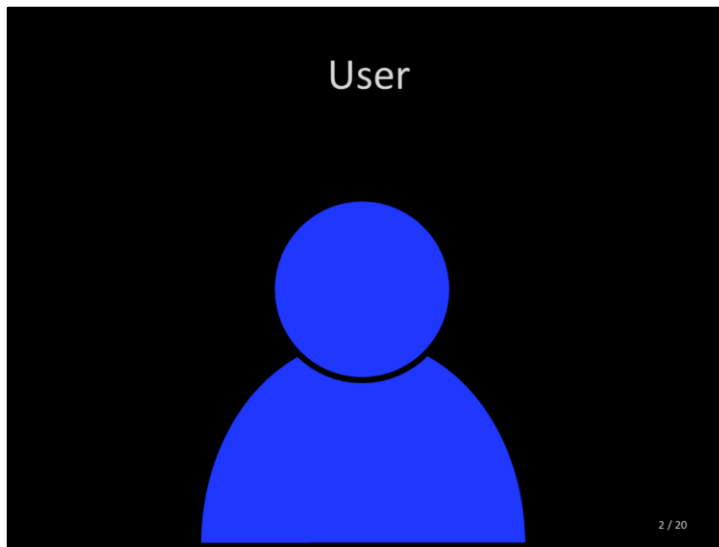Nothing makes the tech world unhappier than an unhappy user.

The tech world is about growth. Only happy users produce growth.

The simplest definition for a user: If we have any interaction with anything that someone has created for us to use, we are a user.

Post internet, If we have any interaction with anything that is run, created or managed by some kind of software, we are a user, or end-user.

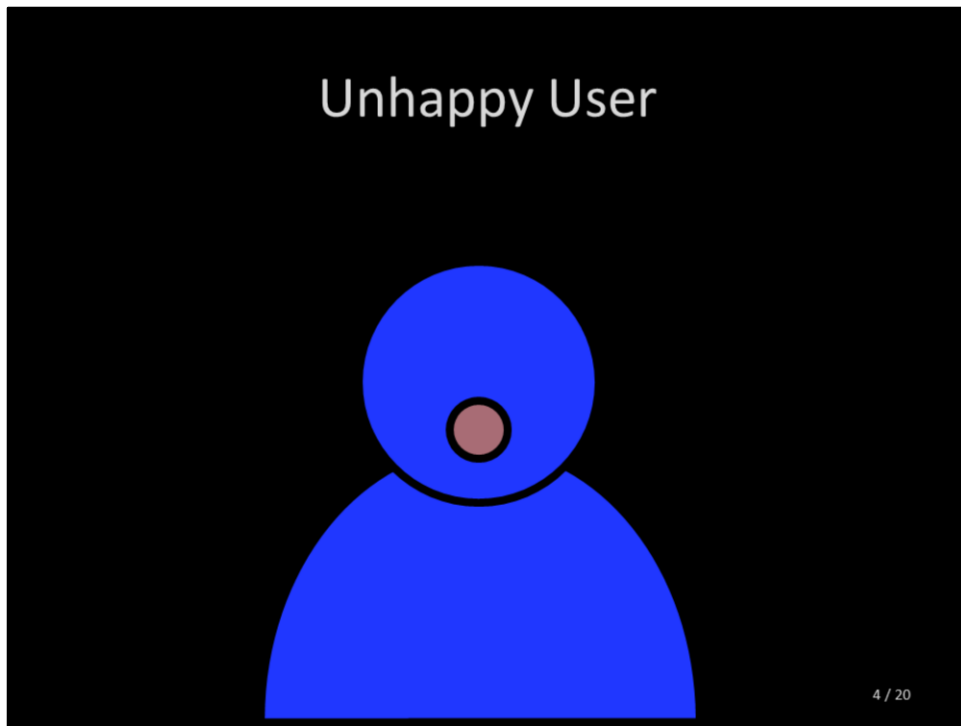And we do that through some kind of interface.

A user is *us* both as an **object** and **agent**.
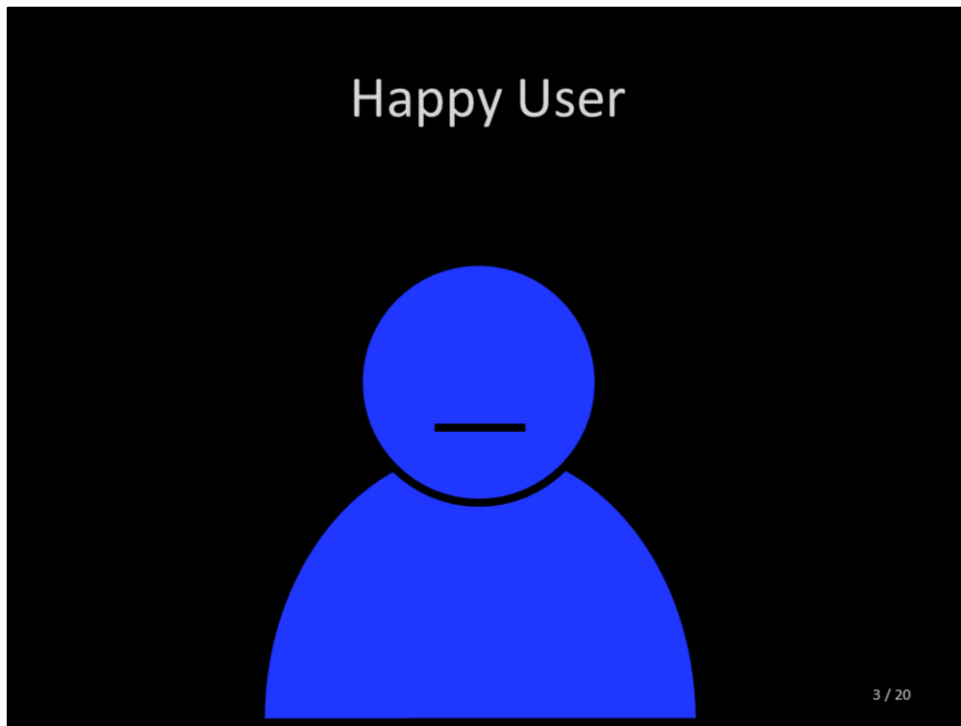
What makes a happy user?
We can start with what makes for a so-called, good user-experience

-- Easily completing tasks or actions
-- The design is intuitive and the interfaces are clear and uncluttered
-- Good support and clear help documentation

Unhappy User

But much of the time that is hard and we get unhappy users

An unhappy user can represent the failure of interfaces,
the failure of services,
Poor design,
Complicated or awkward interactions,
business logic not thought through or business logic overriding common-sense, logical user flows
Bad or rushed technical implementation
The list is long…

An unhappy user represents a broken promise.

This slide has two points.   5 / 20
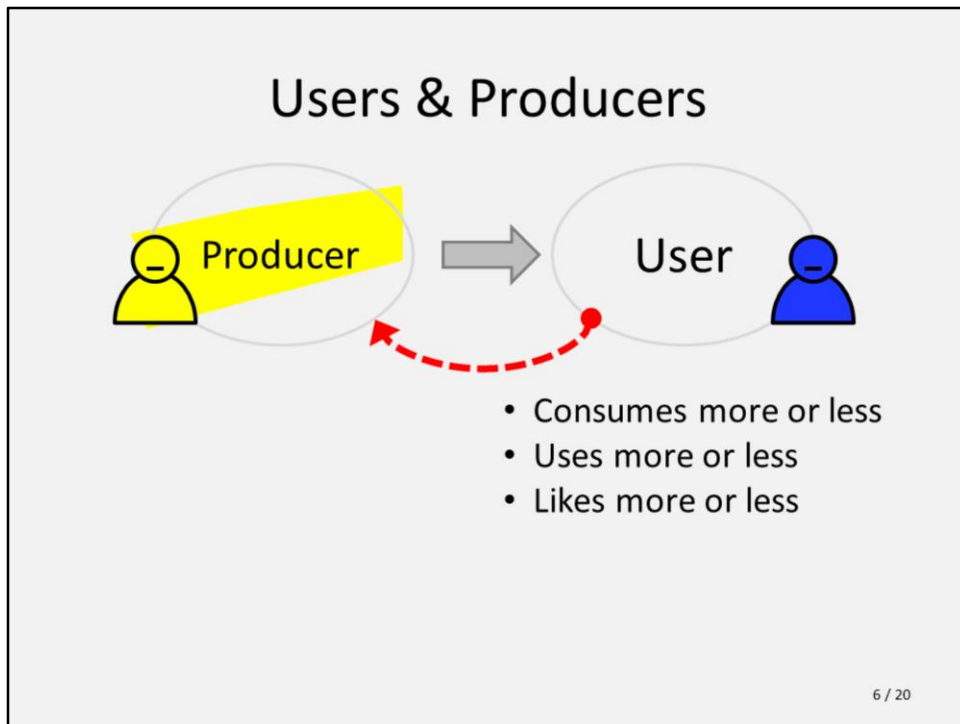
But most of all an unhappy user represents a broken promise

An unhappy user is a failure to deliver on product-hope.

An unhappy user is the beginning of the end of the producer-user relationship

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With technology, a producer makes something for a user to use or consume….

Users & Producers

Producer → User

- Consumes more or less
- Uses more or less
- Likes more or less

The relationship is bilateral and measurable.

For many years I have been making sites and services where the delivery of seamless interfaces and entertaining experiences was the business.

The goal was a happy user, at all costs.

But I'm also an artist.

The art world is different - in fact it's the opposite.

The art world does not value the same kind of user experience that technology values. In fact, art does not really think of itself as a user interface.

And this is one of the reasons why the art world and the tech world get close but can't talk. Or they talk but can't meet.

Contemporary art

- Challenges the viewer
- Critical assets include ambiguity and uncertainty
- Keen awareness of context and interaction
- Opportunity to experience and confront the unfamiliar
- Only you to confront the problem
- Contexts are often opaque and unclear

Contemporary art, in bullet point form …

It is meant to challenge the viewer

Ambiguity and uncertainty are critical assets

You should be keenly aware of the context and interaction itself

It's an opportunity to experience and confront the unfamiliar

There is only you to confront the problem - which generally means confronting your socioeconomic or cultural complicity of some form, or your own mortality

The title, press release, statements, and even criticism sometimes, are often opaque and unclear because the exact purpose of art is not always clear

Users, Makers, Creators & Destroyers

User — Maker

Creator — Renderer (Destroyer)
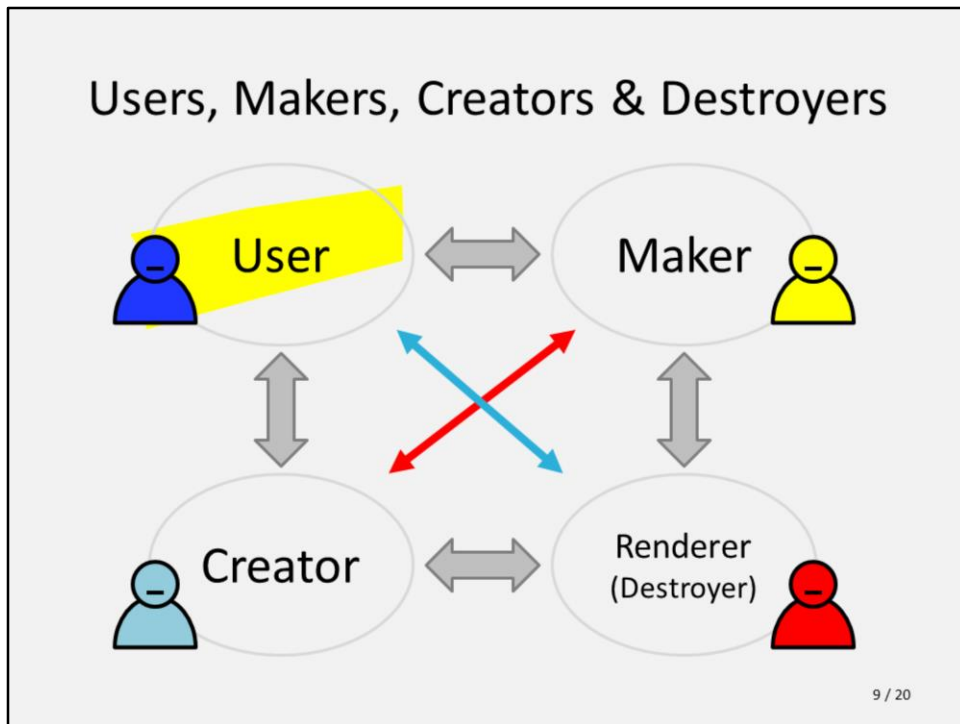
Art is meant to create work for the viewer, or user – it's not about ease of use, in the tech sense

With art, the user is included in the equation. The art does not exist without the user.

The art user can be seen as being in a matrix of oppositions

The promise to the user, is still engagement – complex, difficult, challenging, uncomfortable, silly, degrading engagement – anything but seamless.

Unhappy Users in Conversation
2016, LED matrix panels, non repeating loop
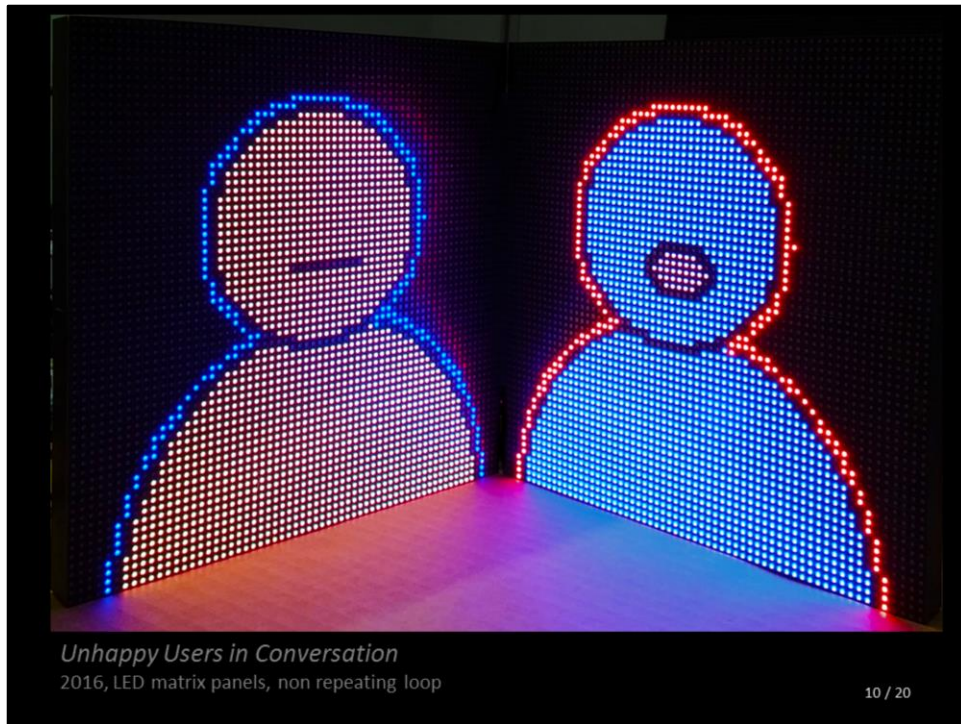
A couple years ago I realized I was caught between these different these definitions of happy users – and that technology was changing how we interact with art because it was making us users of art.

I was serving two lords and the user was being evolved

This piece, on LED matrixes is unhappy users in conversation
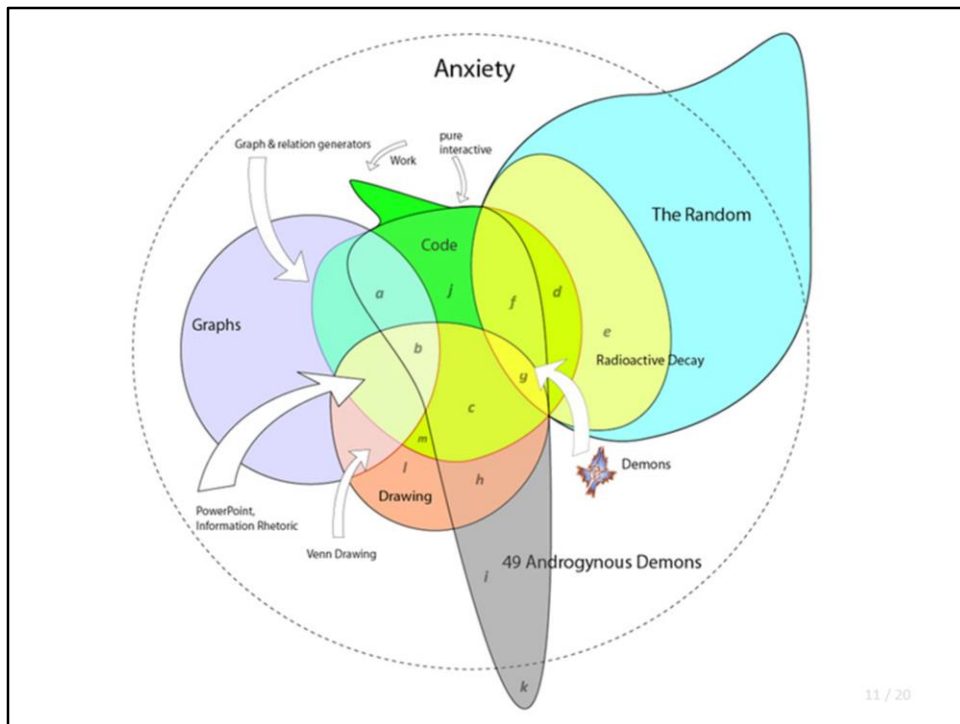
This is how I used to present myself as an artist -- as a hopelessly complicated Venn diagram bound by anxiety
and I thought that was ok

I was trying to use the language of business and technology to describe art.
But I think we need to do the opposite, or inverse.
I'm not sure what that means either, but here are some examples.

User explains selfie
to user-friend
2015, 56"x70"
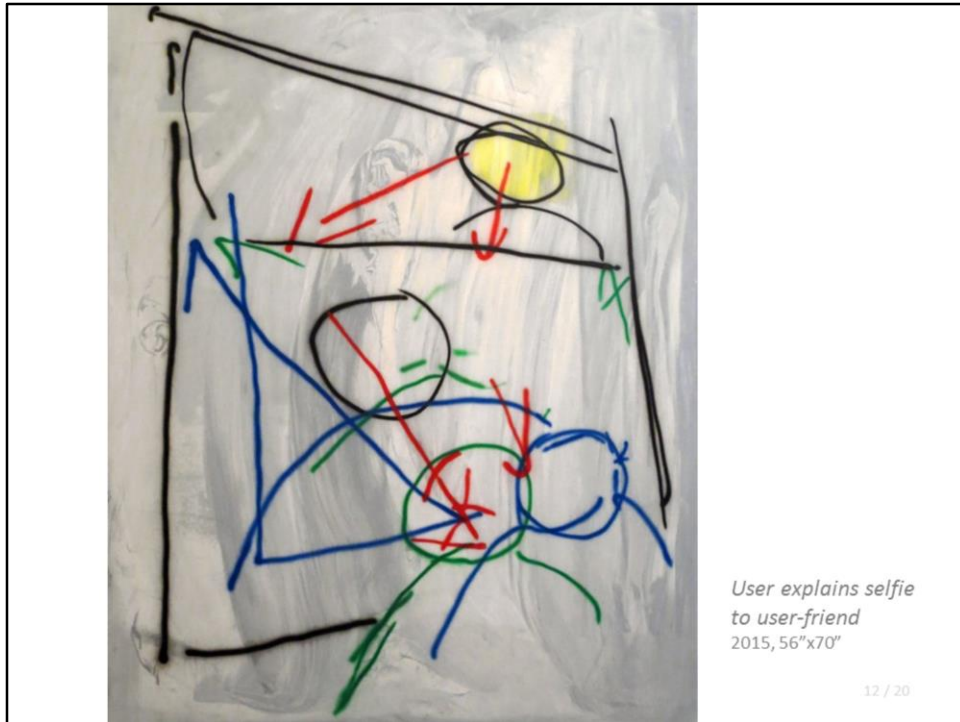
This is my painting of a drawing of a user explaining how selfies work.

What I think is a better metaphor for the art process and successful interaction with it – and which might be more compatible with our digital experience is the The Stroop Test,
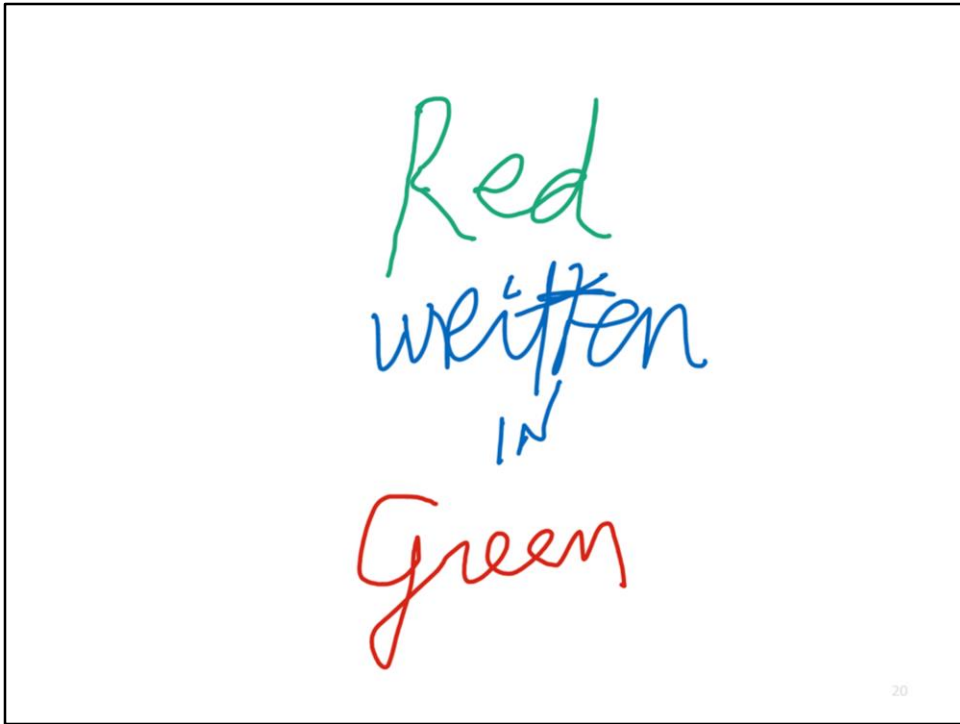
The Stroop effect, after John Ridley Stroop's paper in 1935, showing the effects of competing tasks on attention and processing,

The Stroop effect makes us feel our mind at work, trying to resolve a conflict between what we see or understand and what we are supposed to do with that information

That's what makes art great.

*What Color
(Stroop Test)*
2016, LED matrix panels,
non repeating loop
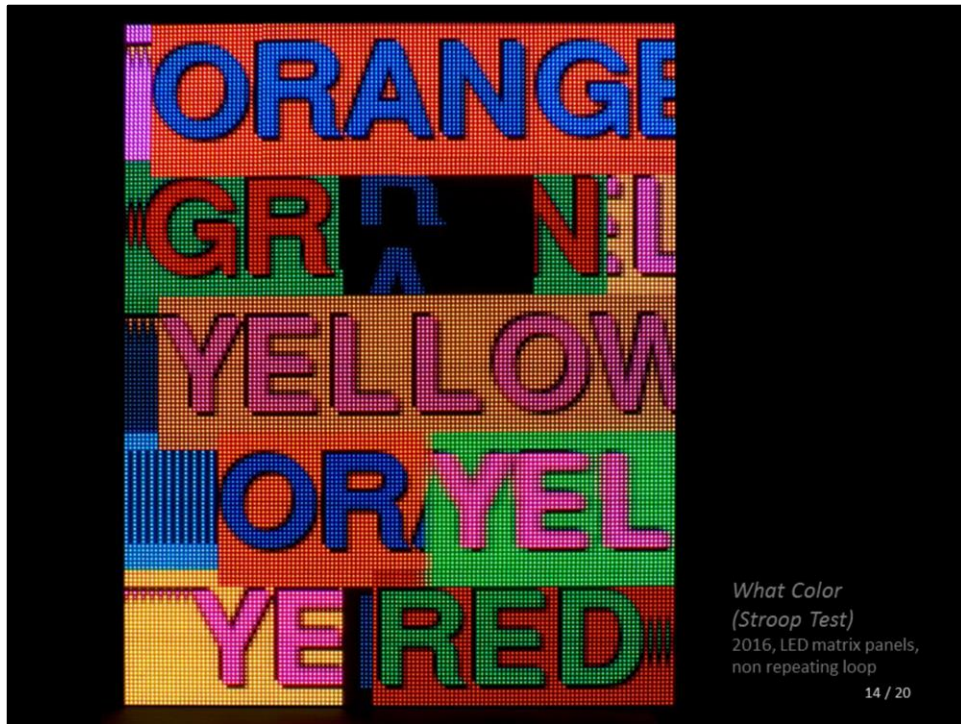
So if I was going to make great art, where else but on a bodega sign

This is a work that is a sign, advertising itself and the colors it uses, or the colors you can read on their optical or RGB opposite backgrounds. And the other way round too. Again and again.
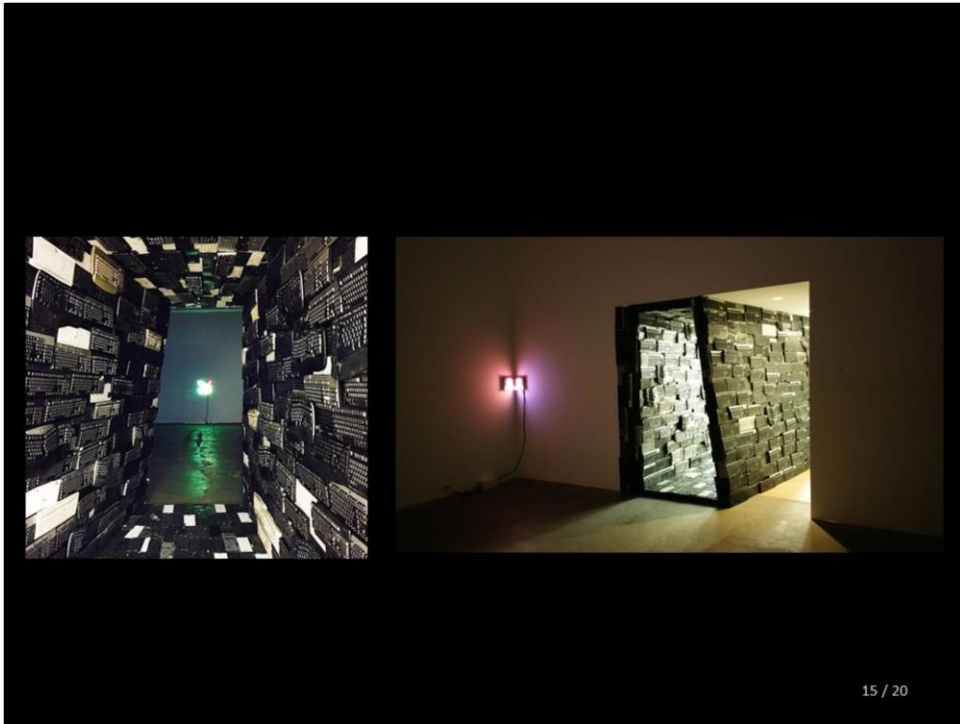
A lot of this work started based on Paul Eluard's surrealist love poem, The World is Blue like an Orange...

This is my personal conversion funnel - A passage way made up of one of our most ubiquitous interfaces, the physical keyboard – figuratively and physically going from painting to screens

Someone helping me construct this referred to it as the cave of forgotten emails.

The Conflict

- We are getting used to being happy users
- For art, being an unhappy user is a productive state.
- This is not good in business - Imagine if Google results were always a challenge to your expectations?
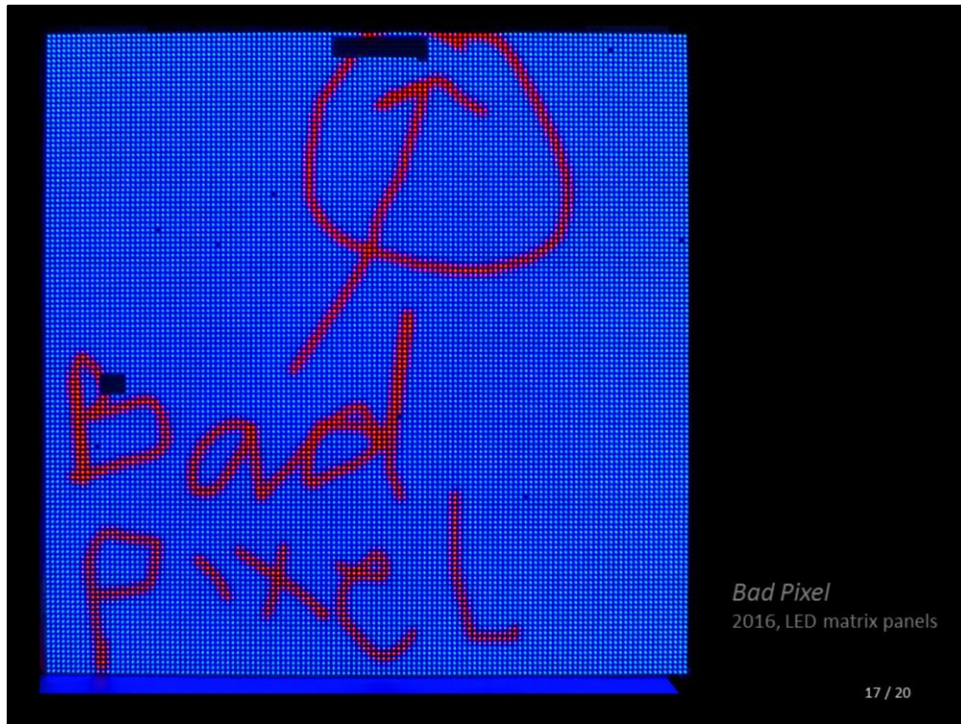
16 / 20

The problem is, and it's Internal & External – is that we are getting used to being happy users

For art, being an unhappy user is a productive state. It's called being an art-user.

What do we do as users AND consumers of art?

What if we also work in technology? Art is not meant to be some kind of antidote – right?

Bad Pixel
2016, LED matrix panels

In response I made things like this – here is a work that is about pointing out what is obvious to distract you from what is not so obvious -- that it's a sign for it's own failure.

This whole thing is broken, an yet, because it's art, it's ok, brokenness is the subject

You Win!!
2016, LED matrix
panels, non repeating
loop
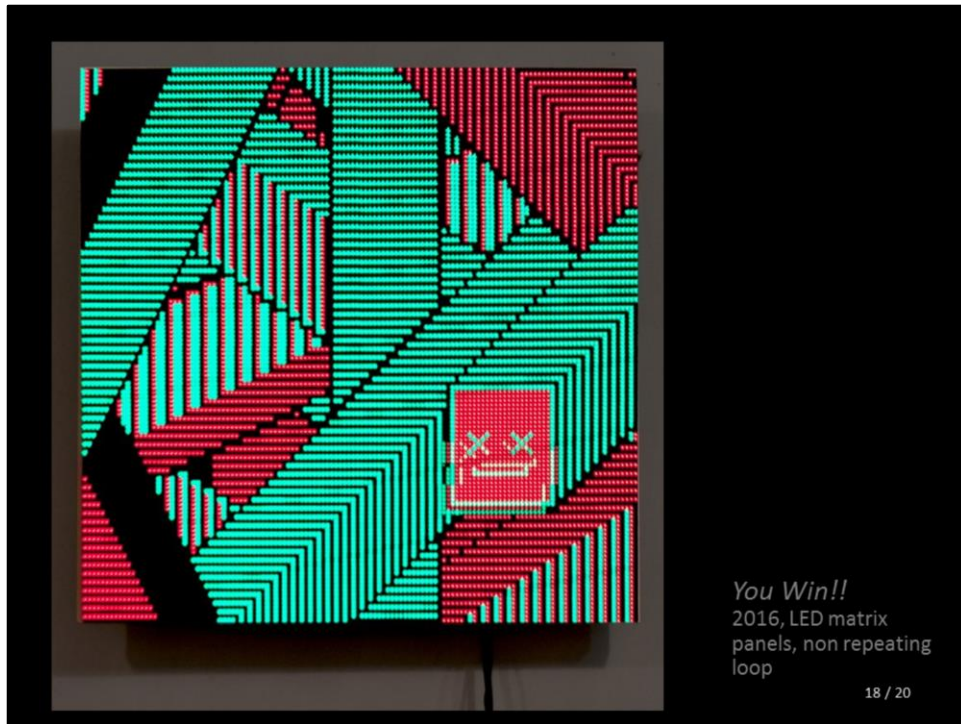
In geometric art, satisfaction comes from patterns where the repetition has predictable variations and disruptions have resonance.

This piece does this but with some old game motifs – In particular that fabulous cascading cards when you win solitaire – but uses to build an abstract painting from the trails of a mostly happy user icon being bounced from edges to edge.
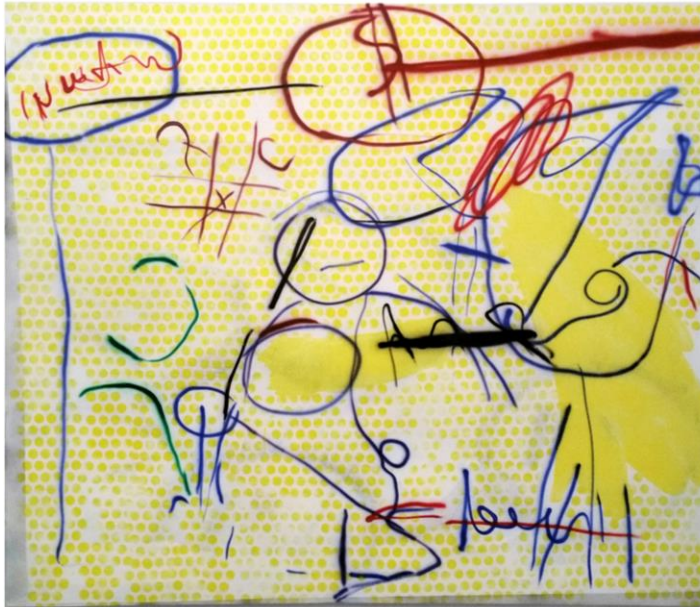
PostIt Note on Users
2015, 56"x70"

I love the whiteboard as an aesthetic – much more than the retro-blackboard aesthetic of Cy Twombly – because it's not about teaching, it's about collaboration and process.

I love the way whiteboards trace the efforts to diagram thought and process and then turn that into into action – in particular those trying to conceive of user experience flows.
Over time, though they pick up the residue of previous sessions and create a miasma of thought noise in scruffy marks and partial erasures. That's a kind of art-user experience.

I Need 2. Always Make Backups
2016, 72"x84"
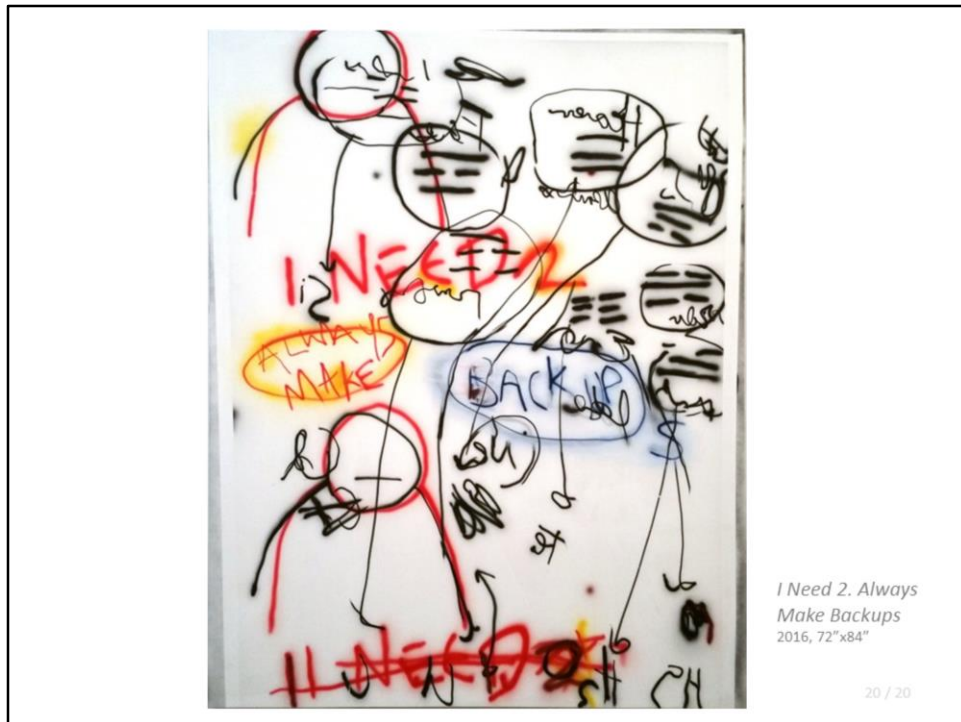
But there is anxiety about us as users or viewers. Nothing makes for an unhappy user more than being reminded they need to make backups, and then not offering a solution.

Of course, one solution here might be to think about whether this is actually a diagram or a drawing of a diagram and which kind of user is it meant for?