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PRIX ARS ELECTRONICA 2003 / JURY-STATEMENT

NET VISION / NET EXCELLENCE

Galvanizing the Engagement of Society Steve Rogers

It was fascinating to be on a jury with such breadth as the Net Vision / Net Excellence this year, renowned digital artists, academics and highly regarded professionals from the commercial world. It was clear from the level of debate on the jury that our profession is maturing and growing, having left behind the baggage of the 2000 fall-out. We all had war stories and scars to compare but like our industry have moved on. This was reflected in the way that we tackled one of the hardest tasks we faced, the distinction and clarification of the two categories, vision and excellence.

We determined that for a project to win a Nica in Net Excellence then it had to excel in every aspect. Visual and technical excellence were a pre-requisite of course, but also the concept behind it had to have been truly followed through, and it must clearly be the absolute best example of its field. We determined that a project did not have to be new this year as long as it continued to grow and change to maintain its relevance to its user group.

Net Vision is altogether different, this category is not necessarily about perfect execution, this category is about challenging the way we view the Net in order to move our thinking forward. In the very best cases, such as our Nica winner and two distinctions for this year, they move our thinking forward, not only within the network but they also challenge our thinking and perspective outside the Net.

Much of our discussion centred on the appropriateness of use of the medium; whether, for instance, it was right that the Net be used simply as a publishing medium, or whether to be worthy of inclusion it should make use of some of the other intrinsic qualities of the Net. Of course one of those intrinsic qualities is the opportunity to publish that it offers to everyone. Publishing on the Net enables the artist to enter into a direct dialogue and to offer others the chance to adapt, contribute to and grow the work, alternatively to offer everyone a unique and transitory experience. We talked at length about the use of user generated content and the growth in general of social software and communities.

Communities or Social software were one of the key themes for us this year and the possibility to use the Net to galvanise the engagement of society is seen in both of the Golden Nicas. True social software allows the creators to enter a peer relationship with their contributors so that the boundaries between them fade. This gives communities both vibrancy and longevity; it also allows these communities to have relevance in the physical world.

Finally we looked at the increasing importance of the Open Source movements to all our lives. The democratisation of the development process and the reinvention of the issue of intellectual property is being explored and celebrated by many entrants this year.

Golden Nica / Net Vision – Carlos J. Gomez / Yury Gitman: [Node Runner](#)

Our selection for a Golden Nica in Net Vision brings many of the threads outlined above together. It melds physical and Net space through a strong community who are helping to change the way we interact with the network. The site itself documents an event in NYC in a style that parodies TV game shows and reflects on early computer games. The reason that we gave this project a Golden Nica however, is that it represents a movement to re-democratise the Internet, and does it in a way that is accessible. Through *Node Runner* the team has demonstrated a way of working and interacting that is first possible due to the proliferation of WiFi networks in cities such as New York.

Distinction / Net Vision David Crawford - [Stop Motion Studies](#)

We were all enthralled by *Stop Motion Studies*: this project uses the power of the network to allow users to create wonderful juxtapositions of people on subways, which enable us to see just how much we all express as we go about our daily lives. It turns the limitations of bandwidth into an advantage by looping a number of still images to capture a moment rather than attempting to stream video. Through this the essence of each expression is captured and displayed. As a user you can either browse through the subways of the world almost hypnotically or bring four together to create your own story with limitless variation.

Distinction / Net Vision Golan Levin: [The Secret Lives of Numbers](#)

Through *The Secret Life of Numbers*, Levin Golan encourages us to re-examine the relationship of primacy between words and numbers; in almost every aspect of life we use words to describe, locate, and classify things. Here we look at the world purely through the language of numbers, now possible because of the vast amount of data available to the Net. Previously the use of numbers was limited to distinct fields; postcodes, telephone numbers, or grid references, whereas words were used to define the fields or domains of knowledge and therefore allowed them to be used together. Here we see how our world looks once we start to see things through this different axis. The way that the information is presented is truly excellent, with the possibility to focus in on vast fields of data to see the significance of individual integers in a way that is fascinating and accessible to everyone.

Golden Nica / Net Excellence**Sulake Labs:** [Habbo Hotel](#)

There are very few projects which have maintained their relevance in the way that *Habbo Hotel* has done. It has become such a strong part of the lives of its members that the community of Habbo starts to blur with the real community. This project more than any other showed us why it is starting to become necessary to see projects with a longer perspective. Both technically and visually *Habbo Hotel* continues to excel and grow as an environment which is both safe and cool for children to enjoy. Its continued growth and development is what we are recognising this year, particularly two aspects thereof. Firstly the introduction of "the yellow bus" to the community, which echoes the real life yellow bus scheme, where a bus parks outside schools to allow children to visit councillors to discuss their worries over topics such as drugs or sex. In Habbo a yellow bus parks outside the hotel with a real team of councillors. When there, an orderly line forms for the children to take advantage of the opportunity in safety and relative anonymity. Secondly we recognise that it is able to adapt to new environments and cultures, having opened this year in Japan with ongoing success.

Distinction / Net Excellence**James Tindall:** [Boards of Canada](#)

Wonderful, here is somewhere that you can both wander and become lost or sit back and spectate. The work of James Tindall combines a fabulous 3D environment with the music of *Boards of Canada*. The way you navigate through the environment allows you to interact with music meaning that each journey for each user is unique. What is really refreshing is the way that a major recording artist is enabling each user to change the way they are heard rather than controlling the experience. Here the use of the network as a publishing medium works magnificently, allowing the artist to publish once to an infinite number of executions.

Distinction / Net Excellence**Lia:** [Re-move.org](#)

Many artists have explored the world of shockwave to create exciting and intoxicating images. Lia, through *re-move*, has presented us with the most compelling and professional of these. Each of the ten works presented through *re-move* is worthy of note in itself but the bringing together of this body of work is truly impressive. What sets this apart, however, is that not only does Lia present us with the tools to create stunning works, but she also shows us her vision for the work and her achievements through the portfolio which accompanies every part of the site. This is truly the very best example of this field of exploration.

As a jury we decided not to distinguish between Net Excellence and Net Vision for those projects we chose to give an honourable mention. We were impressed by the high standard of all entries but the following projects merit particular mention.

Christophe Bruno: [The Google Adwords Happening](#)

Christophe Bruno used the advent of commercially available keywords on Google to create a poetry event. Although it was unfortunately short-lived as Google decided to close the project, it was a truly inspired project: it brought poetry by serendipity to at least 12,000 people.

ubermorgen: [Injunction Generator](#)

The "injunction generator" demonstrates the international nature of the network and exposes the difficulty of one nation trying to regulate it. This project allows anyone to create an injunction document that has no more or less validity than one from a foreign nation. Impressive is both the simplicity and extremely convincing nature of the result.

LAN: [SuPerVillainizer – Conspiracy Client](#)

This project shows the difficulty in attempting to watch and control email traffic, akin to trying to tap all telephone conversations continually. *SuPerVillainizer* introduces "noise" into the system by allowing software agents to create dialogues and conspiracies between fictitious characters. It also allows you to watch the conspiracies that ensue with often very comical results.

Agathe Jacquillat / Tomi Vollaueschek: [Bzzzpeek.com](#)

Agathe Jacquillat has created a project which is both fascinating and engaging whilst being educational. It makes use of the international nature of the Internet, the ease of introducing user-generated content and the commonality of sounds. It compares in a charming and inviting way the differences in children's sounds between cultures for a number of everyday things.

Amit Pitaru / James Paterson: [Insertsilence](#)

This work produces a beautiful fluid animation born out of the technique of creation during real time. This approach allows the artist to play the visual media in the same way that a musician plays music. The result is a stunning combination of the two where both are created simultaneously.

Axel Heide, onesandzeros, Philip Pocock, Gregor Stehle: [Unmovie](#)

Axel Heide, onesandzeros, Philip Pocock, Gregor Stehle provide context and motive to engage in poetry. Users enter into the stream of poetry, which is created partly by the participants and partly by the bots that permanently inhabit the space: the result is splendid. It takes the concept of chat and community as communication and effectively allows it to become the context for creating a joint work of art.

Antoni Abad: [Z](#)

Antoni Abad builds on human nature to care for a "pet" to create an extremely unusual and organic network. That the instantiation of the network is a fly makes it intriguing. It shows a very original train of thought that is supported by excellent execution. Of particular note is the possibility to see the global level of activity of the network, clearly although not exclusively following daytime around the world.

Wiggle / Jan Hoogerbrugge: [Flow](#)

Flow is a hypnotic experience which although it is superficially extremely simple, it engages and intrigues. gil kuno has created a form of animation which has a simple mode of interaction for a very rich experience. The image of a man in an infinite elevator is compelling and disturbing in equal measure

LeCielestbleu: [PuppetTool](#)

The very best projects are often those which do one thing extremely well; such is the case here. *Puppet Tool* does

not attempt to create faultless models, but to create faultless motion for its simple models; the result is fluid, and fascinating. Being able to see the work of other users as well helps to build the value and community of the site.

Jared Tarbell: [Levitated](#)

Jared Tarbell has created an excellent open source graphic work that has incredible breadth. The project clearly shows the wealth of work done which is then offered as a rich open source palette to work from. The quality of the experience and interaction is as high as the quality of the work making for a very complete and fulfilling work.

LAST: [Last.Fm](#) / [Flast.Fm](#)

Both the rise of communities on the Net as well as the growth of music sharing have been dominant forces in the industry for some time. *Last FM* brings both of these together in an extremely compelling well-executed work. It uses the context of music and musical taste to create vibrant communities.

LAN: [Tracenoizer](#)

We have all put our names into Google to see what exists about us on the network. We don't always want to be so easy to find, so *Tracenoizer* allows us to create an alter ego, which although resembling us will be completely fictitious. The result is a site which can then be hosted and which combines much of the real information found about us with real information found out about people with similar names to ourselves. What makes this so compelling is the quality and credibility of the resulting site.

[Sourceforge.net](#)

Open Source is changing the way that the economy works: it demands that we rethink the way intellectual capital is handled. Sourceforge is the pre-eminent company in the domain. As a company they have embraced and enabled the Open Source movement, which puts them into a peer relationship with their customers. This, more than any other recent event, changes the way we all work and develop our products.

Shinya Yamamoto: [Sinplex Show](#)

Shinya Yamamoto explores the world of silent imagery in a stark but exquisite work. Through choosing to exclude sound the impact of the visual is even stronger. The intriguing manner of interaction through "catching falling droplets" encourages repeated exploration and experience.