International Digital Art projects (IDAprojects)

Teachers Resource

IDA PROJECTS OVERVIEW

IDAprojects began as a web-based project in 1999. It was conceived as a structure for the negotiation of new connections in the fields of academia, emerging technology and professional art practice. In the past seven years IDAprojects has grown to include national and international touring exhibition programs with the aim of presenting leading artists from around the world who engage in new media arts and creative technological research. Major institutions and museums support IDAprojects as an important voice in new media and contemporary arts. IDAprojects has partnerships with both private and institutional galleries, and a team of freelance curators from China and Australia. IDAprojects continues to develop a forum for the public to better understand how art, technology and industry influence contemporary culture and social phenomena.
IN BREF: A HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF DIGITAL/NEW MEDIA ART

Computer art and video art emerged from technologies that were initially associated with the field of science. The basic principles of these two technologies were established in the 1920’s, though widespread applications (TV and data management system for business) were not developed for the public until after World War II.

The landscape of the 19th century was dominated by the labourious machinery of the industrial revolution. The 20th century ushered in an age of microprocessor, miniaturization and faster and faster data flows. As these technologies were made publicly available artists quickly and eagerly began taking advantage of these new tools.

Video brought fluidity, a certain lightness and ease of use which broke with Artistic tradition (painting, sculpture, drawing). The introduction of video bypassed the cumbersome weight of these traditions and gave way to a seemingly direct connection with ordinary life. Video became a tool for the democratisation and expansion of the closed world of the traditional arts.

Artists’ approach towards these new tools and technologies was one of ‘appropriation, vigilance and refusal’. Video art emerged in the 1960s and by the 1970s video was synonymous with the Fluxus movement and artists involved in second wave feminism. These art movements created work with intentions that were often blatantly anti-establishment. However since these times a wide range of practices have emerged alongside the continued growth of new technologies over the last four decades, that it is now implausible to associate the medium of video with any singular artistic movement or attitude.

Computer art emerged approximately a decade after Video (during the 1970s.) This is partly due to restricted access to the technology (the home computer revolution did not start until the late 1980s) as well as the complex nature of the binary code interface (which didn’t transform into the ‘user-friendly’ interfaces we use today until the early 1990s). Early computer art and digital imaging used pure code as a kind of ‘paintbrush’ for creating virtual environments. Artists such as Paul Brown, Jean-Pierre Hebert and Jon McCormack (whose works were all featured in IDAprojects 06) continue this method even today and consider programming as an integral part of their creative process. This work is often referred to as computational art.

During the 1990s hybrid works began to emerge which utilised both video and computer technology. The blurring of media was a trend that also encompassed the more traditional art forms. As the boundaries between mediums became more and more fluid the term ‘multimedia’ began to surface regularly. The term Digital and New Media Art also emerged during these years, though even today both terms lack clarity as the media they encompass develops and mutates at an ever increasing rate.
Digital media has often been developed through the collaboration of the technician and artist. Technical research has been and continues to be an intrinsic component of creative experimentation. Artists have frequently enlisted technicians and electronic specialists to inform, and often create the interfaces for their artwork, (electronic specialist Shuya Abe designed and built Num Paik first synthesizer in the early 1970s⁴). This relationship remains strong today and we continue to see the roles of technician, artist, and programmer merging to develop new creative practices. As Stephen Danzig, Director of IDA projects stated in 2007 ‘Digital art is an interdisciplinary practice, a hybrid process in which artists engage with practices and outcomes that go beyond any single art form’ ⁵.

The 2007-2008 project’s curatorial focus is the concept of the Vernacular Terrain. The exhibition explores how the artist expresses and discusses their physical, political and cultural environment. This year’s project features over fifty national and international artists from Europe, Australia and Asia. Inspired by the notion of a Vernacular Creativity, (a term coined by Jean Burgess\(^1\)) the curatorial team has chosen work that is in some way connected to the local or personal, yet creates opportunities to discuss their physical, political and cultural environment in global terms.

Examples of the Vernacular: in relation to the artist’s visual landscape; Van Sowerwine animation *Clara* (2004), where the details within the ‘home environment’ are distinctly Australian, thus giving the work a sense of physical locality. In relation to the artist’s personal experiences; Andrea Innocent’s work is influenced by her exposure to Japanese culture, this experience informing her own cultural terrain and image making\(^2\).
The exhibition rationale and works chosen have also been influenced by De Meredieu’s observations in her book *Digital and Video Art*; that in the current state of play artists are using the personal (the micro, the vernacular) to discuss issues of the macro, the social, political and scientific debates of our time, as well as ideas about global and local existence. This use of the personal could perhaps be attributed to the super-flux state of data and information flows, opinion and counter opinion, travel and globalization. ‘The Vernacular Terrain’ aims to provide an overview of artists throughout the world working with these ideas and concerns.

Video art emerged during the 1960s and 1970s and consists of video and/or audio data. Traditionally video art was recorded on videotapes (this practice continues but is increasingly rare), in recent years video format has shifted from analogue to digital, with the invention of DV home cameras. Video art is screened in many ways - it can be projected onto surfaces or displayed on television and computer screens in numerous locations.

It is important not to mistake video art for film. Video art does not rely on conventions that define film. Resources such as actors, dialogue, narratives and plots do not often apply to video art. In comparison to film, video is cheap, accessible and immediate. These factors often play an important role in the visual and conceptual outcomes of the work. Video artists do not consider their work as a form of entertainment. The work of video artists is sometimes characterised as activist documentary or screen art. Many artists explore the boundaries of video as a medium and aim to subvert viewer's expectations of conventional cinema.
It is now common for many contemporary artists to combine video art with other practices such as installation and performance art.

Two examples of screen based video works in this exhibition are David Rosetzky’s 
*Worlds Apart #1 + #2*, 2006 and Monika Tichacek’s Anne Landa award winning work 
Video installation is a contemporary art method that combines video technology with installation art. It is a practice that utilises all aspects of its surrounding environment as the means of affecting the audience. Its origins tracing back to the birth of video art in the 1970s and has increased in popularity as the means of digital video production has become more readily accessible. Today, video installation is visible in a range of environments; from galleries and museums to new and expanding fields including site-specific work in urban and industrial landscapes\(^1\).

A pioneer of video installation was Nam June Paik whose work from the mid-sixties used multiple television monitors in sculptural arrangements. Paik went on to work with video walls and projectors to create large immersive environments.

Gary Hill created complex video installations using combinations of stripped down monitors, projections and laser disk technologies so that the spectator could interact with the work. For example the work *Tall Ships* (1992) reacted to the audience entering the space. The work consisted of ghostly images of seated figures projected onto a wall which when activated (the viewer entering and moving through the space) stood up and approach the viewer.

Tony Oursler’s work manipulated small scale projection technology developed in the early 1990s to build video sculptures. He also took advantage of improvements in image clarity to begin projecting onto contoured surfaces and objects.

An example of video installation in this exhibition is *Untitled*, 2003-2004 by Briele Hansen. This work is also on exhibition as part of Primavera 2007 at the MCA, Sydney.

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Briele Hansen, *Untitled*, 2003-04, still from video installation, courtesy the artist
Sound is an integral element of video practice and has been explored by many artists. One pioneer of in this area was Gary Hill who often focused on the unique relationship between sound and image. Hill began working with video, text and sound in 1973. He was heavily influenced by the conceptual art of the 1970s. One example is Hill’s work *Soundings* (1979), which contextually favoured sound over image, thus drawing attention to the importance of sound in our understanding of image.

Video installation often uses sound as an integral element to the work and is sometimes understood as the frame in which the image is understood. Immersive environments often utilise the physiological nature of sound to connect with the viewer in new ways.

Collaborative artists Daynor Missingham and David Sudmalis are contemporary artists who work in this sphere. For them the placement of sounds within a work is directly tied to the themes in the work itself. In this exhibition the work *Die Eigenheit*, 2007, uses found and originally designed sounds that are transformed and manipulated electronically. In this work the sound becomes a vehicle for the discussion of social and political terrain.

The design of *Die Eigenheit* also makes use of the physiological nature of sound. It creates a monaural effect, a beating wave in the space between the origin (speaker) and the receptor (ear). When the Sound is played at sufficient volumes the viewer literally ‘feels’ the beats in the fluid of their body. The standing, beating wave has a direct physical impact upon the body, which in certain circumstances and conditions, can result in sweats and uneasiness. The physicality of the sound weaves the viewer intrinsically into the work. The experience of the work moves the viewer beyond the visual to the visceral.

The physicality of this Sound effect can also be seen in a previous work called *Flicker*, 2005 ([www.missinghamsudmalis.com/projects.html](http://www.missinghamsudmalis.com/projects.html)) in which a candle flame ‘dances’ to the inaudible ‘beating’ of two contiguous sine tones.

1. Sudmalis, D. (email address withheld) (29 July 2007), “Notes for education booklet” [E-mail to Lubi Thomas](mailto:3.thomas@qut.edu.au)
2. David Sudmalis, D. (email address withheld) (29 July 2007), “Notes for education booklet” [E-mail to Lubi Thomas](mailto:3.thomas@qut.edu.au)
We have varying examples of animation techniques in this exhibition all of which use digital format in the creative process.

The art of animation, both manual and computer-generated has a long and rich history spanning almost a century of experimentation and innovation. Appearing around the early 1800’s optical ‘toys’ such as the Phenakistoscope and Zoetrope gave rise to the manual process of animating images. Credited pioneers in the field include Georges Méliès (a trip to the moon), J.Stuart Blackton and Émile Cohl (Fantasmagorie, 1908)

Though some artists continue to use only analogue formats, the development of digital imaging and the subsequent reduction in film supply and related products have resulted in most animation genres using digital processes.
Although personal computers only became popular with the development of the microprocessor, and minicomputers, computer games have been in existence since at least the 1960s. One of the first computer games was developed in 1961, by MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) students Martin Graetz, Alan Kotok, and MIT technician Stephen Russell. Together they developed Spacewar! on an institutional computer used for statistical calculations.

The first generation of PC games were generally text-based adventures or interactive fiction, in which the player communicated with the computer by entering commands through a keyboard. The first text-adventure game Adventure, was developed in 1972. By the 1980s, personal computers had become powerful enough to run games like Adventure, but by this time games designers had begun to incorporate graphics into their work. Later games combined textual commands with basic graphics, as seen in the SSI Gold Box games such as Pool of Radiance, or Bard's Tale.

By the mid-1970s, games were developed and distributed through hobbyist groups and gaming magazines, such as Creative Computing and later Computer Gaming World. These publications provided game code that could be typed into a computer and played, encouraging readers to submit their own software to competitions. The 1980s was marked by a flood of poor-quality games resulting in consumer interest hitting a historic low, and prompting the near-collapse of the game console industry. The crash was largely reversed by the introduction of the Nintendo Entertainment System. During this time the home computer games industry boomed. This was due mainly to the development of ‘Mouse’ driven games, such as the highly successful King’s Quest series, which was followed up by Wolfenstein 3D, released in 1992. Wolfenstein is now widely regarded as the game which brought the ‘first person shooter’ genre of computer games to the fore.

It is from this historic position that artists of the late 20th and early 21st century have started to appropriate, critique and manipulate the Game genre. One of the first noted collaborations between artist and games designers was during 1994-1995. (art)n began a collaboration with Tim and Kevin Stamper; highly acclaimed game designers from Rare in England. In this project (art)n reworked original images from a game thus creating new images for that game. This collaboration was the first to explore a shared visual language between artists and game designers.
The creation of ‘Art Games’ brings about a new mode for the discussion of social issues which is not bound by the demands of the gaming industry. This new hybrid practice is also addressing an audience that may previously have been alienated or disinterested in the art world.


Anita Johnson, CuteXdoom, 2004, still from computer game, courtesy the artist

Please note this education kit is meant only as an assisting guide in conjunction with the IDAprojects show. General historic information on media areas has been gathered from a number of locations - some being open websites and as such would require further research should you wish to include information in other written work. This information has been clearly indicated within the footnotes of each section.

IDAprojects Team:
Director: Stephen Danzig
Curatorial Team: Stephen Danzig, Ryuji Enokida (Director Yokohama Art Project), Xu Dawei (Lecturer New Media, Beijing Film Acedemy), Lubi Thomas (Curator and Public Programs, QUT).
Curatorial Advisory Committee:
Pauline Doutreluingne, Assistant Director Platform China Art Institute
Matthew Perkins, Studio Coordinator Photomedia, Monash University
Professor Peter Lavery, Director Creative Industries Precinct, QUT
Professor Wang Hong Hai, Dean of Fine Art, BFA
Professor Liu Xugang, Director New Media Studies, BFA
Regional Exhibitions Coordinator: Benjamin Milton Hampe