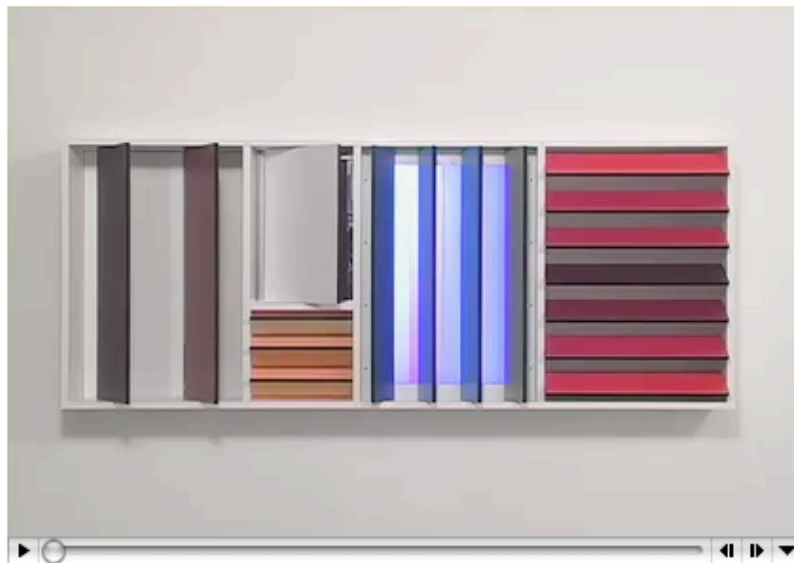
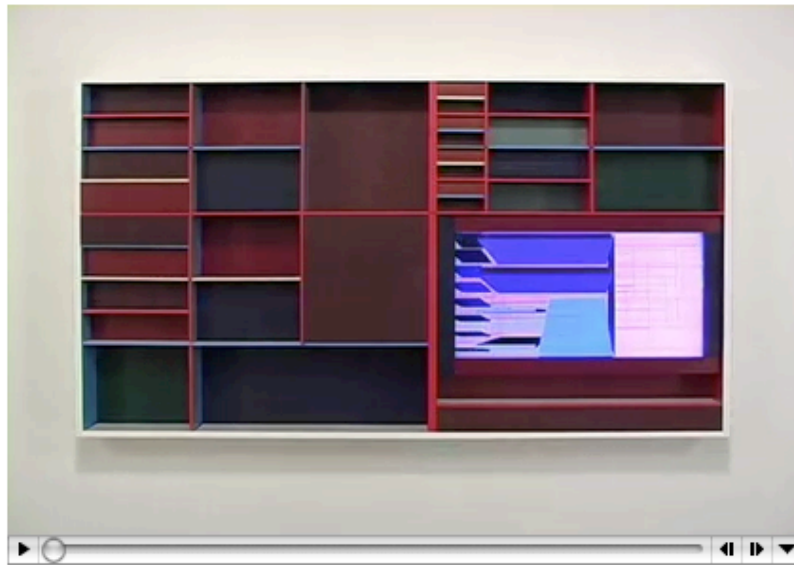




The Nostradamus of New Media?

By Marisa Olson on Monday, March 16th, 2009 at 12:30 pm



Videos: John F. Simon, Jr., Two works from the series "Winds Across the Inner Sea," 2007

Artists often loathe living in the shadow of their older, more famous works. But it is difficult to begin an article about [John F. Simon, Jr.](#) without paying homage to his 1997 project, *Every Icon*. The brilliant algorithmic piece exists on a 32x32 pixel grid, in which any element of the grid can be colored black or white. As it crunches through the billions of possible illuminative patterns, it will--at least theoretically--eventually display "every icon" possible. The work, itself, has become iconic. It's often the first work of art shown in lectures about internet art, and while the code behind the work speaks volumes about the speed of behind-the-scenes technological development, the resultant display is a testament to the poetic beauty and creative potential of a few simple lines and squares. This marriage of sublime potentiality and mathematical complexity has continued to be the cornerstone of Simon's work over the last ten years--as we might expect from an artist who managed to snag the URL [numeral.com](#)! Simon is now enjoying his first Italian solo exhibition, in the form of a ten-year retrospective at [Collezione Maramotti](#) (Reggio Emilia, IT), entitled "Outside In: Ten Years of Software Art." The exhibit presents work from 1999 to the present and the title might refer both to the show's ability to "zoom-in" on an artist's oeuvre or the way in which Simon's relationship to code and form has changed over the years. After making a professional leap from science to art, Simon's early works treated code like a specimen. Akin to a microscope whose focus is pulled back to reveal the larger sample, his work has progressed in a way that now shows us the beautiful images and increasingly organic shapes that one can compose with these digital codes. His most recent screen-based works, embedded within sculptural encasements, add yet another layer. Once again, John F. Simon, Jr.'s work continues to act as part and parcel of media art history. As with previous lens- and screen-based media, algorithmic computer art has evolved from a nascent stage in which the gee-whizzness of the medium was paramount to a perpetual pushing of the envelope, to wring out ever more seductive images and captivating content. If you're worried about what the future holds for new media, keep an eye on [numeral.com](#), where Simon's posted works reflect the field like a crystal ball. - Marisa Olson