

Artifacts

Get crackin'

Disclaimer: Although this issue of *New Times* officially comes out Thursday, Nov. 25, you will probably be too occupied stuffing your face with turkey and giving thanks until at least Saturday, Nov. 27, and therefore will not emerge from your toxic food coma to read this column until after Thanksgiving, in which case its writer ought to be excused for premature *Nutcracker* promotion.

That said, here's a convenient list of *The Nutcrackers* for your easy reference and reading pleasure:

The first post-Thanksgiving *Nutcracker*, presented by Everybody Can Dance, lights up the stage on Saturday, Nov. 27, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, Nov. 28,

BY ANNA WELTNER

Seven serendipitous stochasticons

Watch Jean-François Podevin's latest project, "Composite Memories," give order to chaos

"I don't think straight," the artist said, half apologetic, flipping through one of the 177 sketchbooks that formed the basis for his exhibit "Composite Memories." Graphic artist by trade, installation artist out of sheer fascination, Jean-François Podevin has spent his career trying to inflict order on the vague and intangible, happily embracing the intrinsic contradictions of his efforts.

But does anyone really think straight? True, the French-born artist said, our thoughts and ideas crave expression in a linear, cohesive fashion,

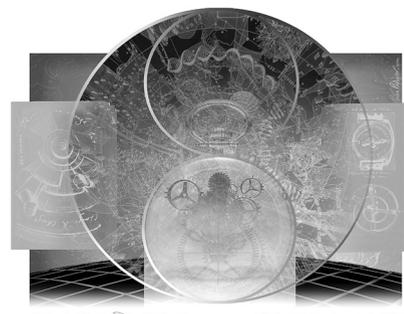
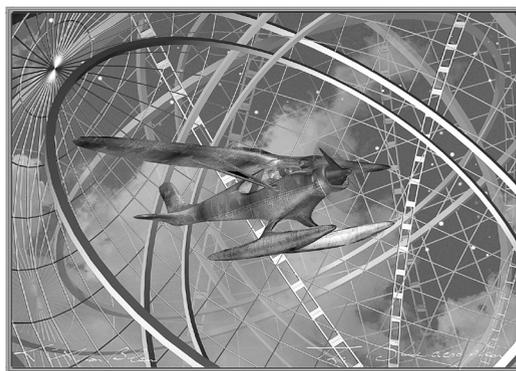
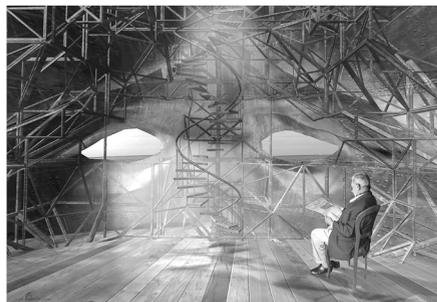
the back of the train as it made its way to his grandmother's town, where it had carried him many times before and would bring him again. He always sat at the back, he said, to see the rail. His interest in seeing where he had been (as opposed to where he was, or was going to) was later echoed in his desire to accurately reconstruct memories of a boyhood spent in France.

"This kind of drawing, that was my theory: Memory was something exact," he said. "It could almost be a science of remembering things."

The Scientific American.

Each of the dreamlike images, which align themselves randomly in rows of four (rather like a slot machine), carries a specific meaning for Podevin. But in presenting them as he does, allowing the viewer to manipulate the pictures' alignment, he relinquishes control, giving us interpretive free reign within a preconceived but expansive landscape. Think of it as fine art's answer to the Choose Your Own Adventure novel.

Eyeing a row of images randomly aligned on a freshly assembled stochasticon, titled



IMAGES BY J.F. PODEVIN

INSTANCES OF ETERNITY

at 3 p.m. at the Clark Center, 487 Fair Oaks Ave. Tickets cost \$10 to 17 and can be obtained by calling 498-8944 or at clark-center.org.

The award for silliest *Nutcracker* goes to *Nuncrackers! The Nonsense Christmas Musical*, running Thursday through Sunday, Nov. 19 to Dec. 19, at the San Luis Obispo Little Theatre. Directed by Jim Shine, *Nuncrackers* is part of the *Nonsense* series, performed as a "TV special" and featuring original songs such as "Twelve Days Prior to Christmas" and "We Three Kings of Orient Are Us." Tickets cost \$15 to \$25, and can be bought at slolittletheatre.org. The Little Theatre is at 888 Morro St. in downtown San Luis Obispo.

The Nutcracker Ballet graces the Templeton Performing Arts Center the weekends of Dec. 3 to 5 and 10 to 12. General admission is \$22; those 65 or better pay just \$17, and those 12 or worse pay \$15. Get tickets for this very traditional version by calling 239-3668 or visit brownpapertickets.com.

Lori Lee Silvaggio's version of *The Nutcracker* presented by the Civic Ballet of San Luis Obispo, opens Dec. 11 at 2 and 7 p.m., followed by performances Dec. 12 at 2 and 6 p.m. Senior and student tickets start at \$15; general admission is \$24. Visit pacsl.org or 756-2787. Δ

—Anna Weltner

but in our minds they have a fluid quality: Our memories are incomplete, unreliable records, open to outside suggestion, super-imposed with other memories like over-exposed film, or like transparencies stuck to one another on the overhead projector of human consciousness.

Our memories are composite.

About three years of work went into Podevin's latest show, currently on display at the Cuesta College Art Gallery. The seven freestanding machines that make up the exhibit (stochasticons, he calls them, or "display contraptions") each contain 365 images, assembled in rows of four, for 45,000 possible combinations. "Composite Memories" is actually a project

decades in the making, one that began with the artist's move to California from France in his 20s.

"I felt a little bit uprooted, and saw myself from a distant point of view," the artist, seated among his sketches and stochasticons, explained to *New Times*. "And I started here to recapitulate all my memories. I tried to remember all the names of my classmates."

The feeling he was experiencing wasn't quite nostalgia, he said. The purpose was more "to reconstruct who I was." Feeling a sense of freefall without the network one has in one's home country—"the places they've been, their family, all their sweet stories"—Podevin began to draw things from memory, like the view from

Then the artist came across the memory that would be the cornerstone of the project. It was a pleasant one, he said, if somewhat elusive, a soft-focus mental photograph: a family gathering, somewhere in the east of France. A nice restaurant. A sunset on a lake. Podevin asked his relatives about it, each remembered it, but in a different place and time—"which was fascinating," he said, "I spoke to my father about it, and he said, 'Oh, that must be a composite memory.' I said, 'I've never heard that word before.' And he said, 'Well, it's easy if you go to the same place every year; you might confuse the people you were with.' And then somehow I'd given so much importance to the fact that memory was exact, it just shattered my whole belief."

Memories, he realized, were not concrete, saved like a document to be opened later exactly as one has left them, but creative, malleable and open to manipulation with each revisiting.

Podevin wanted to give structure to his fluid, inaccurate memories, and when words fell flat, he turned to drawing. Through his work in graphic design, he converted his sketches

into a stunning collection of digital images not unlike the cover illustrations he created for the likes of *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, and

'We are fluid, we are floating, and we have to stop time and triangulate.'

Jean-François Podevin, graphic designer/installation artist

Creative recollection

Jean-François Podevin's latest installation, "Composite Memories," is free and open to the public, showing through Dec. 16 in room 7170 of the Cuesta College Art Gallery, located on Highway 1 between San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay. The artist's sketchbooks are also available to be pored over and scrutinized—just ask! Gallery hours are Monday through Friday, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Find more artist info at jfpodevin.com.

New Times Arts Editor Anna Weltner believes order is just chaos waiting to be disassembled. Contact her at aweltner@newtimeslo.com.