

December 22, 2014

# HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

## The Cultural Evolution of Art and the Net

Posted: 12/22/2014 10:36 am

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It is interesting to consider Jean-Michel Basquiat and Ai Diaz had the first Twitter accounts. Their SAMO tag (along with accompanying phrases) in certain spots around New York's downtown during the late 1970's became part of the landscape to the point that the *SoHo News* began publishing pictures of their tags, thus creating followers, which led to more tagging, feedback and commentary. The rest is art history. It seemed the Net Age had begun and it started on the side of a building.

Jumping ahead 30 plus years, on a December evening in Kansas City, a small gathering sits around an iPad to Skype artist Eric Fickes in the Subterranean Gallery, an apartment gallery close to the Kansas City Art Institute. An informal Q&A led by director Melaney Mitchell presents questions to Fickes and Eric Scrivner, who's in the room, about their work in *refresh + redraw*, the first of the gallery's Digital Exhibition series. What Mitchell, her guests and the two Erics summon together are how today's art world has evolved technologically from the days of Basquiat writing on a wall to our present attachments to all things virtual. Both ideas, seemingly coming from different ends, are in fact committed to the same modes of communication, that is, drawing people closer to the fire, but simply utilizing variant modes of call and response.

These two events, the former being a true precursor to the latter raises many questions about net art, post-internet art, New Media or whatever handle you want to give it. But the main theory is one of accelerationism and instant adaptation, a proposition first presented to me by artist Tim Amundson, likening these theories to economy and social mores.

If painting is a dream realized from imagination or reality, is digital art comprised of code and open source a similar dream consisting of biorhythms? Said Fickes, "the (computer) screen is next for a paradigm shift. Hyper-connectivity is in store for the art experience and that might be what was recently referred to as the ideas of Post-Internet Art struggles to define what this is to the public." We approach an epoch in art history. Once that great breakthrough occurs, and it may not be a price as much as an idea that can be supported by financiers and aesthetes alike, everything will fall into place and traditional institutions the world over will breathe a collective "aha." Until that moment arrives, and it won't be long, Post-Internet Art will remain (for the time being) something to be considered and not consumed. While Net Art has grayed all the lines of absorption, these new states of expression seem poised towards what Fickes believes is a "gamification" whereas an ending will result. Similar to presenting a painting on a wall is what gallerists are waiting to find out and Sub Gallery, amongst others, are presenting. If the traditional gallery space is classical music, The Net is punk rock. And the real punk is often what makes change frightening, like GG Allyn showing up as your daughter's prom date. The online world is learning to "unplug and be competitive."

The ease which one can transform from the virtual world to the actual and vice versa is cleverly defined in the 2012 neo-noir crime film *Spring Breakers*. Three girls rob a restaurant to fund their spring break vacation, removing themselves from actual risk by inferring a virtual danger. "Pretend it's a video game" is said as a talisman to protect them from the actual deed. With that, they don ski masks, squirt guns and hammers to successfully carry out their plan. The movie follows their descent into drugs and violence by seemingly summoning that adage repeatedly. If one pretends it is not real, it is not happening to them. Only until the risk touches them (as when one girl is mentally manipulated and another is fired upon) do they pull back and escape reality. This describes one form of instant adaptation.

Searching for new generation of adapters one could look back to 1992 and Art Club 2000, who were among the first to predict a new generational ennui. Former member Sarah Rossiter describes it as "...a collaboration between 7 art school students and art dealer Colin de Land. Art Club created work based on the dual notions of institutional critique and simultaneously getting famous." Carl Swanson noted in a 2013 *New York* magazine article, the collective "sought to send up consumerism and identity politics by, among other things, taking group self-portraits of its members dressed in identical outfits from the GAP. They exhibited these along with a selection of supposedly meaningful detritus from the stores' dumpsters--a loss-prevention handbook, two unopened letters from Gay Men's Health Crisis, and a dirty diaper--and got flown to Europe and elsewhere as avatars of their generation." But what it really unearthed in New York City's East Village (the same neighborhood where Basquiat and Diaz tagged) during this period was one of the earliest instances of enabling by a corporate superstructure (GAP brand clothing stores) to provide universality and cultural uniformity. Why seek ideas when the GAP's then familiar blue bag contained all the answers? Why go beyond Google when all one needs to do is type a few keywords to unlock the secrets of the universe? In this respect, Art Club 2000 has proved prescient.

The internet has also proven itself as a conduit that supports a groupthink mentality. The lack of editing and punctuation on the side of rushing to judgment enforces the righteousness of vanity and ego when ones point is not clearly articulated. It is quite apparent the *Us vs. Them* mentality is breaking down; how much more security, passcodes and protection can we conjure up before the idea of freedom becomes stifling and pointless? At some point, and it might be generations from now, giving in to a true universality seems the way forward for the human race to survive and thrive.

Brad Troemel's Athletic Aesthetics are a by-product of art's new mediated environment, wherein creators must compete for online attention in the midst of an overwhelming amount of information. Artists using social media have transformed the notion of a "work" from a series of isolated projects to a constant broadcast of one's artistic identity as a recognizable, unique brand...an athlete's audience, once assembled, becomes part of their medium."

Although I agree with many of Troemel's points, the idea of outsourcing and cultivating indifference begs us to explore

socialization beyond what is found on the surface. It is time to mine the code for meaning.

New York artist Scott Hug discussed his work on the net and provides some definition. "My early drawings from the 1990s were about deconstruction of a new kind of non-place, the internet. They were abstract and represented the flux and flow of information also inspired by the techno and electronic music that I was listening to. Also deconstruction in philosophy and politics and Derrida, Zizek, etc."

Kansas City artist Justin Beachler has been exploring similar routes and it isn't just deconstruction, but applying the principle of adding to what already exists in moving the ball forward. Melaney Mitchell refers to this as "constant mutation," making everything, code, imagery, etc., available for everyone.

Salvation, criticism and creativity all conspire as a resolution to whatever problems one might face. The cached universe is forever, all-out work, complaints, data mining and whatever is important today, will be sussed out for later generations who have mastered the technology we are now merely experimenting with.

So, where are we going with this concept? I think we're already here. Having opened the window to everyone, art and the internet has evolved from the side of a building or a subway car to land on our desktops and smartphones. We can carry aesthetics, creativity and ideology with us everywhere. While the patterns and pathways of communication may have changed, the journey towards universality has already begun.



Courtesy [www.noupe.com](http://www.noupe.com)

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Courtesy Eric Scrivner and Subterranean Gallery

Courtesy Eric Fickes and Subterranean Gallery

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