

INTERVIEW WITH

Rolf Van Gelder *Carmin Karasic*

by **Jeremy Hight**, online via email correspondence, June 2011

Re-Drawing Boundaries, Leonardo Electronic Almanac New Media Exhibition

Curator: Jeremy Hight

Senior Curators: Lanfranco Aceti and Christiane Paul

What projects are you working on right now?

Sjansmachine will be shown at Currents 2011, Santa Fe, NM (<http://sjansmachine.cage.nl>). *<1ru5* (pronounced virus) will be presented as a paper about an artwork in development by Nina Wenhart, Jeff Donaldson, Rolf van Gelder and Carmin Karasic, at the FILE 2011 festival, Sao Paulo, Brazil in July. *Exquisite Zone* is a brand new locative media work in Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

Who are some of your influences?

Carmin: Roy Ascott, Karl Simms, Ricardo Dominguez, Brett Stalbaum, Teri Rueb, Natalie Jeremijenko, Martin Wattenberg, Scott Facon, Critical Art Ensemble, Floating Point Unit.

Rolf: the CoBrA Movement, Nam June Paik, Electronic Disturbance Theater, Theo Kuyjpers, Rik van Iersel, Gustav Mahler.

What terms are most often used to categorize your works? Does it vary or end up a bit of a range?

New media art, interactive installation, cyberart, hactivism, locative media, web art. Our art varies, so the terms vary.

What do you see happening in the near future in terms of any new developments in technology and how we in society interact ?

Our culture is drastically changing: better living through communication technology. We'll see more artists addressing: non-tactile UI, responsive environments, sustainability, mobile/social computing, research+art merges in: nano-, bio-, genetic-, social-, cyborg and issues around data control, i.e. 'no privacy ever again', 'who owns your data?', etc...

Are there other areas outside of art that influence your work? How so?

For Rolf, his emotional state is one of his biggest inspirations. In general emerging technologies, social change, political climate, and environmental issues all influence our ideas. For example, Carmin was inspired to create *Handheld Histories as Hyper Monuments* because of US propaganda about the Iraqi war.

Do you incorporate history into any of your work? Do you incorporate incompleteness? How so?

Handheld Histories, obviously. HHHM is also completed by the user. We created a container and invite others to add their contribution, which creates the hyper-monument. There are examples in many other artworks too, for example: *Stateless Half Life* (2004) is a data visualization artwork about refugee migration and re-patriation. The data is an historic snapshot. It elicits a visceral response in the viewer, by banning people from the revisiting the artwork forever, for unreasonable reasons (<http://www.carminka.net/shl>). *Groeten uit Eindhoven!* (2003) uses history and humor to examine Dutch stereotypes in the context of modern global society (<http://www.cage.nl/groeten>). *YOU Girl!* (2002) Sections of the 1960 Wendy Ward Charm School workbook are reconstructed in the *YOU Girl!* website. *YOU Girl!* shows how the book's narrative works to establish impossible 'Beauty Ideals' and vulnerability

in feminine identity (<http://www.carminka.net/yougirl>). *With Liberty and Justice for All* (1998) is one of the very first commissioned hypertext autobiographies. The work looks at the American Dream in 1960–1969 from the perspective of my childhood. (<http://www.carminka.net/pixeliberty.htm>). *St. Lucy Chronicles* (1996) is one of the first web art projects. It explores a virtual meeting between Claude Monet, a painter going blind, and St. Lucy, the patron saint of those who are blind. (<http://www.cage.nl/stlucy>)

What do you think of the naming of "locative media art" in terms of being accurate or limiting in any way?

Locative media art is fine as long as other terms are used to further describe the work. In general we don't like to label artwork because it's too narrow.

What aspects of space and data do you think can be more deeply explored by artists and others?

Artists and the general public can use 'open data' to create transparent community information. Information is power. This power can be used to improve the quality of life in ways best suited to community/social needs. Artists and the general public can contribute unsolicited architecture and recommend sustainable communities. For example Buckminster Fuller's architectural urban designs were unsolicited, yet thoroughly addressed urban population issues. Another example would be city planners designing a new mall, and the citizens of the city presenting unsolicited alternative shopping models that better suit their needs.

Is code art? Is art a sort of code? What relationship enriches your collaborations as far as utilizing and exploring data, metaphor and larger commentary?

Code is not art per se. A developer decides whether the code is a work of art or not. Not all code is art. Some code is just functional, created as a solution to complete a specific task, but it is not art. Other code is definitely art. It's based on the reason the code was developed and the aesthetics of the code itself. Like Marcel Duchamp's toilet seat (*'Fountain'*):

a toilet seat is not art until you place it in a gallery or museum and call it a work of art.

Art can be seen as a kind of communication tool, a language; communication on a deeper level. For that reason art IS a sort of code.

We are as a friend says, “data fanatics”. We both enjoy data visualization/representation created via the aesthetics of beautiful code acting upon data. We don’t limit what kind of data we select. The news, or emotions, or whim, or anything can motivate data mining. Data excites us when we find patterns and/or correlations. We are fascinated by the resulting representation of data when a set of rules (code) are applied. When using data (or live data streams) in an artwork, code becomes the ‘tool’, like a paintbrush, and data becomes the medium, like the paint. The data itself shapes the artwork as directed by the code. We only decide what data to use and how to present it; i.e. audio, visual, both, other, etc.



Handheld Histories as Hyper Monuments, 2007, Rolf Van Gelder, Carmin Karasic. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

Handheld Histories as Hyper Monuments

Handheld Histories as HyperMonuments is an artwork that addresses historic bias and exploits media literacy through GPS and mobile computing technologies. This artwork is a collaboration by Carmin Karasic, Rolf van Gelder, and Rob Coshow, with special thanks to the HP mscapers team, Brett Stalbaum, and Jo Rhodes. History is typically a story perpetuated as fact and published by the dominant social structures. Historic texts often skew event details to favor the victors, usually illustrated with drawings, paintings and photographs that support the victors' tales. The result is an interpreted history, filtered by the producer. This project constructs hyper-monuments at the sites

of historic monuments. The intent is to create electronic monuments as symbols of lost alternative perspectives. Given a prominent historic monument, shrine, location, etc., HHHM plays a location specific movie clip that regresses the present day image to a pre-urbanized vision for the specific location. For example, imagine your cell phone 'alerts' you near the Old South Church in Boston, MA. You 'answer' and see an easily identifiable photo of the Old South Church, just as it appears right there in front of you on the street. You press "Regress" and see the church morph through images that move backwards in history to a time when that location was at its natural, undeveloped state –natural wetlands.



Sjansmachine, 2011. Rolf Van Gelder, Carmin Karasic, Olga Mink. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

Sjansmachine

Sjansmachine (“chance machine”) is an interactive photo installation that works with real time images and face detection software. Participants intuitively use QR tags, Augmented Reality markers and face detection to “find new friends”. Sjansmachine plays with the idea that the virtual world is replacing our social by encouraging people to connect in the real world. The custom software (written in *Processing*, including face detection and motion detection functionality) automatically takes a picture of the face in the booth. The photo is transferred to the projections (one face per square). The images are constantly animated. During “match” mode *sjansmachine* displays its match in front of the audience. The couple can obtain their prize together. The project is a collaboration between Olga Mink, Carmin Karasic and Rolf van Gelder.

Sjansmachine video link:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/LEAbroadcast?feature=mhee#p/c/272279007EEFA15E/8/HWh5zFvxQ-g>

Artists' Statements:**Rolf Van Gelder:**

"My life as an artist has been a continuous struggle between logic and emotion (Apollo and Dionysus). I've been brought up with computers and math: everything should be logical and have a pre-defined reaction on every action. While creating my traditional, abstract paintings I try to switch off the logical part of my brain and let emotion rule. While creating new media art I give room to the logical part of my brain and try to use it in a creative way. My art always has multiple layers. Some of them are hidden and have much deeper, and often darker, meanings. I want my audience to have something to explore, discover and experience while peeling off layer after layer. Some of the layers, most likely, never will be revealed but that's okay! Life is full of mysteries that will never be revealed... For me creating art is a way of self-reflection, meditation, maybe even therapy, and a very personal way of communicating with other human beings. It's a way of 'saying things' that cannot be said via human language or any other regular communication tools. It's communication on a different level."

Carmin Karasic: I use computer based and emerging technologies in my art to increase social awareness through art activism. I believe it is a cyberartist's responsibility to provoke a reevaluation of our existing systems through technology. Because future communication technology will enable total wireless connectivity, I am specifically interested in our interaction with this pervasive computing. My art investigates alternative views, new connections and interaction between edges. My artworks consciously examine the hyperreal, because presentation has become more important than personal opinion, observation, or even reality itself. For example, my artwork "Handheld Histories as Hyper-Monuments" was inspired by the gap between official political histories and alternative histories. Digital doubles in this project create spaces for untold stories, forgotten histories, and pure speculation surrounding monuments and events. Ultimately, my ambition is to contribute to the positive social engagement

of new technologies through art. Synergy between artists, scientists, and engineers can lead to new cultural insights and potential innovation, rather than reinforce old assumptions. I want my work to contribute to invention and digital enhancements.

Bios

Rolf Van Gelder initially studied and was trained in electric engineering (specializing in information science). In 1995 he founded CAGE (cyber arts gallery Eindhoven), one of the first virtual art galleries on the internet (www.cage.nl). His work entitled "Virtual Quilt" (with Carmin Karasic and Clara Wainwright) is part of the permanent collection of the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, Ma, USA. His works have been shown internationally in many festivals, galleries and museum shows. His works are held in private collections in The Netherlands, USA, Canada, Austria, Germany, Belgium and Portugal.

Carmin Karasic, international multimedia artist, has many years experience in information technology (software developer, project manager, information architect). All of her work is information technology based. She is specifically interested in the social aspects and implications of emerging technologies that move people toward total wireless connectivity. She has exhibited in North America, Europe and Asia, and she is a founding member of the Electronic Disturbance Theater, an art activist group. She has also been the Assistant Director of Boston Cyberarts, (Boston, MA) and of MAD Emergent Art Center (Eindhoven, NL).

She is also an educator. From 2002 to 2006, she was a core faculty member at the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University. At AIB she developed, redesigned, and taught New Media and Digital Art courses. She also had independent study students and suggested books to expand the Digital Art collection in the AIB library. In June 2005 she became an Adjunct Faculty member in the Technology in Education (TIE) Master's

Program. She moved to the Netherlands in 2006, and continued with Lesley University teaching and mentoring online and cohort TIE courses, as a National Faculty member.

Recent exhibitions include mobile media collaborative public drawing “Exquisite Zone”, in collaboration with Rolf van Gelder (November 2011); “GLOW” in Eindhoven, The Netherlands (May–August 2011); mobile media artwork “Handheld Histories as Hyper-Monuments” in collaboration with Rolf van Gelder; “Re-Drawing Boundaries”, Leonardo Electronic Almanac New Media Exhibition, Istanbul, Turkey (June 2011); interactive installation “Sjansmachine”, collaboration with Olga Mink and Rolf van Gelder, (June 2011); “Currents 2011 Festival”, El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico. ■