

ART REVIEW | Show has a sci-fi feel

# CONTROLLED 'ORGANISM'

Process overwhelms thoughts behind Epsten Gallery show.

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Special to The Star

A distinctly science-fiction vibe runs through Montana artist Andrew Schell's show, "Organism," at the Epsten Gallery.

Not only do Schell's eight mixed-media hanging sculptures resemble props or backdrops from a film set on a spaceship, but the exhibit's premise also reflects themes common to the genre, such as man vs. machine and the individual vs. the collective. The titles — "Helioburst," "Gravitational Relapse," "Skyhawk Down" — reinforce the sci-fi association. In both his artist statement and in his construction methods, Schell takes care to emphasize the notion that his work is built from a collection of smaller parts.

"In the organism," he states, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Each piece, taken as an individual, is no more than a flimsy plastic cut-out, mute and powerless, barely discernable from the wall on which it hangs."

Unfortunately, for a show titled by a word with such connotations as life and growth, the works in "Organism" add up to a staid and static whole.

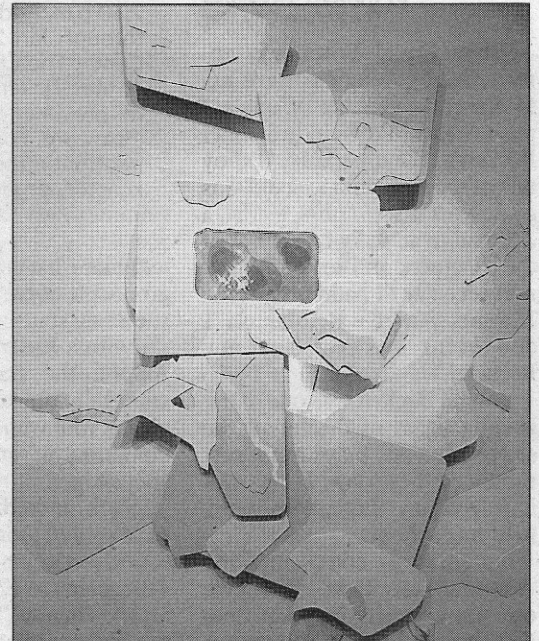
Schell puts together his sculptures like pieces of a three-dimensional puzzle, creating visual rubrics that relate the story of their construction. The artist's hand is not evident, but his decision-making process is discernible. Deftly and smoothly cut and assembled, each piece of medium-density fiberboard, or MDF, plays a specific role within the work as a whole and provides clues to each object's fabrication.

Plainly visible screws and joints provide evidence of assembly methods. Schell cleverly creates an atmospheric light effect by painting the backside of the MDF a blaze orange color, which reflects off the hospital-white gallery walls and makes a warm glow.

This studied effect and scientific method is offset slightly by what comes across as a conscious effort on the artist's part to imply improvisation and experimentation. "Disarmor," for instance, hangs at a sloping 45-degree angle, and the wall behind it is painted the same pale yellow as the piece in a design that echoes repeating shapes on the work's surface.

In "Gravitational Relapse," "Helioburst" and "Transparent Synergy," the cleanly cut, sharp-edged pieces extend beyond the boundary of the MDF base, creating the effect of an implosion or an explosion captured mid-act.

Despite the asymmetry, painted backgrounds and colored light effects, the work still feels



EPSTEN GALLERY

"Transparent Synergy" (2007) is a mixed-media work by Andrew Schell that incorporates a monitor and lights.

## 'andrew schell: organism'

The show continues at the Epsten Gallery at Village Shalom, 5500 W. 123rd St., Overland Park, through Jan. 20. Hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Friday and 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

contained. The cool, clinical feel is enhanced by the grating sound emanating from two speakers in the upper corner of the gallery, a steady, repetitive beep reminiscent of a heart rate monitor common to hospital rooms. Even the brightly hued abstract animations on the LCD screens in "Gravitational Relapse" and "Transparent Synergy" feel significantly tiny and penned-in by the surrounding sculptural forms.

Schell's most ambitious piece here is also his most successful. In "Organism," he beams a projection of fleeting, ephemeral colors onto an oversized white piece of PVC foam board cut to resemble a topographical city map.

The projection, coming from outside rather than within the piece itself, imbues the work with a feeling of flux. The topological imagery, meanwhile, metaphorically links the piece to the idea of the city as a living, growing organism, a collective whole made of smaller individual parts.