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## Even Boring Blogs Are Things of Beauty In Some Artists' Eyes

By Andrew Lavalley

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The Web is full of content that only its creator could love. Witness the office-party photos, blogs about people's pets and bad lip-synched videos that turn up in a few minutes of Google-fueled procrastination.

To Guthrie Lonergan, however, Web junk is the basis of his most popular online art. "I'm sort of interested in that boringness," he says.

*Internet Group Shot* is one example. The collage, cobbled from dozens of group portraits, shows how people adopt the same huddle when they're saying "cheese." For *MySpace Intro Playlist*, Mr. Lonergan looked for the self-made videos that young people post to their personal pages, then strung them together to show how teenagers tend to act similarly and say the same things when they're introducing themselves.

"There are defaults in our culture," Mr. Lonergan adds. "MySpace doesn't set up something for you to create an introduction video, but kind of like a telephone answering machine, you assume a certain kind of voice and say certain things."

The 23-year-old, who lives in L.A., is one of many artists mining Internet culture for creative inspiration. They make videos out of email spam and multimedia projects from MySpace profiles, and make a case for Web surfing as an art form in itself.

Marcin Ramocki is another. He got the idea for his portrait series *Blogger Skins* when a documentary film he made was being shown worldwide. After setting up search-engine alerts to notify him whenever "8 Bit" was mentioned, he was struck by the unrelated images that came up.

For *Blogger Skins*, he Googled a handful of bloggers who write about art, then assembled a virtual mosaic of the images that resulted. "The idea is that a Google search for people who are very active in this community changes every day, so I wanted to capture one specific search," he says.

The image reflects the original order of the search results, he says, "and that creates, sort of accidentally, this beautiful shape, but that shape also reflects the popularity of different



images." Subjects with common names had wildly random images associated with them. The artists, though, exerted control over their search results by filling them with their work.

Some of these Web-inspired works have been included in the recently reopened New Museum's *Unmonumental* exhibition, parts of which are on view at its New York location and others of which can be seen on the site for Rhizome, its new-media affiliate. "This generation really knows the Net," says Lauren Cornell, Rhizome's executive director. "They grew up with it and are, for lack of a better word, native to it."

"Art is just going to be what's going on in the world around you. It makes sense to do work about this thing that's changing our life so much," adds Paul Slocum, a 33-year-old Dallas artist whose day job is in systems programming. His video *Time-Lapse Homepage*, part of the New Museum exhibit online, is intended to follow the development of the digital aesthetic: in 1,200 screenshots and at 20 frames a second, it chronicles the evolution of a single personal page's look.

He also created a functioning replica of MySpace's login page. "I was interested in how you go to these pages all the time that are constantly in flux, changing all the things they show you," he says.

One of the best-known artists in this medium, Cory Arcangel, has "performed" the deletion of his Friendster account in front of an audience at the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Queens, N.Y. "People kind of cringed and then cheered when it was all over," he says. He published on his personal site Kurt Cobain's suicide note alongside Google AdWords that served up ads to social-anxiety treatment and spiritual-growth classes.

"Surfing so much, I get ideas of things that I would like to see that don't yet exist," Mr. Arcangel explains. "This is when I make a project."

This year, Rhizome organized an online group show called *Professional Surfer* that took the prosaic idea of bookmarking Web pages and posited it as art.

On other Web sites, such as Nasty Nets, Supercentral and Yahoo's bookmarking service Del.icio.us, artists link to videos, photos and other digital ephemera they've come across.

"They're like sketchbooks," says Paddy Johnson, a Brooklyn art blogger. "Your ability to spot the best stuff speaks to your eye as an artist. ... The better your quoting ability, the better artist you seem to be."

Even some "offline" works are inspired by Internet culture. For a series called *Monitor Tracings*, Marisa Olson searched Google Images for headphones, radios and other devices, then drew the results on paper.

One thing most of these artists haven't solved is how to make money off work that is available to anyone online. Ms. Olson says she sells her drawings and editioned copies of video pieces, but never an Internet-based work. "You would think that the contemporary, hip art world is ahead of the curve on this," she says, "and it's not -- yet."