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Arts & Culture

I, robot

An artist with a mechanical bent lets machines do the job for him, writes **Joyce Kam**

THE ADDAMS FAMILY has a disembodied hand, Thing, to do the house chores. Barry Freedland has a robotic equivalent. But instead of fetching the mail and lighting cigars as Thing does, Freedland's draws lines, circles, geometric forms and random designs.

At the Sundaram Tagore Gallery on Wednesday night, an army of hands will be creating works of art for the "Synthetic Surrogate" exhibition.

The robots, each made of a rubber cast of Freedland's hand holding a pen attached to the body of a toy car, are programed to react to their surroundings. They might dash away as you get close, or be self-conscious and stop working as you watch.

"I'll be bringing in five robots with electronic directional compasses and motion sensors. One will have a video sensor, another a temperature sensor, and another an RFID reader," said Freedland, a performance artist based in New York.

"And I will be hiding behind a curtain and writing new programs while the exhibition is going on."

Freedland, who grew up in the Motor City of Detroit, which is home to automobile companies General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, likes to incorporate mechanical elements into his art.

In his previous exhibition, he created a machine that suspended him upside down and dipped his head into paint. The audience was given control

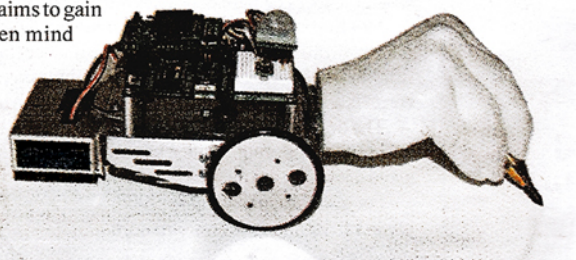
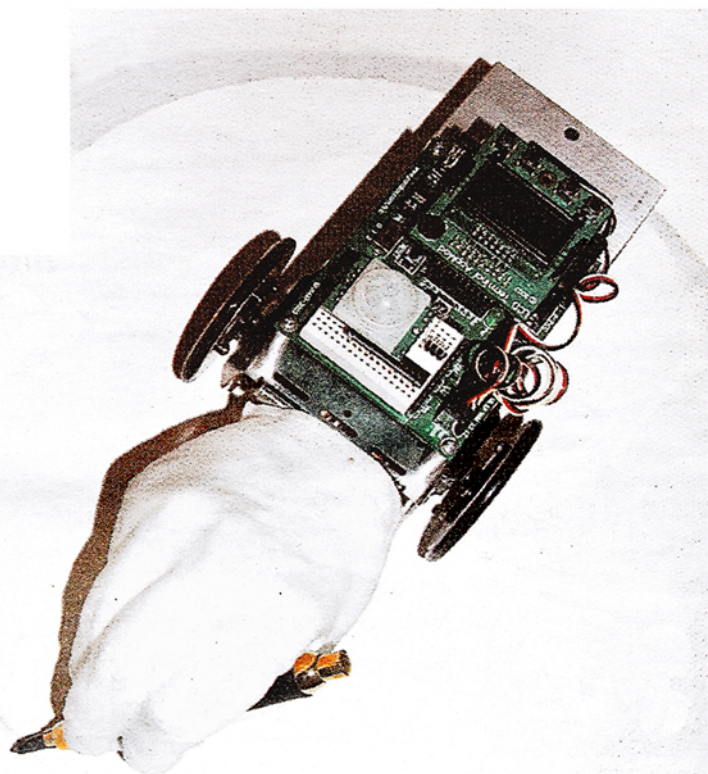
of the machine to move him around, using his hair as a paintbrush to create drawings on paper.

"I'm trying to figure out what the threshold of creating a sense of my own individual identity is. How little a person can do, and still have it be unique to themselves," said Freedland.

"The first robot, or what I now refer to as Thumbprinter 1.0, was designed to create a sense of my presence by place my thumbprints around a room, without me having to be somewhere. But then I recognized the potential of the results and started to write more complicated programs for it."

The exhibition is held in conjunction with the Asia Consciousness Festival, which aims to gain insight into the relationship between mind and body.

"Freedland's show explores the foundation of consciousness. Is he creating the art, or his robots?" said Sundaram Tagore, who owns the gallery. "This kind of art is new to Hong Kong, and we hope to push the envelope, push the frontier of culture, through



interesting exhibitions."

Date: June 10 to 20

Time: Monday to Saturday, 10am to 7pm

Venue: Sundaram Tagore Gallery
(57-59 Hollywood Road, Central)

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