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Synthetic Pleasures: Cybernetics in Studio Art Practice

By Sherry Mayo



Torino:Margolis "Neuromuscular Actuation Console" neuromuscular stimulator and other components for interactive performance Right: Brandon Ballengä½e "Skate" c-print and "Frog Specimen" frog in petri dish.

The exhibition, *Synthetic Pleasures: Cybernetic Relationships in Studio Art Practice* was on view at the Macy Gallery (525 West 120th Street, 4th Floor, Teachers College) from March 29th through April 23, 2004, and was the culmination of a collaboration between eleven artists including Kristin Anders, Brandon Ballengä½e, Sandra Bermudez, Claire

Corey, Millree Hughes, Cynthia Lawson, Ben Margolis, Jenny Torino, Patrick Meagher, Tricia McLaughlin, and Chris Ramey with visual arts researcher, Sherry Mayo from Teachers College, Columbia University. These artists underwent a series of videotaped interviews regarding their integration of digital technologies into their studio practice and the hybrid emergent objects that they produce. These interviews, the resultant art objects, and the exhibition constitute a project-based case study entitled, *Emergent Objects at the Human-Computer Interface: A Case Study of Artists' Cybernetic Relationships*. Artists have been making art with computer systems since the 1960's, but the investigation of information arts and their impact on critical consciousness has just begun. The study investigated a particular cohort of artists who depict a transition in studio art practice that reflects our cultural passage, through the digital revolution, from an analog to a non-linear information-based society.

The exhibition consisted of an installation of hybrid emergent forms of expression such as lenticular paintings that move when the viewer does, a moving projection of digital painting in the process of being painted, a frog specimen and a high resolution electromagnetic scan of a skate, interactive biostim performance, net-art works, an animation of bizarre social behavior caused by absurd architecture and renaissance-style oil paintings of 3D

characters that never really lived. During the opening Torino Margolis remotely caressed one another in different galleries while communicating through video. This installation was a collaboration between the researcher and Macy Gallery Director, Hugo Ortega, whose aim was to challenge the viewer's expectations of the art object in the digital age. Is it a painting? Can a frog be an art object? What can digital painting do that traditional painting cannot? These and other questions emerge that challenge the notion of discreet art objects and the art world.

Human Computer Interface (HCI) is blurring in the new millennium. The human race is quickly evolving toward a Cyborgian stage. Our relationship to the development of cybernetics and HCI is in need of critical reflection by the mass collective. In the information age everyone has become a manipulator and during this time of strife the mechanism of terrorism is quickly ascertained. It is crucial that our cultural relationships to digital systems are assessed as they permeate our infrastructures and our bodies, violate our privacy, empower our information distribution capability, increase our speed of communication and demands for responsiveness, and subvert our belief systems. Who better than the artist practitioner to help us step back in unexpected ways in order to yield provocative insight into the battleground of interface between humans and computers in both RTVR (Real Time Virtual Reality) and RTF2F (Real Time Face to Face)?