

Viewers are part of the medium and the message

BY LESLIE HOFFMAN

Anybody can be a celebrity now. From the proliferation of reality television shows such as "Survivor," "American Idol" and "Blind Date" to the media coverage of the war in Iraq, the imaginary line separating viewers from the world of media and entertainment has been chipped away. This interaction between the "real" world and its representation has become more and more self-referential as members of the public become aware of the possibility that they, or people like them, might appear in the media.

The current exhibition at the Wood Street Galleries — organized by New York curator, writer and editor Timothy Druckrey — displays a collection of installations exploring this concept. "critical conditions: information atmospheres and event scenes exhibition" questions such issues via Internet-based art that relies on the interaction between the viewer and the art itself.

"Empire," by Wolfgang Staehle, exemplifies the dissolution of the separation between the events of daily life and the recording of these events. In the gallery, a live Web-camera image of the Empire State Building is projected onto a wall-sized area. On a clear afternoon, the image is rather boring; it's just the iconic image against a pale blue sky. But when the viewer takes into account the collection of images amassed over the period of time spent watching it, the change in the sky and the events surrounding the building become significant. "Empire" raises questions concerning the perception of "real time" as well as how we as observers interact with a seemingly static object.

Staehle's work was inspired by Andy Warhol's seminal 1964 film of the same title in which a camera pointed at the Empire State Building recorded it in slow motion for eight hours and five minutes. Staehle updates the medium and introduces, by its live feed, the possibility that anything can happen.

Like "Empire," each of the pieces in the exhibit is concerned with the representation of cinema. In order to understand this concept, it's helpful to look at the breakdown of the word "cinema." Don't think of the word so much as a story represented on screen, but rather, think of its Greek



Wolfgang Staehle's "Empire" in an exhibition of Internet-based art at Wood Street Galleries pays homage to Andy Warhol's 1964 film of the same title.

roots that mean "moving pictures."

The installation "Unmovie" by a group of seven collaborators is in keeping with this theme. Rather than letting the audience remain passive observers to a sequence of predictable events, "Unmovie" forces them to anticipate rather than merely consume. The installation consists of two projections splayed across the wall in a haphazard fashion; the corners of the room break up the image. A collection of lights, and occasionally unrelated sound, plays in the space, the lights changing as the viewers walk near them.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's "Vectorial Elevation" originated as a performance relying entirely on audience participation. The artist set up lights around Mexico City and then allowed invited visitors to the project Web site, www.alzado.net, to create their own configurations. The artist displayed the light sculptures as they came in over the Internet, and each sculpture could be seen in a 10-mile radius.

The "Vectorial Elevation" display at the gallery is a documentation of this event and consists of six photographs of the images captured in the night sky, a video, a computer with a browser pointed to the project's Web site, as well as two walls full of printouts of the public's requests for the sculptures. The designer's comments and dedications accompany each printout. Com-

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ments from "I want to marry you" to "Pick-up sticks" were supplied by the creative public. The event, when it actually took place, must have been quite breathtaking, and the project's interaction with the public is noteworthy, too.

In addition to these pieces, Maciej Wisniewski's "Instant Places 2002," a fictional piece of software that pits two projections against each other on opposite walls raises more questions about the personal information available on the Internet as well as its accessibility.

The collective 010010111010101.ORG presents its artistic computer virus, "biennale.py" against a backdrop of a hand-assembled computer whose sole function is its own infection and disinfection. The collective — .01.ORG for short — also presents a series of quotes from the media in reaction to its piece, which was created for the 49th Venice Biennale. As it attempts to bring to audiences an awareness of the importance and cultural significance of what it's addressing, .01.ORG inadvertently promotes itself and becomes part of a system it sets out to critique.

Whether the virus itself is actually art is debatable, but the manner in which the collective has handled its subsequent publicity is really what's intriguing.

In this respect, "biennale.py," returns to the idea of groups and individuals inventing their own celebrity through their own means as well as through the weakening lines separating the media from the public, an idea that runs rampant throughout

the exhibit as a whole.

Despite this breakdown and the fact that the art in the exhibit deals with what has become a very public medium, the Wood Street Galleries' "critical conditions" is not as accessible as could be expected. Each piece is challenging and complex, but not in a difficult or unpleasant manner: The true interaction inherent to each piece comes within the minds of the viewers themselves.

The exhibit "critical conditions: information atmospheres and event scenes exhibition" runs at the Wood Street Galleries through May 17. The gallery is at 601 Wood St., Downtown, and is open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday

and Wednesday and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. For more information, call 412-471-5605.

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