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Digital Manufacturing Meets Art to Create ‘Strange’ Connections On San Francisco’s Open Streets

Proto Labs’ Cool Idea! Award helps create injection-molded lenses to encourage human interaction

MAPLE PLAIN, MINN. — Oct. 18 2016 — [The Market Street Prototyping Festival](#) recently celebrated art and community in one of San Francisco’s most-traversed neighborhoods. One of the event’s premier incubation projects will remain for up to two years, and aims to build powerful connections among street-dwellers, ironically by creating distortions between them.

[Strange Lenses](#) artist Robb Godshaw used a service grant from the [Proto Labs Cool Idea! Award](#), and funding from festival sponsors, to manufacture giant silicone lenses that distort a user’s face when viewed from the other side, similar to funhouse mirrors.

Godshaw’s lenses — produced with injection-molded optical liquid silicone rubber (LSR) — have been digitally designed and manufactured to create geometric distortions. The exhibit encourages visitors to create connections with strangers by interacting in a unique and engaging way.

“Strangers open up — they become completely disarmed and start acting as friends,” said Godshaw. “Seeing people in this way — in a socially interactive art installation — can create an impact on the way you see and interact with your community.”

Godshaw’s work was chosen as an “incubation project” for the Market Street Prototyping Festival after early success in a three-day installation last year, meaning it’ll be installed for up to two years in the heart of the retail district in San Francisco. He applied for and won a Proto Labs Cool Idea! Award, which allowed him to create the high-quality lenses very quickly and efficiently, in time for the event.

“Some initial prototype lenses I had produced elsewhere took more than 25 hours just to polish and sand,” he said. “I had tried 3D printing some lenses with other manufacturers, but the optical quality just wasn’t there. When I met Proto Labs, I was blown away by its optical LSR — especially the speed and clarity.”

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Plus, the funding from Proto Labs and others allowed Godshaw to prepare for the rigors of a two-year installation.

“Designing something to be on the street for two years is a very different challenge than designing something to be up for a few days,” said Godshaw. “Optical LSR is robust and durable. You can’t scratch it, crack it or melt it, so it’s perfect for my installation and for the millions of people who will interact with it over the next two years.”

“The Cool Idea! Award exists to enable promising ideas to come to life, and fittingly, this project will bring people together from all walks of life,” said Proto Labs founder Larry Lukis. “We’re happy to have played a role in this project.”

Follow [Strange Lenses online](#), or on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [Twitter](#).

About the Proto Labs Cool Idea! Award

Offered by Proto Labs, the world’s fastest digital manufacturing source for custom prototypes and low-volume production parts, the Cool Idea! Award helps entrepreneurs bring innovative products to market through grants that support product prototyping, testing and production. For more details and to apply for a Cool Idea! Award, go to protolabs.com/cool-idea.

About Proto Labs

Proto Labs is the world's fastest digital manufacturing source for custom prototypes and low-volume production parts. The technology-enabled company uses advanced 3D printing, CNC machining and injection molding technologies to produce parts within days. The result is an unprecedented speed-to-market value for designers and engineers and an on-demand resource throughout a product’s life cycle. Visit protolabs.com for more information.