Semiconductor: interview for Eternal Gaze Blog

-- What was the inspiration for 200 Nanowebbers?

Well, we started with the music and the title of the track. For recent real-time performances we have made our own tool so that we can generate 3D structures and life-forms to sound on the fly. During the performance we create a primordial soup and this speedily evolves into landscapes and life-forms. We're interested in how human and computer come together to form representations of the real world. We call this Artificial Expressionism. So we had already been exploring ideas of microcosms and evolution and wanted to take this further with 200 Nanowebbers. We wanted to try out visual techniques that would make you feel like you were in a Nano-scale world, without having to use other objects as a scale reference. The pace of the track is quite frantic. In all our work we find different ways to unify the sound and image, so it was clear this pace would be reflected in the piece.

-- How did it come about?

We made some music videos for Mum and QT who are Fat Cat Records artists, and were contacted via them by Patrick from O/S/A/K/A records in Dublin. The budget was minimal but the most important thing for us on these collaborations is that we like the music, and we did. Also, we had just finished a six month fellowship on the Scottish border in Berwick-Upon-Tweed, followed by a solo show, and were gearing up for a new sort of challenge. So timing was everything here. We thought it would be great to have a fun summer project, forgetting that we never do things by half.

-- What was the production process?

We rarely make a storyboard. We're against working with a traditional idea of narrative and often let the sound take over this role. We develop ideas of how something will progress, so we end up with sketches for different parts of the whole; the motion, form, shot and techniques, it becomes a very modular process.
For 200 Nanowebbers we broke down the sound into sections. The music was produced as part of a live performance so there was just a stereo version. This complicated things, as we normally assign different parts of the sound to control different elements. We had to go through a laborious process of isolating parts of the soundtrack. Once this was achieved we wrote a script in 3DS Max that would allow us to evolve the structures according to different parts of the sound. We incorporated hand drawn maps and animations to create a complex world that looked hand-made. We are perfectionists and enjoy the creative process, so this project caused a lot of hair pulling; trying to control so many generative elements and pulling them seamlessly together.

--What do you think about the intersection between art video/installation/vj/music video?

It is clear to see why some artists work across these forms, as they share a lot of skills. To do it successfully it's essential to consider each work carefully and understand the importance of context. We don't like to limit the potential of art works by strict definitions, as often pieces we have made for one purpose crossover successfully into another art form; for example 200 Nanowebbers was

recently curated into a gallery exhibition in Milan alongside our other works. In these situations we are also bringing people who know us for our music videos to the gallery, taking our different audiences to new places.

--What do you think is your most successful work?

The answer to this depends on whether you're talking to our audiences or us, and I guess, which audience. We have always strived to find our own audiences; organising our own events, releasing our work on DVD and making work which crosses the divides. We had a lot of success with the Mum Green Grass of Tunnel promo; we would receive emails saying it had brought people to tears, and we continue to receive emails to this day. It had quite an international effect; we guess it really captured something about the band and their music. Then with our art work, at the moment we have several pieces which are touring galleries and international film and media festivals. These are getting good responses from diverse audiences. With these pieces we had the opportunity to spend time making work in other locations, filming places and processing them with digital techniques. We are really happy with how these have contributed to forming our own language and communicating to an art audience.

--Does your work come from subject contexts, or are they more
process/abstract driven ideas?

Both; we started playing with computers during the first generation of current mainstream software and this put us in a great position in terms of learning the potential of the computer and exploring it as a medium. Back in 1999 we made a piece called Puffed Rice; we made the sound and then we found our own path through the computer where we could change an equivalent of a frame of the sound into image, revealing the data as both sound and image. This was pre 'action' in Photoshop and so was a very time consuming process. We were interested in what the computer visual language looked like. We still work with the raw material of the computer image in our live work; generating stripped back simple 3D forms to sculpt and draw in real-time, working with the innate material.
In other works we have made site specific installations through fellowships and residencies. The starting point for these is our interest in the landscapes of our world, both natural and man-made. Through animation we reveal the physical world in flux; cities in motion and systems in chaos. Central to these works is the role of sound, which becomes synonymous with the image, as it creates, controls and deciphers it; exploring resonance, through the natural order of things. For example; in Inaudible Cities: Part One, a digital cityscape is built by the sound of an incoming electrical storm and in All the Time in the World we have used actual seismic data to re-animate the landscape of Northumberland.