Virtual museum

Adobe creates media for the masses. Will it display mainstream art as well?

As a graphic artist I visit a lot of websites devoted to professional artists. They're sites that artists and graphic designers find interesting, but don't necessarily appeal to the general public. **Adobemuseum.com** is a site that may connect with a broader audience.

Adobe is a company whose products touch the lives of almost everyone in some fashion. A majority of the software used by professionals who design printed materials and websites, or who shoot photos or video comes from Adobe. That means anyone who has ever read a book, newspaper, magazine or business card, and anyone who has ever visited a website, and anyone who has ever used a professional photographer has interacted with a product that Adobe had a hand in making. The brandname of one of their most well-known programs, Photoshop, has become a verb in popular usage.

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InSites

The site's official name is Adobe Museum of Digital Media and its mission is to showcase the latest and greatest digital artwork. It promises to be "an ever-changing repository of eclectic exhibits." Industry leaders in art, technology and business will be called upon to curate and comment on the virtual exhibits.

Impressive but slow

When you first visit the site it takes a surprisingly long time to load considering it represents one of the leading technology companies in the world. Once it does load, there's an impressive video introduction that shows the museum as a futuristic, scuptural skyscraper located in major cities around the world.

The virtual tour guide, which is a really cool computer-generated cross between a jellyfish, a robot and an eyeball, then takes you through the building while the voice of Isabella Rosalinni narrates. The tour concludes in the atrium, which is occupied by a spinning animation of the building, a spinning tour guide and a creepy, twitching eyeball.

The building image has links to replays of the intro and a video of how the museum was created, including using actual architects to design the virtual building. The tour guide image is a link to a message from the museum's curator, and the eyeball is a link to the museum's first exhibit.

In the eye of the beholder

The exhibit "Uncanny Valley" is by American artist Tony Oursler. It was designed specifically for the Adobe Museum's first exhibit. The artist explains the Uncanny Valley as a theory that states the closer machines come to mimicking the human form the more disturbing they become. He postulates that the Internet mirrors the human consciousness in this same manner.

In his exhibit, he attempts to create the types of linkages between different subjects that drive the Internet. It's a visually engaging mix of video, graphics, audio and interactivity with a touch of darkness. Bizarre floating heads with macabre makeup offer what's supposed to be insightful commentary when you click on them.

The exhibit allows the virtual museum to mimic actual brick and mortar art museums in an unintended way. Art is subjective by nature, but it seems that some art museums exhibit truly amazing works alongside bizarre pieces that leave me scratching my head, wondering who would ever consider hanging them on a wall.

Tremendous potential

That being said, I think the Adobe Museum has tremendous potential. Visit many digital artists' and graphic design firms' websites and you'll see an abundance of amazing work being created every day around the world using electronic media. A site dedicated to showing, explaining and preserving that work is a must. If the Adobe site makes an effort to exhibit the work of the numerous talented professionals out there, and not just the elitist material that turns off the general public, it will be worth visiting again and again.

There are sections on the site for comments, biographies, a site map, becoming a member, an about section and a calendar of upcoming exhibits.

The site is visually compelling with sophisticated video and animations throughout. This rich media comes with a price though — individual pages load at an unforgivably slow rate. It's hard to fathom that a company as technologically proficient as Adobe would build a site that loads so slowly.

Adobe is a company that creates sophisticated software that design professionals use to create media for the man on the street. If it continues that philosophy with the Adobe Museum of Digital Media and brings beautiful works by talented people to everyone else, it will have created something truly special.

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