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Fresh Stories
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What excited me was that I could do something so fast-compile some images on my desktop, make a screen shot, send it by email to a stranger -and instantly it was contextualized and public. This was so different from the kind of work I was used to making, ... more

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I see technology as just an amazing tool, just like the camera is a great tool. Its not the technology itself, its what I do with it. If I can use it to make more things and bring more people together, then great. That would be just great.... more

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Both my parents were artists. I tried to avoid the family curse by studying astrophysics, but I had to drop that like a hot potato when I graduated and didn't get into any grad schools. I ended up applying to grad school as a painter and during the first year, was fortunate enough to meet some other students who abandoned painting in order to explore painterly issues in other media.

One woman was throwing ink on the wall, another guy was making sculpture out of cardboard and I ended up stretching tape across architectural spaces. When we got out of school, we decided to move to New York. We had talked about collaborating, but we had real problems with the way most collaborations happened: the most common model being unacknowledged collaboration or there was the United Front model, where everyone appears to be working together, but then you never see the interaction. We decided to do a form of collaboration where everyone sees the interaction; in fact, in order to emphasize it, we sort of foregrounded not only our interactions, but also our disagreements and fights. Quickly, it seemed digital technologies were a great way to encapsulate those flame wars and present them to the public… We found this mode very exciting and were also taken with its independence from the greed-driven art market scene.

How do I explain why I was one of the first artists to work in this medium? I don't know if it's a personal characteristic as much as a conviction -- that was born of having an Abstract Expressionist father and having been a painter for quite a while, -- a conviction that most people, whether artist or audience, who liked traditional art forms completely misunderstood them. For example, the derriere artists who imitated Raphael and Velasquez copied the superficial likeness of those portraits without emulating the innovation that they represented. Similarly, the abstract compositions and painterly touch of artists like Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning were closer to emulating the spirit of "the old masters" than the retrofigurative artists of the same decade. I wanted to make things that broke the mold rather than reinforced it.

At the time that I was working in new media, I was also a curator-in-training at the Guggenheim. I'd end up at art cocktails given by the art world's elite, and found the people beautiful on the outside and less so on the inside. The established system of an economic-based criterion for success seemed hollow to me. By comparison, the groups of people I would meet in run-down lofts filled with computer equipment seemed much friendlier and more open to new ways of working even if they weren't so beautiful.

How would I characterize this period? It seems the metaphor has changed with time. Benjamin (Weil) once said that there are three web years to every year, so we're really talking about a half century (instead of a little more than a decade). The early internet, say from the bulletin boards of the early 90's onward, was a "gift economy." Artists were excited by the potential to speak directly to each other rather than have to be invited into exclusive gallery openings…. It didn't matter if you were from Slovenia or Soho. That then gave way to the illusory aim of a global cybermall. That desire to turn the internet into a money-maker for everyone did put some new tools in the hands of artists, but it also distorted artist's perception of what their online goal was. If you were an artist posting to The Thing bulletin board, say, in 1995, you were probably sitting next to an academic or code programmer, really participating in freely-exchanged ideas and tools, fostering links that weren't economically-based. Whereas, an art student at the end of the decade, say, 1999, they're sitting next to an animator negotiating a contract for a 6-figure salary with Sony or Pixar. The expectations are very different. For the most part, those expectations got in the way of artists rather than helped them. In the late 1990s, we saw a lot of battles between those two economies. The dot-com bust cleared out the carpetbaggers, left the internet to those who really care about it. The battle lines now being drawn have less to do with these two competing economies but rather the varying visions of how the internet can help a society that needs healing globally, especially in the aftermath of September 11th.

To me, the new question facing artists in this third phase of internet history is "what role do you expect to play in global society?" Are you going to be a crafter of images and sounds and text who gauges your effectiveness by what market share you achieve, what placement in Hollywood films you manage? or are you going to gauge your effectiveness by other criteria, like how you contribute to increasing the openness of society rather than working towards its closure?

What's next for museums? Most museums are containers where you put rarities to attract people and on the wall are instructions on how to perceive them, written by art historians. Whereas, successful network arts are the opposite. Napster, ebay, amazon… these are uncontained works and they deliberately spread themselves across a network. They're not based on rarity, but accessibility; the more accessible, the better. They're opposite paradigms. What would it mean to adapt museum culture to net culture?

How has being an artist working at this time marked me? The nicest thing anyone ever said about me was in an interview with Julie Lazar, who referred to me as a renegade. What's odd is that I've always felt like this imposter, a guerilla, a virus in the museum world. The Guggenheim hasn't fired me yet. It's a very welcome mark that I'll take as a badge of honor.