What, exactly, is an “artbot”? That’s a good question, and one we’ve been thinking about for a long time. It’s difficult enough to settle on a good definition of “art” or “robot”; put them together and things really get interesting!

Each artist has her own answer. As curators, our attitude is: “if you think it’s a robot and you think it’s art, then let’s take a look.” In a field as young and open as this one, we’ve tried to encourage people to take chances and to be creative with the idea of an “artbot.” Some artists interpret “artbot” as “a device that makes art,” while others see it as “a robot that is a work of art.” We like both.

For this, the second annual ArtBots show, we received far more entries than we could possibly include. Clearly melding art and robotics is an idea that is in the air. To help narrow the field, we developed some curatorial guidelines. Primary among these is a preference for physical devices that move and systems that have some degree of autonomy.

We also made sure to include small-scale, one-artist works, as well as large, complex, collaborative projects. It’s the ideas we value. Robotic technology is accessible technology. Creative artists with big ideas, small budgets, and a healthy dose of the do-it-yourself ethic can create impressive robot-based artworks.

Of course, not every category of artbot is represented in the show. Due to logistical issues we were not able to include robotic theatrical performances, despite several interesting entries. We would like to pursue this in the future.

We hope that the twenty-two works in this year’s ArtBots show are as engaging, frustrating, mystifying, entertaining, and affecting for you as they are for us. These works probably ask more questions than they answer, and we think that’s a good thing. What is authorship? Can a machine be creative? Who is responsible for the actions of a machine? Can a machine think? Does it matter? Can a non-human be conscious? And what is consciousness, anyway?

We think that this mix of intriguing questions, strange ideas, and sheer, shameless fun is what makes a project like ArtBots worth doing. We hope you will agree.

Douglas Repetto
Philip Galanter
Jenny Lee
Curators, ArtBots: The Robot Talent Show
July 12, 2003
New York City
Saturday and Sunday
July 12 & 13, 2003
Noon to 6:00 PM
EYEBEAM Gallery
540 West 21st Street
New York, NY 10011
Log on to: http://artbots.org for the full catalog and details of show.