

## Microwave 10 years

- Today, *Microwave* celebrates its tenth years' anniversary by re-creating its new brand identity. We become a fully independent organization with the aim to offer all-year-round projects, educational workshops, exhibitions and forums. Based on many years of research on new media arts, we hope to further materialize theories into practices by introducing educational programs such as the procedural animation workshop series we brought to Hong Kong this past summer. As the converging point of the new media arts community in Hong Kong, we endeavor to continue to work vigorously. While looking forward, I'd like to also look back at some of the *Microwave's* past foot prints. From the experience of working with many local and international artists, we also would have a glimpse of the rapid development of new media arts in the global community.

- *Microwave* is the medium which TV stations use to broadcast live news; the energy that boils and heats up water particles. A potential agent that may transmits objects and people in the future, like how it was portrayed in *Star Trek*. Ten years ago, the directors of *Videtoage*, myself included, decided to organize the first *Microwave Festival*. Having curators, academics, and local media artists in mind, we aimed to bring new and important media arts to Hong Kong audiences.

- In 1996, the *Microwave Festival* was first launched, introducing four video presentations to Hong Kong. At the time, Rea Tajiri was a resident artist who was conceptualizing her first feature film *Passion for Justice*. At that time, what seems to be most important for Hong Kong's new media art field was to learn from masterpieces in the international scene. At the that time, artists were demonstrating new pieces with their own bodies, challenging our perspectives on the development of independent short films, MTVs and moving images.

- This pioneering year inspired new thinking on movies and media. Similar to what Micky from the Berlin Videonale (now the Transmediale) believes, video art is not all there is to media art, and new media technology brings in novel media art. Media in itself is open: with the artists' hard work, the technological development progressed from optical printing on film to the plug-in of image processing to the current open source. Local artists like Jamsen Law and Hung Keung began immersing themselves in video and media arts.

- 1996 is not only the year of storming biennales and triennials, but also the year where artists discovered an art form that crosses physical boundaries and bureaucratic recognition: internet art. I had a chance to meet Mike Leggit, who was curating a CD-Rom exhibition titled "Burning Interface" at the Sydney Museum of Modern Arts. Interface design became an unavoidable topic of our conversation. In 1997, based on recommendations from Mike, an interactive multi-media exhibition was added to the *Microwave Festival*: stepping into the new era, we are no longer only transmitting videos, but also CDs, media art and more. From then on, we renamed the Festival the *Microwave International New Media Arts Festival*.

- *Microwave* joint hands with a new multi-media arts festival founded by Australian artist Kim Machen, the MMAP (Multi Media Asian Pacific), and showcased a whole array of Hong Kong new media art pieces. That sparked a further cooperation between *Microwave's* Curatorial Manager Fion Ng and Beth Jackson from Australia to organize "Sick and Dizzy" for the MMAP, signifying the first HongKong-Australian program exchange.

- A new milestone was set for the local media art education scene with the establishment of the School of Creative Media at the City University of Hong Kong in 2000. By working with other academic departments like computer studies, local ground-breaking new media arts and technology was further propagated. A new force is brewing in the scene: Young Hay from the City University of Hong Kong shone with "Body Brush" at the Ars Electronica; Francis Lam from the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong shook the world with his online pixel art piece "db-db.com"; Yasu Santo from MIC stormed the ITU Telecome World with his work on Tangible media.

- In 2002, Camile Utterbeck and Romy's "Text Rain" project stood out in the *Microwave* exhibition. Sharing the same projection area, kids and kidults relish in the refreshing "rain" of alphabets tumbling from the sky, letting alphabets rest on their shoulders, stringing together exotic poetries, cupping a big scoop of alphabets in their hands... Experiencing the art is quintessential in new media arts, blending technology and art composes a score of joy for the audience. New media arts, however, is just taking its first baby steps as the city further promotes creative industry and other media art activities.

- Alice Jim Ming-wai from Montreal University gave a series of seminars in the Visual Arts Center lasting for half a year in 2003. In this series, called the Intermedia Workshop, she systematically presented the theories and history of new media arts—from the 1970's the father of video Nam June Paik to the new millennium's internet artist Jordy; integrating familiar cinematic jargons with Peter Weiber's "Future Cinema" and Lev Manovich's "Language of New Media". She also published a book in which he documented information and interviews about local new media arts development starting from the 1980's, a very precious documentation of Hong Kong's media art history.

- Following the success of "Intermedia Workshop", we further explore the possibilities of workshops, inviting the Austrian art group "Time's Up" to Hong Kong. "Time's Up" is a group made up of psychologists, mathematicians and video artists and we joined hands to create several pieces of fun and humorous interactive installation utilizing the MAX/MSP technologies. In their MAX/MSP workshop, they discussed the concepts of "Chaos" and "Matrix", and introduced innovative softwares and processing methods of handling sound and images in an interactive way... encouraging our imaginations to take wing. In 2004, *Microwave* artist Casey Reas used the concept of John Medea's "Design by Numbers" to formulate his own software "Proce55ing" during his student time at MIT. During his presentation at the City Hall, organizers, scholars, audience stood as witnesses to samples of how Art met with Technology. This year's *Microwave* workshops can be considered a continuity to these experiments on processing. Daniel Shiffman's workshop on utilizing processing was very well received.

- *Microwave* continued to expand in recent years, being able to invite star quality artists like Sterlac, Jeffrey Shaw to be part of us, attracting new interests among local audiences on media arts. Alongside the expansion of new media arts in neighboring cities like Beijing, the number and proportion of new media arts in biennales and triennials increased. In 2004, ZKM (Germany), V2 (the Netherlands) and Tsing Hua University held the first China New Media Arts Festival. Taipei also founded new media arts research centers.

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- Aiming at stimulating the media arts scene, we furthered the mission of *Microwave* and curatorial direction to include professional thematic discussions. With examining Hong Kong's creative power as the major premise, local and overseas pieces converse and inspire each other. Such thematic explorations in turn required a strategic reform of the curatorial team with good knowledge on new media plus sharp awareness in the market mechanism of media art.

- A charismatic Professor from the School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong, Dr Hector Rodriguez, after giving numerous presentations on the realization of new media art theories, later became the Artistic Director of the *Microwave* Festival in 2005. He curated that year's programme "Culture as Play", exploring game design, artificial intelligence, interactive narratives and visualization. One of the exhibits "Pain Station" was brought out the theme of "entertainment stems from pain, while game originates from freedom". It is interesting to note how the audience react to this type of exhibits.

- Over the past ten years, media arts news from all over the world roamed the global internet platform: The Walker Art Center and Whitney Biennial developed their online media arts museums, the online database and forum of New York's Rhizome... New media artists' studios became media labs; with the overwhelming popularity of "blog" and "podcast" and soaring expansion of personal media, media arts spread like open source code.

- Ellen Pau  
Board Director  
*Microwave*

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