art now is a programme dedicated to contemporary art. Exhibitions include recent work by emerging and established artists from this country and abroad. The art now series aims to provoke discussion and awareness of new and unfamiliar art relevant to Britain today.
ART AND MONEY ONLINE

Imagine looking up at a night sky that is also a live representation of the global Stock Market. Each star represents a company. Fed by massive streams of live financial information, they glimmer and pulse, immediately flickering brighter whenever their stock is traded anywhere in the world. Digital creatures, a form of artificial life, inhabit the complex star field, feeding off the trading, much as stockbrokers do.

This is *Black Shoals Stock Market Planetarium*, by Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway, one of the works comprising *Art and Money Online*.

The exhibition explores the impact of commercialisation on the Internet, an issue that has greatly concerned online artists over the last five years. The rapid growth in the use of the Net – partly business-, and particularly finance-led, and partly brought about by the unified interface of the World Wide Web – has not only given artists a large potential audience for their work, but has also profoundly changed the character of the online community. It is now more diverse and less cohesive, and (some would argue) more passive, less engaged in talking than in gazing and shopping.

Each of the works in *Art and Money Online* embodies a different response to this new condition, focusing upon private financial networks, the commercial vulgarisation of Net culture, and an alternative online culture of collaboration and gift-giving.

While the Net is often thought of as a public space, most of it consists of private systems over which financial and business giants trade and communicate. Autogena and Portway’s *Black Shoals* illuminates a part of this system, using a novel form of data visualisation.

Stock market data has been an attractive source for artists to draw upon, not least because it has a proven link to cultural trends and the performance of the art market. In various works, the overall rise and fall of the market has been tied to the flow of fountains and even the hemlines of skirts, but the data in *Black Shoals* processes each share price individually. While the markets have an immediate effect on all our lives, for many they seem remote as the stars. In *Black Shoals*, viewers look upon the sublime spectacle of the markets in action as the ancients gazed at the night sky, immersed in data and searching for patterns that might disclose the future. Furthermore, the artificial life creatures that inhabit *Black Shoals* adapt and evolve as they apprehend what success means within the parameters of their world; they may come to have an instrumental purpose, being cousins to the automated trading programs already active on the world’s exchanges.

*Black Shoals* is an extremely ambitious project, and it is indicative of the collaborations between artists, academics, scientists and engineers that have been facilitated through the Net. Autogena and Portway have been fostering such links for some time (for example, in Autogena’s project on the theme of breathing initiated in 1997; see www.autogena.org/Breathing/home.html) yet their piece for *Art and Money Online* is at once a new form of knowledge, and a tart comment on the aspiration to grasp and reduce all data to a single frame.

The commercialisation of the Net has produced a strange mix of participatory and corporate culture which Jon Thomson and Alison Craighead have long been mining for their work. Among the most...
prominent of British net artists, they make pieces that approach online anthropology, holding up the bizarre habits of net users to the art audience. Some of their work has drawn upon the strange pages that people devote to their pets, for instance, or has examined the specific cultural forms that have proliferated on the Web such as the cutey graphical animations with which people decorate their sites. There is little point trying to trump a culture that throws up such eccentricities as pages devoted to dancing hamsters and varieties of digestive biscuit, and Thomson and Craighead don’t try, instead throwing a frame around the material they select just sufficient to let the viewer take a step back and gape.

While much of their work has been produced for the Web, Thomson and Craighead have always worked in gallery spaces with installation and video works, and have thought a great deal about how online works can function in art spaces. For Art and Money Online, they will show CNN Interactive just got more interactive, which allows users to select emotive, if tawdry, soundtracks to accompany the news of the day on the CNN website. This simple but effective intervention draws attention to concerns about the increasing difficulties in separating out the two halves of ‘infotainment’, especially on the Web where another distraction is only ever a click or a frame away.

Redundant Technology Initiative, a group of artists based in Sheffield are, as their name suggests, concerned with the truly extraordinary waste that is characteristic of the computer industry. Machines are rendered apparently useless in the space of a few years, long before the end of their components’ lifespan. RTI persuade companies to give them their ‘old’ machines and use them either for works of art or for their community computer space. Using donated machines and free Open Source software, they come close to achieving their goal of ‘no-cost technology’. The main cost of their activity, of course, is labour but for many people in the Sheffield area, one of the most deprived in Europe, time is plentiful. Users of the computer centre who help out can earn RTI credit slips that can be set against the centre’s fees. In their creation of an alternative micro economy, RTI offer an exemplary practice, and one that is in sympathetic alignment with the anti-corporate culture of many Internet activists.

While RTI is best known for stand-alone banks of computer monitors and installations using disassembled computer components, they have recently been working with material drawn from the Internet. For the exhibited work, Free Agent, they will use donated machines to make a large-scale display of material from the many websites that purport to offer their users free goods. Here reclaimed hardware and free software are directed at sites that desperately, if dubiously, offer the user something for nothing.

Art and Money Online is not precisely an Internet art exhibition, though all the pieces included draw on data from the Internet. Unlike works that exist only online, each work here needs the gallery space to best show its physical or projected form. The offer of something for nothing on the Web is an issue that carries us beyond these hybrid works to art that only exists online. An online work by Thomson and Craighead is a gift to its viewers, and has no material presence. Anyone can easily make perfect copies of it for free, or copy the code and use it in their own works. This is plainly an unfamiliar type of art work, different...
even from many of the most radical works of conceptual art which retained some sliver of materiality that was seized upon as they were drawn into mainstream art institutions. The ownership and status of online art works is a difficult matter for the art world, mixed in traditional craft practices and habits of patronage, just as the sharing of audio files is terrifying to the music industry.

Art and Money Online is a way of exploring the interaction between online art and the museum. Each have things to offer one another: the museum brings interaction between online art and the museum. Each detail from Landfill 1999 just as the sharing of audio files is terrifying to the traditional craft practices and habits of patronage, institutions. The ownership and status of online art was seized upon as they were drawn into mainstream art which retained some sliver of materiality that was too much in their transformation into gallery works, and the museum did not change enough. The challenge of online art is greater, and holds out the hope for a democratic and participatory transformation of art. Even so, the resistance of the art institutions, and above all of the art market, is strong and dangerous. There is a risk that this kind of exhibition becomes a stage in the domestication of Internet art, as online culture and the art world make the necessary adjustments for cohabitation. The intended purpose of this show is different: to allow art audiences, many of whom have only the vaguest idea that Internet art exists, to glimpse its possibilities; and to highlight the issue of online commercialisation and illumine the resistance that has emerged in response.

Julian Stallabrass

Redundant Technology Initiative

detail from Landfill 1999

Crushed non-functional computer parts

Courtesy lowtech.org

Selected projects 2001

Channel Communication Amplifiers, Folkstone and Boulogne
Most Blue Skies, with Samy Dajvandia, European Space Agency and Richard Barnigts, Space and Atmospheric Physics at Imperial College
2000

Bymobile, Aarhus School of Architecture and the Jutland Academy of Fine Arts, Denmark 1997-98
autogena projects, Neal’s Yard, London

JOSHUA PORTWAY

Biography

1967

Born St. Ives
1992

West Surrey College of Art and Design
Lives and works in England

Selected projects 2001

Noodle, www.realworld.co.uk/ rwmm/noodle
Code Zebra, www.codezebra.net, with Sara Diamond
2000

SHIFT-CTRL, Beall Center for Art and Technology, University of California, Irvine

ART AND MONEY ONLINE

Tate Britain
6 March – 3 June 2001

LISE AUTOGENA & JOSHUA PORTWAY

www.siam.org/shaits

LISE AUTOGENA

Biography

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Architecture School of University of East London
1991

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Channel Communication
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