



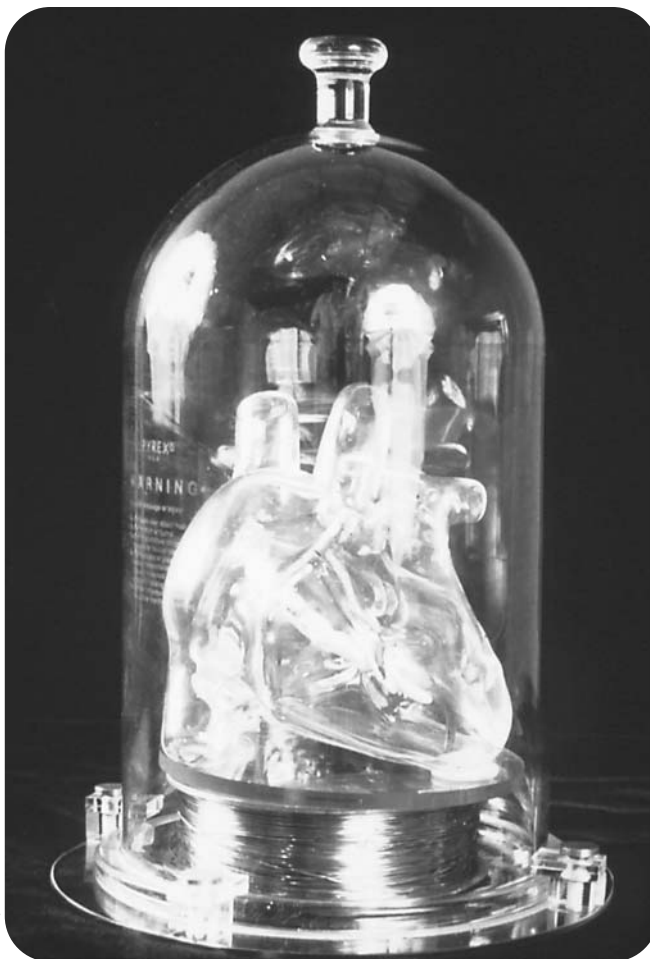
## Curious hearts

**C**uriosities, an art exhibition organized by the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina, presents work by renowned Canadian artist Catherine Richards and Egyptian-born microminiature sculptor Hagop Sandaldjian (1931–1990). Both of these works allude to metaphors of the heart (fragility, vulnerability and emotion) as well as exploring aspects of vision, technology and ephemerality. Both artists emulate strategies of scientific research and creation, traversing in novel ways the boundaries between craft, art and science.

Richards' installation *Charged Hearts* (1997) features two anatomically accurate glass hearts in bell jars and a terrella placed between them. The terrella is a reproduction of a nineteenth-century artifact first used in experiments to replicate, using magnetism, the patterns created by the northern lights. When a viewer lifts one of the bell jars, the heart glows with a ghost-like blue gas plasma, triggered by the electrical activity of charged ions. The glow pulsates, implying a connection to the beating of the viewer's own heart. The haunting, ephemeral dance of the aurora borealis, a sight familiar to many residents of Saskatchewan, is thus remarkably recreated in the gallery. Similar to this illusive phenomenon, our technological environment is often described as "virtual," that is, as being something "in effect" or lacking in substance.

The microminiatures of Hagop Sandaldjian leave the viewer similarly incredulous. These sculptures are confounding in their mysteriousness; they

are almost beyond belief. Depicting historical figures and personae from popular culture, they are so small that they are mounted on the heads of sewing needles and can be viewed only with the aid of microscopes. Carved



Catherine Richards, *Charged Hearts* (detail), 1997, glass, electromagnetic devices, telecommunication software.

from filaments of dust, hair and glue, these works are, like Richards' dancing light, virtually immaterial. Sandaldjian learned to apply his agonizingly minute strokes between heartbeats — a striking resonance with Richards' beating hearts.

Of relevance to these artworks is the idea that miniaturization is one of the definitive pursuits of modern technol-

ogy, one commonly associated with space and military inventions along with more ubiquitous devices such as radios, computers and cellular phones. Richards' second installation in the exhibition, *Curiosity Cabinet at the End of the Millennium* (1995), is a copper-panelled cabinet that the viewer is invited to sit inside. The copper lining makes the viewer impervious to the constant bombardment of invisible signals from the upper end of the radiofrequency spectrum, including microwaves, television signals, and pager and cellular phone transmissions. *Charged Hearts* and *Curiosity Cabinet* work together as conceptual book ends, the former delineating our immersion in and connections to technologically constructed — and increasingly wireless — environments. Just as nineteenth-century European landscape painters depicted an awesome and seemingly terrifying place in nature, to which they applied the term "sublime," these works engender a similar uncertainty vis-à-vis our location in a new environment, one thoroughly penetrated by technology. *Charged Hearts* reveals how we are "plugged in" to today's mediated and virtual environments, while *Curios-*

*ity Cabinet* gives us a chance to become "unplugged" in light of this sublime realization.

*Curiosities* will be on display at the Dunlop Art Gallery until May 17.

**Anthony Kiendl**

Curator

Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina Public Library