

COIN-OPERATED SCULPTURE RAISES MONEY FOR ARTS

NORTHAMPTON, MASS.

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Luke Jaeger may have found the simplest and most fun way yet to raise money for the arts. Jaeger, a sculptor and filmmaker, has unveiled **FUNDRAISER**, a handbuilt carnival midway attraction that takes quarters and keeps the change for the use of local Massachusetts arts organizations.

For 50 cents, deposited in any combination of coins, a user gets to see that change ride in an aluminum bucket up a black conveyor belt. The coins then fall into a clear plastic sorting device that causes them to roll either back to the original hopper, or down into a converted Spam can that, when it becomes heavy enough with contributions, prompts a hammer to strike a bell. Windows on three sides afford views of the Rube Goldberg-like action. The coin mechanism itself came from an old Coke machine. And **FUNDRAISER** contains gears from an exercise bike, a pulley wheel found in a barn, and of course, a Spam can.

According to Jaeger, the stuff he builds with, often collected by trash barrels and at dumps, is a whole new element for the periodic table. He calls it "obtainium," and his newest work positively glows with it.

The high Victorian curtains that surround the machine were made by a local artist friend, and the lettering and design on the outside was done by Ashfield artist **Amy Johnquest** (best known for her work on a recent Bruce Springsteen tourbook), who specializes in carnival and side show settings. Carpentry, machining and welding were done by Jaeger and an assortment of gung-ho artists who donated their time in the service of kinetic art.

Jaeger, a Northampton artist who teaches at **Hampshire College** and at Boston's **Massachusetts College of Art**, agrees that a metaphor goes into motion — maybe a few of them — as those coins chug uphill.

The bell doesn't ring every time, for instance.

"First of all," he said the other day, as a passerby tested his sculpture, "art isn't always efficient."

And it isn't generally about big sums.

"If you put two quarters into this machine, you've probably doubled your **annual contribution to the arts** as an American taxpayer," he said. "It adds up. It's incremental." And in that, he saw another mechanized moral: "It takes more than one person's effort to ring the bell — it's a group effort."

Seen another way, the sculpture

animations, which have been featured at national and international film fests like Sundance, and at the Museum of Modern art, Jaeger has recently started working big — really big — and creating machine art. **FUNDRAISER** is Jaeger's second coin-operated kinetic sculpture. The first, **WAYBACK**, was displayed at the Revolving Museum in Lowell last summer. A giant-sized version of a Victorian parlor toy, it was supported by steel girders that looked like the inside of a New York subway station. It took up an entire room, and, in motion, showed an animation of a couple dancing, to the tune of an old 33 rpm record, activated by a metal box that looked like something between a jukebox and a bus fare collector. The hand-welded seams and handmade components of his work speak to the early origins of machines.

FUNDRAISER was built in part with a small grant from the **Northampton Arts Council**, which had, a couple of years ago, lost two-thirds of its state funding. "I proposed this project as a way of actually making some money for them. It was a way for them to come out swinging," said Jaeger, whose work for the past decade has been funded by grants from the Arts Council, the **Massachusetts Cultural Council**, and many others. The Massachusetts Cultural Council singled out **FUNDRAISER** for **Gold Star** designation, an honor reserved for projects which "illustrate how culture contributes to the quality of life in cities and towns across the Commonwealth."

Someday, Jaeger says, he'd like to curate an exhibit filled with coin-operated art pieces.

FUNDRAISER will likely hit the road in good weather, rolling up to public events around Massachusetts, where it can offer a few joyful seconds of mechanical motion — and maybe even a beautiful ring of the turning-wheel bell inside — in exchange for hard currency for the arts.



High-resolution files of this and other **FUNDRAISER** images are available in the online gallery. Click anywhere on this picture to view them.

pokes fun at the idea, held by many, that a reliable measure of an artwork's worth is its ability to make money. Jaeger's piece generates cash every time it's touched.

The machine, housed in a brightly painted box that looks like it fell off the back of a carnie's truck, is just the latest of this Northampton-based artist's eclectic works. Best known for his award-winning handmade

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