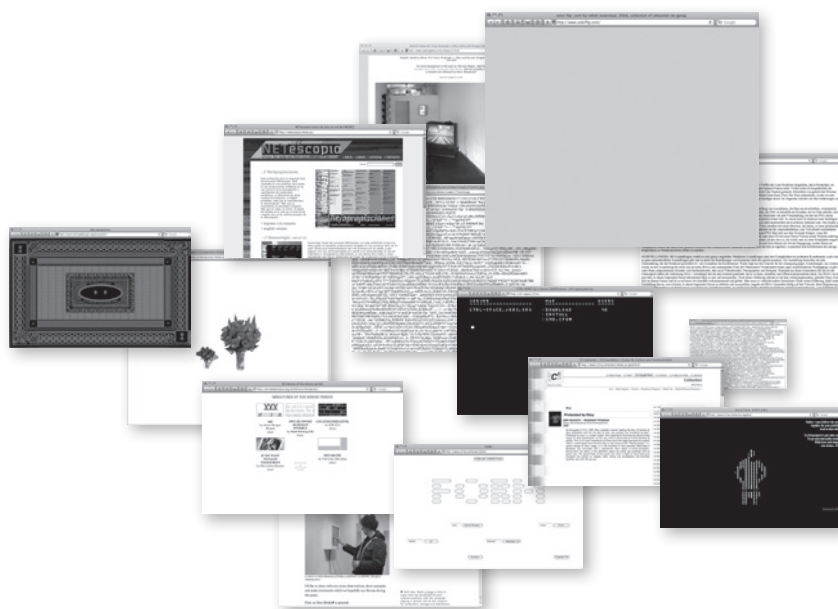




OLIA LIALINA ALUMINUM SITES, GEEK CURATORS AND ONLINE CONSERVATORS

OLIA LIALINA HAS BEEN QUALIFIED IN THE FIELD OF DIGITAL MEDIA SINCE HER YEARS AS A JOURNALIST AND FILM CRITIC IN MOSCOW IN THE EARLY 1990TIES. WITH HER INTERNET BASED ART WORK **MY BOYFRIEND CAME BACK FROM THE WAR** (1996), SHE RAPIDLY ENTERED THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE OF MEDIA ART NO LONGER BOUND TO NATIONAL OR LANGUAGE BORDERS. OLIA LIALINA IS PROFESSOR AT MERZ AKADEMIE IN STUTTGART (GERMANY). HER BROAD EXPERIENCE WITH CURATORS, COLLECTORS AND ARTISTS GIVE INSIGHT INTO EARLY INITIATIVES. THE AUTHOR ILLUSTRATES THE CHANGE WITHIN DISTRIBUTION AND PRESENTATION DURING THE LAST TWENTY YEARS AND MAKES CLEAR THAT NET-BASED ART WORK IS, GENERALLY SPOKEN, DEPENDING ON WIDESPREAD KNOWLEDGE.

«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 technologies 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 conceptual 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 conferences¹ in the second part of the nineties, 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 experience 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 medium 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 offer 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 different years to the walls of real space. In 2008 IMAL in Brussels put together an exhibition of new media works from private collections, 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 proper 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 collection. There's a rumor about him rebuilding his house to give a proper 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 title 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 Rozendaal, 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 Viewer⁸, 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_reappears_net_art_restoration_project.pdf [03.2010].

Restoration of Fine Arts Academy in Krakow, and C³ programmer András 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 experiment: «Although Agatha is complete again and works properly with current browsers, applied conservation treatments won't protect 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 preserving the author's programming and virtualization of the artworks environment. There is a good chance that online art will stay online.

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born 1971 in Moscow, is a pioneer Internet artist and theorist as well as an experimental 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].