

Internet Art I

MAAD 23631 (Winter 2021)

where: <https://netart.rocks/uchicago>;
when: Mondays, 3pm-6pm (synchronous video chats);
professor: Nick Briz (nbriz@uchicago.edu);
office-hours: online, by-appointment;

The Web represents a grand emotional, sensory, and intellectual adventure for anyone willing to explore it actively. [...] For artists, ignoring the imperative to grasp the cultural implications of the Internet means risking irrelevance. [...] As human discourse adapts to its new home, everything we do and think as human beings will be and is being shaped by new values. [...] If it's ever fair to say that anything has "changed everything," it's fair to say so about the Internet.

— Virginia Heffernan (*Magic and Loss: The Internet as Art*. Simon Schuster. 2015.)

Course Description

We generally accept that computers and the Internet evolved outside of fine art contexts, in fields like science and mathematics. That said, the history of these technologies is a history of creative individuals collaboratively shaping one of the most important narratives of our time: the Internet, "the great masterpiece of human civilization" (Heffernan). In this studio course, we'll learn what the Internet is, how it works, how it got here and how to engage with it as an artistic medium. This means we'll be learning how to craft it from code, specifically HTML (hypertext markup language) and CSS (cascading style sheets), but also studying its aesthetics, conventions and practices. We'll be drawing inspiration from various Internet art movements, from the net.art scene of the 1990s, to the digital folk art of GeoCities at the turn of the century, to the CSS art scene of today. The goal of this course will be to cultivate our own piece of Internet art, informed by the research, discussions, exercises and experiments we'll make along the way.

Learning Goals

- Foundational understanding of what the Internet is and how it works (specifically the Web)
- General background on various canonical and niche cultural figures, movements and ideas which have informed the development of Internet art
- Working knowledge of HTML and CSS, specifically how to hand craft works of Internet art as well as how to publish them on the Web

Evaluation

- 30%: class participation
- 30%: tutorials and experiments
- 40%: final project

class discussions: So much of what we're going to cover in class, both in terms of the theory and practice, can be gleaned through your own online research. The most valuable aspect of learning this material in the classroom (albeit virtually this quarter), rather than on your own, is the chance for realtime interactivity with your professor and peers. I can not stress enough how important it is to take advantage of class discussions. The focus of these discussions will be predominantly determined by questions and comments submitted by the class ahead of time on a shared doc. Readings and videos assigned for homework will often be accompanied by open questions which will also inform our class discussions. Participating in these discussions will mean showing up to our meet.jit.si room (group video chat) every week on time, leaving questions or comments in the doc and sharing your thoughts with the class on our group video chat.

tutorials and experiments: In addition to readings and videos, you will also be assigned online interactive tutorials (linked on the class website), as well as creative coding experiments. These will be focused on learning prerequisite skills and core concepts we'll need for the final project. Your sketches (creative coding experiments) will be submitted to a shared doc where everyone in class will be able to learn from and/or comment on each others work.

final project: For our final project you will be creating a piece of Internet art informed by various conversations we'll be having and concepts we'll be exploring throughout the quarter, specifically: net.art, CSS art, digital gardens, digital folklore (Lialina, Espenschied) and the notion of the Internet itself as art (Heffernan). To receive full credit for the final project, your piece must:

- be hand crafted (coded in HTML and CSS)
- accessible by anyone with an Internet connection (ie. hosted online)
- demonstrate the possibility for future "cultivation" (ie. digital gardening)
- aim to evoke (your own interpretation of) Heffernan's notion of "magic and loss"

Schedule

Readings, videos, tutorials, exercises and other details, links and materials related to work and conversations we'll be having each week can be found on the class website:

<https://netart.rocks/uchicago>

- **2020.01.04:** Introductions + Calibrations
- **2020.01.11:** Histories of the Internet
- **2020.01.18:** MLK HOLIDAY
- **2020.02.01:** net.art && the World Wide Web
- **2020.02.08:** Digital Folklore b4 Social Media
- **2020.02.15:** Online Profiles: Me Vs My
- **2020.02.22:** CSS Art: Irrational Virtuosos
- **2020.03.01:** Creative Coding cont.d
- **2020.03.08:** Magic and Loss: the Internet as Art
- **2020.03.15:** Cultivating the Web (final project critiques)