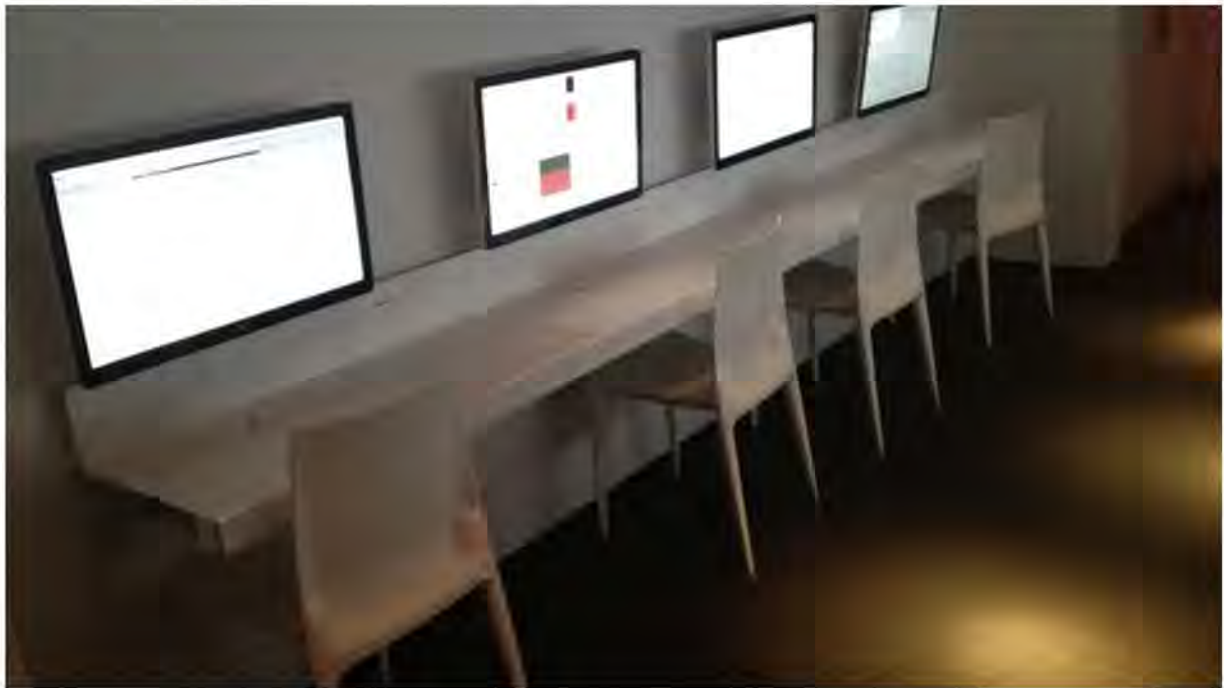




JODI  
The Creators Project  
May 2012

[#DIGART] JODI Makes Art Online, But Don't Call Them Net Artists

By Kyle Chayka, The Creators Project  
May 10, 2012



JODI's websites and videos on display at the Museum of the Moving Image. Photo by Kyle Chayka

*This week we're exploring the Digital Arts Market (or lack thereof). We're asking the tough questions: What will it take for a sustainable digital arts market to form? Is that even a possibility? Can the digital arts make money? And will they ever be incorporated into the contemporary arts dialogue? We invite you to participate in the discussion in the comments section, on your own blog (send us the link!), and on Facebook and Twitter (#DIGART). Let's get the conversation started!*

It's difficult to know where art stops and personality begins with JODI. The internet art duo pioneered the medium by messing with their viewers, creating websites that look more like the work of a deranged graphic designer trapped in a cubicle for too long, intentionally inserting glitches into iconic video games, and collecting YouTube videos of ordinary consumers physically abusing high-end technology products. Given this body of work, it wasn't entirely surprising when, at a recent conversation with artist Cory Arcangel at New York City's Electronic Arts Intermix Foundation, the pair of artists who make up JODI were seen intentionally knocking over water glasses and interfering with their PowerPoint presentation, to extremely distracting effect.



# JODI

## The Creators Project

### May 2012

Though their caps-lock name likely brings to mind a malevolent robotic entity from the future, JODI is actually made up of two humans: artists Joan Heemskerck, from the Netherlands, and Dirk Paesmans, from Belgium. The collective moniker is a portmanteau of the first two letters of their first names. Though their work originally focused on photography and video, they found themselves drawn to the internet as it came to prominence in the 1990s. Given their experience in technology, it wasn't hard to teach themselves the basics of web design. "We had never done our own computer programming before, the HTML was very simple," explained Paesmans in a recent conversation at EAI.

JODI's largest and most iconic work is their website, JODI.org. The site is a digital coral reef, a massive structure of intricately designed text patterns and interactive graphics laid out in the basic HTML that formed the early web's dominant aesthetic. JODI.org is full of strange corners and dead ends, collections of strange pages that seem to go nowhere until exactly the right link is clicked or the right passageway found. It's created to be confusing, to make viewers think twice about what they expect from the internet. At the EAI presentation, Heemskerck played a collection of YouTube videos of bemused web surfers encountering the site and narrating their explorations. The pair pioneered the genre of website as artistic object—when asked what the first art website they saw was, Paesmans answered simply and quickly: "Our own."



Screenshot of JODI.org

Though they are known as some of the first artists to achieve prominence with work on the internet, JODI have a complicated relationship to the genre. When asked how they felt about the early designation "net.art" (net-dot-art), Heemskerck responded, "I think it's very lame to put the dot in titles. It's not relevant at all, what you call it," she continued. "It's just working in the medium of the internet."



JODI  
The Creators Project  
May 2012

Viewing JODI's oeuvre as a whole, it's immediately apparent that creating work on the internet is only part of their practice, though it may have led to their most interesting accomplishments. "Street Digital," curated by Michael Connor, is an ongoing exhibition of JODI's work at the Museum of the Moving Image in Queens, New York. Though it's not a retrospective, the show includes a variety of work from the artists' different projects, ranging from online-only web pieces to sculptures, videos, and even an iPhone app. "Street Digital" takes as its guiding principal JODI's "gleeful iconoclasm," as the wall text reads, or their playful disregard for the inherent rules guiding our interactions with technology. They are computer imps, less techno-utopians than techno-pranksters.



*LED Puzzled (2012), "Street Digital" at the Museum of the Moving Image. Photo by Kyle Chayka.*

*LED Puzzled* presents a digital billboard made up of circular LEDs completely deconstructed and reprogrammed. Scattered across the floor in a field of flashing color, the component panels light up in randomized abstract compositions. A tool built to convey information is turned into a vehicle of pure sensation. A similar hack of familiar technology, *Untitled Game* (1996-2001), presents a series of mods of the popular first-person shooter *Quake*. One interactive projection displays the game as pure code, the zeroes and ones switching when the trigger button is pressed on a provided controller. Another makes all of the graphics pure white, a video game void.



## JODI The Creators Project May 2012

The technological remixes are subversive, but they feel shallow when compared to other pieces that more directly engage not just our visual experience of technology but our relationship to it. *GEO GOO* (2008) is a series of videos created from Google Maps, but instead of providing the crystalline view of our world from above that we have come to expect, these animations show the software's icons spiraling out of control, covering oceans and continents with red place tags and route highlights. They're funny, but also personally revealing: there's a strange sense of vertigo to seeing the digital version of our reality drive itself insane.



Screenshot of *GEO GOO* (2008), "Street Digital" at the Museum of the Moving Image.

In the reading room of the Museum of the Moving Image is a series of monitors disconnected from keyboards and mice beaming out a surreal collection of frenetic videos and online animations created from components of various websites, including JODI's own. Twitching and epileptic, the fragmented sites are brief visions of a language whose meaning has been lost or destroyed. What's disturbing about JODI's work is how it underlines the innate anarchy of the online medium, an arena that we've come to recognize as public but one that the duo constantly undermines and tweaks to their own purposes. Every new iteration of the internet's social fabric seems so stable and enduring—Friendster, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter—but always beneath the surface lays JODI's seething digital lava, ready to prove our impermanence.

After my conversation with the artists, I received an email in my inbox following up on the interview. It was 11 pages long, filled with broken characters, nonsense strings of words, and brief recognizable fragments of "Kyle Chayka," "email," and "JODI." It's a good reminder that what we do in this online space, no matter how significant, is still just a bunch of binary.