

CMJ

WHO'S THE MOPIEST OF THEM ALL? PHAT: DEL. FAT: KENNY ROGERS.

NEW MUSIC

THE BEST MAGAZINE YOU EVER HEARD

M O N T H L Y

THE MIGHTY MIGHTY BOSSTONES

men of respect.

Dicky Barrett's
older, wiser guys
put out another hit.

53 REVIEWS

ELLIOTT SMITH

company loves misery.

SLEATER-KINNEY

suffragette city.

SUPERGRASS

cheeky monkeys

MAY 2000 \$5.98 US \$8.98 CAN

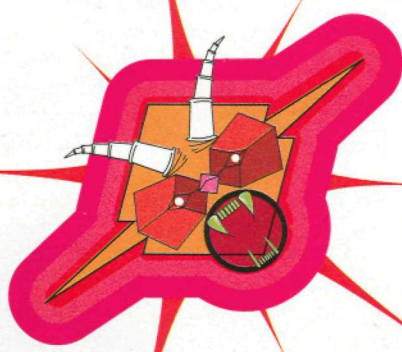


PLUS:

COMMON. EELS. THE BEER CAN CRUSHING BREASTS OF ATLANTA. WE RECOGNIZE THE UNRECOGNIZED GENIUS OF TERRY CALLIER. THE ROCKINGEST FACIAL HAIR. EVER.

DESKTOP GALLERY

WHO HAS MILLIONS TO SPEND ON IMPORTANT CONTEMPORARY ART? JUST POINT AND CLICK.



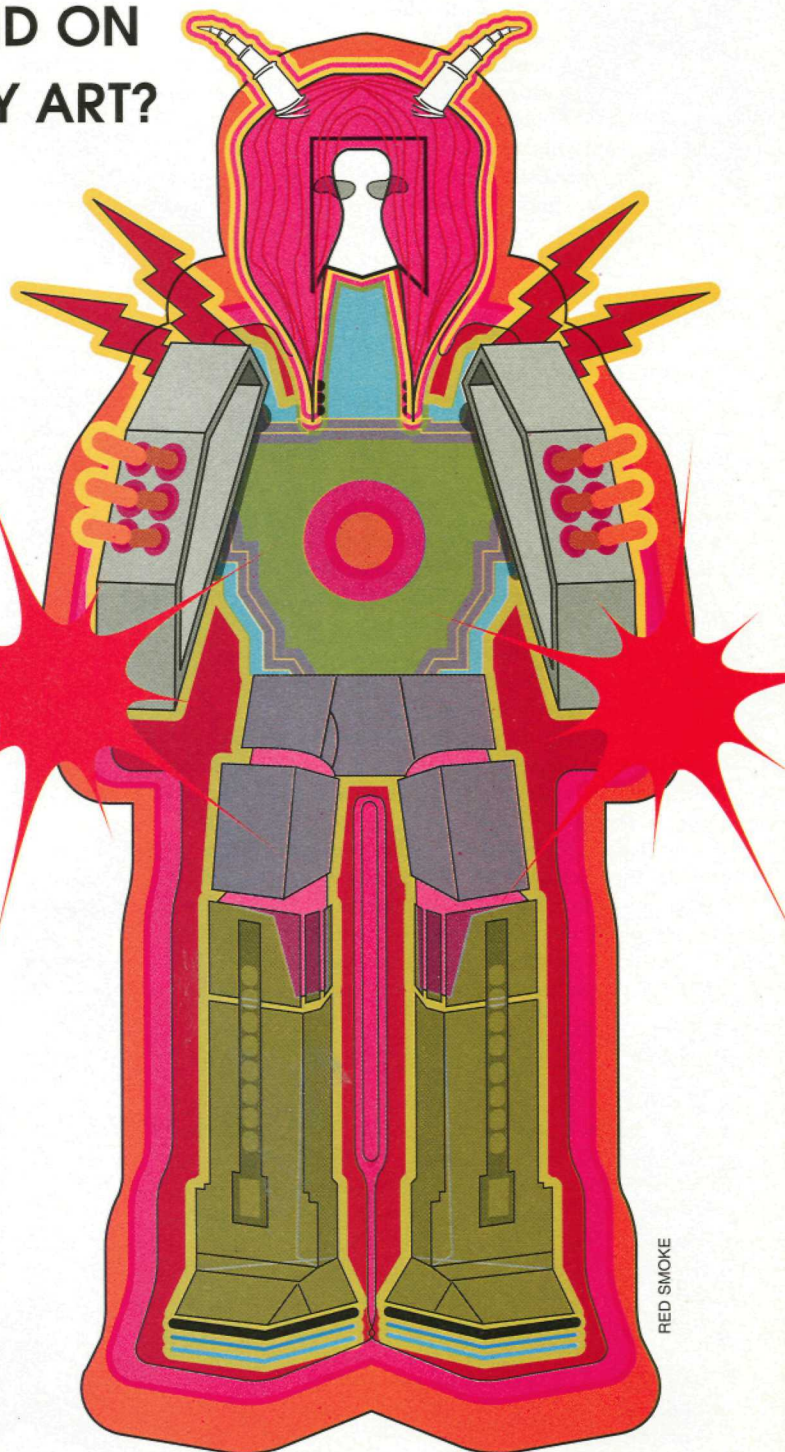
STORY: NEIL GLADSTONE

Type www.redsmoke.com into your browser and an illustrated suburban tract house with a rolling green lawn appears. Then a heart rate monitor beeps and black and white photos flash: a medicine cabinet, ketchup-dipped fries and bloody handprints on a bathroom sink. Exactly why is a Cadillac hovering like a spaceship on your monitor? Toto, we're not on eBay anymore.

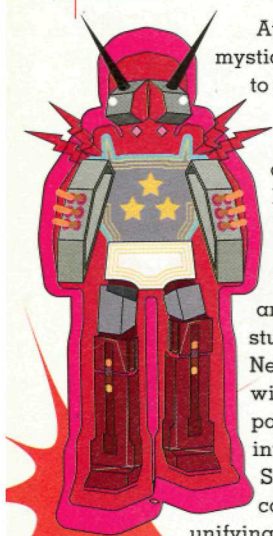
The juxtaposition of ominous photographs, giddy illustration and off-putting statements such as "Youth Sector_Lost and Hopeless" suggests this information superhighway pit stop may have been designed by David Lynch or Art Spiegelman. But is it art?

New York's Whitney Museum Of American Art certainly thinks so. Curators tapped Lew Baldwin's www.redsmoke.com, along with a handful of other "Net art" sites, for this spring's Whitney Biennial, a show renowned for taking the pulse of the current American art scene. Given that there are 200 artists in the show, tossing 10 Web-specific works into the fray might not seem such a big statement, but the decision is a turning point for a barely five-year-old artform. Not only are Internet artists included, but this year, the museum created a new competitive category for them.

"That was actually a bold move because they didn't have to do that," says Ken Goldberg, whose site, *Ouija 2000* (at www.ken.goldberg.net), will be featured in the Biennial. "They made a distinction and that is a milestone. If this field does have a future, that will be a point we refer to."



RED SMOKE



At Ouija 2000, visitors participate in an update of the mystical parlor room classic in which questions are posed to the "spirit world." Goldberg's work ruminates on, as he calls it, "telepistomology," the study of "how beliefs are formed over the Internet." The ironic conceptual piece raises some theoretical questions. How does anyone trying to fiddle with the Ouija 2000 over the Internet actually know if there's a board somewhere at the site's origin? What level of trust is required by anyone who uses the Net? Is this an artistic statement or the basis for a sociological study?

Net art, explains Goldberg, shouldn't be looked at with quite the same expectations as classical painting or sculpture. Its genealogy lies in intellectually driven movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism, happenings, Conceptualism and computer art. Attempting to delineate Net art's unifying characteristics isn't easy, though. The medium enables quick juxtaposition of photographs, illustration and text, which makes for pieces that often favor eye candy and theory over narrative. Technical limitations and incompatibility issues often force the works to be simplified so they can be viewed easily on a variety of browsers, as well.

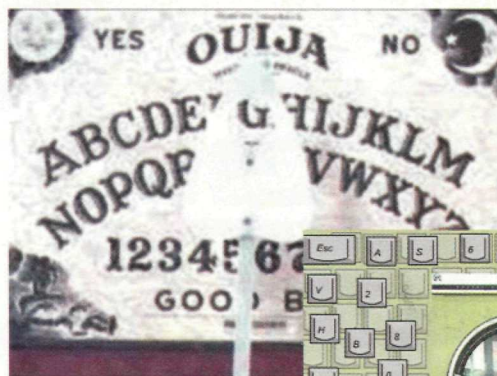
"It's opened up a new whole way of thinking about my art," says Redsmoke's Baldwin, who studied film and video at Chicago's School Of The Art Institute, and also paints, draws and works in the musical medium. He started noodling with Net art in the mid-'90s as a release from a graphic design day job.

"I used to paint all of the time; when your painting's done it's just sitting there against the wall until you get a show," he explains. "[On the Internet] I can put shit up and in two seconds it's out there for anyone to see. That's an exciting attraction."

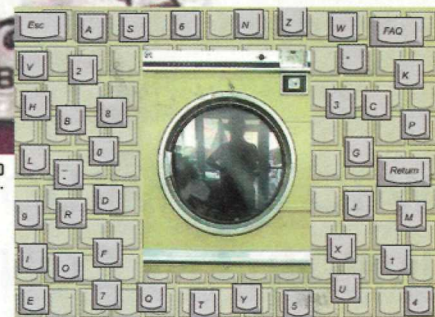
Up-to-the-minute art exhibition, however, isn't exactly what the museums are about, and one of the great debates among the online cognoscenti is whether or not Net works belong in a museum. For many of the creators, being able to distribute art directly to your desktop circumvents the oft-patronizing world of curators, insider hobnobbing and cheap opening-night wine. While some curators are searching for top-of-the-line plasma screens to display Net art and burning CD-ROMS of HTML code, others figure these pieces don't gain anything by being in a gallery.

"It doesn't make any sense to take these things offline. You cut it off from the context it was intended," says Benjamin Weil, curator of media arts at San Francisco's Museum Of Modern Art who co-founded the online gallery at www.adaweb.com.

Net artist Kristin Lucas argues that archivists who are creating offline copies of net art to save for future generations are missing the



ABOVE: OUIJA 2000
RIGHT: ROCK AND A HARD DRIVE.



point: "I like the idea that my project has a limited life. It's implicit in the project." Lucas's work, *Rock And A Hard Drive* (which can be viewed on the Dia Center For The Arts site, www.diacenter.org) spoofs the idea of chirpy chat rooms with images of empty "waiting" areas and samples of inane dialog. Says Lucas, "We're living in a culture of samples where we reconfigure other people's thoughts and this is just one way to [comment on] that." Like lots of online art, *Rock And A Hard Drive* comments on the Internet's singular world—the waiting, the mystery, the ability to reinvent oneself in cyberspace. Online art magazines like *Rhizone* (www.rhizone.com) are loaded with essays on the topic.

Though plenty of Net artists, including Goldberg and Baldwin, say it would be great to make a living with their online art, the question is how to make that happen. *Ada'web* began as a commercial venture, but the founders soon learned that organizing a business model around online art, even one featuring commissioned works by known artists such as Jenny Holzer, wouldn't fly easily, so the developers have given up trying to make a profit.

Many curators and artists say the medium's low market value has kept it from gaining the respect it enjoys in the European art world. One gallery owner scolded Benjamin Weil because he commissioned an artist to do a work for *Ada'web*. He was told: "You're monopolizing this artist's time and in the meantime she's not making art that I can sell." Weil still hopes that Net art will be commercially viable one day, forecasting a time when art lovers can pay a subscription or per-view fee.

Many of the stigmas about Net art parallel the problems faced by video art, another medium that was initially difficult to sell and viewed as base in comparison with fine art. But where video art took about 25 years to gain mainstream acceptance, Net art threatens to do so in a fifth of the time.

"It might be too much too soon," worries Goldberg. "It might be burnt out with all of the enthusiasm. I'm wary of raising expectations too high."

After all, few artists who dabble on the Web are ace programmers, and computer geeks aren't known for making transcendent statements about humanity. Plus, many of the most impressive works are nearly impossible to download without a high-speed connection and a gazillion plug-ins.

"I argue that we have not yet seen work that fully exploits the medium," figures Aaron Betsky, curator of architecture, design and digital projects for SF MoMA, who has appropriated almost 20 websites for the museum's collection. "We've seen beautiful experiments and worthwhile attempts, but we're still waiting for people to fully master the medium."

Think about it: the next Van Gogh might be just a cubicle away.

WINE, CHEESE AND A MOUSE: NET ART SITES

Walker Art Center (www.walkerart.org) One of the first American museums to commission a Web work, it's one of the most important sites in the country for Web art.

Readme.txt (www.museodemonterrey.org.mx/english/) Benjamin Weil's ruminations about browsing online art.

Musée d'Art Contemporain De Montreal (www.media.macm.qc.ca/homea.htm) A host of media art links from Montreal's contemporary art museum.

A Story Of Net Art (www.calarts.edu/~line/history.html) A disjointed history of the online medium.

Whitney Museum Of American Art (www.whitney.org) Check here for more info about the Biennial.