URBAN SCREENS AND PUBLIC SPACE SEMINAR
September 28 through 30, 2009. Medialab-Prado, Madrid (Spain)

Final Conclusions, by United Visual Artists

Further to our peers input on modular approaches and the unwished for dominance of the typical 'billboard' form, we are going to address the issue of content and programming.

We are all agreed that the form is set and purchased by the Madrid council, as it the type of technology. What we are faced with is a large rectangular LED screen positioned above the media lab, abutting neighbouring houses and out of proportion with the public square below. In order to continue with the aims of Media Lab Prado and co-exist in the neighbourhood, the key to success of the work is the approach to programming and content creation.

Taking the pixel as unit in the screen we would suggest that a series of templates are created to give pixel perfect control on the screen, this subtly reducing the dominance and giving the opportunity to develop a flexible perception of the screen. This then offers a series of 'canvases' all of different forms and using the black space [ie the pixels that are off] as a part of the canvas. In essence turning pixels off is the way to change the way you work with it. These templates will allow artists to leave behind the impression of creating work for a 'screen' and work in a more abstract manner. Examples of these templates could be a series of low resolution wide horizontal / vertical strips, a central circular area, a grid and randomly changing matrix of black 'off' pixels. These templates can be built with a view to your curation and programming of the canvas.

Each one of those templates can relate to a particular content, so for example when we have a CIRCULAR AREA template playing the content played is always related to ....market prices In that way, during the causal run of the screen, the public would be familiarised with those features, therefore they would be easier to comprehend, even if they won't understand fully the existence and purpose of this screen, they learn the pattern and rhythm. From the Medialab's point of view the brief becomes a lot more specific for your visual artists. Then the design and presence of the facade is within the restrictions that you set. A nice reference we've found a couple of months ago about that: http://www.wired.com/culture/design/magazine/17-03/dp_intro. Creating canvases and templates create a specific challenge for your artists.

In addition to altering to visual form of the screen through pixel control, a simple and practical approach is to run the screen at low power/ brightness. LED processors offer control over brightness and this can be used to your advantage. The combination of these 2 options outlined above can form the practical background to the artistic curation of the facade. When artist are developing This is an area that Media - Lab Prado are all ready experienced in, where an annual programme can embrace emerging artists, local engagement programmes and international work. This programming can be extended to invite guest curators to run a season. This will allow Media-Lab to build a physical manifestation of its creativity on the outside of the building, and create a platform for other voices and interactions. The timing of your programming needs to reflect the conditions of the neighbourhood and their needs however with dialogue a calendar of programmes can be agreed with timing extended in appropriate periods.

A really simple example of the past, of similar (visual) technology that was successfully introduced to the public is the TV. One of the most apparent reasons is not, only, the variation of choices that somebody has, TV was a complete success even when you had only one channel, but the schedule. The 'time' factor gave the TV the big push to spread widely. The day by day(or seasonal), schedule. Of course, you always turn the TV on to do some zapping but you're always aware, what time the news is on for example. Respectively, for a screen created under those conditions, you won't need to attract only the attention of the passer-by(as Guy Debord declared 3 decades ago) but initiate a seasonal scheduler where the people of the neighbourhood will be drawn in as much as to your the more general audience.