DiVA

Digital & Video Art Fair

2005 New York

A Tribute to Bruce Nauman

Infinite Exhibition
by Christina Vassallo

The day I bought a silkscreen poster of Cory Arcangel's *Super Mario Clouds*, I was feeling quite nostalgic for all the wonderful squiggles and dots of 80's computer graphics—no doubt a result of just having seen the "Infinite Fill" exhibition at Foxy Production curated by Mr. Arcangel himself, and his sister Jamie Arcangel. The dark, cramped gallery space, smothered in the repeating black and white shapes inspired by the 16-bit patterning of MAC Paint, reminded me of learning how to spell "pig" on the Apple IIc that was kept in the coatroom of my kindergarten class. Growing up during a time when Etch-a-Sketches and Lite Brites were replaced rapidly by home computers, anything that resembles the low-tech aesthetic of my developmental years conjures up sweet sentimentality in me for a long-lost no-frills visual world. There is something oddly comforting about the return of falling tetronimo pieces and fit-inducing flashes of low-fi video explosions that make me feel like I am back in that coatroom. It seems there is plenty of material to enjoy these days as a new breed of artists, reared on the same spastic iconography, invades the domestic and international art scenes in the same way Pong took control of American homes in 1975.

The "Infinite Fill" show is noteworthy not only for its style redolent of computer graphics antiquity but also because it raises many important points about the ways in which digital artists operate and the special demands placed on curators who display their work. First, the once-rigid distinction between a fine artist and a digital artist is non-existent now. There was a time when a marginalized group of artists used computer equipment to create technology-driven work that was less art and more engineering breakthrough. But today, the acceptance of artistic uses of digital media allows artists to make work under the umbrella of commercially and critically successful artistic output. Perhaps the most poetic gesture of recognition of digital art's popularity in "Infinite Fill" is Chris Kasper's text painting, *The Future is Stupid*. Kasper—first and foremost a sculptor—utilizes the traditional art form of painting in this work to mimic the rudimentary digital shading function of the 1984 MAC Paint software application. The ominous message layered on top of a checkerboard background takes on a meta-ironic twist within the context of the mawkish exhibition. Ketta Ioannidou and Marc Leblanc, too, contributed black and white paintings that are a celebration of the early software's shading purpose. Artistic karma rears its head as artists imitate computers manually to create a neo-primitive digital aesthetic.

The visually overloaded and overstimulated gallery space of Foxy Production was filled with submissions from painters, knitters, photographers, film makers, and net artists in response to an open call posted on the Internet. Submissions ranged from the Styrofoam prints of Van Arsdale High School art students, to a two-second DVD loop of Phil Hartman as Phil Donahue by the collective MTAA, to animated GIFs by Tom Moody and jimpunk which were listed as "URLs, not for sale," because as Tom Moody states on his weblog, "I was too much of a dork to burn them on a CD and demand several hundred thousand bucks for them."[1] Henry Chamberlain even used the original MAC Paint program to make *Girl in a Bubble*, while Noah Lyon resurrected his ink jet prints from 1989. By no other meager means except an Internet posting could such a varied response have been achieved.

The "Intinite Fill" submissions display the different creative paths that can exist within the aesthetic of a vintage software application. But this evocative digital zeitgeist hinges on something other than pure nostalgia, which brings up another prevalent theme found in the current landscape of digital art: the open call method of organizing an exhibition underscores the generally democratic nature of digital art-making. To make *What an Art Gallery Should Actually Look Like (Large Glass)*, the Turkish artist Serkan Ozkaya also posted an open call for submissions of art work via the Internet and displayed 20,000 slides from artists all over the world at the recent "public.exe: Public Execution" show at Exit Art. In the organizing of the "Infinite Fill" and "public.exe" exhibitions the curators and participants exercised some of the original utopian purposes of Internet use—connecting people and disseminating information to a large audience—in order to display the submissions for a varied mix of viewers.

The ways in which technology facilitates the reception of art made for the masses is the devotion of the "public.exe" show. Much of the art was displayed outside of the gallery, in public parks, retail stores, on the street, via performances, and on the Internet. The show emphasizes that the ability of digital art to be copied, posted, and broadcasted truly makes it the art of the people. Kelly Walker's CD of a poster he designed was sold for $10 so that the buyer could print (and manipulate) as many posters as he or she likes. Many of the other works in the show are websites which, like Mr. Moody's GIFs, cannot be purchased. Will Kwan contributed a photo blog that records his collaboration with New York City housing advocates to raise awareness of overdevelopment in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood. Yucef Merhi's website is a clearinghouse for documentation of international artists' projects, serving as a stylish channel of information distribution. The messages of these artists are capable of spreading in endless directions.

Easy accessibility of both information and the objet d'art are major components of the "Infinite Fill" and "public.exe" shows. Devin Flynn's *Infinite Chicken*, displayed at the former show, is an infinite edition DVD which can be copied as many times as necessary, presumably. The collective Paper Rad distributed a free cartoon newspaper at both exhibitions and other venues throughout New York City. The hero of the zine, Tux Dog, is a palimpsest that was created by one of Paper Rad's members and modified by a slew of contributing artists for the printed version. Tux Dog is also available online to undergo continuous transformations by any one who visits the Paper Rad site, as long as the results are made available to the public at no cost. This stipulation enables the "free distribution and empowerment of the Tux Dog character," according to the Paper Rad website.[2] Tux Dog gets his wings not from his superhero capabilities, but from his transmission through cyberspace.

These two exhibitions illustrate that ambiguous issues such as ownership and intellectual property no longer apply to collaborative artists when the sharing of information leads to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This is especially true of artists who produce ephemeral works using whatever technological tools are on hand. The immediacy and immateriality of digital art and its ability to be trafficked over the Internet—and even changed from its original form—make it possible for digital artists to foster a thriving atmosphere that can reinvent itself on a daily basis. Digital art is constantly changing and so too must curatorial practices so that we can all keep up with the artistic innovations spawned by developing technologies.

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Tribute to Bruce Nauman
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From left to right on the opposite page:
- Frère Independent Founders; Thierry Alet, Tony Dunoyer, Tom Hopkis, Christopher J. Davis, Sarah Belden
- Man's mouth
- Emily in the studio, New York 2004
- Thierry's desk
- Karen Lee and Lisa Lee
- Soyon Kim, Designer, Frère Independent
- Kianga Ellis, Trustee, Frère Independent
- Jean-Michel Arnoult, Curator, Frère Independent
- Landscape by Joan Pamboukes
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- Soichiro and Thierry