



MARK NAPIER

MARK NAPIER OVERSEEING AUDIENCE INTERACTIONS WITH HIS WORK IN THE SACKLER COMPUTER. PHOTO BY ELLEN LABENSKI.

Mark Napier created *net.flag* as a symbol for the Internet—a new territory composed of people from various geographical regions and ideological backgrounds. The design of the work changes constantly, as it is manipulated by users who make selections from menus of familiar flag motifs: stars, fields of color, bold patterns, insignia, and stripes. As *net.flag*'s viewers add their contributions to the palimpsest, the cumulative identity of the flag changes as one country's insignia or symbols temporarily overlap those of another.

“What happens when art becomes completely non-physical?”

“If it can be reproduced is it art?”

In spring 2001, artist Mark Napier, Associate Curator for New Media Jon Ippolito, and Gail Engelberg Director of Education Kim Kanatani met to explore ways to contextualize the imminent launch of *net.flag*. Our discussions over the next several months would reveal some of the most fundamental as well as controversial issues swirling around this unique museum commission and new media art in general:

Unlike traditional art forms, an Internet artwork relies upon the viewer's ability to negotiate a navigation of the work before the process of comprehension and an informed response can take place. What is the responsibility of the artist in enabling viewers to successfully navigate such work in an activated spatial environment?

WHAT IS “NET” ART?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ART BECOMES COMPLETELY NON-PHYSICAL?

HOW DOES ONE DEAL WITH ITS AESTHETICS AND CRITICISM?

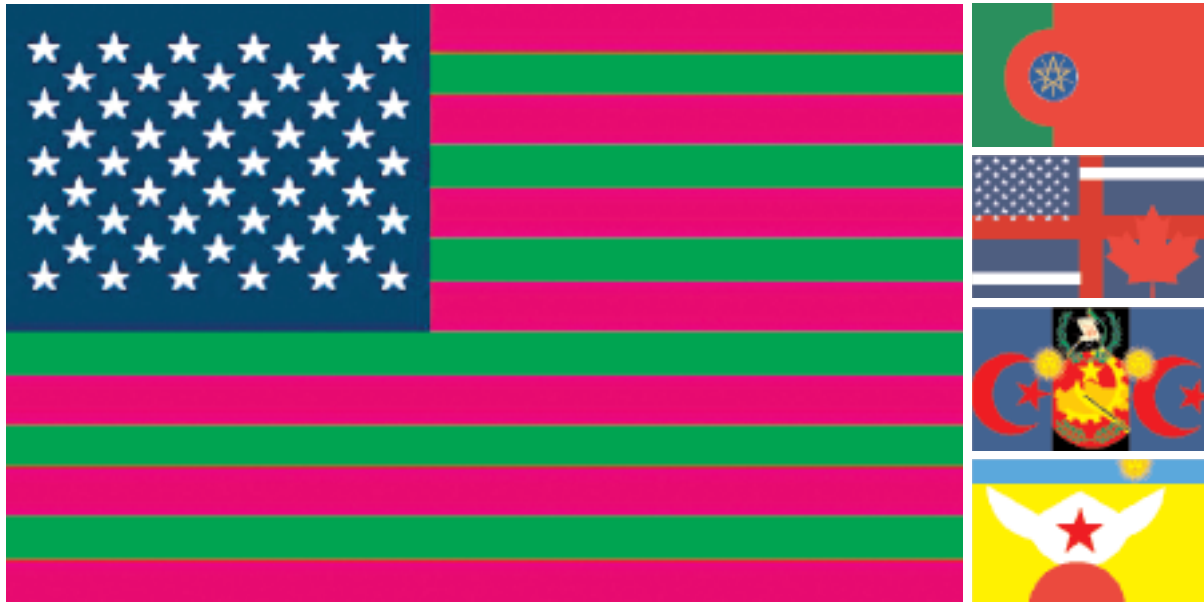
IF IT CAN BE REPRODUCED, IS IT ART?

HOW DO YOU PRESENT AND COLLECT IT?

WHAT WOULD ONE ACTUALLY OWN?

INTERNET ART COMMISSIONS

A LONG-TERM VISION OF THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM HAS BEEN TO COMMISSION AND COLLECT WORKS OF INTERNET ART, IN RECOGNITION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY PROMISE THAT NEW MEDIA—AND THE INTERNET IN PARTICULAR—HOLDS FOR TRANSFORMING VISUAL CULTURE. IN FEBRUARY 2002, THE MUSEUM LAUNCHED TWO NEW INTERNET ART COMMISSIONS. TWO WORKS, MARK NAPIER'S *NET FLAG* AND JOHN F. SIMON, JR.'S *UNFOLDING OBJECT*, WOULD ENTER DIRECTLY INTO THE PERMANENT COLLECTION OF THE GUGGENHEIM ALONGSIDE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE. WHAT GAPS NEEDED TO BE BRIDGED FOR AUDIENCES TO MAKE SENSE OF ARTWORK ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL CULTURE? WORKS CREATED FOR THE INTERNET WERE MATURING AS RAPIDLY AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY, BUT WERE AUDIENCES KEEPING UP? NAPIER AND SIMON COLLABORATED WITH THE MUSEUM TO INVESTIGATE THESE AND OTHER ISSUES. A DIVERSE AND DYNAMIC SERIES OF RESPONSES REFLECTED THE ARTISTS' STEADFAST COMMITMENT TO AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE NEED FOR AN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS FOR UNDERSTANDING THIS NEW FORM.



In response, Napier proposed multiple formats for implementing several offerings that would address these concerns and interests. Utilizing the technology-based facilities of the Sackler Center, the artist proposed a three-month “roving” residency (in reference to the mobility of his medium) that involved setting up an on-site studio to work on new projects while engaging in informal interactions with various audiences. Since Napier’s art frequently involves participants in witnessing each other’s interactions over the Internet, he was particularly drawn to the possibility of

observing participants simultaneously interact with his work in a computer-lab setting.

Napier also envisioned the possibility of holding lecture demonstrations in the Sackler Center’s New Media Theater followed by an audience interaction with the work in the adjacent computer lab. To this end, he also conceptualized and presented a three-part series of issues forums for audiences interested in Internet art, from curators and collectors to artists and art students:

Art in a Networked Space featured the artist discussing the underlying social implications of net browsers and networked environments, as illustrated by net.flag and some of Napier’s past projects, including *P-Soup*, *Shredder*, and *Feed*. The audience then had the opportunity to interact with *net.flag* in the computer lab of the Sackler Center.

Collecting the Un-Collectable investigated the challenges and potential of buying and selling software-based artwork from the perspective of artists, curators, and gallery directors. Napier was joined by artists

John F. Simon, Jr., Golan Levin, John Klima, and art consultant, curator, and former gallery director Michele Thursz in a lively discussion moderated by Jon Ippolito about new business models for artists working in digital media and the implications of its production and sale.

the Sackler Center to formatively solicit feedback on *waiting room*, the new work-in-progress created during his residency. To this end, museum interns and even members of the Guggenheim’s education board subcommittee participated in providing the artist with input. For the

museum, Napier’s offerings attracted a new audience to the recently opened Sackler Center—the New Media Arts community—and demonstrated that learning about new media art is a dynamic exploration into yet uncharted territory.

net.flag may be viewed at www.guggenheim.org/internetart.



Reflections on the Residency—An Interactive Multi-User Art Screening with Mark Napier transformed the Sackler Center Computer Lab into a multi-user networked environment that offered participants a rare opportunity to experiment with interactive Web-based artwork that Napier developed during his three-month residency. Participants contributed to an on-site testing of his artwork and provided the artist with real-time feedback.

According to the artist, one of the highlights of his residency was having access to the “multi-user networked environment” of

“How do you present and collect it?”

NET.FLAG, 2002. INTERACTIVE NETWORKED CODE: JAVA APPLLET WITH SERVER DATABASE, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE. SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, 2002.17.