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CURRENT MUTE

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ARCHIVE &gt;&gt;

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MUTE MAGAZINE

PRODUCTS

EVENTS

SUBSCRIBE

BACK ISSUES

ABOUT US

OFFICE

E-MAIL

SITE MAP

[ARCHIVE](#)

&gt;&gt;EVENTS ARCHIVE

## WEB EXCLUSIVE

### "companies like to deal with companies - more then they like to deal with an individual artist"

#### Interview with Mario Hergueta from Artcart

By Josephine Bosma



JB: When and why did you start artcart?

MH: The concept was developed end of 1999 but the domain went on line in February 2000. For me everything started with 'cybordelics' in 1997 - my first website. It was kind of curated link list of my favorite artists pages. The selection was highly influenced by my interest in interfaces. At that time I noticed that people like to set up link lists. But they include links without asking. I thought that was a pity. I really would like to be notified when someone puts me on his list. So I asked each artist for permission and only after an agreement with them I would create a link to their work on 'cybordelics'. It developed to a network of over 32 artists with whom I had contact over email. So there was an active exchange with the artists before the implementation phase of artcart. The input of the artists was and is quite important. One of the topics we discussed was the - of course ambivalent - desire of the artists to earn money with their work. Artists do not try to live up to some "business plan". Their artistic work is their first interest. Beyond the desire for appreciation - in addition - the question arises here: how far can the self-exploitation of an artist go? And why not let people, who say they want to support net art for instance, know that they should put their money where their mouth is?

JB: Do you think the net art 'community' itself does not do enough to support net art?

MH: Well, maybe we have to specify what or who is the net art 'community'. There are a lot of people and institutions like Rhizome that

are really working hard to support and develop net art. These people are very close to net art and they form this net art 'community', but I am thinking of institutions like museums, foundations and curators - the art world in general. Some of them are just beginning to understand that net art is something worth to be collected and to be included in exhibitions. There is an attitude in the net art community to keep off from the art world and run the risk to become invisible or not to be accepted. At the same time there is a desire of artists to find a way into the system "art world" to intervene from the inside to represent the artists interests. Artcart tries to create some kind of net art economy. Not only for selling net art, but to force the collection, preservation and support of net art. There are many important net art works which simply disappeared over the last few years. Institutions, like museums, should pay more attention to this.

JB: Was the presentation of artcart at the Station Rose webcast at Art Frankfurt 2001 a turning point? Tell us what happened and what this event added to both the presentation of artcart and the artworks available at artcart.

MH: In the first place artcart sells net art over the internet. As long as net art is digital art it makes most sense to distribute it using the e-commerce tools. Artcart was presented in the Real World (physical space JB) for the first time at this occasion. And this event was indeed a turning point, because suddenly we had to think of how to exhibit and present net art in the physical realm. This in turn provoked a new way of thinking about what defines net art. These things will have quite some impact on the further development of artcart. We included T-Shirts of Blank+ Jeron, the Midi-Pillows of Station Rose and a CD-ROM of Lfoundation. We prepared a real shopping cart with printed certificates of all works available via artcart. It was great fun to walk through the art fair with the cart to the webcast launch. Besides this I presented the works of our artists on a cube with four screens in the center of the launch space. It was kind of web VJ - mixing, but with respect - that means every single artwork had their time to be viewed. I also invited Jean-Phillipe Halgand (Pavu) and Takuji Kogo (Candy Factory) to do a special performance. Another thing that was very pleasant was the direct contact to the audience. Some people were really interested and we had some discussions not only about the work that was presented but also about its value.

JB: Do you have the impression institutions and companies feel more secure when they have you to do the negotiation for net art works? Would this be a traditional art market phenomenon?

MH: I was surprised about the interest of some commercial and non-commercial institutes for artcart. I received a few queries asking for co-operation. Building networks - this is something that it is very essential and important. What's new is that through artcart it is possible to not only cooperate with artists but also with companies and institutions like galleries. It is just another context or level we are operating on. It seems that companies like to deal with companies - more then they like to deal with an individual artist. That was very interesting. It is clear that artcart represents and sells net art. So it is the right context for business. It makes things easier, especially if a curator or collector plans a bigger project. For example artcart set up the Net art category for e-cards hosted at alb36.com. ... erklæren.... A nice project that shows that net art can be content that helps to enhance commercial web sites. Moreover we have co-operations in the art world. We worked together with Amy Davies at Haines Gallery for the show "Multiple Personalities" in San Francisco. Some of our artists were included and it was possible to purchase their works via our shopping system.

JB: Do you encounter any difficulties?

MH: Yes! One difficulty is the confrontations about definitions of value, authorship, originality and function. But I like that. A more important advantage could be that artcart can be a catalyst to change the way we value and consume net art. That is what is interesting about artcart. People often say: "Why should I buy something I can get it for free." artcart simply says: Be avant garde - buy net.art.

JB Buying a net art work can also help save it for posterity. You mentioned before that some works have already disappeared.

MH: Vuk Cosic already showed in 1997 with his copy of the Documenta X site that it is time to conserve net art. I wonder when institutions or curators realize that there are some things missing, that some works have disappeared which can now only be present in our memory and through descriptions. They have to take care. Museums should integrate not only single works but whole art servers.

JB: Do you think artists have a reasonable approach to selling their work at artcart? Do you agree with the works they select, how they offer them and what prices they ask for them?

MH: The economic situation of young artists is usually difficult and uncertain. There is no difference between artists working in the medium Internet or artists making sculptures from iron. Most artists, although they have a supporting gallery, need further funds, scholarships and other support. It is also important for artists to have the possibility to offer their artwork in a fitting context. Our artists can refer to artcart and say: "Go there and buy!" That is quite a substantial point! Habitually I ask artists if they have a work they like to sell at artcart. Then we have a discussion about concept and prices. Some net art is static, while other net art works are constantly changing. It is interesting to see artists developing strategies. For example Peter Luining is using Shareware strategies by including NAG Screens, the work by Melinda Rackham is given authenticity and value by including the purchasers name, or different ways to involve the collectors in the creative process is practiced by f.ex. ValŽry Grancher or PAVU.

JB: There is always discussion about what price to ask for a net artwork though. Do you think websites, prints from sites, documentation or installation pieces should fetch the same money paintings, prints, drawings, documentation and sculpture does?

MH: In my opinion digital art should be priced same as other art. The art market creates the monetary value of artworks and it doesn't really matter if it is digital or analogue.

Josephine Bosma, April 2002

<http://www.artcart.de/>

[BACK TO EVENT ARCHIVE](#)