

**BREAKING THE SPACE**  
**Cyberfeminist Activist Net Art**  
**Curated by Evelin Stermitz**

**BREAKING THE SPACE is part of the exhibition Speculum Artium 09, Festival of Inter-Media Art, in collaboration with the Department of Video and New Media, Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.**

**[http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/2009/index.php?option=com\\_artnetlab&EventID=32](http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/2009/index.php?option=com_artnetlab&EventID=32)**

**The exhibition takes place from May 12 – 15 2009, at Delavski Dom Trbovlje, Trbovlje, Slovenia.**

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New Media offers new possibilities and chances, but also comprehends old restrictions and patterns. Women collaborate virtually worldwide on debates, theories, art works and building cyberfeminist groups such as FACES mailing list, based on gender, technology and art, or OBN (Old Boys Network) as new collectives. These alliances offer possibilities to use New Media with female agendas. Works in the field of New Media, feminism and art is a way to subvert the public economic tradition and offer new views and perspectives. The term media activist occurs as an opportunity to undergo a shift from the male technocratic society, where knowledge, money and power go in one hand to strengthen male interests and visions. Cyberfeminism can be an answer to tech-malestream, as VNS Matrix (Francesca da Rimini, Josephine Starrs, Julianne Piercel, Virginia Barratt) the early Australian cyberfeminists stated: "mission to hijack the tools of the techno-cowboys and remap technoculture with a feminist bent"[1] in an active and not passive user role intended to recode, remap, relocate and reconstruct tech-culture. "Cyberfemmes are everywhere, but cyberfeminists are few and far between." [2] Core cyberfeminist actions are aesthetic/artistic strategies, not only as deconstructions of representations of gender, but also of traditional concepts on the net and in the institutions of tech-culture. Cyberfeminist projects do not work as a massive front in a manner of counter cultural movements, they are subversive, infiltrating the mainstream with ironic breaks, citations and deformations. [3]

Cyberfeminist Activist Net Art is breaking with traditional concepts of art and art history by exploring new forms of creating art in digital modules as a vivid and not static perception of art. Feminist thinking is influencing the primary male dominated digital field and breaking with concepts of a male technocratic (net-)culture, which leads to pieces of reflections on both, the socially constructed media and the society itself.

The selected net art works show its emphases on various social imbalances of real and virtual gender issues. Still existing male violence and suppression exerted on women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and after more then hundred years of fight for women's rights are articulated for example in Annie Abrahams, Deb King's and Margot Lovejoy's works. Another important issue are developments of artificial embodiment and the influence of biotechnologies on the female body and reproduction, e.g. works by Faith Wilding and Critical Art Ensemble. Other net art works are revealing the commodification and objectification of women in a mediated society by exposing male dominated spectatorship and its regalia of power.

Cyberfeminist Net Art addresses and spreads their broad field of feminist agenda to global recipients, democratic, multi-dimensional and participatory to evolve change. By involving digitality and virtuality in an aesthetics to subvert common practices of (net-)behaviour a re- and de-coding of structures is shaped towards an open space.

References:

1. Claude Draude, *Introducing Cyberfeminism*, in: [www.obn.org/reading\\_room/writings/html/intro.html](http://www.obn.org/reading_room/writings/html/intro.html), accessed 30 March 2009.
  2. Nancy Paterson, *Cyberfeminism*, 1996, in: Draude [1].
  3. Draude [1].
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### **Bindigirl**

**Prema Murthy**

**[www.thing.net/~bindigr/](http://www.thing.net/~bindigr/)**

According to Prema Murthy, Bindi is a girl born out of the "exotic" and "erotic". She is the embodiment of desire for and of the "other" - the desire of wanting to be known, or to know on an intimate level, and at the same time finding safety, even power, in distance, in being mysterious. Liberation in not being easily categorized. *Bindigirl* is the product of a colonialist mentality. She is aware that she is being watched, and asks for something in return for being looked at, to mimic the symbiotic relationship that exists in the "real" world between the colonized and the colonizer. Not only does a desire to conquer the Other exist in colonialism, but a longing by the Other for the conqueror and his or her (capitalist) ideals exists as well. This pattern of desire and longing must be re-evaluated before we can move on into a post-colonial territory.

Bindi is Murthy's avatar. Not only is she her alias in the virtual world, but a play on the word, which in India means an incarnation of a Hindu deity, the embodiment of an archetype. In this case she is the embodiment of the "goddess/whore" archetype which has historically been used to simplify the identity of women and their roles of power in society. Bindi is neither here nor there but exists in screenal space. She is somewhere between a question and an answer.

### **chronaMora**

**Deb King**

**[www.chronamora.com](http://www.chronamora.com)**

An examination of rape as a military tool -- This is a mere glance -- one would need a thousand moons... Commissioned by *The Women's Media Center*, NY.

### **Cult of the New Eve**

**Critical Art Ensemble, Paul Vanouse, Faith Wilding**

**[www.critical-art.net/biotech/cone/index.html](http://www.critical-art.net/biotech/cone/index.html)**

*Cult of the New Eve* reacts to modern biotechnology as manifested in its promises of salvation by practising a "new eve" cult aimed to unmask the utopias. In this performance, an intermeshing of electronic information systems with performative theatre practice, Critical Art Ensemble explores and provokes the discourse of life science.

### **Dollspace**

**Francesca da Rimini**

**Sound by Michael Grimm**

**[www.dollyoko.thing.net](http://www.dollyoko.thing.net)**

An internet artwork exploring issues of power, violence, sexuality. *Dollspace* collects the tracks of Doll Yoko, the ghost of all the children that were drowned in the Pond of Dead Girls, in Japan, only because they were born female. The artist is haunted by this ghost and tells all her possible lives, her sexual desires and obsessions to which a body was denied. Doll Yoko says: "All history is pornography" and "History is written by men who fuck their daughters".

## **D/t/P disturb.the.peace [angry women]**

**Jess Loseby et al.**

**[www.d-t-p.tv](http://www.d-t-p.tv)**

*Disturb.the.Peace [angry woman]* is aimed at creating a collaborative net-based installation with the core concept of the visual portrait of feminine anger. The net offers a canvas for self-portraiture and self-documentary, which both men and woman users and artists have used to explore the many eclectic thematics that make up contemporary net art. However, anger - that non PC, emotional serpent - still remains visually elusive. Emails are full of bile, blogs map outpourings of rage and disgust, newsgroups simmer over with adversary and cutting one-liners but not, apparently, visual artworks...? Can anger be beautiful? Can rage be aesthetic? In popular culture there are a range of angry babes to pick: from girl-power to the Powerpuff girls but "...their popularity may not reflect a dramatic shift in our society's view of gender roles, but rather our inability to stomach female anger unless it's sugar-coated in cuteness and scored with a pervasively chirpy, non-threatening tone." (Powerpuff Girls to the Rescue: Heather Havrilesky, Salon. Posted July 5, 2002)

## **ebaybies**

**Nanette Wylde**

**[www.preneo.org/nwylde/ebaybies/](http://www.preneo.org/nwylde/ebaybies/)**

*ebaybies* are selected from abandoned, up-for-auction darlings. Their net value at any given moment is based not only on their physical condition and the near extinction of their type, but also on the current state of the market and the economic conditions of both the seller and potential buyers.

I scour the internet's online auction sites for potential ebaybies — dolls, often labeled 'antique' whose images are particularly embedded with traces of their history and service to humanity. Each ebaybie is transformed from auction photo to fine art print through a labor intense process involving an interchange of aesthetics, narrative play, concept, and technique.

*ebaybies* have been rescued from the harsh realities of electronic commerce: commodity, novelty, ownership, capital, collections, and shipping. These small edition, hand printed, original fine art prints are available for adoption into loving homes. Each ebaybie comes with a Certificate of Rescue.

*ebaybies* transcend the auction block and the price of their heads to levels of adoration only previously imagined. Contrary to Walter Benjamin's theory of "loss of aura" in the age of mechanical reproduction, ebaybies provide a genuine and lasting friendship. (Nanette Wylde)

## **Female Extension**

**Cornelia Sollfrank**

**[www.artwarez.org/femext/](http://www.artwarez.org/femext/)**

**[www.net.art-generator.com](http://www.net.art-generator.com)**

*Female Extension* is perhaps one of the more renown pranks within the history of net art. For the project, artist Cornelia Sollfrank submitted more than 200 applications by fictitious female artists to the net art competition EXTENSION sponsored by Galerie der Gegenwart (Gallery of Contemporary Art) of the Hamburger Kunsthalle (Hamburg Art Museum). She simulated not only a name, email address, phone number, and address for each applicant, but generated also an example of original net art work as well. Despite the disproportionate number of submissions by female artists, only male artists were selected as finalists. After the decision was announced, Sollfrank went public with the spoof. (Ceci Moss, <[www.rhizome.org](http://www.rhizome.org)>)

## **Flesh Machine**

### **Critical Art Ensemble**

**[www.critical-art.net/biotech/biocom/index.html](http://www.critical-art.net/biotech/biocom/index.html)**

*Flesh Machine* focuses on eugenics in the discourse and practice of current reproductive technologies, featuring the genetic screening of audience members and the diary of a couple going through in vitro fertilization.

## **[GashGirl] [Puppet Mistress] [doll yoko] [Liquid\_Nation]**

### **Francesca da Rimini**

**<http://gashgirl.sysx.org>**

Francesca da Rimini alias Gashgirl created a figure, in which her real and virtual life merged and are not distinguished anymore. The Australian artist, who also belonged to VNS Matrix, lived through the years from 1994 to 1997 mainly in the internet and lead as a form of alternative embodiment and "Identity-Bending" logged in different relationships.

## **Hommage à Olympe de Gouges**

### **Isabel Saij**

**[www.saij-netart2.net/processing-html/processing.html](http://www.saij-netart2.net/processing-html/processing.html)**

A net art work and software art based on the history of feminism and women's rights.

## **Mythic Hybrid**

### **Prema Murthy**

**[www.turbulence.org/Works/mythichybrid/index.html](http://www.turbulence.org/Works/mythichybrid/index.html)**

*Mythic Hybrid* is inspired by my interest in women working in microelectronics factories. This project stems from reports I found online linking collective hallucination experienced by women in South Asian microelectronics factories to globalization. Using the platform of an online search engine and video footage I shot on-site at a microelectronics factory in India, this project explored the often-mythologized links between hysteria and women's labor. Upon my research, I came across reports of collective hallucination and mass hysteria occurring among women factory workers.

In 2001, I traveled to India to continue my research and investigate these reports. What I found along the way was contrary to expectations – a group of sane, rational women with identities constructed by a set of complex social and psychological factors.

This project uses the term "mythic hybrid" in a critical way. It was coined by Donna Haraway over 10 years ago in her "Cyborg Manifesto", to invoke an imagination of fictions and feminisms that dreams "not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia".

Since then, how far has cyberfeminism taken us? (Prema Murthy)

## **Parthenia**

### **A Global Monument**

### **Domestic Violence Victims**

### **Margot Jovejoy**

**[www.parthenia.com](http://www.parthenia.com)**

This website was created as a companion to the *Parthenia* installation as a public monument to healing victims of domestic violence. Stories can be read and shared as a way of breaking the silence about domestic violence. The site also contains support resources, statistics, and views of the monument.

## **Pieces of Herself**

**Juliet Davis**

**[www.julietdavis.com/studio/piecesofherself/](http://www.julietdavis.com/studio/piecesofherself/)**

*Pieces of Herself* is an exploration of feminine embodiment and identity in relationship to public and private space and symbolic language. Drag and drop the pieces onto the body and reposition them as you like.

Using a drag-and-drop game interface, viewers scroll through familiar environments (e.g., domestic, outdoor, work) to collect metaphoric "pieces" of the self and arrange them in compositions inside the body. As each piece enters the body, it triggers audio clips from interviews with women, music loops, sound effects, etc., so that layered narratives form. The project, which was inspired by Elizabeth Grosz's theories about embodiment, comments on social inscription of the body. The environments are composites of more than 400 photographs, the pieces include 40 vector drawings, and the audio clips include segments from interviews with 10 women. (Juliet Davis)

## **Resurrection Karaoke for the Humiliated or "Test to predict potential aggressive behavior"**

**Annie Abrahams**

**[www.bram.org/karaoke/karaoke.htm](http://www.bram.org/karaoke/karaoke.htm)**

A sound piece with images of a woman on the ground in front of a freezer. The visitor is invited to sing the text that scrolls over the screen. Closing the window of the work will lead the visitor to a page where he is asked to contribute in a collaborative text about violence. I am aware this is not an easy work. The visitor will have to be able to listen till the end if he wants to be freed of the image of the suffering woman. He can also choose to karaoke it and so actualise the resurrection enacted in the text. Closing the window might be like refusing to be implicated in the woman's story and will put the visitor in front of a question about violence. (Annie Abrahams)

## **Smart Mom**

**SubRosa, Faith Wilding and Hyla Willis**

**[www.smartmom.cyberfeminism.net](http://www.smartmom.cyberfeminism.net)**

(created in the year 2000, currently work in progress)

*Smart Mom Pregnancy Technologies* is a parody on the marketing strategies of reprotch companies. The smart technologies marketed by this particular fictional corporation enable the obstetrical monitoring of women's pregnancy and birthing. The *Smart Mom Pregnancy Technologies* Corporation boasts, that their products are harbingers for a new kind of technically engineered and assisted biological evolution which holds out the hope of the birth of a new race of cyborg platforms and cyborg organisms.

## **Society for Reproductive Anachronisms**

**Critical Art Ensemble, Faith Wilding**

**[www.critical-art.net/biotech/sra/index.html](http://www.critical-art.net/biotech/sra/index.html)**

*Society for Reproductive Anachronisms* has been formed to combat the rationalization and instrumentalization of the reproductive process that is occurring in order to totally manage its service to the pancapitalist order and engages the audience in a dialogue about the problems of medical intervention in reproduction.

## **The Qi Project**

**Nanette Wylde**

**[www.qiproject.net](http://www.qiproject.net)**

*The Qi Project* is an inquiry into the nature of humanity and what it means to be human at this moment in time.

**venusConstruct**

**Deb King**

**[www.venusconstruct.com](http://www.venusconstruct.com)**

The web version of *VenusConstruct* uses *The Birth of Venus* by Boticelli as a jumping-off point to examine the effects of technology on the cultural view of femininity and identity.

Originally exhibited as a large-screen computer installation at the Forum Gallery (NY) as part of the "Feminist Figure" exhibition.

## **TACTICAL COLLECTIVES**

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**CRITICAL ART ENSEMBLE**

[www.critical-art.net](http://www.critical-art.net)

**Dones i noves tecnologies**

[www.donestech.net](http://www.donestech.net)

**FACES gender, technology, art**

[www.faces-l.net](http://www.faces-l.net)

**Genderchangers**

[www.genderchangers.org](http://www.genderchangers.org)

**Guerrilla Girls**

[www.guerrillagirls.com](http://www.guerrillagirls.com)

**Old Boys Network**

[www.obn.org](http://www.obn.org)

**subRosa**

[www.cyberfeminism.net](http://www.cyberfeminism.net)

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## **ONLINE RESEARCH SOURCES**

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**artfem.tv**  
**Art and Feminism ITV**  
**Evelin Stermitz**  
[www.artfem.tv](http://www.artfem.tv)

**Assemblage**  
**The Women's New Media Gallery**  
**Carolyn Guertin**  
<http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/traced/guertin/assemblage.htm>

**function:feminism**  
**an overview of cyberfeminism by Deb King**  
[www.functionfeminism.com](http://www.functionfeminism.com)

**International online databank for female media artists**  
**Ulrike Rosenbach**  
[www.bild-rausch.de](http://www.bild-rausch.de)

**n.paradoxa**  
**international feminist art journal**  
**exploring feminist theory and contemporary women's art practices**  
**Katy Deepwell**  
<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/>

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