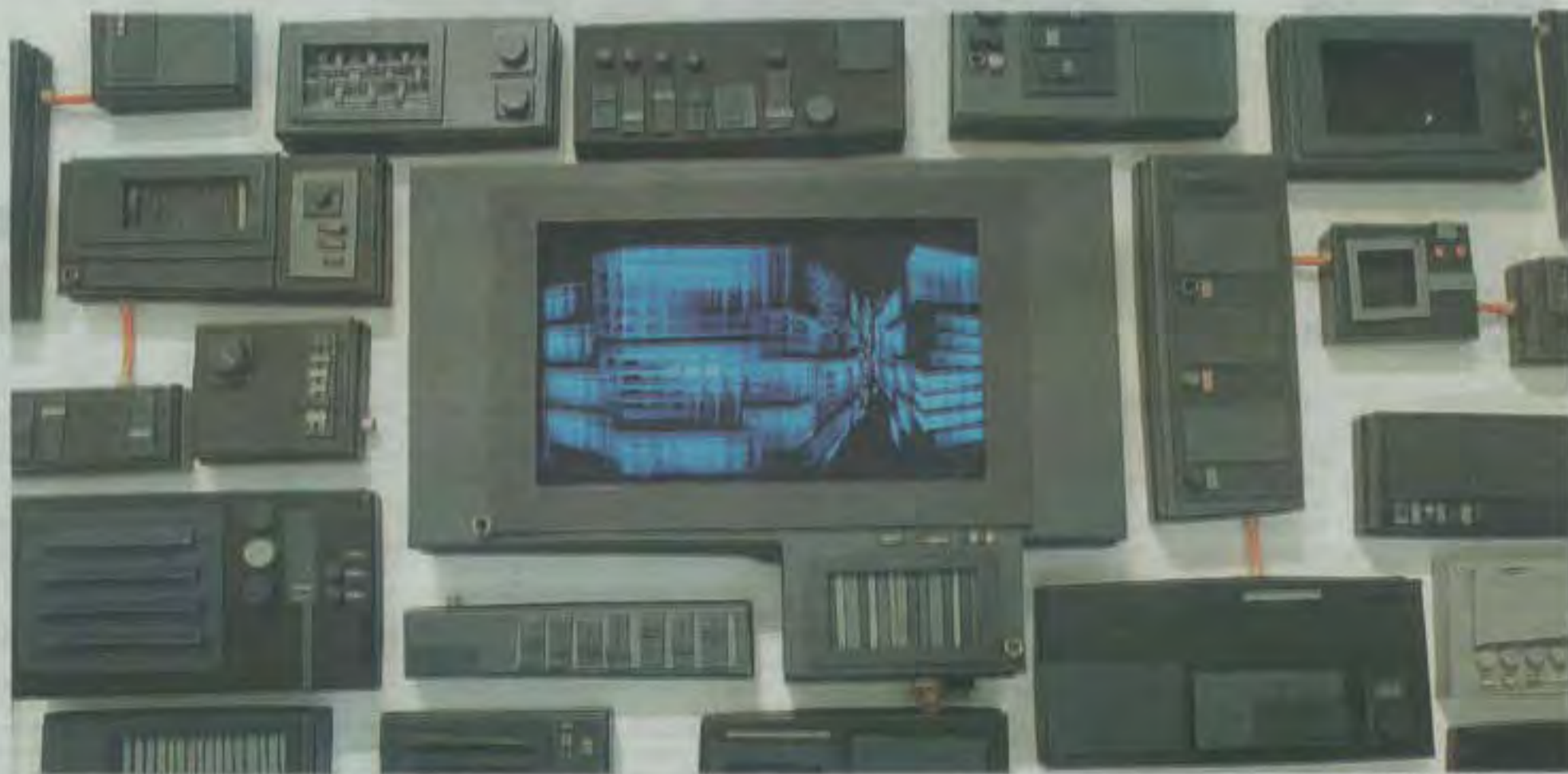


# SYSTEM SEQUENCE

1 exhibit is a real snore, the other is 'cyborg' friendly



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"Systems Theory" is an exhibit distinguished by its repetitive sequence of art and technology, such as Kiel Johnson's "Export the Output, Download the Uploaded Input."

## preview >

### SYSTEMS THEORY and SONG TO SNORE

> **When:** 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, until March 8.

> **Where:** Torrance Art Museum, 3320 Civic Center Drive.

> **Admission:** Free.

> **Information:** (310) 618-6340, [www.torranceartmuseum.com](http://www.torranceartmuseum.com).

BY JIM FARBBER > LA.COM

At first view, the works that make up the Torrance Art Museum's latest exhibit, "Systems Theory," appear as diverse and individualistic as possible.

But look closer, says curator Kristina Newhouse, and you'll discover a methodology at work that connects the dots between these sculptures and works on paper by Sky Burchard, Enrique Castrejon, Kiel Johnson, Flora Kao, Joel Tauber, Shirley Tse, Tao Urban and Meeson Pae Yang.

That factor involves each artist's reliance on a self-imposed system, and in several cases a fascination with replicated forms — whether it's Burchard's digitized grass blades resembling Day-Glo Legos; Kao's housing project made from origami real estate ads; Johnson's cardboard jungle of mock electronic units and TV monitors; or Yang's power grid of softly glowing protoplasmic modules sealed in medical isolation.

As explained by Newhouse, who took months visiting studios and looking at proposals to curate the installation, the term "systems art" has loosely come to describe any work produced by highly organized means emphasizing the arrangement of, and relation between, the parts and the whole.

Systems artworks are often distinguished by their emphasis on repetition, patterning, sequence and progressive variations. The systems used by the artists allow their objects to participate in a dialogue between structure and function, in which medium and form become interrelated. There's also a "cyborg quality," Newhouse says, "that collision between art and technology."





"If you boil it right down, a system is something that operates according to its own internal and self-defined rules. And often there is an element of replication."

— KRISTINA NEWHOUSE, TORRANCE ART MUSEUM CURATOR

"If you boil it right down, a system is something that operates according to its own internal and self-defined rules," she says. "And often there is an element of replication, as if a bunch of unicellular organisms were replicating themselves again and again."

If you're finding all this a bit difficult to grapple with, don't worry, it's all explained on the gallery walls to provide visitors with a skeleton key to understanding the exhibition.

"What I find that's kind of funny," Newhouse adds, "is that a lot of these artists have very elaborate systems — far more elaborate than I even imagined."

In a show that combines the serious with the humorous, Kao's "Soundscape" (2007) is by far the most playful. Constructed from cardboard tubes, nylon fishing line, Styrofoam tortilla warmers and little motion-sensing motors attached to whirligigs, the piece is as much a musical instrument as a piece of art. Stomp your feet and the whole thing goes into motion — pinging, panging and ponging in chorus. It's a combination of everyday objects and random music-making the late composer John Cage would have found delightful.

Delight does not play a role in Castrejon's large-scale, black-and-white, torn paper, push-pin, ink drawing wall sculpture, representing the devastating effects wrought by an exploding car bomb. This fascinating installation piece combines obsessive attention to detail with an aura of political timeliness and a fascinating sense of graphic abstraction.

In contrast, Tauber's ongoing work in progress, "Sick-Amour," documents (in photos and video) the artist's devotion to saving a forlorn sycamore tree he discovered in the Rose Bowl parking lot. In this literal act of tree hugging, Tauber has recorded his efforts to protect the tree, while at the same time following in the ancient tradition of adorning its branches with "sacred" decorative ornaments.

In a separate exhibit, Jessica Rath's sound sculpture, "Song to Snore," is an elegantly subtle installation piece that transforms the museum's hallway and second gallery into a curving seashell environment of stretched blue fabric (made from recycled denim). While moving through this embracing flow of fabric the viewer is serenaded by the warble of bird song interpolated with the gentle sounds of slumber.

"There is an intimacy inherent in the work," says Rath, "that represents that vulnerable state between sleep and consciousness."

Created in collaboration with composer Robert Hoehn, "Song to Snore," said Rath, speaking from her Glendale home, was inspired by a series of early morning reveries born of twittering birds and the rustle of her own and her infant son's breathing.

"When you hear the multiple sounds on the light blue side of the installation you are in a sort of a forest between those walls," says Rath. "But when you move into the dark side of the space, that dark blue room seems to be palpably breathing. One person described it as though they were standing next to some mammal. It's as if the sound becomes tactile."

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Meeson Poe Yang's "Synthesis," top, and Flora Kao's "Soundscape," above, are two examples within the "Systems Theory" project. Kao's playful entry is constructed from cardboard tubes, nylon fishing line, Styrofoam tortilla warmers and motion-sensing motors. The stomping of feet sets off Kao's entire exhibit.