July 22, 1999

@ large arts

By MATTHEW MIRAPAUL

Art as a Game, and Games as Art

... [A]s the "Cracking the Maze" exhibit shows, the game industry also has a few things to learn from digital artists. One of the highlights of the show, curated by Anne-Marie Schleiner for a new-media program at San Jose State University in California, is Natalie Bookchin's "Intruders" game. An adaptation of an especially misogynistic short story by Jorge Luis Borges, Bookchin's reinterpretation uses classic video-game scenarios as settings for the narrative. Although the work is game-like in appearance, the story advances regardless of the player's skill level. And the brutal nature of the tale is a sharp indictment of the game industry's violence-laden offerings.

In Natalie Bookchin's "Intruders," a short story is told through a series of games.

Bookchin, a Los Angeles artist, said she is not a big fan of computer games, but she acknowledged their power. "Games are still the most successful example of hooking a user into an interactive narrative," she said. "Games can implicate a user in the narrative so you're not just on the outside, as you are in a movie when you look at a screen and identify. Instead, you become a character. There's a certain kind of thrill that 10-year-old boys know about from killing the bad guy. I wanted to use that strategy in telling a story." [...]

February 10, 2000

On This Network, Nothing but Internet Art

Developed as a parallel exhibition to "Let's Entertain" which opens on Saturday in the Walker's real-world galleries, Arts Entertainment Network examines how contemporary artists have used the seductive appeal and cheap thrills of popular culture to comment on society while exploiting its ability to lure audiences.AEN is focused on digital culture. The projects include ... computer games like **Natalie Bookchin**'s "Intruder," a brilliant adaptation of a brutal Borges short story. [....]

January 6, 2000

The Latest in Digital Art: Stunts and Pranks

Just as the art world has started to take the idea of digital art seriously, the artists have stopped. It sometimes seems as if most of the digital-art works that have appeared on the Internet in recent months have been little more than a series of conceptual pranks.

But Natalie Bookchin, whose computer-game adaptation of a Borges short story was one of 1999's aesthetic highlights, objected strongly to the characterization of many current works as jokes.

In a telephone conversation from her Los Angeles home, Bookchin said, "To call something a joke makes it seem not important." Instead, she argued, the Internet encourages a kind of play that pushes boundaries, particularly those related to property, leading to works that are neither traditionally decorative nor narrative in nature. For example, she said, the Akshun auction was a genuine attempt to bring together the spheres of e-commerce and the fine-arts economy.

"There's a lot of work that's quite serious," she said, "but there's also a little bit of play, and the Net allows for the play. So much of the work is not just about making something that you put on your wall, but it's about a kind of dialogue between people, or community building. It's all of the things that sitting in a studio and making painting never allows for, and we're all trying to figure out what to do with that."

Bookchin was sanguine about the prospects for art on the Internet. "It's only the beginning," she said, "and I'm incredibly confident that it will keep going because it's the most important medium of our time and if artists aren't doing things with it, then it would be tragic."[....[

Yes, the Internet really is the most important medium of our time [....]