

# ArtReview

APRIL 2001

|          |          |                 |          |           |             |
|----------|----------|-----------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| about us | contents | editor's letter | calendar | auctions  | previews    |
| profiles | views    | reviews         | news     | subscribe | exhibitions |

## THE NEW ALTERNATIVE

**For all the column inches written about the internet's potential to radicalize art practice, there has been precious little in cyberspace that deserved the revolutionary tag. Until now. Tom Flynn reports**



It used to be called "the new economy", but now the gurus of internet commerce are telling us that if we want to stay really au courant we should refer to it as "the next economy". Act I of the internet revolution is apparently over, and we are now entering Act II. Whatever you call it, there are days when it still seems as though everyone in cyberspace is either staking out their real estate or "getting big quick". Even within the fine art community, corporate ideology has had a dumbing-down effect.

However, unlike the inner cities, it makes no difference how much real estate the multinationals claim, for the open architecture of the web continues to offer rich opportunities for alternative modes of expression. If you can look beyond angel money, first-mover advantage, consolidation, convergence and the rest of the claptrap coined by the leaders and bleeders of the old new economy, you'll find plenty of antidotes to such world-dominating viruses as the Time Warner-AOL alliance.

This month's breaths of fresh air are [Newsgrist.com](http://Newsgrist.com) ("where spin is art and art is spun") and the [Alter-nativeMuseum.org](http://Alter-nativeMuseum.org) (TAM). The latter will already be familiar to those who have followed the careers of artists such as Nam June Paik, Leon Golub, Lorna Simpson or duo Komar and Melamid, to name but a few whose talents were nurtured within the real world portals of TAM's New York Tribeca home (aka The Alternative Center For International Arts).



Beijing artist Wang Qingsong's digital photographs *Can I Cooperate With You?* 2000.

The ethos of The Alternative Museum is particularly amenable to electronic space, with the web's lack of geographical boundaries allowing TAM to keep alive the notion of the "global groove" which Paik espoused back in the 1970s. Essentially a research and development institution devoted to contemporary art, the Museum's mission is fourfold: "To explore new ways to present art and culture worldwide; to bring an appreciation of artistic endeavour to the global society; to present a programme of contemporary art exhibitions and ancillary activities in order to stimulate discourse on artistic, social, philosophical and cultural issues; to seek out and present the work of artists from the US and abroad on the basis of excellence." Over the past 24 years TAM has presented over 300 exhibitions and more than 500 concerts, poetry readings and panel discussions, and its site expands the nature and scope of these activities still further. It remains a non-commercial, charitable public institution, reliant upon grants and donations from its supporters, but given these constraints its online programme of digital exhibitions offers a rich and oblique contribution to alternative web culture.

With so much emphasis at present on the web as just another route to market conventional offline activities, it's always invigorating to encounter initiatives like TAM which promote the use of digital space as an artistic medium in itself. "Multi-user interface projects" are the flavour of the moment. Check out, for example, the thought-provoking interactive work entitled *Closed Reality Embryo*, by Croatian artist Andreja Kuluncic, which explores the social implications of human genetic engineering. Through simultaneous e-mail communication with the website, viewers share ideas and opinions based on Kuluncic's project data to "create a new human being".



*1,000-hand Soliciting Buddha*, 1999, this and above on show at [AlternativeMuseum.org](http://AlternativeMuseum.org), "a new experiment in global democracy and international arts communication".

Another striking offering in TAM's current crop is a series of photographic works by the Beijing artist Wang Qingsong, whose kitsch, hybrid Pierre et Gilles-inspired creations fuse references to the Chinese mythological pantheon with trashy popular culture, while New York-based artists Jon Ippolito, Keith Frank and Joline Blais invite you to choose your own plot or story endings for classic fairy tales such as "Cinderella", "Rapunzel" and "Little Red Riding Hood".

Finally, if you want to be kept in touch with the soft underbelly of contemporary art and culture, try subscribing to [Newsgrist.com](http://Newsgrist.com)'s weekly e-mail newsletter which combines a sassy digest of happening events and provocative opinion.

Being a simple soul I was happily engaged by the neat bit of Flash animation that Newsgrist's designers kindly stuck to my mouse-cursor as I browsed their homepage. It trails around after you like one of those aeroplane banner-ads, its mission-statement rippling in the digital wind. Little things please little minds...