

Bridging the Void: Online Creative Networks

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Bibliography

Sites for Study

Primary

Axisweb.org

Jotta.com

Saatchi-gallery.co.uk

Risearts.com

Ideastap.com

Secondary

Deviantart.com

ThisIsCentralStation.com

ArtSlant.com

Artnet.com

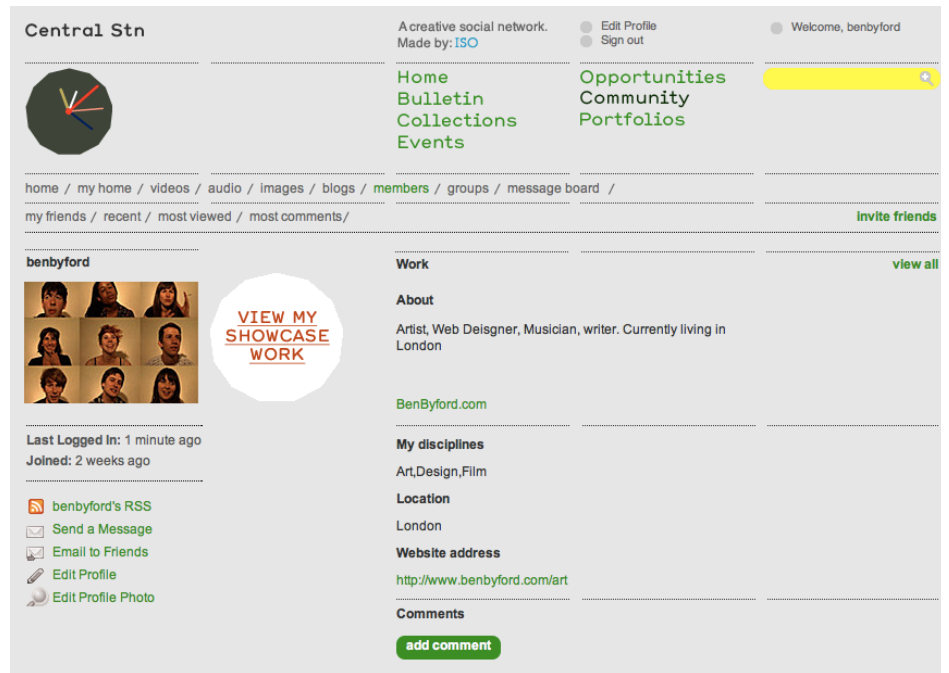
Artreview.com

Studentartnetwork.co.uk

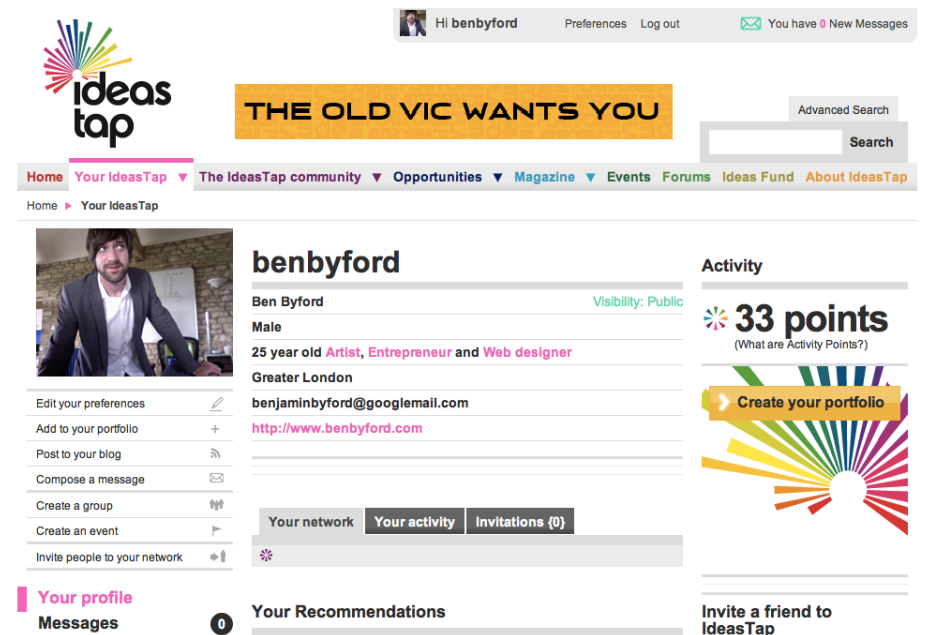
Etsy.com

Behance.net

Re-title.com



Profile on Central Station



Profile on IdeasTap

Introduction

Online Creative Networks

“Because the connections are through the phones lines, it no longer matters where in the world the users are. There does not have to be any one 'art capital', because art can exist 'virtually' everywhere” (Coate 1988)¹

As more artists make their way into the Internet’s digital realm, more businesses are offering these artists provisions for making this transition. Artists are spoiled for choice when considering where to put down their digital roots. One can make a website, a blog, join a forum, try a social network, or sign up for a membership of an Online Creative Network. The act of joining an Online Creative Network implies uploading photos and other media, adding artwork information, and making connections with other artists; it implies the creation of a digital self. Artists are creating parallel presences for their real-world artwork; it is this duality that I wish to explore here.

So what do we know about the context of what an Online Creative Network (OCN) has to offer? Are these OCNs a new digital frontier where there are no gatekeepers, where tactile art works find a *duality*, where curators and buyers are constantly searching for new talent, or even where an artwork’s *aura* is lost? This paper aims to create bookmarks on the way to understanding our current position in an art world increasingly mediated by emerging technologies.

Online Creative Networks, for the purpose of this study, can be defined as dynamic² websites that provide memberships enabling an interaction between creative users, or that

¹ Coate, John. (1988). Whole Earth Lectronic Link (WELL), *Leonardo*. Supplemental Issue, Vol. 1, Electronic Art (1988), pp. 118-119. Published by: The MIT Press

² Dynamic website design refers to the use of read and write databases to change the visible content of the site.

allow for the public posting of creative endeavours online. This generalised synopsis allows various websites to come under this labelling OCN (an acronym used to help us understand similarities between services, but not an overarching term used by any one of these networks themselves). Facebook, the online social network that “give[s] people the power to share and make the world more open and connected”³, for example, may enable an artist to interact with other artists, find buyers in their associated network, and post imagery, but does not, strictly speaking, provide services which are publicly available to those outside the network (one has to be logged on to use the service). These *social networks* have been excluded from this investigation, as not to be confused with sites that are explicit in their target audience of artists. Facebook.com and other *social* networks like Twitter.com, Friendfeed.com, and Myspace.com, however can help artists to digitally distribute information about their projects online, so I felt it was appropriate to mention them here before continuing onto OCNs.

The Online Creative Networks that I will focus on in this paper, in contrast to *social* networks, publicise themselves as more specifically aimed at artists: “Axis ... The online resource for contemporary art”⁴, “Deviantart ... the largest art community in the world!”⁵, “Jotta is a place for creative people and artists across every discipline”⁶. I will be discussing some of the functions of these networks, interviewing artists that use them and the people working on them, therefore allowing a contextualized discussion of these “Creative Social Networks”.⁷ While academic discourse surrounding these networks specifically is limited, I hope to discuss OCNs within a dialogue using theories relating to the commodification of artworks such as Benjamin’s *Aura*, Bourriaud’s *Relational*

³ [accessed 26/07/2010] <http://www.facebook.com/facebook#!/facebook?v=info>

⁴ [accessed 26/07/2010] <http://www.axisweb.org/>

⁵ [accessed 26/07/2010] <http://www.deviantart.com/>

⁶ [accessed 26/07/2010] <http://www.jotta.com/jotta/tour>

⁷ [accessed 26/07/2010] <http://www.thisiscentralstation.com>

Aesthetics, and the discourses of *Mediation*, *Supermodernity* and *network theory*. Using these theories I will create a discourse that spans the practical intentions and usage of OCNs and the wider implications on art theory and practice.

I believe there are some questions yet to be posed concerning these OCNs that, it seems, are silently creating a second market place. Are these networks even useful? Is their sole purpose to help connect artists with the art-world? Alternatively, are they helping to create a new *hypermediated* art world where art is both tangible and digital simultaneously, thus rendering the artwork conversely unbreakable and timeless? Should this interconnected relationship between the art object and online representation be considered perhaps in new terms; can this duality be categorised as *hyperart* or *hyper-representation*?

At the time of writing, a relatively small OCN called Jotta, which focuses its marketing materials on the student and the under thirty demographic, has 6,500 members participating in the network⁸. Members are uploading images, video, sound, and descriptions, commenting on each other's work, messaging, and creating collaborative projects. If we are to analyse the interactions that occur within these networks it is imperative that we think beyond the formal logics contained, such as collaboration as progressive and positive (normalized in part by *Situationism*, *Participation Art*, and *Fluxus*). If a network provides the tools for collaboration, we should look to see whether these additions are working as intended and useful for the user, not just accept the logic presented. Putting some of these logics to one side, we may assess what is actually occurring in these networks in real terms. Are OCNs helping artists to collaborate, or to sell and exhibit artworks? Do they live up to their own hype?

⁸ Jotta.com statistics provided by Millie Ross, Jotta.com Editor on 01/07/2010

This paper does not cover purely mediated or networked art works like that of Net.Art, Internet Art, Web Art, and other digital forms that can only be represented online. My point of investigation concerns tangible artworks that have been given an online presence. In my research, I have found that the majority of submitted works distributed on an OCN consist mainly of tangible art objects. Internet Art, it seems, isn't well represented on OCNs. The investigation of this absence could easily constitute its own paper, exploring the infinitely distributable nature of net art and its free to access ethos, as well as the reluctance of traditional gallery spaces to embrace the new medium, mirroring the OCNs behaviour. That said, there are successful websites devoted to just such art mediums like Rhizome.org, which have a single focus on technology based artworks. This is touched on again during my interviews (see: *Observations*) where I discuss whether my interviewees consider any art mediums excluded from these networks. While I am generalising the term *art* in this essay, the reader should consider it in traditional terms of the Fine Arts and lineage of the tangible Art Object.