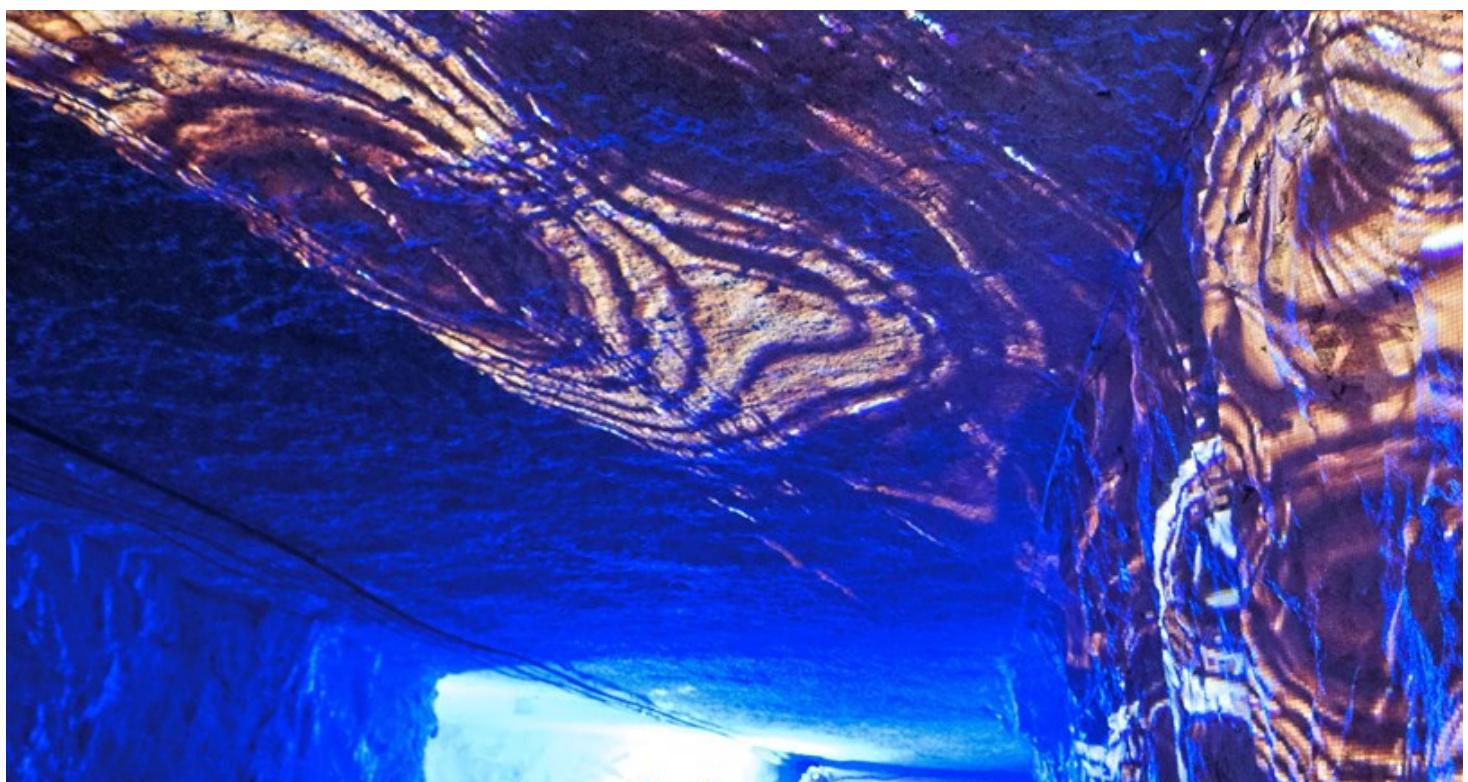


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Review: CMU students stage



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weird art festival in limestone mine



JEREMY REYNOLDS
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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Carnegie Mellon University started an outlandish new tradition Saturday, sending roughly 110 students, faculty and alumni deep into a former limestone mine for an art festival designed by art and music students.



“SubSurface: Site Specific Sight and Sound” is intended to be the first annual performance in collaboration with Brady’s Bend Underground Storage facility in Armstrong County. CMU alumnus Daniel Bruce owns the mine and welcomed the installation pro bono.



The festival is the brainchild of professors Richard Pell (art) and Jesse Stiles (music) and their students.



CMU professor Jesse Stiles
(Justin Merriman/CMU)

The mine’s temperature is a consistent 55 degrees throughout its inconceivably vast, 50 million-square-foot interior. Underground roads stretch for more than 625 miles inside the mine, although CMU

crews utilized only about a half a mile of the tunnels to install exhibits that included sculpture, light projections and both live and pre-recorded music and sound.

“SubSurface” spotlighted the idea of the Anthropocene, a recently proposed epoch marked by humanity’s impact on the environment rather than geological shifts.

The entire experience was thoughtfully curated. Attendees began their adventure Saturday afternoon on a fleet of five buses at the Oakland campus. Riders were invited to download and listen to podcasts detailing the mine’s history en route, and provided travel packs which included dust

masks. After more than an hour's drive, the buses took visitors deep into the mine.

Once inside, attendees wandered on foot through the mine for an hour and a half, directed and entertained by nearly 50 students, faculty and staff members dressed in white jumpsuits adorned with decorative light-strips. Some performers wore masks.

Visual exhibitions ranged from the tactile experience of walking through rows of dead cornstalks, to paintings representing human impact on the environment. The more evocative pieces included a cast-iron hand with burning talons, a simple window with curtains facing a wall of rock and a simulated projection of a changing forest that shifted colors as viewers walked by.



"Untitled" by Gwen Sadler
(Justin Merriman/CMU)

Networked speakers broadcast sound — some pre-recorded and some played live — from various rooms to other spaces within the mine. Installations included members of CMU's experimental music research wing, the Exploded Ensemble, performing on electric guitar, drum kit, viola, trumpet, trombone and other instruments.

Performers moved through the tunnels with the viewers, and the experience culminated in a

most anticipated highlight: a 160-foot chamber with all



Samir Gangwani, trumpeter
(Justin Merriman/CMU)

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vast, echoing in 500- by- 100-foot chamber, with all ensemble members playing improvisatory lines or vocalizing from different places in the space.

Surprisingly, the sound wasn't overpowering or cacophonic. The limestone walls, floor and ceiling soaked in much of the music rather than creating an echo chamber. As the event concluded, the music coalesced into a dirge-like march, many attendees unconsciously stepping in time back toward the waiting buses.

Mr. Bruce, president of Brady's Bend Corp., said he looked forward to continuing his partnership with the university.



“Metamorphosis” by Katherine Tsai
(Justin Merriman/CMU)

Since he did not charge for use of the space, the entire project cost only about \$20,000 that was raised within the CMU network, Mr. Stiles said. This event was free but organizers may choose to charge admission in the future.

Jeremy Reynolds: jreynolds@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1634; twitter: @Reynolds_PG. Mr. Reynolds' work at the Post-Gazette is supported in part by a grant from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, the Getty Foundation, and the Rubin Institute.



Sara Adkins, violinist
(Justin Merriman/CMU)

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