TWOHUNDREDFIFTYSIXCOLORS BY ERIC FLEISCHAUER AND JASON LAZARUS 2013, 97:00

by Soojin Lee

Ars Gratia Artis by Stephanie Tisza, 2012 (still frame from an animated .gif)

Premièred at Chicago's Gene Siskel Film Center in April 2013, Eric Fleischauer and Jason Lazarus's *twohundredfiftysixcolors* (2013) is a 97-minute silent film made entirely of animated GIFs that the artists collected for approximately two years. It is an experimental film about GIFs, and the title refers to the number of colors on the file format's palette-a title that hints at the film's intention to explore and present the aesthetic possibilities of the GIF. Since its introduction in 1987, the Graphics Interchange Format has become a convenient and ubiquitous tool for making memes and simple animations. Featuring some three thousand GIFs found on the internet, created, or donated by others, *twohundredfiftysixcolors* not only functions as an archive of sorts, but also offers "an expansive and revealing portrait of what has become a Zeitgeist medium," as the film's website proclaims.

Fleischauer and Lazarus did not randomly splice together the found GIFs, but compiled them carefully and smartly according to their contents and styles. Thus organized, the images in the film help us begin to see how

the GIF medium has evolved and how it reflects our internet culture. The film provides an immense pleasure of discovery. For example, the film opens by showing dozens of different animated graphics that indicate "loading" on the internet. Computer users encounter loading signs and messages several times a day, but the film amazes by revealing how various, inventive, or silly the designs have been and can be. At the Chicago première, as this sequence of loading images continued on the screen, the audience burst into sighs (immediately responding to the loading signs) and then into laughter (at our collective impatience).

In the film's archive of GIFs, a few particular themes appear dominant, namely sex, politics, and pop culture. Playful and sarcastic images of politicians, celebrities, animals, food, and defecation, as well as pornography, are the quantitative standouts. At times, the sexist and racist jokes are quite offensive, yet they are reflections of our culture. The film's audience may already have seen many of the GIFs because they have been so widely circulated. For example, they include the viral GIF known as "If you like it then you shoulda put a vote on it" (made in 2012 by Chris Ritter for a Buzzfeed post by Krutika Mallikarjuna), in which Barack Obama's face was inserted onto Beyoncé's swimsuited dancing body. Other memorable images include a Gummi Bear raising the middle finger at the viewer and the MGM film company's iconic lion vomiting while roaring (made by Stephanie Tisza).

The animated images pass by rapidly, and the film requires an intensive viewing that draws the viewer into focusing on every movement. But it is also an entertaining film to watch. The content of the collected GIFs is generally humorous, and they have been edited to highlight and augment wit. The film is simultaneously an unprecedented archive of GIFs and a unique, well-made conceptual artwork.

Author affiliation: SOOJIN LEE teaches art history at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

For more info + upcoming screenings visit http://twohundredfiftysixcolors.com // ericfleischauer.com // jasonlazarus.com