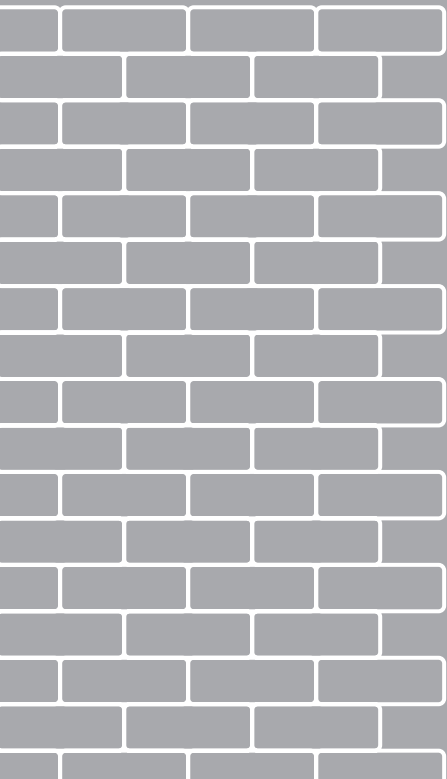




LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC



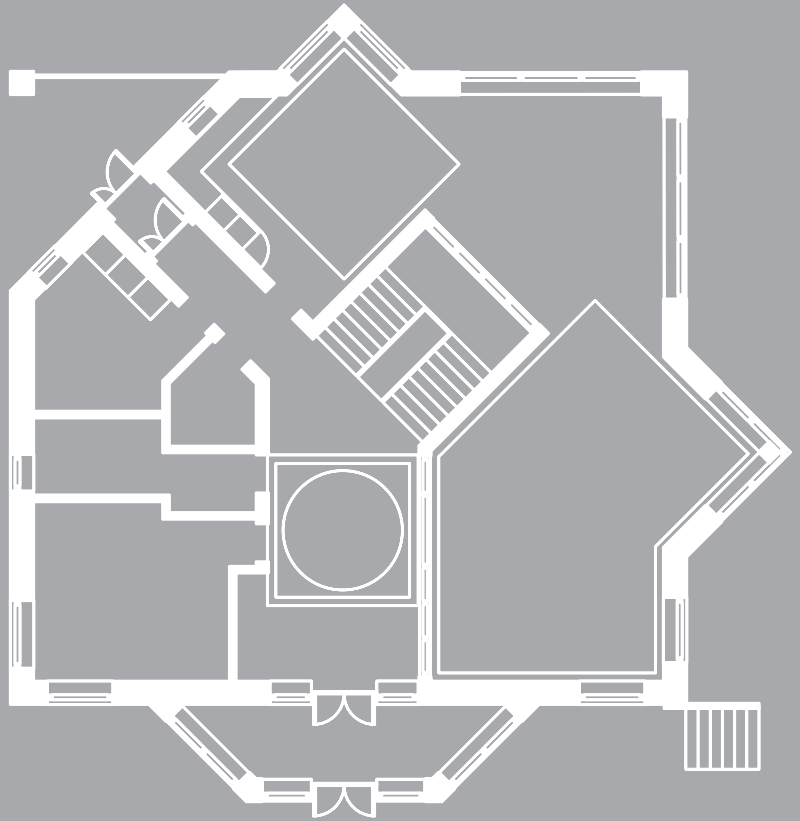
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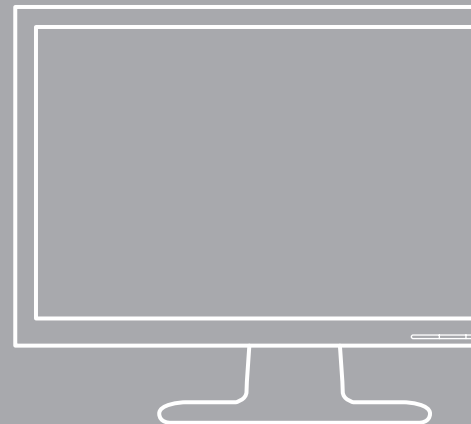
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EDITORS **ÖZDEN ŞAHİN**, **JONATHAN MUNRO** AND **CATHERINE M. WEIR**

This LEA publication has a simple goal: surveying the current trends in augmented reality artistic interventions. There is no other substantive academic collection currently available, and it is with a certain pride that LEA presents this volume which provides a snapshot of current trends as well as a moment of reflection on the future of AR interventions.



NOT THERE



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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 1

Not Here Not There

VOLUME EDITORS

LANFRANCO ACETI AND RICHARD RINEHART

EDITORS

ÖZDEN ŞAHİN, JONATHAN MUNRO AND CATHERINE M. WEIR

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Not Here, Not There: An Analysis Of An International Collaboration To Survey Augmented Reality Art

Every published volume has a reason, a history, a conceptual underpinning as well as an aim that ultimately the editor or editors wish to achieve. There is also something else in the creation of a volume; that is the larger goal shared by the community of authors, artists and critics that take part in it.

This volume of LEA titled *Not Here, Not There* had a simple goal: surveying the current trends in augmented reality artistic interventions. There is no other substantive academic collection currently available, and it is with a certain pride that both, Richard Rinehart and myself, look at this endeavor. Collecting papers and images, answers to interviews as well as images and artists' statements and putting it all together is perhaps a small milestone; nevertheless I believe that this will be a seminal collection which will showcase the trends and dangers that augmented reality as an art form faces in the second decade of the XXIst century.

As editor, I did not want to shy away from more critical essays and opinion pieces, in order to create a documentation that reflects the status of the current thinking. That these different tendencies may or may not be proved right in the future is not the reason for the collection, instead what I believe is important and relevant is to create a historical snapshot by focusing on the artists and authors developing artistic practices and writing on augmented reality. For this reason, Richard and I posed to the contributors a series of questions that in the variegated responses of the artists and authors will evidence and stress similari-

ties and differences, contradictions and behavioral approaches. The interviews add a further layer of documentation which, linked to the artists' statements, provides an overall understanding of the hopes for this new artistic playground or new media extension. What I personally wanted to give relevance to in this volume is the artistic creative process. I also wanted to evidence the challenges faced by the artists in creating artworks and attempting to develop new thinking and innovative aesthetic approaches.

The whole volume started from a conversation that I had with Tamiko Thiel – that was recorded in Istanbul at Kasa Gallery and that led to a curatorial collaboration with Richard. The first exhibition *Not Here* at the Samek Art Gallery, curated by Richard Reinhart, was juxtaposed to a response from Kasa Gallery with the exhibition *Not There*, in Istanbul. The conversations between Richard and myself produced this final volume – *Not Here, Not There* – which we both envisaged as a collection of authored papers, artists' statements, artworks, documentation and answers to some of the questions that we had as curators. This is the reason why we kept the same questions for all of the interviews – in order to create the basis for a comparative analysis of different aesthetics, approaches and processes of the artists that work in augmented reality.

When creating the conceptual structures for this collection my main personal goal was to develop a link – or better to create the basis for a link – between ear-

lier artistic interventions in the 1960s and the current artistic interventions of artists that use augmented reality.

My historical artist of reference was Yayoi Kusama and the piece that she realized for the Venice Biennial in 1966 titled *Narcissus Garden*. The artwork was a happening and intervention at the Venice Biennial; Kusama was obliged to stop selling her work by the biennial's organizers for 'selling art too cheaply.'

"In 1966 [...] she went uninvited to the Venice Biennale. There, dressed in a golden kimono, she filled the lawn outside the Italian pavilion with 1,500 mirrored balls, which she offered for sale for 1,200 lire apiece. The authorities ordered her to stop, deeming it unacceptable to 'sell art like hot dogs or ice cream cones.'"¹

The conceptualization and interpretation of this gesture by critics and art historians is that of a guerrilla action that challenged the commercialization of the art system and that involved the audience in a process that revealed the complicit nature and behaviors of the viewers as well as use controversy and publicity as an integral part of the artistic practice.

Kusama's artistic legacy can perhaps be resumed in these four aspects: a) engagement with audience's behaviors, b) issues of art economy and commercialization, c) rogue interventions in public spaces and d) publicity and notoriety.

These are four elements that characterize the work practices and artistic approaches – in a variety of combinations and levels of importance – of contem-

1. David Pilling, "The World According to Yayoi Kusama," *The Financial Times*, January 20, 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/52ab168a-4188-11e1-8c33-00144feab49a.html#axzz1kDck8Rzm> (accessed March 1, 2013).

porary artists that use augmented reality as a medium. Here, is not perhaps the place to focus on the role of 'publicity' in art history and artistic practices, but a few words have to be spent in order to explain that publicity for AR artworks is not solely a way for the artist to gain notoriety, but an integral part of the artwork, which in order to come into existence and generate interactions and engagements with the public has to be communicated to the largest possible audience.

"By then, Kusama was widely assumed to be a publicity hound, who used performance mainly as a way of gaining media exposure."² The publicity obsession, or the accusation of being a 'publicity hound' could be easily moved to the contemporary group of artists that use augmented reality. Their invasions of spaces, juxtapositions, infringements could be defined as nothing more than publicity stunts that have little to do with art. These accusations would not be just irrelevant but biased – since – as in the case of Sander Veenhof's analysis in this collection – the linkage between the existence of the artwork as an invisible presence and its physical manifestation and engagement with the audience can only happen through knowledge, through the audience's awareness of the existence of the art piece itself that in order to achieve its impact as an artwork necessitates to be publicized.

Even if, I do not necessarily agree with the idea of a 'necessary manifestation' and audience's knowledge of the artwork – I believe that an artistic practice that is unknown is equally valid – I can nevertheless understand the process, function and relations that have to be established in order to develop a form of engagement and interaction between the AR artwork and the audience. To condemn the artists who seek publicity

2. Isabelle Loring Wallace and Jennie Hirsh, *Contemporary Art & Classical Myth* (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 94.

in order to gather audiences to make the artworks come alive is perhaps a shortsighted approach that does not take into consideration the audience's necessity of knowing that interaction is possible in order for that interaction to take place.

What perhaps should be analyzed in different terms is the evolution of art in the second part of the XXth century, as an activity that is no longer and can no longer be rescinded from publicity, since audience engagement requires audience attendance and attendance can be obtained only through communication / publicity. The existence of the artwork – in particular of the successful AR artwork – is strictly measured in numbers: numbers of visitors, numbers of interviews, numbers of news items, numbers of talks, numbers of interactions, numbers of clicks, and, perhaps in a not too distant future, numbers of coins gained. The issue of being a 'publicity hound' is not a problem that applies to artists alone, from Andy Warhol to Damien Hirst from Banksy to Maurizio Cattelan, it is also a method of evaluation that affects art institutions and museums alike. The accusation moved to AR artists of being media whores – is perhaps contradictory when arriving from institutional art forms, as well as galleries and museums that have celebrated publicity as an element of the performative character of both artists and artworks and an essential element instrumental to the institutions' very survival.

The publicity stunts of the augmented reality interventions today are nothing more than an acquired methodology borrowed from the second part of the XXth century. This is a stable methodology that has already been widely implemented by public and private art institutions in order to promote themselves and their artists.

Publicity and community building have become an artistic methodology that AR artists are playing with by

making use of their better knowledge of the AR media. Nevertheless, this is knowledge born out of necessity and scarcity of means, and at times appears to be more effective than the institutional messages arriving from well-established art organizations. I should also add that publicity is functional in AR interventions to the construction of a community – a community of aficionados, similar to the community of 'nudists' that follows Spencer Tunic for his art events / human installation.

I think what is important to remember in the analysis of the effectiveness both in aesthetic and participatory terms of augmented reality artworks – is not their publicity element, not even their sheer numbers (which, by the way, are what has made these artworks successful) but their quality of disruption.

The ability to use – in Marshall McLuhan's terms – the medium as a message in order to impose content by-passing institutional control is the most exciting element of these artworks. It is certainly a victory that a group of artists – by using alternative methodological approaches to what are the structures of the capitalistic system, is able to enter into that very capitalistic system in order to become institutionalized and perhaps – in the near future – be able to make money in order to make art.

Much could be said about the artist's need of fitting within a capitalist system or the artist's moral obligation to reject the basic necessities to ensure an operational professional existence within contemporary capitalistic structures. This becomes, in my opinion, a question of personal ethics, artistic choices and existential social dramas. Let's not forget that the vast majority of artists – and AR artists in particular – do not have large sums and do not impinge upon national budgets as much as banks, financial institutions, militaries and corrupt politicians. They work for years

with small salaries, holding multiple jobs and making personal sacrifices; and the vast majority of them does not end up with golden parachutes or golden handshakes upon retirement nor causes billions of damage to society.

The current success of augmented reality interventions is due in small part to the nature of the medium. Museums and galleries are always on the lookout for 'cheap' and efficient systems that deliver art engagement, numbers to satisfy the donors and the national institutions that support them, artworks that deliver visibility for the gallery and the museum, all of it without requiring large production budgets. Forgetting that art is also about business, that curating is also about managing money, it means to gloss over an important element – if not the major element – that an artist has to face in order to deliver a vision.

Augmented reality artworks bypass these financial challenges, like daguerreotypes did by delivering a cheaper form of portraiture than oil painting in the first part of the XIXth century, or like video did in the 1970s and like digital screens and projectors have done in the 1990s until now, offering cheaper systems to display moving as well as static images. AR in this sense has a further advantage from the point of view of the gallery – the gallery has no longer a need to purchase hardware because audiences bring their own hardware: their mobile phones.

The materiality of the medium, its technological revolutionary value, in the case of early augmented reality artworks plays a pivotal role in order to understand its success. It is ubiquitous, can be replicated everywhere in the world, can be installed with minimal hassle and can exist, independently from the audience, institutions and governmental permissions. Capital costs for AR installations are minimal, in the order of a few

hundred dollars, and they lend themselves to collaborations based on global networks.

Problems though remain for the continued success of augmented reality interventions. Future challenges are in the materialization of the artworks for sale, to name an important one. Unfortunately, unless the relationship between collectors and the 'object' collected changes in favor of immaterial objects, the problem to overcome for artists that use augmented reality intervention is how and in what modalities to link the AR installations with the process of production of an object to be sold.

Personally I believe that there are enough precedents that AR artists could refer to, from Christo to Marina Abramovich, in order develop methods and frameworks to present AR artworks as collectable and sellable material objects. The artists' ability to do so, to move beyond the fractures and barriers of institutional vs. revolutionary, retaining the edge of their aesthetics and artworks, is what will determine their future success.

These are the reasons why I believe that this collection of essays will prove to be a piece, perhaps a small piece, of future art history, and why in the end it was worth the effort.

Lanfranco Aceti

Editor in Chief, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*
Director, Kasa Gallery



Site, Non-site, and Website

In the 1960's, artist Robert Smithson articulated the strategy of representation summarized by "site vs. non-site" whereby certain artworks were simultaneously abstract and representational and could be site-specific without being sited. A pile of rocks in a gallery is an "abstract" way to represent their site of origin. In the 1990's net.art re-de-materialized the art object and found new ways to suspend the artwork online between website and non-site. In the 21st century, new technologies suggest a reconsideration of the relationship between the virtual and the real. "Hardlinks" such as QR codes attempt to bind a virtual link to our physical environment.

Throughout the 1970's, institutional critique brought political awareness and social intervention to the site of the museum. In the 1980's and 90's, street artist such as Banksy went in the opposite direction, critiquing the museum by siting their art beyond its walls.

Sited art and intervention art meet in the art of the trespass. What is our current relationship to the sites we live in? What representational strategies are contemporary artists using to engage sites? How are sites politically activated? And how are new media framing our consideration of these questions? The contemporary art collective ManifestAR offers one answer,

"Whereas the public square was once the quintessential place to air grievances, display solidarity, express difference, celebrate similarity, remember, mourn, and reinforce shared values of right and wrong, it is no longer the only anchor for interactions in the public realm. That geography has been relocated to a novel terrain, one that encourages exploration of mobile location based monuments,

and virtual memorials. Moreover, public space is now truly open, as artworks can be placed anywhere in the world, without prior permission from government or private authorities – with profound implications for art in the public sphere and the discourse that surrounds it."

ManifestAR develops projects using Augmented Reality (AR), a new technology that – like photography before it – allows artists to consider questions like those above in new ways. Unlike Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality is the art of overlaying virtual content on top of physical reality. Using AR apps on smart phones, iPads, and other devices, viewers look at the real world around them through their phone's camera lens, while the app inserts additional images or 3D objects into the scene. For instance, in the work *Signs over Semiconductors* by Will Pappenheimer, a blue sky above a Silicon Valley company that is "in reality" empty contains messages from viewers in skywriting smoke when viewed through an AR-enabled Smartphone.

AR is being used to activate sites ranging from Occupy Wall Street to the art exhibition ManifestAR @ ZERO1 Biennial 2012 – presented by the Samek Art Gallery simultaneously at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA and at Silicon Valley in San Jose, CA. From these contemporary non-sites, and through the papers included in this special issue of LEA, artists ask you to reconsider the implications of the simple question *wayn* (where are you now?)

Richard Rinehart

Director, Samek Art Gallery, Bucknell University

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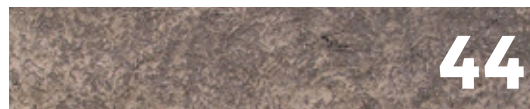
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A New Relic Emerges: Image as Subject to Object

by

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The banality of objects and platitude of imagery is more insistent than ever. Nuance, in its subtlety, has the power to set something apart in the realm of infinitely reproduced/reproducible art and image-based objects that philosopher Jean Baudrillard previously classified as “only concentrated effects, miniaturized and immediately available.”¹

With the advent of the Internet, there has been a distinct state change. In its wake visual artists are able to rupture the causes and effects of contribution within any small sphere of network intervention, specifically “when the internet is less a novelty and more of a banality.”²

When the Internet became more widely available in the 1990s, average users were led towards constrictive formats that limited their ability to interact with an interface and manipulate content that was available to other users. However, the last decade has given birth to an explosion of possibilities for information generation, storage, and retrieval. The vernacular has been shifted accordingly. Users are no longer restricted by database systems with severe edges and limits in their archiving abilities. These database systems are now in a continual state of unfolding, onto which each user is affecting his or her custom influence. By this, I am referring to the structure of content of each site that exists on the Internet which has been customized over time. With this seemingly infinite “colossally huge, searchable, public domain...now at your fingertips” as writer Bruce Sterling has described it, there is also the

consequence of overload. The Internet has itself become a new statistical model of data growth that supersedes any previous quantifiable structure in terms of breadth of information and reproduction of images. As such, Baudrillard's understanding of the simulacra becomes solidified and validated in a way that even he might not have been able to predict. If “the orders of simulacra increase as it becomes less and less possible to trace the origins of the simulations”³ one can persuasively argue that by virtue of the internet's infinitely layered “hyperstructure” of connectivity, linking one of thousands of images to one object approaches an asymptote of impossibility.

Suppose we disregard any criticism that this daunting structure is indeed “vague, unstable, indeterminate, unidentifiable, fragmented, amorphous, and always impersonal.”⁴ Perhaps we will not be dampened by Baudrillard's “bleak interpretation of postmodern culture” or his “romantic concern for the loss of the real, the natural and the human”⁴ and instead meditate for a moment on possibility have been stretched open as a result of this contemporary phenomenon. Upon the realization that for the most part, our ability to contribute to this structure is not stifled by law (in particular natural law). We not only have the freedom to direct our own mode of interaction but to begin directing others' experience as well. The “Internet provides the medium for disrupting models rather than confirming them.”⁵ The evolution of the Internet is still in its infancy, to the extent that we, as users, maintain a certain power over the direction in which it grows. “We don't have a coherent outlook or interest that can enslave us. This means we are closer to a potentially objective history than anybody has ever seen.”⁶

This condition does present its own set of challenges and exciting intricacies. As Sherry Turkle pointed out in 1996, “Today's computational models of the mind

often embrace a postmodern aesthetic of complexity and decentering. Mainstream computer researchers no longer aspire to program intelligence into computers but expect intelligence to emerge from the interactions of small subprograms.”⁷ The complexities that have surfaced from these models of the mid 1990s exemplify an incredible evolution. The Internet contains within it an entire world that is disjointed from actual reality. Generations of “digital natives”⁸ communicate within varied cultures, subcultures and countercultures that are reality-based, but internet-specific. Taking this into account, however, there is an immeasurable amount of bleed between the cultures prevailing on the Internet and in the real-world interests of the active users of the Internet. Hosting sites and search engines are programmed to be generic and simple so that the user can apply his/her “intelligence”⁷ to it, which generates overall user satisfaction. From this, there comes the often coincidental beauty of the nuance.

What becomes interesting, particularly for a visual artist, is the expansive array of opportunities embedded within a tool that is now a necessary component of everyday human existence. As Bruce Sterling suggests, “there are interesting potentials for complete digital recapturing of earlier artifacts, earlier means of production.”⁹ Though it may not be in anybody's basic interest to completely archive the entirety of human artifact, it has certainly become conceivable; and it has become nearly a legitimized reality since most users own devices that can remotely transmit information to the internet. We can rest assured that if there is an object, article, or occurrence of interest and a human happens upon it, the likelihood of it being captured and archived is substantial. As such, the hypothetical possibility exists for anything in the world to be found by somebody anywhere else in the world. The only requirements are, that the person who requires the information has access to an internet enabled device,



Little information to locality of the object can be inferred from the image. Image copyright of the author.

and the required data plan. It is irrelevant, at this point, whether the information is of high commercial or social value; the fact is that the objectivity of the archival database imbues potential for an object to gain a more subjective value.

The mode of this phenomenology is subsequently brought into question. How does one begin to approach the attachment of value, of any kind, to objects and images that begin with a user in physical space? How can the desired route of the Internet “explorer” lead them to gems in the “termite mounds of poorly organized and extremely potent knowledge, quantifiable, interchangeable data with newly networked relations?”⁶

Say, for instance, that you were to post a picture of a piece of wood on the Internet. For clarity's sake, we'll say that the piece of wood is an 8 foot-long 2" x 2" plank of pinewood. Say, also, that it has been photographed in front of a white wall and it is, let's say, lying in no particularly fascinating way on a concrete floor. Or, maybe we'll even say that it is photographed on an entirely black background so that all that is paid attention to is the wood. You post it onto the internet, and your photographed piece of wood will fall very quietly into the massive lumberyard of images of the same type of wood photographed against the same background.

But let's say, for instance, that you decide to put the actual piece of wood against a wall, upright, leaning. Again, you take a picture of the wood to put on the Internet. This gesture moves the object just barely out of the initial virtual iteration, which was the very generic image taken of the wood against the black background. Now, because of the special value applied to it, the wood actually exists somewhere in the world, in an actual space that has only now been represented in a virtual realm. Any person who comes across this



new image can see that it has been placed in a space that exists outside of the screen. However, it is still just one of a potentially infinite number of planks of wood that can lean against any number of available walls. The relative embedded interest of the original image has barely changed and it is still almost entirely reproducible.

When considering these images in relation to the expanse of distribution that they lie within, one wonders ultimately what might begin to dislocate an image on the Internet from itself when it is one of so many dislocations. It is a complex line of inquiry that yields results that are equally multifarious. However, the aforementioned overabundance of imagery may catalyze the nuanced object into making it a more effective image: “Although it sounds counterintuitive, a kind of non-reflective consciousness can be attained through

A specific site is present, not identified; the object can be understood as existing in a physical location. Image copyright of the author.

an excess of self-reflexivity or self-referentiality. Even though the gesture of self-reference begins ‘in’ a subject, greater degrees of self-reference eventually tear it away from the subject.”⁹

Now let's say you cut the wood in two places. The first of the cuts is a 23 degree angle, and the two lengths of wood are now 6' and 2'. The second cut is a 60 degree angle and the three lengths of wood are now 5' 6", 2', and 6". You now lean each piece of wood against a wall, with the end that's on the floor flush with it. The result, you will see, is an interesting arrangement of varying heights of wood, leaning against the wall at varying angles because of their new properties. You will notice that interesting negative spaces will occur, and nearly infinite compositions can be made through the lens of your camera. It is also a triptych, which alludes to and historic reference of art making. This is where the conversation within the bromidic object enters a sublime actualization that is “a kind of simulation, because it draws attention to the sheer existence of something...verifying to the point of giddiness the useless objectivity of things.”¹¹

Now the image of the piece of wood has departed even further from its beginning stage of relative inconsequence. The image has been altered by way of manipulation of the object itself, which, according to the image, is indivisible from the geographical site of the object. To the hypothetical Internet user who sifts through imagery in search of an interesting artifact, this would be a very peculiar nonpareil to stumble upon. It would stand out from other images, however minutely. It would have a tinge of intentionality, which flavours any triviality with artistic reference. This reference, even in its subtlety, would be uncannily palpable even if the user is a non-artist. Given the right elemental chemistry, the image would appear unusual in comparison to others. The negligible object has been removed from its ordinary iteration and ad-



The object has been given new properties that assert the individuality of the resulting image.
Images copyright of the author.

vanced to a unique level of complexity. The elegance of these small gestures is the range of possibility that is infinitely implied within it. "On the Internet, one will expect to find the banal at every turn. One would also hope to find objects of seduction and artifice, objects that turn us away from our intended goals." ⁵ The subtle nuance is, what will become desired in an increasingly screen-based world overloaded not only with mass-produced objects but with mass-produced images. The nuance makes the infinitely reproducible once again interesting; it glorifies the timid object as a relic that does in fact belong to *somebody*, or that does exist *somewhere*. This immediately gives it value. Not monetary value, as it were, but some sort of coveted use-value.

The preceding examples surely extract reference from a Duchampian idealism. However, Marcel Duchamp enacted his interventions before the arrival of the Internet. In our contemporary locale, the rules and possibilities are constantly being re-established, never completely solidifying. With this, visual art that parallels, aligns itself with, or exists exclusively within Internet culture gains the advantage of immediacy. In

the same instant, it finds the navigation of temporality difficult. While a timestamp on an uploaded image can indicate chronology, "time" has different rules in the reality of Internet culture. A great amount of digital art that is being created for a web-only viewing experience is sweeping along as quickly and as frequently as plastic toys are being pumped out of factories. These images, as important as they are to help future historians locate a movement, are once again amassing. The ingenuity of each individual image is becoming lost amidst increasingly similar and analogous elements. There is a flashy, colorful silkiness to many of these images. Ironic reference to classical forms and Greek Canon sculptures is rampant. Photoshopped waves, lines, wavy lines, watery textures, desert-like textures, gradient overlays, obscure non-sequitur one-liners are, upon first glance, pleasing and sometimes ingenious. However, these products are in danger of cycling and recycling themselves. As crafty as they may have been to begin with, they are so rampant and redundant that they quickly expire their novelty. Browsing through imagery has, for many, supplanted leisurely activities such as reading newspapers. In the same vein, what's been seen once, often becomes old news. The differences, though, are vastly notable. For one, anybody can participate. Secondly, there are options such as "share" and "reblog." This allows the chance for a curious image to resurface over and over, depending upon its success with an audience. What results, then, is the need for an image to be instantly captivating.

Images like these are made using a specific set of computer-based tools that are globally accessible, and they are inherently recognizable as such. What is, at times, most highly considerable about these images is the range of subtle appearances of the human hand. The "artifact" of a digitally manipulated image is what fundamentally distinguishes it from others of its genus.

This is an opportunity to put into effect the simple, subtle, and honest interventions to alter the impact of virtual images on a viewer. It involves creating, re-creating, or re-contextualizing physical objects in a way that emphasizes the presence of the object. Providing a foundation for a virtual interaction with an actual, physical object is fertile investigative territory since what people are often looking for, from images and objects, is a certain familiarity: "...when people consider what if anything might ultimately differentiate computers from humans, they dwell long and lovingly on those aspects of people that are tied to the sensuality and physical embodiment of life." ⁷ But it doesn't stop there. "...the virtual body sets us astray from our assumptions about what it means to have a 'real' body..." ⁷ If this assumption is accurate, it seems apposite to be reminded of our proximity to the physical, sensual world; to the objects that share space with our bodies.

Let's return for a moment to the cut piece of pine-wood. Whatever image you might create within the photoframe can be further engaged upon with induction of new elements. You could begin to make small assemblages that more closely hinge the image to its global site; objects that hint towards physical dimension and spatial occupation. The same principle applies, but an expansion occurs by adding new objects. For example, suppose you add a ball in front of your leaning pieces of wood. Suddenly those pieces of wood will be influenced differently than before. Next, hang a rag on one of your pieces of wood and your image changes drastically again. Depending on what color, pattern, fabric, or texture the rag is, whether the ball is a soccer ball or a popcorn ball, and so on, the potential interpretation will shift.

This ball, rag, and wood assemblage now has latent points of interest to be discovered. Anybody who sees it will understand that these are ordinary objects, but

that they have been arranged and formatted in a way that makes them slightly “extra-ordinary.” The connections between objects must be investigated since contextual information about the creation of a specific assemblage is not typically or readily available. These objects will have a certain mystique, but the interventions that have been taken upon them and the setting they have been placed in is disjunctive with the Internet. There is a separable quality about the image regarding the space where the image itself is held.

This is where the highly accessible computer tools come into use. The viewer now has the option and the power to relocate these objects *back* into the virtual. For example, suppose that the user who finds the image interesting is compelled to remove the background from behind the assemblage. In the vernacular of Photoshop, this user might magnetic lasso, magic-wand, eraser tool the original context of physical space to manipulate the amount of influence it has

over the image of the objects. What is left is a digital image of the original assemblages that is removed from direct correlation with the time and space it originally existed in.

Now, the image has been sincerely situated in virtual space. The photoshopped image can be made into a graphic interchange file (.gif), the pixel quality of which is visually distinct. It can be made into a .png file as well, which preserves some pixelation of the image but keeps the transparency of the background, allowing the image-object to be mobile and free-floating. In theory, then, these virtual objects can be placed in the context with other images that attend to their physical locality. This creates a potent theoretical paradox.

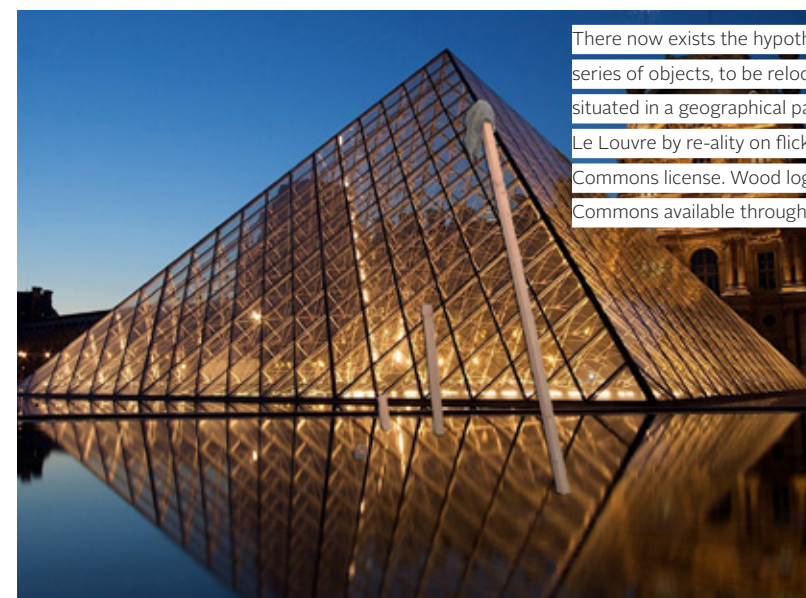
Apart from creating the novelty of an Internet object, it may seem extravagant; but the importance lies in directing the course, through which, one learns how to consume content from the Internet. It is an undeni-



Assemblages direct context the original object toward more subjective interpretations. Images copyright of the author.



Pixelation that is unique to graphic interchange files denies the illusion that the image exists outside of virtual space any longer. Image copyright of the author.



There now exists the hypothetical potential for this object, or series of objects, to be relocated to a new image context and situated in a geographical paradox. Le Louvre by re-ality on flickr available through Creative Commons license. Wood logs.jpg by Parvathisri on Wikimedia Commons available through Creative commons license.

able necessity for all current and future Internet users to be presented with certain intellectual challenges if, as theorist Paul Virilio asserts, “no information exists without dis-information. And now a new type of dis-information is raising its head, and it is totally different than voluntary censorship. It has to do with some kind of choking of the senses, a loss of control over reason of sorts.”¹¹

Baudrillard seemed to think that by removing direct interaction with physical space, that we are in turn rendering our bodies into obscurity. “This body, our body, often appears simply superfluous, basically useless in its extension...since today everything is concentrated in the brain and in genetic codes, which alone sum up the operational definition of being.”¹⁰ Baudrillard is concerned perhaps that we are interacting with spaces that detract from the romance of our solidarity in time and space; I think it is our opportunity now to reform our iterations in this ultra-sensory environment that do not detract from our physical presence, but rather enhance our interpretation of it. ■

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REBECCA PEEL

interviewed by

Lanfranco Aceti & Richard Rinehart

Is there an 'outside' of the Art World from which to launch critiques and interventions? If so, what is the border that defines outside from inside? If it is not possible to define a border, then what constitutes an intervention and is it possible to be and act as an outsider of the art world? Or are there only different positions within the Art World and a series of positions to take that fulfill ideological parameters and promotional marketing and branding techniques to access the fine art world from an oppositional, and at times confrontational, standpoint?

I believe the border is much less concrete than it is often perceived. It behaves like many natural divisions in substances or in biological tissues or in climates, for instance...that is, there are often palpable *qualities* of both "inside" and "outside" that make them recognizable, respectively, but there is a large area that allows for interpretation and interaction between the two states.

What is amorphous about this intermediate area is the rules for which we now define "art." Anymore, an intervention that might appear prosaic in an "outside" context, for example, a sandblasted wall, will gain something when moved "inside" the artistic context. It invariably must be looked at differently because, after all, the *intention* was different. The knowledge and information informing the action inside was not, by default, the same knowledge and information that would inform the action in the context that speaks to the more recognized *purpose* of the action.

What happens, then, when an action such as the one described is done with artistic intent outside of an institutional setting? Does it *require* a document? Of course it doesn't, it can still exist, but it begs the tree-in-the-forest question. In order for extrinsic art to apply to an artistic discussion, it demands evidence. Otherwise, it will be looked over as the same action as the prescribed purpose of the action, the one with an unaltered intention. In this way, "outside" and "inside" is still a binary situation, but they are quite symbiotic. In many contemporary circumstances, including the aforementioned, the two are actually indivisible.

"In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida describes the *parergon* (*par-*, around; *ergon*, the work), the boundaries or limits of a work of art. Philosophers from Plato to Hegel, Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger debated the limits of the intrinsic and extrinsic, the inside and outside of the art object." (Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 13.) Where then is the inside and outside of the virtual artwork? Is the artist's 'hand' still inside the artistic process in the production of virtual art or has it become an irrelevant concept abandoned outside the creative process of virtual artworks?

Such as it has always been, the artist has immediate control over how transparent his/her "hand" will appear in a piece of art, despite if it is virtual or not. It is difficult, if not impossible, to state that it is irrelevant. To some, it might be irrelevant because the *virtual*, being in many ways its own medium and its own artist, is used to state the conditions of its own world, and therefore must be allowed to speak for itself. For example, Alexei Shulgin's *Form Art* project implicates specificities of the internet as sterile and objective tools to create fascinating displays of humour and composition. It pokes fun at internet and gaming history while maintaining an elegant formalism that

bluntly articulates that the internet and its capabilities are able to diversify the vernacular of sculpture.

However, the desire by some to retain individuality is ever-pervasive and this desire can transcend media. Laura Brothers is exemplary in her ability to make digital compositions maintain an expressionist quality that successfully allows her work to morph between a digital/virtual conversation and that of abstract drawing and painting. The mode of interpretation of virtual phenomena by human beings remains quite similar to an interpretation of the actual; virtual information and physical information alike are processed inside of the brain. The output, then, will be an individual expression that has been filtered through the body, through sensory processing. The output, by default, will be touched with life.

In relation to the *parergon*, though, virtuality certainly becomes a fertile space to find areas of rupture between a traditional practice and an exploratory vision that, perhaps, has less to do with “making art” and more to do with traversing uncharted territory.

Virtual interventions appear to be the contemporary inheritance of Fluxus’ artistic practices. Artists like Peter Weibel, Yayoi Kusama and Valie Export subverted traditional concepts of space and media through artistic interventions. What are the sources of inspiration and who are the artistic predecessors that you draw from for the conceptual and aesthetic frameworks of contemporary augmented reality interventions?

The tie to the Fluxus movement is quite appropriate. Gestures that expand and abbreviate time and space in an accessible, “do-it-yourself” manner are a crux of virtual artistic interventions. Yoko Ono’s participatory poems were revolutionary and prophetic in regards to how space and time dissolve in a virtual environment. Just as Ray Johnson engaged in acts that travelled

geographically with his mail art, artists can interact with mediums such as email, Craigslist and eBay (Ben Schumacher). I recently started Exposition Article, a tumblr site aimed directly towards the collection of fluxus-style gestures that assume the sensibility of the digital age. The immediacy that we can attain with our image making, collaborating, and communicating without regard to geographical location poses a vast expanse of recognizable opportunity. I can appreciate global instantaneous travel of ideas and expression, but I can also appreciate this dislocation in the small scale. In an upcoming show, I will breach site-specificity via digital intervention. A series of photographs will be taken from the perspective of the architecture, printed, and then either reflected back towards or placed slightly near its original location. This does little but to elucidate the power of digital technology not only to provide quick access to location, but also to deceive us.

In the representation and presentation of your artworks as being ‘outside of’ and ‘extrinsic to’ contemporary aesthetics why is it important that your projects are identified as art?

If my work was not identified as art, it might not be identified. I tend to want to give value to banal occurrences, if only for the sake of revealing art’s authority over any type of object, image, or scenario. However, I wouldn’t necessarily be able to say that my work is entirely extrinsic to contemporary aesthetics; I see quite a lot of artists delving into similar inquiries. After all, the idea is not particularly new; Marcel Duchamp did a great job of bringing this authority to light in the start of the twentieth century. The difference is, in fact, the existence of the internet. I have the advantage and the liberty of using not only found objects, but found *tools*. I can create a computer-mediated scenario that pulls out areas of interest from within a global connection zone and allow the extremities of the internet’s capabilities exemplify themselves.

Rafael Rozendaal loves the internet because “Coca Cola is using the same internet as me; the Guggenheim is using the same internet as me.” The idea that the internet is a level playing field in which all users have equal opportunity as participants gives the visual artist a great array of possibilities for interaction and intervention. One can simply post one’s work on his or her social networking site and blog, or one can use the internet as a way to sidle up next to other virtual entities and create a discourse in comparison.

This is not to mention that digital personae can be modified as the user behind the screen sees fit and/or is capable of. In cases of criminal activity, this notion can be dangerous; for artists, it can be instrumental and important. If nothing else, it would be a constructive gesture to make performance-driven work that reiterates that possibility of danger, or perhaps that underlines the thrill of constructing oneself in virtual reality.

What has most surprised you about your recent artworks? What has occurred in your work that was outside of your intent, yet has since become an intrinsic part of the work?

I have been learning that a mechanically impartial approach to process-based work has, in my case, given a typical viewer the impression that they are being challenged or mocked; handed a dry joke without a punch line. The first instance of this happened in *Ersatz*. The basis of the process began in a certain space of raw futility: futility of a material (wood) to be another material (aluminum); futility of one of the pieces of wood to use a joint to raise itself off the ground and the other to have a joint that does anything at all; the futility of images gleaned from Google’s *Similar Image Search* to successfully mimic a photographed image of the wood. This futility ultimately translated as wry humour. I was puzzled and fascinated by this. I began to realize that because of the ambiguity and banal-

ity of the images and objects presented, it became apposite for the viewer to either anthropomorphize them to a certain degree, or to enter a vulnerable space of exploration to find relationships between the components. Futility, articulated through a series of controlled and digitally-mediated interventions, resurfaced in a peculiar way. The viewer was directly responsible for his or her own understanding of the relationships, despite how painfully equitable they were in theory. I was, in turn, held accountable for this intriguing fortune, and dubbed a “prankster.”

Since this lynchpin, I have directed a certain amount of focus towards these phenomena. I have adopted the idea in much of my work that I should only be a hand where a hand is needed, and limit my artistic liberties as much as possible. What surprises me most about this method of approach is that it does exactly the opposite. The objects, the interventions, the context are so completely transparent in function that they are also transparent when I stand behind them; the responsibility is focused and directed straight back towards me, the artist. This creates the supposition that I am playing a game, inviting the viewer to dare enter. To say that none of the humour is intentional would be untruthful, however, where the work requires decision, I indeed appreciate taking advantage of inherent quirks in material, structure, and format. ■

REBECCA PEEL

statement & artwork

Rebecca Peel is a Portland-based artist interested in the intermediacy of site-specificity.

She believes that one of the best ways to evaluate provocative phenomena is not necessarily to point at its perfection, but rather to strip it of embellishment, using temerarious banality to chronicle the intricacies of a world in motion.

Her media and approach is mixed. Formal gesture and traditional media are often intervened upon via digital process to create a sense of anachronism. Painting, ceramic sculpting, wood and metal work are all in her vernacular, but she is particularly intrigued by the fluidity and motility of tools like tumblr and Google's Similar Image search.

Rebecca likes the idea of skydiving. ■



CTLWLI, 2011, Rebecca Peel, Microsoft Paint.

© Rebecca Peel, 2011.



CTLWLI, 2012, Rebecca Peel, digital collage.

© Rebecca Peel, 2012.



'Curtainin', 2012, Rebecca Peel, wood, digital print.

© Rebecca Peel, 2012.



Celebration of Middles, 2012, Rebecca Peel, clay, hand towels, plastic tubs.



Jett on the V, 2011, Rebecca Peel, digital photograph.
© Rebecca Peel, 2012.



O-Liberated-Dilemma- (Handless glove), 2012, Rebecca Peel,
digital photograph. © Rebecca Peel, 2012.



Please ensure that they might find their way out easily, 2011, Rebecca Peel, digital installation. © Rebecca Peel, 2011.



Syllabic Painting (slurry), 2012, Rebecca Peel, digital painting. © Rebecca Peel, 2012.



Tally, 2012, Rebecca Peel, digital installation. © Rebecca Peel, 2012.

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