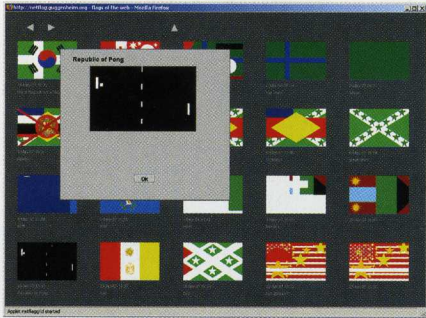# mark napier

Mark Napier, net.flag, 2002, Software, Internet, 2002, Courtesy Guggenheim Museum (s. netflag.guggenheim.org)

Mark Napier, Shredder
potatoland.org/shredder/shredder.html

Mark Napier, RIOT
potatoland.org/riot/

How did you get started with net art?
Well I programmed for a living and i was mostly working as a painter. A friend introduced me to the web. He was a writer.

At what time was this?
This was early ,95 late ,94, he had been involved since ,93. He created a site called „literary kicks". He showed me the web and said: „You like to programme and you like to make art. You should really be involved in this". And i loved it. I was really excited about the possibilities in that environment, to make art that will change over time and could react to the visitor. The viewer of the artwork could actually participate in the art and you could distribute the art. All of that in this one form in the web browser. And the idea that art could be global, that you could make something and then put it on the web and the next day it could be in japan, anywhere a person could get to a computer. I did my last painting in May of ,95 and the first website in June actually. A year later i went back into my studio and everything was exactly like i left it, brushes where still in what used to be water and it was dried up. I realized i shifted. I couldn't go back at that point to making still, static art objects.

What are the connections between the paintings you did and your net art?
One thing that connected the two world conceptually was, that before i started painting, i was working with materials that could age. I was embedding metal and nails into paintings. Things that would oxidize and change colour. Things

that would change over time.

Where they abstract?
Yes, abstract.

What are your influences?
Painting is my biggest influence. I mostly go back to painters from all ages. The history of painting is so intense. There are so many ideas there and so many experiments with different ways to represent reality and how we describe reality through images.
One piece, that i thought of when i got involved in the Internet, was from Walter De Maria. Walter De Maria is an earthworks artist and he did a piece called „the lightning field". It's an installation in New Mexico and it is actually a large field with this metal pulls about ten feet high and Steel rots embedded in cement. And a huge grid of them! The whole idea of the artwork is to attract lightning. The artwork is so much about waiting and knowing there are so much possibilities that can happen in this space. Most of the time there is no lightning, you are just thinking what it would be like, if lightning strikes. When i started working on the Internet I thought of this piece a lot, because i thought of the Internet as a space that has an environment like that. I was making an artwork that's deliberately attracting lightning, but in this case the lightning is people. People that are coming into the piece, doing something with the work to make it activate and come alive in a way that's totally spontaneous and surprising even to me as the artist.

I really like the flag piece
Yes, and with the flags a lot of the time you see the same sort of themes that are fairly generic. and then you see every 50ths flag as this amazingly creative gem that somebody creates. I love that because as the artist i could make the work and leave it to have a life of its own.

How about the works that aren't interactive? What are the opportunities of the Internet there?
Those pieces like Pam don't work on the Internet. They are more common on the influence of that technology. They are not so directly using the technology. Like the melting empire state building. What i was interested in with that was to dematerialize this structure. This symbol which is a symbol of power.
The empire state building is all about getting steel and stone as high as you can into the air. The monumental quality of it is that it's so heavy and yet still so tall. But it's a triumph of this material. It's a way of expressing power. After the Internet it has become clear that power is much more encoded in power of information. So the structures are obsolete. Impressive but obsolete. The melting and dematerializing of that building was really about saying what seemed so solid, timeless and concrete is really now eclipsed by this fluid and organic energy-based form. And of course everybody who sees it thinks about terrorism. To me it's not about terrorism. It's about something that's much more powerful than terrorism: media. Media can change our culture far more powerful than some external
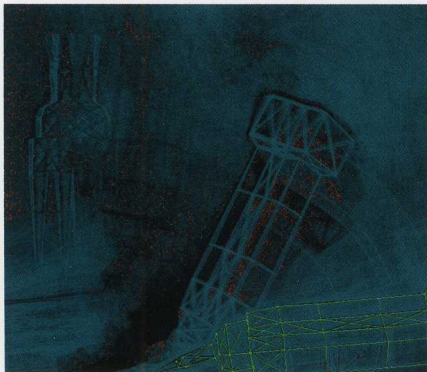
Mark Napier, Solid
potatoland.org/solid/kingkong/index.
html

Mark Napier, Cyclops Birth I, 2007,
digital print, 109 x 142 x 5 cm,
Courtesy Gallery [DAM]Berlin
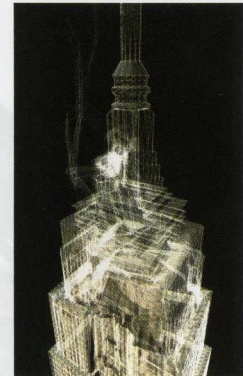
Mark Napier, Dissolve in Light,
2007, Software, Computer, Screen,
Screenshot, Courtesy Gallery [DAM]

people trying to destroy this or that
building. But people don't notice the
media and so they don't worry about it.
I'm not saying they should worry. I'm not
saying it's about fear, but people don't
react to media in the same way as they
project their fears to these concrete,
specific events that often are not as
powerful as they think.

**Is the Pamela Anderson piece is also
about media?**
That is drawing more visibly from
the web, because the source of the
images is the web. I wanted to go back
to the way I worked in earlier pieces,
which is to appropriate contend of the
internet itself. Again the piece is really
a comment on power and how power is
encoded in the world. And in this case
the power is of the human body itself,
which is if you think about it really the
most powerful structure in the universe
as far as we know. That humans can
do more good or more damage to an
entire planet than any other life form
or technology. So it's an interesting
structure to look at and mastering the
human body is the goal of so many
martial-arts forms and religions. Being
able to overcome the limitations of your
body or to control and direct your own
mind and body. Sexuality is power. Any
guy knows that women are the most
powerful things around. The image of
sexuality and the power of sexuality in
art, through the venus the embodiment
of a perfect woman in art over the
years. To me that's an interesting field
to explore. And then again how is that
effected by the Internet or by changes
in media, that are going on right now?

When it came together to me was to
think: „How can i create a body, a single
person?" And it can't be any person!
It has to be a person who is really
famous, that is really visible. I decided
on Pamela Anderson because she is
incredibly visible. She is one of the most
mentioned women on the web.

**What are the ideas of shredder and
feed?**
Shredder was an alternative web
browser. It was one of the first web
pieces I made. The idea there was
that I wanted to create a browser that
completely altered the appearance of
the web by just filtering the web through
this alternative way of seeing. I actually
was thinking about representing reality.
Shredder is actually kind of a filter that
is filtering the reality of the web.
Something that changed on the web
is, as more people got involved, that
it became more standardized like
facebook, myspace and twitter. All
these different kinds of services, that
channel people in really specific ways
of using the web. And in my point of
view it becomes less interesting for art.
It becomes interesting in other ways. I
don't know if the average person will get
what Shredder was about. But I know
that other artists have presumed other
projects based on those pieces. One
of them is called „shift space". It's a
plug-in for firefox that allows you to get
into web pages and edit them. You can
change pages. So if you read an article
for example on the suns homepage it
could be a news article where you have
absolute no control over the content of
this site and obviously they don't want

you to touch the site. You can annotate
the article and say: „These facts are
wrong! Here are the actual facts so go
over to this website and you will find
the real story!". I was kind of surprised
when i met Mushon who was working at
this project and he said: „Oh yeah, I saw
your piece „riot" and i got this idea how
the web could be used by taking apart
other websites." I was shocked because
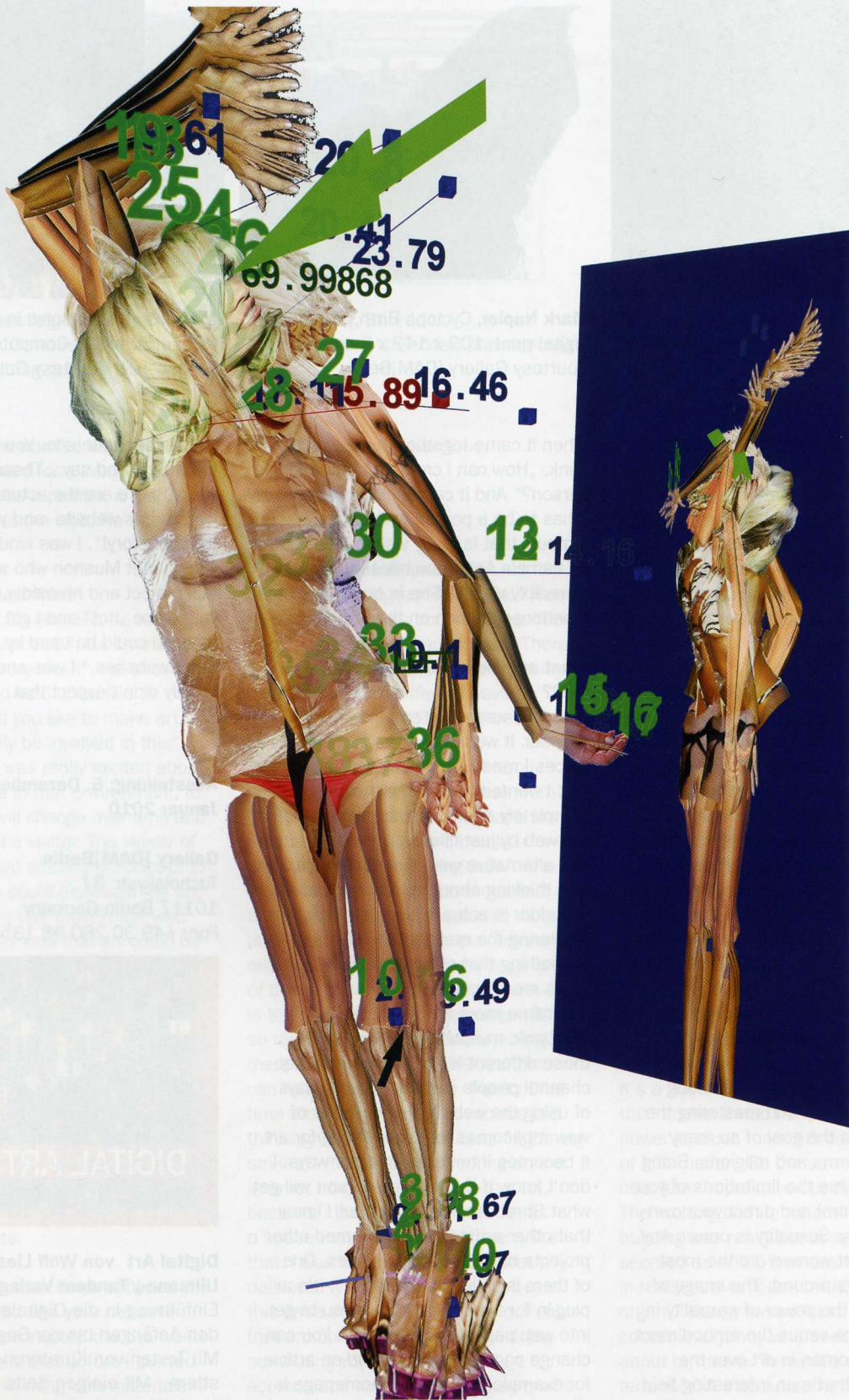i really didn't expect that.
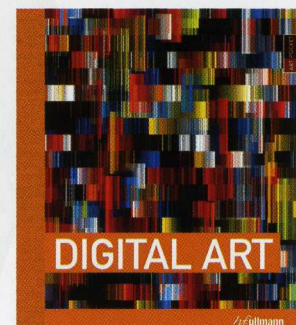
Interview Moritz Stellmacher

Mark Napier, Venus 2.0 No. 003233, 2009, digital print, 76 x 120 cm, Courtesy [DAM]Berlin

Mark Napier, Venus 2.0, 2009, Software, Computer, Screen, Screenshot, Courtesy Gallery [DAM]Berlin