

Three Trends that Defined New Media Art in 2011

by Kyle Chayka 28/12/11



Marius Watz's Montblanc
(Getty Images and Marius Watz)

It would be difficult to say that 2011 signified a full crossover success point for new media art, but this year certainly did see increasing momentum for mainstream awareness (both inside the art world and out) of art and artists that deal with new technologies, digital production, and the Internet. Here, ARTINFO looks at three trends that manifested themselves in 2011, and will continue to define new media art in 2012.

Online-Only Galleries

2011 was a banner year for online-only galleries, art spaces that only exist as Web sites. Working toward solving the problem of how to exhibit Internet art, these spaces showed this work in its native habitat: within the Internet browser. The British/Italian online gallery Bubblebyte.org ramped up its programming with killer exhibitions by Laurel Schwulst, Sara Ludy, and Nicolas Sassoon, and will celebrate its one-year anniversary this coming January. Fach & Asendorf gallery mounted a giddy GIF group show with "Friends" and has since rolled on with a solo presentation by Bill Miller.

Klaus Von Nichtssagend Gallery spun off an online-only component of its physical space with Klaus Gallery, helmed by artist and curator Duncan Malashock. The space has hosted two intriguing projects so far, but there's plenty of room for development over the next year. Art Micro Patronage launched in November to provide a way for new media artists to crowdsource a (hopefully) stable living, while the VIP Art Fair plans another outing for February 2012 to put traditional galleries online. Rhizome expanded its interactive Artbase, developing a systematic framework for preserving digital art in a publicly accessible online venue.

Mounting Exhibitions

This year also saw a series of high-profile exhibitions of new media and new media-related artists in internationally renowned art museums and galleries. Cory Arcangel's full-floor "Pro Tools" retrospective at the Whitney was the first solo exhibition given to such a young artist since Bruce Nauman in 1973. Though the show largely ignored the artist's iconic earlier digital work in favor of physical sculptures and prints, the show's influence and impact on the new media community was clear. Video artist Ryan Trecartin may not work quite so much on YouTube as he used to, but his "Any Ever" at MoMA PS1 was another new media scenester extravaganza — the closing party featured installations and performances from the influential net fashion collective DIS Magazine.

The Creative Time Tweets series further lionized social media art with a project by performance artist Man Bartlett, who continues to lead the emerging group of artists working with social networks as a medium. Pioneer of digital art Manfred Mohr put on a solo show at the technology-oriented bitforms gallery, signaling public recognition of his innovative work. "Notes on a New Nature" at 319 Scholes presented an exhaustively curated, intelligent, provocative, and fun look at the relationship between new media art and natural landscape that curators in 2012 will have a hard time topping.

Branding Opportunities

As generative artist Marius Watz (who recently worked with agency Scholz & Volkmer to create abstract background animations for Montblanc's eyewear series) told ARTINFO earlier this year, "media art has the positive aspect of looking like the future," an appealing quality for commercial industry. As the technology start-up scene heats up in New York with companies like FourSquare and the arty blogging platform Tumblr, some companies are treading into the territory of new media art. Canvas, led by 4chan founder Christopher Poole, echoes the remix culture of Dump.fm in its relentless rehashing of memes and Internet iconography. Mixel, created by former New York Times web designer Khoi Vinh, took a similar approach to the iPad.

2011 also saw the founding of OKFocus, a digital agency created by creative technologist Jonathan Vingiano and omnipresent Internet art wunderkind Ryder Ripps. The agency has created and styled Web sites, digital toys, and applications for Creative Time, MoMA PS1, and the New Museum, as well as Smirnoff, M.I.A., and Lipman Advertising. Their work crosses boundaries between the art world and the commercial in a manic, Pop-inflected way. With big brands ever more willing to hire on teams of digital artists, the division between art and advertising will doubtless become more complex.