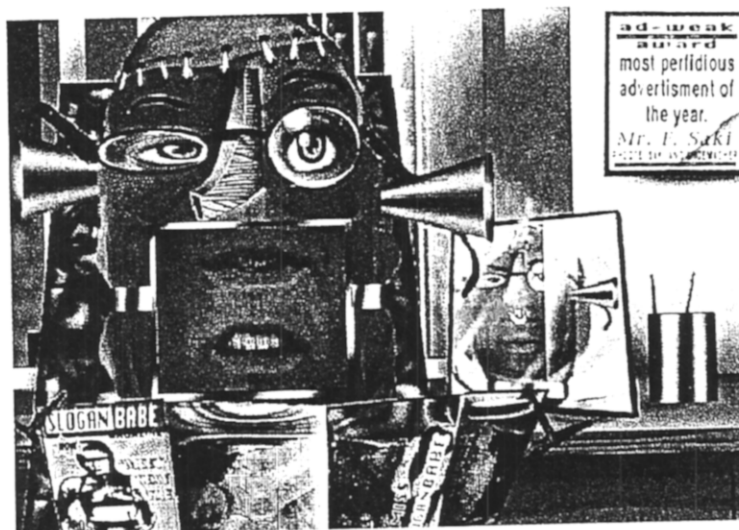


■ MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART ■

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LEWEN ET AL., BAR-MIN-SKI CONSUMER PRODUCTS, 1994, SCREEN GRAB FROM CD-ROM.

"BURNING THE INTERFACE"

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, SYDNEY
MARCH 27 - JULY 14, 1996

"Burning the Interface," organized by digital artist Mike Leggett and in-house curator Linda Michaels, is the first major international exhibition of CD-ROM art to take place in Australia. A companion show to the more modest interactive installation "Phantasmagoria" on the same floor of the MCA, it is a significant but telling report on how visual artists everywhere are using new technology for personal and professional reasons. State-of-the-art CD-ROMs such as Brad Miller's *A Digital Rhizome*, Michael Buckley's *The Swear Club*, Tamas Waliczky's *The Forest* and Jean-Louis Boisser's *Flora Petrinularis*—to mention only five of the 110 exhibits in the show—provide a rollercoaster ride through the highs and lows that currently beset audiovisual fare.

Representing the Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, England, The Netherlands, Canada, the U.S. and Australia, most of the exhibits are only three to four years old and reveal the critical and economic limitations imposed within a medium still to be commercially "refined." The curators' decision to select CD-ROMs dis-

playing an experimental emphasis rather than choosing more established or documentary works is therefore an especially brave gesture. By situating a complex and rich array of various interactive and navigational options for the museumgoer to explore, "Burning the Interface" provides a useful but provocative aesthetic experience.

Not all works on display are completely successful. Artists who wish to contribute to the expanding electronic syntax of new media need more than ever to question their own artistic and cultural assumptions. In recent times, the indefatigable Peter Weibel and German media theorist Friedrich Kittler have argued for the necessity of questioning the unchecked spread of commercial software in this area, with the result that some media artists are now employing personal code crunchers to write their own programs. To avoid the hyperbolic sales pitch that usually accompanies new technology is precisely why exhibitions such as these should maintain a wary distance from the vagaries of the market place. Let us pray that the electronic carpetbaggers also get the message.

JOHN CONOMOS