

Wonderfully Bizarre:

Sue Anne Rische's personality shows through her art

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by Kirk DICKEY

"If you're not doing anything wrong, you have nothing to fear," intones the robotic female voice.

Forget that you are being monitored by dozens of security cameras, some obvious and some hidden. Never mind that you have a grossly oversized "Hello my name

is..." tag hung around your neck identifying you to everyone. Don't worry about the personal information you gave to get into the show. It probably won't be used for some purpose you never intended.

"Just a reminder," the voice continues. "If you think that this art-

work is anything less than spectacular, remember that I have your full name and a sample of your handwriting."

Welcome to "Privacy World," an installation and multimedia art piece designed and brought to life by artist and Collin College professor Sue Anne Rische. At different times, funny, odd and insightful, the piece is, in many ways, a reflection of the artist, who often uses humor to impart deeper commentary on contemporary culture.

The message came in loud and clear to Rodney Greene, who saw the show in 2014 and called it "wonderfully bizarre."

Greene recalled one piece called "Face Book" in which Rische photographically altered existing images to include her own face and placed those photos next to the original to show how easy it is to change an image. Rische's work reinforced the idea that we are always under surveillance and showed the harm that could be done with the information collected. The show made a significant impression on him.

"It was very strange, but wonderfully strange," Greene said. "You were seeing some beautiful pieces, but then you knew you were being watched. It's almost like the exhibit was watching you as much as you were looking at it."

You see similar reactions on a video presentation of the show, where people can be seen smiling and laughing at various pieces, then doing a double-take when they realize there is a camera pointed at them.

"When it comes to privacy, I take



that very seriously," Rische said. "But I don't want to come off as a crazy, tin foil hat-wearing kind of person, so I decided, 'What better way to approach it than with humor?'"

That quirky sense of humor is present in most of Rische's work. Whether it is a weighted subject like privacy or something lighter, like a series of fortune cookie messages written over and over on layers of velum to create composite portraits made of literal fortune cookie wisdom, Rische's sly comic sensibility and outlook on the world is always there somewhere under the surface.

Of course, sometimes it is right there out in the open, as it is in pieces on her website: sueannerische.com. The site has samples of her work and gives visitors a glimpse of the woman behind them.

"She is rarely seen in public, but rumor has it that she likes dim sum," her website bio says, then quotes an 'anonymous former student' saying, "I never actually saw her because she always taught from the inside of a big cardboard box with a picture of Justin Timberlake's face glued to it, but I still hear her disembodied voice pushing me to better myself and open my mind. It's horrifying stuff, really."

One assumes that the description of one of her drawing classes is a joke, but talking to Rische—sans Timberlake face—you get the impression that if she thought it would push her students to do better, she would don the box without regret. She loves opening up the world of art for her students, especially ones who don't see themselves as artists.

"This is performance art," she joked when asked if she saw a connection between teaching and art. "I make people into artists."

But even if she doesn't believe she makes people into "artists," she is at least partially responsible for making them "art." One of the most popular class projects she offers is Live Art, in which students recreate famous art pieces by dressing up and posing as

subjects in the paintings. Classes have taken on pieces like *The Boating Party* by Pierre-Auguste Renoir and *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci.

Rische is quick to note that the class project is just that, a student-led project in which students do virtually all of the work. The central concept of the project, though, betrays something about Rische's outlook on art and education.

"I think that if people are having fun, they are learning, or it sticks easier," she said in a 2010 video about the

project. "The learning experience comes with them doing the research, knowing who (the painting's subjects) are and who painted it, and this was just a more fun way for them to (learn) that."

Education and art are intertwined throughout Rische's life. She said that her family was always encouraging when it came to art, save for an episode when she was six and they found an elephant penciled on the wall of her grandmother's home.

"Sadly, it no longer exists," she

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said. "I was forced to destroy my own work upon its discovery."

There must have been something in the drawing however, because her family supported her passion for art from an early age. She got private instruction as a child and then earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from

Texas Tech University and a master of fine arts degree from the University of Washington in Seattle.

Rische said her father always encouraged her to become a teacher because he thought she would be good at it, but she only came to the idea gradually. She started teaching

jewelry-making in Colorado, then came back to Texas Tech as an adjunct professor. When her husband, who is also an artist and professor, decided to apply for a job in the Dallas area, she applied to Collin College. She has been a professor at the college's Central Park Campus in McKinney ever since.

While you get the impression she loves her work and her students, it's clear that her real passion still lies in creating art.

"It's like having two full-time jobs," she said. "It's always been that way, even when I wasn't teaching. You work that job 40 hours a week, then you come home and make art. You don't watch TV. You don't do anything else. You have to dedicate yourself to that."

Registration for fall classes at Collin College is underway. Visit www.collin.edu for more information.

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Photos: Nick Young, Collin College.