SHIFT

Blockchain: Security for online trade

From digital art to the diamond trade, buyers and sellers face great uncertainty in online deals. Now blockchain technology can eliminate some of that uncertainty. It has the potential to revolutionize the online business.

01:02 – 02:28

watch here
The art side of AI at transmediale + CTM
Harm van den Dorpel: Lexachast + Death Imitates Language

transmediale opened with the audio-visual performance Lexachast, a collaboration in every sense of the word—between the two festivals transmediale and CTM, between the artists Amnesia Scanner, Bill Kouligas and Harm van den Dorpel, between human and machine, visuals and sound. Harm van den Dorpel’s algorithms filter random NSFW imagery from across the internet, generating graphic live-streaming visuals that fade into each other. The filtering process was done with the open_NSFW classification model and word2vec tag cloud analysis, the artist live curating the output during the performance. The visuals were accompanied by a distorted soundtrack that draws on our strenuous relationship with the internet’s onslaught of unthinkable material.
During transmediale, Neumeister Bar-am gallery presented a solo exhibition of Harm van den Dorpel's Death Imitates Language. This series of works investigates how meaning is developed in generative aesthetics using micro feedback and a genetic algorithm. There is a public website with speculative works generated from sequences of information inherited from parent artworks. These ‘genetic’ codes determine the elements present in the work and their constellation. Micro feedback given by the artist act as subjective (‘natural’) selection that changes the population of works as time goes by. Alongside visitor statistics and simulated aging, this feedback leads to the genetic program mutating and (arguably) improving over time. Once the works reach their optimum state, they are turned into physical objects. Five works were exhibited at the gallery alongside the overview of the breeding process on a monitor.
When I went to visit Rachel de Joode in her studio this Fall, she said we were going to try making a "squish." This process consisted of filling a plastic tube with wet plaster and me hugging it like a lover, leaving an imprint of my body, until it dried.
Presenting Harm van den Dorpel’s new online project Hybrid Vigor

Berlin-based artist Harm van den Dorpel just released new online project Hybrid Vigor in early January, 2017.

The web-based work brings together elements of the biological and technological through an algorithmic system of shapes and lines, creating a feedback between the input and the software used. Often working between online and IRL exhibition spaces, Dorpel’s work explores randomly generated outcomes. Recent projects include Talking Turtles (2016) that looks at the relationship between visual graphics, software engineering and artificial intelligence, and Death Imitates Language (2016/17) where micro feedback (likes etc) would determine which works lived on.

The title Hybrid Vigor refers to the biological process of reproduction where “the tendency of a cross-bred individual [will] show qualities superior to those of both parents” or as the artist explains “the process of selecting candidates for breeding, examining the results, and using those results to further breed to eliminate or emphasise particular traits in animals and flowers.”

The project itself is constantly evolving over time, and changing depending on who visits the site, or whether no one visits the site. If there is no activity, the site will begin to navigate on its own. Gradual diversity and mechanical incest converge in generative aesthetics, explained further by Dorpel:

“Technically (or biologically), all properties of a drawing (angles, smoothness, shape, color, transparency, scale, position, etc.) are stored in a long string of os and ts: a digital chromosome. These chromosomes hermetically define the appearance of each work (or specimen), just like how the genotype of human beings is defined by their DNA.”

When two drawings ‘mate’, their chromosomes align. The process is continual and repetitive to explore diversity in ‘offspring’ works as they inherit pieces of information (a form of DNA) from ‘ancestors’. The project is set within the context of algorithm and evolution, processes that feel both incredibly natural and unnatural. The publicly accessible project welcomes as many visitors as possible to participate in the slow and gradual project that will continue without ‘freeze’ over time.

Dorpel also worked in collaboration with Bill Kouligas and Amnesia Scanner in current project Lexachast where a live streaming of pictures from Flickr and DeviantArt are being uploaded and algorithmically filtered to show the most NSFW (Not Safe For Work; describes Internet that is generally inappropriate) images.**
Death imitates Language - in gesprek met Harm van den Dorpel

05.12.2016 | FEATURE — Loes van Beuningen

Harm van den Dorpel was ontevreden over de arbitraire keuzes waarop zijn kunst was bepaald. Daarom schreef hij een algoritme dat nu voor hem zijn kunst produceert. Hij hoeft alleen nog maar te kiezen. In Berlijn exposeert hij de eerste resultaten.

Loes van Beuningen: Waar gaat de serie Death imitates Language over?

en de namen van de ouders. Zo kan je de hele stamboom terugvinden. Dat lijkt op een Merkle DAG tree, ofwel een "hash-boom" die gebruikt kan worden om veilig data tussen twee computers te sturen, zoals bij bitcoin. Het is een interessant gegeven omdat je vanuit elk werk altijd de ouders terug kunt vinden en de hele structuur kunt terugvoeren op de Adam en Eva. De namen van de werken zijn trouwens gebaseerd op de vijftien miljoen meest gebruikte wachtwoorden op het internet.'

Hoe zijn die eerste werken, de Adam en Eva, ontstaan?
‘Het project komt voort uit ouder werk zoals dat te zien was in de tentoonstelling Release Early, Release Often (…) uit 2013. Als ik werk maak moet ik veel beslissingen nemen en sommige beslissingen kon ik minder goed verdedigen dan andere. Er bestaat een idee dat de kunstenaar een soort mystieke, artistieke vaardigheid bezit om esthetische keuzes te maken, maar ik was daar zelf ontevreden over. Op een bepaald moment kon ik niet meer zeggen waarom het ene beeld beter was dan het andere. Het is heel arbitrair. Ik ben daarom werk gaan maken waarbij ik geen keuzes meer maak. Bij Death imitates Languages worden alle mogelijke permutaties gegenereerd door een algoritme dat ik geschreven heb. Ik kan keuzes maken uit een serie

Metropolis M, January 2017
van gegenereerde beelden. Ik kan selecteren welke uitkomsten ik het beste vind, maar ik heb geen directe invloed op hoe een beeld eruit ziet. Ik hoef daarom niet geforceerd een bepaald doel na te streven. Ik ontdek geleidelijk wat ik wil. Dat is belangrijk, omdat ik liever wil ontdekken wat mijn inherente, onbewuste aannames zijn, die bloot wil leggen en veranderen, dan dat ik iets van te voren wil bedenken. Als je keuzes maakt, dan kom je steeds uit op hetzelfde denk ik, je herhaalt wat je al in je hoofd hebt. Door het systeem dat ik geprogrammeerd heb, word ik gedwongen afstand te nemen; ik heb minder controle.’

Hoe ziet dat systeem eruit?
‘De software zit in de website. De site toont de gegenereerde beelden. Bij een bepaald werk zoek ik een interessante partner. Er is soms ook sprake van incest. Zo kan ik bepaalde eigenschappen isoleren, zoals dat ook gebeurt bij het fokken van honden bijvoorbeeld. Als ik een werk goed vind, dan klik ik op "freeze" en kan ik het bevriezen. Daaruit ontstaat een lijst van kandidaatbeelden, zo’n vijftien op dit moment, die uitgevoerd kunnen worden. Ik kan ze vervolgens versturen naar een bedrijf in Berlijn dat de werken op een industriële manier vervaardigt. Ik kom daar zelf bijna niet bij aan te pas.’

In wat voor materiaal worden de werken uitgevoerd?
‘Het zijn verschillende lagen prints op een hoogwaardig soort kunststof met gaatjespatronen. Het zijn een soort reusachtige cd-hoesjes. De werken lijken heel licht, maar ze zijn best zwaar. Er zit ook beschermingsmateriaal in het werk verwerkt. Normaal bevindt zich dat aan de buitenkant natuurlijk, maar hier is er sprake van een inversie van container en inhoud.’

Waarom houd je je niet bezig met de vervaardiging?
‘Het systeem moet getraind worden om te functioneren zonder mijn invloed. Ik wil een systeem dat kan doordraaien als ik er niet meer ben. Het neurale netwerk wordt uiteindelijk hopelijk zo slim dat het mij na kan doen, dat het mijn esthetische keuzes kan nabootsen. Zo kan het eeuwenlang doorgaan, mits de hostingkosten voor de website worden betaald.’

http://death.imitates.org/

Harm van den Dorpel, Death imitates Language, Neumeister Bar-Am, Berlijn, 26.11.2016 t/m 04.02.2017

Metropolis M, January 2017
On View

Gallery Hopping: Harm van den Dorpel Breeds Artworks at Neumeister Bar-Am

As part of the artist's latest project, an artificial intelligence software creates abstract images.

Alyssa Buffenstein, January 20, 2017

Better explained with terms used in genetics and coding rather than those typically used to describe art, the Dutch artist Harm van den Dorpel is currently showing his second exhibition at Berlin’s Neumeister Bar-Am, titled “Death Imitates Language.”

The works on display are part of an ongoing project, currently developing with the help of an artificial intelligence software designed by the artist. A “population” of 2D images is being continuously “bred,” expanding on and further abstracting a number of elements that the artist first sourced from 20th-century collage works.
The Berlin-based artist turned these elements into “organs,” and encoded them into “binary chromosomes.” Writing a “genetic algorithm," he created a software that allows the images to “mate” with each other, making new images that take on characteristics of both “parents."

The breeding process, watched over and tweaked by the artist according to his own aesthetic preferences, has birthed hundreds of images so far. Van den Dorpel himself assumes the role of a breeder, intervening in the algorithm to choose which of the images should mate with each other, creating families and generations of related images.

When he is satisfied with a result, he can “freeze” the image. Five of these frozen images have been turned into unique wall objects, made of multi-layered UV prints and plexiglass. Alongside them are displayed two works from 2014 that precede this process, as well as a monitor where visitors can see the population as it evolves (the population can also be accessed online).

The works can, however, be described in formal terms, and even praised for their aesthetic qualities. One, Acura Bigboobe Romcops (each work’s title, presumably, is an amalgam of its ancestors) hangs in the center of the gallery, with layers of radioactive green, blue, and red oozing over lighter washes of purple and blue, for the most part with sharp, cutout-like edges. It is blank in the center, resembling a large, soft swipe of a photoshop eraser tool. Two circles of white dot patterns, one smaller and more densely packed, decorate the surface.

It makes one wonder what, exactly, the origins of the work were: Dada collages? Picassos? In any case, it represents in a very literal sense the logical lineage of contemporary 2D images as derived from their Modern predecessors.

5 Digital Artists Who Are Painting with Pixels

Genista Jurgens 18.01.2017

These groundbreaking digital artists are finding new ways to paint a picture, from generating artworks with algorithms to drawing on tablets in Microsoft retail stores.

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2. Harm van den Dorpel

You could say Harm van den Dorpel collaborates with artificial intelligence to produce his intricate, multi-layered digital paintings, and you wouldn’t be too far from the truth. Using software he designed himself, van den Dorpel explores concepts like the regeneration of images, the process of art production, the role of the artist, and the value of art itself.

In his 2016 work *Death Imitates Language*, the Dutch artist spent three months developing an algorithm which can accurately and independently simulate his own design aesthetics. By pinpointing, extracting, and feeding recurring design elements from 20th century European artworks into the algorithm, van den Dorpel was able to kickstart the process of artistic automation.

The images produced by this process were displayed on the website death.imitates.org, where van den Dorpel gathered information as additional input for the algorithm. Dubbed “breeding,” this process uses visitor statistics, micro-feedback, likes and the artist’s own personal preferences to manifest 2D images that the artist himself would be likely to make.

Once the images reach their final stage, they are frozen, printed out onto transparent sheets of laser cut multiplex glass, and take the form of physical objects. As an artist with a computer science background, van den Dorpel is all too familiar with the pace of technology. His decision to bring algorithmically created art off the screen into the physical world feels like an attempt to catch up to, and perhaps slow down, the rapid progress of digital change.

format magazine, January 2017
The Tech behind Bitcoin Could Help Artists and Protect Collectors. So Why Won’t They Use It?

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY OSCAR LOPEZ
DEC 16TH, 2016 10:00 PM

Growing up in Soviet-era Latvia, Masha McConaghy never imagined she’d become a curator. The only access she had to modern art was in the books her father’s students smuggled into Riga from East Berlin. “I remember sitting on the couch and going through these beautiful books,” she says. “I could make up whole stories from one painting. My imagination went wild.”

McConaghy soon realized that art was her calling. She taught herself French and moved to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, where one of her professors introduced her to curating. “Before it was all old books and dead people,” says McConaghy. “Suddenly I was talking to real people.” McConaghy went on to pursue a museology degree at the Louvre School, and worked at the museum as an assistant curator. “I would go out for a smoke, and see the Louvre, the Tuileries, the sun setting on the city,” she says. “It was magical.”

It’s an impressive résumé, but by the time I met McConaghy in Berlin this year, her career had become much more cutting-edge. Her latest artistic venture? Utilizing blockchain,

Artsy, December 2016
the technology behind bitcoin, to revolutionize the art world. We met at a cafe near Alexanderplatz where McConaghy explained how the city’s blossoming tech culture was inspiring her. “It’s refreshing for me coming from the traditional art world,” she says. “People are not afraid to fail.”

Blockchain, or the “spreadsheet in the sky,” as McConaghy likes to call it, acts like a giant online ledger which records every entry and updates everyone who is part of the ledger’s network accordingly. No one owns it, everyone can access it, but once a transaction is recorded in the blockchain, it cannot be removed or altered. In the case of bitcoin, this means that currency transactions can occur securely without the need to use a bank.

But for McConaghy and other curators, artists and collectors, blockchain has incredible potential in the art world as a means of verifying authenticity, enhancing traceability, and improving the security of art market transactions. Last year, McConaghy founded ascribe.io, a startup that lets artists register their work into the blockchain, creating “a permanent and unbreakable” link between the artist and their work. Through a unique cryptographic ID, each artwork can be authenticated and its ownership rights securely transferred to galleries or collectors. “It’s all about empowering the creator,” says McConaghy.

For Berlin-based digital artist Harm van den Dorpel, blockchain presents a solution to many of the problems facing the art world today, particularly for those creating and dealing in digital and net art, which by its very nature can be easily copied and transferred. “Blockchain creates a fingerprint,” he says, “something that identifies the owner. Through blockchain, you can see who owns it now, who owned it before and who created it.” By making each artwork identifiably unique, blockchain can also impose scarcity on an digital works that have often been seen as difficult to collect due to their reproducibility. “There’s a lot of good digital artwork that no one knows how to monetize,” says van den Dorpel. “For artworks to be desireable, to be valuable, it’s very important for a work to be scarce.”

Last year, van den Dorpel became the first artist to sell an artwork authenticated through blockchain to a museum. The MAK—Austrian Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna purchased his Event Listeners (2015), a screensaver created in a limited edition, using bitcoin. In a press release, the curators wrote that MAK “is the first museum in the world to have acquired a decentrally authenticated digital artwork with digital currency. The museum sees this as a new form of collecting in the digital age.”

At the time, Event Listeners was simultaneously displayed on Cointemporary, a digital-only online gallery. Founded by Valentin Ruhry and Andy Boot, the gallery is “dedicated to one artwork for a period of ten days, with the aim of allowing the work to carve out its own space in the Internet.” Would-be collectors are forced to purchase works from Cointemporary using Bitcoin. And the gallery then transfers ownership rights to the buyer through the blockchain, using Ascribe.

For Ruhry and Boot, Cointemporary is as much a conceptual experiment as it is a working gallery. “We wanted to create an actual internet of space,” say Ruhry. “Where it’s not about scarcity, it’s about the value of our webspace.” Cointemporary allows artists to display their work beyond the constraints of platforms like YouTube or Instagram, and enables them to securely sell the rights to their work online using blockchain. The gallerists hope the online space will inspire more artists to create digital works and encourage collectors to buy and collect digitally by assuaging their fears over security and originality. As Ruhry says, thanks to blockchain, “you can track the work forever.”

Artsy, December 2016
One collector who needs no such encouragement is Alain Servais, a Belgian former investment banker who’s been collecting digital art since the late ‘90s. Back then, Servais says digital art wasn’t even considered art: “One time I brought back a desktop computer on a plane, with the artwork’s software loaded on it,” he says. “I had to pay tax at the rate of computer goods, not as if it was a work of art.” Since then, Servais says the legitimacy of digital art has increased, but not as much as he would like. “The art market is still object-obsessed,” he says. “But the most interesting works of art are virtual.”

Part of the resistance towards technology, including blockchain, is the conservatism of the art world itself. “We’re talking about the beacon of advancement and humanism, but it’s also one of the most conservative institutions I know,” says Servais. “They won’t touch technology with chopsticks.” (McConaghy laughingly remembers her professors at the Sorbonne telling her that the idea that the internet had changed society was “debatable.”) Servais says that the art world has a certain suspicion towards the internet.

For Servais, McConaghy, and others, blockchain presents a solution. “The forgery problem has always been there,” says Servais. “But now there are many more outlets for buying and selling work, as well as higher prices. If it’s easier to sell for more, it’s easier to put fake work into the system. Blockchain is a means of digitizing the certification process.” And it’s not just for digital art. Servais says blockchain should be used for certifying all works of art, even sculptures and paintings by Old Masters.

There have been no shortage of fraudulent art deals this year, including a recent case in Austria where a criminal gang attempted to sell works by Pablo Picasso and Claude Monet valued at €72 million ($79.6 million) using forged certificates. According to the Economist,
the total value of sales of counterfeit goods worldwide, including things like clothes and jewellery, can be as high as $1.8 trillion annually. "When you see this happening in the 21st century, it just doesn’t make sense," says Servais. "Whether it’s a Rodin or a Monet, why not just make it an entry in the blockchain?"

Others are more ambivalent about the technology. Simon Denny is another Berlin-based artist who also works with blockchain—not as a tool but as a creative concept. When we met, Denny’s studio in Berlin looked like something out of a sci-fi experiment, filled with technological detritus, sculptures of video game characters, and three giant replicas of the boardgame Risk. “Each [sculpture] offers a different perspective on the future of blockchain,” he explained. Denny, who earlier this year presented a blockchain-themed work at the Berlin Biennale, had created these works for his solo exhibition, “Blockchain Future States,” which was on display at New York’s Petzel Gallery this fall. “I want to make blockchain accessible,” he told me. “But I also want to ask questions. I’m a fan of critical art.”

For curators like McConaghy and artists like van den Dorpel, blockchain offers a kind of utopia: Open sourced, freely available and totally decentralized, it’s an escape from the traditional financial world. But for Denny, many of the firms that are utilizing blockchain technology are starting from a neoliberal, right-wing view of the economy: “All of the futures of blockchain end up there,” says Denny. “I want to make a caricature of these companies and what they represent, of a world where power is increasingly defined by private companies.” Still, Denny is not entirely critical. By utilizing things like board games and videogames, his work remains playful, allowing viewers to draw their own conclusions about the technology.

Denny is skeptical about the application of blockchain to the art world itself. For him, provenance and verification of artworks isn’t an issue. “The art world is too small,” he says. “Things move too slowly. Art sales are very personal; everyone knows where a work came from. The art world can’t be disrupted from the outside in.” Even Servais admits the technology has its limitations. “Is it the grail and the final solution? No, of course we need to keep improving,” he says. “But it is a fantastic base that we can continue.”

As for McConaghy, blockchain has always been just one of many technologies that will continue to change and improve the art world. For her, technology is about creating many possible answers to a problem, not a single solution. “People think it’s a magic bullet, but it’s not. Blockchain is one vehicle, a tool where you don’t have to trust just one institution,” she says. “I grew up in the Soviet Union, I like having choices.”

—Oscar Lopez
Art World

The 50 Most Exciting Artists in Europe Right Now, Part II

See who made our list this year.

Hettie Judah, November 24, 2016

48. Harm van den Dorpel (Born Zaandam, The Netherlands. Lives and works in Berlin)

In 2015 Harm van den Dorpel hit the headlines as the first artist to have a work acquired by a museum in Bitcoin, and he's not stopped testing art world limits in 2016. In March, Deli Near Info—a social media network on which “distinctions between navigation and content are suspended”—won the Net-Based Prize at the House for Electronic Arts in Basel. In, we assume, a comment on choice as an art form in itself, his project Death Imitates Language used an algorithm to learn and evolve to reproduce the artist’s aesthetic taste, generating combinations of layered colour and form (“pictures” in other words) that the artist might have made himself.
10 Artists You Might Not Know Are Berlin-Based

According to the German culture secretary Tim Renner, the majority of the artists featured in the 2016 Venice Biennale live in Berlin. The city resides continuously on the brink of action. The tension between policing and anarchy, uniformity and debauchery, rules and social unrest, as well as a bristling right wing intimidation is also tangible. This makes it a fertile space for activism, creativity and agency that artists record and channel into their work. Many also come to Berlin for the (still) affordable studios and space that allows them to nurture their practice. When we think of Berlin artists instantly Tillmans, Weiwei or Eliason spring to mind, yet there’s a myriad of other artists, established or emerging, you’d be surprised live and work here too.

We’ve taken a closer look at some of these artists who have settled in the spirited city

HARM VAN DEN DORPEL
With a background in computer science and artificial intelligence, Harm van den Dorpel is widely regarded as a key figure of internet art. His practice encompasses online animations and the dialogue between digital artefacts and physical artwork such as sculpture and collage. His recent online work includes the “algorithmic studio” Deli Near Info and left.gallery which explores different curatorial mechanisms.
Family Function: Harm van den Dorpel’s Algorithmic Art

by Nora N. Khan

Perhaps some aspects of the creative mind can be stored in code, but all of it? While the analytical capabilities of artificial intelligence are recognized as “real,” many refuse to acknowledge that simulations of taste can be equally authentic. The common-sense consensus seems to be that aesthetic feeling is too complex to ever quantify, as it is generated by dozens of factors, from class upbringing and education, to social influences and pressures, to remembered and learned preferences.

In Death Imitates Language, Harm van den Dorpel attempts to formalize artistic agency through an automated fitness function. Over the course of three months, the Berlin-based artist has developed an algorithm that learns his aesthetic choices as he expresses them over thousands of iterations and accretive steps. As the algorithm is perfected, the images it produces should suggest something like his taste and, eventually, come close to replicating it, possibly through a neural network that he will design. The system will not only measure van den Dorpel’s aesthetic choices, but also regenerate and simulate them in order to run without his input.

Death Imitates Language takes the form of a website populated by hundreds of stunning, strange, and difficult digital paintings. Six pieces have been pulled from the site and executed as UV prints on CNC-cut, laser-polished Plexiglas, and are featured in “wer nicht denken will fliegt raus,” a group exhibition organized by Heinrich Dietz at the Museum Kurhaus Kleve in Germany. (A seventh software piece shows an animation of all the paintings in the series.) The show—which includes eight other artists, including Hito Steyerl and Alice Channer—takes its title from a provocative saying by Joseph Beuys, which can be translated, “He who does not think will be thrown out.” In an interview, Dietz said he wanted to further explore Beuys's suggestion that the engagement and interpretation of art is entirely contingent on the ability to think. The works by van den Dorpel challenge the notion that thinking and the capacity for making and appreciating art are exclusive to human beings.

Each work in Death Imitates Language is the child of two parents, which themselves are the children of their own parents, all the way back down the page to Painting 0 and Painting 1, which van den Dorpel titled Adam and Eve. Eve is a blank white square; Adam is a white, crumpled sheet, with a spiral of tiny circle outlines blossoming in the upper central field. At genesis, Adam and Eve passed down information sequences in phrases of code that determined the visual characteristics for each of their descendants by generating constellations of colors and forms, their repetition, scale, degree of transparency, and arrangement within the frame. The qualities are encoded as chromosomal sequences of 0s and 1s: Adam is set to all 0s, and Eve is all 1s.
Van den Dorpel based his algorithm on one widely used in the technical sciences—to refine radio antennae, for instance. The program chooses whether a “gene” will be taken from parent or both parents. Variation emerges over time as van den Dorpel steps in to select which children will live, which will breed, and which will get killed off. The ones that live fade through a simulated aging process. As you scroll through the site, aspects repeat, shift, and evolve from one family to the next. Blurry spots, reminiscent of viral forms in a petri dish, multiply. Abstractions of diseased eyes on an ophthalmologist poster contract and expand. Heavy black L-shapes cut into outlines fine as needlepoint. Galactic spirals like the one in Adam move across the field and vanish, only to emerge a generation later, double the size or mirrored or with dozens more arms.

Eventually, the thousands of micro-feedbacks fed into this algorithm should constitute what van den Dorpel calls “a Harm-like taste.” Death Imitates Language suggests that the positive decisions that users offer to a network say more than they realize about what they really enjoy. “The algorithm itself is the aesthetic process,” van den Dorpel wrote in an email. “The ideology is in there, in the code.”

Van den Dorpel further pointed out how sudden shifts in art appreciation can result from social and political movements or the influence of institutions, art historians, and other hierarchical figures. “The outcome of such a process can be aggregated, analyzed, and reproduced by algorithms,” he said. But he added that algorithms couldn't cause them. No current computational system could innovate or redefine taste. Human aesthetic feeling requires context. It occurs in a body that has grown up over time in a social matrix, with memories and experiences shaped by interpersonal relationships.

This past February, the Musée du quai Branly in Paris let a robot art critic named Berenson loose in its halls. The unsettling apparatus wore a white scarf and a bowler hat, tottered about the galleries, sharing its negative and positive opinions about pieces after analyzing museumgoers' facial expressions. The project was most successful as a formal reflection of one crucial aspect of how we cultivate our own taste: by mimicking or rejecting the cues of our peers.

Death Imitates Language can replicate van den Dorpel's aesthetic decisions. But it won't object to his taste, or develop its own. "It might sound funny and unreasonable to expect this from an algorithm," van den Dorpel said, "but for me, such traits would be prerequisites of intelligence." He added that he admires the work of philosopher Hubert Dreyfus, whose research is based on what computers cannot yet do.

Anxiety over whether the creative mind could be stored in code often raises another considerable specter of fear, namely, of obsolescence. However, van den Dorpel's work does not suggest that an aesthetic sensibility can make artificial intelligence fully human. Automata that can make and differentiate art are not a threat to personhood.

Some taste is simulated, and some taste is human, and they could exist in a hybrid system or a feedback loop. Van den Dorpel noted that his work of training the algorithm has influenced his own sensitivity for shapes and colors. As artificial intelligences approximate human attitudes and inclinations, they can be considered companions, not competitors. A future robot art critic running on the neural network that van den Dorpel may someday build could only enhance art criticism, challenging human and humanoid aesthetes to refine their own language for discussing taste.
Harm van den Dorpel: Unstable Media, the Post-Internet Art Movement and Blockchain

Digital art is all at once tangible and intangible, dynamic and static, existing both online and offline. This inherent duality ultimately forces the viewer to think about things beyond what they see on screen. Artist Harm van den Dorpel could be seen as a philosopher of the digital era, exposing more people to opportunities to ask questions about life online. How does the Internet influence culture? How does the Internet influence our daily lives offline?

With a background in computer science and artificial intelligence, van den Dorpel started making digital art by creating online animations. Since then he has integrated a variety of mediums, both originally digital and originally physical, into online exhibitions that pull digital artifacts into an amalgam of ideas. He uses algorithms and data to explore how things online relate, or not, to one another. He creates what is called “unstable media.”


ascribe.io, May 2016
“I think that if you look at all my work over time, it’s about aggregating a big pile of information, a pile that has particular origins but it is still not completely defined and it’s not really clear what all the data could mean,” he said. He then applies self-made algorithms that ingest the information and adds subjective feedback as the final layer. Just as one can like on Facebook, van den Dorpel has created networks which he trains by giving micro-feedback sometimes thousands of times. It is the algorithms fed with this feedback that are giving a new kind of organization to the data, turning it into information, a narrative, theme or conclusion that makes his work so unique and so compelling.

He, along with other contemporaries, is related to the post-Internet art movement, cultivating a new way of exploring technology, digital footprints and social networks.

“My generation of people who grew up with digital media don’t really care about owning anything. We often don’t have the big houses to hang work in.”

Deli Near Info
The idea for Deli Near Info originally stemmed in 2008 while he was working on an earlier project called Dissociations, which generated pages containing images and text, the combinations of which were algorithmically determined. He needed to create a database with properties that could “think alongside” Dissociations. In 2014, he quietly launched delinear.info, an open project with more of a collage logic, adding a layer of social networking to the mixture.
“I approach these kind of things really slow, I don't work on it for a long time and then launch it, I launch it from the start” he explained. “I like starting with something small that barely works and then building it up. I've never really announced delinear.info as a thing, it just grew gradually.”

Outside of the regular 300+ contributors, art schools and art academies in the U.S. and Helsinki use Deli Near Info, as does the record label PAN. PAN uses an isolated version, creating what they refer to as “a conceptual album that acts as an immersive virtual ecosystem.”

Utilizing the ascribe API to enhance his work, van den Dorpel can ensure ownership is maintained while he focuses on providing the philosophical and aesthetic layers to the art.

“By leveraging ascribe's API artists can get the support to ensure the art remains digital and maintains its original integrity, benefiting both the artists and collectors.”

left gallery
Launched in late 2015 with Paloma Rodriguez Carrington, left gallery produces and sells downloadable objects. Intended as both an artistic statement and long-term business and curatorial platform, van den Dorpel is tackling an issue he feels few are prepared and properly equipped for in the gallery world—selling digital art.

left gallery features and sells a variety of forms of digital media from novels to screensavers. ascribe's API is currently being leveraged as a part of the editioning process of work each time a purchase is made.

FINDING ASCRIBE
Harm describes finding ascribe as part chance and part opportunism during his search for a new way to distribute non-material artwork.

Cointemporary, an online gallery that sells ascribed limited digital editions, approached him looking for a piece of art they could sell on their platform, which at the time was only selling material objects like paintings and sculptures.

Through conversations with Valentin Ruhry, artist and co-founder of Cointemporary, he learned they were going to start doing digital editions, registering and storing the pieces with ascribe and would only be accepting payments with Bitcoin. It became clear that he was already well versed in these concepts still abstract to most, prompting Ruhry to invite him to join a panel discussion at the MAK (Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art) in Vienna.

“I had had the idea of creating a screen saver and the opportunity gave me that deadline,” said van den Dorpel. “They sold it on cointemporary.com and I was surprised at how well this was going with people actually buying it. I kept getting inquiries from interested buyers.”

The screensaver he created for the occasion became the first piece of art to ever be sold for Bitcoin, ultimately purchased by the MAK.
“They say that 2016 is the year of blockchain and I do think we will see huge changes in the coming year.”

When ascribe hosted their first hackathon in September 2015, it was his first time using the open source API. “One of the things that work really well are the emails and the easy communication,” he says of ascribe’s technology. “The API itself is also straight-forward.”

When building left gallery, ascribe was the only choice considered for the task.

“When someone purchases a piece on left gallery they receive a few emails,” he explains. “One from their payment processor confirming the transaction, one from left gallery that has a link to the downloadable file in a secret URL and one from ascribe that says you are now the owner edition 24 of 100 for example, where you can download the first version of the file.”

“It’s an extra security for collectors to have an impartial party confirm the effective ownership and which edition they have.”

By leveraging ascribe’s API artists can get the support to ensure the art remains digital and maintains its original integrity, benefiting both the artists and collectors. For him technology like an ownership blockchain provided by ascribe is not only beneficial to art online, but also to the way society lives online altogether.

“The classical Internet has the memory of a goldfish, but what it does remember it repeats like a parrot. It’s great that ascribe allows us to trace intellectual property,” he says.
ART ON THE BLOCKCHAIN
As a pioneer of the post-Internet art movement, a lot of thought around the complexities of creating, buying and collecting digital art go into his own work and education remains a large component of this.

“Generally people have no idea but when I explain it, they think it’s really interesting,” he says. “They might not completely understand the whole story with blockchain, it’s kind of over their heads which is ok.”

“The collectors who own physical works that they have paid a lot for, appreciate the fact that they are unique. It’s something they can hang in their house and know it can’t be copied,” he explains. “I think that my generation of people who grew up with digital media don’t really care about owning anything. We often don’t have the big houses to hang work in. If you install an app on your phone, you’re not going to look at your phone and think look how cool it is that I bought these apps. It’s more of service you’re using, it’s about access.”

“That’s the thing with digital objects. They are always alive and you have to keep updating otherwise they die.”

Digital art is experiencing some of the same problems as music, a form of digital art in itself. He draws a comparison here in the same way that people aren’t as concerned where it comes from, or whether they really own it, just that it’s accessible.

“That’s the thing that I like about ascribe, that it’s a blockchain technology, its peer-to-peer and non-regulated which are the answers to these kind of problems. I’m not sure if it’s what will happen but I hope so, I’m working towards it.”

ascribe.io, May 2016
LOOKING AHEAD
The next issue that van den Dorpel would like to tackle with ascribe is what he calls versioning. The problem of versioning is one he sees as both a practical issue that needs to be fixed and as a philosophical problem, one that begs questions around the essence of a piece and what defines the unchangeable core of the work of art.

“Just like this chain of provenance that we receive with ascribe, you want a chain of versions,” he says. “So let’s say I have an edition of 500 and we’ve sold 100 and we make a change, then what? If I sell a digital artwork and there’s going to be a new version of an operating system which would stop it from functioning, then I would have to make a new version of it.

“That’s the thing with digital objects. They are always alive and you have to keep updating otherwise they die. Traditionally, there is a moral judgment on changing an artwork whereas in apps and software, it’s judged if you don’t update it and I think I have to incorporate this in art pieces.”

He also sees wider adoption of blockchain technology as a crucial piece to establish more legitimacy and ultimately secondary markets emerging with everything from stock photography, music, sound effects and themes for software.

“The art market is a difficult market and the art world is one of the most conservative. The art world takes 20 years to accept new technology, and then you look at the world of tech and how fast it is always developing. I think the future of ascribe is in things that have to do with creative industries as a whole and not necessarily just fine art, there is so much possibility within this platform.”

“I’m wary of blindly accepting the gospel of singularity and decentralization,” he says. “They say that 2016 is the year of blockchain and I do think we will see huge changes in the coming year.”
Rachel de Joode
Various Qualities To Orbit The Mysterious Core, 2013
Interview by Whitney Mallett

When I went to visit Rachel de Joode in her studio this Fall, she said we were going to try making a “squish.” This process consisted of filling a plastic tube with wet plaster and me hugging it like a lover, leaving an imprint of my body, until it dried.

A number of your works focus on how “relevance” as a cognitive concept is generated or understood; your non-linear social media site, deli near info, for example, reflects on how temporality affects relevance in the stacked perceptual field of social media streams. Could you talk about how you understand relevance, and the ways in which you feel digital culture reveals how our minds work and/or creates new modalities of relevance?

We talk about the internet as if it’s this revolutionary thing, but it’s primarily based on written language. And everything that you can find is done by using words. Say you have Image A and Image B and you want to find some kind of connection, first, you will have to come to some sort of conclusion about what that image is about and then you describe it with keywords, and a match is made based on those interpretations which is very likely to be a connection on the most common denominators like color, or media, or age, but not about other intrinsic, more difficult things to articulate like a particular uncanniness or a particular aesthetic, but that kind of information would disappear because the relation has to be translated into words. So what I tried to do with the deli near info was to take away the written language proxy and have the images directly connected. Often people say that if you can’t articulate it in language, it doesn’t count, it’s nonexistent; but, still, I think it is possible to make these inarticulate connections. Systems help you to structure your brain so that over the longer term, things are emerging, that’s why it’s important that older things are as valued equally to new things. It’s a bit like psychoanalysis, in a sense. Also with older ideas if you think about, say, printed matter in that case you have to think an idea through completely and give it a form and then publish it, and it is unchangeable. So you’d better figure it all out properly before you have it printed. But that’s not the case anymore; now, it’s a continuous process. Before, if you printed a book and you read it and then a few weeks later said “Oh, shit, I was wrong”—like you’ve made a mistake either conceptually or you have typos—then you have failed in a way; but if you make an app, then these events are not seen as a failure, they’re an “improvement.” If an app is not receiving updates then it’s actually a dead product. Nobody is going to complain if they update Facebook and say, “Hey Facebook, I thought you had it right the previous time”—this is essential. The internet is an ecosystem of live objects that interact.

The latest in a series of interviews with artists who have a significant body of work that makes use of or responds to network culture and digital technologies.
You have spoken about how your work often seeks to approach information processing from a sidelong angle—not seeking out the most obvious, efficient connection but a connection that is relevant in another way, or which eventually becomes relevant in a surprising way. Given your own background in artificial intelligence (AI) development, has this approach to working with technology given you any perspective on the ways in which the "smartness" of smart devices mirrors or diverges from human intelligence? In many of your works, you seem to be making the case that smartness and intelligence must be understood as distinct concepts, and that the "randomness"—or apparent randomness—of certain associations is perhaps critical in delineating this distinction: smartness works to filter out randomness, but intelligence assimilates or contextualizes it. Is that an interpretation that resonates with your own understanding of your practice?

There is one approach to art making, or thinking, where you have a bigger plan and you work toward a particular goal; you kind of already know where you’re heading in advance, and what you’re going to say. This is a legitimate way of working, but I find, in creating, that if I work that way, then the outcome is not going to be desirable because a lot of what I do relates to the emergence of things. I’m not esoteric, but I feel that there are things going on in your brain—there’s a lot of noise there, but there are also a lot of ideas and interests already percolating which you haven’t been able to formulate fully yet. When you have an information system in which you put all those raw fragments and you give it a lot of small feedback on each fragment, the system might generate random connections and you can make judgements based on those so that, gradually, the randomness aligns into something that maybe has more substance. This conclusion is not something I could write down, but it’s the whole point. Consequently, it is getting away from the dominating force of written language—which I love as well, but it’s also possible to think visually or associatively or intuitively.

Your recent exhibition at Neumeister Bar-Am, “Ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing,” featured a number of works that reference the biological world, not least the large work, Chrysalis. As digital aesthetics are encroaching into all areas of life, do you see them as influencing the expectations for biological outcomes? One could draw a parallel with dog breeding which itself could be thought of as an application of the same logic as contemporary versions of bioengineering: information manipulation in the service of specific biological outcomes, often outcomes seeking an aesthetic result. Do you feel that there are unique ways that digital culture and aesthetics are influencing this process, or is it merely the continuation of the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure/cuteness by other means?
It's a difficult question. I can start by saying a few words about that show which touched on the idea of incompleteness and change over time, also of things that are essentially dead and which lack the capacity to transform. The cocoons were made with heat-shrink foil, which is one of the cheapest materials there is, and it doesn’t last. The inside of the cocoons is bubble wrap, so it’s really like packaging foil that’s usually discarded, but the chrysalis is this big metaphor for transition; at the same time, however, the ones in the show are never going to pop; they’re never going to “happen,” so the objects are dead in that sense. Then the other works in the show were white boards which were also incomplete but which were asking for interaction—but it was unclear what people should actually contribute to them. Both works were about this change and incompleteness and were sort of opposites of each other. The show was, in part, about dissatisfaction with the staticness of art production—but not just art production, also any particular theory or religious idea, any kind of dogma. Any kind of thing we fix is immediately dead. Every kind of conclusion for me is a problem.

In other interviews you have frequently been asked about your statement that “net art is dead.” Though perhaps too much is made of a single aphorism, one of the things that those conversations addressed is the approach you took earlier in your career in which you sought to build the platforms, sites and other digital objects you created more or less from scratch. You speak of the ease of accessibility in changing the dynamics and expectations of digital creation. While, no doubt, no end of second-tier net art is now being produced, do you feel that there is, in this process, a dialogue with the conceptual turn in non-digital visual art over the last half century wherein the “object” that results is secondary to either the idea from which the work derived or the artistic process by which the work evolved into its present state? If that is the case, is that turn necessarily a negative, or does it merely shift what “net art” is about?

I recently found out that I am still extremely inspired by the actual technical possibilities of networks and making works for computers—basic computers. There was always the promise that this was going to happen, but if you look at the art online, art that is often branded as “digital art” or “internet art, it’s actually old media. It’s video, or collage, or text, or music—which are all amazing and good, but I still believe that you can make art by taking advantage of medium specific properties of technology. That’s why I have Left Gallery now. The whole idea of post-internet art is you go back to the media we already had and say “now we’re going to make art about the things you can do on the internet,” which is fine, but the problem, I feel, is that if you’re going back to sculpture making or collage making, I don’t have much to contribute anymore. I feel that in the field of internet art, pure internet art, there’s still so much to discover there, from a pragmatic point of view, my aesthetic language is stronger when I do online stuff. I tried to deny this, but I just have to admit it. In terms of craftsmanship, I’m genuinely strong there. I also studied it, and I hate buying materials.
I recently found out that I am still extremely inspired by the actual technical possibilities of networks and making works for computers—basic computers. There was always the promise that this was going to happen, but if you look at the art online, art that is often branded as "digital art" or "internet art," it's actually old media. It's video, or collage, or text, or music—which are all amazing and good, but I still believe that you can make art by taking advantage of medium specific properties of technology. That's why I have Left Gallery now. The whole idea of post-internet art is you go back to the media we already had and say "now we're going to make art about the things you can do on the internet," which is fine, but the problem, I feel, is that if you're going back to sculpture making or collage making, I don't have much to contribute anymore. I feel that in the field of internet art, pure internet art, there's still so much to discover there, from a pragmatic point of view, my aesthetic language is stronger when I do online stuff. I tried to deny this, but I just have to admit it. In terms of craftsmanship, I'm genuinely strong there. I also studied it, and I hate buying materials.

You have spoken about your recent work as addressing the mechanics of curation. The term “curation” is ubiquitous these days—people curate playlists, desktops, “evenings,” menus—but perhaps the most useful interpretation of the term in relation to your work is again to be found in the notion of the management of information flows. Could you speak about the ways you understand and apply the term “curation” in your work, and how you seek to explore it via digital and IRL methodologies? Is it perhaps connected to the way you seek connections in supposedly unrelated objects? Is the mind itself, and the programs designed by the mind, something you understand as a framing device?

The word “curating” in Dutch means when a company goes bankrupt and the stakeholders want their money back then someone must execute the “curation” and determine what kind of value is in the remaining stuff and then sell it. The proceeds then go to the people who have lost out on the investment. That is the intuitive connection I’ve always had with curating. I used to have Club Internet in 2008, and I think curating for me means I see things that are good, or interesting, or maybe are better than I could ever do, but they’re not getting attention, or they’re not understood because they’re not surrounded by other objects that make it clear what they’re about. That’s why I want to curate, and not just work by other people, but things I encounter in the world, or things I upload onto deli near info where I think, “these two things are interesting, but I don’t really know why, but maybe let’s just put them there and wait for a bit, then maybe add something later and see what happens.”

Initially my curatorial perspective starts out very open, but there is no interest in just leaving things open and never reaching any kind of conclusion, so there is an ideal, or a hope, or a desire, that gradually, if I add more and get more information, that something will come out of it, and not just the number 42 [laughs], but something which I would really love. Let’s take Facebook; Facebook knows a lot about me, and it could, maybe, actually tell me things about myself which I haven’t figured out yet, but they’re not in the business of doing that. There’s also a political dimension to my understanding of curation. I don’t agree with the ways information is treated. deli near info is tiny, and its user interface awkward, but still I really hope that there will be some kind of change.
that will result from it to begin to create a situation where information control is given back to the people. Maybe it sounds a bit hippy, but actually I really want that.

Harm van den Dorpel, Scrum Kanban whiteboards (2015; courtesy of Neumeister Bar-am and American Medium)

Harm van den Dorpel, Left Gallery (screenshot, 2016)

Questionnaire:

Age:
35

Location:
Berlin, Germany

How/When did you begin working creatively with technology:
That question could mean so many things.

Where did you go to school? What did you study?
Studied AI at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Time Based Arts at the Rietveld Academy, also in Amsterdam.

What do you do for a living, or what jobs have you held previously?
I'm an artist, software developer and have worked in art education. In that order.

What does your desktop or workspace look like (screenshots or pics please!):
I often wonder what people expect to find in my studio.

Rhizome, February 2016
“Macbeth” contains one the most famous soliloquies in the Shakespearean canon. In it the eponymous hero laments and celebrates life’s brevity with the following bleak exultation:

All our yesterdays have lighted fools/The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!/Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more.

Macbeth’s nihilistic roar seemed to crackle in the background of Harm van den Dorpel’s exhibition “IOU” at London’s Narrative Projects Gallery. The show consists of works van den Dorpel made by staining thermo-sensitive paper using an open flame. The works themselves are not intrinsically nihilistic, though there is, both literally and figuratively, a darkness in the undefined shapes that haunt their surfaces.
Interview by Whitney Mallett

When I went to visit Rachel de Joode in her studio this Fall, she said we were going to try making a "squish." This process consisted of filling a plastic tube with wet plaster and me hugging it like a lover, leaving an imprint of my body, until it dried.

The wounded quality at the heart of the works is in part a function of their inspiration. In his artist’s statement, van den Dorpel cites the life and work of the programmer, businessman and hacktivist, Aaron Swartz, as one from the network of individuals and themes that occupied his thoughts in the creation of "IOU". Swartz is perhaps most famous for having created the protocol known as RSS, a means for net users to organise data from the websites to which they subscribe into a manageable, uninterrupted stream. Swartz’s brief candle burned out in 2013; he committed suicide facing prosecution for downloading a suspicious volume of files from JSTOR, the digital library of academic journals.
In “IOU”, van den Dorpel draws parallels between Swartz’s story and other areas of life where digital and analogue culture contend for legal and cultural space. One place where van den Dorpel argues tension is most noticeable is in the ways different countries treat physical manifestations of money. The decision to use thermo-sensitive paper was rooted in van den Dorpel’s experience of filing away heat-printed receipts from transactions in Germany only to find that the information had disappeared by the time he needed the receipts to file his taxes.

If this level of conceptual interplay is making your head spin, it’s all part of van den Dorpel’s strategy: “high” culture and “low” culture meld as easily as high and low tech in his work. For example, the dangers of solemnity or limpidity in a show of works made without the artist’s hand ever touching a canvas are undercut by the quotidian nature of the materials on show; the humble paper of a supermarket receipt becomes the support in an eloquent coalescence of the art and commerce. The process itself, as banal as your nearest burning cigarette, is lent a poetic quality in a number of the works on show. Works like “Fastener” evoke the heroic period of Abstract Expressionism, but substitute the resolutely painterly spray of Franz Kline for a more nebulous play of shapes and shadows.


Not every work is quite as potent. I can’t say the smoke emoji of “bottle cork” had me reaching for the “Like” button, but when van den Dorpel works with a darker palette, as in “Sonogram”, where the smoke creates a frame within the frame and only small, uneven swatches of white peep through, a real majesty emerges. “IOU” may be part homage to Swartz and to other netizens in van den Dorpel’s personal pantheon, and the works may neatly materialise the intellectual angst of the eternal battle between art as spiritual transcendence and art as commercial object, but these are only a few of the myriad theses and antitheses floating in the shadows. Van den Dorpel’s ghost-like formations may be somewhat sombre, but like Banquo’s spectre at the feast in “Macbeth”, they demand attention.

Text by William Kherbek

Harm van den Dorpel, “IOU” is at Narratives Project Gallery, London, until 19 December 2015

Sleek, November 2015
“Ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing”—the title of Harm van den Dorpel’s recent solo show – is taken from Martin Heidegger’s 1954 essay “The Question Concerning Technology.” Deprived of its context the line itself becomes ambiguous, an empty shell to be filled with any random meaning – and exemplifies the artist’s practice of collage for the digital age. A programmer-cum-artist, Van den Dorpel, born in 1981, is generally associated with the so-called post-Internet generation. The rationale behind this label seems to be that there’s been a shift in sensibility between the Net artists, who specifically worked for and with the Internet, and a younger generation of artists who grew up online and focus on the appropriation of data and content. But the distinction is a dubious one. Taking images and texts from magazines, is common practice and not specific to the post-Internet generation – Richard Prince is just one of the veteran artists who also does this.

Van den Dorpel began to create his own algorithms as a response to the strang structure of social media such as Facebook, in which users simply add one thing on top of another, thus burying older information in technological amnesia. In order to draw new connections within his own work, he programmed an algorithm that connected things in a nonchronological way, his method recalling Tristan Tzara’s technique.
of cutting up found texts and randomly splicing the snippets together to create a new chance-based poetry. “I wanted to make a system in which combining works is actually the work itself,” Van den Dorpel said in a 2014 interview. “There’s a curatorial element to my own practice, so sometimes I just make a specimen that I feed into the system and see how it behaves in relation or other images.” The artist takes what sounds like a creative virus spreading through the network from the digital realm into the physical world, making it manifest as painting or sculpture.

This showed featured sculptures made from printed Internet images that have been turned into three-dimensional objects—hollow mock-ups of the pictures they present. The artist calls this “a method of ontological inversion.” Two sculptures, Chrysalis (blue) and Chrysalis (mint) Mark II, both 2015, hung from the ceiling like oversize cocoons. Digitally enlarged images of the eclosion of butterflies (or collages of such images) have been printed on heat-shrink foil, which then encases the image-sculpture, resembling the form of the cocoon it depicts. Holes that emerged through the heating process seem to indicate an organic activity—as if a butterfly might emerge from its chrysalis, unfolding its crumpled wings—yet the shrink-wrap, the same material used in industrial food packaging, simultaneously suggests a permanent preservation, one that would hinder mutation forever.

Also exhibited were abstract paintings on Plexiglas (framed so that the paint is behind the transparent support) and a group of whiteboards featuring text snippets written in marker (VERY BETA STILL, TODO, and WON’T DO), digital prints, magnetic items, and Post-its. The combination of text and image doesn’t seem to be the result of a random process, though—instead, these works appear highly composed. Van den Dorpel, whose latest curatorial project, his second online platform, Deli Near Info, was conceived as “an algorithmic studio with a social dimension,” open for anyone to upload material, here undertook the transfer of technocratic poetry shaped by digital aesthetics into a rather archaic concept of the artwork—yet another shift in his work since his early Club Internet days. Perhaps his disillusionment regarding the Internet as a new and free platform that led him to work with materials again.

—Eva Scharrer
Navigating the Complexity of Harm van den Dorpel’s Post-Internet Art

By Tanja Laden — Feb 18 2015

While the “net artists” of the early 2000s designed art expressly for the web, today’s post-internet artists work in many mediums, from painting and illustration to photography and video, using web-based content as their source material. In this vein, Berlin-based Dutch post-internet artist Harm van den Dorpel creates not only live websites, but also tangible, three-dimensional objects, like sculptural assemblages and photo collages, that both reference and target emerging technologies. As the post-internet genre continues to evolve and gain new meaning, van den Dorpel now has three concurrent solo shows in Berlin, Brooklyn, and Los Angeles, each which explores the changing organizational structure of the creative process itself, and the new paradigms that are emerging.

Drawing from a background in computer science and artificial intelligence, van den Dorpel first began making art by doing animations online with friends. “I was never really fond of the idea of putting the work that I made for the browser, to put that in a space,” he says. “So I guess with the new context and possibilities, the work changed a bit, and that’s I guess where I am now.” While science and technology are traditionally focused on application, art addressed the philosophical questions van den Dorpel found himself asking, so he went from calling himself a computer programmer to an artist, though he still seems to vacillate between the two.
In 2008, he programmed the Dissociations website when he found that social media was all about adding things, and older activity became less relevant or forgotten. He created an algorithm that would help him find connections in his own work that weren’t based on chronology. Instead of telling it what should belong together, the system he devised determined what definitely did not belong together. Then van den Dorpel calculated the inverse, which resulted in a new project called Deli Near Info, a platform which introduced a social dimension to his work.

“I think the systems in my art that I make are not only about exploring technology but also really showing how often the connections [we] make are wrong or stupid,” he says, “a certain bluntness in combining things that are kind of ridiculous, but then somehow are the output of some kind of system or algorithm.”

Van den Dorpel uses the phenomenon of inline advertising, when a blog post with seemingly unrelated ads combine to create one block of text as a whole that illustrates the awkward placement of the targeted ads, as an example, but also a strange kind of serendipity. He maintains that when making art, he doesn’t start off by having a clear idea of the concept he’s trying to illustrate: “I’m just steering it with micro-decisions into a direction that I think might lead to more interesting micro-decisions.” As a consequence, the artist admits to being reluctant towards defining an essence in his art, partially because he believes “it’s happening between the nodes in the system, or in the constellation, or the combination.”

On view until April 11, van den Dorpel’s solo exhibition at Neumeister Bar-Am in Berlin is called Ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing, the title taken from German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s 1954 essay “The Question Concerning Technology.” Meanwhile, van den Dorpel’s show Just-in-Time is on view February 20 through April 3 at American Medium in Brooklyn. Both exhibitions utilize the concept of the whiteboard, a tool which modern developers ritually gather around and use to map out their ideas with magnets, Post-It notes, markers, etc. It’s a metaphor for the aforementioned paradigm shift that has taken place in the creative process, van den Dorpel explains: “In the Middle Ages, if you would build a church, you would start building a church and it would take maybe a hundred years, and the church would only really be ready when it was ready... And when you’re halfway to building, you can’t really change the design anymore. So you call this the cathedral model, and that model, it doesn’t work in manufacturing nowadays.” Instead, there are now many different agents who collaborate on smaller systems while change is still occurring, creating various iterations while the current one is still in use. “It [is] a way to show the transformation of the temporariness of ideas,” he states.

In van den Dorpel’s show Loomer at Young Projects in Los Angeles, on view through March 1, the impermanent, oddly organic, and unpredictable interstices of art and technology is further explored—among other artworks—through a quartet of Internet-based pieces.

Showreel (2009) runs about 20 minutes long, and it came about after van den Dorpel invited people to upload him more than 5000 pictures, creating a kind of an online visual narrative. He then programmed a script to turn the images into a video, and edited the images while discovering and exploring the existing visual associations himself. By organizing it and showcasing it in video form on a screen, van den Dorpel recognized that he was translating the online activity into visual space. Strategies (2010), his next project, was a similar exercise, only using visuals taken from van den Dorpel’s own online activity, paired with text. Meanwhile, The Four Master Tropes (2011) is an annotated YouTube video that follows a similar logic, but the text actually originated in van den Dorpel’s own Kindle highlights, mostly from books on semiology. The images came from DeviantArt users, because as van den Dorpel explains, “they also think or call themselves artists, but they operate in an entirely different context than, let’s say, institutionalized contemporary art.” Just as the highlights are snippets of various larger written texts, so are the images on DeviantArt snippets of each artist’s larger body of work. Finally, Deep Tissue (2014) is a video generated from van den Dorpel’s Disassociations website, “which had this algorithm of negating association and thereby calculating the associations that are important.”
It may seem obvious how people can acquire his sculptures, collages, and assemblages, but how do collectors go about actually buying websites that are art pieces? In van den Dorpel's case, certain ones can be purchased as higher-res videos, but the website itself is also for sale, and it functions as the "artist's proof." Van den Dorpel also offers buyers solid-state hard drives engraved with his name and the title of the work. But the main requirement is that the works remains online. In certain cases, they come with a contract that states that the buyer promises not to take down the website when he/she buys it, although the domain name is transferred over. In terms of buying and selling art, van den Dorpel says the only possible comparison would be public sculptures.

While van den Dorpel's art and his process are both highly complex, the artist says it's important to understand the quality and the state of things being complicated and/or intricate, at least for himself.

"There's always been an attempt to reduce complexity to understand it better, but I think we can actually embrace complexity, and instead of having a big picture, find a good way to navigate the complexity, where you always are somewhere, and there are other places where you can go from there... But you will never have a whole map of all the places where you were, where you can go, because the map changes as well, all the time. So instead of trying to make it a system that gives an overview, I think I'm trying to develop new ways of navigation — mentally, or in information."

By Tanja Laden
Conceptual Art Goes Viral in Harm van den Dorpel’s Berlin Exhibition

Visiting Harm van den Dorpel’s exhibition at Neumeister Bar-Am’s West Berlin gallery, one may sense that the artist has probably read William S. Burroughs. “Language is a virus from outer space” was one of the experimental writer’s maxims, and while there are few words in this exhibition, it recalls the line, at least in spirit.

The theme of viruses reproduces itself throughout the exhibition, “Ambiguity points to the mystery of all else revealing” (the title is a willfully obscure fragment from Heidegger), with psychedelic-colored parasites worming their way into Van den Dorpel’s layered, mixed-media wall pieces, covered in printed heat-shrink film in unique textures. Pupae-like forms hang from the ceiling in lurid colors (as in Chrysalis, 2015) and a brain is molded from digitally printed plastic, shiny and tangible (as in #speedbrain, 2015). Tech office whiteboards are decorated with magnets of grubs and fungi, and phrases written in marker pen such as “very beta still,” “todo,” and “won’t do.” The boards’ columns reference the concepts of input and output, productivity, and “blue-sky thinking.”
While a large part of Van den Dorpel’s production exists in online information systems that he programs, his physical works extend his process to three dimensions, while carrying his computer software background and generative concerns with them. His art engages with how we are embedded in interlinking systems—language, artistic production, the internet—in which viruses, both literal and figurative, are reproduced. As Sadie Plant and Nick Land put it in their wild text “Cyberpositive,” “viruses are not just infection, but connection.”

Regarding past work, Van den Dorpel commented in an interview with aqnb: “I wanted to make a system in which combining works is actually the work itself. There’s a curatorial element to my own practice, so sometimes I just make specimen that I feed into the system and see how it behaves in relation to other nodes, other text, or other images.” Understanding that everything is encompassed in the network, he tries to reflect this web of relations in the development of his practice. Through his artwork, Van den Dorpel propagates a virus—and now he’s watching to see how far it will spread.

—Hannah Gregory

“Harm van den Dorpel–’Ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing’” is on view at Neumeister Bar-Am, Berlin, Feb. 7th–Apr. 11th, 2015.
When I went to visit Rachel de Joode in her studio this Fall, she said we were going to try making a “squish.” This process consisted of filling a plastic tube with wet plaster and me hugging it like a lover, leaving an imprint of my body, until it dried.
Young Projects Gallery, January 2015

Loomer

A solo exhibition by Harm van den Dorpel

Opening Reception: Jan 23rd, 5:30 pm - 9:30 pm

Young Projects is pleased to present Loomer, Harm van den Dorpel's first solo show on the west coast. It will include a wide range of work including photo-based collages, Perspex sculptures, heat-shrink-wrap objects, videos and websites from the past five years.

Born 1981 in Zaandam, the Netherlands, van den Dorpel studied Interactive Design at Gerrit Rietveld Academy and Artificial Intelligence at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, where he later taught New Media from 2008-2012. His work has been the subject of numerous solo shows at institutions such as the Abron Art Center in New York; the New Museum (NY); American Medium (NY); and The Moving Image fair in Istanbul. It has also been included in a number of important exhibitions of late including: Private Settings at the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2014); Image Employment at MoMA PS1 (2013); Free (2010) at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; Collect the World at Link Art Centre, Brescia, Italy; and New Wave at the Internet Pavilion within the Venice Biennale, 2009. He currently lives and works in Berlin.

In the artist's own words:

I am lying down in my bed, attempting to write texts about my upcoming solo exhibitions. The texts serve multiple purposes, of which the most important two are: a: provoke people to come see the show, write about it, buy the work, etc. and, b: help people understand what the exhibition is ‘about’.

Although I am writing the text myself, it is common to pretend to write it in the third person: ‘the artist’, ‘van den Dorpel’, ‘he’, so it looks like I’m not exalting myself too much but appear humble, and to suggest that somebody else is writing it. An outsider perspective gives more authority, and protects the artist from explaining his own work - defence is so tempting.

Young Projects Gallery, January 2015
I graduated art school in 2006, yet still hesitate to talk with people about what I do. At obligatory gatherings I rather tell that I’m a computer programmer, which is more tangible. Not that my work is not about something - I think it is about many things - but that what it is about, seems to run ahead of myself, and I will never quite catch up with it. (I suspect it is always about the same thing).

Often people approach explanations of my work in terms of ‘found imagery’, which is ‘culled’ from the internet. This emphasises the ‘as-found nature’ of my source material. Because these images are from the internet, and I make an object in space using them, I’m labeled ‘post internet’, but this is not sustainable. Using existing images from the internet is not saying much about the work at all. It’s 2015. Appropriation is a default. It is a meaningless gesture in itself.

Fragments of images, texts, thoughts, sequences I combine, with a faint belief, that the result could somehow be something new, or at least new enough to me. Or at least new enough to you. And every time, when I manage to give a conceptual explanation of the result of this enduring association-mining, I must divert, or it dies.

Making art compensates a melancholic desire. There is this romantic notion that every object of desire is unattainable, because once acquired, once understood, it disappears by morphing into the banal. Although having access to financial means greatly reduces worries, it makes me sad that I have become a professional now. It sort of spoils it. I should not have married my mistress.

Absolute potential: performance artists are not theatre actors, and sound artists are not musicians. What is to become of me if not a computer programmer anymore?

There is no need to solve the same problem twice.
Harm van den Dorpel's four works; Showreel, Strategies, The Four Master Tropes, all recently 'reframed' for web, and Deep Tissue are exhibited together here for the first time, showing their emergent conclusions.

Throughout the works a vast range of material; image, sound and text, are combined to the effect of an 'equalised hierarchy'. All works are described as 'Pseudo Generative' employing generative software, designed by the artist to create initial organisation of content, before being heavily manually and intuitively edited.

The visual content of Showreel, 2009, was derived from experiments with a screen capture software which posted images directly to a website. The software was developed by Van den Dorpel and used by him and a group of friends like a surf club. Upon recognising an associative narrative, showreel became an anthropological investigation, as well as a documentation of the process of making sculptures, the 3-d renders of which also appear in the video.

Strategies, 2010 a sequel to showreel, documents the process of making two collages. Screenshots, images and other found footage were collected over the course of two months and combined with rewritten phrases of advice given by business experts, martial arts gurus, software developers and Jacques Derrida. The background track was made by Van den Dorpel in 2002 and was never used before, for anything particular.

The Four Master Tropes, 2011 reflects the artist's ambivalent engagement with, and occasional misreading of, contemporary philosophy gathered via Kindle highlights. These are presented as YouTube annotations as layered on top of artwork created by users from the social network deviantart.com, which foreground 'destabilised' photographs of Van den Dorpel's studio. A jarring piece of music, made by Van den Dorpel in 2002 plays as the soundtrack.

Deep Tissue, 2014 serves as one possible conclusion to Dissociations (dissociations.com) before Van den Dorpel moved on to his next project Deli Near Info (delinear.info/harmvddorpel). Dissociations is a site programmed to inform associations between the artist's materials and his past/present/future artworks, and also acts as a live studio.
“We got there (late)”, says one of the alt-text boxes in Harm van den Dorpel’s ‘Deeptis.su’. It’s a durational online work running over an eerily upbeat and repetitive soundtrack, as disjointed images develop and diffuse across a slideshow of equally contrasting and transient wallpapers. There’s a sketch of a Victorian Lady stood next to a pair of computer speakers, the words “some things that work in one decade” emerging over gloomy-hued brushstrokes before slowly vanishing to white: “just don’t work in the next”. Gestural streaks of complementary colours, a lorem ipsum site template and evaporating beads of water grow out of, and melt into each other as these small fragments of text, thoughts, occur randomly across a browser window: “it was still soaked with information”.

This is one of the most recent works by the Berlin-based artist, whose practice has changed, shifted and evolved over his early Club Internet days, to the negative connections in the research, influence and process presentations of ‘Dissociations’, and his newest curatorial project ‘DeliNearInfo’. The latter is something van den Dorpel calls an algorithmic studio with a social dimension, open to anyone, and made in response to the unnaturally streamlined nature of contemporary social media. “I made that system because I couldn’t work with the existing blogging software,” he tells me via video across cities; van den Dorpel at his new studio in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg, myself at my desk in London. “Existing systems are completely linear. There’s always a new one added but there are never really connections between the posts in time”.

Harm van den Dorpel, ‘Reverse Engineered Consent’ (2014). Courtesy the artist
As an artist born in ‘81, of a computer science background and living through the shift from the self-initiated, self-sustained and largely unnoticed ‘net art’ days of the web, to the ubiquitous Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr-driven online art world of today, van den Dorpel maintains an ambivalent position in relation to contemporary practices. He’s one who’s achieved a measure of success since starting out buying “corporate-sounding” domain names and turning websites into art spaces, now become absorbed into the greater gallery system and losing his claim to the Creative Web he in some ways had a hand in building. But, far from becoming disconnected from his roots as an artist interested in artificial intelligence, it’s in the rubble of this very collapse between the lawless frontier-past of an internet without infrastructure and its current corporatised state, that van den Dorpel’s work actually rests. Despite his assertion that “internet art is dead”, he’s taken to still producing online, while leaving his digital exhibitions undocumented and material object-art destroyed. Because it’s an amalgamation of ideas, images and processes that make up these material/immaterial hybrids into such beautiful and ultimately human work.

“I’ve always been very interested in how thought is organised and how people learn and if you could even simulate or represent this”, van den Dorpel says about the conceptual framework of a practice that seems to flatten the hierarchy of time into an accumulation of instances, taken from the past and reiterated in the always-moving present. “The works themselves, they have this organisational structure, almost like an algorithmic organisation of how you group things in your mind and then that is also repeated in how the pages are laid,” he adds about the internal logic of a piece like ‘Deli Near Info’: “the work is happening on that page.”

aqnb: ‘deeptiss.u’ is a durational piece that you have to sit through, was that a conscious decision?
HvdD: Yeah. The work is somehow generated on 83 or so dissociations. It’s a generative piece and, if you’re talking about a conclusion of online activity, in hindsight that work is one. It also marks the end of ‘Dissociations’ when I moved on to ‘delinear.info’. I’d maybe call it the conclusion of that.

aqnb: The role of text in your work, why are you focusing on that more now?
HvdD: I never really dared to write because English is not my native language but why I’m writing now is because it’s kind of powerful, or it’s free, combining these. I think I started the writing when I was making captions for art pieces, or descriptions of them, and then I found I only understood the art piece after I wrote the caption, and then the captions became more elaborate.

aqnb: When I read the text, I had my own interpretation of the work. I absorbed some fragments while dismissing others to construct, or apply to my own narrative of reason.
HvdD: Filtering.

aqnb: Is that something you’re thinking about?
HvdD: I wanted to make something that has complexity. Where you don’t understand it all but it’s still functional in your reading of it, which is also my conviction that there’s no overview anymore, there’s no index page. There’s not a page on YouTube where you can go ‘these are the pages on YouTube’. The rhizomatic structure is the reality now and I tried to make this a way to navigate it.
aqnb: Do you mourn that lack of an index page, and also do you think that’s strictly true? The hegemony of mass media seems stronger than ever.
HvdD: There are systems that are taxonomically organised, like classes, or categories, or stores, and they’re always based on text grouping, like, ‘this is that or that is that’ based on years, or other metadata. I tried to make systems that are based on intuition; where you can’t even know why something belongs to something else, you just have to associate.
I think language, text, is still prevalent online; it’s still dominating grouping systems. And taxonomies are always a mess. If you go and see a tag cloud on a website, it’s always ridiculous. The category errors are very funny. So ‘Deli Near Info’ is based on a graph database, which has weighted factors, of ‘this is more associated than that’, which is also used on Twitter with recommending friends or ‘follows’. I like to think about those organisational structures that have emergent behaviours.

aqnb: Are you generating your own kind of artificial intelligence, in some way, reflecting the human experience in the software and your processes?
HvdD: Not so much the experience but more the development of the mind and thinking of how information is embedded in a composition but also in time: ‘what other movement does this associate with?’ Those are questions that I like.

aqnb: When you say social media is just for entertainment what do you mean?
HvdD: I think a lot of internet activity in social media, it’s just a constant stream of something new, and new, and there’s no conclusion; there are no crossover links. In my practice, when I look back at something that I made in the past, and compare it with more current activity, things start to make more sense.
I wanted to make a system in which combining works is actually the work itself. There’s a curatorial element to my own practice, so sometimes I just make specimen that I feed into the system and see how it behaves in relation to other nodes, other text, or other images and all the cross sections in time. Old things and new things can be combined, and over time it grows and the connections become more interesting. At least that’s what I hope. You don’t really get that in social media, which is more just an endless stream. You add something on top and you’re supposed to forget what’s on the bottom.

aqnb: It’s interesting that you think that way because it comes across as a sort of duality, which I suppose is a reflection of your practice working across the immaterial and material, and also the ephemeral and the permanent. You yourself destroy your objects and primarily archive online. What’s the difference between doing that, and
allowing things to be forgotten in a stream?

HvdD: The important thing for me is that the database grows, the archive grows, in order to understand better what it means to make a piece of art. Then I gain insights into my own thinking more and discover unconscious decisions. This is the ultimate goal. But the art pieces are often destroyed, or they never existed in the first place, because they’re renderings. It’s still essential to make physical work though, because software doesn’t give you the problems that materials have. These problems, these restrictions, are good.

aqnb: You said before that ‘internet art is dead’ and you’re one of the few artists working in that early millennial era that is still producing work online. What about it is ‘dead’ and what was the goal in the first place?

HvdD: There was not necessarily a goal or agenda, it’s just that it was possible, it was also the only venue we had access to, it was free and it was fun. Also, if you were making something for online, you actually had to do it all yourself and now people are more like using existing boxes to put something in, like social media, which is totally fine. I’m just a very technological person. I like programming and I want to have control.

aqnb: It sounds like your issue with social media is more political than you’ve been making out.

HvdD: It didn’t start with a political agenda, but I find it quite dangerous that these huge infrastructures of social media have no other agenda than to make money. It’s like hyper-privatisation and I don’t know where it’s going. My work is reacting to that, or opposing it, or trying to give some alternative networks. Obviously I’ve only limited resources to make my own startup [laughs], but I try to make some system that somehow works. I don’t even know if other people will use it, maybe that’s not even the goal. It just exists like other things.

aqnb: As an artist coming from those early days where the infrastructure was still not available for art online, how do you reconcile the way you want to make work and the way you have to in a gallery context?

HvdD: It really exists in this hybrid. I said once in an interview that the physical objects, which the collector eventually buys, that’s their problem [laughs]. I call it the debris; the things that fall off. And, of course I like to sell, but I also like the material object. I could just simulate everything with software but I think I need this materiality to make the thing.

aqnb: So it’s an adaptive approach for survival as an artist but you also just like the process.

HvdD: I have this ongoing investigation into the materiality of printed stuff. The collages on that page, again as an example, especially this one [sends link to ‘Reverse Engineered Consent’ (2014)], the one on the left is real and its made of printed textures from a stock footage material collection which you can use for 3D software. I printed the materials on it but when you come close you can see that it’s the actual real material, but you can also see it’s still a print. It’s like a kind of unreal collapse in a way, and then in the print, in the backside I scratched the image, and the resolution of the print makes you really aware of it. It’s almost like a screen and it also has no frame.

Harm van den Dorpel is a Berlin-based artist taking part in the In Its Image group exhibition at New York’s American Medium, running July 19 to August 24, 2014.


aqnb, July 2014
Harm Van Den Dorpel recently talked with me over a shared-screen skype session about his semi-generative image navigation system called Dissociations. The work could be described in many ways: feedback platform, assistend-intelligence interface, online studio, anti-tagging archival system. But regardless of hard definition, this ongoing engine fuels a lot of Van Den Dorpel's online presence, as well as guides the way in which he decides to translate that work into physical galleries. The uniqueness of this project not only rests in Van Den Dorpel's distinctive visual approach to online imagery, but is also due in part to this system being a type of conceptual launching pad for critiquing the ways in which certain user-generated image curation platforms all too quickly create a kind of same-same-ness (ahem Tubmlr).

In our conversation, we discuss some of the back-end of Van Den Dorpel's program as well as how the selection process – which again is based on negative association nurtures the artists’ intuitive studio practice. In doing so, the project becomes a kind of tableau for Van Den Dorpel's work that is not based upon typical systems of organization like construction material and/or chronology. Instead, as we find in our explorations of both the selection process and the front-end display of the “results” of this software, one looks at the artist’s work in a more nuanced way. As a result, Dissociations becomes more like a game; one in which the feedback and immediacy of the computer can become more measured and distinct when brought offline.
‘Harm van den Dorpel: Release Early, Release Often, Delegate Everything You Can, Be Open to the Point of Promiscuity’ at Abrons Arts Center

Untitled (portraits from Deviant Art), 2012, is a spring-loaded misdirection. A dark photo print under beveled matting under hand-etched glass, with the rectangle formed by the bevels overlapping a pale gray cameo-style oval, it’s almost impossible to look at. It’s much easier to see your own reflection. So you move back and forth, trying to find an angle from which you can see what is being so elaborately framed, suspecting with some irritation that it may only be your own face—and all the while, the pear-shaped mountain of snakes etched into the surface is clearly framed by all three frames and visible from every angle. What’s more, before being realized, the collage was designed—like all the alluring collages in Mr. van den Dorpel’s first American solo show, some of them built up with layers of resin or extra pieces of glass—using Photoshop. Mr. van den Dorpel is a programmer by training, and the show, which was curated by Karen Archey, includes two computer-assisted video loops, as well as some assemblages. The material realization of a virtual design that draws on diffuse influences and uses found imagery to deflect the viewer’s gaze from its center, it’s the first collage that’s collage all the way down. (Through June 1, 2013)
“Deep Space (insides)”

12.05.12

AUTHOR: FRANK EXPÓSITO
10.28.12-12.16.12 Joe Sheftel Gallery

Upon loading Harm van den Dorpel’s website, etherealsef.com, visitors are greeted by a notice that it might record them, appropriating the user’s embedded webcam like a ventriloquist would the watchful eye of his dummy. Launched in 2009, the site gathers its consenting viewers’ serial faces in a grid on its back-end site, etherealothers.com, which is displayed on a laptop at the entrance to this group show. Seemingly unaware of the actual moment when their likenesses were taken, the people are pictured staring at the camera’s on-screen feed (out of frame here, of course), which morphs in a psychedelic diamond, self-reflection as engrossing as Narcissus was in water.

“Deep Space (insides)” is a redundant title for this exhibition, but its repetitiveness finds its place within the works. Rochelle Goldberg’s 2012 series “The Bold Look,” for instance, was made using an abandoned photocopier that once belonged to Vito Acconci and was left derelict on the street in front of his New York studio. With it, Goldberg scanned Kohler ads depicting dry hands rising from inky pools, and she layered them behind more copied photographs of hazy childhood baths. The resulting mercurial images displace cohesion in distorting echoes that resemble ripples, washing subliminal messaging with the faded memory of a previous moon.

In another standout work, Josh Kline investigates the sanitation of drug stores in his Share the Health (Assorted Probiotic Hand Gels), 2012, three dispensers that hang casually by the gallery’s exit like hand sanitizer dispensers normally do. Here, though, they grow pink bacterial cultures spawned from swabs taken inside three local chain pharmacies. Interiors, as this show reveals, are ripe with life, even when they’re concerned with physical projection.
Harm van den Dorpel: The Four Master Tropes

WEDNESDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2011

Harm van den Dorpel’s two new works evince an Internet-informed mode of appropriation and assemblage, and its possibilities for reconciliation between varying contextual experiences.

The first, a video titled The Four Master Tropes, consists of layered compilations of images and text from multiple sources, published together into simultaneous presentational streams. Images gathered from deviantart.com (a social network of artists founded in 2000 and known for its emphasis on formal technique) are overlaid on photographs of the artist’s studio, which have been manipulated to convey an ambiguous and “destabilized” relationship with physical space. Van den Dorpel’s own voice provides a narration to the film in the form of modified and reordered quotations from a range of books, gathered by highlighting within the artist’s Kindle reader.

The second work, stillintherunningtowardsbecoming.com, takes its title from Tyra Banks’s affirmative catch phrase from reality television show America’s Next Top Model. A pure tone plays at a frequency equal to the number of the current year, as the browser displays a pair of highly typical Mark Rothko paintings, the hues of which continuously cycle in endless opposition.
For their latest exhibition, the Rod Barton Gallery in London presents the work of Dutch artists Harm van den Dorpel and Bas van den Hurk in ‘You’re so Beautiful, and so on.... and so on.... and so on....’. The exhibition explores the artists’ attempts to discover a new way in which to find modern expressions through art. On the one hand, Harm van Dorpel uses new media to filter the contexts of a budding age of communication and meaning, whilst Bas van den Hurk reacts to a ‘living death’ in painting, subverting the contemporary abstract form to pave a new direction to a supposedly outdated and ineffective vehicle of speech. In advance of the exhibit opening this weekend, Dazed Digital caught up with both artists to discuss the re-workings that lean to a free and more radical future of art...

Dazed Digital: What do you find interesting about working within and incorporating a wide range of media in your art work?
Harm van den Dorpel: All media are equal and available for use. A theatre play can in some way be interpreted as physical cinema, painting as flat sculpture or software as interactive video. Everything can be persisted as information, continually transformed back and forth. For me it would be impossible to insist on a practice based on using one fixed medium. I'm interested in applying methods from media theory, information science, philosophy and semiotics on these transformations.

DD: Would you define your work as a product of art history or a reaction to it?
Harm van den Dorpel: That sounds like an interesting question but I think I can't be reflexive enough to address that. Probably both? It's hardly an opposition is it?

DD: What is the relationship between your work and the contexts of media which you feel the need to address?
Harm van den Dorpel: Coming from my own appreciation of art, often I prefer to consume video art at home, movies in cinema and internet art on my own laptop. In the context of the gallery or museum I aim to structure a situation that is depending on that context. For me this means creating objects and collages that tie into a fascination for software and digital processes yet are exploring physical parameters like materiality and scale.

dazed digital, May 2011
Dazed Digital: Why is it you feel abstract painting has reached its ‘living death’? What is its logical conclusion?
Bas van den Hurk: For me this is a challenge to see if I can work in a field of which specialists say that everything already has been done. Where painting has reached the end of its logical conclusion. Where painting is dead. But which has still the potential to speak to most people. There lies for me the freedom, the opportunity. In this time there is a whole new zone of networks, virtual worlds, modes of production, contexts, texts etc to which I can relate. How does a canonical field, seen as static and outdated relate to this? How do materiality and immateriality relate? How are things represented, re-worked, re-used, put in new contexts? Painting made flux.

DD: What does the unfinished nature of your work represent?
Bas van den Hurk: My work is permanently unfinished, it therefore looks fragile and vulnerable. And it gives a contradictory feeling: on the one hand the works are estranging, unreadable, radical autonomous - you look at something you cannot understand. But on the other hand you feel it is just a mode of things, it is open to other versions, in your mind you can make these and this relates to our sense of perceiving the world: we don't understand the work, but we feel related to that feeling at the same time, because we for ourselves, other people and all the things around us, also feel uncanny to some extent.

DD: Where do you foresee the future of art?
Bas van den Hurk: In his recent book Peter Sloterdijk says we must change. And he means this in the broadest sense of the word: as well economical, political, social, ethical as aesthetical. He phrases it as an imperative. A must do. And we must. The future of the arts is therefore radical and utopian. There is space for a new avant-garde. Not a linear one as was before, but a networked one. In this lays an enormous potential and freedom. Everything can be rendered together, cut up, stitched together again, mixed and re-mixed. That is the mode with which I work at the moment, I treat my work as a montage. I cut, rework, re-use. Then I install it temporary, use it again in another form in another context. So beautiful...and so on...and so on...and so on...
Bas van den Hurk and Harm van den Dorpel combine and manipulate multiple spatial co-ordinates through different mediums in a given context, in this case Rod Barton Gallery in London. In an era where the potential to make new remarkable gestures seems exhausted, they instead productively research discursive networks, modes and models of painting and virtual reproduction.

Harm van den Dorpel investigates how intentional concept and expressive intuition, software and matter, complement rather than conflict. He works in a wide range of media: collages, installation, websites and animation.

The artist’s practice is structured around acts of publishing – online or in a space – by positing objects as documents into a networked model. His often computer generated, speculative art explores how algorithmically constructed and distributed reality has given rise to a new urgency and understanding of the human relationship with material objects.

Bas van den Hurk’s practice circles around questions of the possibilities of painting today. For him painting functions in a permanent tension that on the one hand strives for radical autonomy and on the other is aware of the fact that it is part of a network of texts, modes of production and commodifications.

Van den Hurk treats his works as permanently unfinished. By doing so his works often look fragile and vulnerable. He exhibits them as site-specific installations and temporary events that question not only the value of the individual pieces and their combinations, but also their relation towards the (exhibition) space, the spectator and their modes of production.

“You’re so Beautiful, and so on….and so on….and so on…”
Bas van den Hurk & Harm van den Dorpel
Until 11th June, 2011
Rod Barton Gallery, London

Images courtesy of Rod Barton Gallery, London