

DALLAS WINTER MEDIANALE 2015



Webcam Venus

Addie Wagenknecht & Pablo Garcia, Webcam Venus (2013), 2:41 min.

Parental advisory: This program contains nudity.

The following info was provided by the artists.

“I know it when I see it.”

—US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, on the elusive definition of hardcore pornography, 1964.

If asked if there is a difference between the Renaissance painting *The Birth of Venus* (1486) and a *Playboy* centerfold, most might say it's no contest: one is art and the other pornography. One is of human ideals, the other smut. Are Botticelli and Hugh Hefner really that different? Both project fantasy and erotic imagery through the media of their day. Both are vehicles of gender politics, defining standards of beauty and sexuality. What if adult performers—already mediated sex objects—struck “classic” poses?

In *Webcam Venus*, we asked online sexcam performers to replicate iconic works of art. This piece is an experimental homage to both fine art and the lowbrow internet phenomenon of cams. Sexcams use webcams and chat interfaces to connect amateur adult performers with an audience. Users log on to see men, women, transsexuals, couples and groups broadcast their bodies and sexuality live for the public, often performing for money. To create this experiment in high and low brow media, we assumed anonymous handles and spent a few hours each day for a month asking performers: “Would you like to pose for me?”

BEAUTY

What is beauty today? By operating in the language of sexcams, we alter the contemporary ideal of beauty with the ubiquitous display of sexuality online. We challenge the institutions which enforce false perceptions of propriety—via nudity in classical painting—as the only form of acceptable safe-for-work beauty. Publicly presented traditional paintings and sculptures are prevalent with sexuality and gender politics, and yet the display of nudity online is usually defined as ‘pornography’. Amateur adult broadcasters also resist the popular, contemporary definition of beauty. They are not the typical definition of beauty prevalent main

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stream media: heavily Photoshopped image in the name of advertising, which destroys self image and confidence while encouraging materialism. Sexcam performers are the apotheosis of the most honest parts of us and yet typically the least valued part of a society. Even though they are transmitted virtually, they are real people and they are beautiful.

PROCESS

The models are live, and we propose via text chat scroll: “Would you like to pose for me?” or similar. We—like all guests in the cam rooms—only type in limited but sequential lines of text in a chat scroll. The performer can either interact via typing text lines which appear in the chat scroll along with our comments, or speak directly to guests in audible voice. The majority of performers do not speak, even though many have a microphone broadcasting ambient sound like background music. If they respond at all—a lot of hours spent being ignored—we start discussing the pose. We show them an image, either through asking them to do a Google search, or a URL we paste in the chat line. Sometimes we make our avatar profile pic the pose we want so they can click on it directly. They pose, holding for 30-60 seconds. They take direction from us to “correct” their pose. The webcam became the image frame. The performer’s bedrooms or kitchens or bathrooms became the backdrop to these new works and mash-up of histories.

Joint Biographies:

Pablo Garcia and Addie Wagenknecht have been working collaboratively since 2012. Trained in computer science, new media art, film, and architecture, the pair operate through a variety of media, scales, and contexts. Their collaborative work has been featured in such international media as ANIMAL, Vice, Hyperallergic, Canal+ French Television, and many others. In just a short time working together, they have already exhibited internationally from New York City to Copenhagen to international acclaim, with new exhibits planned in Berlin, Paris, and Dublin.

Much of their work is driven by a simple collaborative constraint: Addie and Pablo are not on the same continent. This distance (Innsbruck, Austria to Chicago, USA) fuels their interest in digital spaces, instant communications, net culture, and the nature of reality and virtuality. Their most recent works Webcam Venus (<http://fffff.at/webcamvenus/>), Waiting, and brbxoxo (<http://brbxoxo.com>) explore our intimate screen-based relationships with the digital world.

More about their work can be found here:

Pablo Garcia <http://pablogarcia.org>

Addie Wagenknecht <http://placesiveneverbeen.co>