

POSTMASTERS
459 WEST 19TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10011

Weekend

The New York Times

ART GUIDE

PERRY HOBERMAN, Postmasters, 459 West 19th Street, (212) 727-3323 (through Feb. 19). Mr. Hoberman continues his witty and inventive attack on computer culture. In "Carthartic User Interface," throw balls at targets video-projected on a wall of keyboards and you might get a message like: "You have no mail. You have no friends. You have no life." Just as entertaining is "Timetable," a sleek round table with animated game imagery that you can control by manipulating dials around the periphery (Johnson).

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2000

ARTS ABROAD

Samuel Len

Art or Advertising? Either Way, Seoul Is Mesmerized

SEOUL, South Korea, Sept. 13 — A digital and media art exhibition here features not only museum pieces but also work shown on huge electronic screens on streets throughout the city and on walls and pillars in subway stations.

The exhibition, "Media City Seoul 2000," includes more than 60 pieces of interactive media art at the Seoul Metropolitan Museum downtown and at two adjacent exhibition halls. Visual works by internationally known artists also appear randomly on 42 electronic Jumbotron screens throughout the city.

"A city that's so dynamic and constantly growing — that's the landscape," said Barbara London, an associate curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and coordinator of one of the exhibition sites.

Works by Nam June Paik and 29 other artists from around the world are inserted between advertisements and news briefings on the Jumbotron screens. A Yahoo! Korea commercial, for example, is followed by "102," a brief visual presentation of scenes of Seoul by the French artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster in which he stresses certain colors that to him characterize each scene.

In one of the 13 subway installations, the German artist Bernd Halbherr wrapped panoramic photographs around pillars in stations in the downtown area. The photos, with the overall title "Transplantation," depict the street scenes just above, creating the illusion that the viewer has been transported to the ground level.

Another subway display, "Subway Comic Strip" by two South Korean artists, Kang Young Min and Lee Dong Ki, is a horizontal series of colorful and playful images in contrast to the sober functionality of the subway passageways.

More than a third of the country's population, or 16 million people, are Internet users, so South Korea is no stranger to the digital revolution. Yet exposure to digital art has not been widespread, said Song Misook, general artistic director of the exhibition. By using a wide range of public venues, the organizers hope to bridge the gap.

"Korea has a short history when it comes to media art," Ms. Song said. "We put together a program that could expose and satisfy a wide range of people. It's a textbook exhibition that tells people: 'this is what media art is about.'"

The exhibition aims to get viewers not only to see but also to "touch, experience and become one with the works of art," said Yu Hyun Jung, a computer design professor at Dongduk Women's University who has created a work for children for one of the viewing spaces.

"Cathartic User Interface" by the Brooklyn-based artist, Perry Hoberman consists of 39 keyboards mounted on a 12-foot-high vertical frame that serves as both viewing screen and target. Spectators throw rubber balls at error messages that flash on the screen.

"We insist," says one message. "Click O.K. to agree to something that you probably won't understand." If a viewer hits it with a ball, a new message says: "Warning: you can try to com-



Hwang Kwang-Mo for The New York Times

"Analogue Assemblage" by Nam June Paik in the Korean exhibition "Media City Seoul 2000."

plete this operation. But if you do, your computer will probably burst into flames."

Mr. Hoberman described his piece this way: "It's kind of a cross between a drive-in movie and an arcade game. The inspiration for the piece was really the daily frustration one has in working with digital technology."

Near the main exhibition hall is a high-tech journey into children's fantasy based on Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland." Danny Rozin, a professor of interactive telecommunication at New York University, said: "What's amazing about children is that they have imagination and don't need structure. They intuitively understand, whereas grown-ups will just stand and watch."

People in Seoul appear to welcome the explosion of art in their everyday surroundings. On the sidewalk of a major intersection in downtown

Seoul one recent evening, Lee Mi Ok, a 24-year-old college student, and her boyfriend, Hong Sung Hee, a 28-year-old office worker, seemed absorbed by three Jumbotron billboards but uncertain whether they were seeing advertisements or art.

"We've been here for close to an hour, but I don't think I saw any works of art on the electronic billboards," said Mr. Hong, adding, "I don't think I'd be able to recognize them even if I did see them."

Ms. Lee admitted that she had not visited the exhibition proper but said that she welcomed the concept of artists reaching out to the public. "I would love to see more works of art in the streets and subways, where many people can enjoy them together. It would be like a breath of fresh air."