

# New art form, old challenge

By RODNEY CHESTER  
computer editor

**A**N INNOVATIVE exhibition at the Brisbane City Gallery is challenging gallery goers to reconsider the age-old question of what is art.

While many computer users think of multimedia simply as a technique of introducing games, entertainment or educational material into the home or workplace, to a growing school of artists it is a medium which allows them new levels of creativity and interaction with their audience.

The Burning the Interface <International Artists' CD-ROM> exhibition, the first major survey of CD-ROM artists from Australia and overseas, has arrived in Brisbane after its launch in Sydney last year.

The exhibit looks at multimedia art, where the personal interaction between the viewer and the product is part of the artistic experience.

Multimedia art is not new to Brisbane. Students at several tertiary institutes study it and the CD-ROM exhibition, From Silents to Cyber, was a popular part of the Brisbane international film festival last year.

The scope of work in this current exhibit and its location is designed to introduce the art form to people outside the field.

Curator Mike Leggett took to the Internet asking for submissions in compiling the exhibition and received 130 proposals from 110 artists in 14 countries.

Mr Leggett said the exhibit presented the challenge of how to display multimedia art without creating an area that looks like an administration office. The solution he chose was to have several computers spread around the gallery sitting on lily-pod looking stands, with one computer projecting the CD titles on its screen on to a wall.

The museum also created a Web site to go with the exhibit (<http://www.mca.com.au/burning/index.html>). While the real exhibit attracted 600 visitors a day on average during its four-month season in Sydney, the on-line version attracted 2400 visits a day.

"As one reviewer wrote last year about the exhibition when it was launched: 'I know it's fun but is it art?' The review continues that the same question has been asked for centuries with the development of every new art form.

Mr Leggett labels the works in the exhibit multimedia art, which he distinguishes from digital art. Under his definition, the first involves a computer in its display, the second involves a computer in its creation but not necessarily in its display.

The title of the exhibit comes from the technology of burning CDs to produce the works — a medium which Mr Leggett equates with the arrival of bronze casting in the 5th century BC. "Both technologies provide plasticity and permanence," he said.

To view the works, visitors to the Brisbane City Gallery use a computer to navigate through a range of titles, making choices about the way they travel through the product.

One of the titles, OmTipi, by leading local artist Dorian Dowse, is the winner of an Australian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association award for best art and music title.

Another title, Anti-rom, is described in the catalogue as "a critique of those CD-ROMs which fail to go beyond traditional linear form — the kind of CD-ROM where shiny 3D buttons are grafted over packets of pointless information — the automatic vending machine type of CD-ROM where you can press a button and have whatever you want, as long as its Coke or Fanta (and there is no Fanta)".

"Does a CD-ROM have to be banal and boring, or is it rather that crucial formal aspects of interactive media (how it operates as a language, what forms and figurations of rhetoric it makes available and most importantly, what spectatorship it offers) are barely understood by any of us?"

The exhibit has set out to highlight experimental works. "They encourage viewers to work out different ways of interacting and reflect on the interface between people and computers," Mr Leggett said.

While the art form is experimental, the art galleries that display it are also being forced to experiment with the challenge of creating an interesting display.

People can scrutinise the Mona Lisa together but exploring an interactive CD-ROM is typically an individual experience.

And as the area develops, it could be just as important to have fibre-optic networks running through the gallery rooms capable of carrying broadband communications as it is to have large open walls capable of displaying paintings.

The role of the gallery also changes with the medium. Mr Leggett talks about art galleries as being like bookshops where people browse to get a taste of a piece but then purchase the work to take it home and explore it further or log on to a Net site and continue exploring.

Certainly the works that are part of Burning the Interface can take hours for a person to discover all its parts.

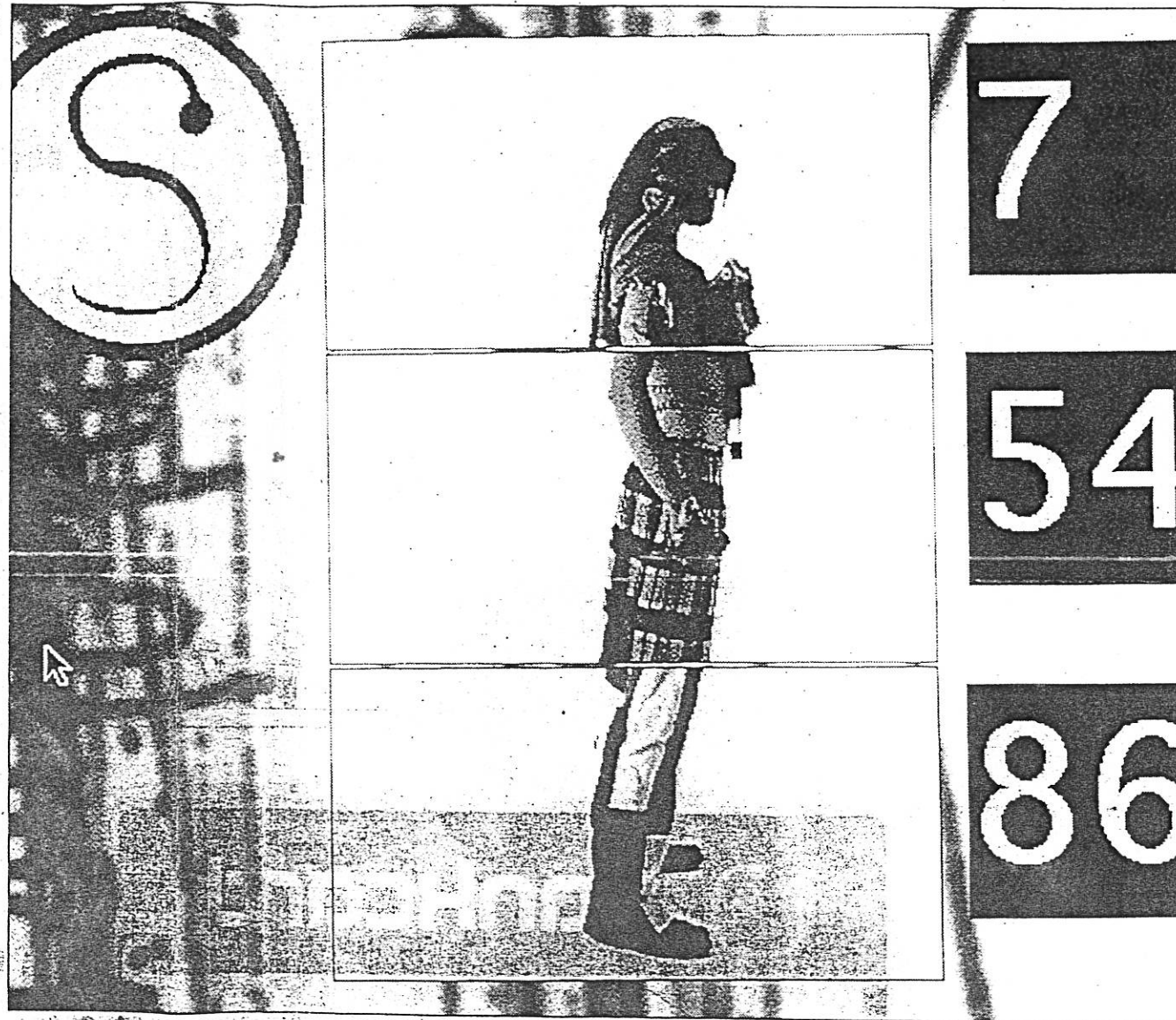


IMAGE from Anti-rom, part of the Burning the Interface exhibition at Brisbane City Gallery.

## \$160,000 Government boost for CD-Rom quality

**T**HE Queensland Government tomorrow will launch the state's first programme designed to foster the development of digital and multimedia arts.

Arts Minister Joan Sheldon will launch the \$160,000 programme, which aims to encourage the growth of high-quality content.

Arts Office digital media and technology acting manager Bret Mannison said there was a content problem in the multimedia industry — for every CD-ROM title that was a hit, there were a long list of misses.

"Technology is not enough on its own — we need imagination," he said.

Mr Mannison said one of the reasons for the establishment of the programme was federal funding for multimedia-based cultural practices was not going to Queensland at the same rate as other states.

Another reason was that last year, the arts grant programme received 65 applications for technology projects, asking for a total of more than \$500,000. That demand for funding in the area had doubled in the previous 12 months.

"Many of these applications, irrespective of their inherent quality, are not successful," he said.

The 18-month programme has been designed primarily to encourage the members of the artistic community to explore and extend their designs in digital media, such as CD-ROM and on-line services. The programme is divided into four areas:

- The innovative works programme which is aimed at high-end research, an area which is typically a high-risk investment but with potentially a high rate of return.

- The studio programme offers access to the production studios at the QANTM Co-operative Multimedia Centre or up to 25 days training at the centre.

- The scholarships and residences programme offers a residence at the University of Southern Queensland's media lab or a scholarship, worth \$20,000, sponsored by Apple and QANTM for a six-month project.

- The business solutions programme will fund innovative technology solutions to improve business for the cultural community.

Media Real Time  
Date June/July

## Reviews

# At the time and space of interface

Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch do the interactive at *Burning the Interface*, *Cybercultures* and *No Exit*

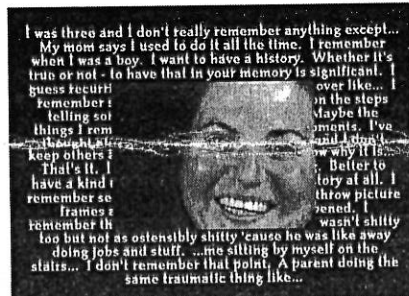
Are galleries quite the right places for exhibitions like *Burning the Interface*, *Cybercultures* and the Luc Courchesne contribution to *No Exit*? You have to ask. At the MCA's *Burning the Interface* at 11.30 on Saturday morning the room is already full of people quietly tapping away. What's the alternative? The private booth? Appointments at your local gallery? Certainly some kind of ticket that allows a couple of visits seems to be indicated. It's depressing to think the only solution is back home in front of your own computer because there are some pleasures in being with other people in a sea of CD-ROMs—though not many. This artform would seem on the one hand to be the least social but, let's face it, the more adventurous works will always need public space. The answer is some as yet unimagined place.

As with any art you can scan images but here it's not just seeing that's at stake but more the time of cinema, the textuality of books, the pleasures of sound and most importantly time to choose from a range of options. You're likely to spend much longer with an engaging CD-ROM than a painting or a sculpture because it requires you to. And watching over other people's shoulders is no fun for them or for you. With some, non-interactive works, like Peter de Lorenzo's *Reflections, Abstractions and Memory Structures* all you do is watch as frames become flames, images unfold and fragment, transform through twelve minutes that slowly focus and transform and sometimes look like 'pixelist' paintings.

A room full of CD-ROMs and similar offerings is like being at a party where every person in the room is talking about something different and everyone is inviting you over to talk. So you move from machine to machine and you know the room is bound to contain a few bores who will never let you go. A couple of women are having trouble exiting from the jaws of the very insistent and confronting seedy-ROM *Necro Enema Amalgamated* in the corner. They're trapped until we start to hover and they make their escape.

With Luc Courchesne's *Portrait One* you feel you'd like to be alone. A young woman speaks intimately and offers you a set of responses and questions with which to address her. Courchesne's other work *Hall of Shadows* for the *No Exit* exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, is like being in a room full of holograms and you know, because you heard it on the grapevine, that if you push the right buttons, you can get these laser-disc-video images to actually speak to one another. Just like the host at a real party. Somehow, these naturalistic/theatrical works are the most confronting because they are the least like paintings and the most like engaging with real people. And you need to be alone or nearly alone with them. A crowded gallery room reduces *Hall of Shadows* to four duets.

In another intimate work at the MCA's *Burning the Interface*, Nino Rodriguez' *Boy*, a woman offers you fragments of memories of her childhood "as a boy", "as a tomboy", when "my mother was always throwing picture frames at people". As she speaks, her words unfold on the screen and you can click on an earlier word and phrase and she'll repeat that passage. You don't get into an exchange as you can in the Luc Courchesne, but by using the mouse you



Nino Rodriguez, *Boy* (United States, 1994)

can get her to repeat and re-order what she has said. You, in turn, play with what she says, creating an even quirkier poetry of the everyday. There's no animation, no collage, you simply choose to watch and listen to someone speak. You can even make her disappear and just read or listen to what she's got to say. All she requires is that you be with her for a time.

There's quite a lot of reading on offer on these CD-ROMs, though the kinds of reading experiences vary. Something like Jean-Louis Boissier's exquisite *Flora Petruscularis* needs an hour. It's like reading a precious book in which words become flesh. The text comprises sixteen quotations from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions*. You move from sexual encounters between 18th Century characters in Quick Time movies—breasts, faces, delicate clothing in surprisingly fine images—to a catalogue of plants in nature to close up specimens of the same that press against the screen. The urge to touch is irresistible. Who said we were mousebound? This one requires patience and a delicate hand. If you push too hard, you'll just find yourself back with the relentless lapping of water over pebbles that lies behind every image and you'll miss the eroticism of the work. Again, the human figures exert a personal directness—gazing into your eyes, flushed with near orgasm in a QuickTime loop of heavy breathing. Only when you think you encounter perhaps too obvious a connection between woman and nature do you feel the pull to another machine.

You can read Erik Lanz' delicate *Manuskript* like a visual encyclopaedia. It's a collection of small images of hand tools that first look like rows of words until you move in closer, clicking on each tool to get

a small movie with the sound of the object performing its function. That's it. But what a pleasure as the everyday object and its sound and movement become epiphany.

Bill Seaman offers a similar intense proximity to the object, though he also takes in roads, buildings and landscapes (even then miniaturising them). In his *The Exquisite Mechanism of Shivers*, Seaman hands over the controls to a Chomskyan generator of sentences and a string of objects in shifting juxtaposition, which you in turn can play with.

The word is firmly and playfully with us again in Felix Hude's *Haiku Dada*. You conjure up a classical haiku in delicate woodblock print settings by capturing, with a move and click, a dragonfly, a falling leaf, or a passerby. Or you can call up the personal files of the cartoon host, Ichi Ni San, a sumo wrestler ("Rank: Behind the Curtain"), his female friend ("Degree in Education; Degree in French Literature; Wish: White wedding, Sydney Opera House") and his dog ("Variety: Cute"), or visit them floating around in a spaceship and shooting out haiku doggerel. From a bag of lines, you can make your own haiku. Animation and reading pleasures abound with a choice of interactive experiences.

Information is everywhere if you choose to read it. As well as lots of background from the artists on how and why the work was created, Bill Barminski's *De-Lux 'o* gives you a mock training course in advertising. You move through the nostalgia of 40s and 50s products ("SubVert, the fish flavoured cereal") packaged with surreal images, like the advertiser's dream—a face with two mouths ("That guy with the two mouths, he would drink a lot of beer"). Brad Miller's *Digital Rhizome* wittily extrapolates complex theory with multiple Quick Time movies (which you can stop-start—card shuffling, riots, curious helixes) but you can still have a great time without dipping into the Deleuze and Guattari passages (though the challenge is to do both).

Playfulness is everywhere at the MCA. *Anti-Rom* is a brisk fun parlour you are seduced to enter. A map of the heavens is hove to stars like Jacqueline Onassis and Myra Hindley, the Moors murderer. Here you can get a little girl to pull a face and say something rude at one click and then something poetic like "Time sleeps in thunder".

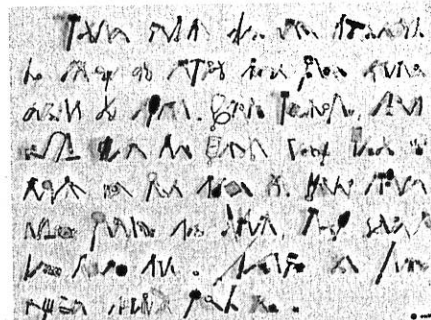
Like the Dutch Mediatic contributions, these works are quick, rude grabs that subvert expectations and stretch the limits of mouse abuse.

Also for the speedy, the aforementioned *Necro Enema* from New York is a fast and insistent prayer for sexual liberation through interactivity: "I love you interactivity, my one and only proclivity." The crude rhyming argument runs that if interactivity lives up to its promise then the speaker will give up molesting children and other deviant practices. Ironically, though, the work itself is not interactive. Once you're in you're in.

One of the demands of an exhibition like *Burning the Interface* is that as you move from ROM to ROM you have to learn a fresh set of usually simple rules, not hard but requiring some patience, quite a bit of laterality and, again, time. Michael Buckley's *The Swear Club* yells, "The way inside a house is usually through the door!" until you click on the door. Once inside, you are in the company of cursing children, old people talking about falling and

forgetting. There's some nice play with silhouettes which reminds you there was a time pre-cinema (engagingly on show in the *Phantasmagoria* exhibition in the next room). You work your way in, feel where you connect if you do at all. With the pressures of time, an audience watching you fumble your way in, it's easy to get impatient with *The Swear Club* and that's not the fault of the artist.

*Cybercultures* at The Performance Space Gallery, is like walking into a Japanese pop playground. At first sight, it's all primary colours—Troy Innocent's *Jawpan* and *Techno Digesto Fetishism*,



Eric Lanz, *Manuskript* (Switzerland/Germany, 1994)

created with Elena Poppa, use dense, rich colours and Potato Man graphics. Martine Corompt's *Sorry* (part of a larger CD-ROM project called *The Cute Machine*) offers a fight to the death with four cute cartoon characters on a giant children's toy. You don't click, you hit and stomp. Patricia Piccinini's *Your Sperm Our Egg Our Expertise* invites you to cost the mutation of your own computer-animated baby and then to take in her fleshy mutant inward images on the wall. In the corner Josephine Starr and Leon Cmielewski's *User Unfriendly Interface* pulls the rug on your sensibilities, a very clever relative of some of the speedier CD-ROMs at MCA. *Cybercultures* is a curious mix of the straight interactive experience, the old gallery pleasure of looking at things on walls, and a bit of real physical engagement. It points towards a multi-experience 'gallery' of the future, a rich playground of dark themes and critical ideas behind a techno-pop exterior.

The MCA's *Burning the Interface*, on the other hand, although of the sit-down-and-interact variety, poses even more significant questions about interactivity and the future of the gallery experience. Revelations from the CD-ROM experience include the power of the word on the screen, the variety of reading experiences, emerging new forms of the book, a more alarming and seductive intimacy than that offered by the movies, simple interactivity that can be profoundly pleasing, the sheer inventiveness of the artists. Despite impatience in many quarters, the mouse and the CD-ROM (or whatever replaces it) still offer a wealth of experience fast and funny or reflective and deep (in the layering of choice). Interactivity in the form of CD-ROM may only be an interregnum between cinema and something else, but *Burning the Interface* suggests a rich experimental domain drawing together image, film, video, sound, the word and the book with new ways of reading, scanning and choosing. How best we should enjoy these new pleasures and how galleries will accommodate us as audience and participants is right on the agenda.

*Burning the Interface*, curated by Mike Leggett and Linda Michael, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, March 27-July 14; *Cybercultures*, curated by David Cranswick and Kathy Cleland for Street Level, The Performance Space Gallery, Sydney, March 21-April 13; Luc Courchesne, *Hall of Shadows*, part of *No Exit*, curated by Victoria Lynn, Art Gallery of NSW, May 22-June 30.



# Is that all there is?



JOHN McDONALD

ART

## Burning the Interface: International Artists' CD-ROM

Museum of Contemporary Art, until July 14.

## Phantasmagoria

MCA, until June 30.

PERHAPS the biggest impediment to the final, unholy triumph of electronic media over traditional craft-based art forms is the boredom factor. In moments of lucidity, even the most dedicated techno-freak must admit that computer art is probably a lot more interesting for the creator than the consumer. It is partly a question of the mind-numbing quantity of information one can cram onto a CD-ROM or a World Wide Web Site, and partly the way we are all pre-programmed to expect instant gratification from anything resembling a TV screen.

Where the artist's imagination can run riot, the viewer may find his or her input to be accordingly diminished. Even with interactive programs that allow a wide range of options, there is the irritating feeling that one is at the mercy of an omnipotent deity who offers only the illusion of freedom. One knows that each option has been plotted down to the smallest pixel, and soon it all becomes predictable and frustrating. Waiting for a new slab of bad prose to appear on the screen, or gazing at a piece of nondescript animation, is rather like being held captive in the corner of a crowded party by some crashing bore.

Soon, inevitably, comes the moment of desolation when the screen freezes or a connection fails. This is an experience one cannot have in front of a painting, unless one lingers too long at an opening at Watters Gallery and finds the lights abruptly turned off. Technology, however, has the habit of constantly underlining our state of abject dependence, by going on the blink when we least expect it. Then one experiences the despair of the technologically illiterate, when the media that seemed so simple and transparent become as obscure as a Dead Sea Scroll.

These are the thoughts I always carry with me to an exhibition of computer-generated art. Although I try to leave this mental baggage at the door, it reappears around every other corner. There it was again at the Museum of Contemporary Art last week, in *Burning the Interface*, an exhibition of artists'



## CD-ROMs, and Phantasmagoria: Pre-Cinema to Virtuality.

With the CD-ROM show, there were the predictable long vigils waiting for someone else to be finished with a computer terminal, followed by disappointment at how rapidly each program used up its small quotient of fascination.

Curators Mike Leggett and Linda Michael made their selection from 130 proposals submitted by 110 artists in 14 countries. Early on they decided to eliminate works that functioned as artists' CVs or documentation, and those which used "traditional exchange protocols associated with games". This cannot have been easy, since there are no fixed boundaries between these categories, with pieces such as Nigel Helyer's *Hybrid* CD-ROM (not included in this

selection) functioning simultaneously as CV, game and a self-contained work of art.

It is precisely those game protocols that entice children and adults to waste hours in front of a computer screen and it may be argued that any form of interactivity is a kind of game. The difference is that *Crystal Quest* and *Lemmings* are games that become dangerous addictions, while many of the artist CD-ROMs seem utterly futile. Of course, nothing could be more futile than *Lemmings*, just as nothing may be more subversive, challenging, poetic, etc, than some of the titles in the MCA exhibition. Yet a game pushes us towards some imaginary goal, asks us to beat our own high score, while CD-ROM art, in comparison, seems like poor entertainment.

Naturally any form of fine art is an elite entertainment alongside the popular culture of footy, discos, beer, barbecues and the races. Yet those artists working on CD-ROM are addressing an elite among elites: those rare souls who combine an interest in avant-garde art and advanced technology, with time on their hands. This is an audience that is still being born and educated, with shows such as *Burning the Interface* providing a push in the appropriate direction.

SO WHILE this is a genuine state-of-the-art event, looking at one of the only artistic avenues where there is still room for progression, it would be a very dull future in which all new artworks were made on computers. CD-ROMs, as

Douglas Kahn admits in his catalogue essay, "are basically nothing but a storage medium", and not even the greatest paintings or sculptures have such a huge volume of information to convey. The most memorable artworks and ideas are often the simplest, with extraneous complexity obscuring the suggestive power of an image. But CD-ROM provides the artist with the means to create a mammoth information overload, a megalomaniac fantasy of putting whole worlds onto a disk.

Unless one has the technology and finances to make room-sized installations, as do the American artists Bill Viola and Gary Hill, this superabundance of data is devoid of aura, presence, or any other — largely indefinable — quality that we look for in a work of art. Peering at a monitor is an

impoverished aesthetic experience, especially when one's patience is tested by the CD-ROM's usual slow reaction times.

In catalogue essays, Kahn and Leggett show they are perfectly aware of the limitations of the medium. Kahn even quotes the opinion of the Czech artist Milan Knizak (who distinguished himself by his rudeness at the 1992 Adelaide Festival and has now become Czech Cultural Minister), that electronic art suffers from "tiredness of creativity". Perhaps it takes someone with such bad manners to cut through the glow of positivity that envelops so many commentators on computer art.

The effervescent Professor Nick Zurbrugg is a good example: in his introduction to an issue of the journal *Continuum*, dealing with electronic arts in Australia, he rails against a sceptical American critic who points out the emptiness of so many post-modern art experiences. In a nutshell, the offensive criticism is "when they're over, they're over". This tautology aptly sums up my experience of CD-ROM art, and, I expect, the experience of many other viewers. Zurbrugg, however, is a representative of the audience of the future, transported by time tunnel back to our own dark ages as a technological missionary. He is incensed that anyone could take such a narrow and negative view of the changing face of art. New types of art require new forms of interfacing, new modes of awareness. But until we have learnt to develop those faculties, or had them surgically implanted in our brains, such openness will always be a problem. Human nature always seems to prefer a more conservative path, and the commercial exploitation of computer technology is currently making us

less, not more, susceptible to experiences that require a little sustained concentration.

I tried the experiment of taking my nine-year-old to both shows in the hope that he would find qualities that I missed. The CD-ROMs exerted little attraction on either generation, but in *Phantasmagoria* he was spellbound by Toshio Iwai's *Music Insects*, an ingenious game where, using a mouse, one may paint lines across a large grid that is traversed by four electronic insects.

Each colour corresponds to a different note, so by painting lines in the path of the insects, one gets them to "play" an improvised composition.

IWAI is not the usual techno-solipsist, since he has designed the sets for a popular interactive children's show on Fuji TV, and for a television science program. His *Music Insects* was easily the most engaging interactive piece, although Agnes Hegedus's *Handstight* is an electronic artwork of unusual formal elegance. This piece was previewed by French curator Anne-Marie Duguet in last year's Biennale lectures, and it is a coup for the MCA to be showing it before this year's Biennale exhibitions get under way.

Hegedus has created a virtual environment that echoes a "passion bottle", inherited from her Hungarian grandmother. This is a work of folk art that puts hammer and tongs, crucifixes, ladders and other symbols of Christ's passion inside a large bottle. To her credit, Hegedus has not tried to copy these objects exactly, but has created a set of brightly coloured equivalents that may be viewed, and circumnavigated, by moving a spherical hand-held camera within a larger, transparent

bowl. As one moves the camera the image appears on a circular screen on the gallery wall. The larger bowl is the cornea of the eye, and the camera the retina. When the camera is removed and pointed at the exterior of the bowl, a gigantic eyeball appears on the screen.

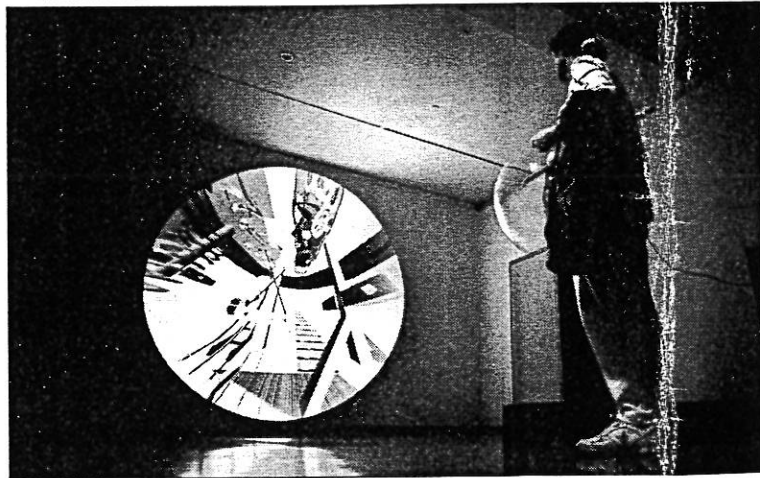
For this show's organisers, Peter Callas and David Watson, Hegedus's piece is significant because of the way it refers to the famous scene in Georges Méliès's film *Le voyage dans la lune* (1902), where a rocket is embedded in the eye of the man in the moon. Theorists of the cinema have celebrated this image as a primal metaphor for the whole filmic process — the urge to penetrate the eye and capture the consciousness of the viewer.

Méliès (1861-1938) is rightfully the star of this exhibition, and the works of Hegedus, Iwai and the American Tony Oursler pay homage to this vaudeville conjurer who became one of the fathers of the cinema. The two short Méliès films that can be viewed at the MCA, including *A Trip to the Moon*, are still as fabulous as they must have been to a contemporary audience. In his compressed plots, rapid pacing and emphasis on special effects, Méliès is undoubtedly the precursor of the current crop of Hollywood films, such as *Jurassic Park*, where the story is a transparent excuse for a roller-coaster ride for the senses. The museum will be hosting screenings of 70 short films by Méliès on May 19 and 26.

Méliès was a complex blend of artist and entrepreneur, a showman who used elaborate sets and technical innovations to produce ever-more spectacular illusions. It is a familiar irony that the results he obtained, with relatively primitive means, are still more exciting than the high-tech productions of the present day.



Left and above, scenes from films made by Georges Méliès. Méliès (pictured below left), one of the fathers of the cinema, is the rightful star of the *Phantasmagoria* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Below right, an installation by Agnes Hegedus at the same exhibition.



Media

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

Date

APRIL 13, 1996

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART



# Mnemonic CD-ROM display demands interaction under clouds of sound

THE AUSTRALIAN  
5/3/96

## Burning with a digital flame

By JACKIE COOPER

EVER stood in an art gallery, toed the half-metre distance line, and felt the impulse to touch the textured surface of the viewed piece? Sure, it sounds clichéd in digital terms, but Burning The Interface, a computer art on CD-ROM exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, from 27 March to 30 June 1996, wants us all to interact.

Exhibits will be viewed in customised units shaped as lilypads, which will seat the viewer on designer chairs and have upward-pointing speakers to produce "clouds of sound".

The exhibition's curator, Mr Mike Leggett, made the call for submissions on CD-ROM over 18 months ago but had to wait for Apple Computer to come in as the main sponsor before the exhibi-

tion could reach MCA gallery space.

The local artists represented in the exhibition include John Colette, Troy Innocent, Linda Dement, Brad Miller and Phillip George — all high-profile names in the new media arena after prominent electronic art exhibitions and expositions overseas.

Phillip George told *The Australian* this would be the first time his collaborative progressive work, Mnemonic Notations, would be shown in Sydney.

The work has travelled to Los Angeles for Siggraph 95, to London for the 1995 Electronic Visual Arts Conference and to a fire-engine red gallery room in New Zealand.

The Mnemonic Notations collaboration between George and the interface designer, Ralph

Waymen, began in 1990.

Waymen worked at the bureau where George had his photographs of paintings scanned to disk. The partnership stuck as George layered images with various digitised images, and Ralph worked in the role of "navigator", hot-spotting routes throughout the high-resolution work.

Mnemonic Notations works on the theme of memory recall, offering 32,000 possibilities with complementary sound.

This exhibit will be the only installation piece in Burning The Interface, located in a separate darkened room and with only a mouse, table and screen visible.

The only illumination in the room will be the projected image.

Latch on to the digital lilypad experience as the exhibition tours the nation's capital city galleries.



Art you feel with your mind... an extract from the interactive artwork, Mnemonic Notations

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Media THE AUSTRALIAN

Date MARCH 5, 1996



Media *Real Time*

Date *Feb/March 1996*

## Digital feature

# Critically interactive

Previewing the Museum of Contemporary Art's *Burning the Interface*, John Conomos demonstrates artists' challenge to prevailing multimedia myths

In the wake of the *Creative Nation* cultural policy document, launched in October 1994, the much touted new media technologies of our post-computer epoch—especially the current hyperbole heralding the internet and CD-ROMs, amongst other popular forms of emerging computer-inflected media—require a sustained deconstructive analysis of the complex dialectic existing between electronic media, culture, gender and power.

We live in an increasingly mediated world where the computer and its related technological myths of artifice, control and rationality are instrumental in creating a sense of reality that is becoming more intricate, more contingent. Given that we are becoming more reliant on digital languages of representation—where the discourse between images and knowledge, cognition and epistemology is being radically transformed—it behoves us to formulate the awkward questions that analyse the cultural mechanisms of Western representation, questions about our socio-cultural institutions and ourselves and our prevailing dependency on spurious modernist paradigms and their legacy to Cartesian perspectivalism.

When examining interactive CD-ROMs as the popular mode of digital media technology, we have to ask why this is so? How do we precisely locate them in consumer culture, contemporary art practice and the older cultural forms and outcomes? How do we approach interactive CD-ROM art in a meaningful dialogic manner? If we are going to probe beyond the current penchant for defining CD-ROMs as something more than an expedient commercial down-loading technology so Australia may enter the post-broadcast world of satellite communications, then we should not avoid addressing the difficult cultural, gender and phenomenological issues. We need to remind ourselves (something that *Creative Nation* conveniently overlooks) that our academic and popular discourse about electronic media (including CD-ROMs) should negotiate the key problem of aesthetic and ethical abdication (Felix Guattari) and the substantial significance of the more marginalised artists and their oeuvres, artists who have been central (since the historical avant-garde) to the little understood, (in)visible historical narrative of electronic art.

The forthcoming show *Burning the Interface*, curated by media artist Mike Leggett and curator Linda Michael at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney is the first major survey exhibition of international and local artists' use of CD-ROM technology that seeks to address these critical issues. It will italicise through its 30 or so diverse examples the range of ideas, forms and approaches informing this new interactive multimedia medium.

Curatorially, as a comprehensive showing of interactive CD-ROM, the exhibition thankfully does not subscribe to the worst critical excesses of intellectual fashions of the post-aesthetic, post-auratic and post-philosophical strands of contemporary thought. For it also contests the glib euphoric double-talk and ethical solipsism that still characterise our critical approach to the digital arts and the persistent tendency to evaluate them in terms of the more established forms of cultural production. This signifies the hermeneutic necessity to question how many examples of new media—including interactive CD-ROMs—exemplify

conceptual, formal and technological facets of a "boy's own adventure narrative" and the overall problematic cultural mind-set that the personal computer suggests "a dialogue with the infinite" (Iain Chambers), or if you prefer, the thematic premise of Disney's fully computer-animated feature *Toy Story* (1995) of "infinity and beyond".

*Burning the Interface* aims to advance popular and specialist interests in examining the potential of CD-ROM interactivity for experimental artistic expression and casts a fairly wide net over artists who are already navigating the medium. The curators decided not to include works that are archival/documentation or artist CV in emphasis, nor works that are primarily developed as computer games. From over 130 proposals from fourteen countries (publicised through the internet that is metamorphosing into a gallery space—a curatorial phenomenon that will rapidly expand as we witness the dynamic growth of cybersalons, etc.) the show will exhibit works from overseas artists like Eric Lanz, Luc Courchesne, George Legrady, and David Blair, and locally Troy Innocent, Phil George/Ralph Wayment, Linda Dement, Brad Miller and John Colette.

These works were chosen for their experimental engagement, reflexivity and humour and share a major conceptual and technical interest in using the CD-ROM interface to permit the user to navigate (with varying critical success) image (still and-moving), word and sound, to experience differing levels of conceptual and technological immersion. In the main, this show is interested in exploring the complex aesthetic facets and possibilities of the CD-ROM interactive encounter and in presenting works that explicitly address a reflexive take on the limits, contradictions and experimental innovation of interactivity. It endeavours to go beyond *Creative Nation's* mistaken corporate emphasis of CD-ROM technology as a marketing/instructional medium.

Amongst the eight or so Australian exhibits, three examples of local interactive CD-ROM art come to mind: Michael Buckley's elliptical sound-driven *The Swear Club* (1994), Brad Miller's Deleuzian-inspired *A Digital Rhizome* (1994) and Phil George and Ralph Wayment's interactive installation meditation on cultural displacement and memory *Mnemonic Notations 5* (1996).

Buckley's humorous and inventive *The Swear Club* displays a diverse cross-disciplinary interest in experimental film, sound art, animation and graphic design. Its pronounced visual and verbal pun-encrusted concerns and minimalist audiovisual style reflect Buckley's non-didactic playful critique of the more familiar 'point and click' technological determinism that often flaws CD-ROM art. *The Swear Club's* Art Brut influenced graphic and typographic features are ideal for its autobiographical subject matter based on Buckley's personal father and son motif.

Miller's reflexive computer-generated screen and mouse interactive *A Digital Rhizome*, is structured on the central notion of the rhizome as stated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "schizo-analysis" philosophy, and represented by their book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). The evocative digital images of this exhibit are based on sophisticated image-processing software and operate as a fairly reflexive digital collage. Its Quicktime movies, still images, sampled soundtracks and multilayered graphic design allow the user to form his or her own elaborate connections and links. Further, the artist's digitised appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari is structured on an unobtrusive interactive interface, so as we follow numerous flights of intensities and relations we have entered into an interzone where identity, the body, space and scale are in constant transition.

George and Wayment's *Mnemonic Notations 5* (1996) is an interactive installation in a darkened room consisting of a large screen, a fish tank, and a black plexiglass table where the user can utilise a mouse to manipulate the work's highly compressed collage images of cyberpunk mythology, postmodern science, Tantric Buddhist symbols, Celtic mazes and Orthodox Greek mysticism. Inspired by John McCrone's 1990 paper "The Ape that Spoke" this installation explores in vivid spatial and metaphorical terms George's long standing interest in postcolonial identity and memory. Between the table and the screen is the fish tank featuring carp that activate (via surveillance software) the installation's soundtrack.

The international CD-ROMs, like the local examples, feature an experimental inventiveness that suggests a questioning approach to the orthodoxies of modernism, postmodernism and the computer tools of interactive multimedia production. Characteristically, they also display a diverse array of thematic and formal interests: cybernetics, cultural histories, subjectivity, the body, autobiography, language, and sexuality.

Luc Courchesne's deftly constructed *Portrait One* (1995) features a female 'virtual being' conversing in three languages (English, French and German). The conversation that unfolds as we interact with the exhibit's minimalist interface depends on the answers, questions and comments we select from the available sets on the computer screen. *Portrait One's* 'face to face' encounter with the virtual subject resonates with irony considering the complex philosophic issues relating to computer-generated interactivity, choice, and participation. Nevertheless, its overall engaging textual approach suggests an inventive humorous simplicity in terms of interactive design.

Tamas Waliczky's *The Forest* (1994), like Courchesne's work, manifests an uncomplicated design approach to CD-ROM interactivity (particularly if exhibited as an installation). Its intricate 3D forest imagery and appealing soundtrack of bus or tram sounds suggest the work's prefigurative tradition of the 'ride' movie of the early twentieth century. In this context, it also suggests many links with virtual reality arcade games (especially the "third window" (Virilio) variety of racing cars and jet planes). Through its omni-directional 'clicking' design emphasis we can journey through Waliczky's atmospheric forest in any given direction. In another critical sense, interacting with *The Forest* resembles an elaborate long take or dolly shot in classical cinema: there is a pervasive sense of unstoppable movement as in the case of the celebrated extended long take in Murnau's *Sunrise* where the couple travel by cable car from the country to the city.

Finally, George Legrady's documentary styled *An Anecdoted Archive from the Cold War* (1994) represents an "inventory-archaeology" of home movies, personal objects, recent collage videos, archive propaganda films, and stories delineating the artist's own history in the context of the Cold War. The main structural motif that defines the exhibit's interactive interface are the floor plans of the Former Hungarian Workers' Movement (Propaganda) Museum Palace of Buda Castle (Building A) Budapest. These floor plans constitute Legrady's memory-aid text (echoing similar conceptual and formal interests in Woody Vasulka's subjective documentary video *The Art of Memory*) as we navigate through the various rooms of the artist's personal history. Its 'non-linear' subject matter functions as a paradox in the context of the CD-ROM's colourful linear floor plans.

*Burning the Interface* is not only a survey showcase exhibition of the more creative instances of personal CD-ROM art but it illustrates how these multimedia exhibits are transforming many of our assumptions about what constitutes art and to be 'human', and are an integral part of our 'lifeworld' and its growing non-neutral deep technological concerns and textures.



par informatique demeure principalement sur supports traditionnels (papier ou toile), alors que plus récemment, les progrès ont permis à la machine d'assurer simultanément les rôles d'interface, de médium et de support. Si l'ordinateur était effectivement un immense calculateur de plusieurs tonnes auquel il fallait ordonner des programmes forts complexes dans les années cinquante/soixante, les années quatre-vingt-dix connaissent désormais une toute autre configuration avec le prototype de la machine multimédia connectée aux réseaux numériques mondiaux (ou «home computer»). Devenu un objet de masse standardisé comme la calculatrice, le magnétoscope ou le lecteur cd audio, l'ordinateur vient répondre aux actuels besoins économiques de nos sociétés post-industrielles. L'accès nouveau à la machine et à l'information qui s'opère alors (par l'hypertexte et l'Internet) module une autre organisation sociale et permet d'investir un cyberspace exponentiel où convergent toutes sortes de convoitises et de phantasmes. Les artistes ne s'y sont d'ailleurs pas trompés ! Depuis la fin des années quatre-vingts, ils sont de plus en plus nombreux à créer et à exploiter architecturalement, musicalement ou encore plastiquement les différents modes du numérique (hypertextualité, interactivité, multimédia, virtualité) et à tenter de faire naître une nouvelle écriture esthétique. Plus qu'un simple outil multi-usage, l'ordinateur («icône de notre époque, de l'information généralisée»<sup>4</sup> selon Matt Mulican) est devenu dorénavant une nécessité intrinsèque aux œuvres numériques.

### Apparition du disque compact comme support des œuvres numériques

Si le cd-rom existe depuis le milieu des années quatre-vingts, cela ne fait qu'un peu plus de cinq ans maintenant que l'œuvre d'art numérique sur disque compact<sup>5</sup> a fait ses premières apparitions lors de grandes manifestations d'arts électroniques

(*Artifices 3&4*, *Video Positive 95*, *World Wide Festival...*) et d'art contemporain (*Biennale de Lyon 95* ou *Documenta X*). Depuis le début de la décennie quatre-vingt-dix, plusieurs institutions se sont établies et ont mis en place une dynamique de production, de diffusion et de réflexion sur l'art numérique. Le ZKM de Karlsruhe reste pour l'instant l'exemple le plus avancé dans le domaine, avec l'édition annuelle de la revue *Artintact*. Présentée sous la forme d'un cd-rom (comportant trois œuvres) et accompagnée d'un livre au contenu analytique, elle figure certainement parmi les meilleurs objets pouvant contribuer à une réflexion sur le sujet. Enfin, l'année quatre-vingt-seize connaît un événement majeur puisqu'une institution nationale – le Musée d'Art Moderne de Sydney – organise sous la tutelle de Mike Leggett, la première exposition internationale d'œuvres numériques sur cd-rom : *Burning the Interface*.<sup>6</sup>

Dans le cadre des pratiques artistiques numériques, on observe deux types majeurs de mise en exposition : la consultation simple sur ordinateur et l'installation (chacune de ces deux formes pouvant comporter plusieurs déclinaisons comme le «off line» et le «on line»). Lorsqu'encore récemment un artiste concevait une œuvre numérique, celle-ci dépendait presque toujours d'une infrastructure lourde et d'une logistique complexe rendant le coût de sa circulation prohibitif et son accès plutôt difficile. L'arrivée sur le marché du cd-rom est venu rompre en partie avec ce régime, en permettant davantage de souplesse, et dans le maniement des œuvres et dans les facilités d'exposition. En fait, le cd-rom qui est un support de stockage d'environ six cent cinquante mégaoctets offrant un accès à l'information selon un protocole interactif, s'est très rapidement imposé aux yeux des artistes et des institutions comme étant un objet d'édition. Au fond, il est fort à croire que nous nous retrouvons actuellement dans une situation analogue à celle du début du siècle lors de l'apparition du microsillon

part presented on the traditional media (paper or canvas), while thanks to more recent progresses in the field the computers have simultaneously assumed the roles of interface, medium and support.

While in the 1950s and 1960s the computer was effectively an immense calculator weighing several tons which was extremely complex to program, the 90s have seen the development of a wholly different type of configuration, a "home computer" type of a prototypical multimedia machine connected to world-wide digital networks. The computer, through mass standardization<sup>3</sup> like the calculator, the tape recorder or the audio cd has begun to answer the present economic needs of our post-industrial societies. New means of access to the machine and to information now operative via hypertext and the internet have brought about another social organization and allow to inaugurate an exponential cyberspace where all sorts of desires and fantasies may come together.

And artists have been right about this! Since the end of the 1980s, more and more of them have begun and continued to create and exploit – in architecture, music and still the plastic arts – the different digital modes (hypertext, interactivity, multimedia, virtual reality) and have attempted to give birth to a new esthetic writing. More than being just a simple multi-use tool, the computer ("the icon of our times and generalized information", according to Matt Mulican<sup>4</sup>) has become henceforward an intrinsic necessity for digital works.

### The Appearance of the Compact Disk as Support for Digital Works

Though the cd-rom has existed since the mid-1980s, it has been only a little more than five years since the digital work of art on compact disk<sup>5</sup> first appeared in large-scale demonstrations of electronic arts (*Artifices 3 & 4*, *Video Positive 95*, *the World Wide Festival*, etc.) and contemporary art (*Biennale de Lyon 95*,

*Documenta X*, etc.). Since the beginning of the 1990s decade, several institutions have been created and have established a dynamic of production, diffusion and thought concerning digital art.

Karlsruhe's ZKM is the most advanced group in the digital domain at the moment with its annual edition of the revue *Artintact*. Published as a cd-rom comprising three works and accompanied by an analytical volume, it certainly assumes a most important place among other similar projects concerned with current thought on the subject. Finally, 1996 witnessed a major event: a national institution, the Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, organised under the tutelage of Mike Leggett, the first international exhibition of digital works of art on cd-rom: *Burning the Interface*.<sup>6</sup>

Within the framework of digital artistic practices, two major types of presentation can be noted: 1) a simple viewing on a computer, and 2) a spatial installation, with either of the two entailing several settings such as "off line" and "on line".

When, even recently, an artist conceived a digital work, it was almost always dependent on a heavy infrastructure and a complex program which made the cost of its circulation prohibitive and its access rather difficult. The arrival on the market of the cd-rom did away with these requirements by permitting greater ease in the handling of these works and in the exhibition facilities. Since a cd-rom will hold about 650 megabytes of information and offer access to the information interactively, artists and institutions quickly saw it as a means of publication. Basically, we find ourselves today in a situation analogous to one at the beginning of the century when the micro-groove record first appeared for recording and distributing music. And as we know that a recorded disk cannot replace a live concert, the cd-rom poses a long series of questions concerning the adaptation and reception of certain works in this medium.



# interesting interactive

FROM the solid walls of galleries to the amorphous gleam of the cyber screen. How things are changing for artists. But, as artists of history have grasped each new material to explore its potential, so do today's artists take the quantum leap into the new electronic technology, exploring its possibilities with explosive gusto.

The significance of this technological swing in the art world this week is brought home by the latest issue of *Art Link* magazine, which is being launched in Adelaide today.

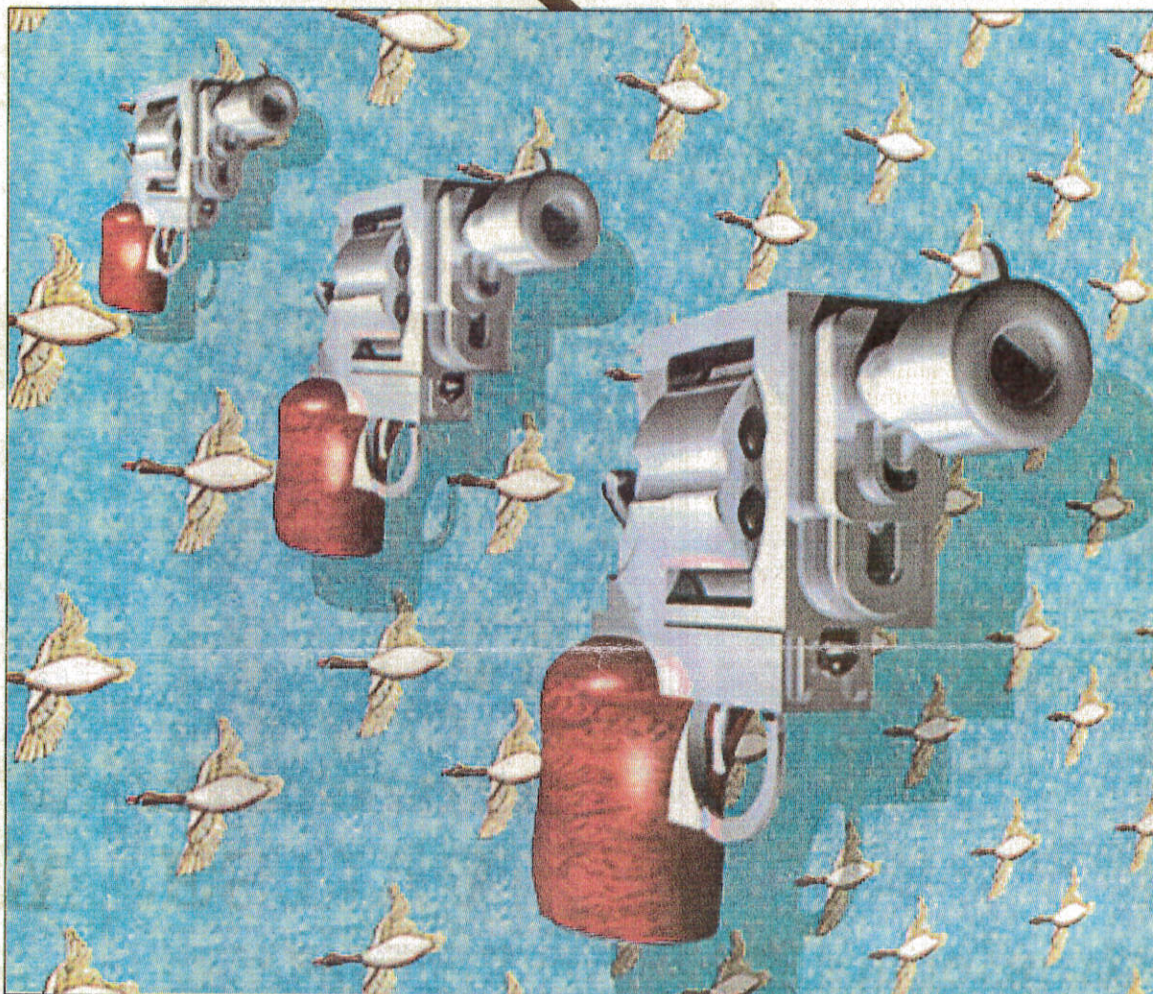
This most respected national visual arts quarterly publication, which comes out of Adelaide edited by Stephanie Britton, has devoted its spring issue to *Arts in the Electronic Landscape* and comes with a CD-ROM called *Sequinz* peeking through a window in the cover.

While the magazine describes and discusses developments in arts and techno culture, the CD-ROM (for use on Macs) acts as a virtual gallery, with comprehensive exhibitions of still and interactive art by leading players in the new technology.

The diversity of digitised art and of artists' concepts for exploiting the pixel, the way and the ram are inspiring, although not all of them are easy on the eye. Much of this art challenges the senses and defies political nicety. Some, on the other hand, offer adventures in a moveable feast of ravishing beauty.

The magazine itself offers contemplations on how virtual is virtual reality and, indeed, how multifarious is the new multimedia. It includes academic analyses, critical essays, artists' perspectives and more examples of new thinking on the electronic art front.

And, of course, with the CD-ROM, subtitled "a survey of electronic art from Australia", *Art Link* makes its mark on this very multimedia by being the first arts magazine in Australia, and possibly the world, to do a double act on paper and computer screen.



Details of images from *Sequinz* CD-ROM and *Burning the Interface* (from far left to right): Jean-Louis Boissier's *Flora Petrinsularis*, Edite Vidins' *Supersonic Blah Blah*, Andrew Bonollo's *Three Guns on the Wall* with *Blue Flying Duck Wallpaper*, Moira Corby's *My Memory Your Past* and Edite Vidins' *Latvian Lunches and Internet*.

## What's innovative @ the gallery?

THE heartland of multimedia in this Festival city is Ngapartji, the South Australian Co-operative Multimedia Centre, in Rundle St, city. Headed by entrepreneur and publisher Michael Harbison, with a phalanx of technical and arts talent, this multimillion-dollar centre, surrounded by clusters of working new-tech small businesses, is the headquarters of our little Silicon Valley.

Since inception, with much liaising and revamping of its old former Salvation Army building, Ngapartji has been gathering its network ready for full public function this year.

It is still under physical reconstruction but next month will burst into official function — with a celebration of the new interactivity which symbolises its role.

Ngapartji's first display of the creative wares of the new multimedia technology will be the hit exhibition *Burning the Interface*. This comes in the form of a collection of CD-ROMs made by international artists.

Each is interactive; a viewer controls the artwork by use of a computer mouse, guiding and selecting modes of exploration of the creation. It is possible to navigate deeply or breeze superficially through works — entirely at the discretion of the viewer. This provides a sort of shared dynamic between art and viewer — "Interfacing" in a literal sense.

Computer proficiency is not an issue in this experience. The viewer's role,

albeit powerful, is technically very simple. Among the myriad possibilities contrived by artists are chances to play with narrative, image distortion or sharp political commentary.

The exhibition, which opens in the Ngapartji Gallery on September 12, is coming from a wildly successful season in Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. Its 30 discs were assembled from among 130 proposals from 110 artists in 14 countries after a call for proposals was put out on the Internet.

Some of the work is individual, some collaborative and some collective. Background information and explanations about the creative processes also are incorporated into the exhibition — along with glossy catalogues for people who still like to keep art on paper.

Among the art pieces are works from the whimsical to the witty, from elegant to grotesque. There is Felix Hude's cute, cartoony *Haiku dada*, for example, and Troy Innocent's *Idea—ON>!* of computer animation, broad brushstrokes of George LeGrady's *#An Anecdoted Archive from the Cold War* and Jean-Louis Boissier's metamorphosing lyricism in *Flora Petrinsularis*.

This historic exhibition will not only offer exposure to the artists of this new era but it also will give the public at large a hands-on opportunity to see exactly what the new-tech fuss is all about.

## DAWN OF A NEW FESTIVAL

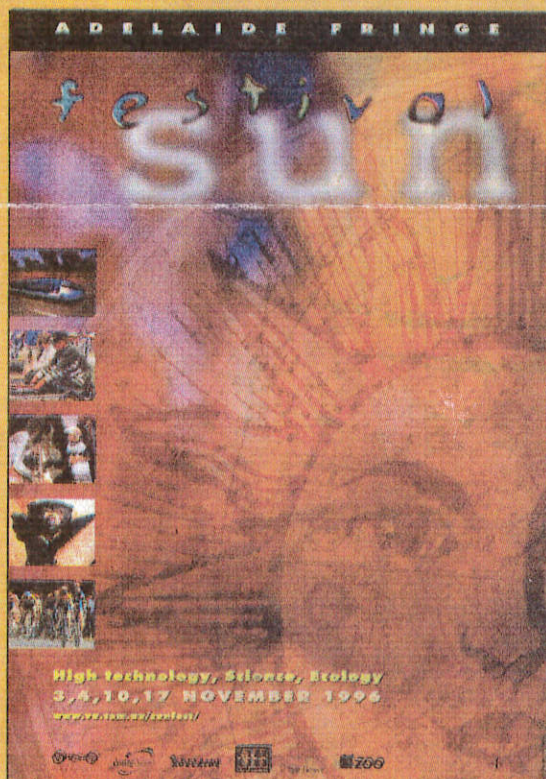
THEY can take away the "Festival State" motto but they can't stop the burgeoning of festivals in South Australia. The Festival Fringe today announces the Festival of the Sun — a state-of-the-art festival about new arts in this State. The Festival of the Sun, to be held over three weekends in November, will celebrate the marriage of art and technology, demonstrating the wonders of new electronic media, why it is an important art tool and why the arts are important to it.

Significantly, the Festival of the Sun will focus on ecological issues... and the power of the sun. For starters, it will welcome the Solar Car Rally as it hums in from the north. Ngapartji, the multimedia centre, will preview the arrival celebrations with live link-ups to some of the solar cars from 36 countries en route from Darwin.

There will be free activities in the parklands with artists, scientists, car enthusiasts, computer buffs and image engineers. Fringe director Barbara Allen says this happening, the full details of which are to be released later, "has all the elements of Sun culture celebrations of old, delivered in a very '90s way".

This festival is the first of its kind to be co-produced by Adelaide Fringe Inc and Australian Major Events. Primary supporters are Ngapartji CMC, Adelaide Zoo, Life. Be in it, the East End Co-Ordination Group, Adelaide City Council and Living Health.

The zoo will be an active player, with November 10 Festival of the Sun events featuring sun bears along with science and environmental technology demonstrations, South American music and dancing. Life. Be in it is turning on cycle races and bringing a cycle rally to the East End, along with a Heart Walk and street event.





## Viva la chamber

By MIRANDA MURPHY in Melbourne

THE 200th anniversary of Franz Schubert's birth forms the centrepiece of Musica Viva's 1997 season of chamber music. Launched in Melbourne, next year's program will span March to October and presents international stars, Australian favorites and hot newcomers.

Schubert's major chamber works will be highlighted in the five-piece *Schubertlade*, named after the composer's legendary evenings of music played to a drawing room of friends and admirers. *Schubertlade* opens the Musica Viva season, performed by six of Australia's top instrumentalists including pianist Maureen Jones, accompanied by mezzo-soprano Suzanne Johnston.

Schubert's works also will be presented by Australia's Macquarie Trio and top chamber group the Australia Ensemble. The Australia Ensemble's headline work is a new composition by Briton, Colin Matthews, commissioned by Musica Viva.

Norway's exciting Vertavo String Quartet returns to Australia this year after its acclaimed first prize in the 1995 Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition. Comprising two sets of sisters, the group will perform Mendelssohn, Sibelius and Schubert's best-loved quartet, *Death and the Maiden*.

And one of the great quartets — Chicago's Vermeer Quartet — will perform Haydn's meditative *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, with actors introducing each movement.

World-renowned renaissance choral ensemble, The Tallis Scholars, celebrate its 25th anniversary this year with an eagerly awaited return to Australia. Wind ensemble, Nachtmusique, also returns to Australia to present two rare Beethoven works and the Overture to Rossini's *Barber of Seville*.

The Adelaide Musica Viva series runs at the Town Hall.

# Future art a key-punch away

By Arts Editor SAMELA HARRIS

IF the electric typewriter had not been broken, perchance, Linda Dement would never have become an internationally recognised computer artist. It was when she could not type her art school essay on the typewriter that Dement was forced grudgingly to confront a computer.

Now, she says, she is no longer able to think or write coherently without a computer.

"I think I have become a cyborg," she declares. "Computers are part of my physical existence, as important as an arm or spleen."

Interestingly, it's arms and assorted parts of the female anatomy that Dement has scanned, digitised, manipulated and transmogrified for the artwork which Adelaide will see at the opening of the *Burning the Interface* CD-ROM exhibition at Ngapartji Co-Operative Multimedia Centre tonight.

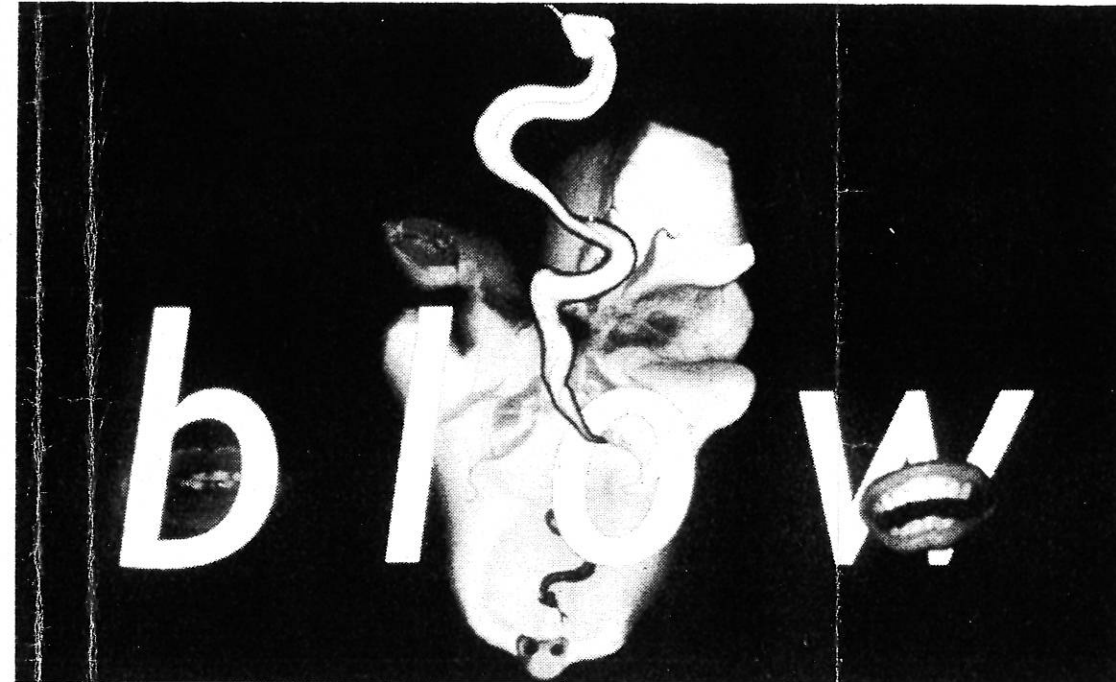
Dement is one of the new media elite who are being represented in this international exhibition of CD-ROM art. Theirs is "interactive" art — art the viewer can steer, ride, guide and go inside, controlling their visual and aural voyage at the click of a computer mouse button. The new technology has provided artists with a fresh tool — and their way of

playing computers is a wild adventure in ideas. Dement has described her computer as "an extra space for thinking in", a "prosthetic imagination".

Dement, who has a Master of Fine Arts degree and a background in fine art photography, has been teaching courses in digital multimedia and authoring for the University of NSW, the Australian Film Television and Radio School and the ANU, as well as creating her own CD-ROM works. Her representation among the 32 artists represented in this historic international exhibition, marks her as one of the cutting-edge artists of the day.

Her work is entitled *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* and it is a quirky, sardonic look at the monstrosities of the human anatomy. The bodies depicted in the work are Adelaide bodies, for Dement had the women of Adelaide "donate images" of body parts during the Artists' Week of the 1994 Adelaide Festival.

She has merged and mingled these body parts, making conglomerate bodies upon which the viewer can "click" and move in animated progressions, creating or dissembling amazing and often quite comical monstrosities. Dement has designed the work very carefully to "sweep" the



*Cyberflesh Girlmonster*, computer art by Linda Dement.

viewer along. There is only an illusion of having control.

"Sometimes, I hear people talk about digital interactive media giving control to the viewer of the work," she explains in an interview with *The Advertiser* via the Internet. "In my experience this is

not the case. I find that interactive works are as tightly and carefully constructed as films or complex buildings or motorbike engines.

"And I think that this is one of the things that goes towards producing an engaging and satisfying experience for viewers. If, as a

viewer I am to determine the work, I may as well go make my own."

Dement describes herself as a "total control freak". "Computers allow me to get into the images and exercise absolute control of almost any aspect, at a minute level," she says. "There are limits

of course — a lack of memory, which is essentially a lack of money — is the most frequent one any computer artist faces. Also I just love technology.

"I have always enjoyed things like motorbikes, cameras, and expensive machinery of any kind has appeal. I like to obsess over technical readings and measurements. Precision and control. Acquiring expertise."

Dement always has enjoyed a range of media (writing, photography, film, animation...) so she revels in being able to end up with an object that includes different kinds of media.

"Also, I like that this is not a finished precious art object thing," she says. "It's more like a magazine or a book. It's an instance of a work which is infinitely reproducible and that really only exists as data. It's also always able to be changed. It's always flexible."

The CD-ROM, however, Dement perceives as being "just a medium". "Digital art may or may not end up on a CD for people to buy or use," she reflects. "Maybe all CD-ROMs will end up as drink coasters and Christmas decorations and we'll get our digital art on line. Maybe not. Actually I don't think about the future much at all. I find it hard enough to think beyond next week."



## SOTHEBY'S

This remarkable self portrait was purchased from the artist in 1923 by Tom Elder Barr Smith for £1000.

It was sold by Sotheby's in August 1996 for \$178,500.

### BOTH RECORD SALES FOR THE ARTIST

Sotheby's Managing Director,

Justin Miller

will be visiting Adelaide on

Monday 16th and

Tuesday 17th September

to inspect and value works of art for inclusion in Sotheby's forthcoming auctions.

For a confidential appointment please contact  
Sotheby's (02) 9332 3500

Left: George Lambert "Self Portrait with Gladioli"

## Converging on film's backyard

By Arts Editor SAMELA HARRIS

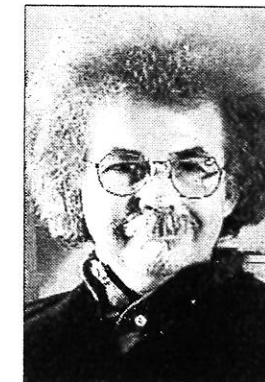
PETER De Lorenzo might have been a painter or a classical violinist. He trained in both arts. Instead, he is a painter, musician, film-maker, computer wizard — an archetypal example of the new breed of multimedia artists.

De Lorenzo is one of the Australians represented in Ngapartji's *Burning the Interface* exhibition of 32 CD-ROMs by international artists.

He says the new technology has not so much inspired his work as "enabled and enfranchised it".

"The state of the art, with these digital imaging tools, represents a whole new exciting set of possibilities for me; I am so glad they came along at the right time for me to use," he says.

"I worked with 16mm film in the '70s using optical printers and so on, but was forced to stop due to the cost; I find, to my joy and amazement, that I can now spend as much time as is necessary, working on my desktop, working through endless permutations and



Peter De Lorenzo's art evolved from film to computers.

combinations of images and sounds, throwing away or archiving segments as appropriate.

"Not only am I able to work again with the medium of layering image and sound, but I am given direct control of every nuance."

"Working and re-working the images, I try to distill essential qualities, getting closer to "the instant"; this is a process of filtering,

of layering, of abstraction. Images and sounds, dancing and singing!"

De Lorenzo has an impressive resume of exhibitions and achievements, much of it in film. And perhaps none of it would have happened had it not been for his Morris Major, the car he sold for \$200 in 1974 to raise the course fee for workshops at the Sydney Film-makers Co-op. The resulting film screened in the Sydney Film Festival, toured to France and spun off for De Lorenzo two Experimental Film Fund grants which led him, via video, to computer technology.

In 1994 a New Image Research grant enabled the making of this exhibition work, *Reflection, Abstraction and Memory Structure ... RAMs*.

De Lorenzo sees the CD-ROM as "today's way" to distribute work from the desktop.

"Tomorrow there may well be another format or platform of delivery," he says. Meanwhile, it is his hope "that the art schools bite the bullet financially, equip the high end digital imaging labs, and enfranchise the next generation of artists".