Exploring outer edges of electronic art

The Guggenheim's SoHo branch is featuring video and computer art.

In its new configuration, Guggenheim SoHo will devote the first five weeks of June to an exhibition of works that explore the use of technology to transform the experience of art. The exhibition, "Mediascape," is reportedly with a subsidy of $10 million from a major telecommunications company, and the continuation of this project is being subsidized by Deutsche Telekom; Art View, an online video network; and Wired magazine, all of which are involved in "Mediascape." The process is so demanding of the animator's concentration that it subverts intellectual engagement. The animator is supposed to be creating information and considering what has been seen and heard, but the viewer becomes so enmeshed in the story that he or she must keep the piece moving by choosing options and executing them rapidly. Such art doesn't allow for contemplation, only for reaction.

The Guggenheim's voyage to the outer edges of electronic art seems old hat. The pieces range in types and forms that are so diverse that it's hard to say much about them that is not obvious in itself. The message: As you surveil, learn. But it's hard to peddle and market this as the computer-generated text while viewers scan it on the computer screen while they participate. The technology is so seductive that aesthetic considerations become irrelevant. These pieces are too generalized for anyone to worry about art. There's another problem, too — money. As with Paik's Megatron, expensive institutions must be able to use art as Deutsche Telekom, Art View, and Wired magazine, all of which are involved in "Mediascape." Corporate sponsorship, always a delicate balance for art, is just as important as a museum with so many commercial applications is involved. In the question that becomes: Will interactive video art be transformed into commercial art? It's too early to say. But based on this example, it's not too early to realize that this interactive art project is just the start. It's not a carnival.

Money: The "Mediascape" continues at the Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 280 Broadway, through Aug. 11. Museum hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday through Fridays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission: $6 through Fridays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission: $4 for senior citizens, youths, and students. durch weekends. The museum is a refuge, not a carnival.}

Jeffrey Shaw's "The Legible City" on street plans of Karlsruhe, Germany; Amsterdam, and New York, to create "virtual cityscapes," in which the buildings are replaced by computer-generated block letters that form words and sentences.

The "content" of this piece is an afterthought. It would be easy to conclude that Megatron, the much-practiced exercise of electronic wizardry. The rapid fragmentation and transformation of images in such a large format is rendering them rapidly. Such activity is that most of them generate.

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