Sterling Allen, *Father and Son*, 2007, graphite, ink and Prismacolor on paper, Courtesy the artist and Art Palace Gallery, Austin

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Conversation

Confluence of Interests: A Conversation with Artist, Musician and Gallerist Paul Slocum

Josh Rios

And/Or Gallery opened in January 2006 and is run jointly by Paul Slocum and **Lauren Gray**. The store front gallery, near downtown Dallas, showcases a wide range of mediums, but focuses on new media artists and works. Paul and Lauren are both artists as well and collaborate in Tree Wave, a music/video/hacker group that has screened, performed and installed works at Deitch Projects, Exit Art, Eyebeam, VertexList, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, the README Software Art Festival in Denmark, Trasitio MX in Mexico City and in Dallas, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Barry Whistler and The Dallas Museum of Art. Tree Wave will be playing July 7th as part of Okay Mountain's after party series. Paul will be showing some new work at Okay Mountain in August along with Kevin Bewersdorf.

Josh Rios: What are the events that led up to the opening of And/Or Gallery? What was going on for you around this time?

Paul Slocum: Long story short, Lauren Gray and a friend of hers had the idea and they found the space. I was involved with the project some from the beginning, but Lauren's friend decided to bail and that's when I got heavily involved. I was ready to move to Austin at the time, and was pretty down on Dallas since two things I really liked in the art community-the Southside/UTD Artist Residency and Gray Matters Gallery-had just folded. But we had seen and performed/exhibited at some really cool spaces around the country and in Europe and thought it would be cool to have a similar space in Dallas. Part of what was nice about the spaces we'd seen was that they were showing good art, performances, screenings, etc. all in one space. We're just now getting around to adding performances at And/Or and hopefully screenings will come later.

JR: I am curious about what you think about this idea of new media art being separate from "regular" art. Is it the technical demands of showing the work that fuels this difference? Is it just terminology or is there a real palpable difference between the focus and interests of new media artists and artists working in traditional or other mediums, but incorporate computer culture into their work? It seems like more and more artists are addressing or utilizing Google images, search histories, chat rooms and so on, but don't use hacking, programming or technological manipulation to create their work.

Treewave, *Video for Sleep*

PS: It's not separated much, which is why we can easily do a two-person show with a new media artist and a meatspace artist in the same room. Art generally reflects what's happening in the world around us, and it's sure hard to miss the influence of computers and networks right now.

You could say that **Andy Warhol** is as much a pioneer of new media art as, say **Nam June Paik**, because a lot of what Warhol was interested in only existed because of

media technology. But it's interesting how his work is partly obsolete now because of advancements in media distribution and authoring technology. As a medium, of course photography is the original new media. It went through all the problems and growing pains that what we now call "new media" is going through. It allows for unlimited duplication and has some built-in questions about what art actually is. The technology itself had a big impact on the world.

Nam June Paik, *Electronic Moon #2*

JR: Can you elaborate on these growing pains? Photographers mimicked the conventions and contrivances of painting early on in its history as an artistic medium, dealing mainly with composition and certainly painterly effects. In my opinion, it wasn't until film technology came about that photography came into its own as new media. It took more technology to turn photography into the independent art form of film. Is there something like this happening for new media arts right now, or has that mark already passed?

PS: Growing pains isn't the right term-I meant "struggle;" to be accepted as a legitimate art form and to gain the support of institutions and collectors. I often get asked how video can be collected when it can be copied.

Then we can get into the whole thing of artificial scarcity, which I've just come to accept as a necessary evil. Most of the new media artists I know make editioned and un-editioned work to balance it out.

But yeah, it does seem to take some additional advances in technology to move new media art along, partly because a lot of tools were just too expensive to work with until recently. Also, technology is moving so fast that it seems to take artists some time to really get their head around what's going on.

JR: How do you argue for collecting video work at your gallery when it is so easily copied?

PS: I just explain that it's pretty much the same as photography-work is editioned. It's not really to the collector's advantage to distribute the work, so that's not an issue. Even if someone gets a copy of the video, it's (usually) not worth anything and you can't exhibit it publicly unless you have a certificate. Also, I think there are a lot of collectors whose primary goal is to support artists that they think are doing important work, so market value and economics are not always of primary concern.

JR: I'd like to switch gears a little and talk about your history as an artist. Can you elaborate some on the ideas in your work, how you came to music and how you first began integrating hacking and sound. When and how did you move from music venues into gallery settings?

Paul Slocum, *Color Sequencer*
Video sequence programmed on three Atari 2600s designed to drive three monitors facing the wall.

PS: I was writing generative music programs on a Commodore 64 when I was in junior high. Then in high school, I started working a lot with MIDI, and when my sequencer software broke, I started working with an odd interface of using voice and guitar samples triggered by a drum machine through MIDI. This was the first time I realized how interesting it could be to use electronic music interfaces the wrong way.

Click to listen to Treewave's *C64 Data*.

Through the 90s I did a lot of ridiculous house music and also recorded music with Chad Hopper (Palfloat) in a band called The Science Club or The Sleuths. We used anything that made a sound that we could find. This prompted me to get back into hacking the Commodore and Atari, but in a much more elaborate way than I had before. We also occasionally added visual or conceptual elements to our stuff, but we played shows less than once a year, so nobody ever saw or heard anything we were doing.

Then, eventually I made the printer synth, using 1985 Epson LQ-500 printers as musical instruments. I put everything on my website and I started getting asked to do installations for galleries. I started to think a little differently about the projects I was doing at that point, more visual and conceptual elements and not just sound tools.

Paul Slocum, *Dot Matrix Synth*

JR: You and Kevin Bewersdorf are doing a two person show at Okay Mountain in August. How do you know Kevin and what are some of the projects you are working on together? Not to give anything away, but maybe you could talk a little more about the conceptual and visual elements you mentioned.

Kevin Bewersdorf, *GEARt.e.k. Corporation Promotional Video 003*

PS: One of my good friends who does movie soundtracks met Kevin at some film festivals that were showing this awesome movie he worked on and starred in called *LOL: The Movie*. The movie sounded amazing and I got a screener, and since Kevin essentially plays himself and includes a lot of his own art, music and performance in the movie, I could tell that he was somebody I would probably get along with. When I heard he was moving to Austin, I emailed him. Now we usually hang out when I'm in Austin.

I'm probably showing my *Deep House for Symphonic Band and Choir* which is, as the name describes, installed as sheet music, a sound loop and some grow lamps. Also, some prints of pictures I found on the internet of a swinger's club that looks like a stoner kid's apartment and a demo video I made for a blogging club with

my webcam and some unconventional open-source video editing software.

I think Kevin's showing a video from a chiropractor's office and a remake of the same video that he made for that chiropractor. Also, a series of photos he took of subdivision signs in Chicago along with another set of photos of the same signs taken a couple of years later coincidentally by an art student.

We've gone through a lot of titles, but I think the current title for the show is *Passing Time and the Changing Seasons of Time*.

JR: Going back to the gallery, what criteria do you use to decide what type of work you present in your space? What do you have planned for the future of And/Or?

PS: I generally choose work based on a gut feeling that's difficult to explain, but I think a lot of the work we show either has conceptual elements or a narrative behind it, some sort of complex system underneath. I like work that I don't entirely understand at first. We show more artists from New York than anywhere else.

At And/Or we're going to just keep doing what we're doing but, are trying to add more music performances. We have a group show in August guest curated by Titus O'Brien. And I'm working on getting Kristin Lucas to show sometime in the near future, which looks like it will happen.

I'm seriously considering open-sourcing the gallery in the fall sometime, which means I'll put all internal details of what we do on our public website. This means all money spent, all sales, artists we're considering for future shows, etc. will all be public knowledge. The idea is to encourage more external involvement, to explore an alternate business philosophy and for the gallery to become more of an educational tool. We might also do a show related to this.

JR: That sounds amazing. I love the idea of demystifying the internal operations of the gallery. It always feels like something that shouldn't be talked about for some reason that I never understood. Thanks so much for taking time to talk with me and good luck on all your projects.

Josh Rios is a partner at Okay Mountain, a student of art history and a working artist. His work was most recently shown in Coconuts at Art Palace, Staff Infection at Okay Mountain and Words at Work at the UTSA Satellite Gallery.

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