is the case with Jesse Stiles. His art touches on both science and technology, and he works with engineers and designers, such as Michael McAllister (industrial design) who designed and fabricated the robotic drummer display for the Window Projects.<sup>3</sup>

"takes its cue from Cage's assertion to listen to all sounds, natural and man-made, and in doing so eventually shifted the stage to the environment itself rather than the concert hall; ... sound art as the ultimate destination for the removal of the performer/audience relationship."<sup>4</sup>

In his first solo exhibition, Stiles has created *Automatic Speleology*, a three part audiovisual work consisting of multi-channel video projections, LED lights, spotlights, glass resonators, robotic drumming, and electronic sound. These elements are synchronized and orchestrated through a network of computers running software developed by the artist. As the title suggests, *Automatic Speleology* explores the depths of visual and aural space. One computer generates the images, another the sound, while the third controls the other two. Rather than a clear narrative, Stiles' work

the artist gave instructions on how to perform in front of the camera,<sup>5</sup> a gravestone, a military helicopter, the US flag, and a child's drawing titled *It Was Not a Fair Fight*, alluding perhaps to the country at war (past or present). Sounds sometimes briefly match the images. Stiles acts as what he calls a mediator engaging the viewer, as does performance art, to give the work a personal meaning.<sup>6</sup> His images also draw upon 1960s experimental film, where snippets of 'reality' allude to a narrative but deny its coherence.

In the vault, the images from the main gallery are repeated and mixed with new images, yet the angle of projection has changed, the speed with which the images appear and disappear is dramatically reduced, the music becomes softer, and LED lights mirror the changes in the music. One can hear the sound of someone walking, cars driving on rain soaked streets, the



*Automatic Speleology* (view of the Window Projects), 2010 (From left to right) Michael McAllister, Jesse Stiles, and Olivia Robinson during the installation at The Warehouse Gallery



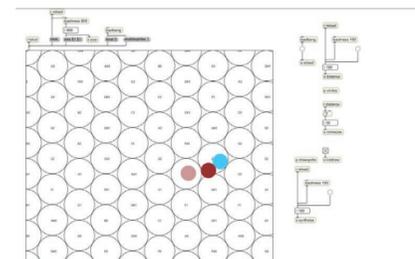
From left to right:  
*Automatic Speleology* (video still: main gallery), 2010  
*Automatic Speleology* (video still: main gallery), 2010  
*Automatic Speleology* (video still: vault), 2010

How does one write about audiovisual art without alluding to a hierarchy of either sound or image? How can we perceive *Automatic Speleology*—multimedia artist and musician Jesse Stiles' first solo exhibition—as a traditional exhibition since the audio-visual

The collaboration between artists and engineers is nothing new—recall Jean Tinguely's self-destructive kinetic sculpture *Homage to New York* (1960), created in conjunction with engineer Billy Klüver. Nor is the artist's fascination with machines and technology anything new—think of Leonardo da Vinci's sketches of flying machines in the fifteenth century. In our own times, the computer has irretrievably changed the ways we think, communicate, operate, and socialize. For the past thirty to forty years, artists have experimented and critically engaged with computers. Beginning in the 1960s, Nam June Paik experimented with robots and Warhol thematized the temptation for art to become "machine-like". It is musical composition that first embraced computer technologies. Sound art, coined in the mid 1980s and used as a term since the late 1990s, "comes from the appreciation of the total environment of sounds, both wanted and unwanted" and

evokes what the spectator might imagine while viewing a familiar landscape and sounds associated with nature, a city, or a synthesizer. It also explores how synthesized sound can mirror the multiple ways of perceiving a constantly changing visual object.

In the main gallery, each of the three projections is matched to its own voice or speaker. A few images stand out, such as the artist playing a trumpet, close-ups of people's faces to whom



*Hexagonal Grid Patch*, 2010 Created in the graphical programming environment Max/MSP, this software draws a hexagonal map of musical pitches and explores the map randomly to create the evolving harmonic and melodic sequences in *Automatic Speleology*.

wind, a turn signal, and synthesized sounds. In this way, time seems to come to a standstill and sound appears and disappears, as do the images that turn, almost like the pages of an endless book.

For The Window Projects, Stiles and McAllister mounted robotic drummers onto the windows that are illuminated by spotlights of varied color. Glass resonators convert the windows into large speakers transmitting rhythmic sounds to the outside world—physically reaching out to anonymous pedestrians in downtown Syracuse, and turning the Warehouse building into a sculpture.

In all its manifestations, *Automatic Speleology* both challenges the traditional notion and space of performance and exhibition and offers up to its viewers the bewildering and apparently paradoxical phenomenon of computer-generated real-time experience.

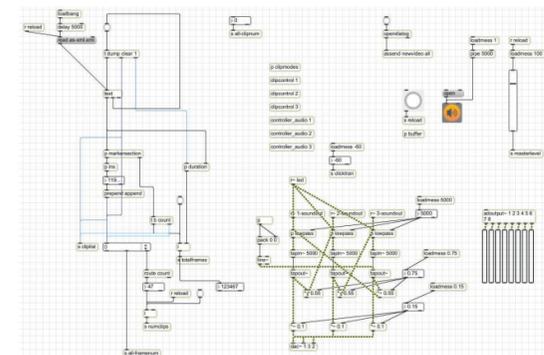
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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- Michael McAllister for the design and fabrication of the robotic drummers
- Olivia Robinson, Production Assistant
- Stephen Belovarich
- Carl Gruesz
- Phidgets Inc.
- Light Work

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*Conductor Patch*, 2010 Created in the graphical programming environment Max/MSP, this software controls timing events for the *Automatic Speleology*.

## NOTES

- 1 Andy Warhol, quoted from G. R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Answers From 8 Painters, Part 1: Jim Dine, Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein," in: *ARTnews*, October 1963, 26.
- 2 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 32.
- 3 Conversation with the artist on March 1, 2010. Unless otherwise noted, all artist related information or quotes refer to this conversation.
- 4 Quoted from Alan Licht, *Sound Art. Beyond Music, Between Categories*. (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 116, 123-124, 216. See also Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance. A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), X, 157; See also: Christiane Paul, *Digital Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 25.
- 5 Conversation with the artist on March 5, 2010.
- 6 Christiane Paul, *Digital Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 21.