

ART

SPOTLIGHT: BRAKHAGE RETROSPECTIVE

A program of films by influential experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage kicks off the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art's fall "Electromediascope" of experimental film, video and new media. "Stan Brakhage Retrospective Evening" begins at 7 p.m. tonight in Atkins Auditorium and includes screenings of 11 Brakhage films dating from 1959 to 2003. Admission is free.

—Alice Thornton

SLOW MOTION

Nate Fors takes a risk with somewhat tame foray into digital technology

By ROBIN TRAFTON
Special to The Star

Nate Fors is one of Kansas City's finest local artists, a status he earns for consistently creating smart and inventive art.

Yet in "Loops," his second solo show at Joseph Nease Gallery, his experimentation with digital technology sometimes forfeits his usual aesthetic acumen.

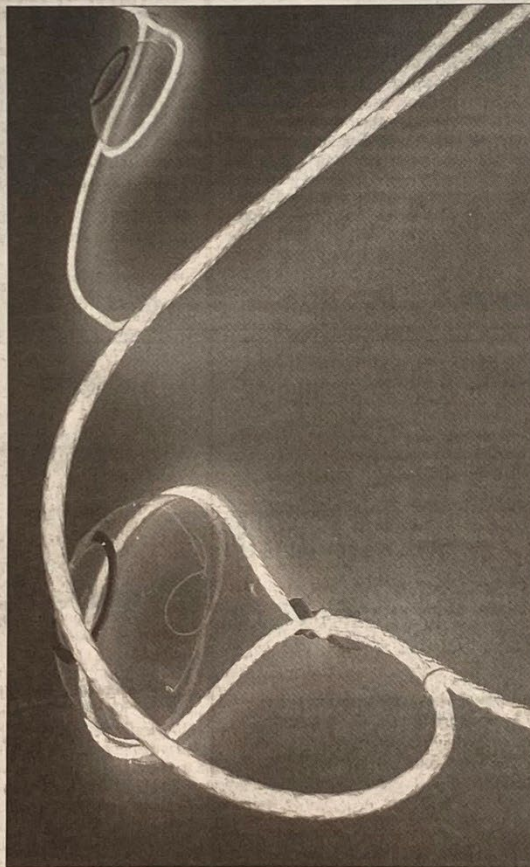
Fors is a past recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship and a Charlotte Street Fund award. His street installation for the 2000 Avenue of the Arts was listed by *Art in America* as one of that year's 23 best public artworks in the United States. For the past decade, he has exhibited primarily in Kansas City, as well as in California and New York, and examples of his earlier work can be found in the collections of both the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, where he had an exhibit in 1991.

Today, Fors is best known for his large-scale, colorful abstractions of purposely irreverent and playful media. Inflated rubber tires, wispy feather boas, shiny plastics, fake fur, electric lights and vibrantly patterned fabric have filled walls and floors in unabashed collages.

While his reputation is one of never being timid about experimenting with luxurious texture and excessive color, the crux of his talent has been his ability to convince such brazenly untraditional materials to assume topical intellectual content. In his work, meaning is accrued subjectively without resolution and leisurely tied to such weighty issues as beauty, the decorative and even the feminine.

But in "Loops," Fors' boisterous visuals arrive tamed, harnessed and scaled back. Gone are the itchy textures and sensually colorful materials of his past sculptural works and the physical and emotional rewards they provided.

In most of the show, an interest in imagery arrived at through new technology displaces the corporeal texture of the real world. It pushes the work into a new dimension that feels sophisticated, composed and



Courtesy Joseph Nease Gallery

Detail of "Bold One" (2003), by Nate Fors, part of his exhibit "Loops," at the Joseph Nease Gallery.

a bit slick, even as it takes up the age-old issue of illusionism on a flat surface.

This change in direction is best evidenced in "Spool," a DVD video projection installation — Fors' first attempt at video art. For roughly 32 minutes, the hovering camera lulls in and out of focus while observing the minute details of his working materials.

Long, lingering scenes of wrinkles in fabric, fuzzy string and pink

shiny plastic are interspersed with monochromatic screens, to the accompaniment of mind-numbing music at a speed just above comatose.

In a phone interview, Fors said the video is a study of color and materials. It is about focus and its role in making quality art, he said.

The goal of his meditative video, Fors said, was to purge the fast-paced visual bombardment associated with cable television and "to

THE SHOW

"Nate Fors: Loops" continues at the Joseph Nease Gallery, 1819 Central, through Oct. 11. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday and by appointment. Call (816) 421-2166 for information.

slow things down." He hopes the viewer will experience it like a Color Field painting in motion, and he does not expect people to hang in there for the whole thing.

Long or short term, Fors' materials in slow motion fail to yield dramatic or insightful moments, leaving us with just the mundane. Still, credit should be given to an established artist for taking risks instead of rehashing a successful style.

Fors also shows five large digital C prints mounted on Plexiglas. Their collaged imagery, which includes fields of upbeat color ornamented with oversized cutouts of yellow yarn weavings, plastic flowers and chump beads, was created with his scanner or exported digital video.

Fors may have stopped painting on canvas in 1999, but he did not abandon the idea of the "painting," and here, too, he enjoys tapping into its weighty history. The works' purposely rough cut-and-paste jobs create moments that call attention to the artists' hand, even if that "touch" was simply a click of the mouse.

In the show's most successful work, "Bold One Liner," Fors draws an improvisational wall doodle in the darkened room with glowing white light, a fiber optic cable that swoops and loops, punctuated only with inverted plastic bowls. Although at first it, too, looked naked without the adornment of a few feathers or painted tires, it works well, clearly demonstrating Fors' capacity to generate interesting form, while rejuvenating the show with lighthearted warmth.

But then Nate Fors has always treated the object seriously and the process playfully.

"I take the 'fun' and 'whimsical' as serious business," he says. "Humor is serious."