

New Media Scan 2002

Making art, opinion, money

Keith Gallasch



Michael Goldberg, *Auriferous - The Gold Project*,
2001,
Bathurst Regional Gallery

By their very nature, 2 new shows at Sydney's Artspace tell us that something strange is going on in the world of art. **Distributive justice** (also showing at **Documenta11** in Germany) and **catchafalling knife.com** take us well outside the parameters of our usual gallery experiences, even in these halcyon new media days. In one the gallery-goer becomes a participant in an international polling of national attitudes to social justice, in the other we witness a share market trader-cum-artist gambling \$50,000 of his anonymous sponsors' very real money on NewsCorp shares for 3 weeks. The seriousness of both works is immediately evident, but a sense of playfulness, of art cogently querying opinion and money making pervades. Both can be experienced in situ or online, though it's the gallery which provides something more substantial, but is it art?

Distributive justice

I met the Croatia artist Andreja Kuluncic, creator of **Distributive justice**, just before her show opened here. The project is multimedia and multidisciplinary. Kuluncic says that "it lives on the internet but comes

into direct contact with people during big exhibitions like Documenta.” She calls the work “a social laboratory where the audience actively influence the content, the duration and the results of the project.” The open installation is an inviting forum—the curve of the furniture provides desktop space and room to sit at computers (where you play games) and monitors (watching interviewees from other showings talk about their share of ‘the common good’) or to read books, documents or a social economy map or to simply fill in questionnaires, to meet other people and the human guides to the work. “It’s not just a mouse and keyboard show, besides the galleries still do not accept virtual arts as true value... Web art pieces still encounter the resistance of curators.”

The show’s catalogue describes the virtual space of the work as an internet game “in which participants...freely distribute material and non-material goods, building a society that undergoes dynamic changes; several types of society emerge as a result.” The combination of online game, questionnaire results, recorded interviews, a newsletter, associated lectures and forums with philosophers and sociologists involved in the project, and statistical analyses, add up to an intriguing survey of intuitive and objective responses to the notion of social justice and its distribution in a nation. All of this is integrated on the web in a permanently open forum.

I ask Kuluncic about her artistic input into the work. “I am managing the project like a visual artist, trying to create the platform or the frame for other people to join. There are now around 15 people working with me: 7 people more or less continuously, though not every day—2 philosophers, a sociologist, web designers and a programmer. I talk with the designers...Sometimes it’s not easy, you have to fit the different ideas in. It’s like working as a film director. The concept is not so much visual as that art can open up barriers and make a good platform for discussion, to be somehow much more alive, near to real problems and **life**.”

Kuluncic describes the work’s travels: “The work has been to the Torino Biennale, Documenta and is on its way to Innsbruck (Austria), Berlin, and Minneapolis (Walker Museum), sometimes all of it, sometimes as in Sydney, just 2 or 3 parts. In the US I would like to add a new part. I don’t know what it is yet, something about how the US approaches global distribution. They have a big share in it compared with us in Croatia with 4 million people.”

Has the work been shown in Croatia? “We did the initial surveys and discussions there but the finished work will go to Croatia later. That’s the idea, the Croatians will be able to see the different models of

social justice. This piece comes from Eastern Europe. My grandmother was born in a kingdom, then there was socialism under Tito, there was a war and now we have this wild capitalism... It's not clear what kind of capitalism we are going to have. We want to raise this question to the people because they still don't take enough part in political life. In socialism someone would care about everything for you, your flat, your education. Now it's **my** flat, **my** education... but it's not easy to resource and resolve this." One thing that pleases Kuluncic is the arts funding from the Croatia government and the city of Zagreb that has allowed a provocative work like **Distributive justice** to be realised, along with the international galleries and biennales showing it.

Distributive justice has the potential for provocation, but what kind? In the catalogue, Nevena Tudor comments: "There's no so-called direct action that results in something visible, aggressive. It's about the use of intellectual activism, establishing a network of relations to function as a platform every act can rely upon... The action is without provocation, the action that actually means contemplation: gaining space for contemplation."

catchafallingknife.com



Michael Goldberg, *Auriferous - The Gold Project*, 2001, Bathurst Regional Gallery

Michael Goldberg is a Sydney-based artist and a former share market day trader who says, "I see stock as a living, breathing organism." What grabbed you? I ask. "Greed!" he jokes. When did it start? "I was sucked in by the Telstra sales share and was a day trader for a while. I enjoyed the click of the button, the knife edge." Goldberg researched candlestick charting which was originally created to monitor stock ("Rene Rivkin thinks it's a joke") and thought it looked very much like art making.

As for his role in his daily dealings and his appearance at Artspace, he is emphatic: “I am not being a stock trader. I’m playing one. I’m going to work like a day trader for 3 weeks at Artspace.” He adds, “I am not a performance artist.”

Of course, performance artists are usually themselves. Goldberg will be himself. Performance artists work in real time, and often see the sustained duration of that time as significant. Goldberg will respond to market movements, trading his sponsors’ \$50,000 in Newscorp shares for 3 weeks. If it was his money the performance artist label might fit—the whole event could turn into a financially self-lacerating misadventure. Or it might turn a profit for his anonymous backers. “Catching a falling knife” is stock trader jargon for taking especially risky trades.

Goldberg initially put the idea out on the web, provoking responses like “You’re an artist, you’re mad”, until people realised he was serious. His backers declared a long held interest in being patrons of art. But, they asked, what are your skills as a trader? To prove himself he had to make some convincing market predictions. He did. The anonymous syndicate came good with the money. Goldberg himself will not make money out of the performance, which is the way he wants it. Australia Council funding will look after installation and other costs (he usually teaches at the Sydney College of Arts).

The installation at Artspace will be, he says, “virtual site specific, taking place in the cyber world of the stock market.” His focus will be on Newscorp shares only, “riding the stock like a horse. It’s a trading project, not investment. It’s very short term, minute by minute, In 2 to 5 minutes you can buy big chunks of Newscorp at any time, play it up or down. It demands absolute concentration...80% of share traders don’t make any money.”

Goldberg says he will become “an agent of risk and reward; my investors know the odds, they’re big gamblers who can afford it. The added value for them is the involvement in the arts.” He will report to them every day, which involves “a stressful accounting procedure, with public access via the project website.” In Artspace you’ll be able to see him at work (he’ll commute from home) in the mornings, trading (in the afternoons he will have his portable electronic trading system with him, clipped into his belt), posting charts, watching the Bloomberg channel.

I ask what if something major happens, a new Gulf War? Goldberg retorts, “People won on 9/11, bet on the stock going down.” At the time he posted a

message suggesting that these winners donate some of their earnings to Red Cross.

As for art, “There’s an aesthetic in the markets, otherwise there is no point in doing this. Art has to emerge as in the Deleuzian rhizome...like an organism.” The candlestick chart patterns will build up. The Japanese names for the movements are lyrical and translate, for example, as ‘paper umbrella’ and ‘dragonfly’. “Each pattern represents a probability—it feels analogous to martial arts, where you look at the probability of moves and move with them.”

And, yes, Goldberg will be available to engage with the public, which reminds him of his last installation where he monitored gold share movements (there’s an open cut gold mine outside the city and the show at Bathurst Regional Gallery was part of the **Auriferous** project). He had to put up a disclaimer saying that he couldn’t offer investment advice. For that installation Goldberg commuted daily from Sydney, stopping off at the Stock Exchange. He then travelled by small aeroplane to Bathurst to his scaffolding roost in the gallery. There he was surrounded by mats he could fall onto if there was a big dip in the market. In this work he saw his art as portrayal of the “relocation of the value of gold from the dusty hinterland to the stock exchange.” The difference this time, he says, is that he’s very anxious, working with real money.

Distributive justice, **Andrja Kuluncic and collaborators, Sept 19-Oct 12**, www.distributive-justice.com; catchafallingknife.com, **Michael Goldberg, Oct 17-Nov 9**, www.catchafallingknife.com. Artspace, Sydney.



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