

# Whirl through ARTcade is a dazzling ride

Art

By MARY JO PALUMBO

**I**magine you're a pinball, whirring through a dizzying array of flippers and bumpers, lights and sounds.

That's the idea behind "Pinball ARTcade," the latest exhibit at the Boston Center for the Arts Mills Gallery.

More than 40 artists and dozens of neighbors-

joined forces to transform the gallery into a walk-in pinball experience.

Visitors walk onto a rickety wooden ramp that feels like the entrance to an amusement park ride. Overhead, a 5-foot sphere made of a string of arcade tickets hangs above the doorway.

The idea belongs to Jerry Beck, whose father owned a penny arcade, and who was inspired by the of honky-tonk world of amusement parks, carnivals and circus shows.

"It was an exciting atmosphere of spinning

numbers, flashing lights, secret passageways, smells, sounds — like a miniature Las Vegas for all ages," said Beck, artistic director of The Revolving Museum. "Once inside, you forget the banality of everyday life. But in this show we will also use the elements of the penny arcade to explore some of the tougher issues we face today."

Visitors pass through soft fabric "flippers" and navigate around "bumpers" as they view

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## Community shows life's diversity in art

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dozens of zany installations. Sculptures and large curls of rubber from old tires hang from the ceiling. Artists make use of everything from safety pins to soda can tabs, candles to rubber boots. Music and lights blink from five video projects. A large sign reads "We Sell Hope."

Some of the projects were created by collaborative ventures with artists and members of local community groups.

Jeff de Castro worked with DEAF Inc. and the Massachusetts Association for the Blind to create a revolving "spaceship" made from bamboo poles. Around the perimeter, a dozen plaster hands offer a sign-language poem with symbols for expressions like "bright star," "to fly" and "to love."

"This has been a fascinating experience for me," said de Castro, a South Boston artist. "In some ways, the deaf are more visual than I am."

South End artist Heidi Schork worked with youths from the Castle Square

housing development to create large murals depicting the diverse makeup of their neighborhood. Nora Valdez created two large pinball bumpers along with Puerto Rican girls from Villa Victoria.

The girls used the bumpers to show pictures of their future dreams: getting married, becoming a career woman, returning to Puerto Rico. They also depict Villa Victoria's legendary 1968 struggle to preserve Latino residences in the South End.

Valdez believes the project provided an important link between the BCA and the neighboring Villa Victoria.

"The kids I work with live two blocks from the BCA and they have never been there," said Valdez. "This is part of their neighborhood. For them it is very strange being in a gallery. They feel so unfamiliar here, but they were proud to see their pictures."

*Pinball ARTcade at the Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont St., through Jan. 29, Wed.-Sun. Call 426-5000. Free.*



**ARTWORK:** Susanne Watson, below, and Pina Dolce, who is blind, in front of 'Keep Your Eye On It.' Staff photo by Matt Stone