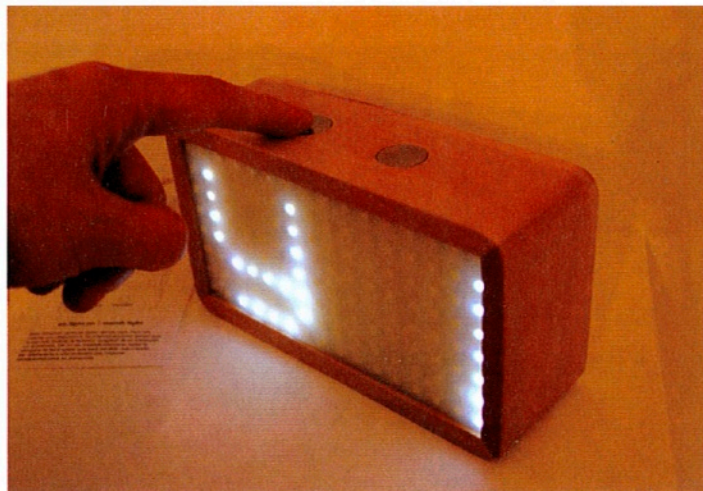


## SANTA FE / ALBUQUERQUE

New Mexico hosts a range of new media art this summer in a pair of joint projects—

“Currents” and “Digital Latin America.”



“EN.LIGHT.EN,” 2009, **Hernando Barragán**

WOODEN BOXES, LEDs, MICROCONTROLLER

84" x 48" x 28½"

PHOTO: COURTESY 516 ARTS

A joint project to explore and advance new media art begins this summer in Northern New Mexico. Uniting the efforts of Albuquerque’s 516 ARTS and Santa Fe’s Parallel Studios, the aptly named “New Media New Mexico” launches with 516’s exhibition-centered “Digital Latin America” and Parallel’s annual festival of new media, “Currents 2014.”

One organizer said that the groundwork for electronic arts has long been set in the Land of Enchantment, citing the community that developed in the early 1980s around the work of pioneers Steina and Woody Vasulka, who moved to Santa Fe around that time. Today, new media is well represented in the state by the Electronic Arts program at the University of New Mexico, the new Media Arts Program at Santa Fe Community College, and the annual Outdoor Vision Fest at Santa Fe University of Art and Design. New Media New Mexico is an attempt to draw more attention to the work and the place. “For a century or longer New Mexico, has been about art and science and so [new media] is where they kind of meet,” says Parallel co-executive director Frank Ragano.

Running June 7 to August 30 with multiple exhibitions and events, “Digital Latin America” came out of the 18th annual International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA 2012), a traveling event that 516 hosted that year. 516 Executive Director Suzanne Sbarge and DLA project manager Teresa Buscemi said that they wanted to continue the momentum they had established with a Latin American forum at ISEA. “It was one day of a weeklong conference at the Natural Hispanic Cultural Center,” Sbarge recalls. “It was one of the most popular days of the conference.”

Like other institutions along the southern border of the US that have recently made the connection—the Getty and Hammer museums in LA, for instance, as well as Santa Fe’s own SITE Santa Fe—516

recognized that New Mexico’s proximity (geographically/culturally) to Central and South America should be better represented in North American art establishments.

“It just makes sense for our region to make that connection,” Buscemi says. “Technology has made areas of Central and Latin America more accessible, but they are also very contemporary.”

Currents, which runs June 13-29, is a cornerstone of Parallel’s programming, beginning in 2002 as an outlet for executive directors Ragano and Mariannah Amster, as well as their friends, who had trouble finding venues to showcase their work. By the 2010 iteration, the annual festival had gone international. The organizers pride themselves first on creating an event that celebrates imaginative uses of technology that go beyond the “technological gimmick,” in Ragano’s words, and, second, on providing a fun, immersive experience for all breed of art-enthusiast, even the uninitiated. “We have people who are really engaged in art on a daily basis and people who aren’t,” Amster says. “For one thing, it’s a very pervasive technology; it’s a bridge for people to experience the work.”

DLA hosts 16 artists from Latin America and the US, with exhibitions at multiple sites throughout Albuquerque, as well as an opening weekend symposium that addresses intersections of art, technology and science, and a block party in downtown Albuquerque. Currents, meanwhile, collects the works of 370 artists from around the world, primarily in El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe. Fortuitously, the New Mexico Rail Runner Express train connects the main venues for both events.

While the two projects have very different aims, attendees can expect a number of similarities in the variety of media employed at both. Consider *en.light.en* by Columbia’s Hernando Barragán at DLA and *Synthesis* by the Chicago duo Luftwerk at Currents. Both are interactive light installations that manifest in different ways according to the viewer, and both offer the possibility of new media as a mediator between human relationships, but whereas *en.light.en* presents a number of narratives initiated by the viewer, *Synthesis* creates shadows in primary colors, along with corresponding soundscapes, that increase in complexity as more viewers enter the field of the installation. To liken the two pieces because they use light, however, would be akin to comparing two paintings by the fact of their using oil paint, for instance.

The same could be said about comparing DLA and Currents. The most the two events have in common is the field of new media, and their different applications of it highlight just how far-reaching the field has already become. Notes Ragano of new media’s increasingly visible role in contemporary artistic practice, “I don’t think of it as displacing traditional sculpture or painting, but it’s definitely where a lot of the art is moving.”

—MATTHEW IRWIN