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Date: Tue, 1 Apr 2003 14:22:39 +0200

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Sender: "Curating digital art - www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/"
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From: Josephine Bosma <jesis@XS4ALL.NL>

Subject: [review: 'written in stone,](#)
a net.art archeology' at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo

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hi all crumbs,

Thought you might like to see this, especially since in this show the curator is an artist, and the formula of the show is as so close to a personal on line art experience as it can be:

Written in Stone, a net.art archeology

Norway: it seems too far from the usual places to be sometimes. But now there is a nice reason to visit it. A week ago (March 23rd) a remarkable exhibition opened at the Oslo Museum of Contemporary Art. Artist Per Platou has curated an exhibition on net.art which is an odd mixture of artistic installation and almost archeological introduction to what was probably the most infamous period in network art: net.art. The exhibition concentrates on Jodi, Alexei Shulgin, Heath Bunting, Olia Lialina and Vuk Cosic. The largest part of the exhibition is not about the art works though, which is what is so extraordinary, even strange if you will. Most of the exhibition is taken up by a trip through memory lane, by objects and paraphernalia which somehow reflect the atmosphere of net.art in the mid nineties.

The first thing you see when you enter the exhibition is a small white pillar with a Perspex cube on it. It stands, all alone, in the middle of a high, nineteenth century space. In it we see a small golden marble or ball on a red velvet pillow. It represents the dot in net.art. It is the dot, the dot on a velvet pillow. If that is not ironic enough, behind the golden dot, in the alcoves behind marble pillars, are five more of these boxes, with objects representing the five (or six, since Jodi are two people) artists in the exhibition. There is for instance a knife, for Heath Bunting, who got into a lot of trouble for carrying a knife in Great Britain. (further on in the exhibition you will find print outs of the whole story behind the knife, copied from Bunting's web site.) There is also a dried bunch of roses, representing both the roses Vuk Cosic placed at the Jeffrey Shaw/Benjamin Weil installation at 'net_condition', the huge exhibition about net culture at the ZKM in 1999, to mark the death of net.art, and the roses Cornelia Sollfrank gave to Vuk Cosic at the opening of his net.art pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2001. The strangest objects at the exhibition however must

be the little busts of every individual artist. They were created from photo's taken from the web, photo's of Olia Lialina, Joan Heemskerck, Dirk Paesmans, Heath Bunting, Vuk Cosic and Alexei Shulgin. The result is six oddly similar looking heads. Some with glasses, some with slightly longer hair than the rest.

The title of the exhibition points at the ironic work by Joachim Blank and Karl Heinz Jeron (in collaboration with Alexei Shulgin and Natalie Bookchin) called 'introduction to net.art', which shows this well known text by Shulgin and Bookchin carved into stone tablets. The tablets are hanging behind the 'dot', opposite the entrance. Seeing them there, with the objects representing the artists (a typewriter with a sheet of paper full of gibberish to represent Jodi) in front of them, the little busts to the right and screenshots of well known web sites in heavy golden frames (Jodi's '404', Lialina's 'Agatha Appears' and more) to the left of them, creates a feeling of romantic nostalgia and an almost painful sense of decay at the same time. This exhibition has little to do with any historical overviews or theme shows of net.art. This exhibition is almost all atmosphere and personal experience. Even if this is what makes it most vulnerable, this is also what makes it strong. I have seldom seen a net art exhibition that convinced me and I am beginning to think this is why: exhibiting net art is all about commitment, because it is simply not possible to avoid interpretation if you want to exhibit this art in a way that engages the audience in an exhibition space beyond the click of a mouse. What is interesting about this is that it brings the curator very close to a net art experience on line, the curator somehow reveals her or his individual approach and motivations, even more so than with creating an exhibition of existing material objects. The difference for the audience, between visiting such an exhibition and experiencing different projects and art web sites on line, is that the audience is at the mercy of (or rather: captured by) the approach of the curator.

In this case the curator has chosen to pay a very personal tribute to a period of net art he loves, showing the art works from this period from three different perspectives. I have already described the main room of the exhibition, but there are three more. Two of these are filled with small paraphernalia, leftovers and 'souvenirs'. Here we find anything from the original workspace poster and the Polish CD-Rom that was created from Vuk Cosic's hijack of the Documenta X web site to small material works created by other artists than those who are represented in the main room. Here we find for instance the paper shopping bag by Mouchette, with the image of the woman sticking her tongue to a glass plate. There is also a photo of Cornelia Sollfrank hugging a keyboard and of the performance group she used to be part of: Innen. Etoy is represented by a Lego truck which one can order from their web site. Thomson and Craighead have their tea towels with images from the 'E-Poltergeist' project hanging on the wall. RTMark's cheap watch in a golden cardboard box with the text "Time isn't money" is also in one of the displays. Watercolors from Hakim Bey's office, a Superman T-shirt worn by Vuk Cosic and a vest worn by Olia Lialina are mixed with prints from mailing list texts by Netochka Nezvanova, Tilman Baumgaertel or the (fake) books on the history of net.art by Vuk Cosic. Especially the room with Lialina's vest is a trip down memory lane.

Then the third room is where the audience can experience net art closest to its original form. This is a video room, in which a video of somebody browsing the web sites of the artists is shown. The computer has simply been connected to a VCR, so we see what happens on the screen of a computer. Showing net art with a beamer is always dangerous. Some works become much stronger, especially those that are mostly dependent on simple or abstract visuals. It is harder to show

more complex works this way though, especially work in which the audience is asked to participate somehow. Choosing to record a personal journey through some artists' sites is, like this entire exhibition, a way to reveal aspects of the works in question which an exhibition audience often would miss, because it is too inexperienced or uncomfortable to explore something on a computer in a public setting. To me this room felt a bit odd though. Maybe here the experience of someone else browsing for you becomes too close to ones own experiences, threatening it somehow. Funny is that the rest of the exhibition did not have this effect on me. I remember seeing 'Net Affects', an exhibition in which five beamers showed the work of twenty artists. There the works had been taken off the web too and played from stand alone computers. Whereas the video in 'written in stone' shows the works in the pace of one person browsing, at 'Net Affects' the artists had been asked to create 'self-refreshing' html pages which jumped from one web page to another, without any further human interference, creating a film or video like experience as well. It was very impressive, and some works really stood out, making me appreciate browser based art more then I did before. I am not saying I did not like the video set up in Oslo, it just somehow made me feel uncomfortable.

Yet the entire exhibition is on the edge of the acceptable, but in this case (comparing it to for instance net_condition) the edge is not an unpleasant place to be. For instance: net_condition was 'unbrowsable' and impersonal. It in some ways exhibited an overkill on correctness, in avoiding the horrible A-word (art) by talking about 'exhibiting net culture', and it tried to show everything at the same time, erasing the possibility to pay respect to individual works. 'Written in Stone' is humorous and personal. It is an extraordinary exhibition, even if I am tempted to call a large part of it an art installation by the curator. One interesting detail to it is that the audience can create its own catalogue on site, but also on line. On site, at the museum, two computers which are on line, a printer, a copy machine and the possibility to bind the pages you have selected create something highly unusual: different, individual catalogues which all have the same ISBN number. Unfortunately the ISBN number is something the on line audience has to do without.

exhibition web site (all in Norwegian, but still browsable):

<http://www.student.uib.no/~stud2081/utstilling/>

articles on the web from which a catalogue can be compiled:

<http://www.student.uib.no/~stud2081/utstilling/artikler.htm>

works represented in browsing video:

<http://www.student.uib.no/~stud2081/utstilling/videofilm.htm>

dot on velvet pillow:

<http://www.student.uib.no/~stud2081/utstilling/bilde21.htm>

Jodi in golden frame:

<http://www.student.uib.no/~stud2081/utstilling/bilde11.htm>

Net Affects

<http://www.pavu.com/netaffects/>

net-condition

<http://www.zkm.de/net>

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