

FEATURE

Internet art

幸運PDF S/S 2013, a fashion collection by the collective Lucky PDF, in which they created patterned fabrics by appropriating images created by artists in their online network



Web of intrigue



In the 'post-internet' age, digital artists are reassessing their relationship with galleries and collectors. By **Ben Luke**

The mainstream art world has until recently had a rather uncertain approach to internet-based art. Earlier manifestations of art online have frequently been ghettoised and struggled to be absorbed into the core of art-world discourse, while museums' online commissions, like those of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and the Tate in London, have only fitfully spluttered into life.

But as the internet has naturally become part of the daily lives of artists, so art made on the internet, or plundering its endless resources, has grown in prominence in art institutions. The New Museum in New York has led the way, with "First Look: New Art Online", a monthly series of online exhibitions, as well as the regular incorporation of digital art into group shows and its affiliation with the non-profit website Rhizome, dedicated to "artistic practices that engage technology".

Meanwhile, digital art's rising significance in the UK alone is evident in three recent projects: the Serpentine Gallery's *AGNES*, a digital commission by the Belgian-American artist Cécile B. Evans; Oliver Laric's online project "Lincoln 3D Scans" at Lincoln's The Collection museum, winner of the Contemporary Art Society's annual award for museum and artist collaborations; and the imminent launch of *Opening Times*, a non-profit commissioning body for online art, supported by Arts Council England.

This increase in online commissioning matches the rise of the much-debated idea of "post-internet" art, initially coined by artist Marisa Olson and sometimes called "internet-

aware" art, which is largely object-based and shown in galleries, but inextricably linked with the language, form and content of the internet. Two shows reflect this tendency in different global settings: "Speculations on Anonymous Materials" at the Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany (until 23 February) and "Art Post-Internet", which opens at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing (1 March-11 May).

Karen Archev, the co-curator of the Ullens Center show with Robin Peckham, has spent years curating and interpreting the work in this

it is basically comparable to the industrial revolution, so everything will change. And of course, art will completely change, because there are such huge differences in the way we work and communicate and travel."

Ben Vickers, the Serpentine's first dedicated digital curator, believes that the art world's ponderous response to these developments has been crucial. "There's a particularly good Rand report [by the US government-funded think tank, the Rand Corporation] that talks about tribes, institutions, marketplaces and networks,

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new age. She admits that the post-internet term is problematic. The way to understand it, she says, is "to think about 'post' in terms of understanding it as meaning 'after', and 'after' meaning 'in the fashion of'. When I talk about post-internet art I think about art that's made with consciousness of the networks that produce and transmit it."

So are we in the midst of an art-historical shift? Yuri Pattison is a solo artist and a member of the collective Lucky PDF, which is included in the Ullens Center show. He believes art history cannot be isolated from the "incredible point in greater world history" we have reached, "where

and the basic argument is that, in the same way as you saw the erosion of the Church to the institutions of the state and then later to the marketplace with financial capitalism, what we're witnessing now is the same shift with networks. But what's particularly interesting in the art context is that the art world has been quite slow to adapt to this stuff."

This has meant that the new epoch for contemporary art could develop organically. "What that scene constitutes is a group of people that just met online and started doing stuff themselves," Vickers says. "They wrote the texts, they put on shows and decided what that looks like.

And now, in the past 18 months, you've seen a rapid adoption of it on the part of institutions."

Part of the difficulty for museums and galleries has been a reluctance from internet artists to engage with the traditional art-world model. "Net art really came into being in the mid-1990s and then it was a group of artists that actually didn't want to be affiliated with institutions," says Melanie Bühler, the founder of Lunch Bytes, an online platform and discussion series dedicated to art and digital culture. The net artists "conceived of the internet as a space where they could express themselves freely aside from the institutions", Bühler says, "so there was a notion involved of creating something entirely of their own".

The networked generation

Even today, an ambivalence to the art world exists among some digital artists. The Lucky PDF collective, whose online works sit somewhere between a magazine TV show and a group exhibition, are at once artists, curators and producers and have said that their ultimate commission would be to direct a music video for the hip-hop artist Kanye West.

Vickers, who has worked with Lucky PDF, believes this attitude flummoxes institutions. "If you don't think that the gallery space or even the art world at large is the primary site of display for the ideas that you're trying to narrate, then it actually doesn't matter too much whether one of you says, 'I am the artist,'" he says. "It's one of the most interesting shifts that we are seeing in this moment, and the one that's most difficult to understand for existing institutions, because it completely breaks the model – how does a

gallery begin to represent a network?"

Many of those networks began life as "surf clubs", essentially a collaboratively produced blog, in which artists posted found and manipulated online imagery. They were the "primary form of output for a lot of artists for a long time", and fundamental to post-internet art, Archey says. Among them was Club Internet, a site founded by the Dutch-born, Berlin-based artist Harm van den Dorpel, who invited guest artists from across the world, essentially curating international group exhibitions of online art.

Attilia Fattori Franchini, the founder of the online project space bubblebyte.org and the curator of the Opening Times website, says that "empowering the artist has been one of the features of the digital revolution". She adds: "Before, you had totally to rely on showcasing your work to galleries or curators, whereas today, artists can decide how to brand and distribute their own work, through which channels, to which community or blog or online website – they're the master of their own images."

Yuri Pattison, who made a project for bubblebyte, says that this sense of a global community has spilled over into post-internet art, where, he says, "the speed of engagement" with fellow artists has created huge possibilities. "If you're interested in an artist, you can find their website and you can propose to do a show with them," says the London-based artist. "And even if they live in New York, they can send you the files and you can fabricate them at this end. You can have an international group show with no money, with the same impact as something that could've happened 20 years ago at great expense."

Rise of the digital natives

Key to this scene has been the democratisation of online programmes. "Before, the internet was a language that was open to few people," says Fattori Franchini, and online works were largely created by artists who knew complex coding languages, but today's digital art is informed by "the easier access we all have into making work, from a software point of view. Programmes are becoming easier and easier to use, and the latest generation was born digital."

Among the highest profile of these digital natives is the Los Angeles-based Petra Cortright, who first gained interest with *webcam 2007*, 2007, a self-portrait for the YouTube age, in which she filmed herself nonchalantly flicking through the visual effects of a cheap webcam,



A still from Petra Cortright's video, *RGB, D-LAY*, 2011 (above), Harm van den Dorpel's *Assemblage (everything vs. anything)*, 2013 (left), and (below) a screen shot of Rafaël Rozendaal's *Jellotime.com*, 2007



including animated pizza slices. It triggered a series of webcam films using freeware she finds online – chance discoveries are fundamental to her approach. "I really enjoy that aspect of the hunt," she says, "and I use whatever I can get my hands on." She uses Mac and PC

platforms because "there's so much more weird freeware" on PC, that is "kind of virusy, you're almost scared to install it. But this is exactly why this stuff is the best." Like many artists, Cortright naturally flows between online works and physical objects. "I make files, that seems like the most honest way to describe what I do, and then it's really exciting to be able to have so many outcomes," she says.

Cortright's recent show at the Steve Turner Contemporary gallery in Los Angeles included "digital paintings", actually Photoshop images printed on aluminium, as well as the webcam videos and flash animations. Turner also represents Rafaël Rozendaal, another leading internet artist. When Turner began working with them, the two artists "made very little that existed in the physical world", he says. "Rafaël made websites and those websites exist on the internet and if someone wishes to look at them, they can look at them for free and if someone has the inclination to own it – since ownership is often a key element in the history of art – they can

buy it." Turner says of Rozendaal that he "knew not to ghettoise him" and he now makes lenticular prints that reflect the exuberant plays on abstraction found in some of his websites. "He's still dealing with the same issues, the same concerns, the same curiosities," Turner says, "but he's figured out – because he wanted to – how to show those works in a physical space."

The cash question

Cortright and Rozendaal have taken novel approaches to selling their work. Cortright, uneasy at defining the price of her online work, has used an algorithm to decide it for her, based on the number of YouTube views: when *The Art Newspaper* viewed the work *football/jaerie*, 2009, which was included in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's exhibition "Fútbol: the Beautiful Game" (2 February-20 July), it had garnered 10,626 views and was valued at \$3,131.30. Meanwhile, Rozendaal has published on his website the contract for how prospective collectors must use his online works.

Certainly, the trend in post-internet art towards digitally-created physical works has helped drive the market's interest in its artists, with many signing up with galleries. But Karen Archey says some artists remain sceptical: "It's partially that the art world is

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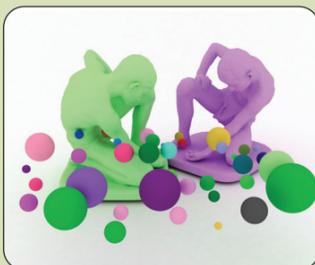
a really gross, fierce place, and I think that people that work online, and do so exclusively, do so for a reason. Just to speculate, I think they don't want to be part of the market, but also don't feel that they're capable of existing in it... A lot of these people that choose to work online see others that entered into the gallery system as playing a game that is going to fuck them over and chew them up and spit them out, and that maybe they think that people who work with galleries now are too good for them."

Archey is acutely aware that the post-internet phenomenon is the art world's "next big thing" and hopes her Beijing show will help prevent it being seen merely as a trend. "[It] will create lineages for this work, so that it's rooted in a history and a lineage of knowledge and artistic labour," she says. In the show, post-internet artists such as Laric and Van den Dorpel are shown alongside established figures such as Dara Birnbaum and the Bernadette Corporation. "My feeling is that I really do care about and love this work and feel to some extent like a shepherd of it and don't want it to be swatted away by a capricious art world," Archey says. "The way you make something not a trend is by identifying the roots and letting them grow."

• *First Look*: www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/online; *Rhizome*: www.rhizome.org; *Opening Times*: www.otdac.org; *Oliver Laric*: www.oliverlaric.com; *Lunch Bytes*: www.lunch-bytes.com; *Yuri Pattison*: yuripattison.com; *Lucky PDF*: www.luckypdf.com; *Harm van den Dorpel*: www.harmvandendorpel.com; *bubblebyte*: www.bubblebyte.org; *Petra Cortright*: petracortright.com; *Rafaël Rozendaal*: www.newrafael.com



Net gains: five recent works capturing the new spirit in online art

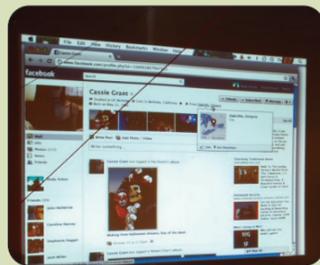


Lincoln 3D Scans, 2013

The Collection, Lincoln, and Oliver Laric

www.lincoln3dscans.co.uk

Laric made 3D scans of works from the collections of two Lincoln museums, the archaeology works at The Collection and sculptures from the Usher Gallery, from Roman busts to medieval armour and even a skeletal pelvic bone. These can be downloaded for free and then manipulated using free programmes listed by Laric to create entirely new works—these manipulations can be viewed on the website (Fernando Foglino's is pictured). The work relates to Laric's ongoing "Versions" project, in which he plays on the culture of bootlegs, copies and remixes in the networked internet age.



Dorm Daze, 2011

Ed Fornieles

www.facebook.com/sitcom

Fornieles's self-styled "Facebook sitcom", which has been bought as an installation by the Zabłudowicz Collection, is a vast three-month long online performance in which Fornieles created a self-contained network on Facebook. Participants played fictional roles based on "scalped" accounts of real-life students at University of California, Berkeley, and created a soap opera of philandering "hotties", drug abuse, unrequited homosexual love and, of course, death. Ben Vickers, who has worked with Fornieles for some time, says of the artist: "At times his work is totally abhorrent, but it acts as this social mirror."



You, the World and I, 2011

Jon Rafman
youtheworldandi.com

A modern-day telling of the Orpheus myth, Rafman's digital video tells the story of a man searching for a lost love who refused to be photographed, because "she would rather think of things the way they were in her memory", and the mournful narrator searches for a record of their time together online. Using digital renderings of heritage sites and images found on Google Earth and Google Street View, Rafman's video reflects on a world experienced increasingly virtually, in which even the most private of us leaves a trace.



AGNES, 2012-13

Cécile B. Evans
serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/agnes

The Serpentine's colourful first digital commission, is, according to Evans, "a spambot" who lives on the gallery's website and will evolve over the coming months. "Please answer my questions so I can help you with yours," AGNES tells us in a video. You can then respond to differing queries, asking how you end a phone call or where you go when you need to be alone. Crucially, and rather uncomfortably, you are then asked for your email address. Vickers, the project's curator, says the project began before the NSA (National Security Agency) revelations, "but it's heavily predicated on this identity that's collecting information about you but wants to reward you for it".



RELIABLE COMMUNICATION, 2013

Yuri Pattison for Legion TV
reliablecommunications.net

Internet art for the post-NSA scandal era, Pattison's dense and absorbing work is based on the Soviet Coup Archive, a digital archive relating to the attempted coup d'état in 1991. The archive, Pattison says, is "a 'pre-internet' internet that was established in the Soviet Union that had connections with the West". Not deemed a major media source, it was uncensored and "it actually prevented the coup because people were feeding out information." Pattison links the material to another famous leak: the soldier Chelsea Manning's conversations about the leaking of classified information with Adrian Lamo, who eventually turned her over to the US authorities.