

Interview: Sachiko Hayashi

Agricola de Cologne (AdC) interviews Sachiko Hayashi (SH)

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Sachiko Hayashi

is a visual artist who primarily works in video and screen-based interactive media.

[artist biography](#)

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10 questions—->

AdC:

You belong to an art scene using new technologies, you are an active representative of a genre dealing with Internet based art, called “netart”. When those artists started who are active since a longer time, the education in New Media was not yet such advanced like nowadays, often they came from different disciplines and had an interdisciplinary approach, those young artists who start now have partially this more advanced education, but rather not much experience in other disciplines.

AdC:

1. Tell me something about your educational background and what is influencing your work?

SH:

I come from a theoretical background with my first degree in International and Cultural Studies (Tsuda College, Tokyo), i.e. interdisciplinary studies comprising studies in philosophy, social ideas, comparative cultural studies, media studies, international relations, politics, economics, well, you name it, anything to do with society and humanities. I chose to work on women’s issues for my undergraduate thesis, investigating how ideology, political decision, economical necessity on the national level, and influence from the media all came together to nurture a certain condition for the members of a particular society. I think my interest in co-relation between society (the collective) and its members (the individual) is still very much part of me and is traceable in many of my works.

I have my second degree in Digital Media from Coventry School of Art and Design, UK. I also have two-years’ postgraduate studies in Computer Arts at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm (this being the most advanced studies you can get at the academy). I think these have also been influential, though I considered them to be more of a vocational nature at the time. They not only fostered my skills and certain references-preferences within the genre, but also introduced me to certain discourses that have had impacts on the way I relate to the media.

2.

AdC:

The term “netart” is widely used for anything posted on the net, there are dozens of definitions which mostly are even contradictory. How do you define “netart” or if you like the description “Internet based art” better, do you think your work belongs to this specific genre, do you think “netart” is art, at all, if yes, what are the criteria? Are there any aesthetic criteria for an Internet based artwork?

SH:

Though I use the term “net art” and “net artist” to describe what I do and what I am on various occasions, these terms are used more of a convention and for convenience and not from a firm conviction. Coming from the studies of CD-ROM (proceeding interactive net art), I think it is more accurate to describe me as an artist who is interested in possibilities of interactive art.

Having been a student of Xanadu “hypermedia” tradition, I am probably more interested in seeing interactive aspects even on the net than many of my colleagues. Having said that, that still remains only as my personal taste. I find many works that utilise other possibilities of the Internet equally exciting. And I hold to the opinion that any attempt to define net art at this stage would probably be a very bad idea. Any types of definition have a tendency to be outdated while excluding much of what it can be tomorrow, leaving us only with the known which often embodies the risk of turning into stereotypes.

3.

AdC:

What kind of meaning have the new technologies and the Internet to you, are they just tools for expressing your artistic intentions, or have they rather an ideological character, as it can be found with many “netartists”, or what else do they mean to you?

SH:

What attracted me to the use of the Internet in the first place is its possibility to reach out to people regardless of my own geographical limitations. This came mostly from the fact that I had found the conventional art world too hierarchical – as you go along with their rules, you actually end up playing their game and not your own. When the Internet came, it opened up a new possibility for artists to test their own ground in their own ways. At least that’s how I felt. I know it is a worn-out cliché but I thought then and I still do think now that the Internet is a very democratic medium – at least more democratic than any other media I have been involved with.

I should also mention that my interest since the middle of 1990s has very much been revolving around the notion of “non-linear narratives” where the public becomes part of the process of retrieving or forming narrations through interactivity. I still find this an interesting area. I like the complexity it can bring when successfully done. When I started probing into that area (at first CD-ROMs and then the Internet), I saw this to be a new unexplored ground, like a virgin territory. Its language was yet to be set, and I liked the experimental or researching

aspect of it while imagining myself contributing even only a little to the foundation of the genre.

4.

AdC:

Many “Internet based artists” work on “engaged” themes and subjects, for instance, in social, political, cultural etc concern.

Which contents are you particularly interested in, what are the subjects you are working on and what is your artistic message(s), if you have any, and what are your personal artistic visions for future artworking (if you have any).

SH:

See my answers to your questions 1 and 3.

5.

AdC:

“Art on the net” has the advantage and the disadvantage to be located on the virtual space in Internet which defines also its right to exist. Do you think, that “art based on the Internet”, can be called still like that, even if it is just used offline?

SH:As mentioned earlier, I am not keen on defining what net art is or what “art based on the Internet” should be. However, if i utter the first thought that comes up in my mind on the subject, to me “art based on the Internet” should have something to do with how a work integrates the specificity of the medium “the Internet” in its construction at the level of conceptualisation – more than mere on-line/off-line end result.

6.

AdC:

Dealing with this new, and interactive type of art demands an active viewer or user. and needs the audience much more and in different ways than any other art discipline before. How do you stimulate the user to dive into this new world of art?

SH:

By having faith in others, i.e. by believing that they are or will be interested in what I am interested in.

AdC:

What do you think, represents an appropriate environment to present net based art to an audience, is it the context of the lonesome user sitting in front of his personal computer, is it any public context, or is it rather the context of art in general or media art in particular, or anything else.? If you would be in the position to create an environment for presenting this type of art in physical space, how would you do it?

SH:

I am a little confused by this question. Do you mean presenting net art shows to the audience sitting at home privately vs. organising net art shows in the public

space to the audience? Or do you mean how we should present net art in the public space?

Interpreting your question as the first, I think we'll have to proceed pursuing both venues, both public and private.

Interpreting your question as the second, I think we should be able to do better than placing a computer and a monitor for a sole user. Replacing monitors with video projectors (or large plasma screens), providing sufficient physical space for each work by starting to treat each work more as an installation or even as a sculpture that requires certain amount of physical space, recognising and introducing the importance of sharing-experience-with-others feel in the public exhibitions, etc., etc., – there are many counts that one could take into account when it comes to presenting net art in a physical space. Also I am a little amazed by the fact that net art is not presented in the public open space (on a street, at a market place, in a tube station) more often – by using touch screen technique or projecting images onto house facades, for example. These non-conventional-art-venues would not be so foreign to many video artists, etc. It seems to me that many people can't get rid of the image of viewing net art sitting at home (or at school/work) in front of a computer monitor because it is so closely linked to personal computers in their minds. Imagination is the key word here, I believe.

7.

AdC:

As Internet based art, as well as other art forms using new technologies are (globally seen) still not widely accepted, yet, as serious art forms, what do you think could be an appropriate solution to change this situation?

SH:

I honestly don't know. I always wonder why things are as they are. It is maybe a simple fact that things do take time to get established and we just have to accept that. It took almost a century for photography and cinema to be regarded as legitimate artists' media. Let's hope net art won't have to wait so long.

8.

AdC:

The Internet is called a kind of "democratic" environment, but the conventional art practice is anything else than that, but selective by using filters of different kind. The audience is mostly only able to make up its mind on second hand. Art on the net might potentially be different. Do you think the current practice of dealing with Internet based art is such different or rather the described conventional way through (also curatorial) filtering?

Do you think, that speaking in the terms of Joseph Beuys, anybody who publishes anything on the net would be also an artist?

SH:

I think there are several things that constitute an artist – his/her own intent, reception of his/her work by others, historical evaluation, etc. In the end whom we call an artist is based upon a time-based consensus, an agreement in social and historical context. It is a term, like any other term in society, that consists of constant collective reevaluations through history, revealing much of what we believe.

Going back to the question of whether I find the condition of present net based art practice as “democratic” or “filtered,” I think the arena contains both versions. Do I like to take the side of any of those two? No. My opinion is that both conditions are equally necessary and I hope the weight of one of the two does not wipe out the other.

9.

AdC:

Do you think, the curators dealing with net based art should have any technological knowledge in order to understand such an art work from its roots?

SH:

I don't think it is a bad idea for a curator to be informed of his/her own field as any professional in any area should be. However, I also think what one considers to be the basic knowledge for curating depends very much on from which perspective or with what emphasis the curation is done. In other words, I think the curator him-/her-self should decide what kind of expertise and knowledge is required for his/her curation. As I see it, generalising the prerequisite of curating net art is as dangerous as defining what net art is. Curation, even in fine arts and other visual arts, is always a statement, conscious or unconscious, a visible trace of reference, taste and ideological stand the particular curator takes. I don't see any reason to over-standardise that in any area. On the contrary, we would probably be better off if there were more curations that accentuate differentiations.

10.

AdC:

It is planned, to re-launch

JavaMuseum – Forum for Internet Technology in Contemporary Art

www.javamuseum.org in 2007 in a new context, very likely even in physical space.

What would be your personal wishes and expectations connected to this re-launch?

SH:

I look forward to that.

AdC:

Thanks for taking your time.