

Robyn Moody 11.01.08 – 09.02.08

Time and space travel made possible with latest exhibition at SKOL!

by Chris Lloyd

Humans have been fascinated with time travel long before Michael J. Fox took a souped-up De Lorian through a trilogy of hit movies. Already in 1895, H.G. Wells' anonymous *Time Traveler* had visited the imaginary Eloi in the year 802 701 A.D. That landmark novel set in motion a concept that has grown to touch nearly every aspect of science fiction, almost to the point that time travel has become a cliché. The idea, however, still inspires legitimate debate in physics circles. Can there be no greater mystery for humankind than to discover—and perhaps even control—the meaning of space and time and quench our obsession to understand the world and what lies beyond it? At one time, a prevailing outlook was that the Earth was the centre of the universe. As the laws of physics evolved and the universe expanded, our role in it seems to have diminished. We send the occasional space vessel into the cosmos to search for data, and we create complex mathematical formulas to describe phenomena, but chances are most of us will live our lives untouched by the magic that is time travel.

Until now, that is, as SKOL hosts Robyn Moody's TARDIS, a functional time and space travel device. TARDIS, an acronym for Time And Relative Dimensions In Space, is also the name of the machine used by Doctor Who from the longest-running sci-fi program in television history. Moody's version of TARDIS challenges the police call box of Doctor Who in the low-tech, anachronistic department, but most importantly, it responds to our collective absorption of the idea of time travel. His project is essentially composed of a doctored 1970s-era turntable equipped with a metronome upon which is attached a solenoid that occasionally strikes the tone arm, sending it flying to different sections of a vinyl record. The playing record is none other than *The Planets*, a seven-movement orchestral piece by British composer Gustav Holst. First performed in 1917, it remains today one of the most popular compositions of the British repertoire, influencing countless sci fi film soundtracks. When TARDIS is at work, endlessly skipping through these tracks of time and space, we ourselves are transported unexpectedly, at times jarringly, from the relentless marching of Mars to the dancing joviality of Jupiter. And while TARDIS tangibly references time through its own intricate arrangement of brass and clockwork mechanisms, it also presents us with its own paradox: that of moving while remaining physically still.

In the main gallery, Moody presents a second installation entitled *Constellation*. The exhibition space has been transformed into a miniature cosmos, an inky darkness dotted with a configuration of glowing lights. In this particular setting the stars are LEDs attached to clusters of poles of varying heights. Here, Moody retraces a historical process whereby we've arbitrarily isolated and named star patterns in an attempt to find order in our night skies. Similarly, he

creates his own star field based on the relative positions of stereo and computer equipment. Into this celestial space we see not Orion the Hunter or Sagittarius the Archer, but the softly pulsating Sleeping Mac, The Modem and The Printer and Scanner. These are the constellations that surround our immediate lives at the office, in the studio or living space. Engrossed as we are in the everyday use of electronic devices, we often overlook their tiny beacons in the dark, those signals of some underlying evidence. Moody isolates them from their casings and combines them into a new galaxy of gadgetry, attentive for the appearance of intrepid gallery explorers. We survey this domain with TARDIS as both our guide and source of inquiry.