

What you see is almost what you get

<http://www.idealword.org>

'What You See Is What You Get' (WYSIWYG) is a term meaning that what you see on the screen is what you will get on output. However for artists who produce work that is output online, the reality is that what you see is almost never what you get, or more specifically what *someone else* will get. The sheer number of platforms, processor speeds, browser softwares, screen resolutions, font size settings etc. means that a piece is rarely the same on the artist's screen as it is will be on the screens of the audiences.

Rather than battling against the huge fluidity of viewing conditions, idealword.org actively explores this intrinsic feature of digital art - what you see is *almost* what you get. For site creator Enrique Radigales, this 'almost' describes "a blurred circumstance, a space for the translation between the digital and analogue states, the relationship between the contemporary human being and its coexistence with computerized environments."

On first appearance, IdealWord is a periodically updated gallery of computer-assisted sketches. In the piece *EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE* [http://www.idealword.org/sucker/61_ei], we see twelve figures in suits. The scene is familiar: posture and proximity of the twelve suggests they are jurors, yet the large size of the image (2290 x 1215 pixels) requires the viewer to scroll horizontally and vertically, observing individuals or small groups instead of the twelve as a whole. This method of 'partial display' - large images that require scrolling to view - is intentionally used by Enrique to further draw our attention to the peculiarities of the author/viewer relationship, as well as to focus our attention on the composition and drawing technique itself.

The visual style of Enrique's work is an intriguing blend of hand and computer drawn. The process he terms 'MouseStrokes' involves creating each image line-by-line, a technique that has more in common with engraving than the processes normally used in the creation of digital images. This makes the site visually unique - there are not many sketch artists who would choose such a laborious method - but the implication of engraving is a clever one, as the reproduction of engravings through printing can also be seen as a much earlier form of "what you see is almost what you get".

In keeping with the tradition of reproduction, each piece on IdealWord is available as a downloadable pdf for viewing and printing offline. Enrique again anticipates the slippage from artist to viewer, and highlights the

problem of 'correct' reproductions, by providing (different) A1 or A4 pdfs of the same image, in addition to the myriad options found within each user's pdf viewing software and printing hardware: "the home printing revolution... offers a different reading of the serialization of a contemporary work: each user has a copy according to his/her printer and the paper he/she uses."

Yet IdealWord's beauty is not merely surface deep. Each drawing contains texts that have been visually camouflaged within the image. These hidden texts - in a variety of styles, and from often surprising sources - are visible by selecting and copy-pasting the piece into a blank text document, or by viewing the HTML source code.

For example, in *EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE* the sub-text is taken from an article describing software "mind tools" and the development of artificial emotional intelligence via biofeedback, psychometrics or other computer-human interaction. A dynamic relationship is created from title to image, image to text, and text back to title; in this case perhaps asking us to question 'emotional intelligence' in a general philosophical sense and in the specific practical case of the psychometric testing of jurors.

In *DIGITAL VS ANALOGICAL* [<http://www.idealword.org/sucker/023>] the surface image depicts two wrestling figures (D & A?). Copy-pasting the page into a basic text editor reveals the letters of 'digital' and 'analogical' repeated as a process poem, formatted precisely with underscore lines. However we again experience the slippage from author to viewer: the way we actually see this poem depends entirely on our hardware and software settings.

There are more ambiguities. Copy-pasting each page into a more 'advanced' text editor such as Word will only copy the image and not the hidden text. Alternatively, if we view the text within the HTML source code, it naturally appears punctuated by code tags (D etc) - and although these tags may seem to be extraneous noise, we see in the pdf versions that these code tags often remain, though their formatting and appearance is now fixed. The texts sometimes also appear as illegible transcriptions over the image, creating what Enrique calls "stains of text": used as an illustrative compositional technique (creating depth and texture), but also to offer yet another alternative appreciation of the text with image.

Despite the multiple levels of intention and interpretation, one of the first things you notice about IdealWord is the lack of pretension. We see a piece as soon as we arrive on the site, and there is pleasantly little in the way of artist's statements and other pre-explanatory blurbs. Of course, the visitor will see as much as they want to see: the sub-texts are hidden, and

therefore could be completely missed by the casual viewer. But the success of IdealWord is that it can be appreciated on any level, and we are perhaps made more aware that the choice of what to make of each piece we see is *always* up to us. Through this simple trick of emphasising the variety of possible 'ways of seeing', Enrique shows a great understanding of the constraints - what you see is almost what you get - and the possibilities of the digital medium: "The work created by digital artists is ready to develop its own language and a discourse specific of new media and, more specifically, of net art. It would be a mistake to ignore the possibilities of the metanarrative within this process. While we walk along this way towards a specific language we cannot create digital shadows following our analogue equivalents."

Quotes taken from email interview with CJ, 02/2005; translation provided by Gemma Deza, www.gemmadeza.com

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