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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

**VOL 18 NO 3** VOLUME EDITORS **LANFRANCO ACETI, JANIS JEFFERIES, IRINI PAPADIMITRIOU** / EDITORS **JONATHAN MUNRO** AND **ÖZDEN ŞAHİN**

*Touch and Go* is published in collaboration with Watermans and Goldsmiths College in occasion of the Watermans' International Festival of Digital Art, 2012, which coincides with the Olympics and Paralympics in London. The issue explores the impact of technology in art as well as the meaning, possibilities and issues around human interaction and engagement. *Touch and Go* investigates interactivity and participation, as well as light art and new media approaches to the public space as tools that foster engagement and shared forms of participation.

# TOUCH AND GO

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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC, VOLUME 18 ISSUE 3

# Touch and Go

VOLUME EDITORS
**LANFRANCO ACETI, JANIS JEFFERIES, IRINI PAPADIMITRIOU**

EDITORS
**JONATHAN MUNRO, ÖZDEN ŞAHİN**

# Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012

***Touch and Go* is a title that I chose together with Irini Papadimitriou for this LEA special issue.** On my part with this title I wanted to stress several aspects that characterize that branch of contemporary art in love with interaction, be it delivered by allowing the audience to touch the art object or by becoming part of a complex electronic sensory experience in which the artwork may somehow respond and touch back in return.

With the above statement, I wanted to deliberately avoid the terminology 'interactive art' in order to not fall in the trap of characterizing art that has an element of interaction as principally defined by the word interactive; as if this were the only way to describe contemporary art that elicits interactions and responses between the artist, the audience and the art objects.

I remember when I was at Central Saint Martins writing a paper on the sub-distinctions within contemporary media arts and tracing the debates that distinguished between electronic art, robotic art, new media art, digital art, computer art, computer based art, internet art, web art... At some point of that analysis and argument I realized that the common thread that characterized all of these sub-genres of aesthetic representations was the word art and it did not matter (at least not that much in my opinion) if the manifestation was material or immaterial, conceptual or physical, electronic or painterly, analogue or digital.

I increasingly felt that this rejection of the technical component would be necessary in order for the electronic-robotic-new-media-digital-computer-based-internet art object to re-gain entry within the field of fine art. Mine was a reaction to an hyper-fragmented and indeed extensive and in-depth taxonomy that seemed to have as its main effect that of pushing these experimental and innovative art forms – through the emphasis of their technological characterization – away from the fine arts and into a ghetto of isolation and self-reference. Steve Dietz's question – *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?* [1] – remains unanswered, but I believe that there are changes that are happening – albeit slowly – that will see the sensorial and technical elements become important parts of the aesthetic aspects of the art object as much as the brush technique of Vincent Willem van Gogh or the sculptural fluidity of Henry Moore.

Hence the substitution in the title of this special issue of the word interactivity with the word touch, with the desire of looking at the artwork as something that can be touched in material and immaterial ways, interfered with, interacted with and 'touched and reprocessed' with the help of media tools but that can also 'touch' us back in return, both individually and collectively. I also wanted to stress the fast interrelation between the art object and the consumer in a commodified relationship that is based on immediate engagement and fast disengagement, touch and go. But a fast food approach is perhaps incorrect if we consider as part of the interactivity equation the viewers' mediated processes of consumption and memorization of both the image and the public experience.

Nevertheless, the problems and issues that interactivity and its multiple definitions and interpretations in the 20th and 21st century raise cannot be overlooked, as much as cannot be dismissed the complex set of emotive and digital interactions that can be set in motion by artworks that reach and engage large groups of people within the public space. These interactions generate public shows in which the space of the city becomes the background to an experiential event that is characterized by impermanence and memorization. It is a process in which thousands of people engage, capture data, memorize and at times memorialize the event and re-process, mash-up, re-disseminate and re-contextualize the images within multiple media contexts.

The possibility of capturing, viewing and understanding the entire mass of data produced by these aesthetic sensory experiences becomes an impossible task due to easy access to an unprecedented amount of media and an unprecedented multiplication of data, as Lev Manovich argues. [2]

In *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* Timothy Murray writes that "the retrospective nature of repetition and digital coding—how initial images, forms, and narratives are refigured through their contemplative re-citation and re-presentation—consistently inscribes the new media in the memory and memorization of its antecedents, cinema and video." [3]

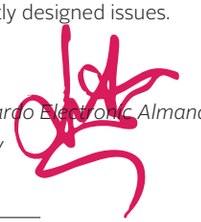
The difference between memorization and memorialization may be one of the further aspects in which the interaction evolves – beyond the artwork but still linked to it. The memory of the event with its happening and performative elements, its traces and records both official and unofficial, the re-processing and mash-ups; all of these elements become part of and contribute to a collective narrative and pattern of engagement and interaction.

These are issues and problems that the artists and writers of this LEA special issue have analyzed from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, offering to the reader the opportunity of a glimpse into the complexity of today's art interactions within the contemporary social and cultural media landscapes.

*Touch and Go* is one of those issues that are truly born from a collaborative effort and in which all editors have contributed and worked hard in order to deliver a documentation of contemporary art research, thought and aesthetic able to stand on the international scene.

For this reason I wish to thank Prof. Janis Jefferies and Irini Papadimitriou together with Jonathan Munro and Özden Şahin for their efforts. The design is by Deniz Cem Önduygu who as LEA's Art Director continues to deliver brilliantly designed issues.

**Lanfranco Aceti**
*Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac*
*Director, Kasa Gallery*



1. "Nevertheless, there is this constant apparently inherent need to try and categorize and classify. In Beyond Interface, an exhibition I organized in 1998, I 'datamined' ten categories: net.art, storytelling, socio-cultural, biographical, tools, performance, analog-hybrid, interactive art, interfacers + artificers. David Ross, in his lecture here at the CADRE Laboratory for New Media, suggested 21 characteristics of net art. Stephen Wilson, a pioneering practitioner, has a virtual – albeit well-ordered – jungle of categories. Rhizome has developed a list of dozens of keyword categories for its ArtBase. Lev Manovich, in his Computing Culture: Defining New Media Genres symposium focused on the categories of database, interface, spatialization, and navigation. To my mind, there is no question that such categorization is useful, especially in a distributed system like the Internet. But, in truth, to paraphrase Barnett Newman, "ornithology is for the birds what categorization is for the artist." Perhaps especially at a time of rapid change and explosive growth of the underlying infrastructure and toolsets, it is critical that description follow practice and not vice versa." Steve Dietz, *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists? Web Walker Daily* 28, April 4, 2000, http://bit.ly/QjEWIY (accessed July 1, 2012).
2. This link to a Google+ conversation is an example of this argument on massive data and multiple media engagements across diverse platforms: http://bit.ly/pGgDsS (accessed July 1, 2012).
3. Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 138.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# Touch and Go: The Magic Touch Of Contemporary Art

**It is with some excitement that I write this preface to Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012.** It has been a monumental achievement by the curator Irini Papadimitriou to pull together 6 groundbreaking installations exploring interactivity, viewer participation, collaboration and the use or importance of new and emerging technologies in Media and Digital Art.

From an initial call in December 2010 over 500 submissions arrived in our inboxes in March 2011. It was rather an overwhelming and daunting task to review, look and encounter a diverse range of submissions that were additionally asked to reflect on the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Submissions came from all over the world, from Africa and Korea, Austria and Australia, China and the UK, Latvia and Canada and ranged from the spectacularly complicated to the imaginatively humorous. Of course each selector, me, onedotzero, London's leading digital media innovation organization, the curatorial team at Athens Video Art Festival and Irini herself, had particular favorites and attachments but the final grouping I believe does reflect a sense of the challenges and opportunities that such an open competition offers. It is though a significant move on behalf of the curator that each work is given the Watermans space for 6 weeks which enables people to take part in the cultural activities surrounding each installation, fulfilling, promoting and incorporating the Cultural Olympiad themes and values 'inspiration, participation and creativity.'

Some, like Gail Pearce's ***Going with the Flow*** was made because rowing at the 2012 Olympics will be held near Egham and it was an opportunity to respond and create an installation offering the public a more interactive way of rowing, while remaining on dry land, not only watching but also participating and having an effect on the images by their actions. On the other hand, Michele Barker and Anna Munster's collaborative ***Hocus Pocus*** will be a 3-screen interactive artwork that uses illusionistic and performative aspects of magical tricks to explore human perception, senses and movement. As they have suggested, "Magic – like interactivity – relies on shifting the perceptual relations between vision and movement, focusing and diverting attention at key moments. Participants will become aware of this relation as their perception catches up with the audiovisual illusion(s)" (artists statement, February 2011). Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi and Emeka Ogboh are artists who also work collaboratively and working under name of One-Room Shack. ***UNITY*** is built like a navigable labyrinth to reflect the idea of unity in diversity that the Games signify. In an increasingly globalized world they are interested in the ways in which the discourse of globalization opens up and closes off discursive space whereas Suguru Goto is a musician who creates real spaces that are both metaphysical and spiritual. ***Cymatics*** is a kinetic sculpture and sound installation. Wave patterns are created on liquid as a result of sound vibrations generated by visitors. Another sound work is Phoebe Hui's ***Granular Graph*, a** sound instrument about musical gesture and its notation.


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Audiences are invited to become a living pendulum. The apparatus itself can create geometric images to represent harmonies and intervals in musical scales. Finally, Joseph Farbrook's ***Strata-caster*** explores the topography of power, prestige, and position through an art installation, which exists in the virtual world of Second Life, a place populated by over 50,000 people at any given moment.

Goldsmiths, as the leading academic partner, has been working closely with Watermans in developing a series of seminars and events to coincide with the 2012 Festival. I am the artistic director of Goldsmiths Digital Studios (GDS), which is dedicated to multi-disciplinary research and practice across arts, technologies and cultural studies. GDS engages in a number of research projects and provides its own postgraduate teaching through the PhD in Arts and Computational Technology, the MFA in Computational Studio Arts and the MA in Computational Art. Irini is also an alumni of the MFA in *Curating* (Goldsmiths, University of London) and it has been an exceptional pleasure working with her generating ideas and platforms that can form an artistic legacy long after the Games and the Festival have ended. The catalogue and detailed blogging/documentation and social networking will be one of our responsibilities but another of mine is to is to ensure that the next generation of practitioners test the conventions of the white cube gallery, reconsider and revaluate artistic productions, their information structure and significance; engage in the museum sector whilst at the same time challenging the spaces for the reception of 'public' art. In addition those who wish to increase an audience's interaction and enjoyment of their work have a firm grounding in artistic practice and computing skills.

Consequently, I am particularly excited that the 2012 Festival Watermans will introduce a mentoring scheme for students interested in participatory interactive digital / new media work. The mentoring scheme involves video interviews with the 6 selected artists and their work, briefly introduced earlier in this preface, and discussions initiated by the student. As so often debated in our seminars at Goldsmiths and elsewhere, what are the expectations of the audience, the viewer, the spectator, and the engager? How do exhibitions and festival celebrations revisit the traditional roles of performer/artist and audiences? Can they facilitate collaborative approaches to creativity? How do sound works get curated in exhibitions that include interactive objects, physical performances and screens? What are the issues around technical support? How are the ways of working online and off, including collaboration and social networking, affecting physical forms of display and publishing?

As I write this in Wollongong during the wettest New South Wales summer for 50 years, I want to end with a quote used by the Australia, Sydney based conjurers Michele Barker and Anna Munster

> *Illusions occur when the physical reality does not match the perception.* [1]

The world is upside down in so many alarming ways but perhaps 2012 at Watermans will offer some momentary ideas of unity in diversity that the Games signify and ***UNITY*** proposes. Such anticipation and such promise!

**Janis Jefferies**
*Professor of Visual Arts*
*Goldsmiths*
*University of London, UK*

23rd Dec 2011, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia

1. Stephen L. Malnik and Susana Martinez-Conde, *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about our Everyday Deceptions* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 8.

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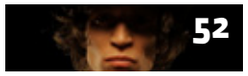
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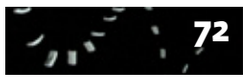
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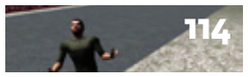
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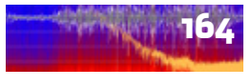
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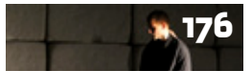
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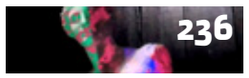
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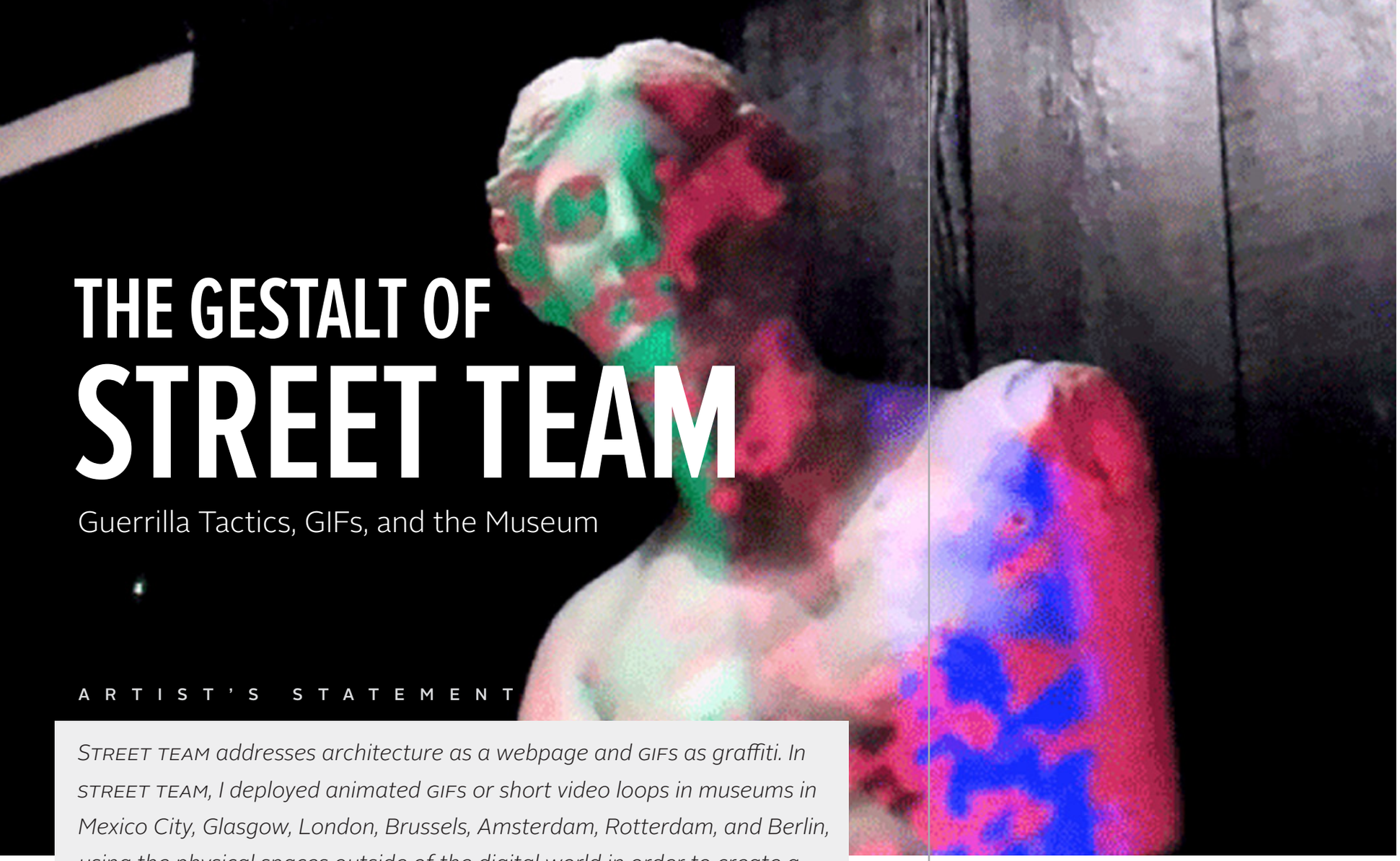
# THE GESTALT OF STREET TEAM

## Guerrilla Tactics, GIFs, and the Museum



*Video Texture* by Andrew Rosinski on a replica of the Venus de Milo at the Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, Scotland.

*by*

***Charissa N. Terranova***

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

*STREET TEAM addresses architecture as a webpage and GIFS as graffiti. In STREET TEAM, I deployed animated GIFS or short video loops in museums in Mexico City, Glasgow, London, Brussels, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Berlin, using the physical spaces outside of the digital world in order to create a discourse between public and private space. I brought together GIFS made by several different artists for the project. At once relational and gestural, animated GIFS are small digital movements and moments existing on the Internet. The Animated GIF format of moving images can be used in conversation to communicate simple ideas in response to other people, other GIFS/images or even websites. They can be short samples, fractions of events, or hypnotizing, timeless loops. This project was made possible by a travel grant from the John W. Kurtich Foundation.*

**STREET TEAM is a digital-physical border-crossing project the central component of which is the guerrilla projection of animated GIFs in major museums in Mexico City and Western Europe.** The varied and manifold movements of STREET TEAM, from Internet connection and intercontinental flight to community of GIFS and in-situ museum projection, constitute a kinesthetic optical-skin connecting people digitally and in real space. In its large, fluctuating totality, STREET TEAM makes up a dynamic gestalt of shifting bodies and action across borders; a network of friends and strangers coming together to create a protean image of social information and institutional subversion.

Alfredo Salazar-Caro, artist, curator, and student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, spearheaded STREET TEAM, which took place in major museums in Mexico, The UK, Germany, The Netherlands, and Belgium in January 2012. Salazar-Caro entered major European museums and, with a small projector and camera to document himself, surreptitiously projected animated GIFS amassed from friends, colleagues and professors, including Jon Cates, Theo Darst, Bill Miller, Francoise Gamma, Jeremiah Johnson, Rosa Menkman,


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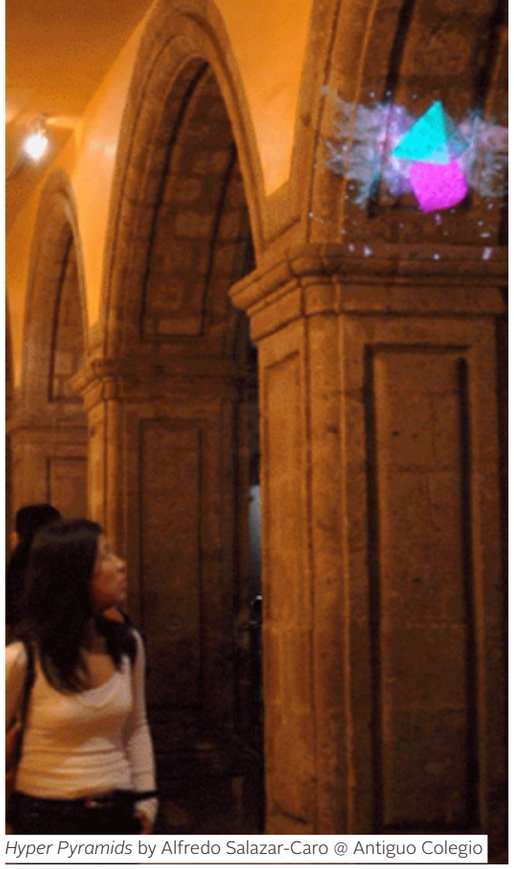

*Hyper Pyramids* by Alfredo Salazar-Caro @ Antiguo Colegio De San Ildefonso, Mexico City, Mexico.

and Brian Khek, next to or on top of a range of art, from old, canonical works of fine art to contemporary, populist works. (See images).

In choosing the GIF, Salazar-Caro participates in a rising vanguard of the outmoded. Introduced in 1987, the Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) has taken on a new life as the bearer of avant-garde promise. Small, cute gestural moments, GIFS can be anything: a kindle of kittens, a floating alphabet with letters that jiggle, a winking Smurf, or your favorite My Pretty Pony, tail swatting. A combination of charm and obsolescence has charged them with the power of subversion. Sally McKay argues the GIF has *affective* qualities, which, following the writings of Brian Massumi and others on new media embodiment, refuse the ontological trap of hylomorphism, or more simply put Cartesian dualism. With other modes of digital interface, the GIF promises a rewriting of the fleshy seat of awareness, action, and understanding that constitute consciousness. With respect to the obsolescence of the GIF – that it is old, low-tech, and "not innovative," to quote Jon Cates – it further thwarts the rapid intake-out take movement of capitalism. Certainly not the latest

*Certainly not the latest in technology, animated GIF images might be cause for reminiscence of an old Hallmark Card or they might be part of the subversions of STREET TEAM.*


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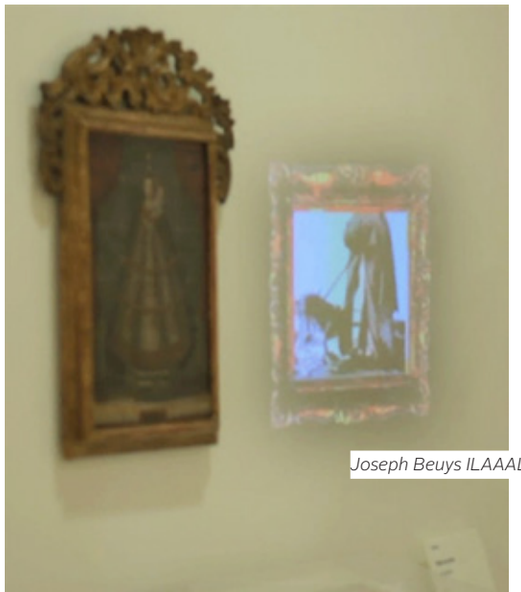
*Gradar* by Eric Fleischauer on Madonna and Child @ Museum Boijmans vand Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

*Fractura* by Francoise Gamma @ Center for Fine Arts BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium.



*Joseph Beuys ILAAALM Remix* by Jon Cates @ Museo Soumaya, Mexico City, Mexico.

in technology, animated GIF images might be cause for reminiscence of an old Hallmark Card or they might be part of the subversions of STREET TEAM. A matter at once of deletion and addition, taking away from the old masterworks and contemporary art while unleashing latent energies, the individual interventions of STREET TEAM are layered acts, equal parts appropriation, institutional critique and light art. ■