



The Hatfields might be the real McCoy's

By John E. Mitchell

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North Adams Transcript

NORTH ADAMS -- Mysterious art duo The Hatfields -- Sadie and Ephraim -- will soon unvei their installation "Not For Sale," opening Thursday, July 29, as part of DownStreet Art at MCLA Gallery 51 Annex, 65 Main St.

The team prefers anonymity -- that component is integral to the physical work, they say -- but they also proclaim on their website, "If we wanted to live in obscurity, do you think we'd have a website?"

Their Unabomber-style approach to publicity often has them speaking through their gallerists at Greylock Arts in Adams, which sponsors this installation, but the Hatfields took the time for an e-mail interview in the hopes of stating their artistic intentions while still being able to move among the art world in secret.

The installation itself consists of absurd items made to spin through special codes sent via the viewers o f the art over their own cell phones. In modern terms, this makes it interactive art.

The obvious question is: Why spinning?

"Spinning represents the mechanized world we live

in," Ephraim Hatfield wrote. "The Earth spins, but we can cope with that, because the pace is reasonable. Spinning is also fun."

He points out that people spin a lot in amusement parks and that experience is created through electronics. That's a very fast pace, he says, and it creates a discombobulating experience for the humans who partake of it.

"When we were kids, there was

this toy called 'Sit and Spin,'" Sadie wrote, explaining their interest. "You would sit on it and spin around in place. I don't remember if it made us sick. Maybe it did, and we didn't mind because it was worth the fun of it. Spinning is such a basic thing people love to do. Julie Andrews ran up the mountain and spun around singing about the hills being alive."

Using technology to create action is at the center of what the Hatfields say they do in their work. If they have their way, wires won't supplant paint but will inspire it to go even further.

"When photography was a relatively new invention, photographers felt like they had to prove that they were artists, too," Ephraim wrote. "And painters were threatened by the things that photographers were doing. And because of this, painters began doing things with paint that hadn't been done before. The dialogue between all these different ways of making art is what makes great art."

"I really dislike hierarchical systems and we live in world full of them," Sadie added. "It's a changing time in terms of art, as well as music, publishing and more. The old systems are being rewritten, and I do think art with wires is part of that."

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With the circuit as their centerpiece working in conjunction with Sadie's artwork, the Hatfields have been able to latch onto an artistic tool that hides in plain sight in everyday life. It's a well-known partner in modernity, and yet a mystery to so many people. They build on that mystery, but they refuse to usher it into the world of commodity -- and that means artistic liberty.

Ephraim points out that the most meaningful art he's ever encountered is the art that has been given to him.

"When you're not worried about your bottom line, you become free to do anything," Ephraim wrote. "And when you value your work in terms of dollars, you are always undervaluing it. You also limit the audience that can access and appreciate it. When you give art away, you make the value meaningless, and everyone can just focus on enjoying it."

The Hatfields aren't a couple that stands still long. Even as they have premiered "Not For Sale," they have also been working on a project studying the role of studio audiences in television productions. For this work, they have managed to infiltrate the audiences during tapings by not representing themselves as artists there to make a statement -- they pass themselves off as ordinary people seeking an afternoon in air conditioning.

"So far, all we've learned is that we're either too boring or too unattractive for television, because they keep seating us in the last row," Sadie wrote. "Maybe the piece will be about that."

Perhaps it's the fact that they are not ready for prime time that makes them so shy of the limelight, but that's not the point of their work. With their identities supplanted, the art lives its own life apart

from the personalities of the creators. In that way, the Hatfields hearken back to the dawn of art. As they say in their press releases, "We created art." Spiritually, this might well be correct.

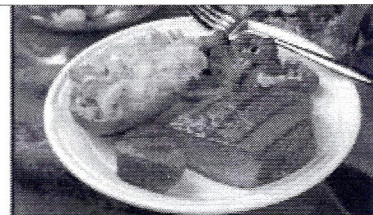
"Nobody creates art in a vacuum, but artists strive to do something totally unique and original," Ephraim wrote. "It seems especially prevalent in the area of electronic art, where everyone wants to be first to do this or that. Being first really doesn't matter. Nobody remembers that first cave painter."

The Hatfields can be found online at www.hatfield.es.

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