

we will never forget

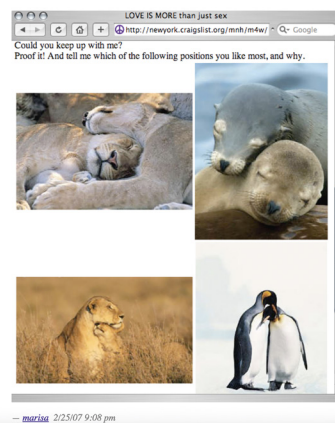
We Will Never Forget

— jodi 9/3/10 6:04 pm

[Comments \(1\)](#)

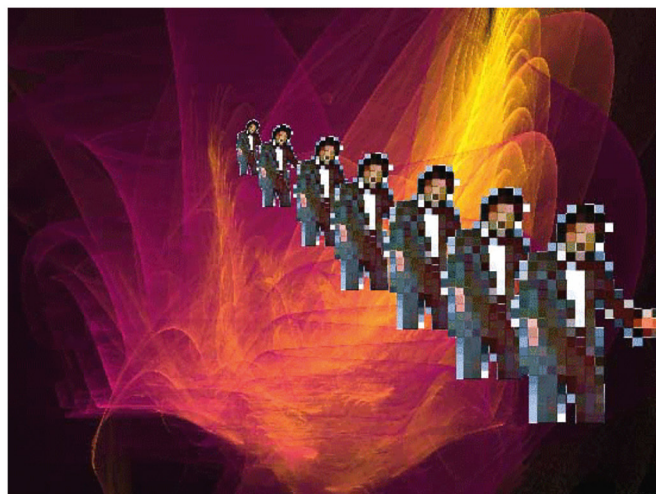
# Surf Clubs (2003–)

Unless otherwise stated, all images are courtesy: Rhizome



— marisa 2/23/07 9:08 pm

RIP



— marisa 12/26/06 3:46 pm

[Comments \(1\)](#)

the new virtual



— tom moody 1/22/11 6:07 am

Nasty Nets (screenshots)

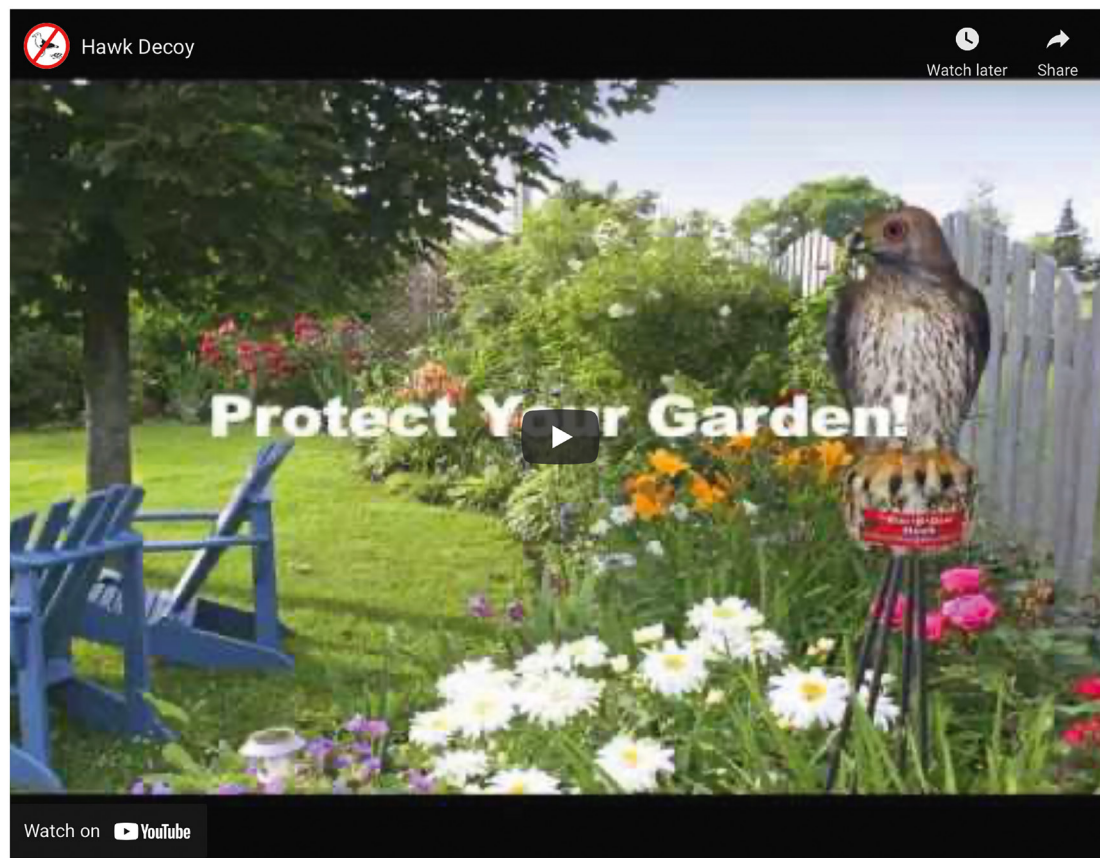
In light of the current discursive and commercial frenzy around digital art retaking centre stage after all that internet fatigue, artist [Constant Dullaart](#) & [Charles Broskoski](#), co-founder of the collaborative research platform Are.na, discuss a recent past where browsing itself was a form of art.

Supercentral  
(screenshots)



First appearing in 2003, surf clubs were blogs to exchange artworks, texts, images, hyperlinks, sounds – often found materials from the nascent expanses of Google and Yahoo. Though some are still around, the format had its heyday in the early aughts, when the informal exchange of weird multimedia as “research” solidified the spirit of a new online culture, and with it, a community of artists that spawned into something now defined as Post-Internet. Embracing the shift to Web 2.0, surf clubs celebrated the idiosyncrasies of early web culture, before mass surveillance, targeted advertising, and filter bubbles darkened the waters.

#### PROTECT YOUR GARDEN BOAT PATIO FRUIT TREES



Left and right: Nasty Nets (screenshots)

#### Constant Dullaart

Surf clubs blossomed after Google Images launched in 2001, but before the iPhone came in 2007 and using smartphones for media distribution became mainstream. Facebook only started to accept sign-ups outside of US universities on 26 September, 2006. With Blogger and WordPress gaining traction in those years, tools for making online publishing easier were proving to be extremely lucrative. Advertising and showing information based on users' established personal preferences or profiles – what we now call filter bubbles – did not exist yet, so the sheer amount of media, of all sorts of quality, often seemed overwhelming. Supercentral and Nasty Nets started in 2006, in what seems to be a perfect media storm, to facilitate informal publishing, information-swapping, and exchange between artists. There, communities shared research and almost sketch-like artworks, often even purposefully naive, in close conversation with the other members. It seemed like there was a type of “information should be free” ethos in how one would treat content and one's own practice in this time – an almost idealistic position, compared to today's customs towards sharing and copyright.

#### Charles Broskoski

It's also important to note that there wasn't yet a sense of collective exhaustion from the amount of content available – but that feeling was definitely building. Right now, I'm thinking about it in terms of something much smaller, which is personal perspective and taste. It's similar to the mentality one has at a thrift store or a used book shop. It's not just about finding the diamond in the rough, but finding the thing that was important to you, to your own ongoing practice. Looking back at the archives of these surf clubs, it's clear that everyone had their own style, and the more idiosyncratic, the better. People were having their own conversations and sometimes those would overlap with other people's. This is different from today, because like you said, there weren't any personalised algorithms back then. It was this Goldilocks zone where there was a ton of content – not so much as overwhelming as today – and most of it tended to be pretty weird, or at least it was way easier to get to the weirder territories. Because of this, people were truly digging for the things that resonated with them, and as a by-product, coming into contact with so many other images and ideas, gaining different perspectives as a result. I do think that in today's internet there is decreasing friction, which means people are being served content that platforms think they might be interested in rather than having to find content on their own, and this has actually detracted from the collective experience.





## thumbs & robot stoppers 1



\* btw also check out travis' awesome thumbnail collages on [a.u.t.](#)

— guthrie 8/29/06 5:19 pm

CD

When Rhizome was in the process of archiving Nasty Nets, to save it in case of hacking (which happened) or loss if someone forgot to pay for the domain name, there was a question of whether all the active members were comfortable with their work being archived within another context. I remember Chris Coy [seecoy] saying that all the work had been posted with the understanding that it would belong to everyone as soon as it was online, and everyone could do with it whatever they wanted – almost the opposite of the current attitude towards the commodification of digital files as NFTs.

CB

Right, maybe it started with people growing up with file sharing websites like Napster, Kazaa, and LimeWire, realising that all intellectual property was up for grabs when digitised. We are taking things from people, so we expect people to take things from us. A real abundance mindset.

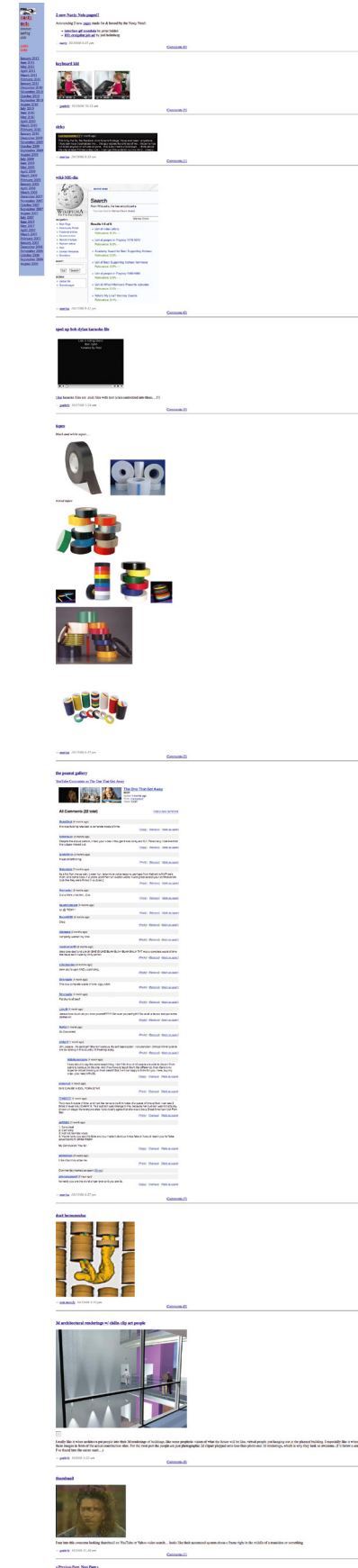
CD

I remember one post by Guthrie [Lonergan] specifically talking about Google search parameters, with a link to searching images in the insecure private directories of websites. These images, if you do the search now, still somehow aesthetically align with the colloquial tone of the conversations posted on surf clubs in that time.

butt freezin



### Nasty Nets (screenshots)



Left: Nasty Nets (screenshots)  
Right: Supercentral (screenshots)

CBCD

CB

Right, sort of in the same way that you can find a personalised inscription in a book that you pick up at a used book store. There was a lack of literacy at the time around what was public versus what was private. In the absence of any kind of online platform like Flickr or Instagram, people would just upload whole folders of images onto their own web servers, not realising that Google had an insatiable appetite. It's interesting that we all settled on this term "surf" to describe what we were doing here. There was a Rhizome "exhibition" called "Professional Surfer" (2006); I wonder how different the energy would have been if we would have referred to it as just being a professional browser. This makes me think that the term "browser" has lost its meaning now, and that it's also not the right way to describe our interfaces to the web.

I remember posting in 2006 to the weblog Squeaky-from run by Hamy Caldwell and me. Harm van den Dorpel joined it briefly and later turned me on to the social bookmarking service del.icio.us, and I got to see all these people who had found posts on the blog I made, and had tagged my homepage. There was an instant sense of community when I got to see their online works and bookmarks. I remember seeing Petra Cortright bookmarking her dentist. The next few years I met many people through del.icio.us. Is that how it started for you? Did you see any geographical limitations? How did you experience the crossover to different countries or continents?

I got turned onto del.icio.us through Cory Arcangel, when I was in his class at Parsons. I definitely remember thinking it was corny at first, specifically the tagging system, and a lot of my early bookmarks were tagged in an intentionally unhelpful way. But over time, I realised the personal utility of being able to see where my taste or interest was heading. The networked part came later, when I realised there were a handful of other people who were saving similar links. I met John Michael Boling through del.icio.us and he's been one of my best friends ever since. It was a good place to meet people – even though that was not the primary intention – because you could tell where someone's true interests were. I distinctly remember not caring at all where someone was from, it only mattered to me how “good”, probably a shorthand for unique, I thought their work or perspective was. I have vague recollections of coming across some of our European friends on del.icio.us, Harm van den Dorpel, Aleksandra Domanović, Jan Robert Leegte, Ola Vasiljeva. Actually, I remember



Tagged from [del.icio.us](#)

1.jpg (JPEG Image, 440x750 pixels) – Scaled (80%):



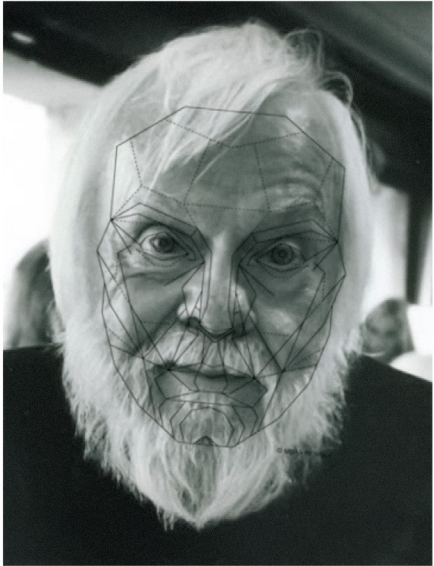
...from [JoelHolmberg](#)

— [del.icio.us/tag/nastynets](#) 8/29/06 4:55 pm

Nasty Nets (screenshot)

[Comments \(0\)](#)

[Perfect Baldessari](#)



<http://www.beautyanalysis.com>

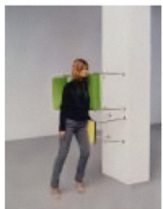
— [psisto](#) 1/12/10 7:56 pm

Nasty Nets (screenshot)

AFTER THE PARTY SCULPTURES



the archive of after party pics [here](#)



quite similar to the work of [erwin wurm](#)

Squeakyfrom (screenshot)

Below and next page, courtesy: Internet Archive

[CD](#)

There was a brief period where exhibitions would have both a strong online and physical component, dealing with this dichotomy. [CD](#)

coming across Ola online and being adamant that I meet them, having no idea who they were at all. I'm pretty sure I thought Damon Zucconi was European before I knew anything about him. Anyways, if I can remember how I thought about it, it was more like some vague, internal, subjective ranking system that had to do with whose work or brain (or both) I was most interested in. [del.icio.us](#) was interesting because there were some attempts by various people, myself included, to have some of their own activity be somehow more formal than the rest of the casual bookmarking that went on – trying to figure out where the line was between research and Curation (with a capital C).

In 2009, I organised two shows in Amsterdam. One was based on [del.icio.us](#) and how artists were bookmarking, posting research for and references to artworks, within the same context *as* artworks. Several works got released just being bookmarked by specific people. The exhibition consisted not only of finished artworks; it also included the research and reference-points that had been bookmarked in relation to the work. The research held an equally considered position within the exhibition to the artwork. Guthrie Lonergan's work in the show, *Floor Warp* (2008), referred to the scrolling introduction text from *Star Wars*, the style of which the press release was published in. The other show was called "Versions" and was about the comment, like commenting on a video on YouTube or a post on Nasty Nets, as a medium for artworks. I curated it with Annet Dekker and Petra Heck at NiMK, the Dutch Media Art institute which is no longer in existence. I selected several Nasty Nets posts to exhibit in the show, and tried to find a way to do them justice. It felt inappropriate to bring these



and [harm van den dorpel](#)



also check out the [stacked interiors](#) by [franziska sinn](#)

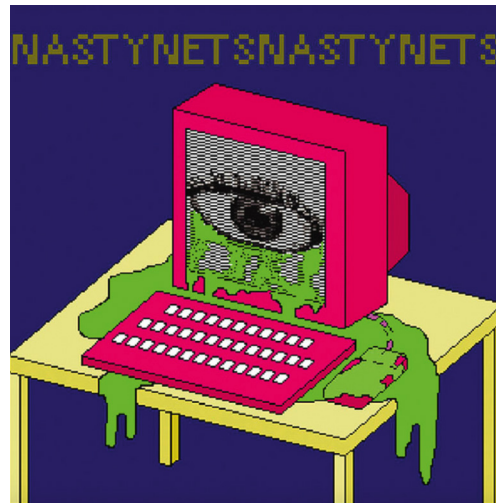
anybody wants to join me for a [stacking](#) manifesto?

anyway, here some more of my favourites from the after party pranks archive, which I love..

Squeakyfrom (screenshot)

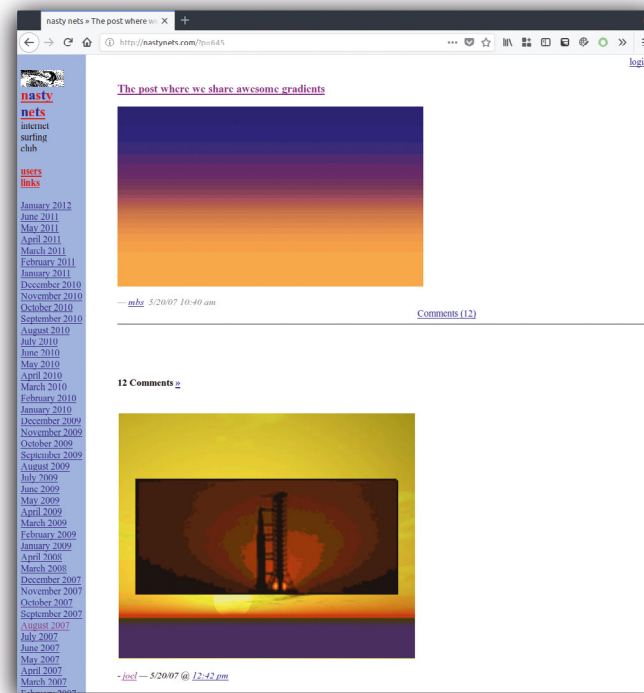


## The work was ideally meant to be seen by someone in their bedroom at 2 a.m. with a million browser tabs open. CB



Javier Morales, cover artwork for Nasty Nets (DVD), 2008

gestures into an art exhibition, somehow – as if these works never wanted to be shown within the traditional context. Although this was a pivotal moment where many artists working online were seeking stronger validation from the established art world – we were in the early stages of Post-Internet. There was a brief period where there were so-called “dual sites”, like Mike Ruiz’ Future Gallery and Extra Extra – one of whose founders, Daniel Wallace, went on to open American Medium, where exhibitions would have both a strong online and physical component, dealing with this dichotomy. The point at which people started professionalising was interesting. There was definitely a time



Nasty Nets (screenshot)



Nasty Nets (screenshot)



and anne de vries with melanie bonaio.

Squeakyfrom (screenshot)

immediately prior where there was a kind of political stance – or at least I felt like this – that showing in a gallery or physical space was degrading and an inevitable mistranslation of the work, which was ideally meant to be seen by someone in their bedroom at 2 a.m. with a million other browser tabs open. The whole premise was that a work should be stumbled upon.

Spirit Surfers, one of the clubs that is still active, categorises their posts in “boon” and “wake”. I understood this as the difference between the thing of beauty that was found online while surfing – an image or a bit of information – and the journey towards a thing. In my eyes, it enabled thinking about an entire conversation as an artwork, instead of a single argument, piece or comment.

I remember Aleksandra’s [Domanović] piece *Bien-nale (Dictum Ac Factum)* (2009), which blew my mind at the time. One of the ways to release work online was to buy a domain, which would be the title of the piece. This was the most formal way. Another was to have a directory under your own website; this was still formal but slightly less so. The least formal was to have an HTML page under your root directory, e.g. artist.com/work.html. This was the equivalent of leaving cables strewn all over the gallery floor. Aleksandra made a beautiful and labour-intensive 3D animation, embedded it on an HTML page, and also placed all of her reference materials on the HTML page as well. It might sound ridiculous now, but I was totally blown away. Just the way everything was so flattened. All of the research and references and the final piece were all placed on the same level, as if they were the same thing. I still think it is an amazing gesture, especially now that half the links are broken. But more broadly speaking, what surf clubs were doing, and what we are calling “artistic research”, is actually something that can and should be done by everyone. It’s just following your own interests and keeping track of where you go. This quote from Virgil Abloh, which came up a few days ago, summarises it nicely: “the process is the practice, the artifacts are just the side effects.”

Courtesy: Internet Archive

*CHARLES BROSKOSKI is one of the many co-founders of Are.na, a platform for connecting ideas and building knowledge. He was web-master of the surf club Supercentral and contributing member of Nasty Nets.*

*CONSTANT DULLAART’s practice includes online performances, custom routers, startups, armies, and redistributed found images, to reflect on the broad cultural and social effects of communication and image processing technologies. He was contributing member of Nasty Nets and curator for Club Internet.*