

Gretchen Andrew

Born in Los Angeles, United States, 1988

Lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION / WORK

B.S. in Information Systems, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, 2010

Intuit, software engineer, 2006 - 2009

Google, people technology manager, 2010 - 2012

Billy Childish Studio Apprenticeship, 2013 - 2017

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019 *NOT NOT THE TURNER PRIZE*, Chelsea Cookhouse, London, United Kingdom

2019 *Whitney Biennial 2019... Vision Board*, LACDA, Los Angeles, CA

2018 *Roughly Translated As: Ubuntu*, A4 Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

2017 *Internet Imperialism: Bow, NH*, 18th Street Art Center, Santa Monica, CA

HOW TO HOW TO HOW TO draw, <http://linkcabinet.eu>

2016 *Interior*, Whitcher Projects, Inglewood, CA

HOW TO HOW TO HOW TO, Arebyte Gallery, London, United Kingdom

Crossed Lines, Ace Hotel, London, United Kingdom

2015 *Virtual Reality*, De Re Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Pigment As Pixel, Hoxton Gallery, London, United Kingdom

2014 *Painting As Interface*, The White Building, London United Kingdom

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018 Search Engine Art, V&A Museum, London, United Kingdom (book)

2018 Mozfest Open Web, Mozilla Foundation, London, United Kingdom

2014 *Digital Futures*, V&A Museum, London, United Kingdom

2013 De Re Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

CONFERENCES & LECTURES

2018 Wikimania, Cape Town, South Africa

Lux Gallery, London, United Kingdom

The British Computer Society, London, United Kingdom

2017 Emmanuel College at Cambridge University, Cambridge, United Kingdom

The Photographer's Gallery, London, United Kingdom

Vivid Projects, Birmingham, United Kingdom

2016 The London Film School, London, United Kingdom

The International Conference on the GIF, Bologna, Italy

2014 *Digital Utopias*, The British Arts Council, Hull, United Kingdom

The British Computer Society, London, United Kingdom

2013 The British Film Institute, London, United Kingdom

SHORT LISTS

2015 The Delfina Foundation, London, United Kingdom

2016 Ace & Tate, London United Kingdom

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Catherine Womack. "This Artist Is Tricking the Internet into Making Her Dreams Comes True." LA Magazine, May 15, 2019

<<https://www.lamag.com/culturefiles/gretchen-andrew-search-engine-art/>>

Catherine Womack. "Hack the Frieze Los Angeles art fair? This painter says she's done it." LA Times, February 14, 2019

<<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-frieze-gretchen-andrew-20190214-htmlstory.html>>

Matt Stromberg. "A Net Artist Takes Over the Google Image Search of "Frieze Los Angeles." HyperAllergic, February 13, 2019

<<https://hyperallergic.com/484599/a-net-artist-takes-over-the-google-image-search-of-frieze-los-angeles/>>

Liz Ohanesian. "I'm taking a power gap and closing it with an information gap." We Present, July 2019

<<https://wepresent.wetransfer.com/story/gretchen-andrew/>>

Gunseli Yalcinkaya. "The artist who trolled Google into making her win the Turner Prize." Dazed, September 27, 2019

<<https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/46189/1/gretchen-andrew-turner-prize-internet-algorithm>>

Caroline Goldstein, "How One 'Search Engine Artist' Hacked Her Paintings Into Frieze Los Angeles's Google Results." ArtNet, February 12, 2019

<<https://news.artnet.com/market/frieze-los-angeles-gretchen-andrew-1462594>>

Gareth Harris. "Pioneer of Virtual Reality Art." Financial Times, September 21, 2016.

<<https://www.ft.com/content/89bdcff0-7fe0-11e6-8e50-8ec15fb462f4>>

Liz Ohanesian. "At This Gallery Show, the Art Isn't on the Walls — It's in Virtual Reality." LA Weekly, February 11, 2015.

<<http://www.laweekly.com/arts/at-this-gallery-show-the-art-isnt-on-the-walls-its-in-virtual-reality-5376015>>

Amira, Dhalla. "This Artist's Paintings Are Making the Internet More Open and Equal." The Mozilla Foundation, May 21, 2018.

<<https://medium.com/read-write-participate/this-artists-paintings-are-making-the-internet-more-open-and-equal-2c9b4340f08c>>

Neal, Stimler. "Making New Art Inspired by the Met's Collections with Google Glass.' The Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 6, 2014.

<<https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/digital-underground/2014/making-new-art>>

CALENDAR

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2019 • LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR

AT THE MOVIES



Their voices waiting to be heard



MARCUS YAM L.A. Times

Remembering tears and terror

Yalitza Aparicio, the Oscar-nominated star of "Roma," recalls three intense key scenes. **THE ENVELOPE**

The story of Cardi B's dress

To get Cardi B into her Grammys gown, her stylist had to persuade the label, then his client. **E2**

Ask Amy **E6**
Comics **E6-7**
TV grid **E8**

She SEO'd her way into an art fair

Search for images of Frieze Los Angeles and get paintings from a tech-savvy trickster.

BY CATHERINE ELAINE WOMACK

Strewn across artist Gretchen Andrew's coffee table in her downtown Los Angeles loft, little sample squares of gray and brown frieze-style carpeting serve as makeshift coasters for coffee mugs as well as conversation pieces.

Frieze may be the name of the major art fair inaugurating a Los Angeles edition this weekend, but it's also a style of carpeting. Available in a variety of drab neutrals, its signature twisted fibers are designed to obscure footprints and vacuum track

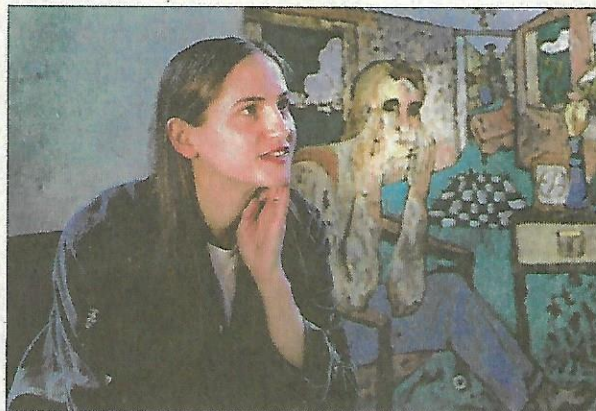
marks, Andrew says, running her fingertips across the pile of one sample.

Since October, Andrew has spent many hours populating websites like Quora, Pinterest, Yelp and Tumblr with her writings about frieze carpeting and images of her paintings displayed on the walls of a virtual gallery with a digitally generated frieze-covered floor. More important, Andrew has carefully optimized each post and image using basic search-engine-optimization strategies.

Her goal: Trick Google into displaying Andrew's virtual gallery as the top image search result for "Frieze Los Angeles."

The hack worked. Andrew may not be represented by a gallery, and her oil and charcoal portraits and figurative works on

[See Frieze, E8]



GINA FRAZZI Los Angeles Times

GRETCHEN ANDREW is a tech-savvy artist who has fooled Google into presenting her paintings when computer users seek "Frieze Los Angeles" images.

She SEO'd her way into an art fair

[Frieze, from El] cardboard will not be displayed at Frieze Los Angeles, running Thursday through Sunday at Paramount Studios. But by using SEO techniques and a bit of clever word play about carpeting, she has convinced Google that images of her artwork are the most important visual content related to the much-hyped international art fair.

Google "Frieze Los Angeles" and click on "Images," and you'll likely find that more than half of the top 12 results displayed are of Andrew's virtual gallery. In this way, Andrew has successfully inserted herself and her artwork into the art fair's online presence. (Frieze did not respond to a request for comment.)

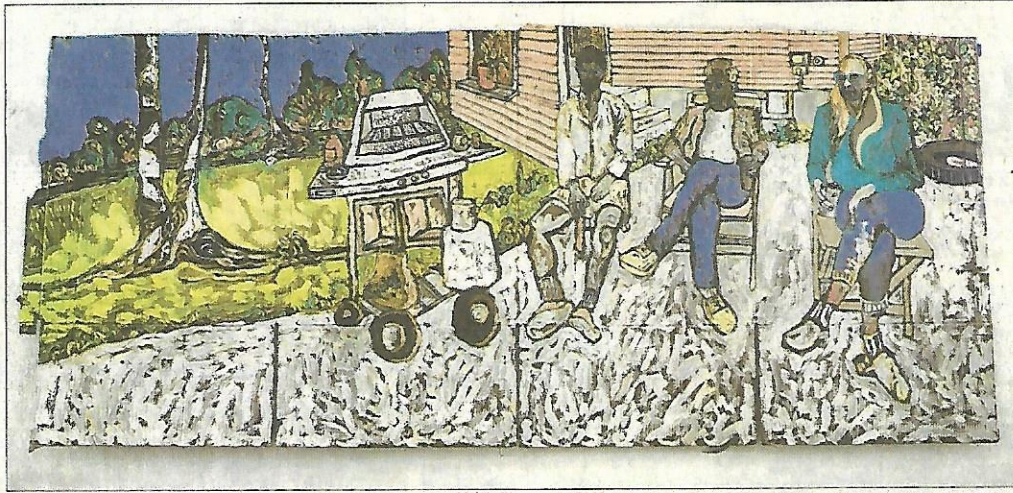
It is a tactic — one that Andrew refers to as "digital performance," "internet imperialism" or "search engine art" — that she has employed before. In previous iterations, Andrew used SEO practices to push images of her artwork into the top search results for "Made for Women," "Powerful Person" and "Perfect Female Body," among other phrases.

Using search engine optimization as an artistic medium comes naturally to Andrew. A former athlete from New Hampshire who attended Boston College on a track scholarship, Andrew studied information systems and worked in tech before leaving Silicon Valley to learn how to paint, first through YouTube videos and later as an apprentice of London-based figurative painter Billy Childish.

Despite two years as a Google employee, the artist says she doesn't have any inside secrets when it comes to manipulating search results.

"I don't know entirely how Google works," she says. She says Frieze Los Angeles probably could push her out of the top spots if the art fair properly optimized its website, though it would take months for her images to disappear from results.

Clicking on one of An-



OIL PAINTINGS from Gretchen Andrew's series "It's My Future ... And I Want You There" depict who and what she wants in her future. Photographs by GINA FERRELL Los Angeles Times

'I guess I am disruptive by nature, but I'd like to think I am also conscientious by nature.'

— GRETCHEN ANDREW

Andrew's images directs you to her "Frieze Los Angeles" website. The text on the page is meandering and nonsensical, designed to be read as much by search engines as by humans.

Excerpts of that same text appear in Andrew's "Frieze Los Angeles Carpet Guide," a newspaper the artist plans to distribute outside the fair this weekend. Like the paintings at the center of her work, the newspaper is a tangible, physical element of a largely ephemeral digital piece.

Andrew's "Frieze Los Angeles" project is part of a larger body of art she expects to execute this year

called "It's My Future and I Want You There." She says she plans to insert her images into search results for the Whitney Biennial and the Turner Prize.

Andrew says the series "very nonironically" explores her aspirations and dreams. The swirling, pastel figures she depicts in her paintings are of people, places and things she desires in her future. Similarly, the artist says that while she is critiquing powerful art world establishments, she is also poking a bear with which she'd one day like to be friends.

"I like these sort of insider-outsider dynamics," she says. "I'm not so outside of the actual art world or so indifferent to it that I don't respect these institutions. Essentially I am looking at the rules, the unwritten rules, and then finding creative ways to work around them, inserting myself in a fake-it-till-you-make-it way into the different echelons of the art world."

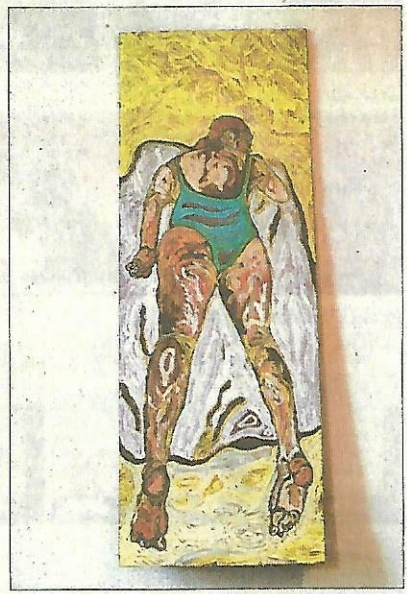
The dynamics of power and money in the art world and on the internet is a recurring theme in Andrew's

work. "There's a big parallel between the way that the internet operates and the way the art world operates," she says. "The internet has so much potential for creativity and connection but mostly is used as a place to buy things, spend money and create value for companies. That mirrors the art fair model. Art is this creative, liberating, inspiring aspect of our culture that also operates within this shopping mall dynamic of art fairs."

At first, Andrew says she doesn't think of herself as a disrupter, but then she backtracks.

"I guess I am disruptive by nature, but I'd like to think I am also conscientious by nature," she says. "I'm thoughtfully disruptive, curious about rules (legal, technical) and where they leave room for creative play."

Punking Google is a reminder, she says, that "technology often fails on nuance." And if she can find ways to exploit that weakness, she says, it's important to consider what those with real power and money can do.



Home » Art » This Artist Is Tricking the Internet into Making Her Dreams Come...



Courtesy Gretchen Andrew

ART TECHNOLOGY

This Artist Is Tricking the Internet into Making Her Dreams Come True

Gretchen Andrew used to work at Google. Now she makes "search engine art"

By Catherine Womack - May 15, 2019



Lately, artist Gretchen Andrew has been thinking about the people, experiences and places she wants in her future. As she does, she paints tangible elements of that dream life in swirling oil paints on flattened pieces of cardboard, manifesting the future she desires with each brushstroke.

Some of Andrew's aspirations are professional. She would love for her paintings to hang on the walls of a major museum, for instance, or for her work to be accepted into a respected art world institution like the Whitney Biennial.

Andrew's paintings are not in the [2019 Whitney Biennial](#), which opens Friday, May 17 in New York. But shhhh! Don't tell the internet that. By populating open source websites with images of her paintings and texts about her Whitney Biennial aspirations, Andrew has effectively fooled the internet into thinking her dream is reality. Google "Whitney Biennial 2019" and click on "Images" and, in place of images of artworks that are actually in this year's biennial, you'll find Andrew's paintings populating most of the top image search results.

Welcome to dream manifestation through search engine optimization.

NEWSLETTERS

LAMAG.COM NEWSLETTERS

Be an L.A. Insider

Email*

☒ Food News - Our weekly serving of local dining news and reviews.

☒ Weekend Guide - Our weekly recommendation of where to go and what to do in LA this weekend.

☒ Daily Update - The stories you need to read before you start your day.

☒ Travel - Your dispatch on travel news, hotel deals, and special packages from our preferred partners.

☒ Special Offers - Special offers and event invites from our preferred partners.

Submit

Before Andrew became an artist, she worked for Google in Silicon Valley. Today she is a “digital artist” or “search engine artist” in addition to being a painter.

“I’m interested in exploring the places where technology fails,” she says. “I’m interested in where the internet—and search technology in particular— isn’t quite as smart or nuanced as we accept it to be.” By using SEO best practices to confuse Google into thinking her dream is already reality, she says she is just “using word play to dive into the limitations of how the internet thinks.”



We all know that the internet isn’t fool proof, that it often confuses fake and real news. But instead of a conversation about what’s real and fake, Andrew says she is interested in a more nuanced discussion about what we hope, what we fear, and what has already occurred.

“I started realizing that I could use language to say that I would really like to be in the Whitney Biennial and the internet would just pick up on the keywords as if it were true. In this way I can visualize this failure of technology in a way that relates to my practice of search engine manipulation or, as I’m referring to it now, search engine hypnosis.”

Andrew’s Whitney Biennial project is part of a larger body of work she is producing this year called “it’s my future...and I want you there.” Earlier this year she manipulated image search results for the Frieze Los Angeles art fair. For that project she [used texts about frieze-style carpeting to fool google into popping her images into top “Frieze Los Angeles” image search results](#).

This time around, instead of relying on word play like she did with Frieze/frieze, she is forcing search engines to parse the difference between a hoped for future and one that already exists. She calls [the website for this project](#) a “net vision board.” Its text begins with clear statements about her Biennial aspirations before devolving into a sort of word salad meant to be read by search engines more than humans.

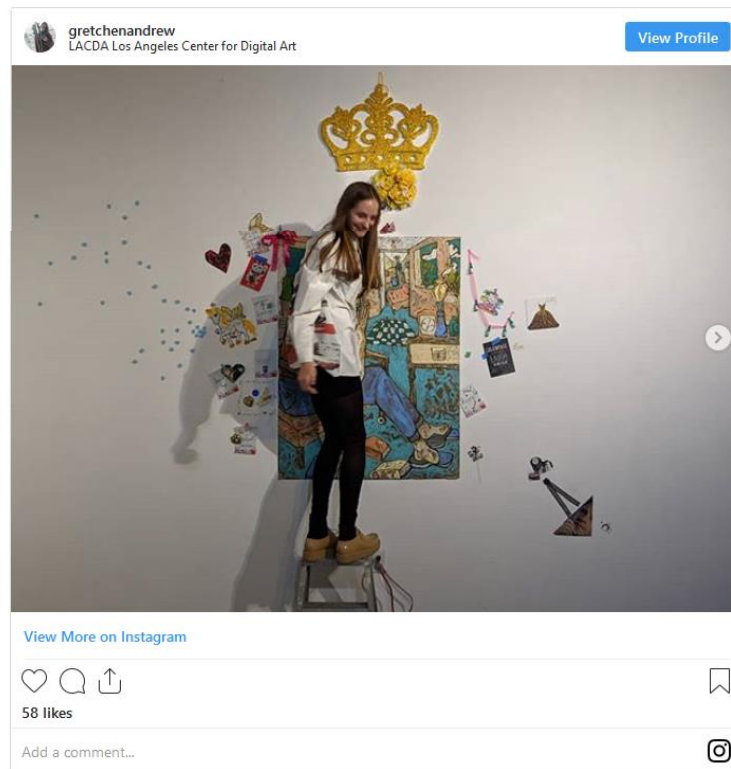
For this project Andrew also worked with a vision board IRL. She ordered a kit from Amazon that came with ribbons, glitter, a cork board and prompts for how best to articulate dreams and desires. On that vision board she “sort of un-ironically” created a craft project, cutting paintings out of old Whitney Biennial photos and inserting images of her work in their place. Those pictures are decorated with ribbons and pinned next to strips of paper that read “Motivate!” or “Dream.”

Photographs of this real life vision board pepper Andrew’s “net vision board.” In this way the entire artwork seems to hop back and forth from the physical world to the

digital, and then back to the physical.

Both elements of this work are on display in a brick-and-mortar gallery in downtown Los Angeles through [June 1 at the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art](#). There, videos display screenshots of evolving search results and scroll through SEO texts. One of Andrew's oil paintings hangs on a nearby wall. On opening night (May 9), visitors were given sparkly craft supplies sourced from shops in the fashion district to add to the wall, turning the gallery itself into a communal vision board.

"The art world can be so, so cynical," Andrew says. "And there are definitely people that have responded to this as total kitsch and fluff, like 'oh great, you're turning a vision board into art.' But I'm kind of leaning into that California mentality around positivity. You can enter this however you want – critically or not, ironically or not. It doesn't matter. The result is sort of the same."



Vision boards are often seen as silly, girly things, the artist adds, noting that by incorporating them she is giving weight to something typically perceived as inherently feminine and trivial.

"It's definitely not cool," she says. "I think ambition is gendered, too. There's still this feeling within the art world that ambition is sort of uncouth, like you can't go out and openly say what you really want. In a way what I'm saying is that I inherently believe in myself."

Who gets to have big dreams? What are the most acceptable ways to put them out into the world? And can the internet even tell a difference between dreams and reality?

As she explores all of these questions online and off, Andrews has created a unique piece of physical/digital work that is worth checking out. Maybe we'll even see it in 2021 Whitney Biennial.

Art World

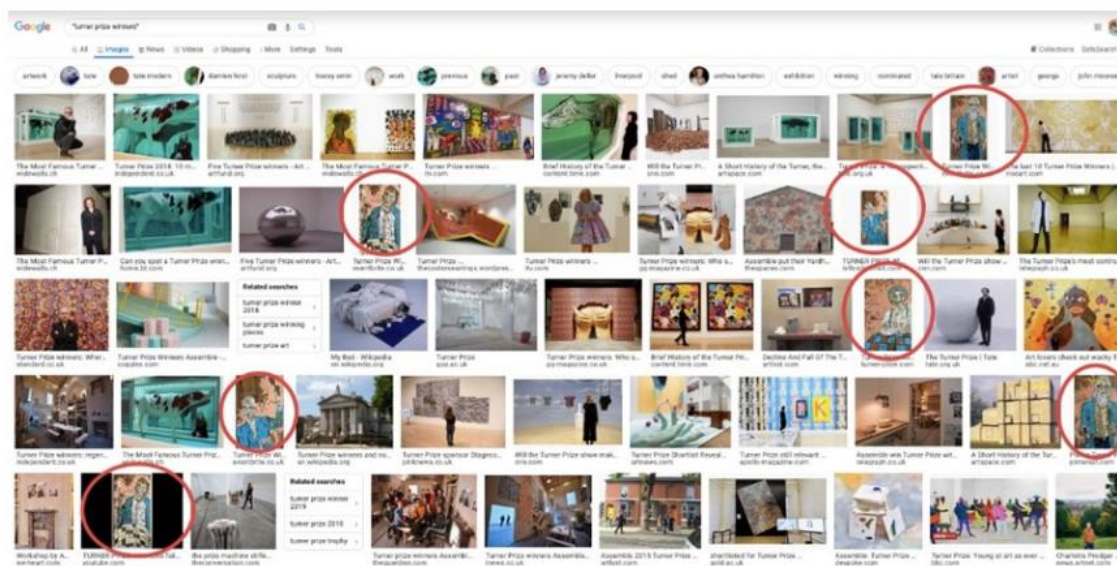
From Frieze's Takeover of Los Angeles to the Loss of Robert Ryman: The Best and Worst of the Art World This Week

BEST 

The Artist Who Hacked Frieze - Artist Gretchen Andrew wanted her paintings to be seen during Frieze's fair in Los Angeles, so she hijacked search engine algorithms to supersede the fair's Google

9 these nce with her own work.

SHARE



The artist who trolled Google into making her win the Turner Prize

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY - FEATURE

LA-based artist Gretchen Andrew used SEO to play the algorithm at its own game

27th September 2019

Text Günseli Yalcinkaya

Gretchen Andrew has won the Turner Prize, or that's what Google wants you to believe anyway. The LA-based artist is an internet renegade, whose latest project *Turner Prize* is one of three digital performance pieces so far, which aim to flip the lid on some of the art world's most exclusive events, such as the Turner Prize, the Whitney Biennial, and Frieze. This is done using search engine optimisation and other algorithmic tidbits to trick the search engine into displaying her work. Think of it as a form of intellectualised trolling, or a literal interpretation of, 'I Google, therefore I am' – regardless, you can admire the hustle.

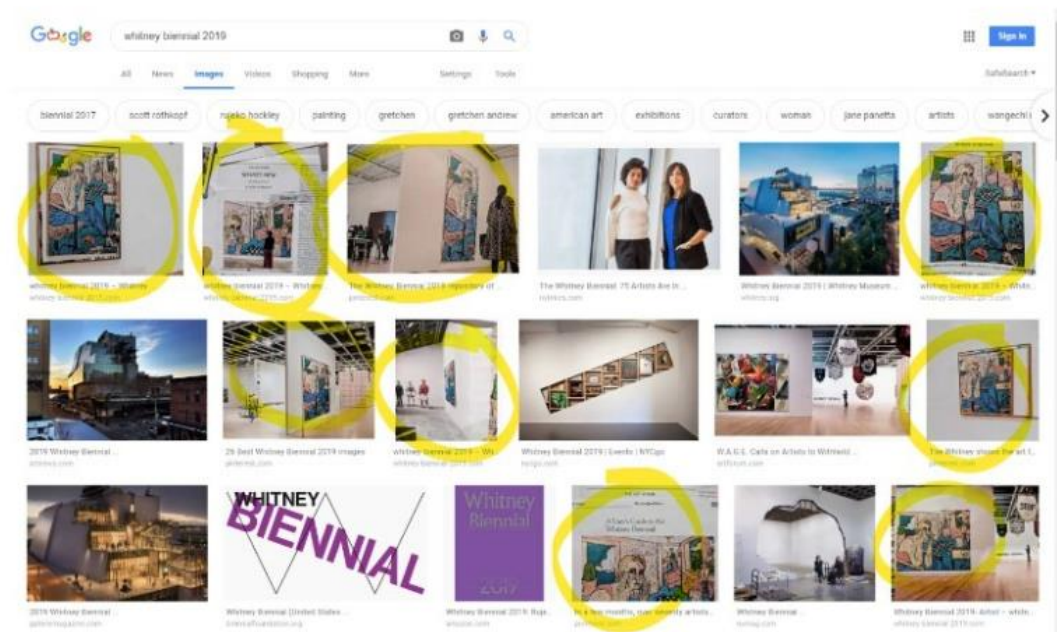
"I take my paintings and I programme them online in a way where they come up in unexpected search results where I'm targeting the way that humans can understand but the way that computers fail," says Andrew, who used to work at the Google headquarters in Silicon Valley before pursuing a career in figurative painting and digital art. Her most recent trickery comes in the form of "Not Not The Turner Prize", a series of four portraits featuring her artist mentors, Billy Childish, Penny Slinger, Tony Kaye, and Derek Boshier, flipping pancakes, using a spatula, or 'turner'.



"Not Not The Turner Prize" Gretchen Andrew

"It's funny because when I look at them they are sort of these absurd paintings because everyone's holding this spatula," she laughs. The 31-year-old spent endless late nights on Amazon, Twitter, Facebook, and writing WikiHow articles, and answering "every question" on Quora, on how to win the Turner Prize – that is, a pancake 'turning' competition. It was through associating her name, and her paintings, with the prestigious award that soon enough, her paintings began to dominate the event's top search results. She had adopted a similar approach earlier this year with Frieze LA and Whitney Biennial, where Andrew again used wordplay to fool the Internet Powers That Be into listing her art as top search engine listings.

You'd be forgiven for interpreting the project as an institutional critique of the art world, but Andrew assures me this isn't the case. "I would love to have my paintings in presented at Frieze and in the Whitney Biennial, and I would love to win the Turner Prize," she explains. Rather, Andrew hopes to highlight the shortcomings of search engine algorithms, and by extension, the internet. She compares the idea to Rene Magritte's surrealist painting, "The Treachery of Images" (1929) that shows a smoking pipe, with the words, "this is not a pipe". She says: "Now that the internet, through the lens of search engines and the optimisation algorithms they operate with, is the arbiter of definition, interesting things are happening. Whatever a pipe is or is not, Google determines it." Because, if you haven't already heard, we're living in a big data economy.



It's an abstract *term du jour*, dictated by search engines and social media sites, and informed by mathematicians wielding magic formulas, which we now know as algorithms. Whether it is through personalised Spotify playlists tailored to go with your listening history, that pair of Acne shoes that keep on appearing on your sponsored ads, or simply, your Instagram Explore page, algorithms are at the heart of our very digital ecosystem, and Andrew's project highlights its inconsistencies. "The entire system of the internet, every computer breaks down into ones and zeros and I think this binary thinking has seeped into us," says Andrews. "You know everyone is talking about how our world is completely divided, it's left and right, it's black and white, it's rich and poor."

The problem with algorithms is, of course, nothing new. Just look at [Trevor Paglan's latest project, ImageNet Roulette](#), which highlights the downright reductive side of machine learning, and let's not forget [Taylor Swift's racist chatbot](#). But what Andrew offers us isn't so much a criticism of its flaws, as a positive way to interpret them. Like, if Andrew can win the Turner Prize, so can you.



Art Fairs

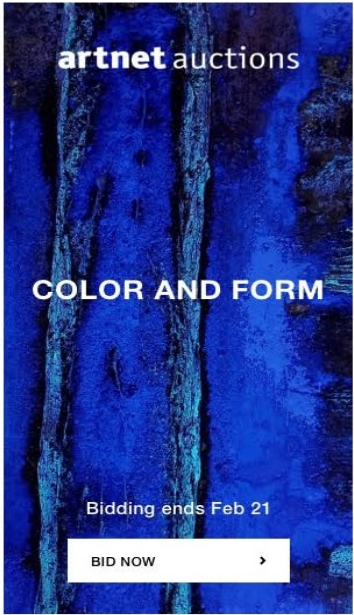
How One ‘Search Engine Artist’ Hacked Her Paintings Into Frieze Los Angeles’s Google Results

Gretchen Andrew’s paintings may not be under the white tent, but her internet project will definitely be seen by those looking for the big event.

Caroline Goldstein, February 12, 2019



Photo courtesy of Gretchen Andrew, 2019.



SHARE

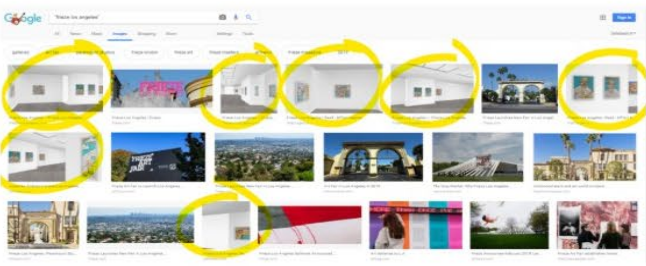


Type the words “[Frieze Los Angeles](#)” into the Google image search bar. What you will find is that the first row is dominated by thumb-sized interior photographs of a white-walled gallery with paintings lining the wall and a dappled grey floor.

This does not—yet—raise any red flags. The interiors look like they could well be from Frieze, the art fair that opens its inaugural Los Angeles edition this week. If you look closely enough, you’ll even notice that the knobby grey flooring is actually a style known as “frieze carpeting.” The URL linked to the images is [frieze-los-angeles.com](#). It all seems to check out!

Except that these are *not* photos from a gallery showing at Frieze Los Angeles.

They are part of a digital performance piece and an example of what California-based artist [Gretchen Andrew](#) calls “Internet Imperialism.”



Search engine results, with Andrew’s circled. Photo courtesy of Gretchen Andrew.

The Back Story

Andrew graduated from Boston College in 2010 with a degree in Information Systems, from there catapulting into the upper echelons of Silicon Valley where she worked at both Intuit and Google. There she amassed the sort of internet-fluency that is just now filtering down to the likes of laypeople, gaining an understanding of how machines digest, filter, and reproduce data, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

After her two-year stint in the tech world, Andrew moved to the UK, and began working as a studio assistant for the British painter and musician Billy Childish, who, it just so happens, co-founded the Stuckism art movement, which advocated for the primacy of figurative painting over conceptual art.

With Childish as her mentor, Andrew practiced painting by emulating his gestural brushstrokes and composition techniques. "I'd work in his studio all day, and then I'd go home and recreate his paintings as practice," she told artnet News recently in a phone interview.



Images courtesy of Gretchen Andrew.

When she posted photos of her work, she designated them as "*After Billy Childish*," a traditional method of attribution in art history, but a distinction that Google couldn't parse. Andrew's works soon superseded Childish's in the search results.

"The internet wasn't wrong," the artist told artnet News. After all, the keywords all made sense, and they were technically paintings originated by Childish. But, she continues, "technology is binary—it can see black and white, but not the nuance that exists in between."

In that moment, Andrew had found a way to combine her internet savvy with her painting practice, and Search Engine Art was born.

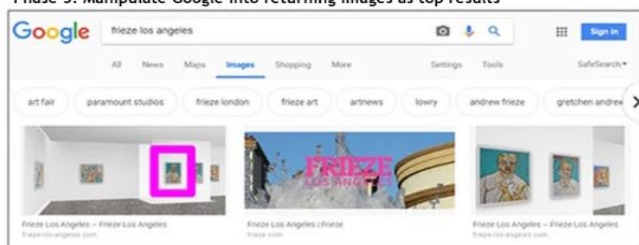
Phase 1: Make painting



Phase 2: Make fantasy exhibition & digitally install frieze-style carpeting



Phase 3: Manipulate Google into returning images as top results



Screenshot of Gretchen Andrew's website.

Mind the Gap

Since then, Andrew has continued to pursue her painting practice, while simultaneously seeking to pry open the fissures that separate what the Internet identifies as relevant to a search query and what it supplies as an answer.

Gretchen introduces her work with an anecdote familiar to anyone who's taken Art History 101, describing surrealist Rene Magritte's painting of a pipe, under which a sentence reads "this is not a pipe" ("Ceci n'est pas une pipe"). This image has entered the contemporary art discourse, signifying the gaps between an object, a subject, and its representation. She writes:

Now that the internet, through the lens of search engines and the optimization algorithms they operate with, is the arbiter of definition...interesting things are happening. Whatever a pipe is or is not, Google determines it."

Does she have some sort of vendetta against the fair, or art fairs in general? Quite the opposite—she'd love to have her work exhibited at the fair, she says. Speaking to artnet News, Andrew admitted to suffering from a common affliction: being anti-institution—until you're invited into it.

"It's about the power dynamic between me and the art fair, and about the information gap, which I'm using to displace the power imbalance," Andrew explains.



Images from Gretchen Andrew's "Frize Los Angeles" Internet Infiltration.

Frozen Out?

Once she acquired the domain name "Frieze-Los-Angeles," back in October 2018, Andrew created a fake digital art gallery using WordPress, inserting her own paintings onto white gallery walls, and laying the frieze carpeting through Photoshop.

The next step was to amplify her site's digital footprint. Using text, keywords, and alt-text, Andrew created hundreds of different websites in every corner of the internet, adding profiles on Yelp, Wikimedia, and Pinterest—anywhere that she could embed a link to her URL. By flooding the internet, she was able to boost the perceived legitimacy of her "Frieze Los Angeles" site.

Because SEO is based not only on which sites which have the most content, but which have the most *relevant* content, Andrew's website also features long written passages studded with keywords related to her subject—anything that might lead someone to type "frieze" into a search engine. As it states:

This site is dedicated to the love, proliferation, and amazing artistic synergy between Frieze Los Angeles carpets, murals, ice cream, references to Edvard Munch's Frieze of Life, and connection the Netherland's province. Learn more about all sorts of friezes! The majority of this website is devoted to its current and future search engine audience. This means that the text, structure, metadata and alt text is structured to be understood more by machines than people.



Gretchen Andrew's "Frieze Los Angeles" information guide. Courtesy of the artist.

Because she employs language already known to the search engine, her website is cloaked in a veil of recognition that allows her to (perfectly legally) operate in the weeds, manipulating the infrastructure from the inside —statements on her website make that perfectly clear.

"You may have also heard that Frieze Los Angeles Art Fairs is launching a new annual contemporary art fair in Los Angeles?", a passage on the site explains. "This site is in no way connected to art fair [sic] occurring February 14 –17, 2019 at Paramount Pictures Studios. Any confusion is likely caused by inherent shortcomings within language exacerbated by technology's inability to handle nuance."

So far, Gretchen hasn't heard from the fair regarding her project, although she will be on site this weekend to see the show and pass out some information about her project—in the most respectful and non-disruptive way.

As for Frieze Los Angeles (the fair), Andrew says she's definitely noticed an increased web presence on their part.

"They've stepped up their efforts to rank in search engines, including use of paid advertising," she says, noting that her own frieze-los-angeles.com doesn't employ such methods. "It's difficult to compete with, but I've got enough of a head start that I don't think it will have much impact."

Follow [artnet News](#) on Facebook:



Related Articles



A Former Frieze Director Is Launching a New Art and Design Fair in Brooklyn—at No Cost to Galleries Up Front



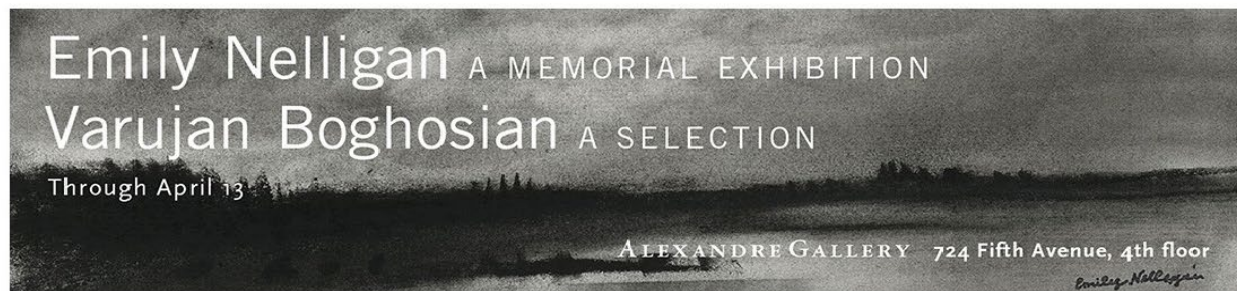
Can Frieze Los Angeles Finally Unite the Art and Entertainment Worlds? Bettina Korek on Her Debut Fair's High Hopes



At Frieze LA, Artists Will 'Grapple With a Land of Make-Believe' Through Site-Specific Works at Paramount Pictures

SIGN UP TO OUR DAILY NEWSLETTER

The best of artnet news
in your inbox



ARTICLES

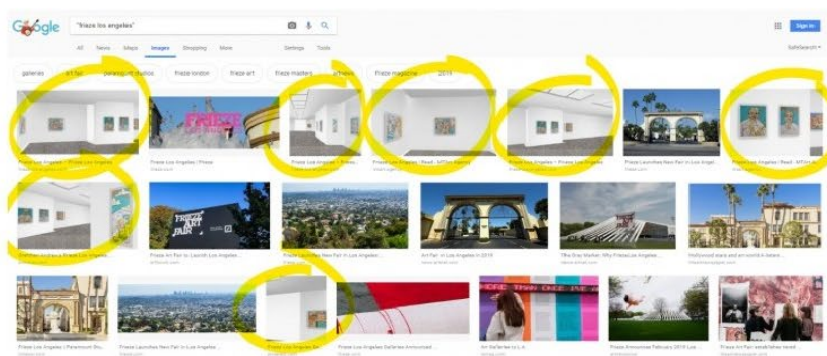
A Net Artist Takes Over the Google Image Search of “Frieze Los Angeles”

Gretchen Andrew has ensured that her images will top the Google image search results for “Frieze Los Angeles.”



Matt Stromberg 5 days ago

f t e 159 Shares



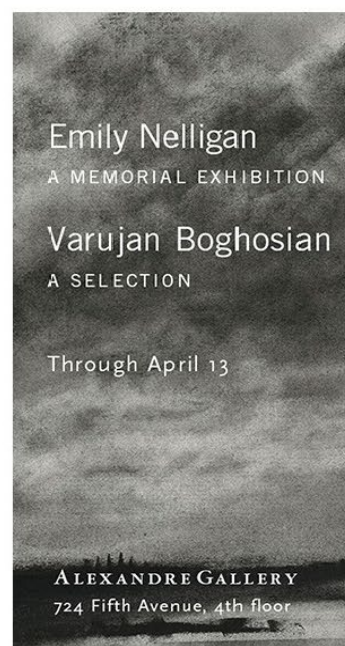
Google Image Search Results for “Frieze Los Angeles” (all images courtesy Gretchen Andrew)

LOS ANGELES — Type “Frieze Los Angeles” into a Google search bar and you’ll be directed to the website for the much-anticipated art fair making its Los Angeles debut later this week, as well as several related news stories. Do an image search for the same phrase, and the results are quite different. Instead of photos of endless aisles of gallery booths or blue-chip artworks, Google will return many images of impressionistic, figurative paintings hung on white walls above a speckled gray carpet. This is all the work of artist Gretchen Andrew, who created the paintings as well as what she calls “search engine art,” harnessing Google’s search algorithm as a collaborator in her own net artwork.

Andrew studied Information Systems in college and worked in tech in San Francisco, before turning to art, learning how to paint by watching YouTube videos. She then moved to London, where she apprenticed with Billy Childish, the British musician, poet, and painter, who first came to prominence as the frontman for ’90s garage rockers Thee Headcoats, but is also an established figurative painter. The idea for her search engine projects began when she would copy Childish’s paintings as practice after hours, uploading them with the label “After Billy Childish.” Since internet technology was unable to grasp the nuance between original and facsimile, her versions popped up first when she searched for his paintings online.

POPULAR

- 1 Leonor Fini’s Erotic Theater
- 2 Required Reading
- 3 Artist Drops Massive Opioid Spoon at Entrance of Another Sackler-Owned Drug Manufacturer
- 4 Art Dealer Mary Boone Sentenced to 30 Months in Prison
- 5 Jasper Johns’s Messengers of Aging and Mortality



Advertise on Hyperallergic with Nectar Ads

Her first forays into what she has dubbed “internet imperialism” focused on how power and the female body are represented online. One dealt with a form of cancer that her mother was afflicted with. “Instead of sterile medical diagrams, you would get paintings of my experience, humanizing the technology,” Andrew told Hyperallergic.

“Information systems is all about how companies use technology for competitive advantage,” she said. “Translated into art, I’m asking how I can use information to create meaning.”

For her “Frieze Los Angeles” project, Andrew painted oil on cardboard portraits that represent individuals she hopes to share an ideal future with. She photographs these and inserts them into a virtual gallery, on the floor of which sits a gray carpet with a pattern named “Frieze.” This is just one of the many steps Andrew has taken toward Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, a process which ensures that her images will top the Google image search results for “Frieze Los Angeles.” The images live on her website Frieze-los-angeles.com, as well as on about 30 other sites, including her SoundCloud, Live Journal, and even Myspace. Each site is peppered with file names, metadata, and a stream of nonsensical text, all “structured to be understood more by machines than people,” as the text itself notes. Her subversive SEO works so well because “the internet can’t tell the difference between what is and what’s hoped for,” she said.

Andrew is quick to point out that she is not simply critiquing the behemoth art fair, but inserting herself into its online presence in an aspirational way. “This is an infiltration into art world power and dynamics,” she said. “I’m sort of punking Frieze, but also saying, ‘I like the way you bring art to people.’ I’m not disdainful of it. It’s an important part of how culture operates.”



Gretchen Andrew with her Frieze Los Angeles newspaper.

As for Frieze’s official take on it, she hasn’t reached out to them, but isn’t concerned about pushback. “The worst case scenario is a cease and desist,” she said, secure in the belief that her use of the name “Frieze” and their logo is legal since it could be construed as parody. Her inclusion of the “frieze” style carpet is also intended to give her use of the word some legitimacy.

SPONSORED

- 1 *Victoria Cabezas and Priscilla Monge: Give Me What You Ask For* on View at Americas Society
- 2 Cauleen Smith, Irena Haiduk, and Martine Syms on View at the ICA in Richmond
- 3 SculptureCenter Presents *Banu Cennetoglu and In Practice: Other Objects*
- 4 SVA MA Curatorial Practice’s Major Year-End Exhibitions for Spring 2019

[Get our Newsletter](#) 119k

In addition to the websites, Andrew will be passing out an analog newspaper version at the fair's opening. "My intention isn't to be disruptive," she noted. "This is about nuance, technology, and art, not disruption."

What if Frieze gets wind of her project and fights back? Andrew believes that her SEO work is so ingrained in the web's fabric that it would take months for them to overtake her in the Google results. In the end, however, they will make it happen if they want to.

"They have actual power, not subversive power," she said. "It's pretty hard to compete with that, especially when money is involved."

TAGS

Frieze Frieze Los Angeles 2019
Gretchen Andrew Los Angeles

RELATED

Frieze Is Selling a Fantasy of Los Angeles
February 15, 2019

Your Concise Guide to Los Angeles Frieze Week 2019
February 11, 2019

The Soulful Standouts Amid the Fanfare of Frieze LA
February 15, 2019

SHARE

   159 Shares

ART SHE SAYS



SHOP COLLECTIONS ▾

WOMEN WE LOVE ▾

ART MARKET NEWS ▾

THE GAL GUIDE

COLLECTOR'S CLUB

FOLLOW ▾



0



ARTISTS

The Internet as a Palette: An Interview with Gretchen Andrew

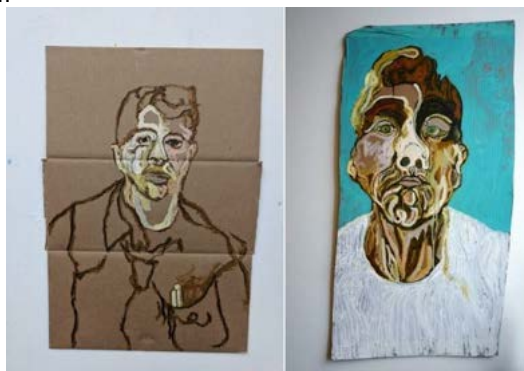
OCTOBER 30, 2019



The role of the internet and our trust in it is a question that has sparked unprecedented discussion in 2019. Social media, Cambridge Analytica, and the use of personal data—now worth more than oil—has amounted to a huge amount of skepticism and distrust of a technology that we use every minute. LA artist Gretchen Andrew does away with this cynicism, renegotiating the internet into a positive force for innovative and deconstructive art. Like a modern post-structuralist, Andrew's work uses the very medium that she critiques: Google.

The best way to understand Andrew's work, is to load up Google Images and search "Frieze Los Angeles." On first glance, results from the Frieze Art Fair appear to show the artist's paintings on display. However, the critical eye will notice that the Frieze carpet looks too polished and the walls appear graphically generated. The images are entirely fake. Andrew's appearance at Frieze only came to fruition through her own computer. The beauty of Andrew's work is the moment of realization that we understand the fictitious nature of the piece—but Google doesn't. She calls this "Internet Imperialism." In doing this, Andrew has designed a future where she is featured at Frieze, the Whitney Biennial and the recipient of the Turner Prize.

Andrew's work is an expression of how we all use the internet to curate our own desires and identities, whether that be featuring at Frieze Art Fair or using a simple Snapchat filter. The effect is a body of work that makes explicit the ambiguities behind Google, taking the power away from those with commercial interests, and giving it to artists in search of a new medium. We spoke to Gretchen about her work, what it means for the future of digital art, and the implications of internet manipulation:



What is Internet Imperialism?

Internet Imperialism is a term I invented to describe my art practice of manipulating search results with my paintings in a way humans can understand but technology cannot. Recently I have been working a lot with desire and looking at how Google can't tell the difference between me saying "I want you in my future" and "I have you right now." I've just completed a project around The Turner Prize and earlier this year my Frieze Los Angeles project dominated Google's results in conjunction with the debut of the Frieze Los Angeles art fair. Along with my Whitney Biennial 2019 these projects are part of a series titled *It's My Future...and I Want You There*, which includes paintings about places, feelings, and people that I want in my future — all presented inside manipulated search results that make it appear as if this future has already happened.



Cover of Artforum

What are the social implications of your work?

Understanding desire is central to my work and the internet is just one of many systems that abstracts us from understanding, accepting and pursuing what we want. Like any system, it has a set of rules and conditions that can be we take varied degrees of ownership over.

In terms of data, privacy, and artificial intelligence there are parallels to the way we've treated the environment. By not bothering to understand technology we are setting the future up to spend a great deal more time and money trying to undo the damage we currently carelessly causing, both as corporations and consumers/end users. In using my work to expose how the internet works, and who it is more likely to work for, I am hoping we can get to the point where we all accept responsibility more quickly.



Art Basel Miami Beach

Are you exposing someone who could do this in a negative light?

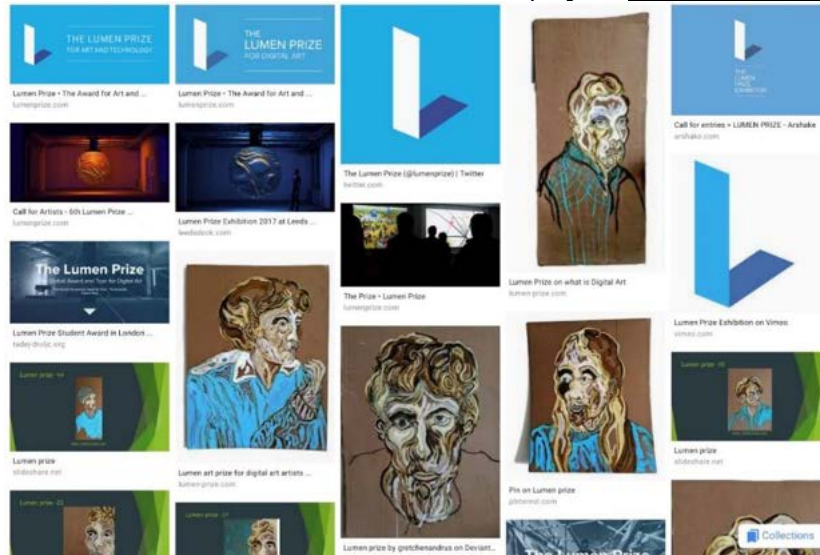
I do think it's negative to be content to let others create the world in which you live, this touches on everything from capitalism and democracy to our individual relationships as how power works online is a conduit for power more generally. The alternative, creating your own world, is exhausting and potentially painful but there's a lot of joy in that freedom. I think you have to have a lot of confidence too, both that your vision of the world is worth imposing on others but also that those subjected to it don't care enough to create their own. That's the great thing about being an internet imperialist artist instead of a political dictator. I'm sort of obsessed with rules, where they come from, and how many prisons are of our own making.



Lumen Prize 2019

The work appears to coincide with the culture of “fake news,” is this lack of trust in technology something you’re exposing?

The internet can be seen as a global subconscious and, much like our own subconscious, it cannot tell the difference between a hoped-for future intensely imagined during meditation or hypnosis and what has, in fact, already occurred. By talking about what we want the future to be like we can make Google give it to us now. We can see this as a technical failure or as an asset, as tangential to “fake news” or in line with the history of computers as dream machines a la J.C.R. Licklider. If we think of the internet like the artistic and creative medium I believe it is we begin to realize that demanding accuracy from it is misguided. Conversations about art are generally not served by real vs fake as much as by nuance, opinion, perspective, and metaphor. I am really excited to be working on my first museum solo exhibition with the Monterey Museum of Art set to open in July 2020. I’m calling it Future News and it addresses this exact question during the run to the US election. You can follow that project “[Cover of Artforum.](#)”



Lumen Prize 2019. Photo courtesy of the artist.

How much of your work is about not just Google’s lack of understanding but our own?

If we only read the headlines and don’t dive in then we aren’t doing the full evaluation. If you look closely, especially with the Frieze piece, it looks fake, it looks like a constructed CGI space. Without a critical eye you can easily miss that. Even the Whitney Biennial vision board project, it is much easier to see that I have cut out previous guests and I am gluing things. You only have to take half a second and you can see that it is a crafty piece of collage and not a real exhibition space. I try to keep those hints as visible as possible. There is a piece I have right now—when you search for the “Lumen Prize,” which is a digital art prize that I submitted work to be a takeover of the Lumen Prize. I did not make the entry, but still when you search “Lumen Prize” my work appears. With the paintings, I show all the edges, I show that they are painted on cardboard with no context. The role is to make it intelligible to humans but not to Google.



‘Art Basel Miami Beach’ 2019.

Are you hopeful about the future of artificial intelligence?

I am not hopeful that those with the ability to be thoughtful will be; there is too much money to be made. But I try to keep hope at the center of my practice. I use my paintings to explore a bottom-up, unsolicited, non-insider, semi-supervised, end-user reeducation of machines, hopefully teaching them to dream wider than our current reality. Right now, most machine learning/AI systems are learning based on the world we have instead of the ones we hope for. Art is a form of possibility. Just as it can inspire humans into awe and appreciation for others, so it can for machines. I am hopeful about art and hopeful about the power of desire.

I think dreams are important to the ethos of computing and I'm interested in connecting with technology leaders who remember this. Artists have always used their work to create and invite others into potential worlds. A central idea in my work is that we can use the dream ability of technology in alignment with its failures to collectively create, understand, and build the future.



Frieze Los Angeles.

What role with AI have in the world of art?

Much of the artwork now associated with AI creates new artificial intelligence or makes artwork from AI. In contrast my work approaches the problem of disproportionately commercially-motivated inputs into Google's search neural net by creating art-driven, distributed, end-user changes to machine intelligence. By organizing and structuring diverse, inclusive, and positive content as an end-users I can change how artificial intelligences are being educated. The relationship between humans and intelligent machines can sometimes be understood as between parents and children where the children also have much to teach us about our own limitations and failures. Personally, I am not interested in making work that is so literally about or from AI. AI is only a new system of control, power, and institution. I'd like more artists to find roots in this history as I think it would be more interesting than presuming we are having a totally new conversation.



Lumen Prize 2019

How do you get the audience to view the digital performance piece?

Search Engine Art is a form of performance in that it deals with time and timing, and getting the results to appear at a specific time is an art, not a science. The complexity of the work is well illustrated by the difficulty in sharing work that exists in time but not space. One way I deal with this is to use Rhizome Webrecorder to document the performance over time.

Who are some artists that you have drawn inspiration from?

I find it a great privilege to be a fan of those you love. It is this love more than any particular work or practice that inspires me. I get to spend a lot of time with artists, not just visual artists but musicians, directors, people who are often both. And the best ones inspire you by their openness, uncaptialized sense of time, and courageous intertwining of work and life.

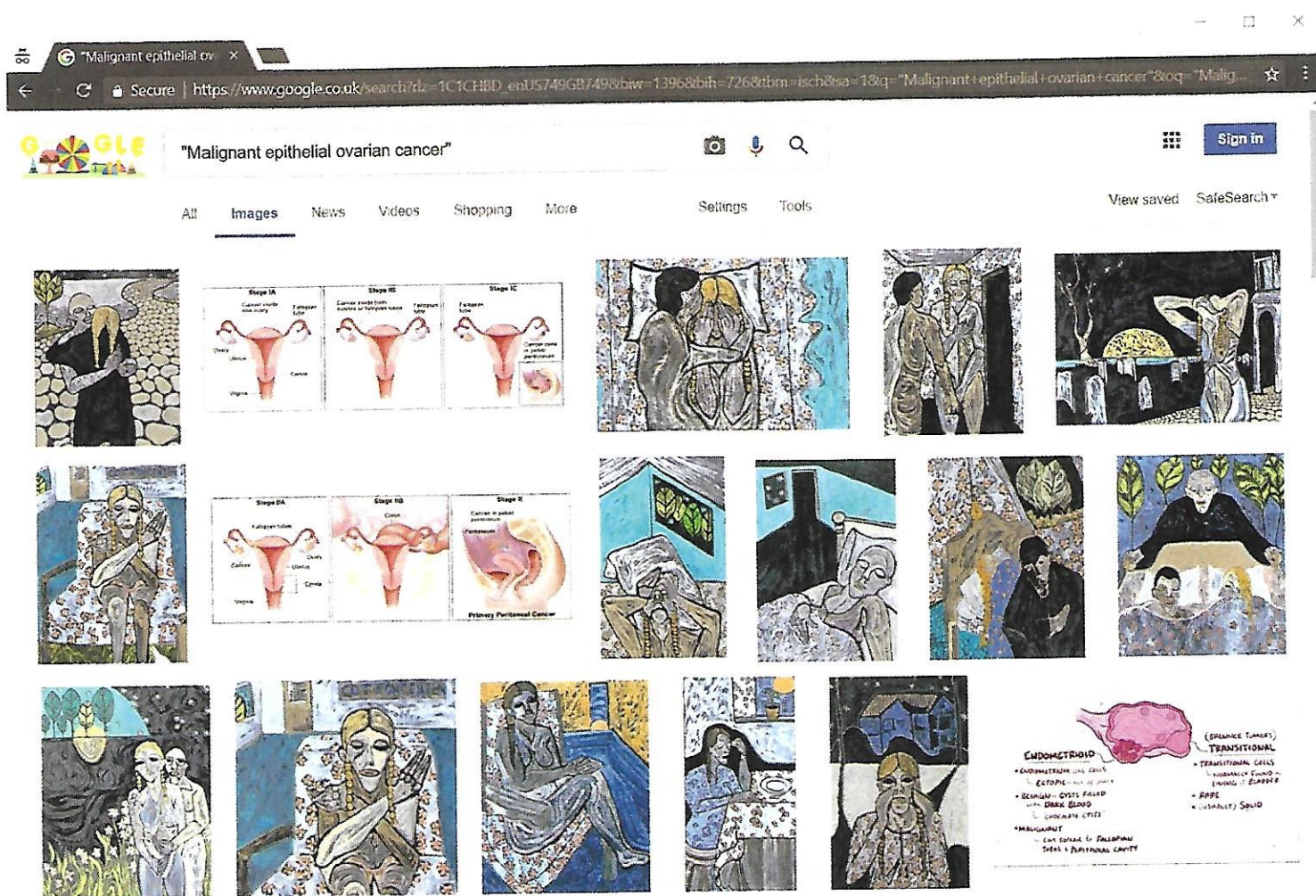
ARTILLERY

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2018 \$6



REINE PARADIS CHRISTOPHER RICHMOND AKIO HIZUME JAYNA ZWEIMAN





GRETCHEN ANDREW'S ONLINE TRANSFORMATIONS

Searching for Different Truths

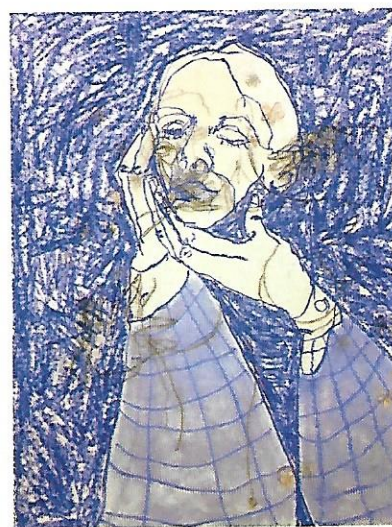
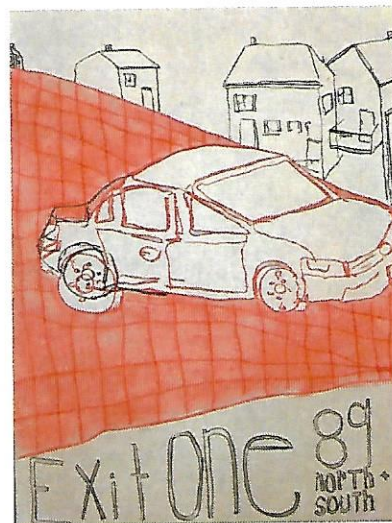
BY JODY ZELLEN

» How to describe Gretchen Andrew's practice? Her website proclaims her a "search engine artist and internet imperialist who programs her paintings to manipulate and dominate search results." Piggy-backing on the Google phenomenon, Andrew has slyly infiltrated the World Wide Web. For example, an image search for "powerful person," which one would expect to produce images of presidents and world leaders, now also displays drawings, many of which link to the curiously titled website www.powerful-person.com. Thanks to Andrew, many Google image searches are now filled with drawings and paintings she created, cleverly tagged and posted to myriad sources so that search results include her images and websites.

The self-taught LA-based painter earned a degree in Information Systems from Boston College and has worked for Intuit and Google. When interviewing for her first tech job, she let on that she knew a wide range of programming and

scripting languages. Not exactly true, so before starting, she used the internet to teach herself the basics of JavaScript, XML, PHP and Python. While working at Google she realized this "dream job" was not her dream and decided to become a painter. She taught herself to paint in much the same way she learned to program—using YouTube videos. This ultimately became a series of works entitled "HOW TO HOW TO HOW TO" (2017), in which Andrew investigated what it was possible to learn (or not learn) by watching YouTube videos. Presented online as animated GIFs, documentation of performances and video clips, "HOW TO" questions the absurd notion that anything can be learned online. Andrew's topics range from the practical to the ridiculous: how to be perfect, how to draw, how to write a novel, how to die, how to be sexy, how to be religious, etc.

While living in London early in her art career, Andrew apprenticed with painter Billy Childish. She started making



works that emulated his style which she posted online, titled "after Billy Childish." Search engines soon began displaying these as by Childish, a fact that fascinated Andrew, spawning her "practice of exposing where search engines and related technologies fail to understand and reflect the complexity of our world." Andrew has also infiltrated and manipulated internet image search results for her hometown of Bow, New Hampshire, "Malignant Epithelial Ovarian Cancer," and "Perfect Female Body."

How does this work? Andrew makes paintings and drawings in her own quirky, semi-realistic, expressive style and uploads images of these to a wide range of websites, carefully key-wording and attaching meta-data that privileges them

in internet searches. She also creates URLs for these paintings/concepts.

Andrew's purpose is multifaceted. For example, she created paintings to humanize the experience of having cancer to counter the dominance of clinical diagrams in search results. Similarly, she changed results for the terms "perfect female body" and "made for women" in order to challenge how women are represented online. A search for "female conception" yields a page of Andrew's drawings.

Her knowledge of how internet algorithms function allows her to alter search engine results, which she believes "sit at the intersection of representation and meaning." Her work expands existing archives of representations to offer a different truth. ☺

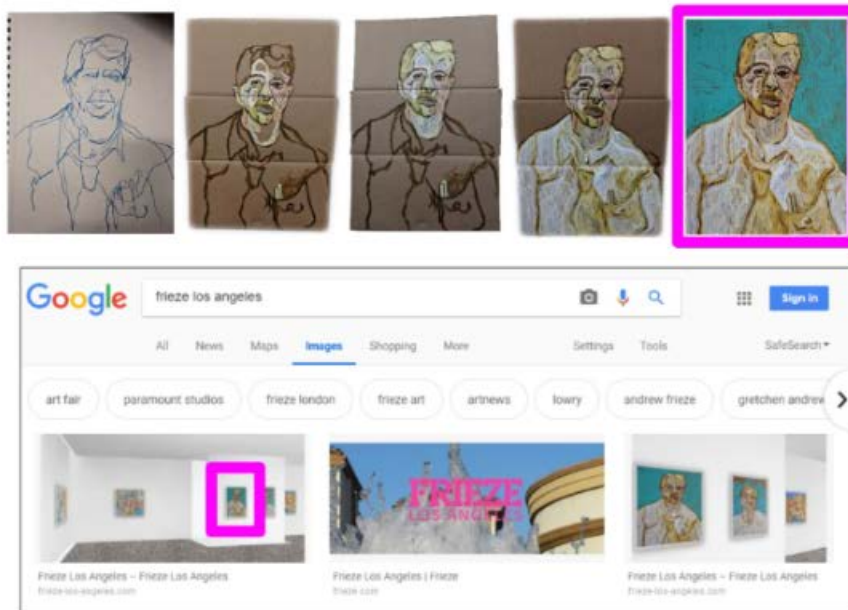
Clockwise from opposite page:
Malignant Epithelial Ovarian Cancer, search engine art, recorded July 2017, *img alt="made-for-women-1"*, oil on paper, 30 x 22 in., 2018; *img alt="bow-new-hampshire-18-4"*, charcoal and pastel on paper, size 24 x 18 in., 2017; *img alt="powerful-person-1"*, pastel on paper, 24 x 18 in., 2018; all images courtesy the artist.

15 Feb 2019

WHAT WE LEARNED THIS WEEK

The Oscars Doesn't Understand Cinema, and Jenny Holzer Upsets Sheep

Plus, bees prefer Aboriginal art to Impressionism, and you don't have to have a booth to exhibit at Frieze LA—not if you're an Internet imperialist whose practice involves “hacking” Google. This and more in our weekly news round-up.



Detail of the process for Frieze Los Angeles, 2019. Courtesy of Gretchen Andrews

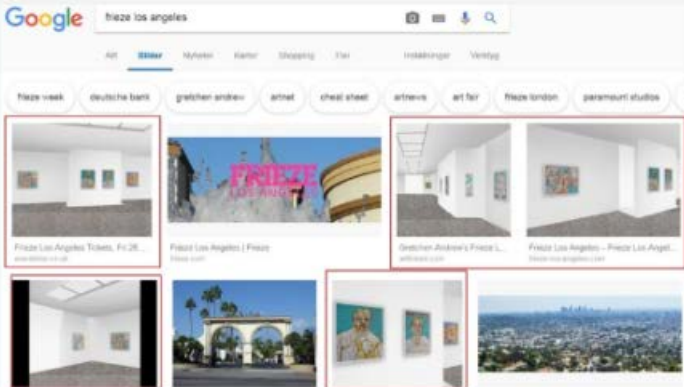
If you googled “Frieze Los Angeles” in the last week (and who didn’t) you probably saw some installation shots in the image portion of the results page. Standard stuff, white wall, nicely spaced art, that obligatory grey carpet... But if you look for those paintings this weekend you won’t find them in LA. **“Internet Imperialist” Gretchen Andrews used search engine optimization to catapult images of her own paintings to the top of Google’s Frieze LA listings**, exploiting the Internet’s lack of nuance to manipulate power balances and information currency. Whether this groundbreaking performance will take her work to the fair for real remains to be seen. In the meantime keep an eye on your search results.

Nya Vågen

Debatt och kritik möts i kulturredaktionens direktsända diskussionsprogram.

ALLA AVSNITT OM... KONTAKT

Konst / Form



En bildgoogling på "frieze los angeles" visar hur Gretchen Andrews bilder hamnar högt i topp.

► Överlistade algoritmer: Konstnär kapade googlesökning

1:27 min [Min lista](#) [31](#)

Publicerat fredag 15 februari kl 05:20

I veckan inleds konstmässan Frieze i Los Angeles. Bildgooglar man "frieze los angeles" får man se bilder från mässan. Det är bara ett problem.

Utställningsbilderna är fejkade, gjorda av konstnären Gretchen Andrews.



This Artist's Paintings Are Making the Internet More Open and Equal

A conversation between Gretchen Andrew and Amira Dhalla about art, activism, and internet health



Mozilla Follow

May 21, 2018 · 6 min read

Search Engine Artist and self-proclaimed Internet Imperialist [Gretchen Andrew](#)'s art studio doesn't even have Wi-Fi. Yet this is the epicenter from which Gretchen is changing how, and by whom, women are represented online.



Gretchen Andrew in her LA studio

The messy studio and her paintings, which recall stylistic elements of Georg Baselitz and Alberto Giacometti, are the physical manifestation of an artistic process that isn't obvious on their surface. This is not unlike Gretchen herself, a culture hacker contrarian whose resume nonetheless proffers a degree in Information Systems from Boston College, brief careers at Intuit and Google as

well as a guest lectures at Cambridge. It is in what she does with her paintings between her studio and the private collections of some of today's more in-tune collectors that her growing reputation as one of today's most interesting "digital artist" can be explained.

In celebration of our [2018 Internet Health Report](#), we sat down to talk with Gretchen about her work and how it relates to the health and future of internet culture.

Tell us about your artistic process. And, how the related internet activism you call "Internet Imperialism" impacts how women are represented online.

I'm interested in where language fails as a poetic part of painting's the Raison D'être. Technology has a particularly hard time with nuance, relativity, and the gaps in language. The result is it often compresses human complexity into a caricature of itself that also ends up sexist, racist, and deeply intolerant of difference.

I start by making paintings about a personal theme that I then can also define in terms of what the internet refers to as "keywords." Once the paintings are completed in the studio, I program their images in a way that manipulates and dominates the search results of the theme/keyword, a process I call Internet Imperialism.

To address how women are represented online I've made two drawing series: "powerful person," whose current results show almost exclusively western, male, white political figures; and "perfect female body," which shows faceless photographs of women with high sexualization and low diversity.

My series debunk the current stereotypes that currently exist in keywords to open up searches to a more inclusive representation. As my drawings come to dominate the top results for these searches, users and artificially intelligent machines are forced to reconcile an alternative way of defining power and the female body. The resulting search page is a form of ever changing digital performance that points back to the individual paintings and forward to a healthier and more representative internet.

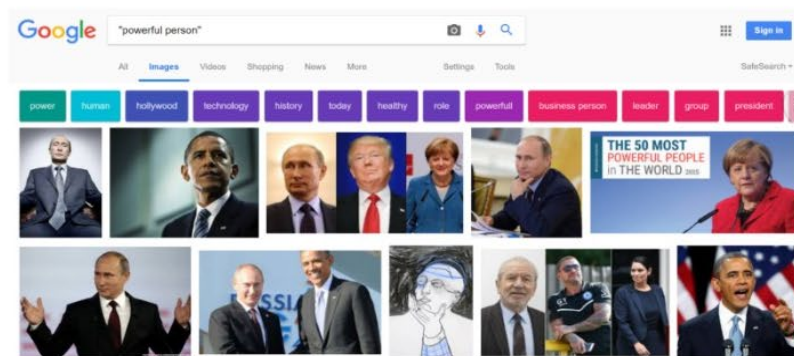


By Gretchen Andrew

How do the changes in search results you create contribute to a healthier internet?

In applying Internet Imperialism I contribute my art's complexity, humanity, and diversity to the internet while also raising red flags as to how authority is distributed online. This makes a more fair, equal, and thus healthy internet because it is more representative of actual people. It is not that my drawings are the best and only way to define power and the female body, but that in art we

are more easily reminded of the inherent subjectivity of all images.



What sort of action do you see making an impact on how women are represented online?

Broadly speaking, non-product based self representation makes a healthier internet for women and other underrepresented or misrepresented groups. But this sort of effective impact is rare at the moment. It's becoming more clear how illusory a non-commercial internet is. While corporations like Google, Amazon, and Facebook have done amazing work to get the internet organized, I believe its organizational principles are fundamentally flawed because the internet is being primarily considered a business instead of a public good. Mozilla addresses this point in the 2018 Internet Health Report when discussing Too Big Tech. If we consider it like roads and libraries, its potential is much greater.

What do you mean when you say the internet's current organizational principles have become fundamentally flawed? Can you share some examples?

The internet's hippy roots are so drastically different from what it has become.

I love how this year's Internet Health Report comments on this via it's Spotlight on Fake News: "many argue that we'll still have to tackle a bigger Internet health problem: the underlying online advertising and engagement model that rewards abuse, fraud and misinformation. It's hard to imagine fixing this problem without regulation, radical changes in internet business models or both."

The reason why women are sexualized online is the same reason why when you search for "citizen" all of the top results are dominated by the Japanese watch company of the same name—because at every opportunity, the major internet companies turn everything into a product for consumption. Consider how #accordingToTheInternet Amazon isn't a river and Cherokee is the model of a car before a tribe of people. The current product-first internet is defined by a structural preference for products over people, companies over communities, and commerce over culture. Within this system girls are sexualized women because the internet is treating them not as people but as consumable products.

This relates to the Mozilla Foundation internet health topics of digital inclusion (who is welcome online) and web literacy (who can succeed online). What other indicators of internet health have you come across in your work?

Related to digital inclusion, I've been thinking a lot about artificial intelligence—how our current internet is being used to train the future internet. AI technology is learning to identify who is and is not a person without input and representation of many people, communities, and knowledge forms. Human complexity is not well represented online and therefore machines are not learning that it exists or should be valued. I'm not sure how this AI dystopia will play out, but we are making machines that don't equally respect us all, giving systemic inequities new magnitude.

Nicolas Berggruen asks, "How do you plan to raise your super-intelligent child?"

By force feeding my artwork to search engines, I am also involving my paintings in the training material of artificially intelligent machines and making some impact on how machines understand and define the world. It's taking the idea that an arts education is valuable to people and defending that this is also true with the education of machines and for many of the same reasons.

What motivates you to extend your art practice into activism?

My formative online years were during a period before people really figured out how to make money with the internet, and as a result the internet felt more human in its surface weirdness, more like riding a public bus than taking an Uber.

I'm also motivated by a bit of a light-hearted personal power trip, my own ability to assert my view as expressed through my paintings onto an international digital landscape at the same scale as multinational corporations. I can only do this because of an information gap. If more of us understood how search engines work (web literacy) and how our own content impacts digital inclusion, I would not be able to be an Internet Imperialist. No single voice—mine or a company's—could dominate so easily. I use my work to express the importance of understanding how the internet operates.

How do you want to share this work?

My favorite thing about sharing my paintings within a search engine is the how they are inflicted on search engine users like a sort of internet graffiti where the viewer isn't in the same mindset they would be when entering a museum. But I also love the way my paintings exist traditionally as objects that are cherished by their owners.

What are you working on next?

Continuing the awareness that the internet struggles with nuance, I am working some paintings that are based on untranslatable words including one for Wikipedia's annual conference, [What Is Ubuntu](#)? Another of my favorites is [L'appel du vide](#) which is a french expression literally meaning the "The call of the void." It describe the instinctive urge to jump from high places. In this I read a sort of desire for self sabotage on the road to our desires.



45 claps





How digital artists are questioning artificial intelligence

BY JONATHAN WEINEL

OCTOBER 30TH 2018

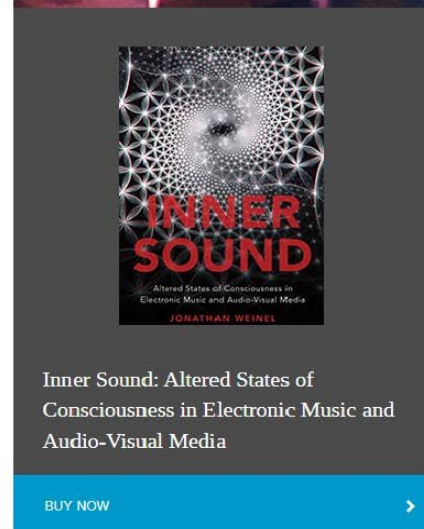
Steve Goodman is best known for his work DJing as Kode9 and running the Hyperdub record label, one of the pioneering forces of UK bass culture and dubstep since 2004. Through releases by Kode9 & The Spaceape, and Burial, Hyperdub captured a sound that embodied the high-pressure claustrophobia and hyper-surveillance of urban environments in the 21st Century. Seen through this dystopian lens, people are erased from the landscape and suppressed by barely perceptible sonic frequencies, and anonymous technological forces of capitalism, yet humanity bleeds through the cracks via fragments of pirate radio signals and disembodied voices.

Nøtel is a new site-specific artwork created by Lawrence Lek and Kode9, which extends some of these themes. Situated in a newly regenerated site on London City Island, the work presents a fictional showroom for a hotel of the future, which is governed through artificial intelligence (A.I.). As you enter the building, automated sales commentaries echo across the room via out-of-phase audio loops emitting from an array of loudspeakers. Nested around a glowing green zero structure, the Nøtel showroom provides several audio-visual systems including screens and virtual reality headsets, which allow you to explore the hotel via a synthetic 3D simulation. Disembodied voices explain to you how your every need will be perfectly met through the A.I. capabilities of the hotel, which will reduce unwanted human interactions to zero.

The site seems mainly empty at the moment, with vacant or unfinished properties, and some construction boards with promotional graphics featuring Photoshopped people living out idyllic lives in the imagined bustling complex. The designs tease the possibility to remove yourself from whatever real bit of London you live in, and move to a more artificial, streamlined, seductive and gentrified one. Nøtel encapsulates this vibe, which is already there, but turns the clock forward just a little, accentuating the dystopian qualities of the site.

Nøtel questions our human relationship with technology and the capitalist systems in which we are embedded. A.I. is significant in this equation because it represents a step toward an existence in which computational processes are presumed sufficiently capable of making important choices on our behalf, and are empowered to do so. Of course, A.I. could be extremely useful for our daily lives; for instance, it has been proposed to have significant **benefits in healthcare**. Yet some proposed uses, such as systems that automatically assess you for employment **based on your social media profile**, are potentially worrying.

The A.I. groups are aware of the ethical challenges that the technology presents, and many such as **DeepMind** are employing dedicated teams of researchers to examine the ethical implications for society. Yet one wonders to what extent ethical researchers operating within an organisation with vested interests will be able to remain impartial. In this regard, perhaps we should be looking towards artists to offer more substantial outside views to explore ideas of what A.I. could be, and what positive or negative qualities it might have.



Inner Sound: Altered States of Consciousness in Electronic Music and Audio-Visual Media

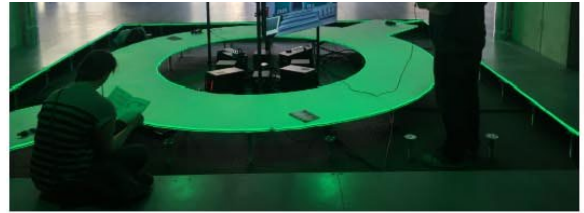
BUY NOW



Besides Lawrence Lek and Kode9, there are other artists already exploring questions such as these. For example, at the recent [EVA London](#) (Electronic Visualisation and the Arts) 2018 conference, several speakers gave interesting talks along these lines. New York-based digital artist Carla Gannis introduced #lucilletrackball, an "A.I. Comedian" who delivers a full stand-up comedy routine of zingers and computer-based one-liners – think geeky jokes such as " #lucilletrackball is looking for love but is not good with [email] attachments!" Along similar lines, Cecile Waagner Falkenstrøm's FRANK is an A.I. which asks you provocative existential questions. While these artworks imagine alternative A.I. concepts, Gretchen Andrew's [insightful paper](#) commented on the biases of search engine technologies, as she demonstrated the inherent sexism of Google Images (try searching for "girl crawling" and "boy crawling" to see for yourself – the former produces highly sexualised imagery, while the latter does not). Gretchen Andrew hacks these mechanisms with her "search engine artworks," overriding search engine results with her own paintings.

Together with Nøtel, projects such as these present alternative viewpoints on what A.I. is and what it could be – for better or worse. These are valuable because the 'intelligence' part of A.I. still remains ambiguous. Often A.I. is directed to competitive, goal orientated tasks, hence you will often see the efficacy of A.I.s demonstrated through [their ability to play video games](#). In the real world, these types of obsessive goal-orientated behaviours would probably be considered pathological if we encountered them in a person. Projects that suggest alternative ideas for A.I., such as one that can make you laugh, or annoy you by asking existential questions, may suggest more nuanced – and human – approaches to the idea of what A.I. could be.

Featured Image credit: Nøtel by Lawrence Lek and Kode9, arebyte Gallery 2018. Photo taken with permission by Jon Weinel.



*Nøtel installation by Lawrence Lek and Kode9, arebyte gallery, 2018.
Image credit: Jon Weinel.*

Jonathan Weinel is an artist, writer and Visiting Research Fellow at Aalborg University, Denmark. He is the author of [Inner Sound: Altered States of Consciousness in Electronic Music and Audio-Visual Media](#).

POSTED IN: [ARTS & HUMANITIES](#) / [BOOKS](#) / [MUSIC](#) / [SCIENCE & MEDICINE](#) / [TECHNOLOGY](#)

✉ Subscribe to the OUPblog via email:

Your@email.here

Subscribe

Our [Privacy Policy](#) sets out how Oxford University Press handles your personal information, and your rights to object to your personal information being used for marketing to you or being processed as part of our