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Internet art on display at Whitney Biennial

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By *Jamie Allen*
 CNN Interactive Senior Writer

(CNN) -- For Maxwell Anderson, director of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the question isn't why the museum finally decided to feature Internet art in its 2000 Biennial exhibit.

"How could we not?" asks Anderson. "The Whitney for 70 years has followed the instincts of American artists."

And so, scant years after the World Wide Web started spinning out to corners of the cyber-universe, those instincts have dragged Internet art from the dark corridors of geekdom and into the Whitney's lighted corridors.

The result is Biennial 2000, the museum's latest exhibit featuring the vanguard of American art, and the first Biennial to feature Internet art.

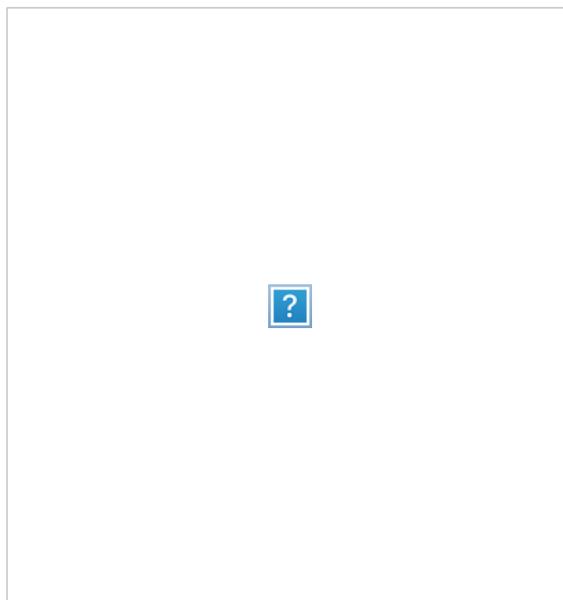
Biennial 2000 runs through June 4 and features 97 artists, including the creators of nine Web sites. According to a Whitney news release, those sites are remarkable for using "an entirely new vocabulary of forms and methods, taking advantage of the seemingly random free association of the Internet."

The sites can be viewed at the exhibit on five laptop computers, museum officials say.

Art in its 'embryonic' form

"If Net art is in the embryonic stage, it's all the more fascinating," says Anderson. He likens this period to the early part of the 20th century, when artists like Wassily Kandinsky were beginning to experiment with new themes of expression.

"You think back to other moments in our history, like the teens and '20s, when found objects became part of the



Salomon Huerta
Untitled Head
 1999
 Oil on canvas, 11.75 x 12 in.
[See more Biennial art in our pop-up gallery.](#)

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For the first time, the Whitney Museum of American Art is featuring Internet works. Do you consider Web site art on a par with traditional forms?

Yes, art is art

No, I prefer paintings

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currency of art," he says. "It would be so remarkable to have carefully documented the first stirrings of abstraction in art making under Kandinsky's brush.

"So it's fun to be on the ground floor of understanding what artists will be doing in the years to come," Anderson says.

Lawrence R. Rinder, director of the CCAC Institute at the California College of Arts and Crafts, headed the quest for Internet content in the Biennial, soliciting advice from artists and curators before narrowing the field of exhibits.

"He spent hours and hours sifting through different sites," says Anderson.

Nine sites

The nine sites picked are: "[Grammatron](#)" by Mark Amerika ; "[Redsmoke](#)" by Lew Baldwin ; "[Superbad](#)" by Ben Benjamin ; " and "[Fakeshop](#)" by the creators of the site Fakeshop .

Also, "[Ouija 2000](#)" by Ken Goldberg ; "[@™ ark](#)" by the creators of [@™ ark Web site](#) ; "[Every Icon](#)" by John F. Simon, Jr. ; "[Blindspot](#)" by Darcey Steinke ; and "[Sampling Broadway](#)" by Annette Weintraub .

The sites range in content, featuring selections as diverse as Weintraub's virtual tour of five spots along Manhattan's Great White Way; Steinke's work of Internet-designed fiction; and Benjamin's mix of graphics and story.

Old, new coexist

Will Net art eventually make old-fashioned, wall-hung art passe? Anderson doesn't see that day coming.

"Everybody thought the newspaper would end the discussions around the hearth, or that radio would end the newspaper, or that TV would end radio," says Anderson. "Everybody always fears this and yet we always make more psychic room for all of these media."

That's one reason why traditional works -- paintings, sculptures, installation art, photography, and cinematic selections -- are featured in the 2000 Biennial, too.

The featured artists include Salomon Huerta ("Untitled Head," oil on canvas), Jennifer Reeder ("Nevermind," video), Chris Verene ("Camera Club," photography), and Rebecca Baron ("okay bye-bye," 16mm film).

Impressive legacy

These latest artists succeed some of the best-known names in American art. The Biennials, which started at the Whitney in 1932, have featured the early works of Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock and Jasper Johns, among others.

2000 BIENNIAL CURATORS:

- Michael Auping**, Chief Curator, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas
- Valerie Cassel**, Director, Visiting Artists Program, The School of The Art Institute of Chicago
- Hugh M. Davies**, Director, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego
- Jane Farver**, Director, List Visual Arts Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Andrea Miller-Keller**, independent curator, based in Hartford, Connecticut
- Lawrence R. Rinder**, Director, CCAC Institute, California College of Arts and Crafts, San Francisco and Oakland, California

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Such an artistic legacy makes the selection process all the more demanding, Anderson says.

To organize the Biennial, the Whitney relied on six curators from different regions of the country, each bringing a different artistic understanding to the process, Anderson says. He calls their collaborations "a fertile chaos of recommendations from artists and collectors and curators and people who are in the know.

"All six curators were invited to bring in 40 artists' names to start the bidding war, and there was very little overlap," Anderson says. "Ultimately, we had to rationalize this and do a single list."

The list hints at the changes that are sweeping us into the dawn of the new millennium of art, too.

"It's a great time to be an artist," says Anderson, "because a lot of the sacred cows are no longer in evidence."

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