

BITMAP: as good as new



Eteam, "What did one elevator say to the other? Darn! We are so 8bit", Director applet

Kimberley Hart,
"Speed Project: Pink & Yellow
Explosion", wool



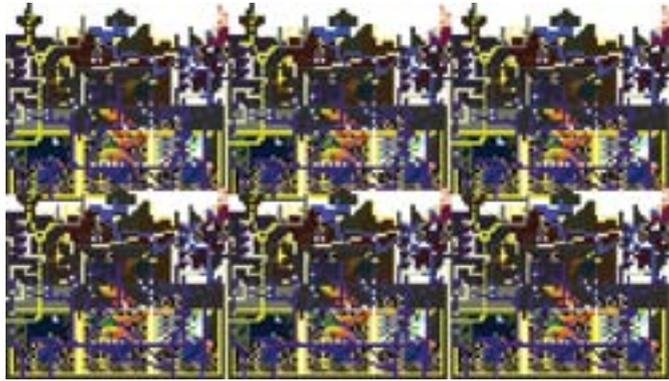
Dragan Espenschied and Oja Lailina, "scarf" (Pacman and Google)

BITMAP: as good as new
June 25 – July 25, 2008

The Leonard Pearlstein Gallery
Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts and Design
Drexel University

Given Drexel University's technology driven mission, I think it is particularly fitting to collaborate with vertexList Space and Marcin Ramocki to bring Bitmap to the Leonard Pearlstein Gallery. Ironically, the technology highlighted in this exhibit is not by any means "new", at least not the cutting edge type of technology that academic institutions usually tend to promote. Bitmap does, however, demonstrate a highly inventive new use of old technology. It supports a growing artistic tendency to not only look back at old technological resources as aesthetic curiosities, but to consider those resources as a new medium. This new medium, obtainable through its obsolescence, is reconsidered, reused, hacked, and modified for artistic exploration.

Ephraim Russell, Assistant Professor
Art and Art History Department



Petra Cortright,
animated GIFs, selection

[about]

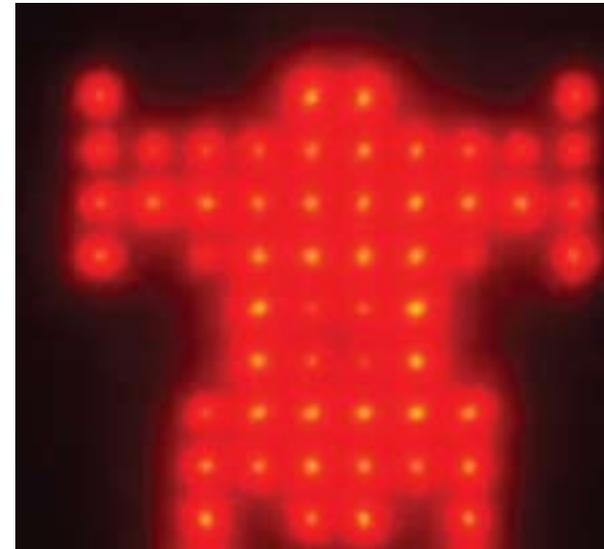
The simple idea behind this group show was to celebrate the history and various occurrences of the bitmap image in the new media art. It consists of both historically significant and brand new works from media artists in various stages of their careers. The original exhibition took place at vertexList gallery and was assembled in conjunction with Blip Festival '07 – an electronic music festival in NYC that brought together chiptune musicians from all over the world. Chiptunes (or micromusic) refers to 8-bit music created with older computers and game consoles.



Aron Namenwirth "Untitled #30", acrylic on panel

"B I T M A P: as good as new" is a visual counterpart of Blip and features works by Cory Arcangel, Chris Ashley, Mike Berardino, Mauro Ceolin, Petra Cortright, Paul Davis, DELAWARE, Notendo (Jeff Donaldson), Eteam, Dragan Espenschied, Christine Gedeon, Kimberley Hart, Daniel Iglesia, JODI, Olia Lialina, LoVid, Kristin Lucas, David Mauro, Jillian McDonald, Tom Moody, Aron Namenwirth, Mark Napier, Nullsleep, Marisa Olson, Will Papenheimer, Prize Budget for Boys, Jim Punk, Akiko Sakaizumi, Paul Slocum, Eddo Stern, and CJ Yeh.

Bitmaps, besides their obvious nostalgic associations with 80's video games and pixelated, iconic figurines of Atari 800 and Commodore 64, open up a plethora of issues related to the curious relationship between binary information and digital images.



Akiko Sakaizumi,
"Get Your Head #2",
custom electronics,
animation

[bitmap and vector]

There are two different metaphors pertinent to the world of computer images: the bitmap and the vector. As a matter of fact, these are much more than metaphors; they are markers of certain discourses of the post-Baudrillard visual culture. They are absolutely essential in understanding the context of "image" in new media.

The pixel-based bitmap image is a tool of manipulation of the "real". The myth of the real (as described by Baudrillard) is at the root of a raster image: it is a product of scanning and parsing photographic images in order to "correct" or "falsify" them. Largely based in the operational environment of Adobe Photoshop, bitmaps preserve the umbilical cord connecting us to the credibility of photographic documentation, verifiability, and, however distant, "truth". Mapping colors onto a grid is modernist in essence and familiar in its nostalgic attachment to photography.

The idea of discrete-unit image composition goes back to resin printmaking methods and optical photography: a layer of silver emulsion sitting on a piece of paper is exposed to light and the stains of corroding particles fill the paper surface at (what we would call today) 2000 dot per-inch resolution. The invention revolutionized our way of thinking about image-making: suddenly the camera lens not only claimed the territory of painting but also declared itself as a source of the ultimate proof of being – evidence of events, a memory. Soon after, the photo-image became animated: cinema and television screen imitated the luminous, optical reality by turning the discrete image units into artificial light dots.

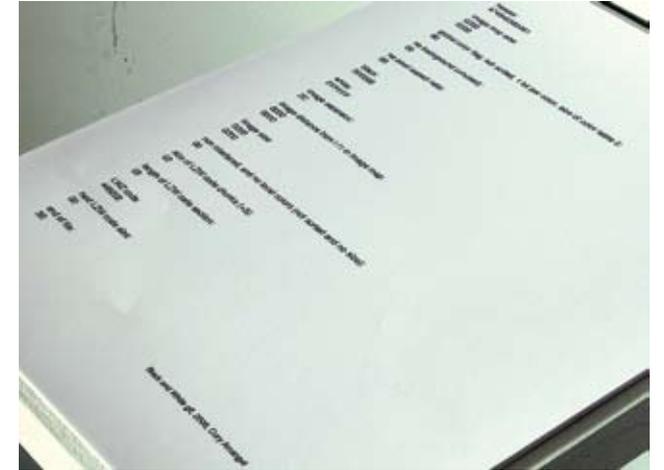


Jeff Donaldson, "Untitled", NES images on panels



JimPunk, "DVblogH4ck movies", online stream

In 1954 a group of mathematicians and engineers at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study came up with a process of representing typographic signs produced by the guts of an enormous proto-computer with glowing diodes. The concept of a pixel was born: a synthetic, luminous spot – an element of the image available for graphic interpretation of cybernetic data flows. The proper term was created in 1965, first mentioned in an article by Fred C. Billingsley of Caltech's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Some quarter of a century later, computers became media tools and a need for a "photorealistic" computer image forced a marriage



Cory Arcangel, "Black and White gif", hexadecimal image editor code



Will Pappenheimer, "Mickey Mouse", pom-poms on canvas

of optical dot and synthetic pixel: bit mapping. The "Tetris"-type 8-bit graphic was replaced by various bitmaps: grids of pixels capable of imitating photographic images.

Bitmap is simply a type of memory organization or image file format used to store digital images, meaning just a map of bits – a spatially mapped array of bits.

Pixel is a threshold of two universes: the micro-universe of binary code stored in an array of miniscule magnets and the macro-universe of a hi-res, photorealistic bitmap image.

The vector image operates differently and was originally conceived for very different purposes. While bitmap tries to mimic a photo by displaying a mosaic of pixels (bit mapping), a vector image is purely synthetic. Historically employed for commercial design, corporate logos, simple low-memory graphics, and typography, more recently vectors are most present in 3D gaming and Shockwave websites. Vector imaging is based on the use of ingenious mathematical vectors (called Bezier curves) and various fills and gradients. Pierre Bezier was a French engineer working for Renault. His invention was only used to design car curves until 1972, when he released the concept to the free market. Each Bezier curve is composed of vertices (points) plus two moveable handles per vertex,



C.J. Yeh, "myAvatar = myChuckClose", Flash applet, online

the positions of which define the curvature of a given segment of the curve. The property holding full mathematical description of a vector image is referred to as vertexList.

Vector image essentially does away with the necessity of the "real" and photo-optical referent. It is a child of a purely virtual formation process and a "perfect simulation", to continue the Baudrillard reference. Unlike the Photoshop filtering process that "tricks" the photo to look a certain way via a chain of intricate algorithms, a vector is infinitely pliable and non-photographic – any vertex can be repositioned along with the handles at any point. There is no claim of optical proximity to some existing universe; there is only the design for its own sake. After all it was initially used to draw out completely original design concepts



Mauro Ceolin, "CARTRIDGEdream", sculptures



LoVid, Archaetech, sound sculpture



JODI, "Composite Club", DVD, edition of 7

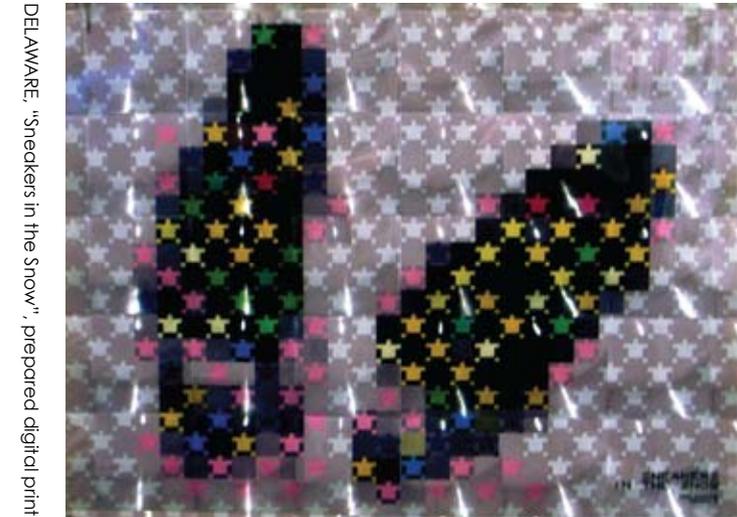
for the automobile industry. This, of course, doesn't mean that 3D game graphics don't attempt being ultra-realistic (e.g., Final Fantasy); they simply define this ultra-realism as an outcome of a sophisticated simulation.

"Bitmap vs. vector" is a simple extension of a more familiar chain of binary couples, like "analytical vs. synthetic", "nostalgic vs. timeless", or "simulacrum vs. simulation".

The next logical step is to question whether this suggested dichotomy extends beyond the world of computer imaging. The beginning of the 21st century is a curious period where the virtual universe of computers enters its middle age and some residue of this virtuality enters the realm of "material". Companies adjust their strategies to the rules of e-commerce, people make their living sustaining Massive Online Multiplayer Games, and the stylistic elements of digital image make their way to furniture and jewelry design. It is the virtual that becomes the reference. By the same token, the new media officially replace printed matter in social programming / education and shape



David Mauro, "Icarus Returns to Spook His Father", encaustic on panel



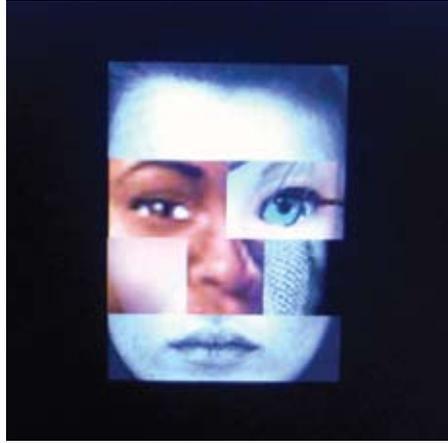
DELAWARE, "Sneakers in the Snow", prepared digital print



interpersonal communication and sexuality. It becomes essential to critically analyze our digital heritage before we forget how it originated out of our eternal urge to accelerate. Entities like code, software, hardware, programming objects, or protocol became legitimate metaphors that will inevitably re-surface in our social institutions, legal system, and politics.

Marcin Ramocki, 2007

Edited by Matt Freedman
Fragments published in Taipei Museum Journal as
""VertexList: An Attempt at Disclosure", Feb. 2007.



this page:

Paul Slocum, "Minimum Atari 2600 Emulator", installation

Mark Napier, "American Heroes", Java applet

Kristin Lucas, "Watch out for Invisible Ghosts", DVD

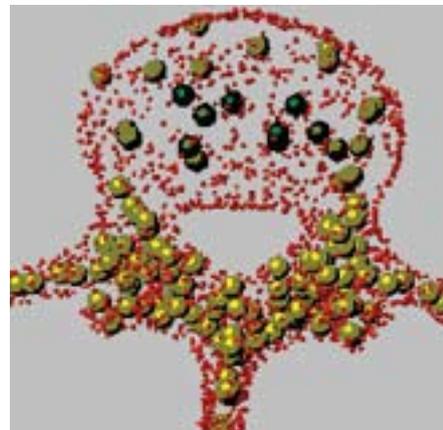
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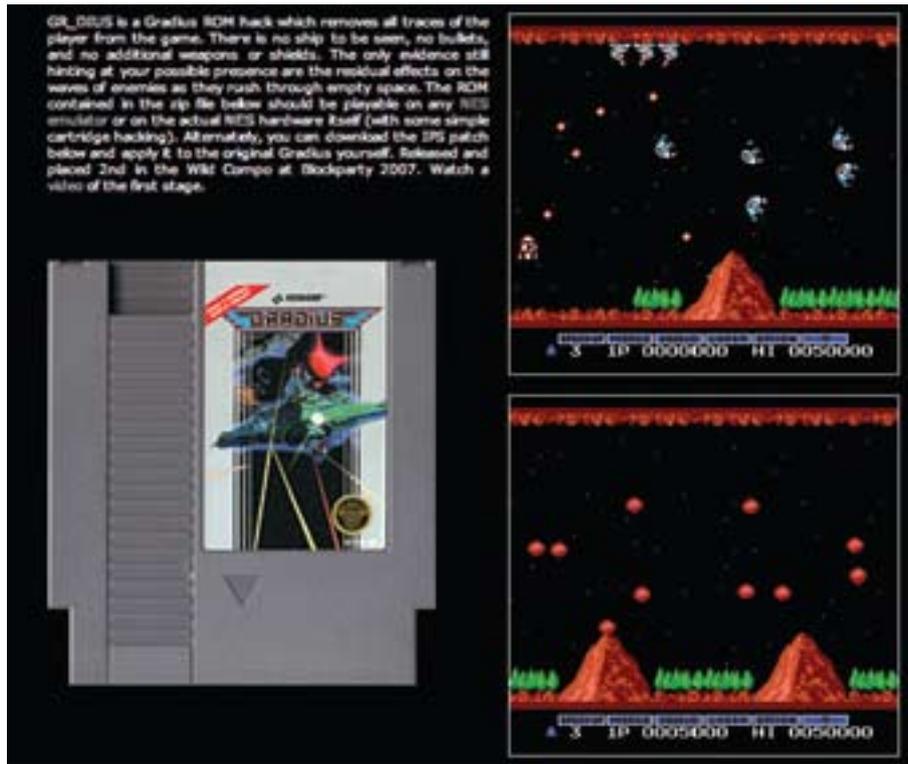
Mike Berardino, "Liquid Pixels", custom electronics, ferric fluid



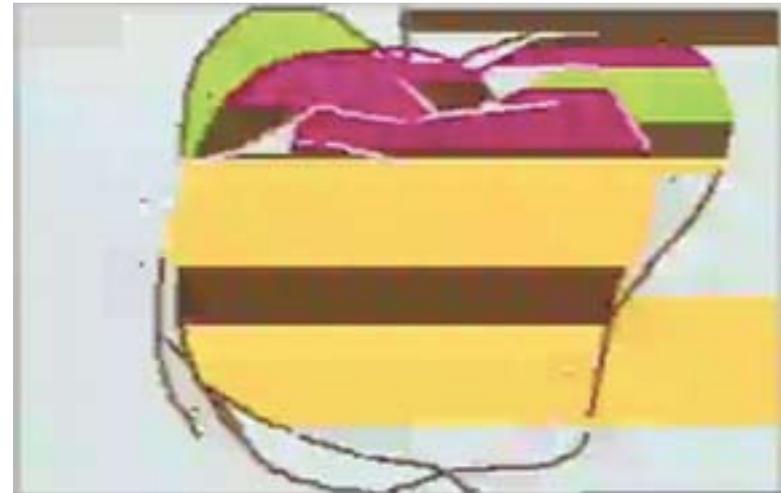


this page: Chris Ashley, "Figure, Head, Rock, Tree", installation
next page (clockwise from bottom left):
Jillian McDonald, "Everyone Will Suffer", DVD, edition of 5
Tom Moody, Animated Gifs, DVD
Eddo Stern, Rock Attack. Machinima, DVD

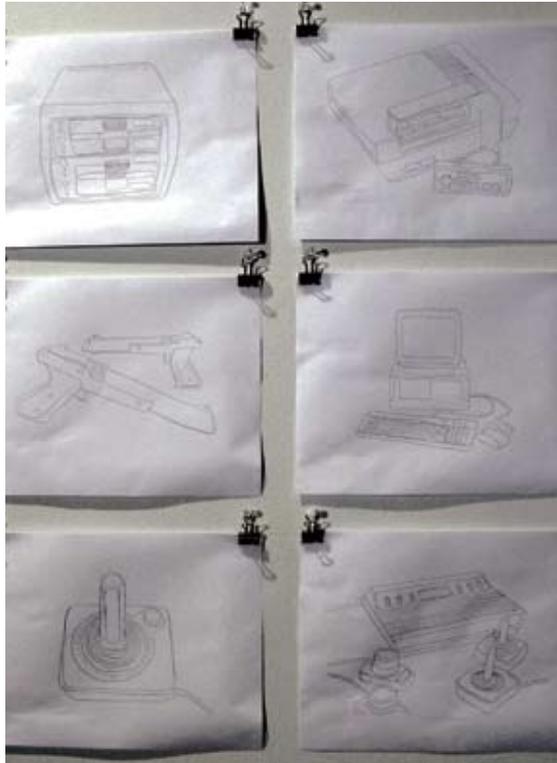




Nullsleep, "Gr_adius", hacked Nintendo game cartridge.



top to bottom:
Lee Arnold, "Winter Light", digital animation still.
LoVid, "Dragon Slayer videos, clip 2", video.



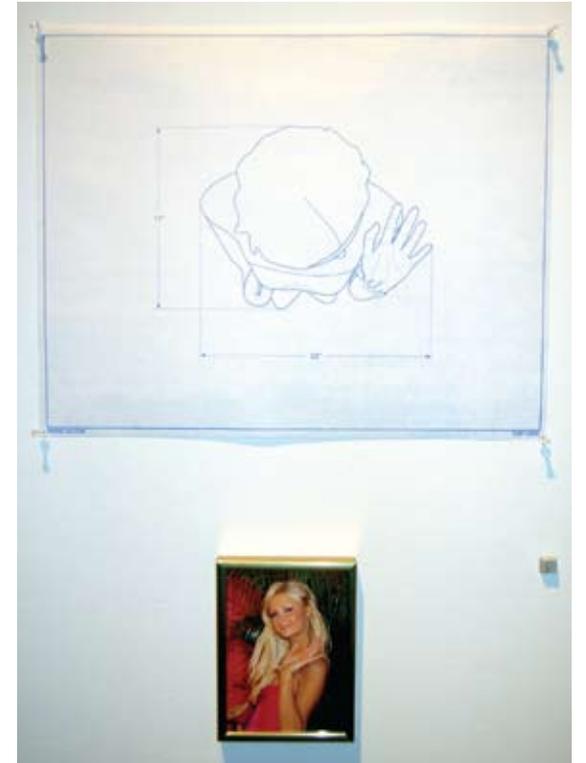
Marisa Olson, "Monitor Tracings", pencil on paper



Prize Budget for Boys, "iPONG", installation



Daniel Iglesia, "DX-Heaven", Max Msp installation



Christine Gedeon, "Paris Hilton", digital print, edition of 10

BITMAP: as good as new was curated by Marcin Ramocki and was originally exhibited at vertexList (www.vertexlist.net) space in Brooklyn, NY in conjunction with Blip Festival 2007 (www.blipfestival.org).

vertexList is an artist-run space, founded in 2003, with a mission of supporting emerging media artists. vertexList seeks artwork that is conceptually involved in exposing the codes of post-capitalist culture, both via new and traditional media. vertexList is named after the property of a vector image which holds all numerical information about the image.

The Leonard Pearlstein Gallery is located adjacent to Nesbit Hall in the Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts and Design at Drexel University. This unique architectural addition to the College was designed by the firm of Sandvold/Blanda and was dedicated in 2002. Since its dedication, The Leonard Pearlstein Gallery has been committed to exhibiting the work of local, national, and international contemporary artists and designers and is grateful for the continuing support of the Pearlstein family.

33rd and Market Streets
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104



vertexList



Paul Davis, "Compression Study #2" (collaboration with Jacob Ciocci and Paper Rad),
DVD, edition of 7 (also on cover / back)

