

Kal Spelletich

DAILY REPUBLIC

Kal Spelletich's art: Where man meets machine

By Amy Maginnis-Honey

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SF

248 Utah Street
SF, CA 94103
+ 415 399 1439

NY

313 W 14th Street 2F
New York, NY
By appointment only

WEB

www.cclarkgallery.com

BENICIA — An awakening.

That's what artist Kal Spelletich hopes will happen as visitors see his work at Arts Benicia.



“The best thing art can do is inspire people to go on their own journey,” said Spelletich, this year's Arts Benicia Artist in Residence.

Art has taken Spelletich, a 52-year-old San Francisco resident, around the globe. The Benicia exhibit is keeping him close to home while exploring a new city.

The gallery, located in the historic arsenal, has provided the Iowa native with lots of fodder. He's photographed flowers in the area that are part of the exhibit. Outside the gallery, he's harnessed the wind that controls a piece of art located inside.



A generic introduction to his work is the marriage of art and technology.

“It’s interfacing people with art and technology, making it fun and confusing, almost like a riddle,” he said.

The concept of his Benicia show centers on a portal to another dimension. Guests will see a creation that includes a motor from a treadmill and a pulley from a chocolate-making machine. There’s a camera attached, so visitors can see themselves on a monitor as they approach. A laser pointer, also attached, projects a small green dot that travels the white ceiling in a circular motion, representing a portal.

Spelletich spent hours devising a drawing machine controlled by motion sensors.

“Just put your hand in front of it and the pen does it all,” he said. While each drawing is unique, the idea is for visitors to draw their own portal.

Visitors can also try their hand at imitating Jimi Hendrix — Spelletich hung wire that stretches across one area of the gallery. The resonance can be adjusted with the help of a gear box and pulley system.

There’s also the coffee pot he “cannibalized” that warms up water then puts it in a beaker for hot tea.

A chemistry set for his ninth birthday provided the impetus for his work. Spelletich began by blowing up aerosol cans in fires and experimenting with electricity, fire and fireworks.

Working at his father's construction company provided another artistic outlet.

His father didn't understand his pursuit of art, Spelletich said.

"My dad raised roses. He must have had as many as 40 bushes at a time," Spelletich said. There was beauty in the roses, just as there was beauty in art, he would tell his father.

Spelletich said his mindset has changed over the years. A 1996 break-up led him to re-evaluate his life and shift the focus from cynicism to hopeful.

"I was devastated," he said. "I analyzed my life. I pulled away from art and bought books on Zen and Eastern philosophy."

He's made a video of people talking about their hope for the future that he plans on including in the exhibit.

Larnie Fox, executive director of Arts Benicia, has known Spelletich since the mid-1990s and has followed his work.

"His early stuff was more dangerous, dealing with machines and fire and how a lot of people encounter dangerous situations," Fox said. "His new work is less confrontational. It's about relationships and how people interact with machines."

The exhibit opens Thursday. The opening reception is 7 to 9 p.m. Aug. 3. Spelletich will talk about his art from 1 to 3 p.m. Aug. 10. Family art day is 1 to 3 p.m. Aug. 11. He will offer a workshop from 1 to 5 p.m. Aug. 18, the last day of the exhibit.

Arts Benicia is at 991 Tyler St., No. 114.