

A dazzling new exhibit

By [Sonya Ellingboe](#)

Before walking into Denver Art Museum's new exhibit "Blink! Light Sound and the Moving Image," park outside the door any previous notion that a work of art is by its nature quiet and still! And allow time to look and listen to videos that run 30 seconds to 30 minutes, although most are very brief. They tell stories that range from humorous to poignant.

"Blink! Light, Sound and the Moving Image" opened March 13 at the Denver Art Museum, its first large-scale exhibition devoted entirely to electronic and time-based media, technology-based art of the past 30 years. Many pieces are in the museum's collection. Some are site-specific, designed for this exhibit and others are loaned by collectors.

There are 55 pieces in this lively new show, "the earliest dating back 30 years when former Modern and Contemporary curator Diane Vanderlip started the collection," said museum director Christoph Heinrich. He observed that it offers "wonderful proof that this architecture really works," as he watched German artist Stephan Reusse's green electronic mice scamper up and down the walls of the second story stairwell.

As the door to the second floor Modern and Contemporary Gallery swings open, one is immediately welcomed by an engaging floor to ceiling-sized video of a singing Koi fish — with false eyelashes and glamorous lips. It's Alan Weinstein's "Three Love Songs from the Bottom of the Ocean."

Because the visitor needs time to watch this video and others, a bank of smart-looking lipstick red sofas and bean bag chairs await throughout the galleries.

In addition to the fish's soft songs, one hears a cacophony of other

sounds: telephones ring, voices of all sorts talk, a pair of feet tap dance on the ceiling of a passage into the quiet, enchanted space where Charles Sandison's "Chamber" plays up and around the walls and ceiling, constantly changing images. (Those who saw the "Embrace" exhibit will remember the piece, which is now in the DAM permanent collection, thanks to generous art patrons).

"This exhibition explores the possibilities that arise when artists use non-traditional methods to express an idea," said Jill Desmond, exhibition curator and curatorial assistant in the department of modern and contemporary art. Many of the objects in the exhibit have visible human images, but even those that don't often have a humanizing approach to technology. See Alan Rath's "Family" and "Looker II" or Nam June Paik's "Lady Secretary, Bilingual, Will Travel ..."

A more peaceful note is offered by Steina's large video installation, "Of the North," Sandison's "Chamber" and other items.

Desmond said there was no separate category in the modern and contemporary department's data base for its electronic art, so she had to survey the large collection and sort those objects from the rest.

An issue that has already come up despite the modern look of the show's objects is the matter of conservation. Perhaps the artists did not consider longevity, but it's the job of a museum to care for its collection.

Sarah Melching, director of conservation, talked about Nam June Paik's "Electronic Fish," to the left of the entrance, an early DAM acquisition. It includes a small 1948 Philco TV console, rabbit ears, an aquarium, black light, TV and sound. Melching's job is to uphold the artistic integrity of the piece, but the original analog workings are outdated. "We mitigated to a digital format for the exhibit. The artist wanted a control signal from a local TV station, so we added a tuning box for Channel 9," she said.

Koven Smith, director of technology, commented that he thinks the museum "bought the last 20 CRT projectors out there" for Bjorn Mellhus' "Still Men Out There," a six channel video installation with sound.

Desmond writes in a catalog of the collection that the museum "has organized a Variable Media Task Force, with representatives from curatorial, conservation, collections management, information technology, installation and registrarial departments to determine processes and procedures for collecting, reviewing and preserving objects with continually changing characteristics."

No industrial standards are in place and artists have not offered many guidelines in respect to these issues...

On the first floor, stop to look at "Feng Shui Brain," a site specific creation by Donald Fodness of Boulder, tucked under the stairs. And visit the nearby animation studio, where the original shop was located to learn how it's done and perhaps try it yourself.

If you go:

"Blink! Light, Sound and Moving Image" will run through May 1 in the Hamilton Building. The Denver Art Museum is on 13th Avenue between Broadway and Bannock streets. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays; 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Fridays; noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. This exhibit is free with general admission. (Free admission the first Saturday of each month). 720-865-5000, www.denverartmuseum.org.