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‘White Noise’

In a first for a department known to push boundaries in the name of innovation, UC Santa Barbara’s Media Arts and Technology (MAT) graduate program is taking its annual end-of-year show on the road. More or less.

Besides its usual single-evening event on campus, MAT, with the 2016 offering “White Noise,” will launch a very public expansion of the showcase by mounting it twice again in downtown Santa Barbara.

The show is set for Friday, May 27, from 5-9 p.m., in UCSB’s Elings Hall, as well as Saturday, May 28, from 6-9 p.m., at the Santa Barbara Center for Art, Science and Technology (SBCAST). SBCAST will host MAT once more on Thursday, June 2, from 5:30-10 p.m., in conjunction with the community-wide “First Thursday” arts event. All events are free and open to the public.

“The first of what we now call our ‘End-of-Year Show,’ I don’t think we knew that’s what it was, because it was informal and primarily curated off the cuff,” said founding MAT faculty member JoAnn Kuchera-Morin, who created the AlloSphere, UCSB’s one-of-a-kind immersive research facility. “After a while, as students started to understand the whole aspect of exhibition and curation — that process is a very important part of how we do research on the arts side — it really took fire. Now it’s gotten really big and is especially big this year.”

Also new in the 2016 iteration is an outreach component with local high schools, who will bring teen engineering students to the AlloSphere for an educational

session with MAT researchers before the public portions of “White Noise” get underway. The four-day event in its entirety speaks to the spirit at the very heart of MAT: engaging the community and “educating the future,” as Kuchera-Morin puts it.

“That’s the big vision that’s been founded here,” she said. “It’s the high arts informing science at a very high level of research, bringing it out to the community, doing citizen science, lectures, all the way to educational reform and bringing the A into STEM.”

Among the key architects of the show’s amplified focus is doctoral student Gustavo Rincon, who with an MAT colleague mentors in two local high school engineering programs. Their philosophical charge to engage the community at large — young, aspiring artists, scholars and technicians in particular — is what inspired his efforts.

“I believe strongly in the importance of our educational and community outreach, and this show will celebrate that mission,” Rincon said. “We have a lot of firsts this year, and it’s all in an effort to engage the community in a deeper discussion of why we, MAT, are here, both conceptually and how we can change the future with our research.”

Indeed, the theme of the show, “White Noise,” is intended to represent the belief in the endless possibilities — in technology and art alike — that are at the program’s core. Situated in the California NanoSystems Institute, MAT is a transdisciplinary graduate program that fuses emergent media, computer science, engineering, electronic music and digital art research, practice, production and theory.

“At MAT, the research is like white noise in that it contains ‘signals’ from every field,” Rincon said. “As technologists and artists, they weave through this diverse research in novel ways, creating new works that transcend the way we view the world. The show is a product of this process.”

The showcase will feature demonstrations, installations, performances and concerts by more than 50 students and faculty, spanning areas from computational perception, digital humanities and experimental music to virtual reality, data visualization and remote sensing.

Remarks from MAT program chair and 2016 Guggenheim fellow George Legrady will open the show at 1 p.m. Friday in Room 2016, Elings Hall. Then, a kickoff lecture will feature curator and media artist Zhang Ga, of the China Central Academy of Fine

Arts, and the School of Art, Media, and Technology at The New School, Parsons. Immediately following that talk, Ga, Legrady, Kuchera-Morin, guest artist Andreas Schlegel and other MAT faculty and will participate in a panel discussion.

More information is available at the program website.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.