

**Paper Abstract:** Steve DiPaola - New Forms Festival '04, Vancouver Art Gallery

**Title:** Face, Portrait, Mask – the Virtuality of the Synthetic Face.

**Abstract:**

With new technological artistic tools that allow us to author 3D computer generated faces that can be as real or as abstract or as iconified as we choose, what aesthetic and cultural communication language do we elicit? Is it the historically rich language of the fine art portrait – the abstracted artifact of the human face? What happens when this portrait animates, conveying lifelike human facial emotion – does it cease to be a portrait and instead moves into the realm of embodied face – when it begins to emote and feel and possibly react to the viewer? Is it then more in the language of the animated character, or as we make it photo-realistic, the language of the video actor with deep dramatic back-story or simply as real as a person on the other side of the screen? A viewer can not be rude to a portrait but can feel that they are being rude to an interactive character in an art installation. When does it become not an embodied face nor portrait but a mask – the icon that speaks of face but is never embodied? Masks also have a deep cultural, historic and ethnic language far different than that of human faces or art portraits. More eastern compared to the western portrait. Iconized faces (i.e. the smiley face or the emoticon face) takes the mask full through to the western modern world of technology.

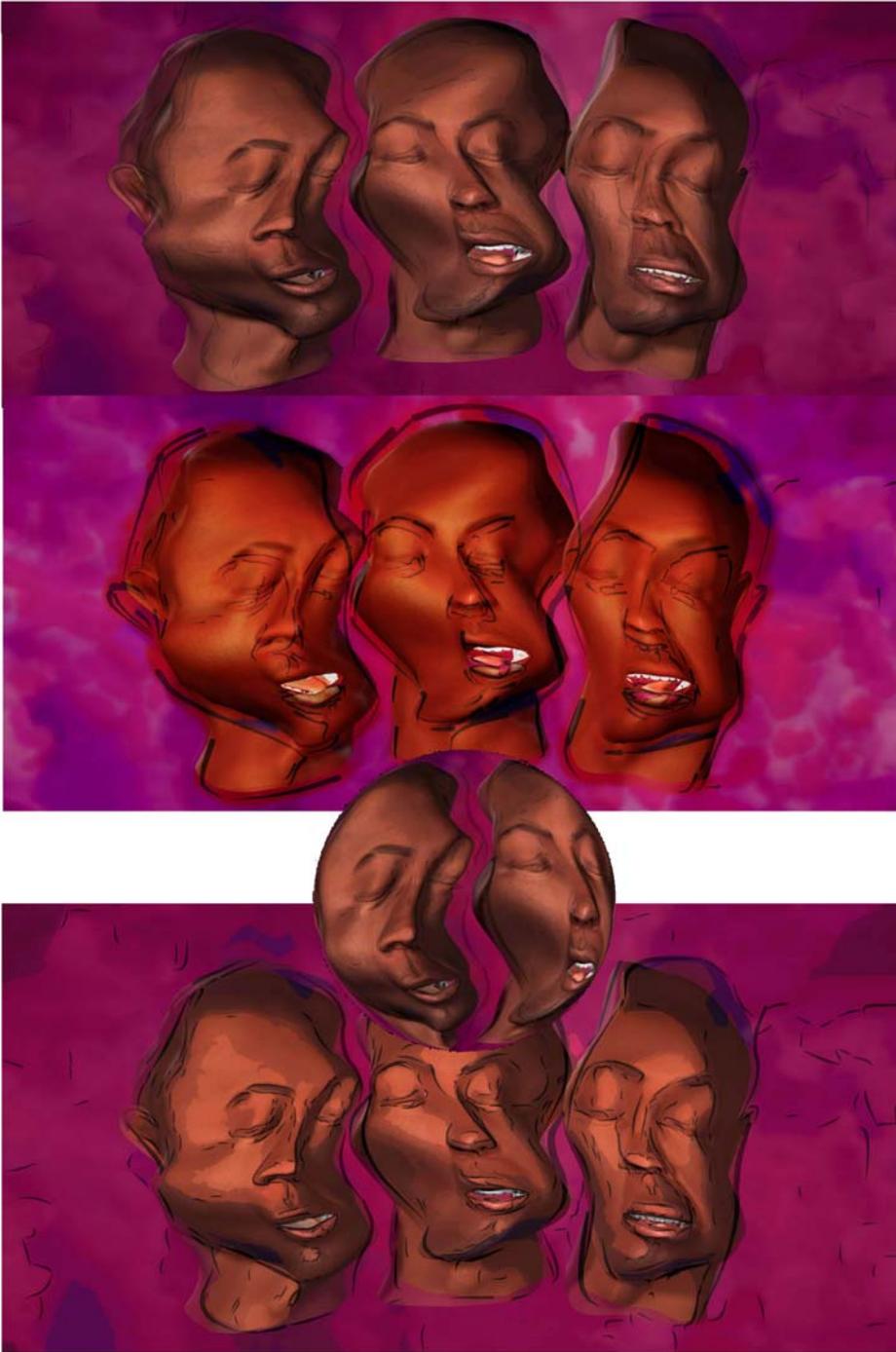
With animated and interactive art work, what is to stop a piece from fluidly moving between all these forms? This paper explores the synthetic face in art in all its forms and more importantly explores the virtuality of the face, for true art has one soul that can be manifest in many realizations and aesthetic communication forms.

The paper will first examine the historic and cultural implications of these three distinct channels -- the human face, the portrait and the mask. It will then discuss where these forms differ and intersect both culturally and in relation to new technology (i.e. - is the robot face more a face or more a mask, what about a game avatar). It will also demonstrate synthetic face artwork and process by the author and other artists that use and move through these different forms in still, animated and interactive art media.

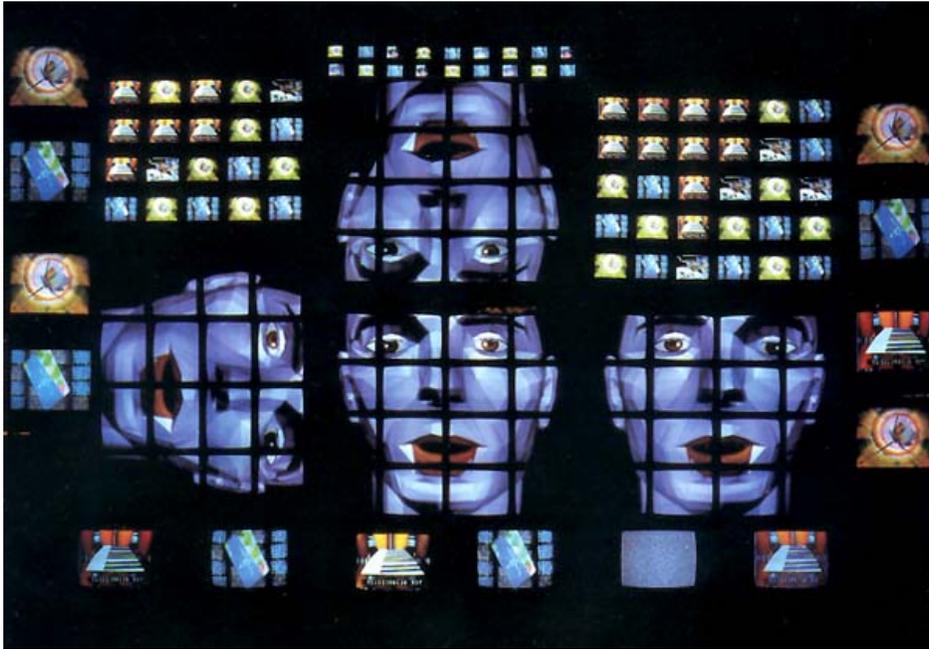
**Supporting Work:**



Same face model rendered 1) as a portrait and 2) realistically; stills from the art installation “Concerto for Face and Strings” – New Forms Festival, 2003 – Steve DiPaola  
See <http://www.dipaola.org/musicface> for details and videos.



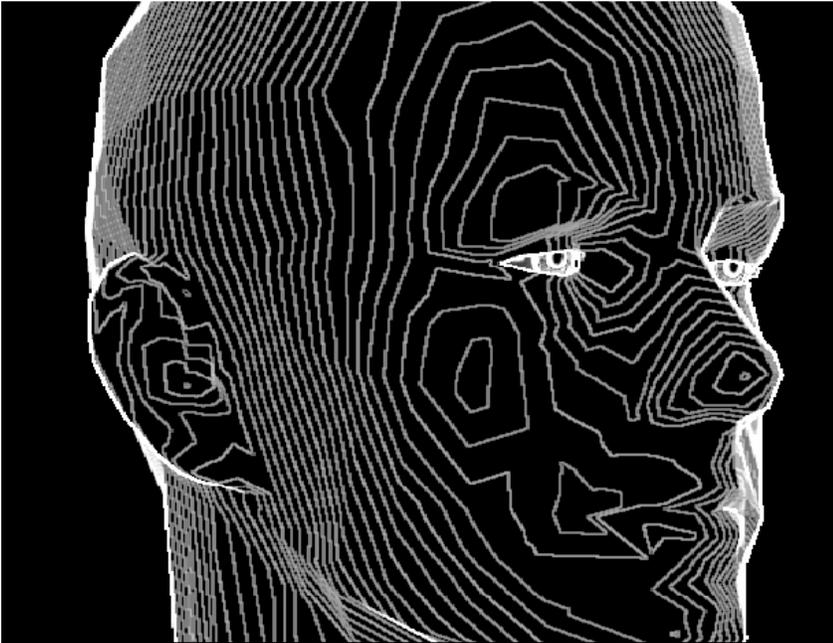
Example stills from the art video “insideOut”. All facial animation is generated from music via a rule based system that extracts out musical emotion and remaps it to animated 3d faces. The work deals with what is the difference between a human face, an art portrait and a mask and how does this culturally relate to more subtle modes of communication like emotional music. See [www.dipaola.org/gallery](http://www.dipaola.org/gallery) for this work that premiered at the AIR Gallery, in NYC and then moved to Siggraph Art Show in L.A. This was created for and displayed on a 6ft projected sphere. See [www.dariadorosh.com/plays](http://www.dariadorosh.com/plays) for more information.



Nam June Paik, 1990, Image World: Art and Media Culture, Whitney Museum of American Art, Steve DiPaola/Rebecca Allen



John II - Stochastic Noise Portrait - 2003 - Steve DiPaola



Still from art video “Kraftwork” – Everson Gallery of Art - 1988  
Steve DiPaola / Rebecca Allen



Claire de Lune – Cibachrome Litebox – 1988 – Tibor De Nagy Gallery, NYC  
Steve DiPaola