

»digital sparks« — Crowning Outstanding Student Media Projects

**MARS—Exploratory Media Lab of the
Fraunhofer-Institute for Media Communication**

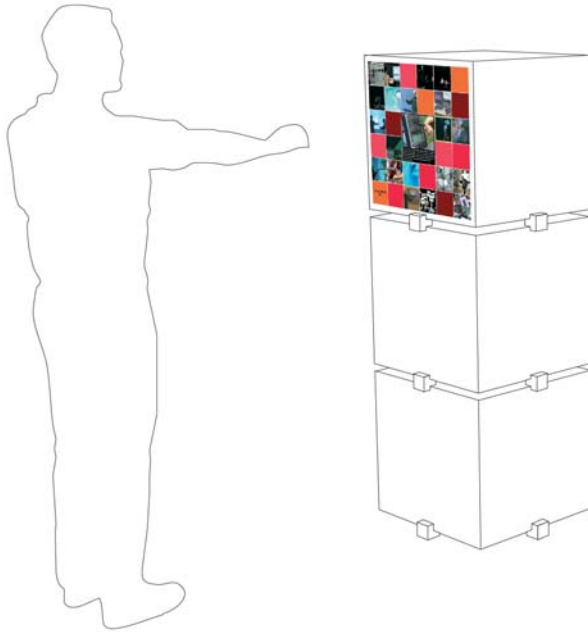
»digital sparks« is a competition among undergraduates and recent grads majoring in media art, media design, media informatics and media communication at German-language academies and universities. Works that display an innovative approach to dealing with digital cultural technologies are singled out for recognition in this competition. Each year, 421 prizes designed to foster talented individuals in the plastic arts are awarded in Germany; however, only 20 of them go to recipients in media art fields and, of these, fewer than a half dozen are expressly meant for young artists. Therefore, the mission of »digital sparks« is to further the careers of gifted students in the media arts and, at the same time, to showcase outstanding work being done at teaching and research facilities in the German-speaking regions of Europe.

The entire competition—from submission to assessment and judging by experts and all the way to archiving the works—is conducted online. The competition is also distinguished by its high level of transparency in that all submitted works are presented online and the experts' commentary is likewise available for all to see.

»digital sparks« is one of the active modules of the *netzspannung.org* Internet platform, the objective of which is to spotlight developments in digital cultures and to compile an up-to-date, network-linked information pool dealing with media art, science and technology. More than 150 institutions of higher education in Germany, Austria and Switzerland were invited to participate in 2003. Prerequisites for a student submission are an accompanying commentary by the professor who acted as project advisor as well as that professor's elaborations on the teaching context in which the project was done. This results in not only a collection of especially interesting projects but also an overview of current curriculum content. A cartographic depiction of all submissions is available at *netzspannung.org*. This interactive map that has been growing year by year provides a picture of innovative places for teaching, research and production in German-speaking Europe, and thus offers users access to information about educational opportunities (<http://netzspannung.org/digital-sparks/flashmap/>). The three best works each receive a prize of 2,500 Euros. This year, the students have the opportunity to publicly present their works in conjunction with the awards ceremony at Ars Electronica Festival 2003.

Production prizes that are also awarded in special cases enable prizewinners to rework their projects or to develop them further. Thus, »digital sparks« is more than just a competition—it is also a media strategy to nurture and support leading-edge media culture <http://netzspannung.org/digital-sparks/>

»digital sparks« is conducted by the MARS-Exploratory Media Lab of the Fraunhofer Institute for Media Communication under the direction of Monika Fleischmann and Wolfgang Strauss, and is produced by Diane Müller (project coordinator) and the staff of *netzspannung.org*: Gabriele Blome, Katja Heckes, Kai-Uwe Kunze, Daniel Pfuhl, Felix Schmitz-Justen; »digital sparks« is made possible by a grant from Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research. <http://www.imk.fraunhofer.de/mars>; <http://www.bmbf.de/>
The Info-Jukebox was produced by: Monika Fleischmann, Wolfgang Strauss, Yinlin Li, Christoph Grönegress, Jochen Denzinger, Ansgar Himmel, Lina Lubig, Gabriele Blome. <http://www.imk.fraunhofer.de/de/jukebox/>



The Mars- Exploratory Media Lab presents all projects on the Info-Jukebox which received the >digital sparks< award in 2001–2003. The Info Jukebox is a digital enquiry kiosk system which allows an intuitive and playful access to multimedia contents. The installation is operated by a touchless pointscreen interface, which allows the user to control the screens with simple hand gestures. The Info-Jukebox will be on display during the festival on the ground floor of the Ars Electronica Center.
<http://www.imk.fraunhofer.de/de/jukebox/>