

**CARLO ZANNI**  
**329,95 EURO – A TEN YEARS INVESTIGATION**

FOR OVER TEN YEARS CARLO ZANNI HAS BEEN CONCERNED WITH THE QUESTION HOW NET-BASED ART COULD BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE ART-MARKET. HE HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN VARIOUS PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS AND HE HAS EXPLORED THE SUBJECT EXPERIMENTALLY IN GALLERY SPACES. BY HIS OWN WORK ZANNI REFERS TO DIFFERENT STRATEGIES, DEMONSTRATING HOW THE CONSEQUENT MATERIALISATION OF NET-BASED ARTWORKS RISES CRITICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ART MARKET IN GENERAL.

I think an artist is responsible for his work from the beginning to the end in all the possible meanings. You can either make art for free or sell it to make a profit. However, if you care for it, your life won't be easy. I choose to sell my projects because I believe in the ethics of a regulated market not only within the art world. Of course some people don't need to sell to keep doing what they like to do most. Many others instead are struggling in daily jobs to finance their lives. And this is how things go whether you are a novelist, a songwriter or a visual artist.

The market of digital works is very tiny in comparison with more established ones (paintings and sculpture). Even video, which has been out for almost 40 years now, isn't well represented in important auctions. Digital art, and even worse, networked art, is almost invisible. Since I've been among the first ones attempting to wade this dangerous river, I always tried to search for easy ways to approach the art market while respecting the pretty unique nature of the projects.

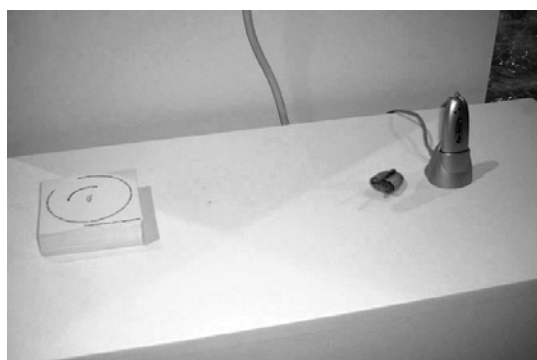
I began thinking about selling models for net-based artworks as soon as I realized that art dealers didn't have a clue on how to sell them. I thought that if I was giving them a model and some possible standards, they could use them to build a market. I was wrong, not in order to develop my theories and models but in thinking dealers needed this. They probably needed and still need education to understand the artworks and bravery to support them in an international context within the contemporary art world and market. Despite this awareness, I always kept investigating the subject both hosting a forum (**P2P\_\$: Peer to Peer Selling Processes for net\_things**, 2002)<sup>1</sup>, a mailing list (**P2P\_.EDU: Peer to Peer Educational for art dealers**, 2003)<sup>2</sup> and testing my ideas on the field on my own projects.

Another 'big reason why' is that the main part of the current generation of influential dealers, critics, and collectors are not at ease with the language developed specifically to the media used by the artists/collaborations (artists today are making works with tools using programming languages as 'colors' 'and brushes', formal structures to incorporate the functions of mass media). More generally, I think that schooling is a key issue to

**1 P2P\_\$: Peer to Peer Selling Processes for net\_things** was a chat based dialogue that lasted three days (May 22, 23, 24 2002).

I was invited by critic and curator Valentina Tanni to give a lecture, but instead of speaking myself I chose to invite 40 speakers worldwide, and asked them to give their opinion and share their experience about selling net things. There were some interesting point of views like from John Klima, John Simon and Wolfgang Staele. But there was no final answer for what I was looking for. The protocol started (or re-started) a discussion about this topic, then I found the perfect balance and answers to my needs with the **Altarboy**, theory + artwork. More info about «The Protocol, discussed on Rhizome that then became Altarboy», discussed below: <http://www.zanni.org/html/altarboyallinfo.htm> [03.2010]. See also: from An Interview with Carlo Zanni, by Anne Marie Boisvert, for **CIAC Magazine** #16 fall 2002, [http://www.ciac.ca/magazine/archives/no\\_16/en/entrevue-zanni.htm](http://www.ciac.ca/magazine/archives/no_16/en/entrevue-zanni.htm) [03.2010]. Press Release from 2002: <http://rhizome.org/discuss/view/1995> [03.2010].

**2 P2P\_.EDU: Peer to Peer Educational for art dealers** was done in collaboration with Michele Thursz. The P2P\_.edu wanted to build an educational bridge between net works and those people who have a really pragmatic position in the art field, i.e. those discovering, supporting and distributing contemporary expressions of our time: galleries and dealers. In fact, a crucial reason why the market for net based art works has not evolved, is the existence of an out of date business model used in the traditional art market. Depending on the nature of the work, the piece has to be checked and debugged constantly trying to migrate it to updated platforms that can be more easily maintained than an old PC etc., otherwise you buy a piece, you store it, and when you turn it on after 10 years of storage, it probably won't work. Conservation and maintenance are very important when dealing with this type of projects. And dealers as well as some artists and collectors are not prepared for it yet. This theme was approached by the first P2P chat conference.



Carlo Zanni, IcoPortraits (Desktop Icons), 2004,  
CDs, portraits original size, screen, installation view und USB stick

build a better world. Of course I'm not talking specifically about art teaching.<sup>3</sup>

## FILE

In 2000-2002 I did some tiny portraits under the form of 32 x 32 pixel desktop icons. Famous people and simple friends, as Elizabeth Payton was doing in her practice. When I've been asked to show some of them in Prints and Chips - a show curated at Bitforms Gallery in New York by new media pioneering curator Michele Thursz - I decided to show them under a temporary visualization form. I made four prints out of them. Each print was hosting a single icon (the same size it has on the screen) and then mounted on aluminium to be hanged onto a wall.

At the bottom of the wall I installed the proper artwork that was a USB pen hosting the files that were also displayed as real icons on a monitor just next to the prints. Doing this I was stressing the fact that the file was more a «flexible spatial concept» than a unique and immutable object like a sculpture or a painting. The buyer was acquiring the rights to «temporary visualize» the file (for instance video projecting it, printing it) while the «value» of the piece was kept in the

<sup>3</sup> From «I simply call it art», an interview done with Kristine Ploug for *Artificial.dk*, June 29 2005, <http://www.artificial.dk/articles/cz.htm> [03.2010].  
Press Release from 2003: <http://rhizome.org/discuss/view/7724> [03.2010].

file. He couldn't go and resell the print but of course he had rights to visualize the file in the way he liked it most.

This empowers the collector by allowing any possible form of temporary visualization of the file, and the ability to re-use or re-load the file in many ways to manifest a variation of objects. The fragility of the file adheres to the notion of the precious object but the malleability of the file is seductive for the ideologies of consumerism. These ideas are expressed in a conversation between critic Claire Barliant, senior editor at Artbyte magazine, and myself for A Post Media Network, 2001.<sup>4</sup>

A few weeks before the exhibition, this theory and specific way to approach the market were supported and explained to a public audience as a case study by Michele Thursz in **Collecting the Uncollectible**, a panel discussion held at the Guggenheim Museum. Panelists: Artists John Klima and John Simon, moderated by Jon Ippolito, Associate Curator of Media Arts, Guggenheim Museum, NYC. Artist Mark Napier initiated this conversation around new business models for digital artists together with educators Kim Kanatani and Rosanna Flouty of the Guggenheim Museum.<sup>5</sup>

## NETWORK



Carlo Zanni, *Altarboy*, 2004

I wanted to find a neutral and very customizable model to sell radical Internet based art, something characterized by a «primordial asset», more a theory than an object of art. A more radical approach to the matter was the making of **Altarboy**, in 2003 presented for the first time during Artissima Art Fair in Turin at the Analix Forever booth. **Altarboy** is a portable metal suitcase that once opened, displays in the top shell a screen showing the art piece (a close up of a

young woman with pupils filled by images retrieved by Google using queries she gave me describing her personality). These images once saved from the search engine were reduced to a size of 1 x 1 pixel to fill the pupil of the subject. People could click on the eyes to check its content in transformation). Inside the bottom shell there was a PC running as a web server. The PC wasn't hosting only the code powering the artwork but also a web server publishing. Once online, the public could have access to a website to interact with the piece. This means that when the buyer plugs the case into the web, the artwork is shown

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.zanni.org/html/txtinterv/clairebinterv.htm> [03.2010].

<sup>5</sup> From *Vitalogy*, published by ICA London, 2005, text by Carlo Giordano: <http://www.zanni.org/index.html> [03.2010].

online as a proper website while when it is offline, it is only available for him, locally. During its online life, **Altarboy** stores the traffic passing through it (images, text, IP ...) in a database, so that you can also run it in an offline mode or in an after-Internet era. This way is very useful when selling a networked piece that requires to be online to be alive.

**Altarboy** is a theory platform and an artwork. It means that the theory (server + domain name etc.) can be used for a myriad of other projects with their own concepts and aesthetics. And it is an artwork as well (actually two) because I used this process for two sculptures called **Altarboy**.<sup>6</sup>

## ARCHIVE



Carlo Zanni, *The Possible Ties Between Illness And Success*, 2006/07, sculpture with iPod

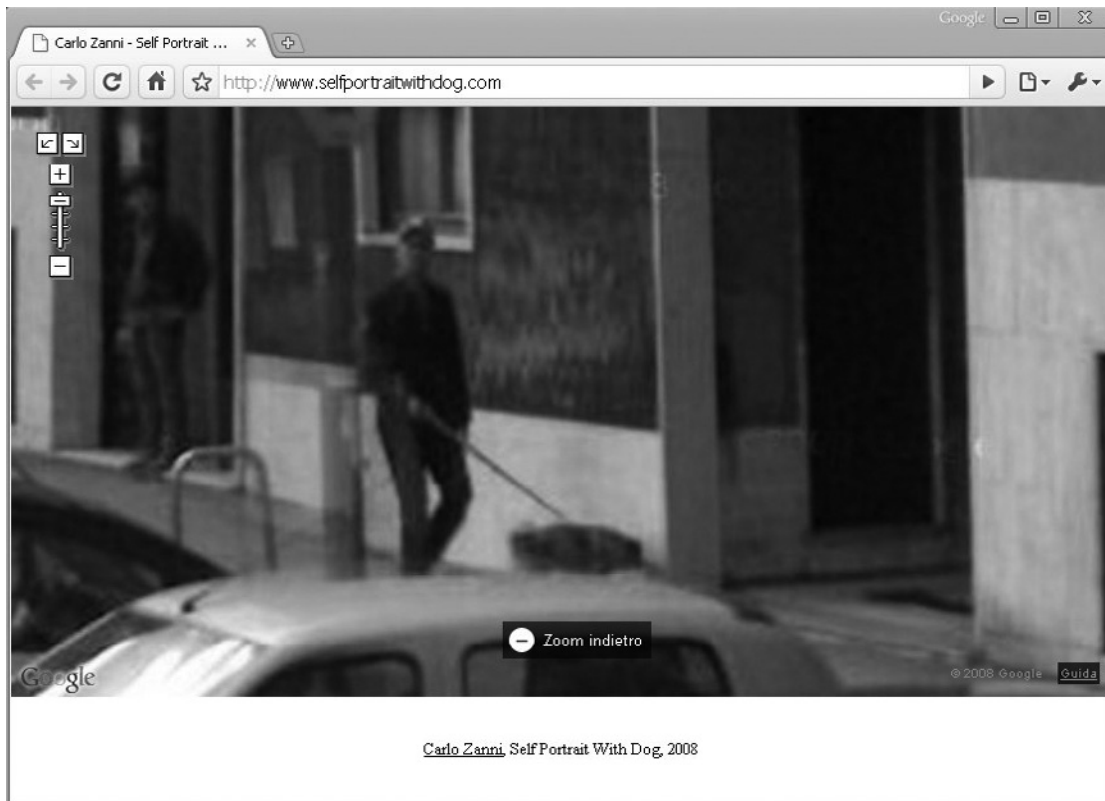
Other forms I've experimented within my practice so far is the sale of archives containing recorded versions of a time based experience. **The Possible Ties Between Illness And Success**<sup>7</sup> is my first attempt of merging cinema and Internet giving birth to a hybrid I call **DATA Cinema**.

The project is based on a sequence where an actor lays on a bed sick with his skin filled by stains and dots. The amount and position of the stains on the body were determined by the number of people visiting the website on which the short movie was available and their country of origin. So statistics were transforming some elements of the narrative. The server behind the project was a dedicated server rendering movies on a daily basis (when web stats were available). The system was publishing online some of them once a week. The daily renderings were kept storing to obtain twelve archives based on the life

span of one year of online life. These archives were then uploaded into an iPod (one month per iPod). This iPod was part of a sculpture consisting of a laser cut metal case covering the iPod (except for the screen) with a nanoceramic sculpture made with a fast prototyping machine from the last scene of the movie (when the actor and his partner lay both on the bed). The collector buys the iPod based sculpture and 30 unique movies rendered in the corresponding month. This sculpture, together with the file and the server, is another very flexible model that can be customized to sell various projects.

<sup>6</sup> See also: <http://www.zanni.org/html/works/altarboy-cyrille/altarboy-cyrille.htm> [03.2010].  
<http://www.zanni.org/html/works/altarboy-oriana/altarboy-oriana.htm> [03.2010].  
<http://www.zanni.org/html/altarboy-allinfo.htm> [03.2010].

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.thepossibleties.com> [03 2010].



Carlo Zanni, Self Portrait with Dog, 2008

## DOCUMENTATION

The documentation of a project instead of the project itself is something explored in the past to sell performance-based works. There are many books giving detailed information and examples. In most cases it's about making photos, or videos and adding a certificate. I think documentation is a good strategy to be added to other forms of conservation and exhibition. For instance an iPod archive could break down or even iPods will not exist at all in a few years. So it's good to give the films on a DVD to the collectors too. To minimize dependency and because of all the instability problems, we should start thinking about the use of many different kind of media and sources for the same purpose.

## WEBSITE DOMAIN NAME

The selling and buying of website domain names is probably the first or one of the first things happening years ago when the net bubble was yet to come. It is a simple and clean way but not too interesting – in art terms – if it is only used to sell some content you could easily save on a CD or on any other storage device. One project I recently came up with fits very well into this model and it is the way I currently sell it. The project is called **Self Portrait With Dog**<sup>8</sup> and is a web page

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.Selfportraitwithdog.com> [03.2010].

with a two-frame layout. The bottom one works like a museum label, with author's name, title of the work and year; the top frame, much bigger, has a link to Google Street View: this link shows me walking my dog in Milan. Basically what happened is that the Google car had shot us on a spring afternoon and then I found ourselves online some months later when Google held a public launch for the Italian version. This means, that when the Google street view car will pass again to keep their database updated, we will not be there anymore. So the website will look the same except that we'll be replaced by someone or something else.

**CARLO ZANNI**

born 1975 in La Spezia (Italy), uses live Internet data feedback to create time-based social consciousness experiences using photos, films and installations that investigate topical issues of our lives. Zanni exhibits internationally, and has had shows and screenings at the Performa 09 in New York (2009), the Galleria Lorcan O'Neill in Rome (2009) and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (2009). The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London organized his first retrospective in October 2005 and published his book **Vitalogy**. <http://www.zanni.org/index.html> [03.2010].