

art&education

ARTFORUM

login | register ADVERTISE BACK ISSUES CONTACT US SUBSCRIBE

search

ARTGUIDE DIARY PICKS NEWS **IN PRINT** FILM 500 WORDS VIDEO PREVIEWS TALKBACK A & E BOOKFORUM 中文版

IN PRINT



SUBSCRIBE

recent issues

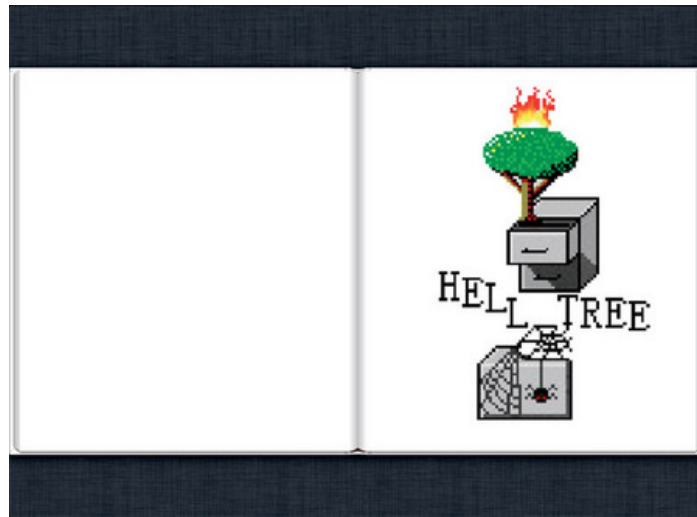
September 2012
 Summer 2012
 May 2012
 April 2012
 March 2012
 February 2012
 January 2012
 Archive to 1998

art&education

SEPTEMBER 2012

CLOSE-UP

Data Mine

BRUCE STERLING ON PETRA CORTRIGHT'S *HELL_TREE*, 2012

Petra Cortright,
HELL_TREE, 2012, e-book.

EARLY NET ART was like building ships in a bottle: arcane, difficult, and little appreciated. It was generally best pursued when cooped up in a state-sponsored computer lab in newly liberated Estonia.

Petra Cortright is a contemporary Californian Net artist, born in 1986. She's had a computer since she could walk, and was spared the earlier era's ideological warm-ups and tortured justifications. For Cortright, computers and social networks are as convenient as a watercolor set.

Cortright's artwork is commonly all about being Petra, a unique state of contemporary being best explored through YouTube videos, graphic FX, slider bars, and pull-down menus. She comes across on screens as a Mariko Mori figure, although younger, blonder, suntanned, down-market, and with a subjectivity thoroughly fractured by social networking. Her "sick" aesthetic is all about digital media systems being coaxed, warped, tricked, or shoveled into unplanned and unplannable performance spaces. Unlike most new-media artists, who are as fussy about their precious hardware as any touring synth band, Cortright will work on almost any gadget available. Any venue is great, too. Art galleries, communal meetups, Twitter, Flickr, LiveJournal, Myspace, Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube—New York, Berlin, Los Angeles, Mexico City—they're all good.

Her material is scraped from the abyss of Internet pop culture: 8-bit clip art, animated GIF files, free screen savers. Polka dots, dinosaurs, sparkles, fake flames. This dazzling clutter is deployed within a twentysomething Millennial cam-girl universe of back rooms, torn stockings, black fingernail polish, lizards, kittens, chickens, and pug dogs. The affect here is not so much nostalgic "retro" as bottom-feeding punk thrift store, or, better yet, one of those giant, folksy automobile-crushing facilities from the Tarantino Los Angeles of *Pulp Fiction*.

Mind you, these are pulverizingly effective works of Net art. Clear-eyed, dainty, and intuitive, they're weird in a way that Net art has never been weird before. The stiff technical constraints and hacker bravado have been blown away and replaced by a polymorphous digital-native approach in which software feels gooey and ductile, all spray cans and airbrushes.

LUHRING
AUGUSTINE

links



LESLIE
 TONKONOW
 ARTWORKS +
 PROJECTS

fonti

DAVID
 NOLAN
 NEW YORK

CHEIM
& READ

ROBERT
 MILLER
 GALLERY

cardi
 black
 box

HONOR
 FRASER
 Los Angeles

Gavin
 Brown's
 enterprise

Lisa Cooley



Petra Cortright, HELL_TREE, 2012. (Trailer)

Cortright's what-the-hell, manic-pixie attitude extends to every possible aspect of computation. Her spelling is irregular, her punctuation barely there; files appear in no particular order and are named the likes of "SNOWFLAEKS" or even "35asgyewwm." Her works are created in surges of inspiration and composed on aging home computers maxed out with external hard drives, webcams, and Wacom tablets, not to mention iTunes, Chrome, Notepad, Skype, Photoshop, µTorrent, and After Effects all running in tandem. Every Cortright artwork possesses a ruptured facade, the result of digital methods that have been pushed until they break the surface and reveal the bones of the software.

There's an endearing slyness about this that is soaked through with the artist's highly personal sensibility. It's truly new and unusual for Net art to carry such an intimate stamp, such a trackpad full of smudgy fingerprints. Part of this arises from the work's diaristic, exhibitionist air, its willingness to flail away in a back bedroom, YouTube cam-girl style. Mostly, though, it's about a startling intimacy with the means of digital composition. Maestros of software are supposed to value its high Formica sheen; they're never supposed to be tender, intimate, and forgiving about its bugs, stutters, freezes, glitches, and compression artifacts. Even glitch artists commonly play up the scariest, most alienating aspects of machine failure. Cortright's mouse, on the other hand, is like the yarn ball for a kitten—the playful failure is half the charm.

This brings us to Cortright's recent e-book, *HELL_TREE*, 2012 (published by Badlands Unlimited). This publication compiles hundreds of fitful, fragmentary human collisions with the machine, experiments that she had swept up, casually named by pounding the keyboard, and stuck into a single jam-packed folder so as to get them out of the way.

page 1 2

continued »

GLADSTONE
GALLERYhosfelt
galleryNYUSteinhardt
ART
GRADUATE
PROGRAMSVW
VENEKLASEN
WERNERART PRODUCTION
FUNDARTGUIDE | DIARY | PICKS | NEWS | [IN PRINT](#) | FILM | 500 WORDS | VIDEO | PREVIEWS | TALKBACK | A & E | BOOKFORUM | 中文版

All rights reserved. artforum.com is a registered trademark of Artforum International Magazine, New York, NY