

The Machine in the Garden

Nancy Paterson



The Machine in the Garden is an interactive installation which deals with gambling and spirituality. The interface for this work is a custom- designed casino slot-machine. Three liquid crystal displays [LCD's] on the front face of the machine display scrolling video imagery when the viewer pulls the slot-machine arm. Identical video imagery is simultaneously displayed on large color monitors, mounted above and behind the slot-machine. Each video display focuses on one of three themes: imagery of war; talking heads of politicians and game-show hosts; and childrens' commercial television programming. In imitation of the action of a casino slot-machine, the scrolling imagery on each video display increases gradually in speed and then comes to a random, rolling stop on one of three final images: a woman's face with hands covering her eyes, ears or mouth. The use of the Buddhist motif — "See no evil, Hear no evil, Speak no evil" — emphasizes our postmodern obsession with gambling and spirituality. Increasingly, we turn to miracles.

Einstein's theory of Relativity eliminated Newton's illusion of absolute space and time, and the combined research of quantum mechanics and chaos theory have shown the flaws in the belief that reality is predictable. As inevitably as we turn to organized religion for reassurance faced with our mortality, and countless other systems of spiritual belief for their promises of miracles, we are drawn to games of risk and chance. Reconciling spirituality with our apparently reckless attitude toward technology becomes less problematic when we acknowledge that they are opposite sides of the same coin. Playing the odds and betting to win is a decidedly postmodern response to a failing faith in technological utopianism. This installation counters the optimism and passive acceptance that women are expected to feel toward technology with the real impact it has had on their lives. The juxtaposition of old and new technology draws the viewer into an examination of popular culture in relation to the current revolution in micro-electronics.

Three PIONEER LD-V8000 laserdisc players and a custom-designed controller comprise the hardware for this installation. Equipment support provided by PIONEER and CASINO. THE MACHINE IN THE GARDEN was produced with the assistance of *The Canada Council* and the *Ontario Arts Council*.