

# JOHANNES VOGT



POST-WAR & CONTEMPORARY ART | INTERVIEWS | MARCH 18, 2015

## *Rising stars No. 3: Marisa Olson*

The third of the artists to be crowd-sourced by ArtStack for our contemporary sale in London is a New York-based interdisciplinary conceptualist who is a distant relation of Claude Monet — not to mention the daughter of two spies

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## How would you describe your work?

**Maris Olson:** I'm an interdisciplinary conceptual artist who's interested in the cultural history of technology, the environmental impacts of constant upgrading, and the politics of pop culture. I make installations, drawings, video art, net art, and performances that address these topics. Objects like the phone in this auction, which is part of my ongoing *Time Capsules* series, are either old devices of my own or those that I've found and 'rescued' from the streets of New York, where I live. The series started with cassette tapes, which I think of as 'endangered units of time' that are otherwise destined for life in a landfill. By taking the objects out of circulation and painting them gold, I think of myself as preserving their value, in the spirit of the gold bars in Fort Knox.

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## Who or what inspired your approach?

Though I am related to Claude Monet I started my creative life as a punk musician, and some of my first visual projects were music videos, blingy mixtapes, and zines. In this sense, the gold spray paint I use is a natural go-to material for me. I've been as performatively inspired by musicians like Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex or comedians like Andy Kaufman as I have by exhibiting artists such as Sophie Calle, Valie Export, Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta or Michael Smith. Coming out of a zine world and into a net art scene, I find affinities between a lot of collage work and my sculptural assemblages, with favourites including Robert Heinecken, Stan VanDerBeek, and Genesis P-Orridge. It's about a level of social practice and a self-reflexive engagement with visual languages.

# JOHANNES VOGT

## **Whose work would you most like to be exhibited alongside?**

I'd love to be in a show of some with my favourite sculptors who responded to everyday materials, including objects that have sometimes been discarded or that people otherwise consider 'garbage' Robert Rauschenberg, Eva Hesse, Claes Oldenberg, Louise Nevelson and Mike Kelley come to mind.

## **In your opinion, what is the most exciting development in contemporary art?**

When I coined the term 'Post-internet Art' to describe my own work, in 2006 I had no idea it would be a concept with which so many other artists identified or that it would become such a hot topic. (Even Kanye West says he wants to be 'the Postinternet Disney!') Though it can now sometimes be a cheesy marketing term, I still find the idea compelling in a number of ways. Living and creating art in a world that is constantly marked by network conditions means having a greater understanding of our interconnectedness, which enables a fluidity between a diversity of media (online and offline) that was not as possible or supported in an earlier era.

# JOHANNES VOGT

## **Can you tell us something interesting/unusual about yourself?**

Both of my parents were spies. They are dead now so there are many things I will never know about who they were and what they actually did, but I know for instance that my father's work entailed elements of cryptography and he was fluent in nine languages. Because of their work interests we had a lot of cool computer gear in my house from a very early age. It's no wonder that I became a bit of a geek with a love of hardware and the internet.

**Bianca Chu, Head of Sale for First Open / London:** Marisa Olson's work chimes with the concept of crowd sourcing art online. Having coined the term 'Post-Internet Art', the inclusion of her piece which directly explores what she terms 'upgrade culture' works on multiple levels in this context.



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## Quoting The Quotidian

By **Sunshine Frere** - August 11, 2015

Seventeen artists will be exhibiting work in *Quoting the Quotidian*. Many of the works are rendered from familiar manufactured items and found readymade objects that have been repurposed and re-envisioned. *Quoting the Quotidian* is an exhibition where "artists embrace the paradox of seeing the everyday for its commonness, while imbuing their works with latent possibilities for transformation to further human experience...Indeed, in a physical and cultural landscape littered with things, perhaps an object's imaginative charge is its most important quality." This exhibition is also part of [ISEA2015](#).

Artists exhibiting work include: Maya Beaudry, Scott Billings, Dustin Brons, Vanessa Brown, Manuel Correa, Barry Doupe, Daniel Jefferies, Ian Johnston, Daniel Kent, Scott Lawrence, Natasha McHardy, Jason Mclean, Marisa Olson, Roula Partheniou, Les Ramsay, Nicolas Sassoon and Kirsten Stoltmann.

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*I No Fun, by Daniel Kent (from the artist's IPhone Series)*

VIA caught up with two of the artists exhibiting in the show: **Marisa Olson** and **Les Ramsay**. They gave some insight into what they'll be presenting.

**Marisa Olson**'s work combines performance, video, net art, drawing & installation to address the cultural history of technology, the politics of participation in pop culture, experiences of gender, and the aesthetics of failure. Olson lives and works in New York.

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**VIA: Many of the artists featured in Quoting the Quotidian use specific manufactured objects and readymades as materials. Your practice utilizes these types of materials often. What resonates within these found objects with you? Why are they a constant source of inspiration for your practice?**

I'm interested in technological objects as vessels of cultural history and markers of social change. I feel like the invention of these things speaks to the perception of a 'need' in society, as well as fears and fantasies about the future. I call them Time Capsules for that reason. But in my case, I'm actually trying to \*prevent\* them from being buried. People are always trying to upgrade to the harder, better, faster, stronger phone, radio, car (or body, diet, mindset), etc... But what does 'better' mean? Then we throw the old stuff away to die in a landfill. I think of myself as taking these things out of circulation & painting them gold to preserve their value, almost like gold bars in a vault.



*Marisa Olson, Gold Digger (Time Capsule Series)*



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**VIA: Using objects that already have a vocabulary and context connected to them creates an interesting point of rupture in their signifying meaning. Many of the pieces in this exhibition work to unsettle familiarity and the notion of the everyday. It makes sense that the show would also be part of ISEA2015 as the theme for this year's iteration is Disruption. Are you able to highlight other interesting points of disruption that may be derived from your work in the show?**

My practice is the result of being lucky enough to be exposed to a random trifecta of experiences: Being raised by a cryptographer/spy fluent in nine languages who taught me the value of super cheesy wordplay, heavy steepage in critical theory around semiotics, and then coming out of a very activist punk scene that happened to align with a hacker/new media art crew. So here I am! And what I got out of it is both an appreciation for the role of spectacle in making a serious statement—for instance, my belief that pop culture can be a legitimate point of entry to addressing deeper political concerns, and the idea that sometimes the best way to address a subject head-on is to pump up the volume on its own vocabulary, almost deploying a kind of rhetorical-readymade tactic, amplifying “the master’s language,” as it were. So I’m not interested in trying to squirt too many new objects into the world. I like trying to paint a new picture of what’s already here. I like to hold up vernacular cultural artifacts, the residue of social and political moments, and ask, “Do you see what I see?,” and then try to imagine a new way of moving forward.

**VIA: Will you be attending any other events that are part of ISEA2015?**

**If so, what are they? and what has you excited to attend them?**

**If you aren't able to, what events from the symposium intrigue you?**

Oh yeah! It's more like I've got to figure out how to be in 3 places at once. ISEA can be whatever people want it to be: A music festival, tons of art shows, a smart conference, a science fair on MDMA... I'm psyched because I've got friends coming in from all over the world for this. It's a pretty big deal. The Yes Men are always fun, as are Instant Coffee, Michael Connor's giving a keynote, Ed Osborn has an installation Friday night at Vivo, I wouldn't miss the Mutek cabaret, and then I think the New Forms events are going to be huge. I'm excited about their new vision for events revolving around more yearlong community-collaboration. Meanwhile, I'm going to try to go to as many panels as I can. There are some top-notch artists and theorists.

# JOHANNES VOGT

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## What's Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?

MICHAEL CONNOR | Fri Nov 1st, 2013 12:45 p.m.

Share



Courtesy [grouphab.it](#) and Harm van den Dorpel.

*An extended and altered version of this text will be published in... You Are Here: Looking at After the Internet (Cornerhouse Books 2014, edited by Omar Kholeif.*

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Earlier this month, Rhizome presented a panel discussion at the ICA in London titled "Post-Net Aesthetics." Following in the wake of prior panels (titled "Net Aesthetics 2.0") which were organized by Rhizome in 2006 and 2008, this edition was precipitated by the recent discussion of postinternet practices by a number of art institutions and magazines, including *Frieze*. We invited a longtime Rhizome collaborator, critic and curator Karen Archey, to chair and organize the panel, and what emerged was a wide-ranging and extremely generative conversation in which participants began to articulate some of the shifts they'd seen in artistic practice in recent years, while critiquing those shifts and their framing as "postinternet."

One dynamic to emerge from the panel discussion is an intergenerational tension that has played out in comment threads on Rhizome and Facebook. This tension was in evidence even before the panel in, for example, a response by Mark Tribe (b. 1966) to a question about postinternet art for an interview that was published in *Art in America* in September:

Internet art was a movement that arose in 1994 and waned in the early 2000s. Post-Internet artists stand on the shoulders of Net art giants like Olia Lialina, Vuk Cosic, and JODI, not in order to lift themselves higher into the thin atmosphere of pure online presence but rather to crush the past and reassemble the fragments in strange on/offline hybrid forms. See also: New Aesthetic.

Examples of efforts by postinternet artists to "crush the past" are numerous; one example can be found in "The Image Object Post-Internet" (2010), in which Artie Vierkant (b. 1986) wrote, "New Media is here denounced as a mode too narrowly focused on the specific workings of novel technologies, rather than a sincere exploration of cultural shifts in which that technology plays only a small role." While Vierkant is using the term "New Media" rather than Tribe's "Net art," he does so in an effort to articulate a new relationship with technology in contrast with preceding generations.

It should be noted that, within postinternet discourse, there are many who do cite the importance of art and technology precursors, such as Karen Archey, Chris Wiley, and Hanne Mugaas in the recent *Frieze* roundtable. Equally, established curators and artists like Tribe have, even while acknowledging the conflict between "postinternet" and its precursors, done a great deal to support emerging artistic practices. In this article, I hope to build on this existing dialogue to further encourage ways of thinking about recent artistic practices engaged with the internet as both distinct from and connected to recent histories of art and technology. To do so, I discuss several works by Olia Lialina spanning 1996 to 2013 in relation to Marisa Olson and Abe Lincoln's *Abe & Mo Sing the Blues* (2005) and the exhibition "Brand Innovations for Ubiquitous Authorship" (2012), in order to show how the problems associated with generational shifts also played within an individual artist's practice. In this discussion, "postinternet" emerges as a useful term for tracking artists' shifting relationships with the rapidly-changing cultural objects we know as "the internet," in that its definition has changed so dramatically since Olson's original articulation.

# JOHANNES VOGT

The reference normally given for the first use of the term postinternet is a 2008 interview, but Olson remembers using it as part of a 2006 panel organized by Rhizome. In an email discussion that was printed in *TimeOut New York* in 2006, she wrote:

What I make is less art "on" the Internet than it is art "after" the Internet. It's the yield of my compulsive surfing and downloading. I create performances, songs, photos, texts, or installations directly derived from materials on the Internet or my activity there.

As critic and curator Gene McHugh has pointed out, this was an early articulation of what Olson would call a "Post-Internet" way of working. The term has since evolved considerably, sprouting an array of differing use cases that would take considerable effort to catalog in full. As a result, today one often hears the criticism that "postinternet" is a vague neologism, but for Olson, it had a specific meaning, referring to a mode of artistic activity drawing on raw materials and ideas found or developed online.



*Abe & Mo Sing the Blues* (2005) screenshot from: [www.lincoln.net/abeandmosingtheblugs](http://www.lincoln.net/abeandmosingtheblugs)

# JOHANNES VOGT

One example of making art "'after' the Internet" is Olson's 2005 collaboration with Abe Lincoln, *Abe & Mo Sing the Blogs*, an album in the form of a blog. Each "track", or entry, consists of the copied-and-pasted text of a found blog post, a link to the original post, and a link to an MP3 in which either Lincoln or Olson sings the the post. Authors of the found posts included music critic Sasha Frere-Jones, artists Ubermorgen, someone named Glue Factory Bob, and Eggagog, the mysterious author of Internet classic "THIS IS FUN TO MAKE A BLOG ON THE COMPUTER WEBSITE." *Abe & Mo Sing the Blues* now functions as an archive of the blog form at what, in retrospect, feels like its peak moment; in many cases, the posts used as source material are no longer online. The website draws together source materials and offers them up for the analysis of a visitor; removing the posts from their original context strips some of their original meaning (what is Frere-Jones is talking about when he says "Look at all the fives. It's like a five factory?). By rendering the posts opaque, Olson and Lincoln make them available as internet objects of study for an observer who is positioned (at least temporarily) on the outside. At the same time, though, by using the blog posts as readymade scripts for a series of performances, Lincoln and Olson *inhabit* these objects, or perhaps the objects inhabit them; they allow them to move through their body as performed songs. This is a kind of mimicry, but by investing their performances with emotion and energy, Lincoln and Olson participate Olson and Lincoln's artistic project can be seen as an attempt to come to an understanding of a quickly-evolving internet culture from a perspective that is both inside and outside of it.

If "making art 'after' the internet" in 2006, then, involved being a participant-observer of an emerging internet culture, then many other artists of the time also worked in a similar mode, including other participants in the first "Net Aesthetics 2.0" panel, hosted by Electronic Arts Intermix in New York and organized by Lauren Cornell for Rhizome. (The other participants were Cory Arcangel, Michael Bell-Smith, Caitlin Jones, Wolfgang Staehle, and myself.) The "2.0" in the title was, in part, a slightly facetious nod to the hype surrounding "Web 2.0," a term used to describe the increasing use of centralized services rather than independent websites to share and access content online. It was clear that the web's culture was changing: social networking sites were growing in popularity, and YouTube had launched the previous year. In broad strokes, these changes meant that many more people were making and sharing content online, and they were doing so through a smaller number of channels.<sup>[1]</sup>

But in addition to this nod to changing conditions on the web as a whole, the "2.0" was also a provocation, pointing to a shift in the ways that artists were engaging with the internet. This can be seen not only in the work of artists like Olson, who came to prominence well after the initial, heroic phase of web browser-based art, but also in the trajectories followed by artists who were associated with that initial period, such as Olia Lialina.

In the 1990s, Lialina's work often took the form of web pages that used various elements of the nascent language of the browser for narrative purposes. In *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* (1996), Lialina used HTML frames and hyperlinks to tell a story that opens out across nested HTML frames; in *Agatha Appears* (1997), she used changing URLs as a narrative device; in *Anna Karenina Goes to Paradise* (1996), she queried three separate search engines (Yahoo, Magellan and Alta Vista) to narrate the searching undertaken by her titular character.

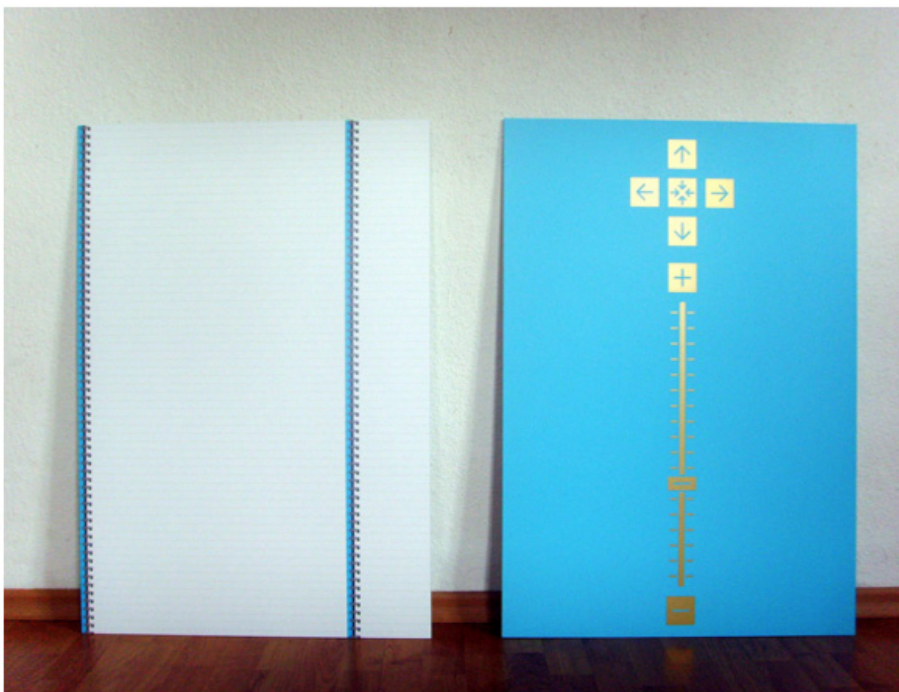
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In 1998, Lialina described her interest in the web during this first heyday of net art:

At that time [1996], I spoke of the Internet being open for artistic self-expression, that the time had come to create Net films, Net stories and so on, to develop a Net language instead of using the web simply as a broadcast channel....<sup>[2]</sup>

With this text, circulated to the artists, writers, and internet thinkers of the nettime mailing list, Lialina announced a shift to working as a net art gallerist. Shortly thereafter, she launched the website [art.teleportacia.org](http://art.teleportacia.org), which offered a series of single-page web-based artworks for sale to collectors for \$1000 to \$2000 each. Lialina later said she was "not really intending to become a gallerist, so the next exhibition, *Location=Yes*, was not about selling." She may not have been selling, but she was acting as a champion for the practitioners of the emerging artistic language of the "Net."

Increasingly, Lialina's focus seems to have included championing not only the work of self-described artists, but also the work of the many non-art identified internet users who also were crucial in developing this "Net language." This interest was manifested through talks and illustrated essays, such as *A Vernacular Web: The Indigenous and the Barbarians* (2005), which celebrated the popular forms of self-expression on the early web and critiqued the more truncated forms of online expression offered by the centralized services of the Web 2.0 era. This shift can also be seen in a collaborative project with her partner Dragan Espenschied, *With Elements of Web 2.0* (2006), consisting of a series of aluminum prints that bring together tropes of the vernacular web (outer space backgrounds) or even older forms of cultural expression (a spiral notebook) with iconography of the Web 2.0 era, such as the Google Maps navigation buttons.



*With Elements of Web 2.0* (2006)

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A decade separated *With Elements of Web 2.0* (2006) from *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* (1996), and there is evidence of a changing set of concerns in Lialina's practice. While the early online work was keenly engaged with the problem of articulating a new artistic language through the internet, Lialina increasingly began to respond (in her solo and collaborative artistic practice, and through her writing) to the wider conditions of cultural production and circulation online. It isn't so much that her artistic project changed. It's the web, and the critical discourse around it, that changed. Commercial companies structured vernacular uses of the web and profited from them long before the advent of Facebook, but with the rise of Web 2.0, they started to get a lot better at doing so. And by 2006, the time of the first "Net Aesthetics 2.0" panel, coming to grips with this changing internet landscape seemed like a most pressing task for many artists. Artie Vierkant characterized this shift as follows: "Artists after the Internet thus take on a role more closely aligned to that of the interpreter, transcriber, narrator, curator, architect."

Both *Abe & Mo Sing the Blues* and *With Elements of Web 2.0* (2006) reflect the artists adopting this role. For their series, Lialina and Espenschied appropriated materials harvested from the web; they presented these materials as solid objects, as aluminum prints rather than digital codes and liquid crystals. While their tone is markedly different from that of Olson and Linkoln's website—melancholic, where *Abe & Mo* is celebratory; contemplative, where *Abe & Mo* is participatory—the series can also be thought of as "art made 'after' the internet," per Olson's formulation. Olson's "after" was connected to a historical shift (to re-state it, the explosion of online creators on centralized web services constituting an internet culture in which artists increasingly acted as participant-observers) but it did not *refer* to this shift; it wasn't marking out an epoch. Instead, it referred to a delineation within the artist's practice, which could be experienced in everyday time, not historical time: "I surfed, and then I created art." Maybe it was just a convenient way of referring to a more general structural boundary between artistic practice and internet culture. Art outside of the internet.

After Olson's 2006 formulation, of course, the cultural conditions of the internet continued to change, rapidly. It's not popular, these days, to ascribe cultural shifts to the appearance of a new technology rather than shifts in perceptual regimes or economic models<sup>[3]</sup>, but let's just say it: the iPhone was released in 2007. Olson's language of making art "after" being online, though surely not meant to be taken literally, initially suggested a perceived boundary between time spent online and off. This boundary was eroded with the proliferation of smartphones and the growing pressures of an attention-based economy. And so Olson's concept of making art after the internet no longer applied in the same way. There was no *after* the internet, only during, during, during. The artist could no longer realistically adopt a position on the outside.

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In this context, it no longer makes sense for artists to attempt to come to terms with "internet culture," because now "internet culture" is increasingly just "culture." In other words, the term "postinternet" suggests that the focus of a good deal of artistic and critical discourse has shifted from "internet culture" as a discrete entity to the reconfiguration of *all* culture by the internet, or by internet-enabled neoliberal capitalism.

Many of the artists who are working on these questions are acting less as "interpreter, transcriber, narrator, curator, architect," and more as fully-implicated participant: Ann Hirsch performing as a cam whore, Auto Italia South East setting up a workspace for immaterial laborers in a major London real estate development, Ed Fornieles' manipulation of other people's social media profiles. One useful example of this shift is the 2012 exhibition "Brand Innovations for Ubiquitous Authorship" at Higher Pictures, in which "a large group of international artists were asked to produce an object using a custom printing or fabrication service such as CafePress, Zazzle and Walmart, which delivered the objects in sealed boxes directly to the gallery." These rules circumscribed the process of artistic creation entirely within the more or less truncated forms of customization available on the internet; one might reasonably draw the inference that all forms of creative production are similarly circumscribed. The process was made visible through a series of YouTube videos in which the gallerists documented the "unboxing" of each artist's work, fresh from the factory, entirely unseen by the artists up to that point, wrapped in bubble wrap or immersed in packing peanuts. The videos were given slightly macabre titles (*Unboxing Marisa Olson* and *Unboxing Jon Rafman*), equating the artist with their product and conveying the impression that the artists' names are also brands.



*Unboxing Maria Olson at Higher Pictures, filmed by Artie Vierkant (2013)*

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As much as the *Unboxing* videos highlighted the artists' participation in digital economies, they also highlighted the *objects'* participation in such economies. Through exclusion, the videos call attention to the highly organized systems of authorship, production, and distribution that brought these objects into existence, and brought them to the gallery. They do not try to represent these systems, only to represent their participation in them.

The strategy of calling attention to these systems of production and circulation is not limited to the world of solid, stable objects. Here, we can return to the work of Olia Lialina. Lialina's past online work has often made creative use of the URL, and she has also written about the importance of the URL in creating the context in which an online artwork exists. The most notable example of this is her work *Agatha Appears* (1997), one section of which involves a series of pages, each featuring an identical image of a woman, that moves the user from one URL to the next, each one adding a bit more narrative information. The current version of the work uses the following URLs:

[http://www.coryarcangel.com/agatha/goes\\_on.html](http://www.coryarcangel.com/agatha/goes_on.html)

[http://www.johannes-p-osterhoff.com/agatha/makes\\_stupid\\_things.html](http://www.johannes-p-osterhoff.com/agatha/makes_stupid_things.html)

[http://www.tema.ru/agatha/has\\_no\\_idea.html](http://www.tema.ru/agatha/has_no_idea.html)

[http://www.irational.org/agatha/wants\\_to\\_teleport.html](http://www.irational.org/agatha/wants_to_teleport.html)

[http://www.tobi-x.com/agatha/teleports\\_and\\_teleports.html](http://www.tobi-x.com/agatha/teleports_and_teleports.html)

In summer 2013, Lialina released another project in which the URL played an important role. *Summer* (2013) is a short animated loop in which the artist swings from a playground swing that is seemingly fixed to the top of the browser window. Each frame of the animation is played back from a different website, and so the browser must re-direct quickly across a number of websites, such as:

<http://1x-upon.com/~despens/olia/summer/>

<http://www.newrafael.com/olia/summer/>

<http://www.entropy8.com/olia/summer/>

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The URLs in *Agatha Appears* are used as by Lialina a creative tool, while those in *Summer* are modified by the artist in the most generic way possible, through the addition of her first name and the title of the work. Thus Lialina's use of the URL here, rather than offering a means for creative expression, merely highlights one aspect of the network in which her work circulates. In this, it has something in common with the "Brand Innovations" project, which also seeks to highlight the networks in which the works circulated. In contrast with that exhibition, though, Lialina chooses to circulate her work in a network defined partly by friendship and shared interests, not solely economics and production. Lialina's work calls attention to the work's reliance on a network of friends, a kind of autonomous zone in which her image circulates, in contrast with the endlessly implicated position of "Brand Innovations," which calls attention to the artworks's reliance on a network of logistics and manufacturing, and no such autonomy is assumed to be available to the artist.

In Olson's articulation in 2006/2008, the term "Post-Internet" positioned the artistic creation process "after" or structurally outside of the internet, while acknowledging that the artist was a compulsive participant in internet culture. In the more recent example of "Brand Innovations," artistic creation is more explicitly tied to a system of circulation of brands and images and objects, an internet-enabled neoliberal ether. The outside is not presumed to exist. Lialina points to this problem, but her response is to try to set off a semi-autonomous zone defined by networks of friendship and trust; the artists of "Brand Innovations" do not assume such autonomy.

This fully-immersed position has interesting implications not only for artistic creation, but also for the circulation, reception, and discussion of art. In other words, it has interesting implications for me, a writer and curator. I wanted to write this text in a way that would appeal to olds like me (I'm not really an old, except in internet years), and so I assumed a serious voice, I tried to stick to the facts, I tried not to make too many grand and unsubstantiated claims. But, this kind of writing somehow feels inadequate for a discussion of postinternet practice; it assumes a critical stance outside of art and internet and even neoliberalism, when in truth I am immersed in all three. So although the word "postinternet" is now about to collapse under the weight of its overuse, even though its position inside of the digital ether may be easily mistaken for a lack of critical politics, I still think there is something true and interesting and complicated about this refusal to buy into the assumption that artwork, artist, audience, and art worker can assume autonomy, and I'm still grappling with this in my own practice as a writer and curator. Even as they criticize the woolly discourse around postinternet art on forums and social media and in the pages of art magazines, I hope the other olds are doing the same.

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[1] For an excellent contemporaneous critique on this term, see *MUTE* Vol 2, No. 4, "[WEB 2.0: MAN'S BEST FRIENDSTER](#)" (January 2007).

[2] Olia Lialina, "cheap.art," Message to Nettime-I mailing list, January 19, 1998.

[3] See, for example, Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, New York: Verso, 2013. p 36: "This pseudo-historical formulation of the present as a digital age, supposedly homologous with a 'bronze age' or 'steam age,' perpetuates the illusion of a unifying and durable coherence to the many incommensurable constituents of contemporary experience."

*Updated 11/1 to add the sentence, "Equally, established curators and artists like Tribe have, even while acknowledging the conflict between "postinternet" and its precursors, done a great deal to support emerging artistic practices."*

Tags: [Marisa Olson](#) [Mark Tribe](#) [Net Aesthetics 2.0](#) [Olia Lialina](#) [Post-Net Aesthetics](#)  
[Postinternet](#)

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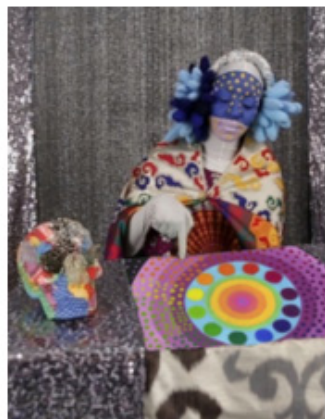
ART

## *WHERE REALITY ENDS*

By RACHEL SMALL

Published 02/19/15

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In a speech last fall, renowned science fiction author Ursula K Le Guin described her chosen genre as the art of creating "larger realities" that could allude to greater truths, surpassing the capabilities of "so-called realists." For the 10 female artists included in "Les Oracles," a science fiction-themed show that opened last week at XPO Gallery in Paris, Le Guin's point rings true as artworks depicting fantastical renderings of dreamy, strange, and unsettling worlds hint at larger realities that might reveal something about our own.

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Although it is sprawling, the exhibition has a succinct purpose, according to Olson. "Sci-fi often errs on the side of trivial," she says. "But I think as a form it can have a potentially utopian aim in the sense that [it can] imagine a new world, or a better world, or fantasize about the future." Throughout the show, themes of the digital, the ephemerality of information, and the intermingling of disparate imagery provoke uncanny insight into our own internet-age conventions. It's time to stop being realistic, to maybe see things more clearly.

*LES ORACLES IS ON VIEW AT [XPO GALLERY](#) IN PARIS NOW THROUGH APRIL 4.*

# JOHANNES VOGT

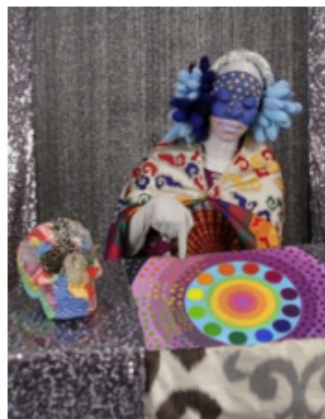
ART

## *WHERE REALITY ENDS*

By RACHEL SMALL

Published 02/19/15

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# JOHANNES VOGT

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10 JUN ART AND THE INTERNET – A CONVERSATION WITH

THE SYMPTOMS OF CONNECTEDNESS

A Conversation With Marisa Olson by Nick Warner

NW: This term – Postinternet – can be useful in talking broadly about the new significance that the internet has come to have in our lives as ‘cultural practitioners’ over the last, I don’t know, ten years, referring to the notion that, at some point, the internet stopped being a specialised technology, and became instead a sort of cultural site. Somewhere where we enact not only socially empowering acts of technological engagement (social networking, blogging, uploading videos of ourselves, et cetera) but also a place where we manage our life admin (pay bills, check our bank accounts, do our weekly shop and use the Royal Mail postage calculator to ascertain how much it will cost us to send a parcel, et cetera).



# JOHANNES VOGT

MO: I think we can walk this back a bit and look at this discourse surrounding “Networked Art.” This was definitely an influence on what I first started calling “art after the internet” and then started calling “postinternet art,” to smoothen the mouthful. There was a turn, in this discourse and in the work it surrounded, from work that was strictly networked and/or strictly online to work that bore the signature of life in network culture. The symptoms of connectedness. I would liken the network to what psychoanalysts Laplanche and Pontalis called the “phantasmatic,” in this case, and the art work produced as coming forth out of something like what Victor Burgin called the “popular preconscious.” That is, on some level, the audience for this work is always already familiar with the conditions of its production and reception (its [network-based] culture). In fact, in the 90s and early 2000s, there were a lot of critics and theorists who began to write about what I’m here calling “the symptoms of connectedness,” and in particular how it impacted political action and art practice. But that writing often uses the phrase “network culture” and it’s one I’m a little wary of. Admittedly I use it at times to describe my specific mainstream online American culture, but otherwise “network culture” implies a global homogeneity that I think is inappropriate. Nonetheless, I do think it’s time for people with an interest in the concept of postinternet to dig more deeply into the network-oriented roots and implications of the internet.

NW: I agree, to an extent. There are some really interesting examples in art history where artists have been similarly empowered by networks of correspondence, or networks of production. The mail art networks of the late 1960s and early 1970s is an interesting example. What I find most interesting about the comparison though is that mail artists were engaging with a ‘technology’ that was already almost vintage, which seems kind of true of post- internet artists as well. Whereas in the nineties artists using the internet were kind of pioneering, post-internet artists are making art out of the internet’s no longer being a new technology, but becoming a standardised life-tool.


MO: As the internet has popularized, certainly in the northern hemisphere, the semantics and aesthetic vocabularies may have shifted, but we are looking at the same idea. If the psychoanalytic model above doesn’t suit you, recall Marshall McLuhan’s: All media are an extension of ourselves, down to our very bodies, and the content of every medium is more media. Don’t get me wrong, from Day-One of the internet it belonged to the government and each day shows us more and more that our “private” content belongs to them. But that just, very sadly, becomes a part of our media subjectivity when we agree to participate in using these tools. The symptoms of connectedness.

NW: With specific reference to the discussion and criticism of contemporary artistic practices, however, it becomes slightly more contentious. How would you define, as the founder of this term, Post-internet, sorry Postinternet, art? Is it simply any art made since this Web 2.0 era was inaugurated? Or is it art that somehow borrows an aesthetic that is some part of the internet?

# JOHANNES VOGT

MO: I have always preferred to use the un-hyphenated term, “postinternet,” just as I write “postmodern,” rather than “post-modern.” I don’t see the “post-” as a kind of flag-pole jammed into the ground, and at some angle to it; I see it as a gloss on the terrain that’s already there. It goes back to the phrase I used to use, “art after the internet,” which I meant to refer to art that (a) couldn’t/wouldn’t exist before the internet (technologically, phenomenologically, existentially) and (b) was in the ‘style’ of or ‘under the influence’ of the internet in some way.... So the answer is sort of “both.” It’s art that embodies the conditions of life in network culture, art after the internet. With early internet art, there was originally a (cyber)punk spirit or aesthetic to much of it, with many of the artists alienated from the (western commercial) art world and many having a diy/hacker/cracker anti-materialist attitude. When people/places started to collect there was a big debate over whether to take sites offline and whether they would still be “internet art,” if they went offline, if they sat on a pedestal, if they were burned to a cd, etc.

The nature of network conditions, artists’ individual attitudes towards them, everyday people’s attitudes towards them in different parts of the world, etc keep changing, even after work is made. And of course works reflect these conditions differently to people with different experiences of network conditions across different times and spaces. Perhaps that’s Relational Aesthetics 101. But I say that as a segue to saying that I brought up “art after the internet” at a moment when Web 2.0 was pretty nascent, in hindsight. And now that the Facebook Like icon is plastered all over food products and restaurant doors I’d dare say its viability as a platform for public art is well-tested but experimentally tepid.

Postinternet Art is not specific to Web 2.0. I think the heyday of Web 2.0 has passed and Postinternet Art persists, but there are some notable shifts worth considering. The term “Web 2.0” is an economic one, and frankly I’ve never been able to say it without feeling dirty. I cut my teeth working to connect the dots between art and technology in the San Francisco bay area during the dot-com era, yet I’ve always felt a cringe of defensiveness when people ask me to talk about the economics of new media. But let’s get real. During that time, the dot-com gold rush funneled an infusion into arts funding in San Francisco and New York, and it dried up in the bust, along with the start-ups and several other speculative enterprises. In the golden years, a handful of artists had a good run of it, despite cries of cliques and nepotism. (Those are always there, everywhere.) There were some key shows, catalogues, biennials... Ironically, if sadly, there were artists who, were they painters or sculptors with the same accolades on their cv’s, would be raking in the dough, but Artforum profiles and Whitney Biennial inclusion parlayed into dust in the wind, post-boomtime. 

# JOHANNES VOGT

MO: I think this is the “work” that a lot of art, in various media across various epochs and genres or periods does. And I think that can be a very good aim—presenting the “real world” through a different lens, different eyes, a slightly different angle, however you want to put it. This has been done in painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, music, literature, poetics, philosophy, theatre, dance, cinema, you name it... I do think that a line often gets drawn between the more mimetic and the less mimetic and that we often expect certain media to be more or less one or the other; particularly in certain social contexts—i.e. when the work is a commissioned “likeness,” or intended to be educational or journalistic, or escapist entertainment, or blue chip Fine Art, and of course we often impose those readings retroactively as well. (Which can be influenced by the absence of the object’s historical subject for later comparison, or by time’s imposed decay.) Time also seems to impose differing sets of audience expectations of media—which, again, we can only ever understand from our position as readers looking back. It seems to me that so many media, in their nascency as considered-media, were used self-reflexively. Artists and their audiences wanted them to be used in ways that underscored their specific properties and, in whatever self-congratulatory a sense, pointed back to the medium. I find this very evident in the trajectory of film- and lens-based media that pushed toward the screen and up to computer animation and early net art. There we saw so much self-reflexivity as to code, protocol, applications, hacks. I would almost think of it like work happening inside the machine and inside the network. It would be a complete lie to say that there were not works at this time that were manifested in physical space, or that didn’t think outside of this box, but the prevailing ethos was to stay plugged-in and to reflect on the network via some form of network connection.

NW: Yes, so it becomes inherent that net artists and web practitioners produce networks, and their artworks are implicitly interconnected, almost in a performative way – this is what I mean. Given this performative, temporal elements to lots of net art, ‘gallerising’ it, or placing it in a ‘white-cube’ freezes it, kills it.



Flash Points

## Inhale. Exhale. Whew.

by Nicole J. Caruth | Dec 29, 2009



Marisa Olson, "Assisted Living," 2008. Performance still.  
Courtesy the Artist.

In the *New York Times* video [Copenhagen 101](#), reporter Tom Zeller asks people in Times Square what they know about the recent [United Nations Climate Change Conference](#) (UNCCC) in Copenhagen. You know how these things go—Americans are, for the most part, painfully unaware. And to tell you the truth, had Zeller approached me, I would have been as clueless as most of the folks he interviewed. Like them, I'm conscious of climate issues and try to do my part. Yet I hadn't bothered to find out what was taking place during this critical 12-day forum with worldwide ramifications.

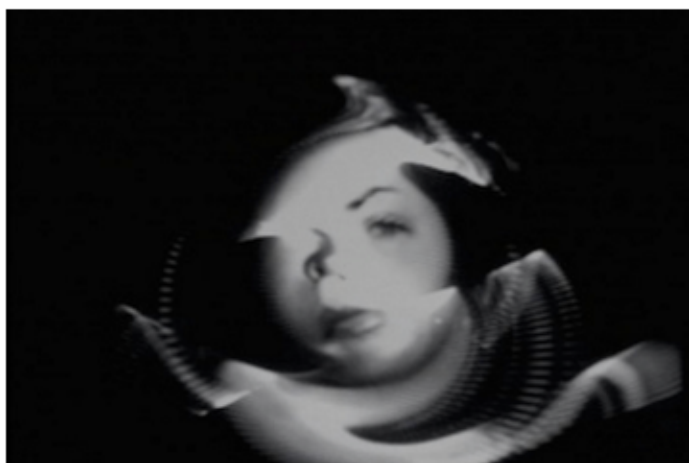
# JOHANNES VOGT

Upon reading more about the UNCCC, I realized not only how large and multifaceted the discourse (“climate change” and “global warming” are umbrella terms for a range of environmental and social problems), but also how scientific. To try and wrap my mind around the issues at hand, I attended two public forums: [Global Warming: Artists on Climate Change](#) at the Brooklyn Academy of Music; and the [New York City Food and Climate Summit](#) (NYCFCS). I also chatted with artist [Marisa Olson](#) who was slated to participate in [New Life Copenhagen](#), an art festival and social experiment organized to coincide with the UNCCC; it was in our conversation that some of the dots began to connect.

Olson was invited to Copenhagen by the artist-run community [Wooloo.org](#) to engage the “social architecture” of the UNCCC, and Wooloo’s corresponding hospitality art project. Working with a team of volunteers, they prearranged free stay for more than 3,000 activists and climate campaigners in the homes of local residents. I had hoped to get a feel for what was happening in Copenhagen from Olson. However, due to unforeseen circumstances she was unable to attend. (Her friends, [The Yes Men](#), took her place.) Still, her upcoming performance in New York City, in addition to a few earlier works, responds to the natural world far beyond the UNCCC.

# JOHANNES VOGT

In February, Olson will present *Whew Age* at PS122, in which she'll play a guru-type character dressed in "somewhat weird, neon, futuristic yoga clothes." As her self-made relaxation videos play in the background, she will lead audiences through a series of relaxation techniques and visualization exercises: "Picture yourself next to a cool melting glacier." Inhale. Exhale. Olson's directives serve as a platform to talk about climate change — the relationship of the body to the air you breathe — as well as the role stress and anxiety, as some theorists suggest, play in our climate, and the power of positive thinking. "I don't really think that people sitting down and meditating and saying 'om' for five minutes a day is going to fix things," Olson says, "but it's a way to have a conversation."



Marisa Olson, "Black or White," 2006. Video still, TRT 4:13.  
Courtesy the Artist.

# JOHANNES VOGT

In preparation for *Whew Age*, Olson has read extensively about holistic relaxation techniques and therapies, the early development of science as a discipline, and, coincidentally, studies that link human diets to Earth's rising temperature. The latter was key to the NYCFCFS held at New York University. In a session about hunger in local communities, a City Harvest representative suggested that if we (manufacturers *and* consumers) can shift the focus from trade and industry back to people and their well-being we can help our climate tremendously. This fundamental shift is at the heart of *Whew Age* — reframing the individual's relationship to the environment.

As Olson continued to describe *Whew Age*, I thought back to Zeller in Times Square. Was Olson assuming her audience would be more informed than the average Joe about climate issues? “No, but that’s a good question,” she said. “What I’m assuming is that there is a massive general awareness of the fact that there’s a problem. And, yes, there are skeptics about that. But I think most people have been subject to green advertising campaigns. [My] undergrads are obsessed with this idea of ‘going green,’ but when I ask them what that means they don’t know.” Not unlike organic food today, Olson suggests that what was once alternative thinking to better ourselves and our planet has become mainstream fashion (read, brand) rather than a genuine tactic for change. The artist says, “Everyone knows that we need to be worried, but there aren’t really proactive strategies ... I have a lot of criticisms of the discourse of environmentalism and the way it gets framed. So much of it is about consumption...It’s just one product versus another.”

# JOHANNES VOGT



Marisa Olson, "Noise Pollution" installation, 2009. Courtesy the artist and Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

In 2007, Olson began to explore media consumption and discard in relationship to the environment with her performance video, [Golden Oldies](#). In this piece, she tries to create dialogue between obsolete, or analog devices such as a CD boombox, child's record player, VHS and cassette tapes. Olson writes, "Like the garbage that piles up as we upgrade our phones and computers, the detritus accumulated in these efforts gets blindly swept aside in this ultimately fruitless effort." In her ongoing-project, [Noise Pollution](#), she continues this investigation of "upgrade culture," collecting discarded communication devices from the streets of her Brooklyn neighborhood. "I'm really interested in what people do with their iPod, boom box or old answering machine when they upgrade to new technologies, and [how] that garbage becomes kind of out of sight and out of mind," says Olson. Using the metaphor of Fort Knox — taking something out of circulation to preserve its value — the artist sprays her finds with gold paint, and displays them in "junk heaps." The piles are a way, she says, to think about commodity fetishism, or "cultural forces that compel us to make and buy new media, and what fall out that has for the environment."



# JOHANNES VOGT



Marisa Olson, "Noise Pollution" installation, 2009. Courtesy the artist and Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

This tension between nostalgia for the old, or familiar, and desire for the new was, for me, the most intriguing point made in the artist talk at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where [DJ Spooky](#) (aka Paul Miller), Art21 artist [Julie Mehretu](#), and ecological designer [Mitchell Joachim](#) discussed their divergent practices in relationship to climate change. In response to Joachim's images of inflatable cars, portable wind-powered homes, and other far-out designs for a not-so-distant future, Mehretu suggested that human resistance to change might be one of the biggest challenges for our environment: How does one make sustainable designs and technologies so desirable that people see them as essentially as we have come to view iPods? How do you make people want to change from their private Hummer to the Zipcar model? Consumption in this context would seem a solution rather than a problem. I shared this with Olson and she responded, "Somehow, I feel like that's just about people buying more cars and things and not really addressing the bigger issue...but [yet] it is! That's the really paradoxical thing. This is about consumption. It is about the carbon footprint of producing these objects, and then the consumer demand for new objects. I guess that's why I'm really pushing this idea of mindfulness in the meditation project [*Whew Age*]. I really want people to be aware of the big picture."

# JOHANNES VOGT

we make money n art

## Interview with Marisa Olson



Before meeting her, i had always imagined [Marisa Olson](#) to be an hyperactive blond girl running around the internet playground. She seemed to have so much fun online... surely that girl was made of pixels. And even now that we've met several times, i'm not totally sure that Marisa is real.

Marisa's work combines performance, video, sound, drawing, and installation to address intersections of pop

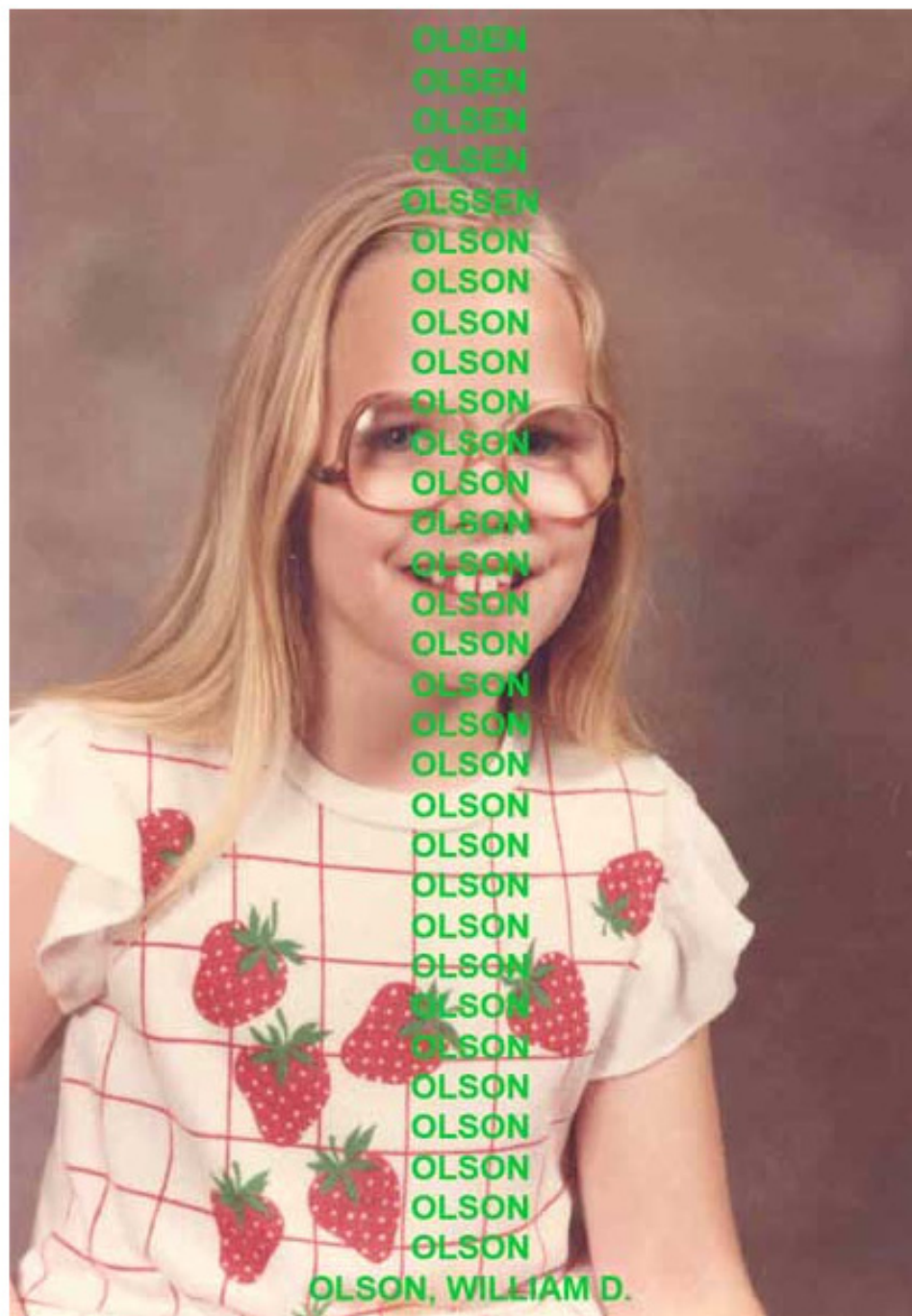
culture and the cultural history of technology, as they effect the voice, power, and persona.

Marisa lives between California and New York, where she shows one of her (half) serious faces: she is a "Curator at Large" at [Rhizome](#). You can find her on her [whatamidoingwithmylife](#) blog, on the [Nasty Nets Internet Surfing Club](#), on her [website](#) and 3 years ago she was writing about her preparation to audition for the popular reality TV show, American Idol on yet another [blog](#)

**How does one become Marisa Olson? What is your background and how did you get involved in technology-based art making, reviewing and curating?**

Hmm... That could be hard to answer quickly. I was always a geek. I programmed the heck out of my C64! I was also always obsessed with mediated communication in the form of pop culture (radio and tv) transmissions. Add to this the fact that my dad worked in intelligence, growing up (I grew up in Germany, where he worked until I was 10) and I was surrounded by scary military technologies all the time (isn't the gun one of the most significant inventions ever?) and that all spells a strange fascination with technology. I always wanted to make art, but I'm actually related to one of the most famous French impressionists and I was raised thinking that's what "real art" was. It turns out I wasn't very good at that kind of art. So I stopped worrying about what was and wasn't art and just focused on what I found interesting. I spent most of my undergrad and grad school years in the SF bay area, and lived through the surreal waxing and waning of the dot-com. I wrote for Wired, consulted a few start-ups, and that sort of thing. Meanwhile, the area was overflowing with artists expressing themselves in work that engaged technology. And I really related. After that, the progression was natural and rapid. I threw myself into new media--as an artist and in terms of supporting the field, not entirely distinguishing between my writing, teaching, or curating. The more peculiar thing, for me, has been switching gears from being a musician (I've been a singer and lyricist in a few bands and grew up in choirs) to making work about music (most recently my [Oh.Yeah.I.Love.You.Baby](#). remix album). There's definitely an interest in the DIY there, but I guess this is also why I often organize my projects as "albums" (like my [Break-Up Album \(Demo\)](#) video project) and I tend to think of curating like making a mixtape.

# JOHANNES VOGT



In **Abe & Mo Sing the Blogs**, an online project for which the Whitney Museum of American Art commissioned an **Artport Gatepage**, you and **Abe Lincoln** sing posts from your favorite blogs. What was the impetus for that project? There's been several discussions of trying to turn blogs into an art form or an art project. What is your take on this issue? Could you name us other examples of successful "blogs-turned-art" projects?

# JOHANNES VOGT

Abe and I are both compulsive web surfers and love unusual blogs. We decided to pick our favorite posts from our favorite blogs and sing them, in a sort of concept album mixtape. His and mine are pretty different. They are all really funny. In our official description of the project, we say that blogs, like the blues, have been credited with channeling the "voice of the people" and we wondered if we could identify specific genre conventions on blogs. We were kind of interested in the blog as a stage for "site-specific" performance, which also carried over into our Universal Acid project. We'd both done blog-based projects before, which was how we met, online. We sent each other fan letters about his conversion of net artist Olia Lialina's My Boyfriend Came Back From the War and my American Idol Audition Training Blog. I also loved Screenfull.net, Abe's old blog with Jimpunk.



Our first collaboration was actually a blog called Blog Art, which was a curated blog listing blogs that are art projects. At the moment, I'm really into group blogs that ride the line between art practice and some other sort of internet fan culture. For instance, some friends and I founded an "internet surfing club" called Nasty Nets--in which we sort of simultaneously celebrated and critiqued the internet--and I love other group surf blogs like Supercentral, Spirit Surfers, Double Happiness, and Loshadka.

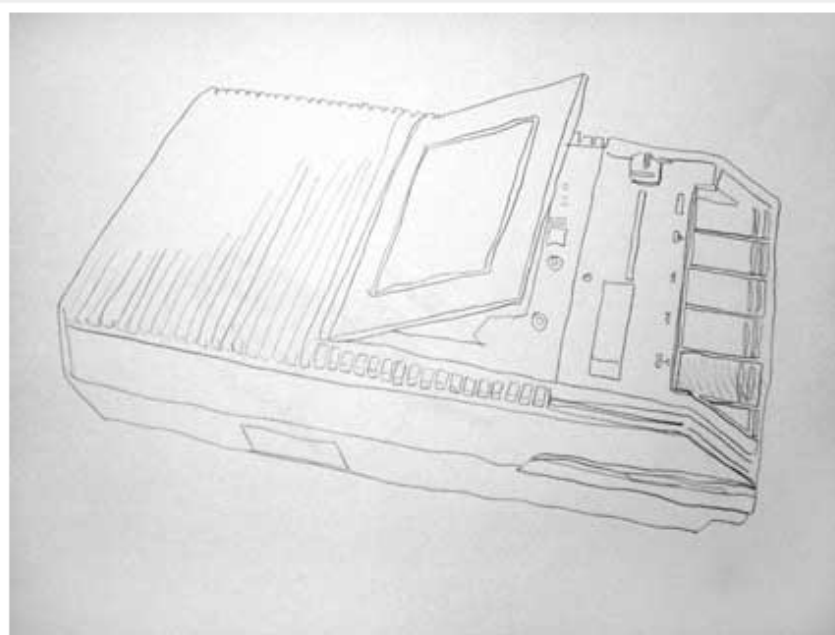
# JOHANNES VOGT



**When you blogged your efforts to audition for "American Idol." How did people around you react to that decision? What did the whole training teach you (I'm not only talking about sun beds and stilettos boot camps of course)?**

Well, my family and grad school professors at the time certainly thought I was crazy. I made what was probably the mistake of announcing it by emailing people out of the blue with the subject line "I need your help" and inside I asked for help in picking what song I should sing. Even though I linked to a New York Times article about the blog, a lot of people told me later that they really thought I was seriously delusional about trying to get on the show! They didn't recognize it as a parody, which is kind of awesome. I started the project wanting to critique the show (which I admittedly also loved) and the gender normative stereotypes it pushes. I was concerned about how artists rights to their own work & identity were violated by the producers, in my opinion. But the project took on a life of its own. The lead-up to my audition (in 2004) was the same as the build-up to the presidential election between Bush & Kerry. I started thinking of how the show is predicated on a model of democracy and voting but I kept hearing how my generation (the main demographic for the show) wasn't showing up to polls. They would stand in line for 8 hours to audition, but not 15 minutes to vote. So the project became all about voting. I told readers how to register to vote, brought registration forms to the auditions, and I had readers vote on what I should wear & sing. Ultimately, I collected over 10,000 votes in the course of trying to get young people to think about the many ways in which they could use their "voice."

# JOHANNES VOGT



**You are also a curator, both independently and as part of your activities at Rhizome. Your curating often deals with new media art pieces. What are the challenges of curating and exhibiting works of new media art today?**

I think that there is presently a very exciting turn happening in new media, with respect to both the art world and the context of "traditional media." It used to be very important to carve out a separate space in which to show, discuss, and teach new media. Nowadays these spaces are sometimes seen as ghettos, but at the time, they were safe havens championing under-recognized forms. Things are more co-mingled now. Not everyone will agree with me about this, but I think it's great that some people no longer even know new media when they see it. I know curators who turn their nose up at that phrase, but they love Cory Arcangel or Paul Pfeiffer. There doesn't seem to be a need to distinguish, any more, whether technology was used in making the work-afterall, everything is a technology, and everyone uses technology to do everything. What is even more interesting is the way in which people are starting to make what I've called "Post-Internet" art in my own work (such as my Monitor Tracings), or what Guthrie Lonergan recently called "Internet Aware Art." I think it's important to address the impacts of the internet on culture at large, and this can be done well on networks but can and should also exist offline. Of course, it's an exciting challenge to explain to someone how this is still internet art... If that really matters...

# JOHANNES VOGT



**Your Media Change course at ITP/ NYU explored the "evolution" of technology. How does your teaching explore an area which is well... evolving so fast?**

I feel like this is a great opportunity and a perfect class to teach at an amazing place like ITP, which evolves daily, with the technology. But I think the way to do it is to try to see media change as having a longer-term trajectory. I have a background in media theory. I studied History of Consciousness at UC Santa Cruz and am PhD Candidate in film studies and new media in the Rhetoric department at UC Berkeley, where my dissertation is on The Art of Protest in Network Culture. So I've read, loved, and taught the classic McLuhan, Benjamin, Kittler, Flusser, Baudrillard, Jameson, etc over and over again. The aim of this class was to consider the cultural and political forces behind the evolution of technology and the broader concept of "change" (which most certainly also incorporates social/ political change). So we read these classic historiographies but tried to read them from the present context as well as the original one. And we read them beside Alex Galloway, Henry Jenkins, Clay Shirky, and other great contemporary writers. I mean, this stuff can never be pinned down long enough to be considered in an isolated temporal context, but it's still important to consider the personal and political forces that compel media change--the desires and impetuses.

# JOHANNES VOGT

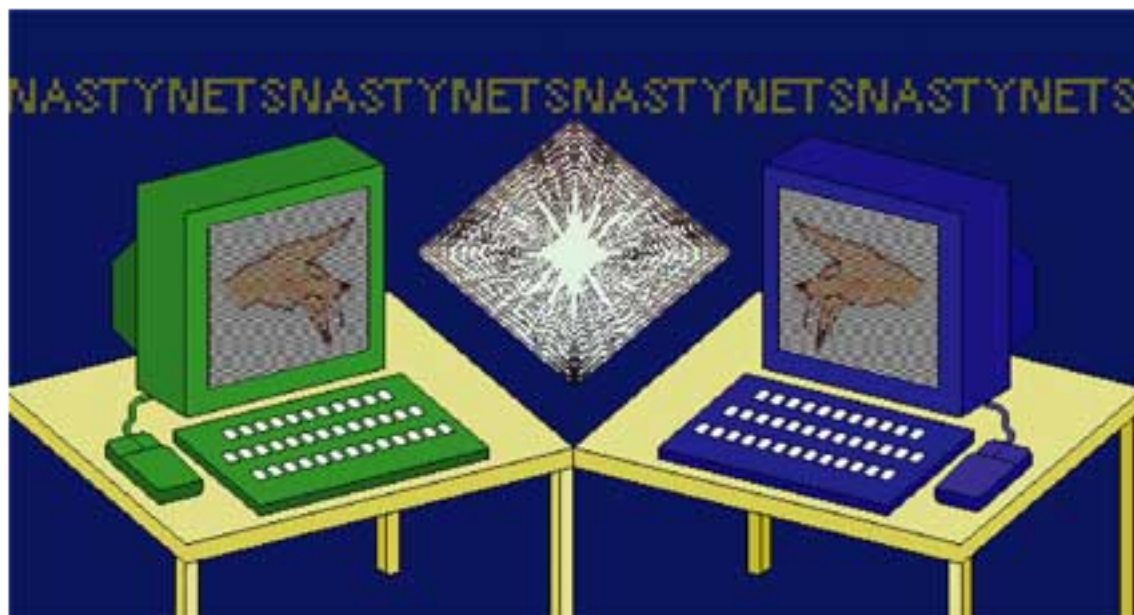


In your recent **Golden Oldies** performance/ video, you seem to give a very hard time to a bunch of electronic devices. What is your own relationship with technology?

Ha, well... It occurs to me now that you could probably say that my relationship to technology is a bit sado-masochistic. I don't mean for that to sound weird or sensational. I think, in the true classical psychoanalytic sense, many people's relationship with technology is very wrapped up in both their libidinal and death drives, as Freud would call them. I guess this video demonstrates that I enjoy abusing technology as much as I enjoy observing its abuse of me. I've always been a fetishist and could never try to hide that. My studio is littered with blinged-out headphones, radios, and cassette tapes. But the tapes I've been calling Time Capsules. I mean, they are moments of time that are disappearing but not really going away, so instead I try to prevent their burial (in a landfill) by taking them out of circulation and painting them gold, much like the symbolic bricks in **Fort Knox**. In **Golden Oldies**, I try unsuccessfully to instigate communication between media of various generations--tapes, vhs cassettes, records, cds.... And after drilling, hammering, and chiseling each one, I give up and wipe the garbage to the floor--where it becomes "out of sight, out of mind," as we say in the US. I feel like this is what's happening with all of our tv's, walkmen, air hockey tables, nintendos, etc as we follow our drives to upgrade. They just get pushed into dumpsters and disregarded. And I've been trying to think about my own role in this cycle, because I certainly love my ipod as much as the next gal.



# JOHANNES VOGT



## Any upcoming projects you could share with us?

Well, we just released a DVD of Nasty Nets members' work (there are 25 of us, including some of my very favorite net artists), and that was generously funded by Rhizome. It includes videos as well as loads of data files and a type-in website by fellow Nasty Michael Bell-Smith. People can get the DVD online, and if they are in New York, they should definitely attend our premiere screening at the New York Underground Film Festival this Friday, April 4th, called Nasty As U Wanna Be.

Otherwise, as you can see, I'm really obsessed with the future, at the moment, which is kind of funny for someone who tends to say that her work is about the cultural *history* of technology. I'm just starting to work on a project called "Martha Stewart Assisted Living" and it's a near-future version of Martha's show (guess who I play!) aimed at an aging audience whose lives have been lengthened by new technologies, but who are also suffering side effects, like head goiters from their cell phones or Global Warming-Related Illnesses (GWI's). I'm devising special recipes and craft projects for those 130-year-olds!

**Thanks Marisa!**

Previously: Sousveillance culture, a panel curated and moderated by Marisa Olson.

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## NY ARTS

### Astria Suparak talks to Marisa Olson



marisa in the rainbow RV is: Marisa Olson & Abe Lincoln, Universal Acid, 2006. Earphones & pink rope is: Marisa Olson, Break Up Album (Demo), 2007, Screwgun is: Marisa Olson, Golden Oldies, 2007.

Marisa Olson is an artist, writer, curator, musician and performer based in Brooklyn and Astria Suparak is a curator who brought Olson and Rhizome's traveling exhibition, Networked Nature, to Syracuse, New York in spring 2007.

**Astria Suparak:** *You have a serious history in academia: You hold a Masters in the History of Consciousness at UC Santa Cruz and are finishing your PhD in Rhetoric at UC Berkeley, have written for various institutions and magazines, and teach a course on the evolution of technology at NYU. You also actively exhibit and perform, often to lighthearted, hilarious effect. Do you see your role as an academic as different from your role as an artist?*

# JOHANNES VOGT

**Marisa Olson:** *Well, I often feel like an "absent-minded professor," if that's what you mean? Academia and art-making are both really important to me. And the writing and curating go along with that. I just see it as a multi-pronged approach to asking certain questions about the world and trying to instigate certain conversations about power, technology, gender, desire, change, and the voice. I also think it's really important to have fun in your work. I mean, I was also in a punk band for a while, but left because I wanted to do something "more punk than punk."*

**AS:** *You've had multiple blogs and websites, and hold Facebook, del.icio.us, MySpace, Flickr, and YouTube accounts. Your work has celebrated the embarrassment of childhood with the slide lecture What My Telephones Knew About Me, the pain of heartbreak in Break Up Album (Demo), and other insecurities in Marisa's American Idol Audition Training Blog. What parts of your life are not available for public consumption? Where do you delineate emotional responsibility towards others?*

**MO:** *Good question! I've gone on blind dates where the person nervously asked me if they were my art project. Ok, I'll be honest: I'm a bit of a control freak. It's often easier for me to bring up difficult stuff in the "controlled environment" of a performance in front of people I generalize as strangers (this includes blogging, irrationally), than it is to do it interpersonally. Of course certain things are off-limits. But things are also changing as my work is becoming less and less about my past and more about more about our future. I appear in my work now not in a diaristic way, but to sort out my own culpability.*

**AS:** *You create a striking figure in much of your work, with your long, golden locks and dance moves directed at the camera. We've previously talked at length about identity politics. What goes into the crafting of your image and identity, and how do you hope others perceive you?*

# JOHANNES VOGT

**MO:** *Well, I've always been very interested in the conscious, branded crafting of persona, at least ever since I discovered Michael Jackson and Madonna. Mine is a bit more like the idea of reducing myself to just a small handful of signs: headphones (my security blanket), long blonde hair, big red lips. It's like... What would happen if one of Busby Berkeley's dancers started a solo performance art career? Even when I "star" as myself, I mostly feel like I'm just a stand-in for some vague subject position—a fan, a voter, a consumer, or some other already-generic role related to media culture. But reducing things to a base iconography leads to an amplification of each element's import.*

**AS:** *Right before your lecture at Syracuse, we were two miles apart and you chose to email me rather than call from the hotel lobby. Is this indicative of your preference for a more mediated social experience?*

**MO:** *Oops! Well, I'm kind of a geek. I've always related to computers, to say nothing of walkmen and boomboxes. Talk about mediated communication! Nowadays I hate the phone. Just hang up and email me, I say. Man, that's really sad.*

**AS:** *What do you do during power outages?*

**MO:** *The same thing I've done almost every night since I was fifteen. Light candles and sing songs.*