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The New Slanted Door and Masa's—yes, Masa's

digital underground

The new season of the TV series *Spark* provides an in-depth look at artists, entertainers and all things eclectic.

In the age of reality TV, media programming and cultural enrichment seem as incompatible as Winona Ryder and Saks Fifth Avenue. Just when you thought popular culture was going down the drain, KQED Public Television (in collaboration with Bay Area Video Coalition) introduces the second season of *Spark*, a series that culls the brightest talent from the Bay Area art scene. Each episode revolves around a theme (public spaces, collaborations, politics) and profiles everyone from sculptors to stage performers, delivering audiences to the doorstep of the city's galleries, studios and concert halls.

At a time when arts budgets are being cut and cultural organizations struggle to survive, *Spark* (which first aired last March) puts creative expression at the forefront. What's more, its second-season lineup—featuring world renowned luminaries, such as choreographer Mark Morris and Spearhead frontman Michael Franti, as well as notable locals, including artist David Ireland—has the potential to surpass its first.

The coming “Technophiles” episode showcases cutting-edge work from Ken Goldberg and

Paul DeMarinis. *Spark* gets up close and personal with Goldberg, a UC Berkeley professor and elite member of “net artists” (tech-minded creatives who collaborate via the web), and his Tele-Actor Project. This device allows participants to explore different environments via a

Tele-Actor—a human outfitted with various cameras and microphones connected to a digital network. Viewers vote online to decide its next move; think virtual reality, but less virtual and more reality.

DeMarinis gives us a look at his latest installation, *Firebirds*. Engaging with technology through its history, the piece revolves around the Victorian-era discovery that flame transmits sound. The artist gives it new life using an antique birdcage and a gas flame that emits a speech from a 20th-century dictator. It's Bill Nye the Science Guy, plus a heady dose of political commentary (“*Technophiles*” airs March 31 on KQED TV; www.kqed.com/spark). —Melissa Goldstein x

TECH SUPPORT: Artist Ken Goldberg examines his latest creation—the Tele-Actor Project.

