



Touch it!

Three exhibits put the "art" in "participation"

by JENESSA KENWAY

VIEWING ART is usually a spectator sport. But once in a while, exhibits pull you in to intimately interact with the artist and contribute in the creative process. May offers an abundance of participatory art projects, including Mark Rumsey's mini mountains of folded paper, Joel Spencer's room full of stickers and Wendy Kveck's spackled frosting and tasty-looking acrylic goodies.

Entering **Noctilucant** at the Contemporary Art Center, you hear the hushed crackle of the folded paper massed into almost ceiling-high piles. The purplish glow from halogen lights placed beneath softly filters up through the cones of white. The luminous, stacked clusters look like clouds that have come to ground. Volunteers spent three days and 14 reams of paper working with Michigan-based artist Mark Rumsey, folding and stapling the abstracted origami structures. This group effort gave physical form to invisible particles of information: memories, jokes, dreams, stories and experiences of the participants.

"At first it seemed like a lot of work," says CAC board member and volunteer Carol Treat. "But there were a lot of awesome stories and you really got to know each other."

Noctilucant refers to ice crystals collecting and joining in the upper atmosphere, forming clouds too faint to see. Likewise, the paper clouds show no visible evidence of the interactions and conversations of the participants who created them, but their existence testifies to a transformative event occurring, spawning further invisible particles dispersed out into the community as participants take the story with them. As a stack of paper grew higher -- like molecules joining -- points and ridges formed a linked structure, with any shift or removal causing tremors or a small avalanche. The result of a structure formed by communal effort is that each piece is important; removal affects the whole, poetically equating links between neutrons in a chemical to individuals linked within society.

We switch our math from addition to **Subtraction** with local artist Joel Spencer's sticker installation at Trifecta Gallery. Spencer lined the walls of the gallery's side room with rows of juicy red graphics, hearts, squares, dots and diamonds; such bright wallpaper strips would've worked well in a Wonderland setting. Last First Friday, participants paid \$5 for the opportunity to remove and rearrange the shapes onto a smaller blank canvas, to take home. All the while, the event was being recorded with stop-motion photography.



PHOTO: ERI KING
Work by Wendy Kveck at The Cosmopolitan

A few remnants remain, dotting the walls of the now-darkened space. In the gap created, a flickering projection displays the delightfully frenzied recording. Like an old silent movie sped up, visitors buzz about the space, chatting with gallery attendants, removing stickers with quick, jerky motions, occasionally climbing up on the table to reach the high ones.

For many, removing the stickers was the art, and they weren't concerned with keeping the panel they had arranged. The installation and charming film documentation made vibrant and humorous commentary on art, not only as a product to be consumed by purchase, but simply the experience of consuming it.

"I liked how anyone could enjoy the art," says Spencer. "You could be a pretentious art collector or a kid."

Speaking of consuming art, Las Vegas local Wendy Kveck's art looks good enough to eat. For her residency at the Cosmopolitan, called **The Pageant of the Amuse Bouche**, Kveck constructed three enormous cakes and frosted them with joint compound. A nearby table displays a pastry plate filled with colorful acrylic paint and Spackle-frosted dessert abstractions. The biomorphic goodies reveal inclinations towards bodily parts and functions with an array of Freudian interpretations. The sugary baubles provide a viewer-participation element, as Kveck allows visitors to select decoration placement, once the frosting of the giant cakes is complete.

Exploring female rituals, Kveck has assigned each cake a decadent representation of a modern female archetype -- bachelorette, bride, showgirl -- encompassing a host of indulgent associations that come with those experiences, ranging from gluttony to over-the-top attire. An abstracted musical track featuring six local women's stories about weddings, proposals, showgirl days and more will further layer the experience with mixed emotions. Guests are invited to write down memories, thoughts and opinions regarding the three archetypes on small note cards, to be placed in photo albums along with wedding, party and Vegas photographs donated to the exhibit. While these archetypes can be found everywhere, they have an especially strong presence in Las Vegas.

Artists who incorporate participation into their art bring their conceptual objectives down to a physical level, allowing viewers to experience the ideas with their minds and shape them with their hands. A painting may soon be forgotten, but viewers who have taken part in the process take a piece of the art with them, embedding it into their memory.

Noctilucent Wednesday-Saturday, 2-7 p.m., Sunday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., and by appointment, through June 16; Contemporary Art Center, 107 E. Charleston Blvd., #120, 382-3886. **Subtraction** Monday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., through May 25; Trifecta Gallery, 107 E. Charleston Blvd. #135, 366-7001. **The Pageant of the Amuse Bouche** Wednesday-Sunday, 6-11 p.m., through June 10; P3 Studio, The Cosmopolitan, 3078 Las Vegas Blvd. South, 698-7000. Artist reception: June 7, 7-9 p.m.