

JavaMuseum Interview Project

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Interview for JavaMuseum 18 Artist Interviews Project

<http://netex.nmartproject.net/> [NewMediaArtProjectNetwork](#)

Agricola de Cologne (AdC) interviews, 10 questions-Ã :

1. Tell me something about your educational background and what is influencing your work?

I enrolled in a department called Intermedia, at Elam in Auckland, New Zealand which had been founded in the mid 80s by one of New Zealandâ€™s most respected performance and sound artists Phil Dadson. Phil was New Zealandâ€™s connection with the ethos of Fluxus and the avante-garde happenings of the 1960s, and that as well as its 20-year history of Dada-inspired mayhem, as well as an academic rigour around the principles of time-based art meant I arrived into a rich artistic environment with a sense of its own accumulated stories, and possessing an energy that no other place could offer in New Zealand. My other tutor was Julainne Sumich who had studied cinema for many years and simply saw things in a different way, she had an approach and understanding of art that Iâ€™ve never encountered before and has had a lasting effect on my work since.

Intermedia was a term coined in the days of Fluxus, and its meaning was essentially ambiguous. I enjoyed working in a department whose name defied meaning, while realising that it was creating meaning constantly in the activity of art-making. You could be free from strict definitions and author a definition simultaneously through a style of art-making that seemed equally ambiguous, but created its meaning in the act of engagement, at the point when the art was served to the audience. I realised that the Internet in all its unmapped expression shared this quality.

2. The term 'netart' is widely used for anything posted on the net, there are dozens of definitions which are even contradictory. How do you define 'netart'? Do you think your work belongs to this specific genre? Do you think 'netart' is art, at all, and if yes, what are the criteria? Are there any aesthetic criteria for an Internet based artwork?

I tend to describe the field as Internet Art. For me, net.art was a movement at the beginning of its history through the likes of jodi, Vuk Ćosić, Alexei Shulgina and others who sounded out what were important territories at the time.

The rest of the answers to me are quite simple: Yes my work belongs to a genre, though how specific that is can be debated forever and naturally overlaps into whatever it likes. Yes net.art is art, and the only criteria for it is that it engages the Internet. No, there are no aesthetic criteria for an Internet-based work because the relationship to the term is in the common medium and not a common aesthetic. It shows me that Iâ€™m still working with a young medium when people ask these questions about it.

The second of those questions is interesting, because certain works can function in the technical sense equally well on- or offline. When I burn a work onto CD and display it on that medium, it is CD ROM Art and no longer Internet Art. The work remains the same but the platform of delivery has changed. This might seem like an over-zealous reliance on definition to the point where definition is proved pointless, but to me it comes down to the host medium. The term for the same work can be exchanged for another when that platform changes. Itâ€™s a contextual change as well. A work made for a browser can become something different when set up like an installation in a gallery. Its medium has changed, the framework with which you encounter

the work has changed, and the work is changed.

3. What kind of meanings have new technologies and the Internet to you, are they just tools for expressing your artistic intentions, or do they have an ideological character?

The Internet is a cultural space, people inhabit it a bit like they do their non-digital spaces. I liken Internet art to performance art because of this; its medium is one where people live. The kinds of cultures that belong on the Internet are a rich source to consider. I also listen to how I use the Internet and what it could become for direction.

6. Dealing with this new, and interactive type of art demands an active viewer or user. How do you stimulate the user to dive into this new world of art? What do you think, represents an appropriate environment to present net based art to an audience, is it the context of the lonesome user sitting in front of his personal computer, is it any public context, or is it rather the context of art in general or media art in particular, or anything else.? If you would be in the position to create an environment for presenting this type of art in physical space, how would you do it?

The practicalities of the human attention-span become more present when situating art on the Internet. It's difficult to ignore the fact that your art is likely to be the filler between someone checking their email and writing a Word document. You can work against that or with it, but I think you have to be aware of it as a factor on some level. Your audience is anything but captive, and unless your work will succeed by being viewed for 5 seconds before being closed these are important considerations, like measurements to judge things off of. This doesn't mean pandering to the sound-bite, but it does require a lot of thought and strategy.

In terms of providing a physical space for Internet art, I think the only answer is to make an evaluation on a case-by-case basis about how best to do it. One of the best examples I've seen came from the Chiangmai Festival of New Media Art, where a large space was laid out with many computers like nodes, having been just placed on the floor with cushions provided for people to sit, or lie down on, or stand on if they wanted. It works because it avoided the situation of the lonely work with one user, and many others watching the one user playing. It avoided the computer being set up on a desk with a chair when neither the desk nor the chair are supposed to be part of the work but outweigh the work 10-to-1. It resembled the kind of environment which these works might normally be accessed. Photos from the exhibition show many people in various postures and positions around the space pollinating the nodes like bees as they move between them. There's a lack of preciousness about singularity and framing importance, and instead a concentration on how people behave in a space.

7. Internet based art, as well as other art forms using new technologies are globally still not widely accepted, yet, as serious art forms. What do you think could be an appropriate solution to change this situation?

I don't agree that's true. 90% of artist production still involves paintings of cats, boats, grassy hills and tits. For the number of artists working with new technologies I think they're fairly well represented in the art world. Young Hae Chang Heavy Industries are superstars. I don't think their chosen medium has hindered the respect they have as artists in the slightest.

8. The Internet is called a kind of 'democratic' environment, but the conventional art practise is anything but that, it's selective by using filters. The audience is mostly only able to make up its mind on second hand. Art on the net might potentially be different. Do you think the current practice of dealing with Internet based art is such different or rather the described conventional way through (also curatorial) filtering? Do you think, that speaking in the terms of Joseph Beuys, anybody who publishes anything on the net would be also an artist?

The Internet could potentially be the first art medium where people can view a range of historical works as

easily as new works, including many that never required someone to make an active decision to hold on to it, allowing them to form perspectives about what is relevant without the past having pre-digested this beforehand. The proxy of the past that is art history could be a bit-part player in many things that inform a future user about an old work. The present time that the artwork is accessed could inform the work as much as the context of its past.

Curatorial filtering is an interesting question, as Google is a major curatorial force and selector of art on the Internet, more so portals like Rhizome. The means with which you find the art possess the bias that stack the horizontal order of the Internet into a vertical one. You need these filters to help you locate the work, but of course some rise constantly to the surface and others don't. Though democracy is not a model where representation is dealt out in equal amounts anyway.

9. Do you think the curators dealing with net based art should have any technological knowledge in order to understand such an art work from its roots?

I think yes, that they do. Technical could be simply experience or thoughtfulness. I think the time when curators could get away with popping in a CD and setting up a computer on a desk in an exhibition and having no further considerations is quickly passing. Curators have skills, and new challenges to the curatorial model require new skills.

I once showed a work as part of a competition under the category of 'Net Art', but one of the criteria for the competition was that the work couldn't use the Internet because they would be shown offline. The more I thought about this, I decided the two can't coincide. The category was misnamed. In fact I had to do some very odd programming to try to make the work behave in a way that it would have if it had been shown online.

The works were shown next to digital images and video and paled in comparison to them all in a way that they wouldn't have if they had been viewed at home or at work on the competition's website. It's not that the works weren't strong enough to survive the comparison but that the context had conspired to make them insipid, neutered artworks. Dormant and gloomy and thoroughly unimpressive within the space. The fact that such a large oversight like this could be made with the organisation of the competition and exhibition is again indicative of how new the challenges in showing this kind of art are, in that the problems are often left unsolved.

I think a healthy change for curators would be valuing the Internet as a place to situate art on, and seeing visitors to their website as art patrons. It would be a simple ideological shift which would benefit the work that they are trying to show.

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