



Globe staff photo/Tom Herde

Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel with their room-size installation "Charybdis" at MIT's List Visual Arts Center.

Creating a sense of wonder about the universe

"CHARYBDIS" - an installation by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel, at the List Visual Arts Center, Wiesner Building, 20 Ames St., MIT, Cambridge, through June 26.

By Christine Temin
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Planets hover, glowing in the dark, occasionally eclipsing each other. Some little ones quiver nervously. Larger ones orbit sedately. A passing light turns a once shadowy circle a nearly blinding silver. A rope-like, attenuated S shape turns constantly, like the blade of a mystical egg beater. Beneath all this are mountains of sand, and in the center of the mountain range is a pond, and in the center of the pond is a flickering flame surrounded by jets that spew smoke that might come from a volcano deep below. The smoke lives out its ephemeral life on the surface of the water, and then silently disappears. The only noise is a soft, ever-present whir.

This contemplative universe is actually an installation by two gifted young New York artists, Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel, who were invited by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to spend some time making a work at the List Visual Arts Center. The result is "Charybdis," named after a legendary whirlpool off Sicily, the site of many shipwrecks. But it is not necessary to know the meaning of the title to be transported by "Charybdis," which is an extraordinary, power-

ful and immediate work, part theater, part religion.

A lot of installations nowadays take as their gloomy theme the potential for disaster in the world, either nuclear holocaust or environmental destruction. The work of Jones and Ginzel is different - and spectacularly so. The artists call themselves optimists, and, without being Pollyanna-ish, their art maintains a sense of unjaded wonder about the workings of nature, about light and weather and the constant movement of planets, about, ultimately, the lack of stasis in the universe. "Charybdis," with its circles within circles, sets the viewer to contemplating the cyclical nature of life, and the reality of constant change: We will never be the same as we were the moment before, and neither will the world. The elements of "Charybdis" are scrambled so that the cycle never repeats itself exactly, and the circular elements never line up in precisely the same way. The contrasting speeds of the various orbs set up a symphonic density.

"Charybdis" takes up an entire large gallery in the List Center. The viewer enters the darkened space and stands in front of a large, window-like opening, with the installation beyond. Pinwheeling shadows and light coming from unseen sources cast an instant spell. Virtually everything in the work is round, starting with the shape of the room itself, which Jones and Ginzel have changed from box to curve. A large circle of light illuminates a wall painted a fiery yet translu-

cent red, but it takes a determinedly literal mind not to see this as a planet on its course through the skies.

The meditative poetry of "Charybdis" is impressive, but so is its engineering. Where most installation artists fall in technique. They can't establish an enveloping atmosphere; the viewer remains painfully conscious of the wires, the motors, the gadgetry involved. Jones and Ginzel make the mechanics disappear: free of distractions, we can sink into thought.

Sitting in an MIT office, Jones and Ginzel talked about their work the other day. They met in 1981, while both were assisting other artists on projects at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., and they began collaborating in 1985. They have a studio in New York, and live modestly, since their art is not saleable. To obtain materials, they often turn to the Materials for the Arts program run by New York's Department of Cultural Affairs, which collects everything from fabric samples to refrigerators and redistributes it all to artists. Jones and Ginzel have taught themselves the technology they need for their installations, and, says Jones, "Our studio looks like a laboratory or machine shop."

"The temporary quality of the work is a metaphor for the brevity of our lives," Ginzel says. They have, however, recently completed their first permanent work, "Analemma," for the Wadsworth Athe-

neum in Hartford. "Analemma" is in two large windows, and is thus visible 24 hours a day. Archways in gold leaf and oxidized copper suggest the Renaissance: Jones and Ginzel are acutely aware of art history, and their work has been linked to the kinetic art of Leonardo. They say that "Analemma's" compressed space was influenced by Borromini's *trompe l'oeil*. The hourglass and what appears to be a roulette wheel in "Analemma" hint at time running out; the artists say that the work, despite its permanence, is about mortality.

Two years ago, Jones and Ginzel did an award-winning piece for the anchorage of Brooklyn Bridge, which Jones calls "a monument to American optimism." On the topic of the optimism of the work she and Ginzel make, she says: "Although we are mortals and there are outrageous wars going on, which threaten our lives, there are also other forms of existence. Even if man doesn't continue to survive, something will."