

ART

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Weaving
a Web

Versteeg uses Internet
as source for
fascinating exhibition

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Like plenty of artists, Siebren Versteeg plunges his hands into the chaos of the world, rearranges it a bit and pulls out a certain kind of individualized beauty. But unlike any other artist I've heard of, Versteeg creates that beauty through the wonders of WiFi Internet access and Google Image Search.

In an exciting exhibition that merges new technology with traditional presentation,

REVIEW

WHAT: "Siebren Versteeg: Identifying Hedges"

WHEN: Through July 11

WHERE: Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, 341 Delaware Ave.

TICKETS: Free

INFO: 854-1694 or www.hallwalls.org

Versteeg presents a series of works so closely tied to our digital culture that they morph in real-time to reflect changes in the online world.

The show, titled "Identifying Hedges," isn't an esoteric exercise where viewers sit down at a computer terminal and log onto some virtual art gallery in Second Life. Versteeg's objects, like any oil painting or bronze sculpture, only require you to look at them and absorb what they offer.

In Versteeg's "Triptych," three plasma screen monitors are set up side by side vertically, their plastic frames sheathed in gold leaf to mimic the classic presentation of



Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News

Siebren Versteeg's "Triptych" features three gold-framed plasma screen monitors that constantly download and display images from Google.

a triptych painting. Through a bit of computer programming wizardry, Versteeg has rigged the monitors to display segmented images culled from Google Image Search, using only the search term "triptych."

What pops up may be an image of a painting above someone's couch; a shot from the current Francis Bacon retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City; or something completely random, like an advertisement for a European cell phone company. The work becomes a constantly rotating slideshow of Internet-dwelling eye-candy, pulling from more than 1 million search results that are constantly expanded and updated. Instead of giving us a painting in the classic sense, Versteeg presents a morphing portrait of an evolving

digital landscape packaged in a form we're all used to appreciating in art museums, galleries and apartment walls.

On the wall next to "Triptych" sits Versteeg's "Diptych," which operates on a similar principle. Instead of simply fading in and out, the images in "Diptych" simply stream upward, presenting an endless procession of bullet casings and junior high school portraits, amateur art projects and Polaroids of beloved pets. It's quotidian beauty presented in a whole new light.

Another large-scale piece, "Whole Earth," creates a kind of loaded landscape in which the sky is arrayed with search results for "heaven" and the ground below contains images labeled "hell." It's a world constructed out of rotating pop cultural fragments

— including advertisements for "Drag Me to Hell" and "The Edge of Heaven."

In a separate space, Versteeg's video "Prop," as well as a gigantic, computer-generated canvas titled "Ideas" provide ample food for thought, but it's the three main video works that deserve the lion's share of attention.

With the work in "Identifying Hedges," Versteeg is not just entering fascinating new artistic territory, though surely he's doing that. Like Jennifer Steinkamp and others who have refused to cower in front of the digital specter or to allow it to water down their ideas, Versteeg is creating an elegant new kind of art that stands up easily against the old.

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