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Iconistory

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Iconistory

Abstract
Iconistory is software for representing complex historical events in highly simplified terms. More specifically, it enables the user to represent events as 32 x 32 pixel icons with short accompanying text descriptions. At one level it is intended as a piece of deadpan parody, adopting the guise of anonymous desktop software in order to push the current state of media to an absurd extreme. But also, in a less ironic fashion, it is concerned with discerning layers of hidden significance within the obvious and schematic.

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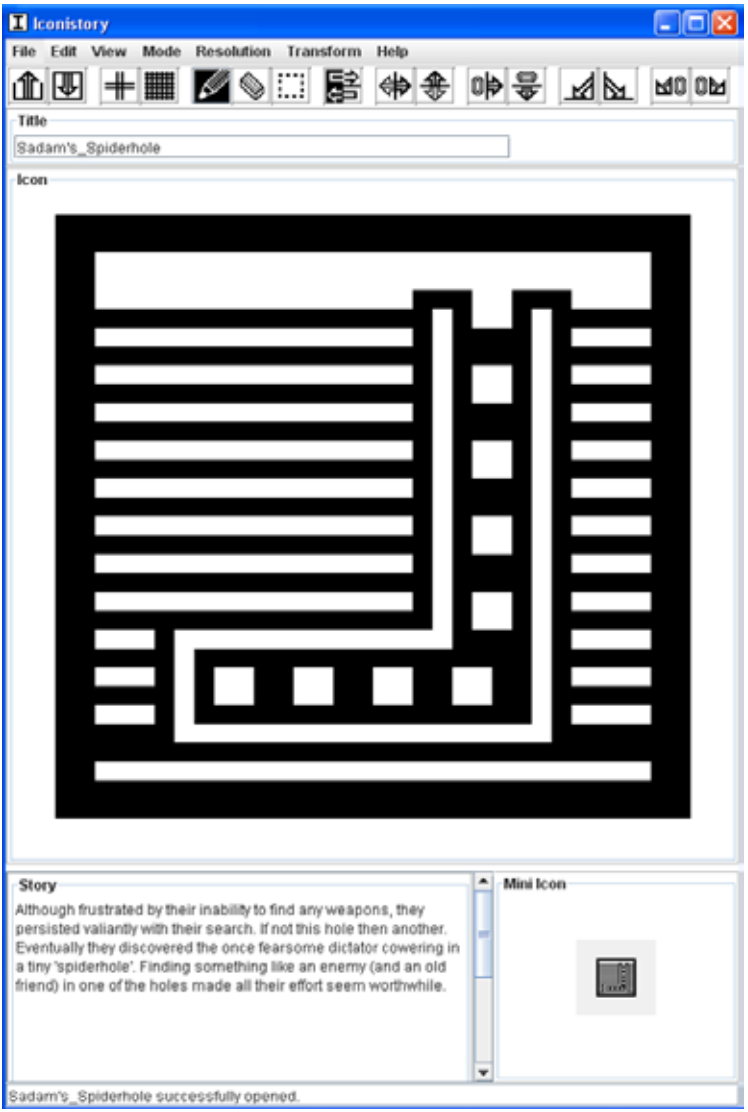


Iconistory: Spiderhole
(Interactive computer application, 2007)

Iconistory

Brogan Bunt

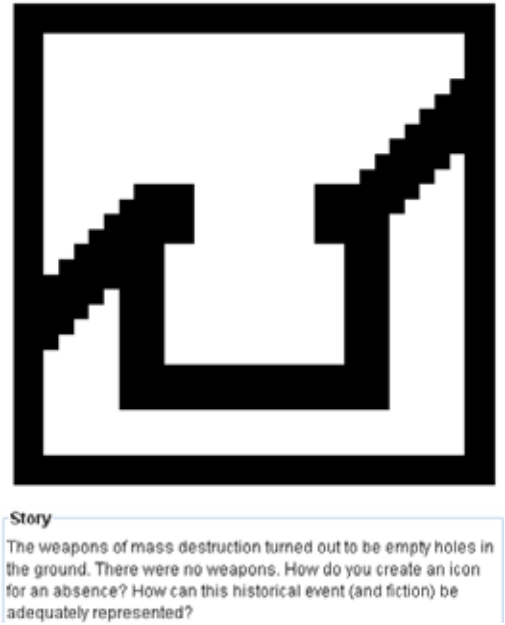
Iconistory is software for representing complex historical events in highly simplified terms. More specifically, it enables the user to represent events as 32 x 32 pixel icons with short accompanying text descriptions. At one level it is intended as a piece of deadpan parody, adopting the guise of anonymous desktop software in order to push the current state of media to an absurd extreme. But also, in a less ironic fashion, it is concerned with discerning layers of hidden significance within the obvious and schematic.

Iconistory formed part of the 2007 group exhibition *Tactics Against Fear* (Faculty of Creative Arts Long Gallery, University of Wollongong) which focused on artistic responses to the 'war on terror'. Here was my accompanying artist's statement:

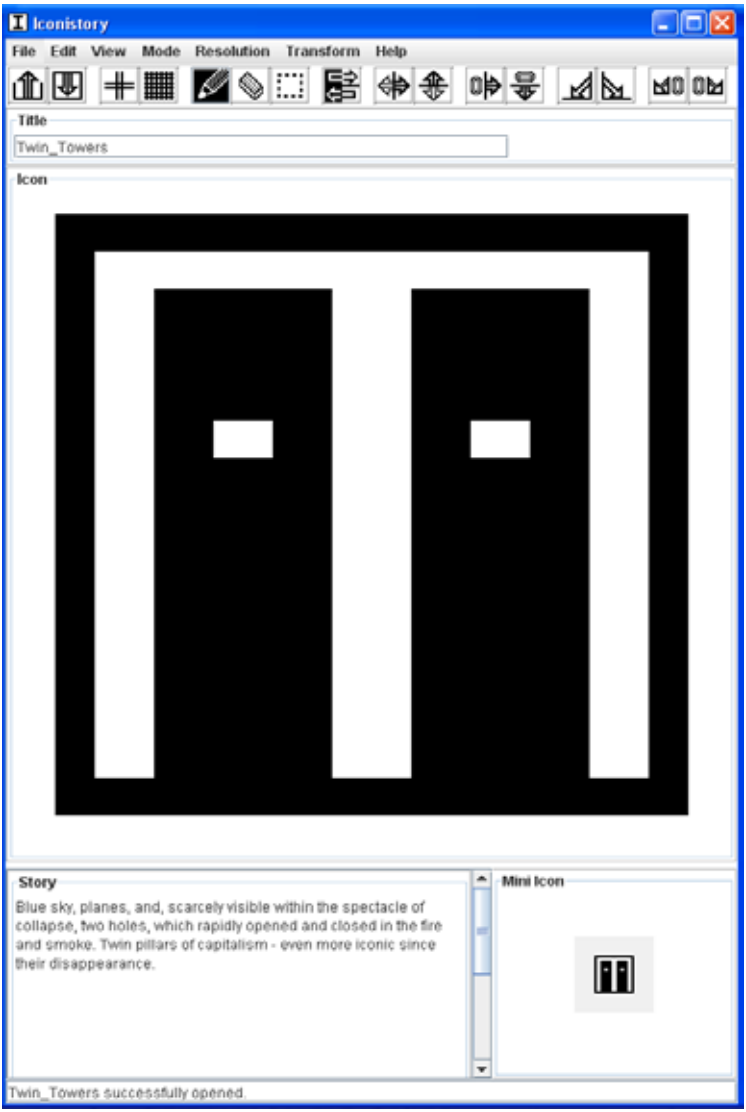
> How can the current 'war on terror' be visually and conceptually represented? Apart from the iconic images — explosions, beards and chadors, beheadings, wrecked towns, caskets etc — there are other ones that threaten to undermine the visible and to pass away from it. Instead of solid objects and bright events there are holes and absences. These visible absences often run alongside the more obvious images so that there is at once the blasting of the Bamiyan buddhas and the scene of the remaining empty alcoves. There is the fiery scene of the destruction of the twin towers and then there is the new, somewhat reduced, New York skyline. There is the face of Osama bin Laden and then the caves of Tora Bora, where he disappeared. In some cases the absences are even more pronounced. The weapons of mass destruction which justified the invasion of Iraq appear as nothing now but holes in the ground — anti-icons that represent through a negation of substantive visible evidence an overriding regime of misinformation and cultural fear. My aim in this project is to render these representative empty spaces as literal icons. The standard Windows icon is a 32 x 32 grid of black and white pixels. These simple arrows, hour-glasses, pointing fingers and eyes represent an effort at minimal, purified clarity. What would it mean to represent the 'war on terror' in these terms? Impossible, of course; but it may also

enable us to recognise the non-spaces that lie at the heart of this very real and yet strangely imaginary space of conflict.

Iconistory still exists as a website where people can download the software, create their own 'iconistories' and post them to the site (http://mediaarts.uow.edu.au/iconistory). It is worth noting that, since it was loaded, the software has developed in new directions. It has lost its political focus and become a more general tool of experimental grid-based drawing. I welcome all contributions!



Iconistory: WMD
(Interactive computer application, 2007)



Iconistory: Twin Towers
(Interactive computer application, 2007)

Iconistory: Tora Bora
(Interactive computer application, 2007)