

## Curator's Statement

“Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight”

By Curtis Stage

2007

Computer-based Art

“Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight” is a click-through-serial-episodic pop heartache. Like all pop heartaches, Curtis Stage's artwork has the “Dream Machine” for a backdrop. The soundtrack (audio for Film and electronic Games are both acknowledged here) draws out Pop Music, filtered, like through a Midi in loops. Curtis applies a working knowledge of old and new school Internet in “Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight”. What distinguishes his offering is an aesthetic headset that insists on contextualizing mind candy in profound, relevant and rich explorations of POV. Self-reference becomes acting, becomes memorializing, becomes revelation, becomes evolution, and becomes critique: which for our purposes (as a sum experience) becomes exposition. If this authorial phenomenon can represent an artistic position, then Mister Stage can represent the borders of a 4D self, a self that's faceted, cocomposed, and layered. The viewer can move through this construct of 4D self, the way one moves through an array of 3D objects in space. I'm thinking specifically of Judd's boxes in the barracks of Marfa, which Curtis and I discussed last Fall...

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Perhaps here, in the interests of transparency, I ought to elaborate on how “Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight” sprouted into existence at ArtMuscle & Art For Humans. (Please note that ArtMuscle & AFH share the artwork equally: “Don't...” exists in both places independently and contingent simultaneously. A viewer can access the work through either “doorway” and experience the work without any further divergence.)

Curtis is my professor at CGU (Final Cut, Computer Processes +). In that capacity, he's been instrumental in the remix and release of the new artforhumans.com portal. His role as “teacher” morphs into a role as “exhibiting artist” in a show I curate fluidly.

Curtis multitasks. This is an asset in 4D production models.

Curtis has put together some heavy credits in cinematic production and is proven as a commercial freelance operator for design projects. His movie/design pro experience, which underscores some of my comments in graph 1 above, facilitates the art. The tools and production process vary little for digital commercial and digital art concerns. The art project, however, develops minus the stricture of cost/benefit analysis. This is critical. Also worth mentioning is how the semiotics/environment vary between the two (commercial versus art), with regards artistic freedom. The entirety of the 4D art project is commodified ultimately, while the commercial project incurs commodification as each production element is made and activated. The latter is parsed for billing purposes. The former is

created on spec and valued upon completion. This dynamic, among other things, encourages aesthetic efficiency or allows for the artist to pursue geometric progressions within a field of exploration. Familiarity with the parameters of both commercial and artistic production affords an artist depth and breadth of vernacular strategies in the current aesthetic discourse (Post-Structuralist/Formalist opposition), which as evidenced in Murakami's strategies is relevant in the contemporary art milieu.

Curtis lectures, presents and curates. I would posit that this experience manifests in the art as generosity towards and consciousness of his audience, a democracy of means, an inclusiveness that is achieved through interface, medium and content. This dynamic is apparent in the best New Media practitioners, especially those who have leveraged skill with gear into a sophisticated re-contextualizing of Art *in toto* to reach the broadest possible audience. An example would be the re-creation, or translation, of the entire Tate collection in online format in a (relatively) universally accessible database. The database cannot replace the Tate collection. It can however supplement it, increase appreciation for it, expose it, and assist it in arguing for its own continued importance as a shared cultural treasure. Note that the Tate collection is flattened in the binary format, and since it is art for humans, just as the web is a medium for humans, the Tate's art approaches personification by a certain aspect of perceptual association. This is an interesting quality of 4D. A sort of consequence can be inferred, an example of which would be the crowd dynamics, the interactive behavior, on display at a typical Free Friday at MOMA. Specifically, I refer to visitors cuing to pose with a famous painting for a camera phone or digital camera snapshot/memento - a 4D variation on the "family portrait." Curtis, by virtue of his academic and curatorial bona fides, knows this phenomenon from the inside and outside, as agent and provocateur.

Curtis makes art and shows it in galleries and museums. This is absolutely essential. I'll try to explain why metaphorically. "Contemporary art" can be likened to an arena. Without the context, the tradition and the language of art, "Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight" can't fulfill its freestyle, free speech function in that arena (of cultural expression/critique, call & response). The artist in this arena functions as a closer (bringing all technical, aesthetic, psychological, etc., threads into a woven form), a perceptual signatory ("I made this, Now"), a cultural emcee or ringleader directing the elements and actors through a performed piece. The artist's name (Curtis Stage) in this 4D Method is a Marquee identifier. When the artist puts his name on the art, he assumes a limited but significant responsibility for the art's causes and effects within the context of the contemporary art arena, and beyond into the general public discourse. The contemporary art arena becomes thereby a manageable microcosm of the general social contract/organism to which it belongs/is attached. Finally, given this virtual/free "architecture," the art (now an agent) is liberated (adopted by the presenter, removed from the artist's studio) to serve as a touchstone for an incredibly complex and valuable exchange with those in the "stands" at the arena, via its exhibition. Hopefully, this event will incite and inspire an expanded exchange in the broader social arena, as a generative effect.

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Curtis exhibited “Pop Bastard” at Fringe Exhibitions (Chinatown, LA) last fall. “Don’t Fall Apart on Me Tonight extends and reformats some of the technical/aesthetic/conceptual threads Curtis wove through “Pop Bastard.” One of the bitchin features of this installation (“Pop Bastard”) was a custom interface designed by the artist, which embedded chance into viewer interaction with the artistic content. The console did not advise the viewer, or give meaning or direction to the pushing of buttons by the viewer (as in a gaming joystick). The panel of colored buttons was pretty on a pedestal, was visually pleasing in its design. The GUI taken as a whole encouraged open-ended play.

(You can check out the documentation of his interactive video piece on his website: [www.curtisstage.com](http://www.curtisstage.com))

The interface Curtis designed for “Don’t...” is significantly different. It’s click-through. The navigation is open-ended in the inverse. It permits the artist to continue to add on to the work, which Curtis intends to do. Please note that the structure relies on one of the web’s radical definitions: the hyperlink. In terms of artistic production, this is radical because the artist’s lab, his studio, used to function as the place where progressions unfolded. The gallery was the place for “finished” art. For web art, this paradigm shifts and the artistic process is made transparent in a project structured like “Don’t...” The studio walls are dematerialized, and the viewer can more easily follow the evolutionary sequence of elements. This may seem a statement of the obvious to those whose use of the medium is perfunctory. Nonetheless, it is not an understatement to posit that the exclusivity of artistry has been flattened by this phenomenon. Rightly or wrongly, the image of the artist in society has been profoundly displaced as a consequence.

Mister Stage was the first artist I invited to participate in “HUM 10 + 1.” The pre-production discourse evolved directly from studio visits, class projects, and study of current developments in artist practice utilizing electronic media. Our conversations have been extensive and expansive, broaching topics as diverse as “online openings” (crappy) to design sensibility (he likes minimal and clean) to luck (as in “scores”). His badgering led me to post work at Perpetual Art Machine, which led to my showing with PAM at Scope/Basel Miami. Curtis introduced me to the incredible work of Erin O’Hara (another PAM artist, based in LA), who as a direct result will show in HUM. And so on. In other words, thank you, Curtis, and thank you to CGU for being the vehicle for our connection. The academic environment is an incubator for artistic success, in my current estimation.

Some more notes on conversations with Curtis: (Subsequent to my posting of the Call for Submissions for AFH Gallery and HUM) Curtis and I began to discuss architecture, and the value of using a 3D structural model as a visualization tool for generating a 4D art exhibit. The Hypercube Unfolded was our point of departure, in terms of design, but also in terms of (I guess this is OK to say in artspeak) a glyph – a catalyst for production of art form as wormhole or beanstalk. We made sketches on scrap paper and talked about them. Fractals were brought

up. We looked at cool websites and mulled over navigation strategies, color, text, tone, 'tude, and narrative progression/digression.

Because we're both interested in artist collabs, especially across the digital divide, we tried to subcontract the visual framing for the project to a new MySpace artist pal, Jacob in Scandinavia, who makes drawings/photos/digi-paintings of often partially whited-out buildings suspended in whitespace, as fragments. When that collab got stalled on logistics grounds, Curtis and I talked about working with local archie designers, wireframers and illustration pros. Again, outsourcing the infrastructure for Curtis's project proved to be a non-starter. As it turned out, these production stutters/setbacks were for the best.

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In "Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight," Curtis Stage disappears from view. One of the subtexts of "Pop Bastard" was (this is my assertion) the artist's realization that he was not and never would be a rock star. He might understand the very essence of "Rock Star" and even know some rock stars personally, but even an encyclopedic knowledge of Rock-Star-ism (compiled into a database) would not translate into an elevation to that cultural iconography for Curtis himself. By examining the Dream Machine in the covert casing of autobiography, Curtis is strobing between the realm of Pop culture and personal trajectory. Utilizing audio/visual means in a New Media contemporary art context, he exposes the psychology of the American self through an iconic lens, though the implied default for this exercise is "my music, my image". It's Self in the post-MTV iPod age. It's Peter Gabriel's "Big" on headphones rattling the skull of an anonymous user.

In other previous works, we see Curtis undergoing the transformative experience of self-negation in the abstract, flattened ether of (software) edited video. Curtis replicates himself to the extent that his identity becomes moot, by virtue of its diffusion. Curtis stages avatars of Curtis Stage within the narrative suspension of a Godot-esque script. Curtis foists on these avatars the ingredients of emotional or existential crisis. Next he deadens himself by staging the props of his own memories and inserting his avatar as a replacement (a sub) for the real past self. The memory-contingent artwork subsequently also folds into the past, creating a weird sequence of time-based/double negatives. Finally, Curtis submits to punishments by real others, which the video environment flattens into the Jackass genre. All the while Curtis is making some incredibly sophisticated and proficient technical and aesthetic innovations that situate his work in the upper strata of "Video Art" or "New Media" or "Convergent Media," etc.

Curtis's array of elements and sequences in "Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight" is a virtuoso combo of stills, digital drawing and effects (2D), representations (3D) and spiral or patterned movements that map space (4D). The audio and repeated forms activate the pages or glue the elements into singular experience. The text is referential in multiple ways, but also functions as a design component. Some graphic "distress" (as patina) is apparent, not as antiquing but as shredder cool.

Finally, Curtis's work is firmly rooted in the LA experience, the work of an LA artist, with an eye turned towards international media arts in Asia and Europe (and on the other coast).

--PM

(unedited, 2/26/07)