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Taking art for a spin

By *John E. Mitchell, North Adams Transcript*
 Article Launched: 10/04/2007 12:02:54 PM EDT

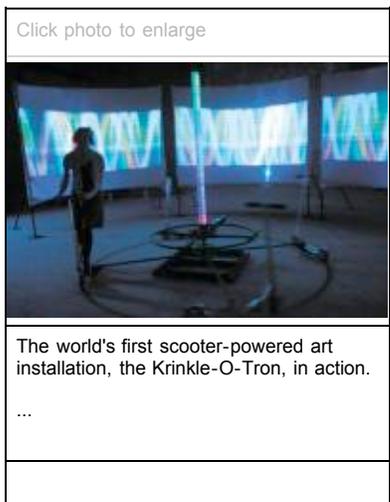
Thursday, October 4

At a time when the entire world is scuttling around for alternative and sustainable forms of energy, Leif Krinkle thinks he may have hit on the ultimate solution — scooter power.

Krinkle's self-made contraption the Krinkle-O-Tron is the result of that idea, an interactive sculpture that powers itself through the participation of art gallery visitors. Get a few people to take a spin on it and the installation comes to life on a rear screen projector that takes advantage of the riders.

"Kids use it way better than adults," said Krinkle. "I think adults are more concrete in their ideas of what is proper to do in a group of people and riding around on scooters doesn't figure as one of them, so I think the adults take a little more coaxing."

Krinkle doesn't consider himself an artist, nor does he consider the Krinkle-O-Tron a piece of art — in his mind it's more of a carnival ride appropriate to festivals. Krinkle's background is more in line with this that sort of presentation — his work has largely consisted of audio and video accompaniment for art performance, including a recent journey to the Burning Man Festival, where huge interactive installations



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and sculptures are the norm.

"The Krinkle-O-Tron is almost like a sideshow attraction," said Krinkle. "I think that's just me and my concrete thing, because in galleries there are a lot of proper things and etiquette and bureaucracy



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some interactive performance ideas he had — using sensors to create rhythmic sounds created by other participants, as well as video. These were the beginnings of some of the same impulses that lead him to create the Krinkle-O-Tron.

"There was this whole idea of creating interactive environments," said Krinkle, "controlling all your senses and having user interaction with them, giving everyone the sense that they had some input or some responsibility in creating the experience."

Seeking more technical experience, Krinkle enrolled in the Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University, where he was able to gain what further technical skills he required. The experience also opened him up to the further possibilities on the road he was traveling.

"Everything is malleable," said Krinkle, "whether it's sound or video or photography, some sort of digital or analog input into the computer, you can create or manipulate just about anything, even your reality if you get intense enough with the media. That's what I was going for with a few of these projects, recontextualizing the dimension that we experience reality in — whether it's time and space or how we physically interact with that — and building physical interfaces for digital media to do all that."

Robot music

Krinkle also works as the managing director of LEMUR — that is, League of Electronic Musical Urban Robots — a group based in Brooklyn that creates robotic musical instruments. One of the organization's most notorious and successful ventures was a live concert with guest performers, including the band They Might Giants. Krinkle and his cohorts also performed "Ballet Mecha-nique," a century-old piece of music written for 16 synchronized player pianos before the technology for performing it even existed.

Krinkle thinks that the best way to address the possibilities of technology in regard to the serious good it can do is illustrate these ideas through the whimsy of performance and art.

"It strikes up a conversation," he said.

One of those back and forths is with a company that is designing sustainable health clinics in Rwanda and Sudan that need to generate their own clean water and doesn't have the money or resources to maintain and operate a generator. Krinkle sees the Krinkle-O-Tron as the answer — a human powered water pump.

"One of the physicians we're talking to in Rwanda is saying 'Well, we don't have enough money for solar cells, we don't have time for the adults to be cranking generator pumps or whatever, we don't have the money or the mechanics to have a diesel generator,' and we're like 'Well, you have these children, right?'" said Krinkle. "Make a whole playground of electricity and water pumping play toys, things that could be made easily from whatever scrap material is around."

The Krinkle-O-Tron itself was made out of found scrap material — the most costly components were the scooters, which came in at \$150. If the idea of people scooting around on a homemade carousel strikes anyone as a bit "Gilligan's Island," well, it is —but sustainability and ingenuity don't have to be dour activities. Krinkle has learned that having a laugh serves creative unity well.

"Just having humor is so inspiring and such a connecting point for everybody to appreciate the work," he said.

Krinkle's dual interest of technology and sustainability are in his blood — he grew up on a peach orchard in Michigan that his father outfitted to be green.

and, again, this question of is it art or is it not, and I really just forgo those."

Fashioning environments

Krinkle began his creative career producing records in Chicago and Michigan. When that phase of his life ended, he realized that he could use his production software for

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"We have a greenhouse with solar panels and geothermal heating and a lot of things that were really ahead of their time when my dad was building the house in the late 70s," said Krinkle. "I always grew up working around tractors and having this idea that we are using non sustainable resources and we have to use them sparingly, we can't pollute the world."

Krinkle's father died when he was eight years old — Krinkle ran the orchard throughout his childhood and teen years. Though he moved on as an adult, he still has plans of returning to his agricultural roots, while adding an artistic element to it, influenced by the number of rural art communities and sculptural gardens that he has discovered through the years.

"I see going back there and setting up a residency," said Krinkle, "and doing intensive organic farming and having classes in art and sustainable practices and organic farming and canning and knitting and whatever we can do to create and promote sustainable living practices on this 50 acre farm and have a sort of art farm."

Krinkle sees that technology itself has made this dream a realistic one. The Internet has created a system through which no one is cut-off — and computers have provided a means to create art and experience in new forms. Krinkle has spent years learning these tools and figuring out how to apply them to real life by experimenting with them in his creations — and that, he thinks, is always the point of art.

"It's the new medium," said Krinkle. "If I were living in the 19th century, paints and canvasses and inks would be great, the printing press. It's just what we have access to — and the fact that the technology in everyday life gives the ability to modify that and make it personalized and make it artistic, it makes it so much more easy now, you're not stuck with the one aspect thing."

Leif Krinkle's "Krinkle-O-Tron" is currently on display at Greylock Arts in Adams. Visit www.greylockarts.net. Krinkle can be found online at www.leifkrinkle.com.

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