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Loop System Quintet: Photo by J. Shaw

Conrad Shawcross: The Steady States

This winter, the Walker Art Gallery will be presenting a major solo exhibition by artist Conrad Shawcross. The exhibition, which runs from 26th November '05 to 26th February '06 will contain new, specially commissioned, sculptures.

2005 is Einstein Year, a celebration of the scientist who changed the way we view our world. In 'Conrad Shawcross: The Steady States,' science is fused with art in three new pieces that draw upon cosmology, quantum mechanics and musical theory to form a fascinating sensory experience.

One of the sculptures, Space Trumpet, was inspired by a trip the artist made to see the microwave radio telescope in New Jersey. In 1963, this telescope had inadvertently picked up the microwave "background noise" coming uniformly from all directions in space, left over from the birth of the Universe. This was the first time that sound and radio waves, rather than light, were used to explore and map out the universe. Its findings gave great credit to the Big Bang theory.



Space Trumpet: Photo by Jonathon Shaw

Space Trumpet allows the viewer to climb into what looks like a shed on stilts at the listening end of a giant ear trumpet. The technical dexterity needed to construct on such scale is obvious and quite breathtaking. We are dwarfed by the construction, which invites us to consider the infinite scale of outer space and our tiny and futile position within it.

Another piece, called Loop System Quintet, is a line of five interconnected oak machines. Each of the five mechanisms produces a three dimensional harmonic loop of light. Conrad says: "This system has been born out of a marriage between quantum mechanics and musical theory. A hybrid of romance and empiricism, the machine is all folly and with no product, as a machine, it is tragic".

The final sculpture is a reconstruction of a harmonograph, a popular Victorian device that created patterned drawings by means of a pendulum. Harmonic Tower is a tall and dramatic contraption, which despite its size creates delicate images. The large-scale drawings produced by this six-metre high tower are displayed alongside it and work as a visual interpretation of harmony.

Ann Bukantas, curator of fine art at the Walker Art Gallery, says: "Conrad is one of the most exciting and innovative of a new generation of sculptors, so it is thrilling to show his work within the context of the

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Walker Art Gallery's historic sculpture collections. His work is intellectually rigorous and challenging in its inspirations. The end result is visually stunning and dramatic, combining light, sound and motion."



Harmonic Tower: Photo by Jonathon Shaw

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