The two projects in this exhibition are a result of the artists’ online encounters and interactions. Both of them probe the creation and experience of simulated reality of the Internet. Aside from a pragmatic information source and electronic business outlet, the Internet has increasingly become a fantasy generating dream machine for the wired masses. As another tool for imagination, the updated answer to a “fly in your head” escape principle for anybody with a modem and a phone line, it allows users to remake, reallocate, invent or alter their personae and surroundings. A catalyst for techno-utopia with no password required.

Kiki Seror explores the sexualization of the Net. She logs onto often uncharacterized porn chat rooms where she assumes different identities, male or female, aggressive or submissive, and subsequently eludes works based on the text transcripts from such encounters. Through Seror’s work, cyberspace acquires an image. Explicit dirty talk rendered through dynamic typography is a stand-in for the absent biological body. Lust becomes erect yet deserted architecture.

Althoff and Wandorf’s installation is twice removed from the real world. And then brought back. The artists met Tanya Murphy from Seattle in Acheh Worlds, a vast 3D multi-user space which allows for building complex architectural sites and communicating with visitors via chat software. “Tanya in Twilight Zone” is a life size model of a virtual living room. Expressed surfaces and men functional furniture replicate a part of a house created by Tanya on-line. The virtual house itself is a precise, idealized, copy of Tanya’s real Seattle home. For the installation she has been asked to give a guided tour - the guests and the host unite in the publicly private space. Transforming and adapting their experiences into physical, material objects, these artists introduce the
Dog Day Afternoon, appropriately held in the heat of the summer, features new work by New York–based photographer Lucas Michael and Japanese conceptual artist Nobuhiro Nakanishi. Both artists study the human condition via the landscape, the former through the lens of a camera, the latter through the eyes of a dog. While Michael’s photographs take us on a trip to the desert, Nakanishi’s video obliges us to wander the city streets, literally at dog’s eye level.

Disguised as a tourist, Lucas Michael recently traveled to Death Valley, Joshua Tree, and the Navajo desert in California. For Michael, the desert represents the last American frontier, where tourists take on the role of romantic hero, roaming the landscape like the lone cowboy in a country ballet, in quest for spiritual enlightenment. Michael, as mere observer, wishes he could go to the desert “with their kind of energy.” Referring to glorified travel photographs or commercial landscape photography, he gives us the ultimate travel poster with a twist.

There is a sense of alienation, of displacement, of unfulfilled expectations in these images of uneasy wayfarers moving through what has become a censored experience, continually mediated and subverted. Signs tell them where to eat, where to pee, where to look. In the artist’s mind these are tourists who have been driven inward, therefore the only travel worth documenting is an internal one. Michael approaches the act of taking a photograph introspectively. Thus the title of this body of work and workplay Landtrend. The man-made objects—walls, cars, and post-oligies—that punctuate the landscape (and blend into it, camouflaged like landmines) bring us back to reality. We are here. Even in the desert there is no virgin space. A panoramic view is littered with footprints.

As civilization breaks “the silence of the sea,” our passion for travel, with all its deceptiveness, continues to proliferate. The packaged tours, books and posters create the illusion of what no longer exists. As Claude Lavi Strauss predicted, the history of the past twenty-thousand years is irrevocable.

Like Lucas Michael, Nobuhiro Nakanishi also walks a fine line between expectation and reality, between artlessness and artificiality. Nakanishi, who was born in Japan and now divides his time between New York and Tokyo, investigates the human world through a dog’s point of view. Attaching a micro-video camera to the dog’s head (the video triggered off and on by the movement of the dog), he allows the various dogs he walks to lead him through the streets of New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, London, and New Zealand. The dogs define his path and his work. The resulting Dog-cam Project is being shown together for the first time in New York at Apex Art.

Existing for some 15,000 years, the dog remains the closest “other” to man. As we move closer to a digital world, perhaps the dog will become the tool to reconnect ourselves to nature. The artist began to use the dog, not because of a special affinity with it, but rather to “find a way to objectively observe the human species.” In the artist’s words, “they have information about nature. A dog is a kind of medicine that is especially necessary in an urban situation. In the red light district in Tokyo a dog pisses on the neon. This is an odd situation... dogs are very adaptable.” They are a product of human intervention. Within these videos, the dog is seen in all its roles, as companion, hunter, guard, shepherd, and faithful servant.

A Golden Retriever, the preferred breed in Tokyo, leads us through the crowded streets— an ironic symbol of Western culture, a suburban pet out of context in this urban setting. Nakanishi reminds us that “pet culture” is pervasive. The dog, man’s best friend, the world’s greatest surrogate child, takes on a new role, as “artist in this video. This transferrence gives a new meaning to the notion that dogs look like their owners, and vice-versa. Nakanishi seems to counter Descartes’ belief that animals are mechanical creatures without souls. He allows his dogs to become human activists.

The filming itself becomes a performative act, referred to by the artist as Dognet. The videos show how integral the dog is to the master’s environment; however as an audience we experience the streets from the dog’s point of view. Our sense of smell is heightened as our sights are lowered. A pit-bull sniffs through trash in Harlem. A Doberman leaps over sheep in New Zealand. A Golden Retriever props the streets of the red light district in Tokyo. We are there. Nakanishi has taken the Dalíist gesture of walking down a street and hopping on an object that becomes a “ready-made” to the absurd.

*From Hobberman, 2000 (messages excerpted from Cathartic User Interface/interactive multimedia installation)