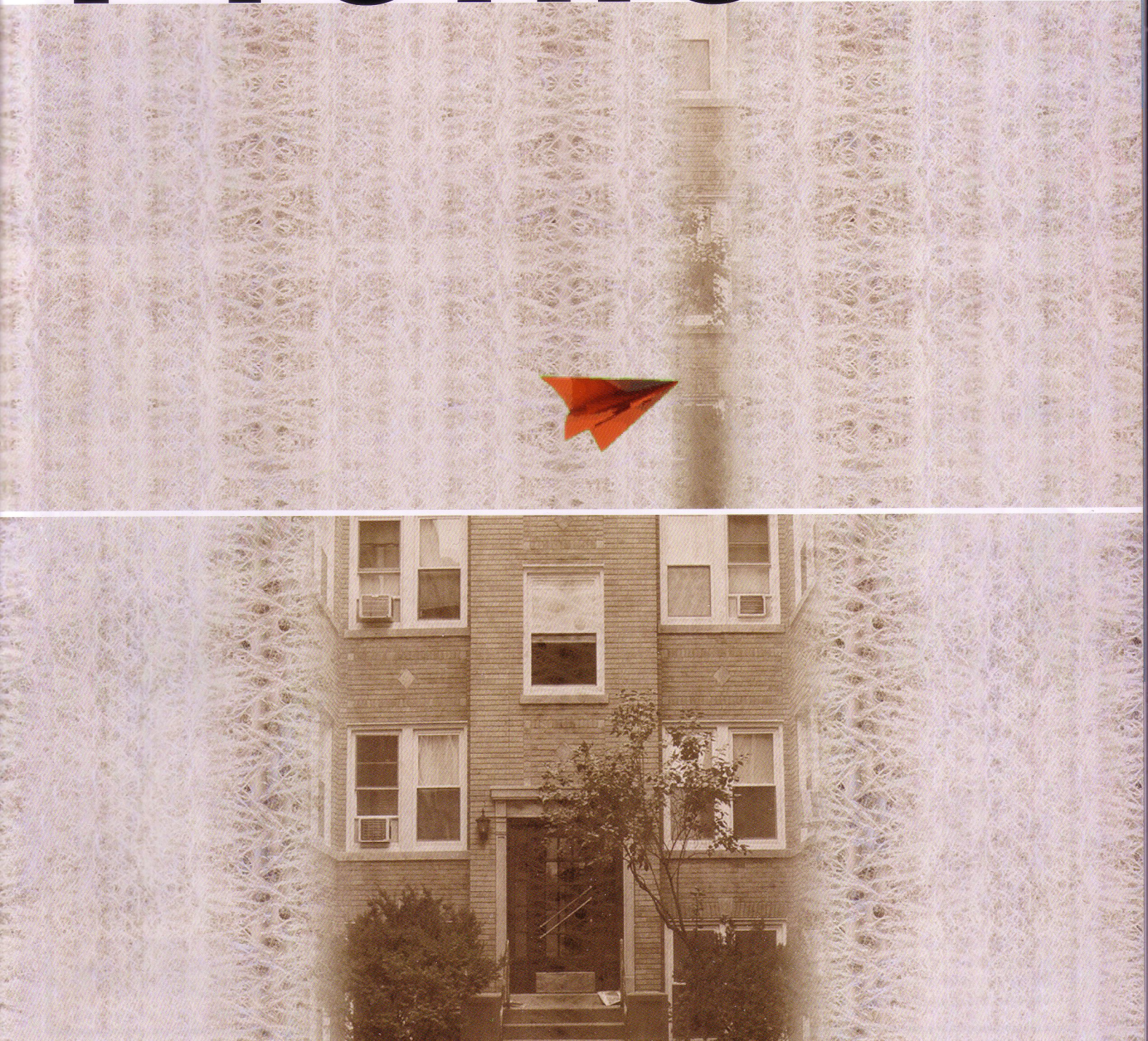# Columbia

COLLEGE CHICAGO

Profile

iam
Interactive Arts + Media

Fall_2008

# faculty profile/

Theresa_Devine Artist Portfolio: www.theresadevine.com

by Steven Beach Art is an object, idea or experience that transcends and becomes more than the sum of its parts. This is a phrase that Theresa Devine lives by and, a long time from now, will die by. This is her definition of art. In her classroom this definition is the core of her teaching. Through lectures, PowerPoint presentations, various videos on the web and in-class assignments, Theresa encourages and pushes her students to develop unique, individual, artistic identities. Not only does she challenge and inspire her students, but teaches them to not merely entertain the masses, but to add value to our society through their work. As a former student of Theresa's I could have written pages about the things I've learned and observed in her classroom throughout the semester. But this isn't my story to tell — it's hers.
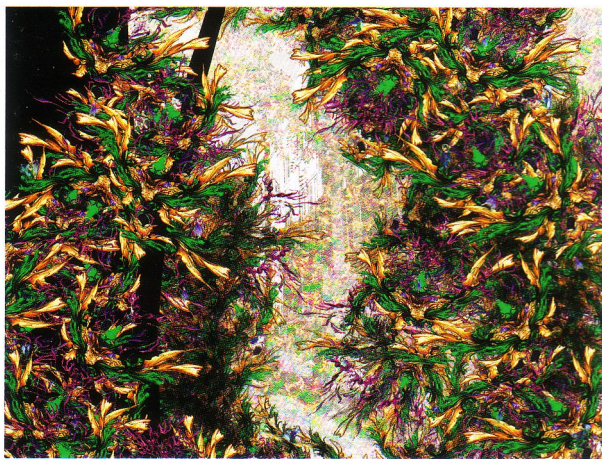
HN163500 Feb 06,2007
30" x 42"digital print
from the *Not in my Neighborhood* series

What is your educational background?

In May of 1991, I achieved a Bachelor of Fine Arts with an emphasis in Painting and Printmaking from Texas A&M at Corpus Christi. In May of 1994, I also earned a Master of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of Houston. In April of 2002, I fulfilled the requirements for a Microsoft Certified Solution Developer designation.

Where were you before you started teaching at Columbia?

I have been making my living as a programmer for 10 years with various corporate IT teams. Before that, I taught art at Junior High and K-8 schools in Houston. I was also a teaching fellow during graduate school where I taught color theory and drawing. I am also currently a resident artist at the Chicago Printmakers Collaborative.

How did you become interested in programming and video games?

I was looking for a medium that would afford me a larger audience. Painting seemed impotent to deliver a message to an audience: A gallery wall is too isolated from the mainstream and it seemed arrogant for me to expect that a larger audience would seek me out. I decided to take my message to the people. This also coincided with my daughter becoming a gamer (she was in third grade) as I realized that the inclusion of interaction and time within the video-game medium gave me more tools to communicate with my audience in addition to providing access to a larger venue. This motivated me to learn how to build games.

You transitioned from teaching only programming at Columbia to teaching programming and game design. How did you acquire the game-design class?

I can only speculate as to the reason, but I suspect because I'm teaching "concept" within the programming class and this got the attention of the faculty. When the question came up as to who would teach the design class, I believe I might have been chosen because of my interest in "concept."

What were your expectations with your first design class and were they met by the end of the semester?

I wanted to give my students the tools to be leaders in the industry. To me, the tool most necessary for this is to be self-aware of a creative identity. Any English major can write specification documents, but a game-design leader will be a mature artist in control of their medium. By the end of the semester, all my students found a beginning of a creative identity and created their first game design based on it. I was really pleased with the results.

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Video still

What is the most important thing you want your students to walk away with?

First, I would like my students to have knowledge of their importance within the creative class and the importance of the role the creative class plays in contributing economically and creatively to society. Students also need to understand that games have a tremendous ability to communicate to a larger audience: This gives great power and with this power comes great responsibility.

Second, it is my goal for my students to become self-aware and familiar with their creative identity. It is also important that they obtain practical tools and skills not just to survive, but to thrive. I would also like them to be able to synergize their creative identity with their practical tools to make the next generation of games truly amazing.

In a classroom, learning goes both ways. What have you learned from teaching classes on programming and now design?

My students help keep me aware of what is going on in the game industry and popular culture. They show me links, bring in articles and feed my game and creative craving. This is non-monetary remuneration which happens in the classroom as a result of the synergistic environment. I love what I am doing and the students in my classroom become energized and, thus, are willing collaborators and creators. We share the excitement between us freely.

Every student I taught last semester had a moment of brilliance when they showed me a beginning of their greatness. This gave me great joy and excitement about perhaps collaborating with them creatively one day. I am so eager to begin a future when I can hire the people I am training and enjoy a professional, creative relationship every day.

Also, in my quest to help my students grow, I strive to discover new ways of presenting information, to pull self-awareness out of my students and help them learn to synergize. While this is very challenging, this process of teaching makes one a better teacher.

Ludology and narratology are two different approaches to game design. You've coined the term "conceptualist" in regard to game design and believe this is a third approach that should be considered when designing a game. What is a conceptualist and how does it compare to the other two approaches?

A conceptualist begins a game design with a concept. I define concept to be an idea that creates a transcendent moment for the audience. This idea is what drives the design. All choices — including aesthetics, level design, sound, gameplay, etc. — are governed by the idea.

For a conceptualist, the experience of the game is orchestrated by the designer to communicate a larger concept. This is different from ludology. A ludologist will explore games for games' sake and does not care about an idea or story when designing a game. However, if a ludologist is completely pure in his/her quest to make games for games' sake, he/she is inherently a conceptualist because the idea of games for games' sake is driving the work.

Pure ludologists are the minimalists of the game world. For narratologists, the story comes first. But, I believe this is putting the cart before the horse because a good story always has a larger concept behind it. Yet, for many, this approach works well. The Final Fantasy franchise is an excellent example of a narratologist approach. Their stories are very interesting and entertaining but the concepts found within the story are weak. The games they create are fun and engaging but do not provide any transcendent moments for the player.

What are some of the major pillars (ideas, statements) you stand by when it comes to art and game design?

First, concept is the compass for art produced in the game medium. Second, entertainment and conceptual depth are not mutually exclusive. And third, art can change the world.

When did you first realize video games could be art?

When the *Mortal Kombat* movie came out in 1995, it collided with frustration I experienced communicating with an audience and inspired me to mainstream my artwork. This decision was solidified in 1997 when *Final Fantasy VII* was released. As I explored the game, I started redesigning the game in my head to satisfy my need for conceptual depth. It was at this juncture I realized games could be a true art medium.

How did you come to create your definition of art?

Every artist has to decide for themselves what art is so that they have overriding criteria for what they do. I was initially influenced by Joseph Beuys when he said, "Jeder Mensch ein Künstler" ("Everyone is an artist"). I adopted his philosophy when I started to think, "Everything is a medium." A natural extension of this would be, "Everything is art." But that is too simplistic and not true for me. As tried to define art for myself, I asked, "What is important?" I struggled with that question for a while when I decided it was easier to answer the question, "What is not important?"

One aspect I define as not important is the physical manifestation of a work of art. How something becomes manifest is merely a byproduct of the exploration of the artist which is further interpreted by the viewer/interactor. A work of art is just like a person, in that it is not only what it looks like, but also the life that resides within. That it has a physical presence of any kind is only so we know it exists, after which, we can begin to engage and attempt to understand.

What is the "it"? "It" is the transcendent moment that is passed from one person to another through the work of art. From there, it is only a small leap to say, "Art is an object, idea or experience that transcends and becomes more than the sum of its parts." This is vastly different than, "Art is everything." I draw the line there because it is the transcendent moment which sets art apart, and not all objects, ideas and ex-

Game Screen Shot
Out of control - every key you press causes something to happen but you have no idea what will happen next. It is a windows game.

periences have a transcendent moment. This definition gives me the freedom to produce transcendent moments in any medium appropriate for the message. It is also an extension of the Bauhaus adage, "Form follows function."

Which video games today you would consider art?
BioShock, Deus Ex, Thief, WOW: Fury of the Sunwell, WOW: The Black Temple, WOW: Gods of Zul'Aman.

Do you think there will be a golden age for art games, where they'll be part of the mainstream? Is this something in the near future or for years to come?
It's happening now! The evidence is found in games like *Bio-Shock* and WOW's release of *Fury of the Sunwell*. The popularity of these games is very encouraging. The rise of the creative class is underway because the demand for conceptual depth is rising. The audience is demanding entertainment which satisfies their sophistication and does not insult their intelligence. It is a good time to be an artist and a very exciting time to be making games.

What is Toxic Interactive, LLC?
TI is a startup limited liability corporation that creates video games which transcend and become more than the sum of their parts. The games produced will help to initiate a new dawn of awareness, social responsibility, creative and critical

thinking and that these contributions will enrich all of our lives. At the moment, TI is comprised of a lawyer, an accountant and me. I am the CEA (Chief Executive Artist). The title Chief Executive Artist is a title I made up to describe what I do within the company. It is a combination of the traditional roles of CEO and Creative Director. The creative direction of the company is directly tied to the growth of the company and a CEA is able to bridge the gap between the business and creative production.

TI has realized these milestones: In October of 2007, TI became incorporated in Illinois; in April of 2008, the TI website was launched, the trademark for "Toxic" was filed and the first downloadable game bearing the trademark was posted for distribution.

The current focus of Toxic Interactive is to accept submissions for game-idea documents and independent games to sell online, and to collect resumes to assemble a team. This will enable me to open the doors to a brick-and-mortar location. I will choose resumes for a team of 40 employees for the purpose of obtaining start-up funds from investors. 15 of the 40 slots will be junior positions.

Besides Toxic Interactive, your day job, and teaching at Columbia, are you currently working on any projects?
Yes, I have five other projects. The first one is called Calcu-

HN229539 Apr 22,2007
30" x 42" digital print
from the *Not in my Neighborhood* series

lated Leap. This is a book which tries to define and solve the problem, "Why are artists starving?" I am also working on a companion site which will give tools to artists to start their own businesses. The motivation of this book and website is to help others help themselves. As I discover the tools and information needed to save myself from the plight of the "starving artist," I am passing on the information. In short, if I need it, others will need it, and I'm going to tell them what I know to help them. You can sign up to be notified of the launch of the book and website here: leap.theresadevine.com

> # A work of art is just like a person, in that it is not only what it looks like, but also the life that resides within. That it has a physical presence of any kind is only so we know it exists, after which, we can begin to engage and attempt to understand.

My second project is "Not In My Neighborhood." This is a series of prints, videos and simple games which incorporate beauty imagery into locations of domestic battery found within a half mile of my home for the year 2007. I strive to give each location a release from its violent identity through the amalgam of beauty imagery. This work makes the point that this violence is found everywhere, even in neighborhoods that are considered good places to live. Each piece is titled with the police report number of the incident. I consider this project—and all traditional studio work— conceptual research and development for future games. To view the portfolio, browse to: nimn.theresadevine.com

My third project is "Unspoken." This is a series of photos and merchandise which make visible the subtext of our lives. Most of the "Unspokens" are inspired by co-workers. I also consider this conceptual research and development for future games. To view the portfolio and purchase Unspoken merchandise, visit: unspoken.theresadevine.com

My fourth project is The Visual Literacy Organization. This organization will be a non-profit. At the moment, it is merely a twinkle in my eye. The vision is to advocate for art and counteract the downward spiral that has been set in motion since 1989, or so, when Jesse Helms crusaded against Robert Mapplethorpe. The mission is to marshal resources to spread visual literacy, create an art public-relation campaign, encourage artists to position their artwork in the mainstream and create a national, non-government endowment for the arts. The strategies I propose to utilize is to revise conceptions of what art education is, change the way art is taught K-12, create pragmatic career options for art graduates and influence public and private funding for the arts. One of the first projects of this organization will be to finish the curriculum I started when I was teaching K-8 and distribute it to teachers for free via art evangelists. literacy.theresadevine.com

And my last project is a collaboration with a garment and textile factory in Pakistan. They saw my portfolio and are interested in producing the aesthetics of the "Not In My Neighborhood" beauty imagery on clothes. It is very exciting to me that "The Beauty Within" could literally be visible on the person wearing it. I will probably pursue this as well. It will be a collaborative effort between fashion designers, the garment/textile factory and me.

Where do you think video games will be ten years from now?
The demand for entertainment that satisfies the audience's sophistication and does not insult their intelligence is rising. This demand will push companies to rise to the challenge of producing products to satisfy these expectations. Video games will be on the bleeding edge of this larger market shift. The games that will rise to the top of the market will be ones that understand this and utilize conceptual sophistication in their design. The video-game medium will mature as works of art are produced and the standards for greatness within the art community will be implemented. The MFA is truly the new MBA and we will see this take hold in all industries in the very near future. I am very excited to be alive right now and to be an artist. The whole world is a canvas now. ⚡