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Science Centre works shown the door

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Form will meet function at the Ontario Science Centre's new "Grand Central" entryway.

The centre announced yesterday that installations by Toronto artists Steve Mann and David Rokeby are among three pieces selected for display in its new entrance space. A small-scale work by Pennsylvania artist Stacy Levy was also chosen in a juried international competition that attracted 230 entries from six countries.

Part of the Science Centre's ongoing Agents of Change initiative that aims to revitalize the site for the 21st century, Grand Central will act as a point of arrival and departure for visitors, drawing on a theme of earth, air, fire and water.

Those natural elements play into the three art installations. Both Mann and Levy's works have a water theme and will be positioned in an outdoor pavilion next to the centre's Great Hall.

Mann, a U of T professor known as the "human cyborg" for his work with wearable computers, has designed FUNtain, an interactive fountain that uses a water pump and hollow pipes to generate music when visitors press their hands over the opening of each pipe.

"As far as I know, it's the world's first and only water-based instrument," Mann explained yesterday while inspecting the site where his fountain will be installed. "There isn't a lot of inventiveness in art (these days) but art is about invention. Art, science and technology inform and influence each other."

Nearby, Levy was laying out samples of the black granite and polished stones that will make up her installation, Lotic Meander, a pathway crafted to represent a river with carved ebbs and flows.

"It was a good match for me because I do a lot of work that's about picturing science in a visual way. I think it's just great that this science centre is sophisticated enough not to draw a line between art and science," she said.

Rokeby's Cloud, a kinetic installation that will be suspended from the ceiling, represents change in the earth around us. The installation will incorporate sculptural elements activated by precision motors to produce complex patterns throughout the Grand Central hall.

Rokeby, an award-winning sound and video installation artist based in Toronto, has been creating installations since 1982, focusing on interactive pieces that engage the human body, or that involve artificial perception systems.

All three works are expected to be installed by the time the Grand Central area opens in mid-2006.

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