

## Net Gambit: See Art, Pay Amnesty

By [Reena Jana](#)

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NEW YORK -- Can Net art raise money and help save the world?

The organizers of [Shine](#), an ambitious online art exhibition launched last weekend to celebrate the 40th anniversary of [Amnesty International](#), hope that by using art to attract people to their Web pages, it can.

It's a peculiar idea. Especially since, as Shine curator Simon Watson says, the \$10 million question in the art world today is how to make money doing digital art.

With the optimism of a start-up CEO circa 1996, he states, "The Web really is the most appropriate main venue for this project, because it can draw hundreds of thousands of visitors, unlike a gallery show that would only bring in 2,000 people in four weeks if we were really lucky."

And with the enthusiasm of a post-crash do-gooder in 2002, Watson adds, "Plus, how else could we get people to instantly become activists -- with minimal risk or effort -- with the push of a button?"

It's not the first time Net art has been linked with activism and active donor hunting. For example, [Rtmark](#) solicits donations online for projects such as its [phony](#) World Trade Organization site.

Watson's primary goal for Shine was to create a unique online destination to draw users to Amnesty International's site. So he commissioned original works from 12 artists, all relating to the theme of "light" (as in the candle flame that serves as Amnesty International's logo).

The Shine roster is a mix of prominent Net artists -- such as [Maciej Wisniewski](#), creator of [Netomat](#), a much-praised non-linear browser -- and more mainstream artists, including performance art group [Fischerspooner](#).

Although these links are easy to follow, the art portion of Shine is difficult to navigate (tip: the cryptic "lift" command should be translated as "drag"). Once a user figures out how to access the artworks, she encounters irreverent yet poignant projects -- a combo that reflects Amnesty International's fight-the-power identity.

For example, Net artist [Mark Tribe](#), founder of new media art organization [Rhizome.org](#), contributes [Revelation 1.0](#), in which he dares to alter Amnesty International's own site.

Could this be a critique of Amnesty International itself? In his artist's statement, Tribe says no, but the user can draw her own conclusions; inclusion of such a project not only encourages debate, but also indicates strong support of artistic freedom.

Watson sees the Shine site as merely the first stage in creating a larger cultural dialogue that can spin easily into a money-generating campaign, rather than an end in itself.

"I know the Web isn't a panacea. But if we can look at a site in broader terms, we can see new opportunities," Watson says. "This site is a seed, one that can grow roots with

tremendous reach." In fact, Shine is already working like a fundraising brand of sorts, with physical-world events and products spinning off the site.

For example, a Shine-branded benefit party was held in Manhattan, where the site was unveiled, with tickets ranging in price from \$175 to \$5,000. And a Shine-branded [portfolio](#) of digital Iris prints of works by the popular painters Jay Davis, Alexis Rockman, Lisa Ruyter and Monique Prieto is available for \$650 a print, \$2,000 for the four. It does not include works by the 12 digital artists, a choice that suggests a lack of faith in Net art's popularity.

Proceeds from both benefit Amnesty International. Watson says there are many more such Shine fundraising events and items for sale planned for the future.



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