

In this issue we report on a unique collaboration between new-media agency Deepend, The British Design & Art Direction and Getty, known as "the bloodbank." We also profile the work of multimedia artist Camille Utterback and report on a Webcast for MCI Worldcom.

All the Right Moves

The art of Camille Utterback by Jennie D'Amato

Walking through the "Genome: The Code of Life" exhibition at New York's American Museum of Natural History this spring, visitors will experience an interactive drama with their genetic makeup. First, a surveillance camera will pick up each visitor's silhouette, transmitting it to a hidden computer, translating the image and returning it as a live video, filling the visitor's silhouette with randomly placed, coded inscriptions of "AGCT"—the letters that symbolize DNA. Then, as viewers walk into the range of another active camera, their image will again be picked up, transmitted and returned as a live video, this time as a vague color version of themselves, made out of "AGCT." Lastly, a third camera will pick up and return their image as a live video, flickering in and out with a blended overlay of

"AGCT," the most realistic representation yet.

"You see yourself in varying degrees of reality, first only as DNA—a template for whom you might be—then, as you move along, you see more of yourself," says Camille Utterback, the 30-year-old artist and technological whiz who wrote the program and designed the concept for the museum.

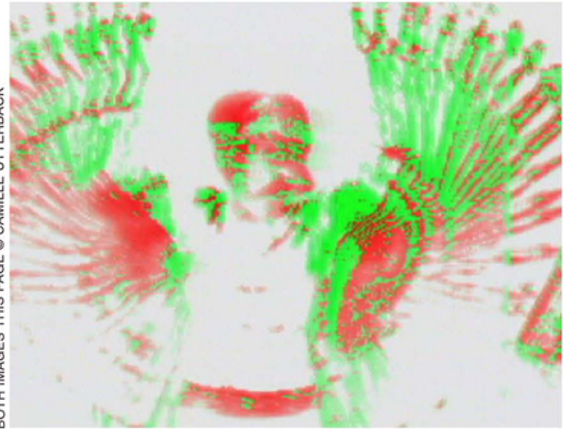
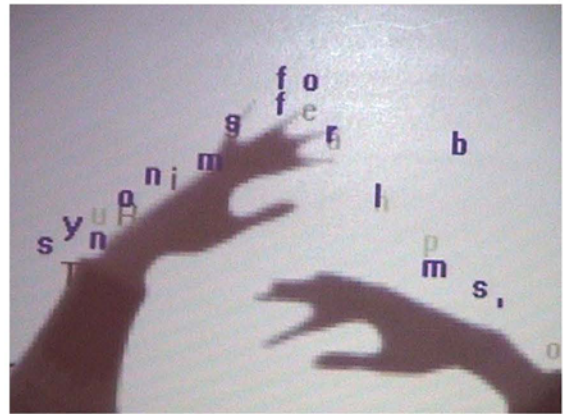
Utterback has been writing programs that analyze video signals and then find ways for bodies to respond to the retransmitted, translated images for the last four years—the first two as a graduate student at New York University (NYU), the last two as an Interval (now Vulcan Ventures) research fellow, a grant funded by Microsoft owner Paul Allen. "[My work is] really a very transparent way to let people interact with a piece of art," she says. "You can be open and free. There's no right or wrong way to interact with my pieces, which I think is very different in the realm of interactive art, where you have to step in a certain place."

In 1999, Utterback and NYU graduate Romy Achituv created "Text Rain," an installation where people see themselves in a live video, while text falls on them, like rain. As the text falls, people can catch words or phrases with their bodies. Utterback's software searches the video data for dark edges (be it an arm, head or umbrella) and controls the animation of the falling letters, based on these edges. This interaction stimulates viewers to explore what she calls "the physicality of language."

In "Liquid Time," also from 1999, Utterback attempted to show multiple moments of time simultaneously. The viewer walks into a video and interrupts its time sequence, "fragmenting time," Utterback says. "You're using your body to control something on the screen."

Technologically dazzling, yes, but the art world is also interested: "Text Rain" sold to collectors in Boston and Kentucky: Ken Freed and Steve Wilson, respectively. The final piece (it is an edition of three) is under negotiation through New York's Postmasters Gallery.

This rub between art and science in these "living paintings," as Utterback calls them, has become a topic of negotiation between NYU and the artist. Because she was working as a researcher for the university, Utterback understood that the rights to anything patentable



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Top: "Text Rain" is described as a living painting. Above work done for cosmetic giant Shiseido.

would be assigned to NYU, which includes the "Text Rain" technology. NYU did give Utterback and Achituv permission to own the artistic license to sell "Text Rain" through galleries. For her current and future commercial ventures, Utterback has formed her own company, Creative Nerve Inc. <www.creativenerve.com>.

If universities, software companies and art dealers are interested, the commercial world must not be far behind, and, indeed, when cosmetics company Shiseido wanted to launch a new product this fall, they hired Utterback. The new makeup features red and green filters to balance skin tones. To complement the product, Utterback created a new installation, "Luminous Flux." This software again analyzed incoming video and output moving horizontal edges in green and vertical edges in red. The projections "look like snow angels," Utterback says, because the returned image is a trace of where the guest has been, reflecting his or her abstract, gestural movements. Shiseido showed the project at New York's DIA Arts Annex, as well as in art spaces in Paris and Tokyo.

"Hopefully, it's artistically and esthetically interesting," Utterback says. "[My work] doesn't look like a lot of computer-based art. It responds to people, motions or video input, which is very rich. A mouse is one point of information, and a keyboard is, however many—but it's all very dull," she adds. "Whereas, if I'm analyzing the video image of someone's body, and they make a beautiful curve with their arm, that's reflected in the imagery."