

Glitch: Beyond Binary

Online Auction: 19–26 April 2023 • 2:00 PM EDT • New York

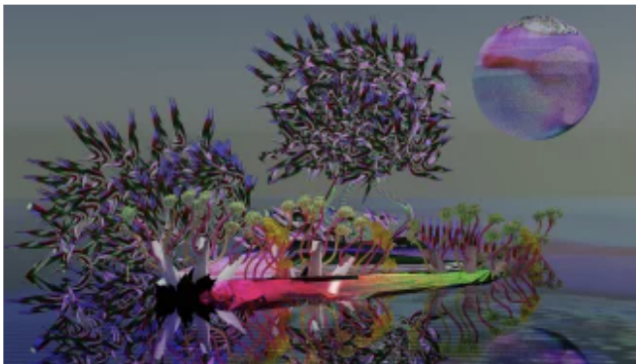
Sotheby's New York is thrilled to announce *Glitch: Beyond Binary*, which introduces glitch art as an umbrella term for the many waves and perspectives glitch art can encompass. It presents the genre not just as a procedural or aesthetic practice, but also highlights the diverse groups of artists that make up the glitch art communities. While these occurrences are rarely anticipated and usually unwelcome, glitch artists may in fact intentionally provoke them.

Glitch: Beyond Binary showcases the various forms in which glitch artists have used disruption, both in the analog and digital realms, as well as for various forms of political and identity expression. These communities do not just identify as male or female but consist of people from every gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, language, neuro-type, size, ability, class, religion, culture, subculture, political opinion, age, skill level, occupation, and background. The sale features sections from leading curators Dina Chang and Dawnia Darkstone aka Letsglitchit, in addition to works from XCOPY and jakNFT, among others.

Glitch: Beyond Binary.

Essay by Rosa Menkman

An MP3 might skip or crackle, a preview window might briefly show shards instead of an image and a website might hiccup on load and scramble its contents. While these occurrences are rarely anticipated and usually unwelcome, glitch artists may in fact intentionally provoke them.[1] *Glitch: Beyond Binary* showcases the various forms in which glitch artists have used disruption, both in the analog and digital realms, as well as for various forms of political and identity expression.



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GLITCH: BEYOND BINARY

Glitch: the Pre Binary

Deterioration has always been part of the life of the image.[1] Even before the advent of digital technology, no image could last indefinitely; sooner or later, all images decay, disintegrate or simply disappear. It is the nature of the world we live in - a world rich with hypertrophy.

While disintegration is typically considered as an undesirable occurrence that conservationists seek to minimize, gradual decline can sometimes also enrich the image. Take for example an old photograph that has been damaged. Its cracks, stains, and other signs of aging can add a sense of history and nostalgia, making the picture feel more authentic and unique: no other copy of the same image would have the same traces of wear and tear: they add to the images' aura.

With this in mind, certain artists intentionally started to create work that incorporates and even celebrates elements of decomposition. For example, pioneering experimental filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage and more recently, Jennifer Reeves, integrate scratches, dirt, and other imperfections onto their film. They don't aim to capture a perfect image, but rather show that the material of film itself is meaningful too.

The dominant, continuing search for a noiseless channel has been — and will always be — no more than a regrettable, ill-fated dogma.

Acknowledge that although the constant search for complete transparency brings newer, 'better' media, every one of these improved techniques will always possess their own inherent fingerprints of imperfection.

Glitch: A Window into the Binary

For a moment, the emergence of digital technology gave rise to an expectation of flawless transmission. However, it quickly became clear that the digital domain wasn't immune to degradation either. The disintegration of files soon became commonplace and with the arrival of digital glitches, a new and more abrupt form of decay was introduced, revealing that computation would not be able to offer the noiseless channel people had hoped for.

Etymologically, the word glitch stems from the Yiddish term "glitsh," which means a slippery place or to slide and glide. Ported to the realms of digital computation, the term is used to refer to an unexpected or not understood break from the expected flow of computation. The glitch reveals itself as an accident, chaos or laceration, offering a glimpse into the otherwise obfuscated language of machines.

When confronted with a glitch while using a digital technology, one often experiences a sense of shock and confusion, followed by wonder: will the computer return to its "normal" state? The encounter of a glitch can be puzzling, yet captivating. And as the user tries to understand the cause and nature of the glitch, it challenges their digital literacy.

Once the cause of a technology's erratic behavior is identified, it may only require a simple recalibration of the code. After this change, the glitch can be named and understood. When the original phenomenon of rupture is resolved, the glitch may vanish, and become a mere bug report. However, if the cause of the glitch remains unknown, it can either be disregarded and forgotten or introduced as a new perspective on the malfunctioning technology. French philosopher Paul Virilio wrote that accidents don't necessarily equal failure, but instead create a new significant state that wouldn't otherwise be seen. They can reveal "something absolutely necessary to knowledge." [2]



Employ bends and breaks as a metaphor for différance. Use the glitch as an exoskeleton for progress.

Find catharsis in disintegration, ruptures and cracks; manipulate, bend and break any medium towards the point where it becomes something new; create glitch art.

Tactical Glitches

As digital technologies became more commonplace, digital artists started experimenting with bending and breaking programs and files. During the mid-nineties, the art collective jodi.org for instance developed a series of unplayable mods from the First Person Shooter Quake. In these modified game levels they exposed not only the expectations inherent to videogames but also offered a rare glimpse into the otherwise digital black box, illuminating its inner workings.

Gradually, glitches became a go-to technique in the toolbox of tactical media artists, as they set out to expose its inherent politics such as bias, habit and the limitations of computation. Through their work, they showed that while technology is designed to function perfectly, or at least as well as possible in a particular predefined context, technology is tried and tested for only particular use-case scenarios, often with only specific financial and economic goals. By illustrating the limitations of technology, this particular branch of procedural glitch art tactically illustrates that technology is never a neutral tool.

Bending the Binary

A common glitch technique is data bending, which involves inserting random data into the file, or the transcoding a file type - such as an image file into sound. File formats are used to encode data by organizing it according to a particular syntax or compression algorithm. The choice of a compression is determined by various factors such as intended usage, required accuracy, and hardware or software specifications. Each algorithm comes with its own rules and compromises that can significantly affect the final output and look of the file.

In A Vernacular of File Formats, I compressed a source image - a self portrait - using different compression languages while intentionally introducing the same error into each file. This allowed the otherwise invisible compression language to reveal itself on the surface of the image. The project served not only as a starting point for my ongoing research into file format politics and their inherent resolutions, but also as a handbook for exploring glitch aesthetics.

Following its release, the images from The Vernacular widely circulated over the internet in all forms and references. But the self-portrait was also used without attribution on mugs, hoodies, vinyl record covers. In 2016, the Vernacular was jointly acquired by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Museum Of The Image (Netherlands). It is however still freely available online for artists and designers to use as source footage for their own work and research, following the spirit of COPY < IT > RIGHT!: It's okay to copy!

Realize that the gospel of glitch art also tells about new standards implemented by corruption.

Not all glitch art is progressive or something new. The popularization and cultivation of the avant-garde of mishaps has become predestined and unavoidable. Be aware of easily reproducible glitch effects automated by softwares and plug-ins. What is now a glitch will become a fashion.

Genealogies of Distortion

Today, digital technologies are ubiquitous, and phenomena such as cracked screens and broken images have become commonplace occurrences. Glitches no longer merely signify a moment of digital interruption, but have evolved as meaningful signifiers and figures of speech, even serving as metaphors. As a result, the glitch art movement evolved from a tactical form of glitch art into a popular aesthetic that was quickly co-opted by various other waves of culture. This transition left the glitch existing simultaneously as a mode of resistance and as a commodity or asset .

This is why the writing of any type of glitch art history is difficult, if not impossible, as writing a historical account seems incompatible with the genre of glitch art. If anything, the historical continuity of glitch is characterized by bends, breaks, voids, forks, in-betweens, instabilities, rigidity, abandonment, and turns. In fact, there is no such thing as a "glitch art continuum" or a "first work" or form of glitch art. Rather than a linear history of glitch, there are many parallel, complex, and intersecting discourses that interact and influence one another.

Every form of glitch, whether accidental or designed, eventually will become a new form or meaningful expression. However, the meanings of glitch are constantly subject to revision: their language systems emerge, their meanings shift, idioms ossify and standardize into a fashion or genre.

...and then they change again. The glitch thus heralds a transformative power - a potential to modulate or productively damage the norms of (techno-)culture.

Glitch: Beyond Binary

In this light, the initial suspension of Sotheby's "Glitch-ism" auction following widespread community backlash, criticizing the event for its lack of representation, illustrates the ongoing transformative power of the glitch art genre.

The newly curated auction, "Glitch: Beyond Binary," features three curated shows on glitch art under one umbrella, curated by Dawnia Darkstone (Letsglitchit), Dina Chang, and finally the original Sotheby's line-up. This fractured show aims to highlight the diverse groups of artists that make up the glitch art communities; communities that do not just identify as male or female but consist of people from all varieties of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, language, neuro-type, size, ability, class, religion, culture, subculture, political opinion, age, skill level, occupation, and background.[4]

Glitch: Beyond Binary highlights that auction houses have a responsibility beyond profit-making. By embracing a broader definition of value and ensuring equitable curation Beyond Binary demonstrates that the value of glitch art extends beyond its market and aesthetics, encompassing the glitch and its cultural significance.

References

[1] From the tactical glitches exhibition text, curated by Nick Briz and Rosa Menkman at SUDLAB Gallery, Naples, 2014.

<https://beyonddresolution.info/quadriptych-of-glitch-curation>

[2] Order and Progress catalogue text by Domenico Quaranta (2010)

<https://beyonddresolution.info/ORDER-AND-PROGRESS-1>

[3] Sylvere Lotringer, Paul Virilio, The Accident of Art, Semiotext(e), New York 2005, p. 63.

[4] Inclusivity language ripped, borrowed, leveraged, and copied from the p5 community guidelines

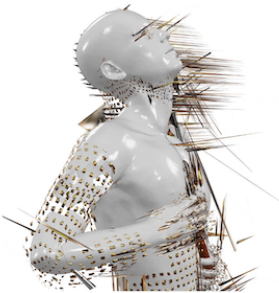
She is also co-founder of Setta, an experimental creative studio based in New York City.



JPEG FROM A VERNACULAR OF FILE FORMATS, 2009 - 2010), 2023



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