

[‘Forever People’ downtown is an interactive art project](#) by Alex Schubert, Kansas City Star.
Published March 21, 2010,

“Forever People” continues at the ARTwall, at the intersection of 13th St. and Grand St., through **November 8th**. For more information, call 816-421-1798 (ext. 111#) or visit www.ascotjsmith.com.

It’s the year 2200.

After the great collapse, everyone’s forced to wear electronic compatibility bracelets. They match men and women as they pass each other on the street. And if you find a match, you’re legally obligated to live together, repopulating the planet.

Local artist Ascot Smith invented this Orwellian eHarmony as part of a new piece, called “Forever People” (2010). It’s the latest addition to Art in the Loop’s long-running ARTwall project.

You may have already seen it.

It’s a billboard on the edge of the Power and Light District, showing a man and woman, each in a white lab coat. Superimposed in front of them is a phone number. Call it, and you’ll hear a voicemail—ostensibly left by a person from the future.

“It’s an experiment the unnamed couple is participating in,” Smith explained. “By sending messages into the past, [they’re] hoping it will alter their time for the better.”

He’s hoping listeners will stick with the story, calling back for a new episode every other Monday for the next 9 months. To keep them interested, it’ll get increasingly dramatic as time goes on.

“It gets kinda racy,” Smith said. “The male character tries to escape the protective dome they live in. Then the female character gets medicated, and they give her a holographic man.”

Smith is adamant that, while his work does include genre elements, it’s an exploration of banality and introspection. He says the Science Fiction element of “Forever People” can be seen as the backdrop to an acerbic look at modern romance.

Interestingly, this is Smith’s second attempt at the “Forever People” project.

The first was shown in 2008 at the Paragraph, during the exhibition “On View.” At that time, the piece was an installation featuring live actors and projections. While reworking the script for the ARTwall, the subject matter began to change. In 2008, the piece was about a man pursuing a woman. In 2010, that’s in the past, and now they’re learning to live together.

“I know so many people whose relationships are built on passion or lust, but you can’t really live with somebody like that—even though it’s what you signed up for,” Smith said, relating the premise to his own experience.

Smith went on to explain that the characters in his work often create fantasies. For example, in his upcoming feature film, “Last Man of Idaho” (2010), an aspiring writer imagines a number of alternate career paths. In another film, “Triple Threat” (2005), a man trapped in an abusive relationship daydreams about getting into a fistfight with himself.

“It’s how [these characters] come of age or learn about themselves,” Smith said.

With this in mind, it’s not hard to imagine that “Forever People” is to some extent autobiographical. Creating these scenarios, Smith may be learning about himself.

And we get to listen in.