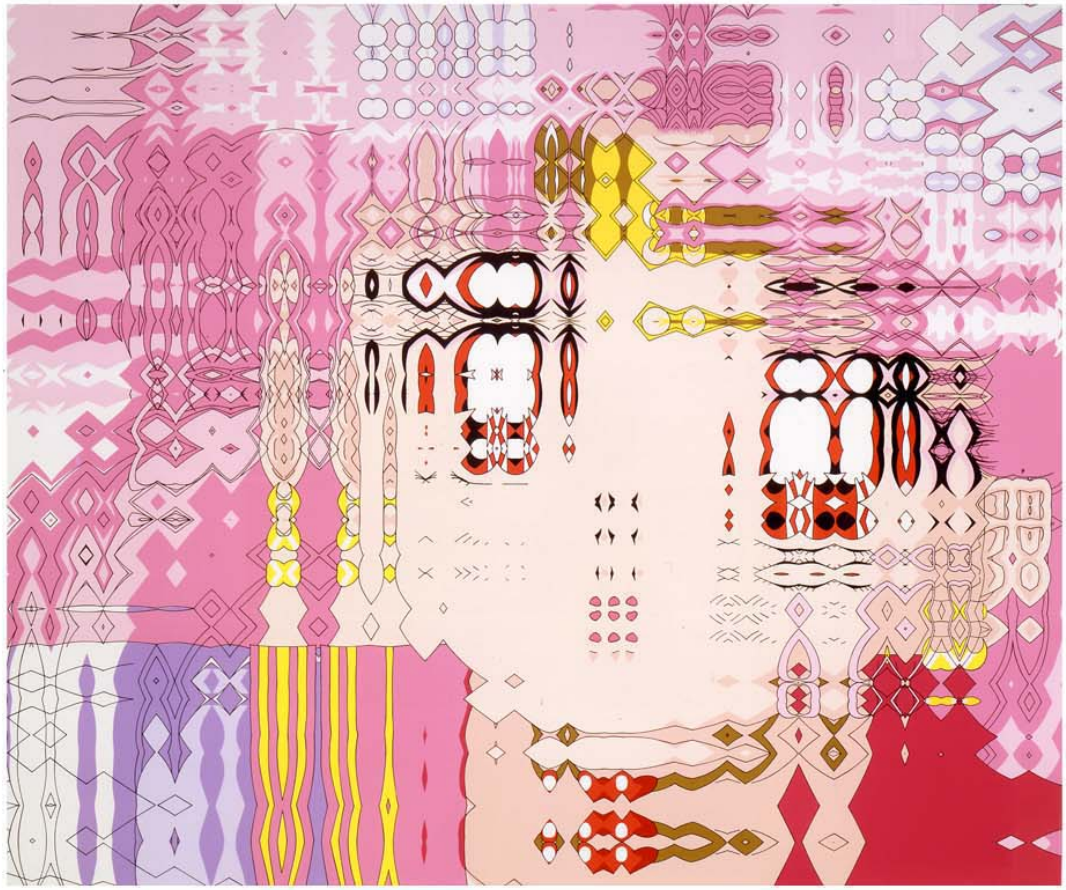
Clifford, Katie. "Bitstreams." *ARTnews* 100, no. 6 (June 2001): 127.



BitStreams

Whitney Museum of American Art

"BitStreams," on view through the tenth of this month, is the Whitney's adventurous effort to present the latest in computer-generated art. Rather than subject the museumgoer to a gallery full of monitors with artist Web sites to navigate ad nauseum, curator Lawrence Rinder presents an impressive selection of digital work that should appeal to techies and Luddites alike.

Some artists engage in a kind of electronic painting. John F. Simon, Jr., for instance, offers a colorful geometric abstraction that appears on a digital display screen. Programmed to be in constant motion, it's like a Mondrian on amphetamines, the modernist grid whipping into a restless frenzy when plugged into the computer. By contrast, Jeremy Blake's digital canvases—actually animated DVDs—portray soft-focus geometric patterns that morph and change color, with dissolves and transitions as seductive as a slow striptease.

Pop culture, too, undergoes software manipulations in the hands of Carl Fudge. Fudge scanned into a computer the image of the Japanese animated character Sailor Chibi Moon, a spunky girl with pink pigtails. He tinkered with its digital makeup, printed out the modified version, then created screenprints based on the new design. The result is a pleasing abstract pattern of repeating lines and shapes on fields of red and pink. Ultimately, the figure's physique is flattened out, a sort of roadkill of the digital highway.

Robert Lazzarini invokes the memento mori, lending his work art-historical heft. He laser-scanned a human skull into a computer, digitally distorted its shape, then reproduced it as a three-dimensional object. Lazzarini cast the final work in solid bone. The four skulls presented here are compelling on many levels: they resemble the contorted skull in Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533); they suggest the apparitions that appear in schlock slasher films; they hint at physical deformity as well as warped minds. Ultimately, they disrupt the viewer's perception; the eye tries to right the skull into its familiar form.

The sleeper is the section devoted to sound art, organized by associate curator Debra Singer. In these works, noise is translated into digital information that can be manipulated into audio compositions. Visitors enter a narrow corridor—part of an installation designed by the architecture firm LOT/EK—put on headphones, and listen to recordings while leaning on a tilted, foam-covered wall. Among the audio gems is *War! Serbia vs. United States*, a 1999 radio broadcast choreographed by artist Brian Conley, in which WBAI in New York and Radio B2-92 in Belgrade staged a battle based on cartoon sound effects—air-raid sirens, explosions, cuckoo clocks—that were lobbed back and forth via the Internet.

At times, the survey is like a science fair, demonstrating the many ways artists can use computers, drawing attention to methods rather than content. What will happen once the novelty of new media wears off? Time will tell, but the Whitney has admirably set the (digital) clock in motion. ***—Katie Clifford***