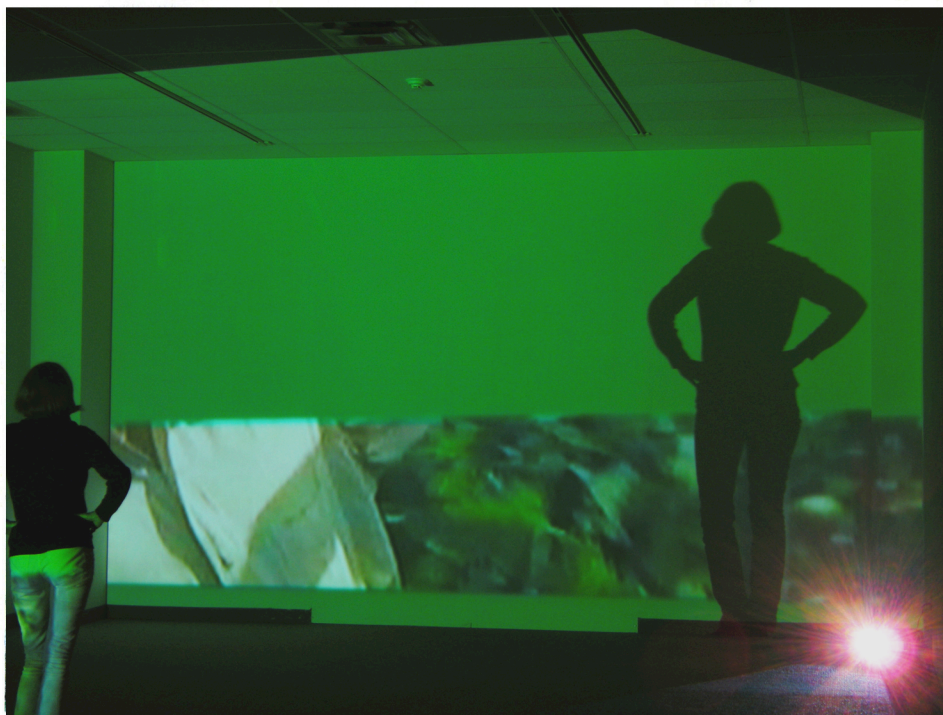


SHADOW DANCING: Conceptual artist Curtis Mitchell's current exhibition at the Sculpture Center effectively inserts viewers into the artwork itself. Digital projectors are positioned on the floor of the gallery so that silhouettes are cast on his wall-sized moving images.

COURTESY OF CURTIS MITCHELL



Amid layers of show's imagery, 'Personas' logic subtly revealed

DAN TRANBERG

Special to The Plain Dealer

From a purely visual standpoint, New York artist Curtis Mitchell's work often appears harsh and guttural. Over the past two decades, he has created sculptures and installations using such materials as broken glass, dirt and ketchup.

And yet, as his work is understood, it frequently becomes lyrical, insightful and downright profound.

Mitchell's current solo exhibition, "Personas," at the Sculpture Center in Cleveland, is easier on the eyes than is much of his earlier work. The show consists of two videos shown simultaneously from digital projectors that sit on the gallery's floor. As a result, two opposing walls of the gallery are alluringly awash with colored light.

The projectors show key scenes from the iconic movies "The Godfather" and "Pulp Fiction," over which vast bands of pure color are superimposed. As the scenes progress, the bands of color move up and down at varying speeds. So, at any given moment, viewers can see only a sliver of each scene.

Just as important, because the projectors are low to the ground, silhouettes of anyone who steps inside the gallery are also project-

REVIEW

The Sculpture Center

What: The solo show "Personas," an installation by Curtis Mitchell.

When: Through Saturday, Dec. 20.

Where: 1834 East 123rd St., Cleveland.

Admission: Free. Call 216-229-6527 or go to www.sculpturecenter.org.

ed onto the walls, creating another layer of ever-changing imagery.

This accumulation of visual information forms a complex equation. But it doesn't end there. The installation also has sound: Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, which seems rhythmically synchronized at times with the up-and-down motion of the bands of color.

The fundamental logic of it all begins to come into focus. The monochromatic bands of light, for instance, are red on one side of the gallery and green on the other. Red and green are complementary colors, opposite from one another on the color wheel.

Similarly, the movie clips thematically represent opposites: On

one side is the buoyant, sexually charged scene from "Pulp Fiction" in which John Travolta and Uma Thurman dance. On the other is the legendary scene from "The Godfather" in which Marlon Brando, as Don Corleone, stumbles to his death from a heart attack.

Other, subtler details may occur to only a few viewers, but it's worth noting, for example, that Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is also called "the apotheosis of the dance" (a title bestowed by Richard Wagner), thus suggesting that the two ends of the gallery represent, in a sense, the dance of life and the dance of death.

Whether one recognizes such details or not, the point is that nothing is arbitrary in Mitchell's work. Nothing is capricious and nothing is superfluous.

Every decision he makes has a reason behind it, and it's all there for those willing to take the time to figure it out. But perhaps the most essential aspect of "Personas" is that viewers are automatically projected into the work. Their likeness is right there, in the center of — and inseparable from — the action on the "screen."

Tranberg is an artist and writer living in Cleveland.