Wired Word Art

School of the Museum of Fine Arts
Text and Image Art Department
Boston, MA

Fall Term: 2007
Instructor: Robert Kendall

Course Description

The World Wide Web presents many new opportunities for cross-fertilization between visual art and literature. In this workshop, you will study some of the most striking examples of online artistic and literary expression and learn how to combine word and image in your own Internet work. You can also optionally explore other electronic elements such as interactivity, animation, or audio. Possible online projects include visual poetry, hypermedia poems and narratives, visual experiments with found texts, and animated works. No previous experience in creative writing is required. Dreamweaver, Flash, Photoshop, and ImageReady will be available for your use, or you can use your own preferred software. Collaboration is welcomed.

Syllabus

This course will focus on your own creative work. You will create several online pieces that combine text and image—some introductory warm-up exercises and two or three full-scale works. Throughout the term, your classmates and I will provide honest, constructive criticism of your work, and you in turn will critique the output of each classmate. Throughout the course, we'll view and discuss samples of work by established artists and writers to provide inspiration for your own work. Using Dreamweaver, Flash, Photoshop, and ImageReady, I will demonstrate techniques that will be of use in your own work. These demos will often take place within the context of developing a collaborative art project in which the entire class will participate. Though I've assigned topics to specific weeks, this outline will be a set of flexible guidelines rather than a rigid schedule. I intend to let the course adapt itself to your individual interests and needs as much as possible. If an opportunity presents itself, we may take a field trip to attend a relevant performance or gallery exhibit.

Week 1:

What is electronic text art? A capsule overview of the genre in its many forms and discussion about what it means to blur the boundaries between art and literature.

Physical precursors to virtual text art: Contemporary electronic text art is an outgrowth of a centuries-long tradition of combining text and image.

How to use online media to the greatest effect: We'll talk about how to use the medium effectively and how to adapt its unique possibilities to your own individual style.

Week 2:

Discuss reading assignment: "Electronic Literature: What Is It?" by Katherine Hayles.

Getting started on your own work: An overview of possible approaches for your projects and an introduction to development techniques, such as storyboarding, prototyping, and beta-testing.

Street art, found text, and photography: Photos of text as the basis for effective Web sites. The Bubble Project, Street Stickers, Logozoa. The legal and artistic ramifications of appropriation.

Creating a Web presence: Guidelines for creating a simple Web site to showcase your class work.

Week 3:

Student Presentations: Introductory Projects—These short projects will let you get your feet wet and have some fun.

Student Presentations: Proposals for Project 1—You'll present a proposal for your first full-length project.

Week 4:

Animation and multimedia: Demos of multimedia work. Poems That Go, Born Magazine, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, Brian Kim Stefans.

Week 5:

Animation and multimedia: Techniques for incorporating animation, video, and audio into your work. Exploring Flash and ImageReady.

Student Presentations: Project 1

Week 6:

Interactivity: Demos of work that relies on hypermedia and other types of user interaction. Marek Walczak, Talan Memmott, Stuart Moulthrop.

Student Presentations: Project 1

Student Presentations: Proposals for Project 2

Week 7:

Interactivity: Techniques for incorporating interactivity into your work. What makes an effective user interface? Exploring Dreamweaver, Flash, and JavaScript.

Week 8:

Generated text/art: Exploring work created dynamically by computer algorithms. John Cayley, babel, Lewis LaCook.

Student Presentations: Project 2

Week 9:

Student Presentations: Project 2

Student Presentations: Proposals for Project 3 or expansion of Project 2

Week 10:

Publishing and exhibition considerations: Getting your work published online or presented in galleries.

Archival considerations: Combating software obsolescence.

Week 11:

Student Presentations: Project 3 or expansion of Project 2

Week 12:

Student Presentations: Project 3 or expansion of Project 2

Course Requirements

1. Create 1 short online work that combines text and image.
2. Create 2 or 3 longer, more complex online text art projects.
3. Build a simple Web site to showcase your work.
4. Participate in class discussions and provide critiques of classmates' work.