

October 13, 2006

Museums Try YouTube, Flickr To Find New Works for the Walls

By **ANDREW LAVALLEE**
October 13, 2006

A forthcoming exhibit at New York's Museum of Modern Art will feature work selected by unlikely curators: visitors to the YouTube video-sharing site.

MoMA solicited videos to be included in a retrospective of the Residents, an avant-garde multimedia group, that will open next week. The museum has posted the clips¹ of 11 finalists on YouTube and invited the public to weigh in. The votes and comments those works receive on the site will help determine which are screened at the museum.

DOW JONES REPRINTS

 This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit: www.djreprints.com.

- See a sample reprint in PDF format.
- Order a reprint of this article now.

Start a **FREE** trial of the **Online Journal**



Subscribe to **The Print Journal**



Free US Quotes:

Symbol
 Name
 

Get **FREE E-Mail** by topic

Check Out our **Mobile & Wireless Services**

DIGEST OF EARNINGS

Details of the latest corporate earnings reported for FREE.

COMING TO MOMA?



These are still shots from two of the (often eerie) videos selected as finalists for a Museum of Modern Art exhibit.

It is among the latest moves by museums to capitalize on the popularity of online communities and remain relevant to the new generation of art fans. London's Saatchi Gallery is sponsoring what it calls "the first reader-curated contemporary art show" later this month, in which online voters picked the participants. In New York, the Smithsonian Institution's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum has this year expanded the prestigious awards it bestows on artists, adding a "people's design award" based on votes from visitors to the museum's Web site.

[See all the finalists on YouTube.](#)²

Meanwhile, the New York's Pace/MacGill Gallery staged a summer show based on the photo-sharing site Flickr. Pace/MacGill's project, called "Self-Portraitr," included nearly 130,000 user-submitted photos, and drew a younger-than-usual audience -- one of the goals of the exhibit, a gallery spokeswoman said.

While MoMA visitors often come for the Matisse and Picasso paintings, if user-contributed art is under the same roof, it is more likely viewers will be open to it, said Barbara London, a longtime curator at MoMA. "Maybe they'll be challenged."

Much the same way that MoMA and other contemporary museums added photography and film as artists began working with them, the Internet is becoming an increasingly important creative medium, Ms. London said. YouTube, in particular, has tapped into a part of popular culture that intrigued the museum. "It's like Andy Warhol and his can of Campbell's soup, almost," she said, referring to one of the museum's signature paintings. "It's a brand. It's very much now. It's alive."

The videos will go into a MoMA exhibit showcasing the work of the Residents, a group of visual artists and musicians formed in the 1970s. The Residents embraced the YouTube component after seeing how many users watched a series of videos the band had posted on the site. "Suddenly tens of thousands of people were watching," said Hardy Fox, the group's manager. "It sort of encouraged them to see what they could do with it."

The secretive San Francisco-based quartet, whose members decline interview requests and wear giant eyeball masks in public, are known for multimedia projects. Their work includes "Demons Dance Alone," a 2002 performance videotaped in the dark with infrared lights, and a 1991 music album called "Freak Show" that was followed by a computer game and a graphic novel.

For the MoMA project, the Residents put out a call on [the museum's Web site](#)³, as well as [its own site](#)⁴ and [MySpace page](#)⁵. They sought videos to accompany "The River of Crime," a short audio piece the group recorded about a woman executed in a Louisiana electric chair. Group members and MoMA's Ms. London narrowed the 60 submissions down to 11 finalists, including a video producer in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and a pair of college students calling themselves the Penguin Brothers. Six videos will be included in the MoMA exhibit.

USER-CURATED ART

• "The River of Crime" at the Museum of Modern Art: [View finalists](#)⁶



Like the Residents, many of the finalists used a combination of photographic and film techniques for their videos. The Penguin Brothers [video](#)¹²

finalists

- "Self-Portrait" at Pace/MacGill Gallery: [Exhibit site](#)⁷ and [photos on Flickr](#)⁸
- "Your Gallery," sponsored by the Saatchi Gallery and the Guardian: [View finalists](#)⁹
- "People's Design Award" at Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum: [Submit and vote](#)¹⁰ on nominees

WALL STREET JOURNAL VIDEO

[WSJ.com reporter Andrew LaVallee](#)¹¹ discusses how New York's Museum of Modern Art is soliciting entries for an upcoming video exhibit.

draws on stop-motion animation and still photography, while Vladimir Ristic's [submission](#)¹³ superimposes actors' mouths on a wedding photo to make the couple appear to sing. [One](#)¹⁴ of the most popular finalists (viewed more than 1,600 times) captured Ms. London's attention with muted colors that evoke a vintage issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* -- "kind of a 1950s aesthetic," she said.

Although the curator's role is changed, if not diminished, when users are helping select works, Ms. London said she welcomes the input. "I've done, in a way, my part," she said. "It is a community art project, so I'm game to go with that."

When visitors to sites like Flickr and YouTube post encouraging comments, it can prompt more artists to take their photos and other digital creations to galleries, said Jen Bekman, owner of an eponymous photography gallery in New York City. But user-contributed sites can also be hotbeds of sharp criticism, especially when anonymous visitors can issue ratings and comments.

For Jacob Strick, one of the Penguin Brothers (the other is his brother Samuel, a freshman at New York's Parsons School of Design), the free-for-all judging is one of the downsides of the Residents contest. "I'm not so hot on that part. I'm wary of most user-content-submitted Web sites," said Mr. Strick, a sophomore at Vassar College. Only one comment has been posted on YouTube about the brothers' video so far: "Not the best. Reminds me somewhat of 'Vileness Fats' [another Residents work]. But, not as cool."

"I'll never know why it's not as cool, or not the best," said Mr. Strick. "I really don't take the YouTube opinion into account -- that the hard work that my brother and I have done is three out of five little red stars." Still, he said, it is hard not to keep an eye on the number of views the video is racking up. "It becomes a bit of a drug," he said.

Paul Still agrees, even though his [submission](#)¹⁵ didn't make the MoMA short list. The 36-year-old Gainesville, Fla., artist posted it to YouTube shortly after seeing the official selections, and labeled his with similar keywords, such as "theresidents," "eyeball" and "moma."

"I wanted people to see my video," Mr. Still said. Thanks to his clever tagging, it has

been viewed more than 1,000 times, more than some of the videos selected as finalists. He said he is embarrassed to admit how often he visits YouTube to check the video's traffic. "It's totally ruling my life right now."

Write to Andrew LaVallee at andrew.lavallee@wsj.com¹⁶

URL for this article:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB116040543414086891.html>

Hyperlinks in this Article:

- (1) http://www.youtube.com/profile_videos?user=theresidentsmoma
- (2) http://www.youtube.com/profile_videos?user=theresidentsmoma
- (3) <http://www.moma.org/>
- (4) <http://www.residents.com/>
- (5) <http://www.myspace.com/theresidents>
- (6) http://www.youtube.com/profile_videos?user=theresidentsmoma
- (7) http://www.pacemacgill.com/exhibitions_flickr06.php
- (8) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/selfportrait/clusters/>
- (9) <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/flash/page/0,,1864683,00.html>
- (10) <http://www.peoplesdesignaward.org/>
- (11) [http://www.openwin.com/public/page/8_0004.html?bcpid=86195573&bclid=86272812&bctid=261086721', 'videoplayer', 993, 529, 'off', true, 0, 0, true\); void\(''\); return false;](http://www.openwin.com/public/page/8_0004.html?bcpid=86195573&bclid=86272812&bctid=261086721', 'videoplayer', 993, 529, 'off', true, 0, 0, true); void(''); return false;)
- (12) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrQINrpZ6ok>
- (13) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlLmU7Csf-w>
- (14) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cknwx0THV_g
- (15) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLwNk9aC3H8>
- (16) <mailto:andrew.lavallee@wsj.com>

Copyright 2006 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.