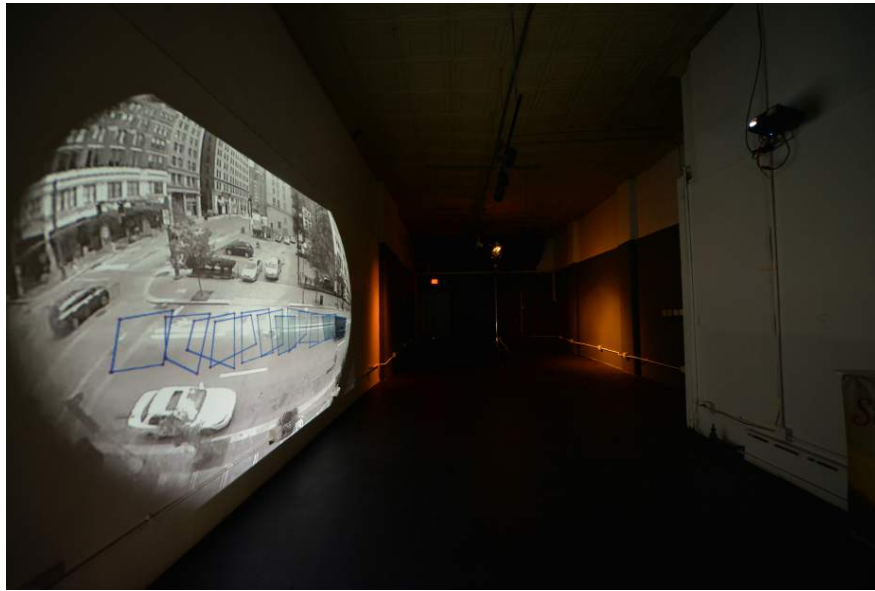




## Art review: 'Jakob Marsico: Traffic Lights' at Future Tenant

KURT SHAW (MAILTO:TRIBCITY@TRIBWEB.COM?SUBJECT=RE: ART REVIEW: 'JAKOB MARSICO: TRAFFIC LIGHTS' AT FUTURE TENANT STORY ON TRIBLIVE.COM) | Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2015, 9:00 p.m.



SIDNEY DAVIS | TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

The light and sound exhibition by Jakob Marsico titled "Traffic Lights" is on display at Future Tenant gallery in Downtown Pittsburgh.

Like father, like son, the old saying goes.

So it is that Jakob Marsico has an exhibit on display, just as his father Dennis Marsico's work is on exhibit at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts.

But, whereas, the elder Marsico, a fine-art photographer, is featured as the 2015 Artist of the Year through Nov. 1 at the Shadyside art center, the younger Marsico's work is featured Downtown at Future Tennant.

Jakob Marsico, 32, describes himself as an interaction designer and new-media artist.

"If I can only choose one, I say interaction designer," the Lawrenceville resident says.

His two-part installation at Future Tenant, "Traffic Lights," is an immersive light and sound installation that very much sums up the word "interaction."

"At the heart of both is a piece of software meant to extract motion patterns from live video," he says. "There is a live video camera above the gallery looking on to Penn Avenue. That video feeds into the software, which extracts the motion of the cars moving through the video frame and translates that motion into sound and light patterns."

Marsico says that single piece of software pulls in video and outputs the projection, which is the first part of the installation visitors will come to, and the sound and the lighting controls of the second part, which is in the rear of the gallery.

Marsico says both are "two arms of the same real-time system."

"The projection that viewers see in the gallery is meant to give viewers a better understanding of what is driving the light/sound installation," he says. "The light and sound piece is really the primary work."

### 'Jakob Marsico: Traffic Lights'

**When:** Through Sept. 13, from 4-8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, noon-8 p.m. Saturdays, 1-6 p.m. Sundays

**Where:** Future Tenant, 819 Penn Ave., Downtown

**Details:** 412-325-7037 or [futuretenant.org](http://futuretenant.org) (<http://futuretenant.org>)

Marsico says the installation is an experiment to see whether the patterns created by people moving through space or driving cars can elicit the same type of emotional or physical response as patterns created by “more natural” phenomena such as trees swaying in the wind or waves rolling onto a beach.

“The idea is that we can use large lights as very low-resolution information displays which, with a small amount of context, can be read from a viewer’s periphery,” he says.

In “Traffic Lights,” custom software draws polygons on top of live video. Each polygon measures the amount of change in the section of video directly beneath it. The software then translates that value to the intensity of a corresponding light.

The resulting light patterns modulate with the speed of traffic, providing users with an abstract representation of the traffic movement outside of the gallery in real time.

Marsico says, along with being informative, the patterns act as a reminder that “the built environment, although chaotic, is always an extension of nature,” he says.

Having received a master’s degree in tangible-interaction design from Carnegie Mellon University a year ago, Marsico is an adjunct at CMU where he teaches two classes, “Making Things Interactive” and “Reactive Spaces and Media Architecture.” He also runs Ultra Low Res Studio, a design/build firm that works primarily with architects to embed experiential or interactive elements in the built environment.

Marsico wrote the piece of software at the core of his installation from scratch. Last year, he wrote a similar piece of software and developed custom electronics for the marquee at Row House Cinema in Lawrenceville. A video of that interactive installation can be seen at [jmarsico.com/Row-House-Marquee](http://jmarsico.com/Row-House-Marquee) (<http://jmarsico.com/Row-House-Marquee>).

Something of a prototype for a multitude of possible architectural lighting applications, it displays real-time traffic flow surrounding the location.

Moving forward, Marsico realizes that each time he produces an installation like this, it becomes a learning situation.

“I’ve learned that the light portion wasn’t as intuitively readable as I had intended,” he says. “Also, that for the light and sound to be “felt,” it needs to be more of the primary focus in the room.”

“A few people I spoke with at the opening seemed to experience the piece as intended, before my explaining my intentions. But, for the most part, the video stole the show.”

Nevertheless, the effect is palpable — as visitors will see and experience when visiting the exhibit.

This bodes well for Marsico, who says that “discovery and attachment” are core themes in his work.

“I believe that people gain a sense of ownership to experiences they feel they’ve uncovered,” he says. “Through a combination of computation and traditional media, I aim to provide subtle, accessible interactions that blend into and contribute to a user’s environment.”

Next week, Marsico will be installing a hanging glass piece at the Butler Institute of Art in Youngstown, Ohio, which translates live video of a tree swaying in the wind into motion patterns for a matrix of “smart glass” panes.

Surely, discovery and attachment will be at the core of that piece, as well.

Kurt Shaw is the art critic for Trib Total Media. He can be reached at [kshaw@tribweb.com](mailto:kshaw@tribweb.com) (<mailto:kshaw@tribweb.com>).

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