



▲ Bitforms founder Steven Sacks, in front of James Paterson's *untitled I (orange)*, 2005.

THE KING OF DIGITAL ART

His New York gallery is turning high tech into a hot commodity. Now he wants to bring new-media masterpieces to the masses.

IN A CONFERENCE ROOM at Handsome, one of the largest fashion companies in South Korea, Steven Sacks, wearing an Etro suit and a Burberry tie – trademark furls of blond hair spilling from either side of his head – is trying to explain the nuances of the art business to Chung Jae-Bong, [...]

Sacks is the founder of bitforms, a New York-based gallery devoted exclusively to what has been variously termed new media art, digital art, interactive art, and software art. [...]

Monumental digital art is becoming a popular choice for public places. Jaume Plensa's *Crown Fountain* was an instant crowd favorite when it opened last year in Chicago's Millennium Park. The San Jose airport recently announced a public art competition that will include "newer forms of visual, digital and information media (digital print, software art, robotics, interactive installations, multiuser installations,

etc.)." Meanwhile, in cities like Seoul and Berlin, LED panels and screens are being wrapped around buildings, sometimes to form entire exteriors.

Digital art is an umbrella term covering a variety of forms, like software code, cell phone-based works, Internet sites, and physical sculpture. What loosely unifies this diverse field is that somewhere along the line, digital technology or software code itself is used in its creation or display. *Standards and Double Standards*, a work by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, consists of 50 buckled belts suspended at waist level. Controlled by a computerized tracking system, the belts rotate to follow people in the gallery. As more people walk near the exhibit, the belts move in a chaotic pattern, evoking invisible surveillance. Another piece by Lozano-Hemmer, *Vectorial Elevation*, takes advantage of pervasive networks. Visitors to www.alzado.net could change the configurations of light projected above the main square in Mexico City, and then receive an email showing the result (the installation moved to Dublin last year). Sacks calls Lozano-Hemmer "the next Christo," with potential for a much bigger audience. "With Christo, you had to get on a plane and fly to New York," he says, referring to *The Gates* project in Central Park earlier this year.

The world has changed a lot even since Sacks opened his gallery. Cofounder of the online advertising and branding firm Digital Pulp, Sacks, a self-described "dotcom burnout," resigned in 1999, he says, "without really knowing what I was going to do." [...]

by Tom Vanderbilt



▲ *Standards and Double Standards*, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. 50 belts and motors, custom software. 2004.