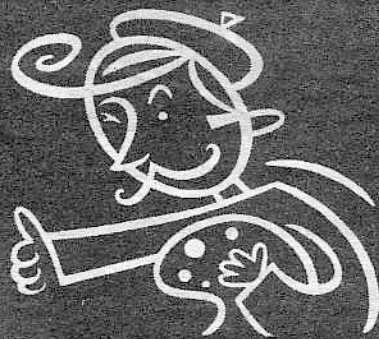


Art



Dark Star

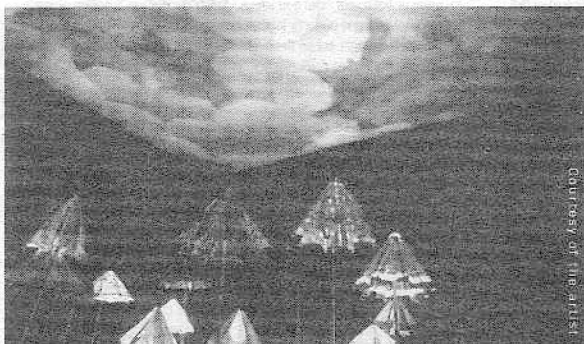
Quebécois artist Diane Landry blows into Rice Gallery

BY KEITH PLOCEK

It sounds so strange at first, like a harmonica ditty played by a tone-deaf inmate through his nose, but you grow used to it, this sour tune. It lulls you into a daze, its rhythm set to the pace of human breath. It's coming from Diane Landry's "**Flying School (École d'aviation)**," one of the best installations Rice University Art Gallery has hosted in years, and it's a sad, beautiful sound, one that permeates the space.

"Flying School," which has had previous lives at galleries in Toronto, Winnipeg, Boston and Stockholm, consists of 24 apparatuses timed to go off at preordained intervals, causing mechanical blooms of sight and sound. Each contraption is topped with an umbrella, which opens and closes when its timer kicks in. These umbrellas are the first thing you see when you enter the space, but they're not even half of the magic.

Each apparatus consists of various parts, and you can almost imagine the disconcerted looks the project must've received when the Québécois artist first proposed it: *Okay, so I'm going to have these bellows, like from accor-*



Rube Goldberg would've been proud of "Flying School."

dions, right, and inside each bellows I'm going to place a slice of a harmonica, so that way each apparatus will make a different note. And then a motorized wheel, set to go off at regular intervals, will spin around, stretching the bellows in and out. This wheel will also be attached to a long stick, which will have a piece of tape measure stuck to it for no apparent reason, and which will be attached to an umbrella, causing the umbrella to open and close whenever the wheel's turning. But these umbrellas, see, will be underlit by bulbs that'll project their shadows on the ceiling, creating images that look like flowers in bloom. Capisce?

In other words, Rube Goldberg would've been damn proud of this music box.

Landry lays bare the inner workings of her installations, and the rotating discs and flashing lights of "Flying School" are just as much a part of the work as are the shadows on the ceiling and the tune in the air. All this business might make the work seem conceptually cluttered, but Landry isn't necessarily using every single thing to make a larger point. For her, the process is part of the product. This creates a nice juxtaposition of cause and effect, calling to mind Roxy Paine's art-making machines or the creations of Jeff Shore and Jon Fisher. And it's just cool to sit back and watch the machines work, popping open umbrellas while humming sad tunes. The whole cycle lasts about 30 minutes, although it's tough to tell where it starts and ends.

Also on display at the gallery is another Landry installation, "**Mandala Naya**." The term *mandala* is Sanskrit for "circle," and with it come all kinds of connotations about purity and the world. *Naya* is a highfalutin Sanskrit word that refers to how we should behave, although in Canada it also means "a company that produces natural spring water," and this company's water bottles surround a plastic laundry basket in Landry's installation. The basket is attached to the wall on its side, and the artist has set up a contraption on a tripod that moves a bare light bulb alternately closer to and farther from the basket, creating a circular shadow that shrinks and grows on the wall. Watching the cycle is like seeing a supernova collapse and explode.

The artist is as into performance as she is installations, and shadows are usually there when she adds herself to the mix. In a heralded 1993 performance, Landry wore ice skates mounted on wooden rockers and walked, slowly becoming more confident and then faltering, her shadow depicting the outline of a girl, then a woman, then a crone. This weekend, she'll be at Rice performing **The Cod (La Morue)**, a DJish performance in which she'll spin various domestic objects on dual turntables. Behind her there will be lights set up (duh), and these lights will

create a narrative of whirling shadows. Based on what we've seen so far, it should be good.

In Plato's allegory of the cave, the shadows on the wall were meant to be hollow replicas of real things (or forms, as he would say). But a replica can be just as important as its source, as Landry's work gracefully illustrates. Shadows are meaningful. And so are their objects. And they can be really beautiful when you look at them together.

Landry performs **The Cod (La Morue)** at 6:30 p.m. Friday, October 28. Rice Media Center, Rice University, entrance No. 8. "Flying School" and "Mandala Naya" run through October 30 at Rice University Art Gallery, entrance No. 1. For information, call 713-348-6069 or visit www.ricegallery.org. Free.