

About the Design & deviantART

The synoptic image for this edition (the horizontal image above) is pieced together using five works taken from the mega artist-sharing site deviantART, and they offer the collection of articles in *Synoptique 11* a curiously familiar, crafted, and careful loveliness—a style of design decidedly 'deviantART-esque'.

2 million people will visit deviantART today, submitting somewhere around 70 000 works. You can develop a sense of this site's importance if you compare this with YouTube's 65 000 daily submissions, the majority foisted without any thoughts of being art. There is a ticker at the top of deviantART counting up the number of submissions. When I started writing this article, the ticker, which has been running since the site opened in 2000, reported 53 million 189 thousand 359 artworks online. When I'm done there will be about 1400 more. With numbers like these it would seem ridiculous to talk about a deviantART style. In the presence of such big numbers, does the word 'art' start to falter?

If museums could be lived in they'd be like deviantART. The site itself is drab and functional. The squatters bring the colour, the tenants tend the new blooming galleries. To look at a work on deviantART is to see it simultaneously with many others, and always with the sense of the artist being nearby, peaking in. Like MoMA, deviantART lends the pieces on display a coherence by virtue of its space: the building itself tells us how to see them.

On the other hand, there is a lot about deviantART which keeps the casual gallery visitor out. The community is kept contained by its shibboleths, its traditions, and runes (member names are prefixed by a whole series of special characters identifying them to other members)—it is guarded by its own etiquette and oiled by quick allegiances. And, of course, there is the lingo: artists are 'deviants', works are 'deviations'. With hefty roots in Japanese anime and manga, the site — which is impressively international even though the language is English — is dominated by a sensibility which, in the eyes of many, marks it as a fringe culture. That being said, it is a massive fringe. There is something poignantly teenager-ish about deviantART — the site just *seems* young. Yet the pulsing potential of the environment is anything but shallow, superficial, or transient.

The site was started by web geeks who specialized in application 'skins'—little bits of colour and design you can use to change the look of your favourite program or browser, like when you change your Windows desktop theme. A new skin allows you to re-decorate your virtual world, to personalize it, to change your mood, to stave off boredom. The metaphor of skin — touching, shedding, stripping, wearing, exposing, and sharing — is central to what deviantART has become. This metaphor suits the deviant's penchant for photo and image manipulation. Since so many of the works are fetishistically rescued from the real through the secret and the leet, through Photoshop incantations and kick-ass Illustrator tricks, the skins multiply. The web site becomes a layer over the work, the work a layer over the original image, and the original image a layer over the creator. These layers define a very definite body, and though it may indeed one day be outgrown, it is not discarded. It is in a museum.

DeviantART as a whole is an ever-expanding body of work. There is the sense that individuality must be impossible because it is so massive. The individual artists all have their names obscured by the huge multilayer fringe culture of web tech. The images so often predictably strive to exist indifferently and yet appear so uniformly polished. The sheer volume makes uniqueness statistically impossible.

However, this experience is not a limitation. For this *Synoptique* layout, expressing the ideas authors were getting at in their articles was as simple as typing keywords into the deviantART search engine and snapping up the deviations as they surfaced. The community's extensive vocabulary, its readiness to offer its 'deviation' on any idea one approaches it with, gives the images their final layer — a branding, a tattoo — of their participation in a culture much larger than themselves alone. Like a museum, deviantART gives us much more help in thinking 'through' a work of art than just thinking 'about' one.

The deviantArt slogan is "Where Art Meets Application" referring both to the site's origins as a place to 'skin applications,' and its interest in matching art to walls that support them and with the communities that appreciate them.

The *Synoptique* designer, Kina de Grasse, asked the artists, through the deviantART messaging system, for permission to use their work. They happily agreed, and we salute them for their talent, vision, and curiosity. It was wonderful to reach the individuals behind the art and to receive their help in creating more connections.

Kina de Grasse

http://www.kina-ink.com/
http://kina.deviantart.com/

Artist: Roman Gordeev

URL: http://softlanding.deviantart.com/
Original: http://softlanding.deviantart.com/art/soap-bubbles-78893478
Article: For A Sentiment of Beat Infancy: Conceptions of Childhood in the American Avant-garde

Artist: "Ellenoir"

URL: http://ellenoir.deviantart.com
Original: http://ellenoir.deviantart.com/art/empty-64425947
Article: Antonioni—La Grande t tralogie du malaise moderne: une  tude visuelle de l'absence et du vide

Artist: Nicoletta Fersini

URL: http://bewel.deviantart.com/
Original: http://bewel.deviantart.com/art/marble-quot-1-78846100
Article: Eye and Brain, Torn Asunder: Reading Ideology in Sally Potter's Orlando

Artist: Juuso Koivunen

URL: http://outeq.deviantart.com
Original: http://outeq.deviantart.com/art/Arctic-Desert-21780399
Article: Si le vent soul ve la neige ...

Artist: David Steiner

URL: http://muetze.deviantart.com/
Original: http://muetze.deviantart.com/art/shattered-reality-8654168
Article: Look At Me and Tell Me If You've Known Me Before

Leave a Comment?

Reader's Thoughts

By Charm on 2008 04 09

Thought you might like this review of deviantART

[The original MySpace post can be found here:

http://forums.myspace.com/t/3888467.aspx?fuseaction=forums.viewthread --ed.]

Art Site Review deviantART

Main complaints:

- * site membership numbers are not represented well. There is a mass graveyard of deleted and banned accounts on the site because accounts are never fully erased. This makes the site look more successful to the media than what it actually is. If you delete your account you are still represented on their site numberwise regardless of how you feel about their service.
- * they take the popularity competition further by allowing members to buy popularity by buying traffic. This baits people into joining thinking that they can reach that same traffic level only to find that they have to throw a few bucks deviantART's way for that to happen.
- * they can't decide who their founders are or how members critiques of the site are deleted or altered.

* they allow art to be labeled wrong even though they claim to have staff and helpers in charge of making sure that everything is in the right place. Anime drawings do not belong in photography.

Main likes:

- * the community of the site is fun as long as you stay away from the drama. There are many people to meet and greet on the deviantART forums and chat rooms.
- * deviantART seems to be OK with people linking to other art sites even if the site rivals their own. Many art sites will ban members in a heartbeat for doing that.
- * I found the site to function well even though I read otherwise. I never experienced any downtime or freezes.

To start my reviews of art sites I must bombard the most successful art site in the world. If you have not heard of http://www.deviantart.com you must not have access to the internet. You can find links to this art site everywhere on the net. Visit any art related forum and you will most likely find at least a dozen entries titled 'Are you on Deviantart?'. This is due in part to deviantART's cult like following of young teens and their volunteer task force. Combined these two forces prowl the net posting positive reviews and comments about deviantART site in order to gain more deviantART zealots into their unholy ranks. They are a massive PR machine! I can't blame them for that.

You might think that I am being harsh in this review, but I think it is about time that someone does point out something negative about http://www.deviantart.com. I take this stance partly because of the number of people who will flame you in forums or on blogs if you say anything negative about this corporate ran mega-hub of online art. And just so you know, if you want to avoid being flamed NEVER and I mean NEVER suggest that deviantART is a corporate entity on forums or anywhere else unless you enjoy having cyber spears thrown at you.

DeviantART is so huge that I must point out their flaws! We all know what happened when Nazi Germany went unchecked. AND NO I'm not comparing deviantART to Nazi Germany, but with a few Google searches about deviantART you will find that many people DO compare their banhammering ways to Nazi censorship. Do a search for deviantART if you want a real treat! So if you think I'm coming down hard on deviantART you are probably right AND it is about time more people do! I'm bringing balance to the force!!!

Besides being a massive art community DeviantART is known for three things. 1.) their deceptive membership numbers. 2.) The drama involving their core staff members and treatment of members. 3.) The hordes of anime and manga influenced artists that fill the ranks of their membership.

Why do I say that deviantART's membership is deceptive, because it is almost impossible to delete your account! When you delete your account your work is removed and your comments are removed but the account remains. This goes for banned accounts as well. This means that your account is still counted as an active member regardless if you delete it or if it is banned. This is good for deviantART because it allows them to ask big bucks for ad spots on their site BUT it is bad for honest art sites that actually allow their members to perm delete.

In many ways deviantART has duped the press and companies that sponsor or partner with them by not being honest about how their membership works where account deletion is concerned. Searching deviantART quickly reveals a graveyard of accounts from members who have been banned or who have moved on YET their headstones remain! IF you can divert yourself away from the nude stock photos of Suicide rejects long enough to find the graves! I've read that over 25% of the deviantART accounts are dead but it is hard to know if that percent is more or less. In defense of deviantART most percents are made up on the spot. BUT I did read that and if you do a little online research about deviantART you will probably find the same page that discussed it.

As for the drama I will put it this way deviantART IS drama. I don't want to rant about their staff issues and hostile take overs for any length of time because I could write a book about it. You can easily find all that slime by doing a Google search for Jark. He was a founder that was removed from his position nevermind the fact that he remains a shareholder in the company (cast cyber spears or magick missile at me if you wish). Alarms should go up when a mega-hub like deviantART can't decide who their founding fathers are. If deviantART can't respect several of their founding staff members where does that leave their membership? There was a huge exodus from deviantART in 2005 based on what I read, but those members did not really prove anything because the bones of their accounts remain.

Just in case you don't GET IT Once you join deviantART has YOU as a number forever regardless of how you feel about them and your reason for leaving. If a staff member deletes what you have posted and you decide to delete your account you are still counted. DeviantART is known for stating that they don't delete text or anything else and when there is proof that they have they blame it on a staff member acting on impulse yet no one is ever punished for acting on their own. I've also read that they claim that none of their core staff would delete anything and that text deletion or account alteration must have been done by a volunteer member BUT if you research further you will find that deviantART also states that volunteer members don't have the ability to delete or alter accounts. I've also read that they blame text deletion or alteration on site glitches or blame it on the users computer. Based on what I've read it makes me wonder if the core staff knows how their own sites runs BUT what can you expect from a site that fires a beloved founder. Jark went by the name Yellow Alien and the yellow alien was once deviantART's official mascot. Confused? So am I and so is Jark from what I've read.

Now this is the open wound THE HORDES OF ANIME AND MANGA WORKS! O MY! Indeed the majority of deviantART members favor this sort of work. I'm not going to say if anime inspired works can be considered art or not. That is not the point. The point is that if you do anything other than anime type art you will end up in the minority on deviantART. If you are a traditional fine artist you will most likely find it hard to establish yourself on deviantART unless you are an established artist to begin with or have a following on other art sites to begin with. If you are a student of art or professional fine artist you will most likely find the site to be very insulting on an academic and professional level. I did a search for traditional art and it took me several pages before I found an oil painting. Everything before the painting was drawings of anime characters labeled traditional art.

IT DOES NOT END THERE search photography and you will most likely find anime drawings there as well. Art on deviantART is often labeled wrong and the members are to blame for that BUT deviantART has a staff member and helpers that are supposed to check for that sort of thing. The site is huge and that is no easy task BUT some of the work labeled wrong has been so for a very long time. Quality control has no control on deviantART. Most of the work you find really belongs in scraps but most of the members don't care about that. The motto should be Everyone is an artist and everything is art. But what can you expect from a site with a large percent of teen members? Percents can be made up BUT I've read that 60% of deviantART's membership is 18 or younger.

Don't think that I'm picking on the kids either. I think it is great that kids are drawing and posting their work for the world to see. My problem is that people including press often call deviantART an art site for the Art World. Have you opened an issue of Art News or Art Forum lately? Have you been to a gallery or museum lately? Chances are you will not find poorly drawn Akira knockoffs there!!! The whole animevasion of the NY art scene died out in 2006 by most accounts. So don't call deviantART an art site for the Art World. DeviantART is many things BUT IT IS NOT THAT!

http://www.deviantart.com is not all bad. It has a positive side and it has accomplished a lot and has helped revive an interest in art in younger generations. It has also helped unknown people get exposure for their art. The community feel of deviantART is fun and there are many people to meet and greet on their forums and chat rooms. DeviantART also seems to function well as a whole. I read that the site freezes often BUT I did not experience that while prowling around.

But don't think that creating an account on the site will make you a star overnight. I tested it. I created an account on deviantART different than the one I used to get a feel for the community there AND I wanted accounted on a few other popular art sites over a year ago for the sole purpose of my research. I created to see if the hype about deviantART's traffic was true. So I uploaded three images to each account and did not touch it after that. I did not post links to the accounts or anything. When I checked back in after the time frame I set passed the deviantART account had just over 1,500 hits! The account on the other site had 900 and the account on the third site had 350. This tells me a few things about deviantART's traffic and online exposure in general.

DeviantART DOES bring in more traffic compared to other sites even when the account is not passed around actively or used BUT the hits to deviantART while higher are not much more than art sites that have 100,000 members or lower. I had expected more traffic to the deviantART test account. So this tells us that if we want our art viewed in mass we have to pass the links around and I tell us that there is no one magical site that will bring in gobs of traffic. Call me a myth buster but I think the claims to deviantART's traffic for each member of the site are greatly hyped.

I also don't like the fact that members can buy traffic on deviantART. This accounts for the members who have over a million hits to their profiles and it leads other people to think that they can have the same. It is easy for the press to state the high number of traffic for certain deviantART members in their reports BUT they should find out if those member had paid for traffic or not. All art sites function as a popularity contest BUT deviantART takes that a step further by allowing members to pay for popularity and I think that defeats the purpose of why deviantART was founded in the first place. If the goal of the site is to help people gain recognition and exposure for their art why offer an unfair advantage to members who can afford it? That is a very corporate idea coming from a site that has long followed an anti-corporate creed.

By John on 2009 01 28

Honestly, I have never known anything like this before about deviantART. I think deviantART is wonderful, visiting that site and looking at pictures or creative arts made by the member can be surprisingly admirable.

This article though has been very helpful, thanks for sharing your thoughts on the subject.

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