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Design, technology + DIY = Digifest
[ONT Edition]

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It's a mod, mod world.

In this age of the remix, where technology, culture and objects are being hacked, changed, combined and redesigned, really the limits are our own imagination.

For a peek at what some of the techie folks are up too, Digifest 2006 is a good look at the subculture of modding (or modifying) which combines forms of art, design, technology and a do-it- yourself ethos.

Of course, although it's hot right now, modding things is something people have been doing forever.

"I was always one of those kids who wanted to take things apart and see how they work, or rebuild them into something new," says Steve Daniels, a 35-year-old assistant professor of new media at the School of Image Arts at Ryerson University.

His addition to the Mods exhibit is a perfect example. A lover of dumpster diving, Daniels found a tiny, old-school black-and-white monitor and started thinking about the first graphical user interface he'd ever used an Etch-A-Sketch.

Through trial and error (and several broken aluminium dust- filled etchers), he rigged the red plastic drawing toy to function as the mouse for his computer. He then wrote the software on the computer, which is a drawing program that was obviously inspired by MacPaint.

"I'd say my work is involved with juxtaposing old technologies with new," he says. "Both the Etch-A-Sketch and the program are drawing tools."

The mouse button is actually a sewing-pedal-like device, so it does require some hand-foot co-ordination.

"Some people are really thrown off by that," he says with a chuckle.

Useful? Perhaps not. Fun? Hell, yes.

Daniels' invention and other mods are on display at the Design Exchange (234 Bay St.). There are other events at Harbourfront and the Ontario Science Centre. It runs until Sunday. For more information, check out www.dx.org/digifest.

Credit: Toronto Star

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