OLIA LIALINA
ALUMINUM SITES, GEEK CURATORS AND ONLINE
CONSERVATORS

OLIA LIALINA, GEBOREN 1971 IN MOSKAU, BEGANN SICH ALS
JOURNALISTIN UND FILMKRITIKERIN IN DEN 1990ER JAHREN MIT DIGI-
TALEN MEDIEN UND NETZBASIERTER KUNST ZU BEFASSEN. MIT DER ARBEIT
MY BOYFRIEND CAME BACK FROM THE WAR (1996) SPIELTE SIE SICH
RASCH ÜBER POLITISCHE UND SPRACHLICHE GRENZEN HINWEG IN DIE
INTERNATIONALE MEDIENKUNSTSZENE. HEUTE LEHRT LIALINA ALS
PROFESSORIN AN DER MERZ AKADEMIE IN STUTTGART. IHRE ERFAHRUNGEN
MIT PRÄSENTATIONEN, KURATORINNEN, SAMMLERINNEN UND KÜNSTLERINNEN
BENENNEN FRÜHE INITIATIVEN DER FÖRDERUNG UND PFLEGE NETZ-
BASIERTER WERKE. LIALINA ILLUSTRIERT VERÄNDERUNGEN DER REZEPTION
IN DEN LETZTEN 20 JAHREN UND MACHT DEUTLICH, DASS NETZBASIERTE
WERKE AUF EIN IM WÖRTLICHEN SINN «VERNETZTES» WISSEN ANGEWIESEN
SIND.

DIESER TEXT LIEGT IN DER ENGLISCHEN ORIGINALFASSUNG VOR.

«Online Art» is of course a very careful term. It is as broad as
computer art. Is there any computer which is not online now?

   All sorts of artistic expression, a large variety of technolo-
gies and media can be seen as online art. Generative graphics made
with processing, performances in Second Life, Flash games, browser
bookmarklets, Google mash-ups, Youtube videos as well as concep-
tual net.art works, HTML experiments of the 1990s and networking
acts of the 1960s. There is a variety of forms. For example at the
time of writing this, Firefox Addons and Wikipedia art are hot and
software art and interface art are out. And whatever or whoever
becomes famous online attracts the interest of gallerists and
collectors today, despite the complex technology or ephemerality
of the work.

Works that were supposed to be online or shown and discussed at
new media festivals and conferences[1] in the second part of the nine-
ties, entered contemporary art galleries, art fairs and private
collections after the turn of century.

Recently, «Net Art» changed from being an art form in New Media to
a subject in contemporary art. I see several preconditions for
this transition:

1. Big audience.
If yesterday for net artists it made sense only to address people
in front of their computers, today I can easily imagine to address
visitors in the gallery – because in their majority they will just
have gotten up from their computers. They have the necessary expe-
rience and understanding of the medium to get the ideas, jokes,
enjoy the works and buy them.

2. Mature medium.
Maturity for a medium means that users are really busy and the me-
dium became totally invisible. If I want to attract attention of
users to their online environment and create works about the
World Wide Web, I'll better do it offline. Net art today is finding
its way out of the network.

3. Slim computers.
They look exactly like picture frames and they come with only one
button. You press this button and the art piece starts. Reducing a
computer to a screen, to a frame that can be fixed
on the wall with one nail, marries gallery space
with advanced digital works. Wall, frame, work of
art. And the art world is in order again.

I formulated these principles two years ago in the
«Flat against the Wall» essay for Media Art Undone
panel at Transmediale07 conference.[2] Today I'd add
a 4th one:

[1] For the variety of methods to
show net art in the 1990s read
my article «Die Kunst reisst aus»,
in: **DU. Die Zeitschrift für
Kultur**, issue no.11, November,
2000, p.31–33 (online version
«A Link would be enough», see
http://art.teleportacia.org/
observation/du.html [03.2010].
[2] http://art.teleportacia.org/
observation/flat_against_the_wall
[03.2010].

4. Geek Curators.

To name some with whom I had the pleasure to work – Paul Slocum,
And/Or gallery (Dallas), Marcin Ramoci, Vertex List (New York),
Maxim Ilyukhin, ABC (Moscow). They are not only knowledgeable about
the online world and free from the media art prejudices of the
1990s, but also technically competent and innovative. They can of-
fer truly unexpected solutions for materializing, objectifying
and preserving works that were born to live in the browser.**3**

Among important events that reflect the process are Bryce
Wolkowitz's On/Off show of 2006 that brought web projects of dif-
ferent years to the walls of real space. In 2008 IMAL in Brussels
put together an exhibition of new media works from private collec-
tions, a big part of them was dealing with web aesthetics or were
formerly web projects. In 2008 net artist Dragan Espenschied and
myself were commissioned to make a web-specific work to be shown
outdoors at the Madison Square Park in New York. The curator of
the park's public art program considered Animated GIFs to be pro-
per visuals for public space.

Talking about the clients, there is Thierry T., a mysterious Belgian
collector, who looks for the stuff he likes online and suggests to
the gallerists or artists directly in what form or storage medium
he'd like to have it in his, they say, biggest new media collec-
tion. There's a rumor about him rebuilding his house to give a pro-
per place to all the «aluminum web pages»**4** he bought in the last
years.

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But about owning art online? There are precedents and interesting
examples. Not so many though, even if technologically it would
have been a very easy thing to do; also effective if you plan to
get some publicity. Today it would be very fitting as well, in times
when it's so fashionable to keep your digital belongings on server
farms. I don't suggest to move collections to the Cloud (it could
be an interesting opportunity for online galleries,
not collectors), but to keep the purchased works
online and to manifest your rights to the copy or
original by making your name prominent. In the tit-
le bar or in the location bar, for example, if the
project is to be seen in the browser.

A curious case is the one-screen-project **Colorflip**
by Rafael Rozendaal.**5** Its title in the very top of
the browser says «ColorFlip.com by Rafael Rozen-
daal, collection of Sebastien de Ganay». As it seems
collector de Ganay knows that web is the best place
to exhibit web art and knows how to deal with the
browser space.

Ten years ago, at the zenith of Dot.Com, Auriea
Harvey and Michael Samin of e8z.com bought my page

3 For example for the Show#17
(http://andorgallery.com/shows/
17.html) Paul Slocum transformed
a webpage **Olia's and Dragan's
Comparative History of Classic
Animated GIFs and Glitter Graphics**
(2007) into a 7-channel video on
commodore monitors. See http://www.
contemporary-home-computing.org/
vernacular-web-2/examples.html and
http://www.andorgallery.com/shows/
images/17stack2.jpg [both 03.2010].
4 Web graphics, or generative
graphics, or interface art is
often sold today as digital print
or silkscreen on aluminum.
5 Such projects can be interactive
and dynamic, but the user is not
leaving the document and thus
not changing the URL.
http://www.colorflip.com [03.2010].

If You Want to Clean Your Screen. The work was a part of Miniatures of Heroic Period[6], a very provocative exhibition for its time, 1998. It was the first exhibition ever that explicitly offered net. art (technically web pages) for sale. e8z.com were the first ones who wanted to support the idea and, I guess not in the last place to experiment with the form that an online collection could take. **If you want to clean your screen** was moved to their own server, where it stays till now. Harvey and Samyn didn't go further with their collection. So my work is the only one in their «possession» folder.[7] But one should say that the way they designed their possession page is a piece of art by itself. Innovative and technologically sophisticated, with a lot of respect to the medium. And not without irony, they were net artists themselves, after all.

But even with only one work in their possession they have enough to do. Though **If you want to clean your screen** was technologically a very primitive work, it uses two functions in Netscape 3. These functions were considered bugs and got removed quite soon. So in browser coming after Netscape 3 these bugs are not working, but every time in a different way, so new code has to be constantly written to keep the page functioning.

Other two works from the Heroic period exhibition were sold only much later, in 2005, when MEIAC in Spain started to build their collection of online art. In the beginning of 2009 it became the Net Art Viewer[8], part of the Immaterial Museum Project of MEIAC. At this moment it is a selection of 30 internet projects. They are presented in a classical web exhibition way: info about artists, about projects, curatorial statement, screenshots and a link to the project itself. An interesting peculiarity is that there are actually two links: One leads to the original project on the server of the artist, the second to a purchased copy stored on the museum server. It looks like a temporary solution… or curator's confusion (I'm still waiting for the curator's statement).

C³ in Budapest is an institution with more experience in maintaining online art. It played an important role in net art in the second part of the 1990s and was providing residencies to net artists from 1996 to 2003. At the moment the C³ collection contains 20 online artworks including Shulgin's **Form Art**[9], Jodi's **Ctrl Space**[10] and Etoy's **Tanksystem**[11]. They all were realized there and are kept online and taken care of for more than ten years. My experimental net drama **Agatha Appears**[12] is maintained there since 1997. It has to go through the «cosmetic procedures» constantly: for example graphics are appearing too small for contemporary high resolution screens, the used audio format is not supported any more, it became impossible to fiddle around with the status bar in current versions of browsers… In 2008 conservator Ela Wysocka, graduate of the Faculty of Art Conservation and

6 http://art.teleportacia.org/ exhibition/miniatures [03.2010].
7 http://www.entropy8zuper.org/ possession [03.2010].
8 http://netescopio.meiac.es [03.2010].
9 http://www.c3.hu/collection/form [03.2010].
10 http://ctrl-space.c3.hu [03.2010].
11 http://www.c3.hu/collection/ index_en.php?id=6 [03.2010].
12 http://www.c3.hu/collection/ agatha [03.2010].
13 http://www.incca.org/files/pdf/ resources/wysocka_e._agatha_re-appears_net_art_restoration_project.pdf [03.2010].

Restoration of Fine Arts Academy in Krakow, and C³ programmer An-
drás Szönyi restored Agatha Appers, by rewriting HTML code, Java
scripts and substituting Real Audio with Flash. Now you can read
the dialogs again and follow the story.

   This was one of the first experiments to restore a net art work.
And the one that actually succeeded. Wysocka writes about the ex-
periment: «Although Agatha is complete again and works properly
with current browsers, applied conservation treatments won't pro-
tect Net-art pieces from further Internet development as it is
barely possible to predict these transformations. Reformatting
and reprogramming strategies are not long-term solutions because
they place the artwork in a never-ending process of continuous
translation to correlate with valid technology. For this reason
and due to the nature of the medium itself the results obtained
cannot be considered the final state of the work and the end of
preservation efforts.»[13]

   I see it as a rather optimistic statement. There is no end to
preservation effort in case of art online. The conservator sees
the priority of old work functioning in new browsers over preser-
ving the author's programming and virtualization of the artworks
environment. There is a good chance that online art will stay on-
line.

OLIA LIALINA
born 1971 in Moscow, is a pioneer Internet artist and theorist as well as an ex-
perimental film and video critic and curator. Lialina studied film criticism and
journalism at Moscow State University, graduating in 1993. She founded Art
Teleportacia, a web gallery of her work, which also features links to remakes of
her most famous work «My boyfriend came back from the war» and was one of the
organizers and later, director of Cine Fantom. Lialina is currently teaching at Merz
Akademie in Stuttgart. Some of her artwork is maintained in the computerfinearts
collection at Cornell University. http://www.teleportacia.org/olia.html,
http://www.merz-akademie.de/cms [03.2010].