LODOWN
magazine

Javier Bardem   Dylan Rieder   Jon Rafman   Nicolas Jaar   Travess Smalley   OFWGKTA   Helmut Smits   Asger Carlsen   AIDS 3D

The
Future of
Pizza

75

✓

ARTDIRECTION
MANUEL BÜRGER

>>I still agree that certain formal aspects are important BUT new technological and artistic developments create a new freedom and re-infuse a new energy into the old mediums.<<

http://www.brandnewpaintjob.com/

http://www.jonrafman.com/

JON RAFMAN

JON RAFMAN IS A MONTREAL-BASED ARTIST THAT SOMNAMBULATES BETWEEN DIGITAL WORLDS AND MULTIPLE MULTIMEDIA CHARACTERS THAT RECENTLY RAISED A LOT OF ATTENTION THROUGH HIS GOOGLE STREET VIEW SERIES.

IF   YOU

Timur Si-Qin

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Tabor Robak

Albert Oehlen

LIKE   JON

Alright, let's be honest here: if it wasn't for our guest art director I still wouldn't have the slightest idea who Jon Rafman is. Maybe it's because I've become more reclusive and ignorant with every new year. Maybe it's because I stopped following any kind of feuilleton a while ago already. Maybe I'm more fascinated by any kind of ephemerality than by persistency and substance these days. Maybe my own little universe and its inhabitants were too busy with trying to establish a weird kind of significant independence apart from a system of labour, capital and time. But most likely: maybe it's because I used to run in the other direction as soon as terms like "internet art" or "digital artist" occur. Not necessarily because I think executing ideas in an analogue way is more elaborate or automatically more meaningful, but because I'm generally scared of 72dpi and its associated accessibility for each and everyone.

It's in the nature of things: digital art tends to be more experimental and subversive than any other art form these days due to its immediate effect and easy ways of distribution to spread the results, regardless how high or lo-brow they might seem. And Montreal-based artist Jon Rafman is one of its finest and most outspoken practitioner of his craft. He lately got a lot of attention through his rather brilliant Google Street project, a series of intriguing and odd images he sourced

Jon Rafman

from Google's street view map system. The rest of his catalogue comfortably sits between impressive and thoughtful ways of renderings (like his Brand New Paint Job project, e.g.) and instantaneous works with the character of elaborate pranks. Time for Lodown to invest a little further.

Jon, we've just slipped into 2011… would you say it's still important to discern between analogue and digital or is there an almost restrictive and hypocritical ring to it as soon as you want to clearly separate these concepts?

My own attitude towards a purist who insists on making the distinction between analogue and digital is a combination of respect and challenge. Respect because I prize their emphasis on formal and tactile aspects such as colour, texture, and composition. I see this as core to the artistic value or quality of the work. I have learnt from this formal rigor and try to achieve it in my own work. What I challenge, however, is an excessive emphasis on what purists, especially photo purists, see as intrinsic or inherent aspects of their craft be it the emulsion or the brand of camera or components. At one point in history, that view may have been relevant but to me it no longer carries the same relevance.

To me it seems like they are fetishizing what they view as being true to the medium. I feel that by doing so they are diminishing the artistic value or potential quality of digital forms or new languages that integrate the still image. I still agree that certain formal

aspects are important but new technological and artistic developments create a new freedom and re-infuse a new energy into the old mediums.

I question the type of "purism" does not allow us to incorporate new forms and developments. Perhaps with some arts like painting it is a lot about the actual materials. In my view, you can be a purist but the purity or perfection or quality is no longer tied completely to the material aspects of the work. I developed this attitude in part because internet culture encourages a sort of lightness or nonchalance, and disrespect towards the precious physical object and this has been liberating for many artists.

Why is the term "internet artist" still handled as a dirty word, even though the internet has existed for decades already?

Jasper Johns Oval Office, 2010

I think the negative association with net.art has developed in part because people tend to reduce it to either boring '90s hacker art or retro web 1.0 animated or a distinct type of ironic kitsch and in-jokes that employ a mix of pop-cultural and obscure internet references.

So would you consider yourself to be an internet artist?

Yes, in that, the internet is one of the primary spaces in which I exhibit my work. Although I do make work that is not exclusively made for exhibition on the web. I prefer using the term Gurthrie Lonergan coined "internet aware art". And with each progressive generation the internet is increasingly integral to everyday living. And so dialogue amongst internet aware artists is steadily turning into less and less of a conversation limited to the signs and symbols of the web. It is transforming into a conversation about everyday reality.

The very majority of art forms aren't only positioned in time, but by geographic coordinates as well. Would you say that the internet and its related blog/tumblr-culture is our new Esperanto, a new kind of international folklore?

Definitely! I think there is a real dialogue that is taking place between artists all over the globe. Back in 2006, group internet surf blogs like Nasty Nets first began to highlight this new vernacular, but since then it has transformed and become increasingly complex. This blog culture allows for individuals to respond instantaneously to each others no matter where one is based,

fostering a culture of direct response that often resembles a real-time conversation where fast paced conceptual and aesthetic exchanges can occur. Sometimes I sense that me and the other internet-aware artists are all collaborating in the search for structure in this seemingly formless overflow of information that we are bombarded with everyday. Other times I feel like we are all simply attempting to highlight the contradictions and chaos of the digital age, revealing a world in which we are constantly being bombarded by fragmentary impressions and overwhelmed with information, a world in which we see too much and register nothing.

Likeminded artists like Oliver Laric for example made the transition from virtual to tangible/ physical art. Were you ever tempted to do the same... I can imagine it's a lot easier in terms of a quick cash-in.

In away I've already made the transition from virtual to physical since I've been making large format prints of my Google Street View images. The desire to create something that occupies physical space is tied to the desire to see ones work in a new context away from the computer screen. When I first saw my Street Views hanging on a wall, I noticed new aspects of the im-

age that hadn't seen when they were purely digital. I think a lot can be gained and learned about ones work by materialize it... also artists have to feed themselves somehow.

I once read you were interested in trying to use a new kind of 3D printer for a certain series of yours. Please

Gerhard Richter Car Scene, 2010

tell me a bit more about this project.

Yes, I see each one of my "Brand New Paint Job's" (BNPJ) as both a stand-alone work and a proposal for a physical object. Right now 3D printing technology is available, but printing at large scales is prohibitively expensive. I imagine, however, that in the not so distant future it will become affordable and one day we will have 12 years old boys designing 3D models of their dream cars in their parent's basement, uploading the

models to an on-demand 3D printing website, and receiving the life-sized prototype shipped to them within the week. Until then, I've been exploring different strategies to realize my BNPJs in new ways. Currently I'm working with Tabor Robak to create a totally immersive 3D environments where you

will be able to interact with my BNPJ models like in a first person shooter. **(>>1)**

I'm heavily fascinated by your Street View series (>>2)... for me it kinda disables the common preconception that the very majority of what you find in the depths of the Interwebs is either gnarly or devoid of meaning. How much time do you usually have to spend before you find an almost perfect picture?

I have to mentally prepare myself before I go Street View "surfing". The process re-

>> One [...] theme in my work is contemporary ALIENATION expressed through the tension between the ideal and the real and the romantic and the ironic. <<

quires intense endurance and concentration. When I first started off, I would regularly go on 12 hour Ritalin-fueled

International Klein Blue Prius, 2010

marathon runs and about half way through the session I would enter an almost trance-like state. Usually it would be hours upon hours before I'd find anything worth screen capturing. These days, however, I'm less interested in finding the "perfect picture" and more fascinated by the idea of the Street View collection as an incomplete whole or as an ongoing stream of images. I've gotten into the habit of analyzing reoccurring motifs and patterns, comparing all the different methods people have of flicking off the Google camera.

Do you sometimes have the feeling that you're the very first person who ever laid

JON RAFMAN'S PICTURE COMMENT

of **Cory Arcangel's** "Photoshop CS: 110 by 72 inches, 300 DPI, RGB, square pixels, default gradient "Spectrum", mousedown y=1098 x=1749.9, mouse up y=0 x=4160 (2008)"
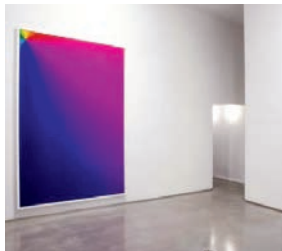
>>Museum goer1: "I wonder how he made this?" Museum goer2: "My mother always wanted me to marry a gradient." Museum goer3: "CS4 totally sucked.<<

eyes on this scenario? Is it like voyeurism without the sleaze?

I often start a session by going onto the official Street View homepage to see where the Google cars are currently

Basquiat Zeppelin, 2010

located across the world and begin surfing from those points. I thrive off the idea that I may be the first person to ever have gazed upon the given scenario. And it is this joy in exploring the virtual world that led inexorably to a critique of the real world in which we are trapped. The 9 Eyes project both celebrates Google's technologies and critiques the culture and consciousness it reflects. We want to matter and we want to matter to somebody but loneliness and anonymity are often our plight. At times, I introduce a moral perspective at times by adopting the role of a member of the community. At other times, I alter or undo familiar conventions by reframing or by introducing the human gaze. In this way, I align myself with the historical role of the artist who not so much liberates us

as he reveals the conditions of our enslavement.

Do you necessarily divide between aesthetics and statement... I'm asking because your Brand New Paint Job (BNPJ) series seems to flirt

with the fascination of triviality (or kitsch).

No, I am as much influenced by a terrible kitsch I consumed growing up as the great works of literature and art I read and experienced. I think this mix of high and low influences is just part and parcel of modernity. Brand New Paint Job was born out of the desire to discover the formal result of the juxtaposition of a two-dimensional image with a three-dimensional model. I wanted to start conversations between surfaces and their underlying structure. So I forced collisions between the 3D model and 20th century painting to create a two-way road of meaning in which the model says something about the painting and vice versa. In this way, the clash of the cultural weight of a high modernist paintings and a mass produced

vehicle is not simply another example of the blurring of the distinction between high and low culture. The object may

Pollock Tank, 2010

have a cultural significance on one level (e.g. a tank) and the painting (e.g. a Pollock) on another level so that the questioning of the meaning of the signs unsettles us in yet another way. BNPJ attempts to confront paintings historic fear of becoming a decorative object. BNPJ begs the question has painting becoming just an exclusive wallpaper for the designer chic? The tension between the uselessness of the painting and the instrumentality of the object highlights the diminished division between art and design these days. I think more and more important to look at the world with a historical consciousness. History is "wrapped" around us at all times, even if it has been relegated to the status of surface textures or a glossy layer of paint simply applied over everything, like a paint job. Some people interpret BNPJ as wryly mocking art history, but one can equally see BNPJ as paying genuine homage to it. When I cover a room from wall to wall with a repeating painting, the room becomes a shrine to the painting.

A rather twisted sense of humour and a soft spot for the

slightly absurd can be found in a lot of your series. Would you say this component is an integral part of your body of work?

From Duchamp's readymades to Cory Arcangel's Photoshop gradients, humour has played a prominent role in the history of art this past century. In my search for how to best critically examine and represent modern experience, I also tend to arrive at ideas that contain an element of the absurd. One reoccurring themes in my work is contemporary alienation expressed through the tension between the ideal and the real and the romantic and the ironic.

What's next for Mr. Rafman?

I just finished up a short film titled Codes of Honor about a pro video game player. The film emerged out of my time spent investigating pro fighting game culture. I was living in New York spending every day in Chinatown at the last great East Coast video game arcade. I bring my camera and interview all the regulars and put the interviews on my YouTube channel (>>3) dedicated to documenting the subculture. It was great, the YouTube videos triggered all these debates about who was the greatest Ken or Ryu back in 1998. The film combines interviews I captured at the arcade and Second Life macinima to tell the story of a fallen video game player reminiscing his glory at the joysticks.
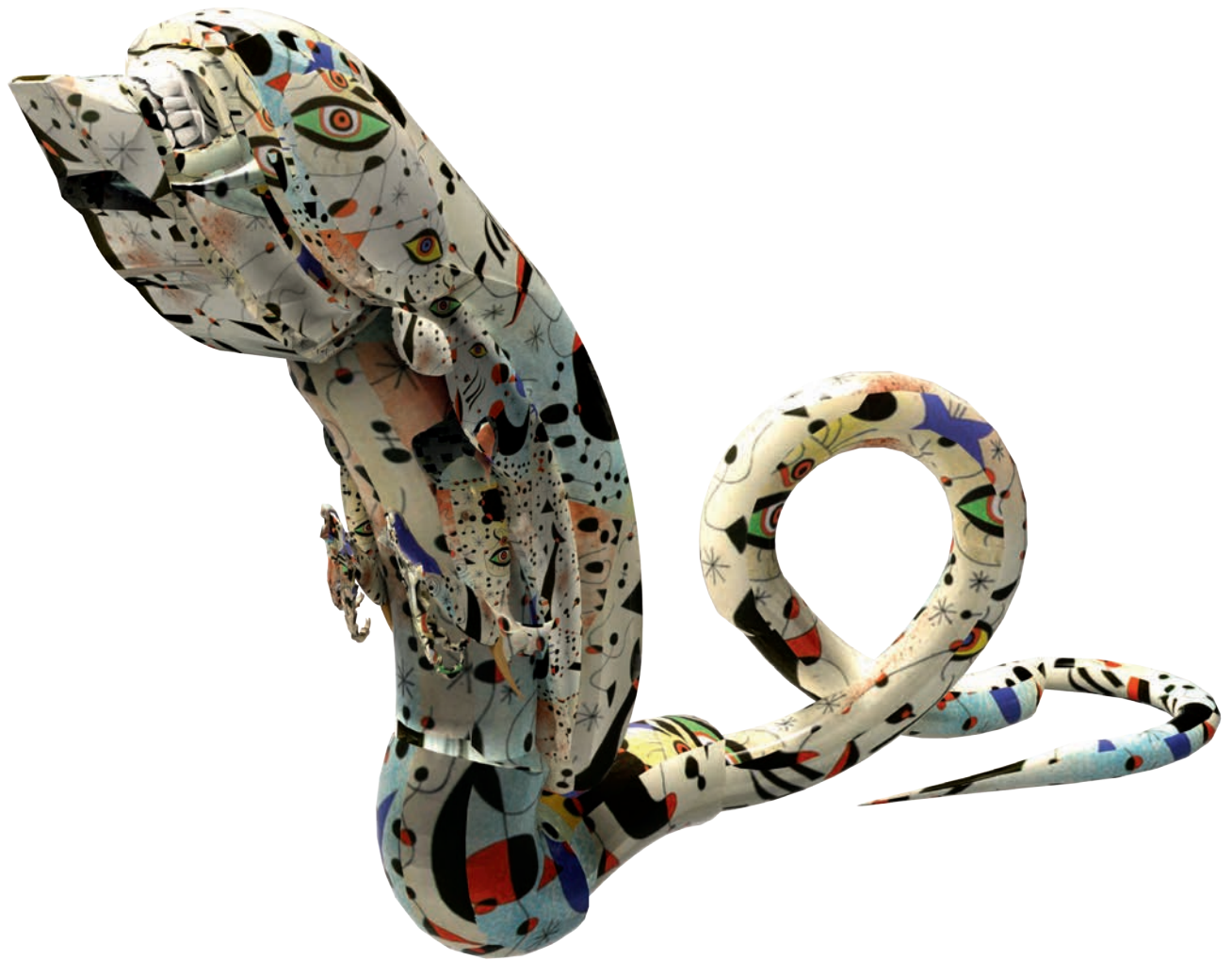
MORE LINKS:
1. http://eexxttrraa.com/
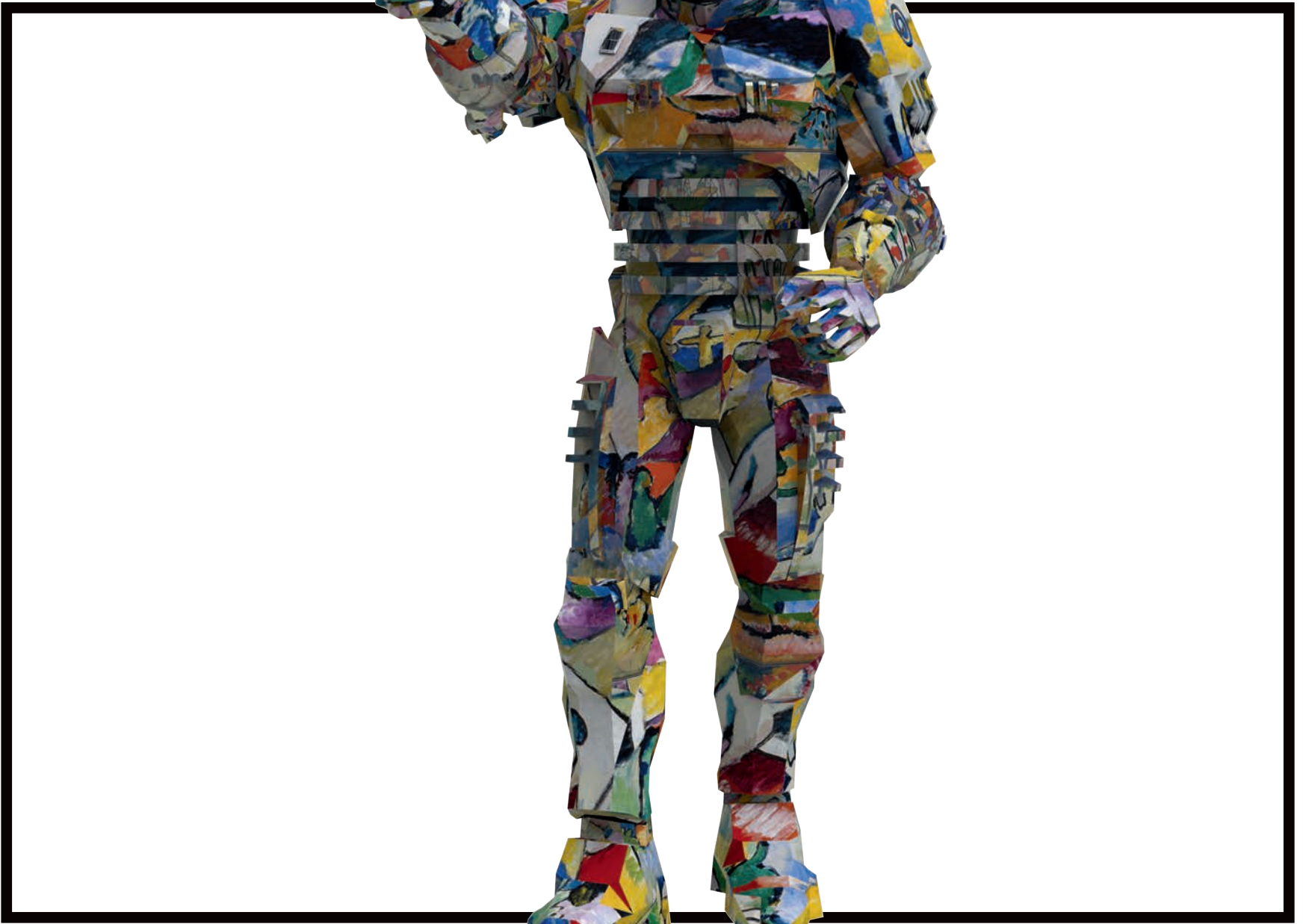2. http://googlestreetviews.com/
3. http://youtube.com/arcadehustla/

Words: Forty

Frank Stella Starship Enterprise, 2010

Miró Alien Chest-Burster, 2010

Brice Marden-Prison Cell, 2010

Kandinsky Robocop, 2010

found on http://www.spiritsurfers.net/
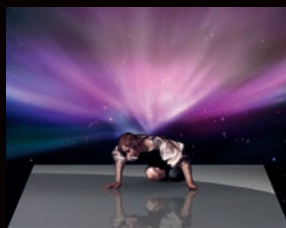
UNTITLED, 2009, by Brad Troemel

>>Sometimes you just hit the bull's eye and SIMPLE imagery turns into beautiful POETRY.<<

Words: Manuel Bürger

CANNON BALLS

You don't necessarily have to be a Photoshop wizard in order to make basic elements of a picture join in for an intense visual relationship—sometimes you just hit the bull's eye and a simple imagery turns into beautiful poetry. Whether it's a cheap montage and the way two entirely different things are connected that causes a tickling irritation, or a trivial graphical effect suddenly becoming a part of a narrative; the simpler the trick, the more beautiful the effect.

Unfortunately, this doesn't work on demand as most of that magic happens by accident—which makes the results even more thrilling. Like pulling a killer joke in a very difficult moment, you can unveil the truth about a whole situation just by using simple, silly means.

Aside from smartly keeping you entertained while you surf, these works reflect on common design tools, web aesthetics, user culture and our daily life with technology; making it an autonomous genre of its own?

CHRIS COY

Is internet art always expected to be unserious and thus more serious than conceptual art?
I think early conceptualists were equally serious & unserious. What I mean is that it's difficult today to view Conceptual Art without fetishizing its aesthetics: typewriters, pseudo-scientific notation, sets of instructions, black & white photography, etc. All have been canonized as markers of a certain type of intellectual endeavor and emotional detachment/coolness. Things were deadpan then, they're deadpan now; not much has changed. We're still dealing with similar questions and being quite underhanded about it.
How stubborn can openness be? Openness can be pretty damn stubborn.

Chris Coy, Conceptual Art, http://proposed.tumblr.com, http://seecoy.com

MARTIN

http://www.martinkohout.com/

Martin Kohut, Waterfalls

Does the amount of visual effects available eat you up?
Somewhere between concepts, desires and shamanism without a strategy to a certain extent. Therefore effects can be fun to play around with but I don't care so much. They are around from time to time (var. colors / lengths / odors / genders and slickness) and at the end one has to pick some1 or whatever. Indeed: if you want, they will pop up anywhere. Like if u want… actually they can act as both a facade or a concept. What a handshake.
Do you sometimes confuse whether you're in front or behind the screen?
Tell me about it. At the same time the common metaphor of cyberSpace as a Space is a piece of a shit. It's not divided by the Screen (it has various qualities from the hardware to your friends list—it's not happening solely somewhere behind…) But yes, I wish mine was at least few inches bigger and with a remote control. We learned pretty well to perceive in the death of one quality a presence of another. Don't u have a boat to borrow? Let's get back to the beach.

BRAD TROEMEL

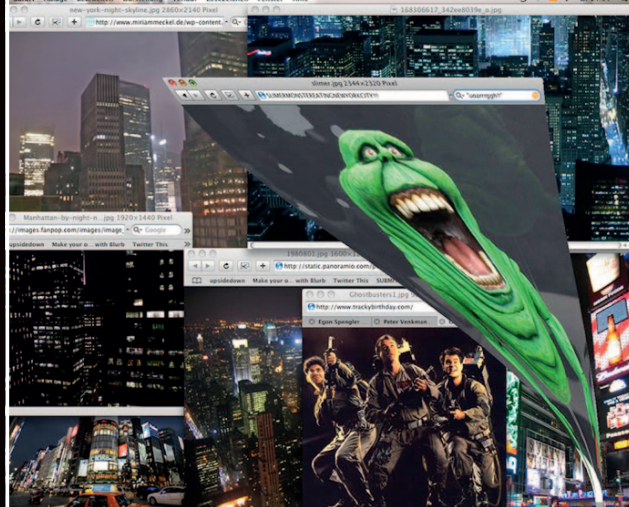RODMAN, 2009, by Brad Troemel, http://bradtroemel.com/

<u>Do you feel it is all about who got game? About creating appealing yet ironic works with references to pop culture and a big "get it?!"</u>

No, I don't think art is a game of Celebrity Jeopardy. When artists' only contextual reference in their work is the work of other artists they become boring very quickly. Viewers who recognize that kind of art's referent say "I get it" and move on without a thought, while the rest of its audience doesn't "get it" and doesn't care. "Art for art's sake" is a tired excuse to become insularly intentioned and limited in your scope of influence. Art has a responsibility to exist in and for the time it is made. The best art isn't even art all of the time—the best art has the ability to shape-shift and become useable in a variety of ways (as protest, as entertainment, as social diagram, as historical revision, as cultural intervention, etc.) It is this textured existence that allows great art to be applicable to many and create new perceptions of the world in the eyes of its diverse body of viewers.

<u>You once said, "The point of art is not to create art out of thin air but to find what is meaningful out of everything in the world." What can we find in Rodman? Can you explain the magic of re-functioning?</u>

Dennis Rodman is an interesting and dynamic person, and for that reason I wanted to associate myself with him by paying tribute to his trademark hair colours in a formal style that reflected the layered complexity of his life. Jogging [A.N. Brad's former blog] was as much about the individual works that comprised it as it was about the performance of constant art production online, so for that reason Rodman probably makes more sense when viewed alongside the other 800 or so other posts on that blog. Re-functioning is a tactic that allows the present to speak to the past– one of many impossible things art attempts to do.

DENNIS KNOPF

Slimer by Dennis Knopf, 2009

collect them. Trying to dig up the author of a work in endlessly reblogged Tumblr posts, that's the sweaty part today. So I'm wondering if Michelangelo was still around (and that quote of his does sound like a classic Twitter post) what would he say? "The sculpture already exists inside Google's 3D Warehouse"?

<u>What's your main inspiration?</u>

The word "inspiration" sounds like there is a moment of reflection in my work, but I can assure you there is not. I'm getting bombarded with signs of pop culture all my life; shit in, shit out. What's more interesting to me is the motivation behind creating what you refer to as cannon balls. I've always been most productive when I had a certain audience in mind that I wanted to impress (not just the anonymous user). So being a member of an internet surfing club or knowing that a particular person follows my blog or feed makes me want to land a hit. I guess I just want those people to like me.

<u>Does "the sculpture already exist inside the block of marble" (Michelangelo)?</u>

I never checked. But I'd say there's tombstones and table tops for hotels inside. I did find sculptures on websites, in spam emails and within the graphical user interface of my computer, however. You don't carve them out of mountains nowadays, it's more like catching butterflies. You have to spot and

I felt the INFOspirit while having an

JOEL HOLMBERG

<u>Either you get a ready-made in just a second or you might ignore it. What do we see here?</u>

I think that Getty Images Hollywood Sign has captured peoples attention because it points to a shift in how and why images are produced today vs. in the past century. Hollywood movies have served as a popular database for referencing a range of emotions and behaviors, and in a way the studios hold copyrights on classic portrayals of humanity. Stock photography agencies like Getty Images are attempting to cast an even wider—albeit more empty and generic—net of cultural signifiers in anticipation of a narratives that do not yet exist.

Getty Images Hollywood Sign, by Joel Holmberg, http://www.joelholmberg.com/