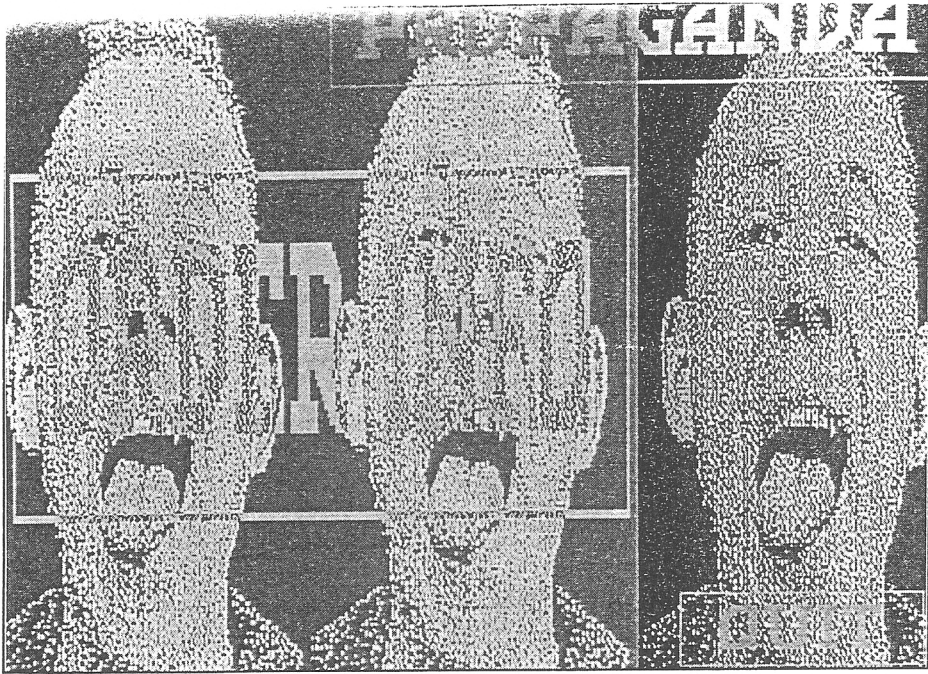


# MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Media CAPITAL Q - XTRA

te APRIL 5, 1996



From Neuro Enema Amalgamated's *Blam! 1* CD-ROM

## CD-ROMs: *doing art*

**Burning the Interface**  
<International artists' CD-ROM>  
At the Museum of Contemporary Art until 14 July

**ART**  
by Paul Andrew

Picture this. A young mother enters an art gallery with her girlfriend and their two children. The gallery attendant tells the children they can't touch the art on the lower floors but they can touch the art on the upper levels as much as they like. Like it or not, there is a lot riding on the wave of multimedia. For some it is being touted as the linguistic coup that magically changes art from noun to verb, hands-on and user-friendly, interactive and self-governing. For others it is a new media that, like film and video, has become a linear recording art for all other art-forms on a new groovy frontier for advertising.

*Burning the Interface* is the Museum of Contemporary Art's latest extraordinary offering, ideal for kids and kids at heart. Like it or not, there is a lot riding on the wave of multimedia. For some it is being touted as the linguistic coup that magically changes art from noun to verb, hands-on and user-friendly, interactive and self-governing. For others it is a new media that, like film and video, has become a linear recording art for all other art-forms on a new groovy frontier for advertising.

*Burning the Interface* is a survey of recent CD-ROM work from artists around the world who were solicited via the Internet. The result is a miasma of screens, mice and CD-ROM covers that has already attracted crowds eager to get their hands in the

muck of technology and to navigate some of the many concepts developed by artists who are exploring the territories and imaginations of digital artists.

This reviewer had to visit the exhibition several times to get near the art, and even after several attempts could only engage with the work vicariously. So much for interactivity.

So what does CD-ROM art offer that other art can't? Well, apart from a mouse and mouse pad, many of the artists have included random programs which allow users to create their own images at the click of a button. These images are still from the artists repertoire, and it is the assemblage of these images or the process which has become interactive.

Australian artists are represented including Brad Miller's beautiful *A Digital Rhizome*, John Collette's *30 Words for the City* and Linda Dement's macabre *Cyberflesh Girlmonster*. Like any survey, whether it's CD-ROM exhibitions or queer films or installation art, institutions are never quite happy to provide an entire exhibition of Australian work. Surveys like this are still predicated by the exotic, a concern for outmoded geographic territories rather than information based territories.

This is not to dismiss the fascinating range of works from overseas, especially the work of Luc Couchesne and Nino Rodriguez or the complementary array of mediatic publications and CD-ROM zines and compilations. John Collette, who

was recently interviewed on the *7.30 Report*, put it succinctly when he said new technologies, unlike film and other art-forms, were developing "like a grass fire" on a number of fronts all at once. Clearly, it is one of the most interesting aspects of information technology.

Perhaps another reason this exhibition is causing a stir is that it is not unlike the dawn of cinema, fraught with wonder, magic and dread by its earliest audiences. Like CD-ROM technology, it was a new media that challenges notions of representation, reality and belief.

Of course, one of the big differences is the tactility of new technologies. Soon technology will be more sophisticated with voice- and thought-activated interfaces. But for the moment, the consumer market is all systems go for getting art back into the fingertips.

*Burning the Interface* is an extraordinary exhibition because it also questions the loss of innocence. It invites kids at heart to get back into the swing. This is arguably not something it has set out to do, but the idea of collapsing the schism between art and wannabes seems very attractive to a lot of people who were very happily interacting while others of us interacted vicariously. In fact, the exhibition seems to suggest that what is lost is not so much innocence but performance. *Burning the Interface* reminds us that art is a verb, and this exhibition is already well onto its way to retrieving performance from the clutches of apathy and indifference. ☺