Seth Thompson, *Bit by Bit: Rhizome Artbase 101 Review.*
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BIT BY BIT:
RHIZOME ARTBASE 101 **REVIEW**
By Seth Thompson
New Museum of Contemporary Art
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The concept of Internet-based art has changed since it first emerged in the early 1990s. Some artists who early on began exploring the possibilities of the Internet initially rebelled against the idea of having their work shown in a museum or gallery as they intended to bypass that filter of distribution in order to have a direct discourse with their audience. Now, artists are no longer so adamant about what Internet art should and should not be, and no longer do many snub an invitation to participate in a museum or gallery-based exhibition when the opportunity becomes available.

Organized by Rhizome.org's current director Lauren Cornell and former director Rachel Greene with the assistance of Kevin McGarry, the exhibition "Rhizome ArtBase 101" culled forty works from Rhizome.org's ArtBase, a database of some 1500 computer-based works. ArtBase, which was launched in 1999, was originally developed as an archive for Net art projects but since has expanded its scope to include other forms of new media art, such as software art, computer games, and Web-based documentation of installation and performance works. The curators' goal was to present prominent themes within Internet art that have appeared in the past ten years. They describe these as Dirt Style, Net Cinema, Games, E-Commerce, Data Visualization and Databases, Online Celebrity, Public Space, Software Art, Cyberfeminism, and Early Net.Art.

The first piece the visitor encountered in the exhibition was Paul Slocum's *Dot Matrix Synth* (2003), which uses an obsolete reprogrammed Epson LQ-500 dot matrix printer to create music while simultaneously creating "ghost-like" printouts. As one partook in the invitation to "push buttons to rock out," even the most unmusical of people can become genius music makers. Slocum explains the mechanism on his site: "The printer creates sound from the print head firing pins against the paper and the vibration of the stepper motor driving the print head back and forth. To generate different notes, the software adjusts the frequency of the printing press."(1)

A few of the works in the exhibition have been turned into expanded installation pieces such as *Nike Ground* (2003) by the artist known as 0100101110101101.org and *extreme animalz: the movie; part 1* (2005) by Paper Rad and Matt Barton. *Extreme animalz* was one of the most memorable pieces in the exhibition. The assemblage-like installation of appropriated animal imagery, both physical and digital, can only be described as perverse eye candy because it is one of the most hilarious yet disgusting collections of toy animals and other objects (such as pink flamingos) found at thrift stores juxtaposed with animated GIFs of animals appropriated from the Internet through Google's image search engine. The creators of the piece also installed a sensor, so as the viewer approaches the mammoth collage of animal imagery, the animals propel into repetitive cycles of motion much like the animated GIFs found on the Internet--sometimes jolting the surprised onlooker.

Nike Ground presents documentation of a "prank" played on the people of Vienna, Austria. 0100101110101101.org released false information that Karlsplatz, one of Vienna's main public squares, was reportedly being renamed Nikeplatz, and that a giant "swoosh" sculpture modeled after Nike's recognizable logo was going to be erected in the public square. Utilizing a Web site and other tactical media strategies, the collective outraged both the people of Vienna and Nike. The purpose of the project was to create a performance-based social commentary on the potentially intrusive nature of corporate advertising in public spaces. Documentation within the gallery exhibition included a humorous six-minute video documenting the "project." Beside the video hangs a representation of the artist's rendering of the proposed "swoosh" sculpture in Karlsplatz. Other works such as Barbara Lattanzi's *The Letter and the Fly* (2002) and *Super Smile* (2005) by the duo Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries had dedicated screens. The remaining pieces were grouped on computer terminals separated by the organizers' thematic categories.

Cory Arcangel's Internet-based project *Data Diaries* (2003) is a discombobulating work where the artist tricked a QuickTime player to read his "daily desktop debris" (such as old emails, images, songs) as movies to produce pixilated, abstract, moving imagery with sometimes piercing digital noise. Each day for the month of January 2003, Arcangel took the computer memory file and converted it into a movie that reinterpreted his day's work on the computer--resulting in a computerized translation of his day. In the forward for *Digital Diaries*, Alex Galloway explains how Arcangel originally developed the idea:

> In college Cory used to slip into the public computer clusters, saddle up
> to a machine and pull what's called a "core dump."... A born hacker,
> Cory   would sift through this tangle of undifferentiated code, line by line,
> looking for interesting morsels. Maybe he would find a forgotten love
> letter here and there, maybe someone's term paper, or maybe just
> nothing. . . . For this piece, Cory has simply taken his hacker mentality
> one step further and converted the hidden world of computer memory
> into the time-based medium of video. (2)

Near Arcangel's *Digital Diaries* was a gallery version of M. River and T. Whid Art Associates' (MTAA) *1 year performance video (aka samHsiehUpdate)* (2004), which uses software to create a video with a duration of one year depicting MTAA living in "seemingly" solitary confinement much like Sam Hsieh's *One Year Performance 1978-79* in which Hsieh lived in almost total isolation in a cage-like room for one year. However, MTAA's piece differs from Hsieh's work in that the endurance or labor necessary to complete the piece has been transferred from MTAA to the audience. This effort is maintained by a database of 160 video clips, previously taped, that run continuously according to the time of day whereby one might witness either of the duo sleeping or working on a computer which in reality may not be. The Internet version allows visitors to keep track of their participatory-like responsibility by logging in to keep track of their viewing time. River writes on the project's Web site, "In the work, we mimic endurance without doing the labor. We also know the audience can just close the browser and walk away."(3) (At the time of this writing, a user with the sign-in name of AVI on the *1 year performance video* Web site has been following the project for 312 days.)

Located on a gaming terminal was Natalie Bookchin's *The Intruder* (1999), which requires the user to successfully multi-task. Using recognizable classic gaming interfaces, players who return the ball-like symbol of a girl or phrase in a *Pong* -like game are rewarded with a piece of the narrative that slowly reveals the story of a sorrowful love triangle between two brothers and a woman. A player has to fight through the ten arcade-like game interfaces to hear the so-called "love story" by Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges. This experimental piece successfully integrates gaming strategies with elements of the story.

The organizers wonderfully categorized a group of varied works into "salient" themes throughout the exhibition. However, without Slocum's *Dot Matrix Synth* and Rad and Barton's *extreme animalz* , this exhibition could have solely existed as a Web-based exhibition. It is surprising that a link did not exist on the New Museum of Contemporary Art's Web site pointing to Rhizome.org's online version of the exhibition, which in the end would not only draw the attention of a greater global audience to the New Museum's site, but show the works in the manner many were originally intended, as opposed to having some of the artists create modified versions exclusively for a traditional museum space. That said, it is good to see the New Museum of Contemporary Art supportive of computer-based art, as its support will help increase the medium and bring it into an established art-making practice.

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NOTES

1. See http://qotile.net/dotmatrix.html.
2. See http:www.turbulence.org/Works/arcangel/alex.php.
3. See http://www.turbulence.org/Works/1year/info.php?page=bg.

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