

FAMILY FARE - The New York Times

More Machines On the Rise

O.K., so maybe there isn't a robot more thrilling -- or threatening -- than the shape-shifting, molecular-recombining villainess in "Terminator 3." But reality offers artificial intelligence that is almost as ingenious, and much more benevolent.

Many of these lean (but never mean) machines can be seen starting tomorrow at "Robot," a free four-day festival at Eyebeam, a Chelsea gallery. The centerpiece is "Artbots: The Robot Talent Show," whose contestants range from BabyBott, which looks like a giant baby bottle and reacts when you cuddle it, to Lemur, an electronic orchestra with a multiarmed robot in the shape of the Hindu god Siva. Its function? To play drums, of course.

"Kids will probably be most interested in what they can interact with," said Douglas Irving Repetto, the show's director. That includes Tribble, which resembles an illuminated soccer ball with whiskers. "It's kind of like a cyberpet," he said.

Children can also make music with Lev, a robot that plays the theremin, and meet Neil, a humanoid with a video-monitor face. "It responds to your physical gestures and tries to emote different moods," Mr. Repetto explained. (More examples and artist information are at Artbots.org.) On Sunday the show will culminate in an official prize and an audience choice award. (Some robots will remain on view Monday and Tuesday.)

The festival will also offer the Tickle Salon, a robotic massage parlor. But this one is G-rated, said Perry Lowe, Eyebeam's director of marketing. It features the Tickler, a machine that administers a light massage, as well as a device that looks like a small tractor, "but instead of a continuous chain, it has little rubber nubs," he said. Rubdowns are first come, first served.

So are workshops from 6 to 8 p.m. on Monday. Participants 12 and over can make their own robots using LEGO Mindstorms (small computers) or build robotic dogs. These creatures, though, are guaranteed to be obedience-trained.

"Robot," tomorrow through Tuesday from noon to 6 p.m. at Eyebeam, 540 West 21st Street, Chelsea, (212) 252-5193. Donations suggested.

The Friendly Skies

Not counting Spider-Man, the only New Yorkers who can swoop from the top of a skyscraper to the sidewalks below are pigeons, hawks and other winged citizens. But now ordinary residents can have the experience, no bungee cords required.

The trip comes courtesy of the New York Skyride, recently reopened at the Empire State Building. This motion-simulator ride creates the illusion of high-velocity air travel by mechanically moving your seat while you watch a film. Now redesigned, it visits 29 city landmarks.

The 22-minute trip is narrated, fittingly, by Kevin Bacon, the actor reputed to be only six or so degrees separated from each of us nonfamous types. It starts with gentle revolutions around sites like the Chrysler Building, the Statue of Liberty and the 59th Street and Brooklyn Bridges. But just as you think, "no big deal," he announces that someone has pressed the wrong button. This sends the imaginary air ship into wild soars and dips, including brief visits to outer space, below sea level and, of course, the Cyclone, the Coney Island roller coaster.

The illusion of hurtling through places like Grand Central Terminal and F. A. O. Schwarz, sending pedestrians shrieking for cover, seems to thrill riders under 12. (So this is how you release that notorious New York aggression.)

Still, the trip is not scary, except, perhaps, for the lines. (The two theaters seat only 40 apiece.) But this is also the city that never sleeps: fortunately, the Skyride is open day and evening, 365 days a year.

The New York Skyride, second floor, the Empire State Building. Continuous shows daily, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tickets: \$14.50; ages 12 to 17 and 62+, \$13.50; 5 to 11, \$12.50. With observatory admission: \$20, \$18 and \$14. Information: skyride.com.

Go Fish

Politicians are often obliged to kiss babies. Adrian Benepe, the city parks commissioner, has a less appealing responsibility: to kiss a fish.

This morning Mr. Benepe will smooch R. H. Macy, a tagged largemouth bass, and release it into Prospect Lake in Brooklyn. This rite signifies the beginning of the annual Macy's Fishing Contest, open to all anglers 15 and under. Any competitor who hooks Macy automatically wins the grand prize, a family trip on a fishing boat in Sheepshead Bay. But it won't be easy. "The tagged fish hasn't been caught in at least 25 years," said Lucy Gentile, Prospect Park's director of marketing.

If Macy eludes capture, the trip will go to the youngster who catches the most fish on a single day. There will also be daily awards for the largest number and the longest fish.

All equipment is provided, and the only prerequisite is an on-site fishing clinic. The park will also offer drier ways to get into the spirit, including a Fun Fish Fest at the Audubon Center at the Boathouse (with a marionette show tomorrow at 2 p.m.), and old games to improve fishing skills on selected afternoons at the Lefferts Children's Historic House Museum. Even empty-handed fishermen can win prizes in a raffle on July 19, including a bicycle and a boat ride.

But the fish have the most to look forward to: all return to the lake.

Macy's Fishing Contest, today, tomorrow and Tuesday through July 19 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Prospect Lake, Prospect Park (enter at Ocean and Parkside Avenues), Brooklyn. Free. Information: (718) 965-6975.

Photo: A drum-playing robot of the Hindu god Siva at Eyebeam Gallery. (Eyebeam Gallery)