

'Magical' cubes engage the senses

Gilbert Bouchard



VISUAL ARTS PREVIEW

Catherine Bechard and Sabin Hudon's Sonic Cubes

Showing at: Latitude 53 Gallery, second floor, 10248 106th St.

Until: Feb. 9

A humble children's toy inspired Montreal-based artists Catherine Bechard and Sabin Hudon to create their cutting-edge, multimedia installation at Latitude 53 Gallery.

Sonic Cubes is an array of six lightweight, wooden, wireless cubes with tiny speakers in each of the cubes' polished faces. Consider it the intellectual descendant of those tiny cylindrical cow-sound boxes that moo when you flip them over.

"This installation is meant to be a tactile, visual and sonic experience that engages many of your senses," Bechard says of their playful project.

"All the sounds that emerge as you flip these six cubes about are concrete and everyday sounds that never come back in exactly the same way. This means you get new sound scenarios that create themselves every time you move around and play with the cubes, much like all the musical pieces you can create from a set of instruments."

The installation is meant to be totally user-driven, producing sounds only when gallery visitors manipulate the cubes.



JOHN LUCAS, THE JOURNAL

Catherine Bechard and Sabin Hudon with their Sonic Cubes installation at the Latitude 53 Gallery

"This is about entering into a world of new, imagined spaces that allows you to leave with something you didn't have before," says Bechard.

Despite the fact the cubes are quite high-tech and complicated (each has a tiny wireless computer), the artists downplay the piece's technology.

"If we could have done the installation without using the technology, we would have," Hudon says. "The technology only serves the idea behind the piece."

The work took two years to develop.

"We don't want viewers to think about what is inside the cubes," he said. "Rather, we want to give the impression that it's seamless, magical."

The duo assigned a lot of importance to the sculptural and tactile realities of the piece, wanting the individual cubes to be fun and pleasant to handle, encouraging users to flip them about with impunity and create a multitude of sounds.

The longtime artistic partners love the fact the installation also blurs the idea of past and present.

"You have this immediate hit of memory or perception when you lift a cube and initially hear a sound, which is then overlapped by other sounds and perhaps revisited in a different context when you revisit that cube," Bechard says.