

Creative Capital

INVESTING IN ARTISTS WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE

John Simon Complicated Boundaries

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New York City-based artist John F. Simon, Jr.'s *Complicated Boundaries* is made up of four acrylic "drawings" created by fitting together differently colored pieces of acrylic (black and white, blue and green, etc.). The piece, which debuted at Sandra Gering Gallery in New York City in 2001, is part of a larger direction in Simon's recent work in which the artist transfers digital technology to analog materials, in this case using a precise, computer-controlled laser cutter to slice through acrylic. Noting his interest in artist M.C. Escher, whose drawings complicate notions of foreground and background, Simon, who studied geology as an undergraduate, Earth and planetary science for his master's degree, and computer art for his MFA, explains that he has always been drawn to the relationship between positive and negative space. "The boundaries in the piece became more and more complicated," says Simon. "I'm especially thinking of the green and blue — is the blue falling into the green? It's like two liquids mixing."

Simon's earlier artworks include *AlterStats-Condition of the Web Observer* (1995), an Internet artwork that returned information to users about their visit to the website. "It would show you a graph of your presence," Simon explains, adding that he likes the idea of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which explores the effect of the observer on the observed. "You couldn't observe the web page without altering it," says Simon.

In his time-based color study *Color Panel*, a version of which (*Color Panel v1.5*) was shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art's prestigious BitStreams show in 2001, Simon explores Bauhaus color theory. "They were very rigorous about defining color rules," he explains. A smaller version of the project, *Color Panel v1.0*, is in the collections of the Guggenheim, Whitney, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Simon's web piece *Every Icon* consists of a square grid of 1,024 squares, 32 rows of 32, which is the size of a desktop icon. The program begins counting through every possible combination of black and white squares. If you watched *Every Icon* run through its entire cycle, theoretically you'd see every icon. According to Simon, however, actually seeing every possible combination is impossible; he calculates that it will take several hundred trillion years before we might begin to see an icon as familiar as the trashcan folder.

Complicated Boundaries continues Simon's ongoing interests in analytical approaches to creativity in general, and in the divide separating analog and digital in particular. "I can take things that I design in software and make them into objects," says Simon, explaining the appeal of the laser cutter. Lately the artist has been using his cutter to experiment with formica, plexiglass, and linoleum. "I like these materials," he says, adding that linoleum looks amazing when it's cut. "I'm starting to call these materials new media," he laughs. "When you take something that has been around, and then apply this digital cutting device, you can create totally new things. I'm very interested in using computers to control the fabrication of things."

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