

x-med. *experimental media arts*

editorial

The motivation behind this review originated from a series of technically, artistically and poetically juicy workshops, organized by four independent technological arts initiatives in Brussels: *nadine*, *okno*, FoAM and iMAL. More than hundred professional artists and students participated in the workshops, eager to remediate a perceived lack of experimental media education in Belgium. The workshops also responded to the need for a place where continuous learning and dialogue between peers are encouraged. Through a sequence of workshops we have attempted to share our experience, skills and knowledge with a wide group of people interested in emerging thoughts, media and technologies. *nadine*, *okno* and FoAM designed a joint programme, which started out from a mixture of introductory tutorials and moved towards master-classes and informal gatherings. This programme allowed novice participants to become prolific media artists over a period of two years. Complementary in approach and content, iMAL's workshops attracted many of the same participants, further enhancing the richness of the evolving independent media education in Brussels.

We wanted to spread the understanding of the diversity and multiplicity of tools and media that can be used creatively, as well as teach the basics of 'making-your-own' techno-artistic materials and instruments. We covered collaborative issues in the production of art, specifically computer-implemented and media-related art. We discussed wider economic, environmental, social and political implications of our works. We forged new projects, performed and socialized together, gathering a critical mass of people and organizations around topics close to our hearts.

To stimulate the reader to browse through the publication itself, we won't spoil the pleasure of discovery by describing each contribution here. We intended to bring forth a collection of interesting materials, either descriptive or synthetic, narrative or poetic in their nature, mostly reflecting the thoughts and techniques that were at the basis of our fertile collaboration. This review tends to present itself like a remnant (and annotated) degustation menu, carrying memories of the many flavours consumed on our digital tables, staining the responsive tablecloths. The dishes range from never-ending, wholesome banquets, to light and frivolous snacks, frozen bites to cleanse the palate, and refreshing flows of imagery to improve digestion.

Our ongoing gratitude goes to everyone who participated in our workshops and has worked with us to compile this publication. Their ideas, concepts, tools and examples, represent a particularly tasty cross-section of media art, which we find points to interesting possible futures.

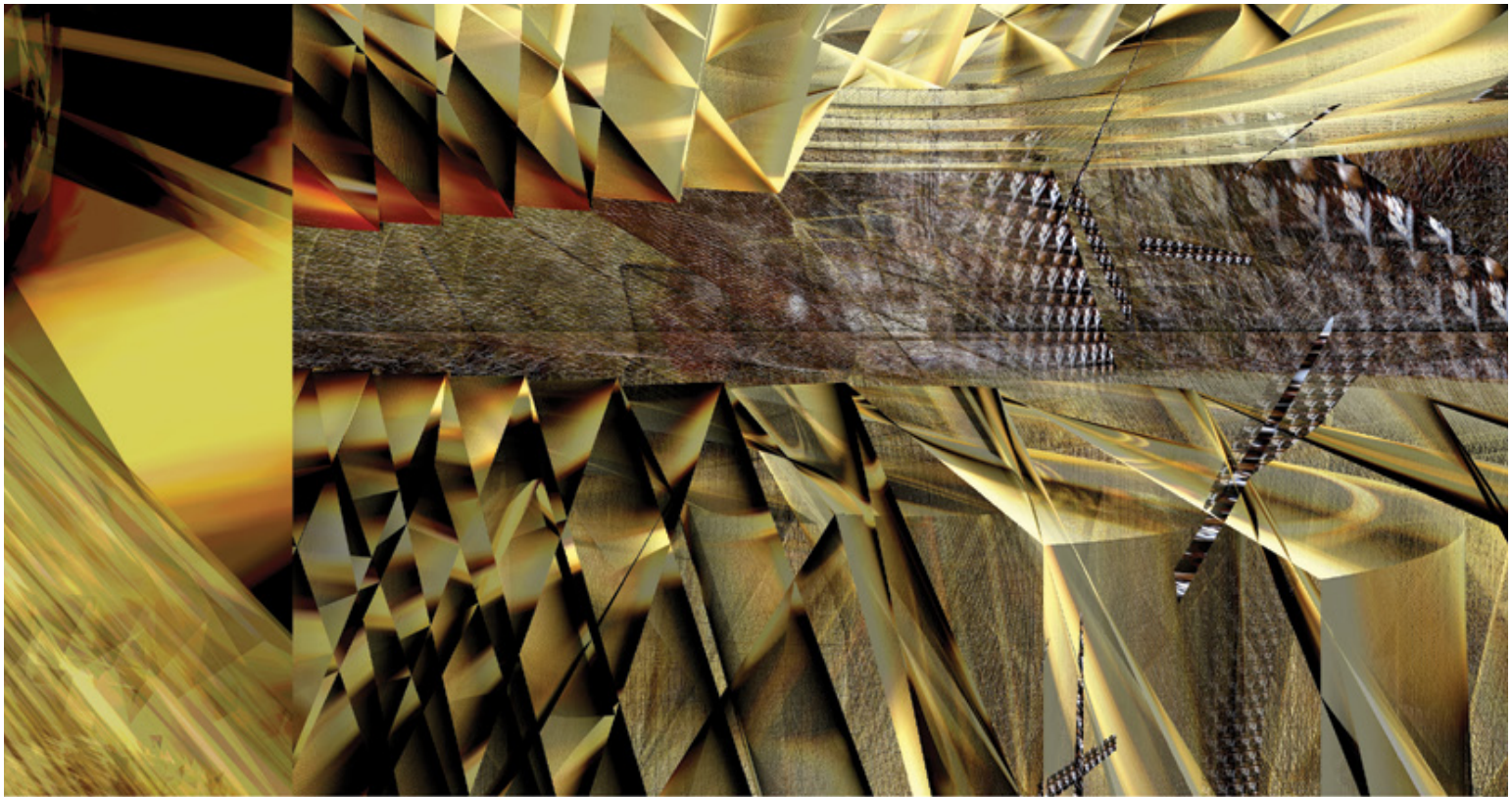
As all the texts, images and designs smell fresh and delicious, we wouldn't want to hold you up any longer... Bon-ap!

For more of the same and radically different .x-med-a.s,
The Editors

✉ <http://x-med-a.be>

✉ <http://x-med-k.be>

The publication you are holding in your hands has a peculiar name .X-MED-A. At a first glance, the '-MED-' in the name might smell of antiseptics and invoke feelings of aichmophobia. However, '-MED-' in the context of this publication condenses 'media', most often digital, sometimes analogue, fibrous or even biological. Similarly, X does not imply X-rays or adult themes, but can be expanded as 'experimental' and finally, the A abbreviates art. Hence: eXperimental-MEDia-Art - the stuff that keeps us busy during much of our waking hours.



images ©jasch

Teaching Digital Tools for Live Audio-Visual Creation

Jasch

At the invitation of iMAL I had the opportunity to teach two workshops in Brussels in the spring of 2004 and again in the summer of 2005. I have been involved in performing, as well as teaching digital tools for audio and visual performance since 2000.

Around 1999 we saw the emergence of the first software tools for live processing of moving images, notably `nato+_o.55` by the notorious Netochka Nezvanova. Without delving too much into the actual history of that net-art project and software system, I want to emphasize the impact of this and other new tools on the practice of live work with digital media. The appearance on the scene of a video tool using the same framework and syntax as the audio tools was a great revelation, and I remember spending entire nights excitedly exploring the visual sibling of my main music software, coming up with all sorts of interesting cross-over methods and mutations of musical into visual ideas.

From today's perspective this may seem a little naïve, but back then it had a strong influence and changed the way a lot of people perceived working with digital media.

Artists from such diverse backgrounds as improv music, electronic music, visual and graphic arts, installation arts and theatre converged around this new method of manipulating and generating visual as well as audio content in real time.

Some waypoints back in 2000/2001 were the 'nato-summit' at the Dutch Electronic Art Festival in Rotterdam, the workshop by Johnny Dekam and Brian Kane in Porto in June 2001, the fiftyfifty workshop at hangar in Barcelona in July 2001 by Johnny Dekam and myself, the betaville workshops in Paris in August 2001 and January 2002 by Pedro Soler and myself. The tag-team configuration of these events helped to bring together people from various backgrounds and focus not only on the techniques but also on bridging the gap between the sound and the image in the digital domain.

The Brussels workshops took all of that to another level. Six years down the road, the digital tool and the 'style' have become very familiar, the initial excitement about the new possibilities has blown over and people have started to dig down into the material and shape new expressions in more differentiated ways. In this context the need for a more specific focus and in-depth knowledge of the processes has grown.



closing event of the "Realtime 3D for Visual Expressions" workshop ©Yves Bernard

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At iMAL the theme given was working with the powerful and complex layers that allow access to the three-dimensional graphic tools of today's machines. Starting on an intermediate level, the workshops dealt with working outside the traditional 'moving image' paradigm in a more structural and abstract manner. The scope of these encounters has been to deepen the understanding of the possibilities inherent in today's computers for artists and creators that do not have a computer science background.

The importance of dialogue, reflection and a long-term practise in these forms of media work is not to be underestimated. The distinction between exploration of digital tools or adding new expression to one's palette and truly diving into a new mindset and methodology for creation is an important one. I feel that only in the last few of years a real practice of these still young forms of expression has started to become visible and individual voices have started to emerge from the huge flood of sometimes gratuitous media content. I consider this a natural evolution and a healthy one. In a way the spread and democratization of the digital tools is raising the overall level of craftsmanship and thus builds a foundation for explorations not only on a technical plane, but

also in finding an artistic and personal form of expression. To put it more succinctly: some individuals have mastered the tools and have reached a level of virtuosity that allows them to speak with a personal voice.

The exchange and transmission of these ideas in the workshops is a fundamental way to share, encourage and spread awareness. Considering the fact that most information about these tools and works is spread through the abstract channel of the internet, the meeting in real life of a group of people engaging in a face to face dialogue acquires a new meaning. Imagine sharing lunch at the 'walvis' restaurant with the people you have known only as names on a mailing list. The discussions and exchanges in these moments help to widen the perspective and deepen the insight for all parties present.

In these moments the focus shifts from the tools to the mindset, from techniques to visions, to expressing more of the human experience through the abstract digital instrument.¶