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Markus Kison uses IT to come up with out-of-the-world designs that can be called the next generation of installation art, as Mathures Paul finds out

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EVEN if you didn't know better, don't call Markus Kison a crazy inventor. He is a zany graphics designer with some excellent ideas and one of his recent projects ~ the VanityRing ~ has enjoyed good press. It allows you to keep track of the number of hits your name produces on Google which, according to many, is the new "popularity status" metre.

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Kison is a product of Berufskolleg für Grafik-Design where the first interactive screen applications and "free projects" were developed. Today, he uses IT to come up with out-of-the-world designs that can be called the next generation of installation art.

"My designs are about the people I meet, what affects them, what interests them. When I start developing a concept, I think about its benefit. The designs are about providing new possibilities for people dependent on technology. I concentrate on keeping designs simple, making them accessible to everyone," says Kison.

One of his projects is Touched Echo, which gives you an idea of the 13 February 1945 air raid. "A touchable echo from another time is generated." It invites visitors to hear airplanes roar across the sky. "The sound runs up the arms into the inner ear (bone conduction)." Every year millions visit Brühlsche Terrasse on top of the Dresden city walls. Here visitors enjoy the view across the Elbe river and of Dresden Neustadt (Old Town). Touched Echo has been installed here.

It tells the story about the place, about what happened on the night of 13 February 1945. That was the night when Dresden's Old Town was destroyed in an air raid. On the balustrade is an "icon". You need to place your elbows on the balustrade and look at Old Town. Soon, you will hear B-25 bombers roar, followed by explosions in the distance. The technology behind the project is not simple. Bone conduction is not an easy thing to understand. To transmit sound up the arm to the skull bone, the railing of the Brühlsche Terasse is equipped with sound conductors that vibrate when your elbows are placed on the icon.

Another interesting project is the Roermond-Ecke-Schönhauser. Webcams bring "distant reality" closer to users. "Roermond-Ecke-Schönhauser completes this idea by transforming distant reality into something real, something touchable. Four webcam-streams (Denmark, crossing, Amsterdam, laundromat, Berlin, courtyard, Holland, marketplace) are projected with the help of a mirror construction on four models of the particular places. To make the projection fit the models, the architecture of the webcam-places is rebuilt using 3D-applications and printed using 3D-plotters. That way, the picture information is displayed on distorted geometrical shapes. The final result ~ four 'live-models' of

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distant space.”

Kison says, “During my apprenticeship as graphic designer we developed interactive applications using Macromedia Flash. This exercise made me fall in love again with computer programming. Once I rediscovered my passion, there was no looking back. With programming I mixed the knowledge I gained while studying Physics.” Kison has received several international awards for Roermond-Ecke-Schönhauser (2005), which was displayed at ZKM (Karlsruhe), Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art (Helsinki), Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography and at the SESI Gallery (São Paulo). His first project was “a typographic river” that allowed “thoughts to flow across the screen, each word interacting with others. This was done using Flash”.

The VanityRing is your “virtual identity” on the Internet. “There are some companies which check your credentials on Google. But how do you flaunt your ‘social status’ before strangers? Wear a VanityRing. The number of hits your name fetches on Google is displayed on the ring.” He is, at present, looking for a company to mass produce VanityRing.

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