

High-Tech: etoy on a Mission From Cyberspace

Cybersalon Helps You Put on the Ritz Without Leaving Your Computer

A troupe of 'Net agents sporting orange crew jackets and shaved heads began their next digital mission in San Diego last week.

Yes, etoy is at it again.

etoy is an international art crew made up of seven media stuntmen – Web-action specialists, designers, programmers, sound coders, an architect and a lawyer. etoy's members are test pilots for the digital generation.

The troupe's mission is to connect sound, coding, visuals, panic management and intelligence to digital action/entertainment.

"We constantly walk on the edge of digital reality," said one of the crew members, who asked to be identified only as press.speaker@etoy.com.

(The reason for the anonymity is they all share one identity. But if you must know, the etoy.CREW, which immigrated to the 'Net in 1994, includes etoy.Hans, etoy.Mark, etoy.Carl, etoy.Taki, etoy.Jack, etoy.Dave and etoy.Matt).

In October, the crew began work on a 40-foot cargo container called etoy.TANK-17 at UCSD Center for Research in Computing & the Arts (CRCA). The container, stocked with high-tech equipment, will serve as etoy's mobile unit as the troupe embarks upon its two-year digital art and entertainment world tour.

Etoy kicked off the tour last week at UCSD. Next stop is the Blasthaus Gallery in San Francisco.

The plan is to invade other countries across the globe, such as Japan, Germany, Hungary and Switzerland. The international tour will also help place the CRCA on the digital map.

"This residency of etoy marks a new involvement of the center in supporting digital artists," said Carol Hobson, administrative director of CRCA. "To really house a project in its R&D phase and know it's going out all over the world has elevated us to a new level of exposure."

CRCA began nearly three decades ago as the Center for Music Experiment. In 1991, the center switched its focus to supporting media computing arts research and bridging the arts and sciences.

"There has been a movement to foster more collaborations within the arts and the arts and the sciences," Hobson said.

She said etoy is the perfect project to help launch the arts and sciences into a world where mankind has not traveled before.

"People are somewhat afraid of what art and the Internet might mean. I'm excited to see what happens," Hobson said. "These are very ambitious and productive young men and they have big ideas."

The etoy.CREW is known for the multi-awarded "Digital Hijack" in 1996, the kidnapping of 1.4 million

hostages on the Web. Etoy has also created computer animations for large techno events such as raves, or all-night parties.

The group's Web sites welcome more than 1 million visitors daily.

To enter etoy's electronic world, browse (www.etoymusic.com). Warning: Once you enter, there is no turning back.