



PRESS INFORMATION - DETAILS

CLIMAX - STATEMENTS : Sean Hu

Sean Hu is co-curator of the exhibition „Climax – The Highlight of Ars Electronica“

The Climax of Experienced Communication - Arrival of an Era of Art Amusement

Depressed for too long, we need to create climax through interaction
The decision to take “climax” as the central theme of the current exhibition is both clear and instantly noticeable. The word itself is immediately provocative and intended to create a degree of psychological stimulation, which is hoped to appeal to the curiosity of the viewer. In essence, this approach solicits a physiological and psychological reaction, deliberately creating a special attraction for the exhibition. An additional intent is to highlight the way in which said exhibition focuses on time and sense of speed, along with the “technological” and “interactive” aspects of media art. By applying a game-like interactive approach to the works on display, a local audience is offered an in-depth introduction to the field of media art, already popular overseas for several years now.

The Czech writer Milan Kundera once wrote: “Speed is one way in which technological revolution has enchanted mankind.” Indeed, our blind pursuit of speed lies not only in the fact that it provides enhanced convenience and comfort of movement, but in the way it changes how we see and consider the world in which we live in. However, in a technological era focused on efficiency, human life has gradually become disassociated, cold, empty and drab. Against this backdrop, it is essential that we strengthen our interactions with the external world, break with depression and seeks simple climaxes in life.

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“Climax – The Highlight of Ars Electronica” is one of the major exhibitions to be organized by the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in 2005 as part of its general promotion of media art. The exhibition will be presented jointly with Ars Electronica Center (AEC) from Austria, one of the global leaders in the field of media art. This combination has made it possible to introduce art lovers from all over Taiwan to some of the finest tech-art pieces in the world. This exhibition is AEC’s first presentation in Asia and its choice of Taiwan as the starting point for a regional tour is of considerable significance and is also a much needed shot-in-the-arm for local efforts to promote media art. The “Climax” exhibition is divided into four distinctive elements; interactive installation art, computer animation, a selection of highlights from 25 years of classic tech-art (digital public art /digital performance art /robot + body art) and the U19 exhibition, dedicated to artists under the age of 19. Of these constituent elements, we first viewed 16 award-winning works of interactive media art previously displayed by AEC before planning the “interactive installation art area.” Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM) and Taiwan Museum of Art (now called the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art) first began organizing exhibitions of overseas tech-art in the mid 1980’s and these began gradually to exert an influence. Later, as students who studied in related creative fields overseas returned home, Taiwan began to develop its own distinctive style of media art. However, the general immaturity of the environment and the limited number of artists has made it extremely difficult for local art connoisseurs to have any sort of interactive experience with such work. In his work, “Phenomenology of Perception,” the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty suggests: “The living body is a primitive medium through which we encounter the world,” “When we use this methodology to reestablish a connection with our bodies and world, what we rediscover is also ourselves.” With this in mind, it is our hope that the interactive art displayed in the “Climax” exhibition will be an interface through which a Taiwanese audience is able to engage with the wider world. Everybody will be encouraged to physically interact with the works, arousing and feeling a new viewing aesthetic and experience that belongs to the here and now.

Interactive Art Work – Past and Present

The interaction of art and audience became one of the central focuses of art development in the second half of the twentieth century. In the twentieth-first century of today, the rise of public art the participation of the public has evolved from considerations of pure aesthetic space to infuse works of art in public spaces, creating an important element modern art can no longer afford to overlook. The first time audience participation was considered important can be traced back to the “Fluxes” and “Happening” art movements of the 1960’s. At that time, artists experimented with ways to make interaction a creative method for Avant-garde art, in an attempt to break with elitist middle class culture and influence popular culture. Attempts were even made to eliminate the distinction between artist and viewer altogether, transforming the roles of giving and receiving to create an artistic form in which there is neither artist nor audience. This also involved the gradual

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introduction of technology into art works, at which point interacting with viewers finally became an important creative consideration for the artist.

In the late 1980's, art officially entered the digital age and as personal computers became more widespread it became increasingly easy to obtain technological products. The use of software also became simpler, as creative forms and ways of thinking developed with such tools, towards more non-linear and interactive concepts. Whereas in the 1960's and 1970's people had hoped to combine media and art through ideology and thereby promote comprehensive change in prevailing social structures, following the 1990's media art fully embraced new perceptual forms created by technology and artists constantly sought out complex technology to express the meaning of their work. In order to break through the limitations of individual ability, artists also became more interested in the possibility of linking up with laboratories, media companies and universities, thereby highlighting the combination of technology and aesthetics. At the same time, in order to attract more attention, they also emphasized the interactive and playing nature of participants. Interestingly, media art has actually transcended traditional definitions of interaction, incorporating programming, computer precision calculations and many of the characteristics usually identified as influenced by computer games. That is to say, works are only completed through the participation of the viewer and can come in a variety of forms. Many results differ as a direct result of the different reactions and operational movements of participants. In this way the presentation of much media art appears highly changeable, captivating to adults and children alike.

Between Interaction and Playing - Realizing Artistic Aesthetics - Reestablishing New Ways of Viewing

In terms of artistic expression, the "interactive nature" of media art is often warmly welcomed because it appears tantamount to game playing. On the other hand, this has also raised questions as to whether such works over focus on technology and thereby sacrifice a sense of aesthetics, over indulging in perceptions and resorting to the use of games just to attract an audience. Much popular media art attracts people because it allows the interplay of playful elements and serious considerations, so that when the audience takes part in interactive media art, the relationship is similar to that of a character in a traditional narrative plot. "When characters and plots attract us, we put our doubts about them to one side and completely immerse ourselves in the story. A good interactive structure allows us to go beyond those interfaces that raise doubts, placing ourselves within the game." Despite this, any operational language needs to be simple, easy to understand and operate, otherwise such works are doomed to the same kind of indulgent self-admiration that befalls much technology-based art. That is to say, when artists consider the presentation of their work, they need to reflect on a broader range of elements and layers. If the conceptual underpinnings of a piece are insufficiently deep, any work that loses its sense of freshness will be rapidly discarded in a consumer area of comparative speed and technology.

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One of the problems with such a diverse display of interactive art is that over concentration on technology leads to a loss of focus. As such, at the same time as they appreciate this type of work, viewers also need to slowly adjust and adapt to a new way of viewing art. This involves searching for the core of the work from a multiplicity of perspectives, rather than being mesmerized by the technology and forgetting the essential nature of art. In addition, time and speed are also important and influential factors in experiencing technological works. Because participation is often limited, to ensure as many people as possible can take part, visitors are required to experience the works of this era as “efficiently” as possible over a set time period, which is why the experience is intended as more of a “climax.” Little wonder then that some people have asked whether the appreciation of media art involves interacting with technology or communicating with people through eye-catching technology. Is this process a discussion with other people on technology issues or a discourse with technology on the problems of people? There are no clear answers to these questions, a fact that changes still further the interactive and communicative relationship between artist and viewer.

Media Not Movement

Because the new generation of artists grew up in an era of video games and computers, their ability to freely use technology ensures that the number becoming involved in media art continues to increase. At the same time, artistic forms produced are also increasingly rich and diverse. Although media art styles after the 1990's differ greatly to the subversive revolutionary movement of the 1960's, it would be more accurate to say that over the long term such work does not represent so much an art movement as works that are part of the broad field of contemporary art and just coincidentally completed using technology. Issues touched on are inevitably broad and diverse, making it difficult to identify anything that could reasonably be described as an art movement style. Other than their technological nature and interactive, game-playing elements, the 16 works being shown at the “Climax” exhibition have little in common in terms of style and subject matter. Different generations zero-in on different cultural questions and have divergent senses of mission; the pursuit of aesthetic style, discussions of technology-based virtual phenomena, eastern philosophy and Zen Buddhism, interpersonal relations in an age of virtuality, discussions of consumer culture, media culture in an age of indiscriminate information, the representation of internal landscapes and tendencies of sentimentality towards nature etc. Clearly, the creative content of media art remains closely related to the artist's pursuit of artistic aesthetics and discussions of issues faced by people in a specific time and place. Although visitors need to spend time and even queue up to experience interactive works that appear humorous, relaxed and fun, we are confident that after reflecting on their meaning people will still arrive at a clearer understanding of the meaning behind each artist's creative work.

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Re-Presenting New Inspiration in Games

Despite the rapid development of technology, the new generation of artists continues to use it as a vehicle to experiment with new creative possibilities. However, the creation of media art has in no way caused a decline in traditional art. The Canadian art critic Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) detailed a “recovery” principle wherein new media allows old media to recover its original focus, just as painting did not disappear following the invention of photography. Instead, photography forced painting to reconsider the re-presentation of its essential nature. From the past to the present, we have seen artists try to use the latest technology to open up new points of consideration and expand visual aesthetics in human civilization. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) points out in his book “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” that the ease of reproduction means any art that utilizes technology as a tool sacrifices the “uniqueness” underpinning traditional art and in so doing loses its “Aura.” Despite this, Benjamin still believed that tech-art reproductions were worth exhibiting. As part of the process by which we view art and aesthetics, the elimination of the desire to possess art and its aura means that the audience is more simply able to enjoy the pleasure and enlightenment art brings with it, which can perhaps be characterized as the Re-presentation of “Climax.” French philosopher Gilles Deleuze believed that art is one kind of science as well a type of philosophy, its equivalent relationship being covert, art as disguised science or philosophy. In their field of expertise, artists produce scientific experiments and create philosophical concepts. Applying this idea to media art could not be more appropriate. Each era has its own media, just as each new media will inevitably bring with it new art forms and change the way we view art. In conclusion, artists should not be scared at the loss of aura in art, but should instead have the courage to rush forward and meet head-on the re-presentation of a different new aura.

For further information, please contact:

Mag. Wolfgang A. Bednarzek MAS
Pressesprecher Ars Electronica

AEC Ars Electronica Center Linz
Museums-gesellschaft mbH
Hauptstraße 2, A - 4040 Linz, Austria

Tel +43.732.7272-38
Fax +43.732.7272-638
Mobil: +43.664-81 26 156

email: wolfgang.bednarzek@aec.at
URL: <http://www.aec.at/press>

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