a dLux*event*

FutureScreen

screen arts........science........technology

dLux media|arts
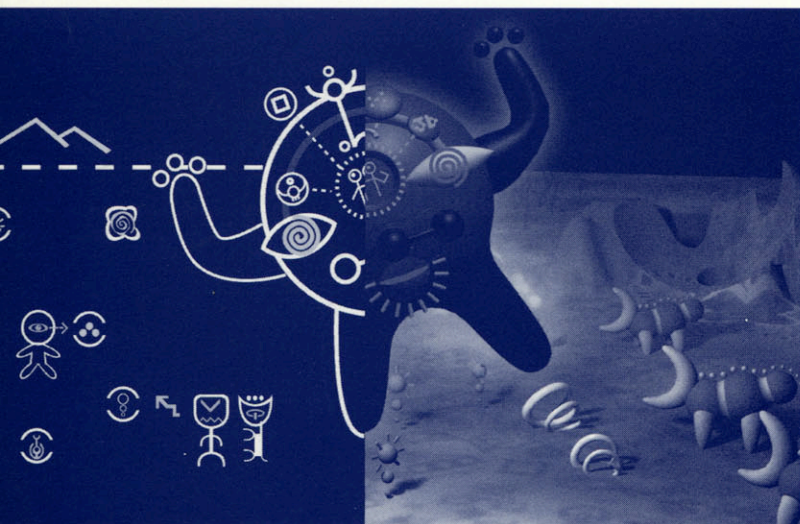
presents
the Australian premiere of

Troy Innocent's

Iconica

an interactive artwork of artificial lifeforms

featuring sound and music by Ollie Olsen
programming by Troy Innocent and Stephen Taylor

thursday 21–saturday 28 november 1998
Artspace, 43–51 cowper wharf rd woolloomooloo

Iconica

an interactive artwork of artificial lifeforms

abstract

Iconic elements are the basic building blocks of a world literally made of language. Six elements from this language relate to unique pictorial styles and soundscapes used to represent the world, ranging from plastic knowbots and surreal iconography to electronic abstraction and the dirt of the real world. These elements are used as the base of an artificial life model which runs the world, the behavior of the objects and lifeforms within it.

The work has the capacity to evolve, change and mutate through human interaction and it's own evolutionary process. Visitors to the world can create, construct and manipulate objects, influence the evolution of societies, and discover new language elements. Communication with the residing lifeforms occurs via the iconic language on which the world is based. The multiplicity of Iconica is experienced through this interaction — simultaneously a cyberspace, a mindspace, an abstract world, and a stylised reality.

Iconica was premiered at SIGGRAPH 98, USA. Iconica recently won the Foreign Title Award, Theatre and Exhibition category, Multimedia Content Association of Japan 13th Multimedia Grand Prix 1998.
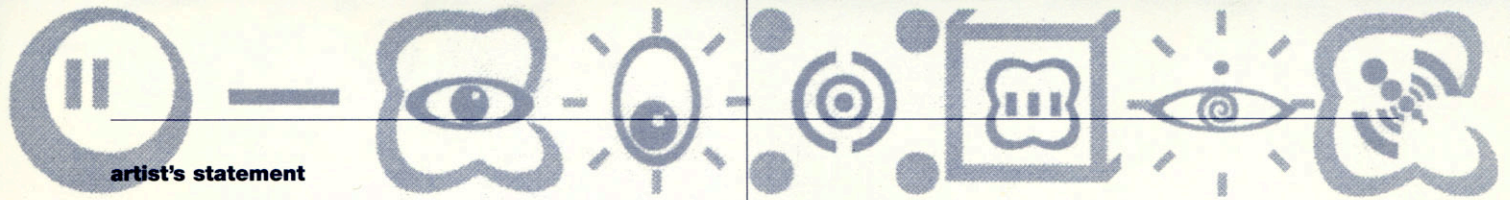
artist

Troy Innocent has been exploring new aesthetics enabled by computers since 1989. Troy sees interaction as a key element of the multimedia experience, be it between an audience and the work, or within the electronic space of the computer itself.

Troy's interactive installation, *Idea-ON>!*, 1994, comprised five virtual worlds. It used a collection of personal, abstract symbols as the interface, and also explored popular cultural iconography. *Idea-ON>!* was exhibited at SIGGRAPH 94, USA; ISEA 94, Finland; and Australian Perspecta 1995, The Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Troy continued his investigations into the synaesthetic relationship between sound and image in the 1996 Psy-Vision animation project. This resulted in a visual language of iconic figuration and synthetic abstraction unique to the electronic space of the computer. Troy's current work furthers these ideas by attempting to establish a working, evolving, artificial life system in which six species of 'media based life forms' exist and interact. This system will then be used to explore language, communication and semiotic codes that are evolving in the digital realm.

Troy completed his Graduate Diploma of Art in Graphic Design at Swinburne University in 1991, and a Post Graduate Diploma of Animation and Interactive Multimedia the following year. He is currently undertaking Masters Studies at RMIT, Melbourne.

artist's statement

Iconica is a three stage project exploring the codes of contemporary reality through the construction of a metaphorical world. Structures such as space, lifeform, object, and language are defined in the world to allow viewers and participants ways to relate to it. In using these structures, the goal is also to examine how they influence our own experience of reality and construction of identity.

Form 1: Untitled (CyberCultures, Casula Powerhouse, Sydney, March 1997) introduced an abstract library of shape and form which act as the building blocks of the constructed world. Each animated image was assigned a particular 'voice' and allowed to 'breed' (share information) with the others, resulting in a constantly shifting soundscape.

Memetic Mutation (Screen: Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, July 1997) and **Memespace** (Altered States: Interact 97, Melbourne Exhibition Centre, Melbourne, October 1997) involved the addition of language and an artificial life model to this library of image and sound. This language is purely iconic, and can be used to describe any object or event within the world. It combines a collection of symbols with grammatical rules for their combination, allowing for a wide range of possible expressions. The use of this iconic language reflects the central concept of the project: that of exploring the codes of contemporary reality.

Images and sounds were assigned meaning in the artificial life model, based on definitions derived from elements of the iconic language. Thus entities and forms in the space move about and interact with each other based on these meanings. The result is a world which mutates and evolves uniquely in each instance, each time offering an alternate view of the material contained within it. *Memetic Mutation* monitored this evolution through an attached Web site (updated daily) and daily printed output reporting on the activities within the space.

Memespace enabled a first person view and an overview 'map' of the entire world. This offered a new perspective on the work, allowing both direct engagement with the world and an overall observation of it's evolution and dynamics.

Iconica, the final form of this project, develops and focuses the themes of the previous works. The collection of forms, animations and sounds have been expanded to cover six distinct views of 'reality':

the NATURAL: reality

the ICONIC: ideal archetypes

the CODED: information

the ABSTRACT: digital abstraction

the SUBCONSCIOUS: mind / dreams

the METAPHYSICAL: energy

A generative model is used to recombine libraries of images, sounds, and animations representative of these realities. This recombination process is based on a genetic algorithm, resulting in endless variations of image and behavior.

The six views of reality are represented by species of artificial life which shape the space according to their beliefs. This space does not model a real-world space or biological model, but instead intends to model a metaphorical space with it's own rules of existence and being. Lifeforms from the space essentially 'speak' their own audiovisual language, and so visitors to the space must learn parts of this language to communicate with the lifeforms.

The dual-screen installation presents one possible world and the lifeforms that exist within it. During the period of installation the space evolves, changes and mutates through visitor's interaction and through it's own artificial evolutionary processes. Genetic programming is used in the behavior of the lifeforms within the space, so that they may evolve and adapt to new situations. Parts of the world die and decay, others thrive bringing new lifeforms into the space. This evolution is monitored and recorded, with periodic printouts acting as a document of the process. These printouts are mounted on a facing wall allowing visitors to observe the evolution of the space.

A high level of interaction with the world is central to the experience of the work. Visitors to the installation can build and manipulate forms in the space. They can communicate and interact with entities, influencing a lifeform's knowledge of their environment. They may also discover new language elements and 'memes' to expand the possibilities of the world. Through this navigation of the space and the engagement with the forms and entities within the iconic world, the visitor develops a complex relationship with a constructed reality.
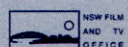
Troy Innocent, november 1998

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