

# *Portraits of digital players*

ARTISTS,  
INSTIGATORS  
OF INNOVATIVE  
PROJECTS,  
EVENTS,  
INSTITUTIONS...



# CARLY WHITAKER

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<http://carlywhitaker.wordpress.com>

Expert in interactivity, artist, professor and researcher, Carly Whitaker explores the specific relationship between artist, artwork and viewer—who becomes user—in her interactive installations.

PHOTO © TAMMY BOOYZEN



■ Born in 1984 in Johannesburg, where she lives and works, Carly is a senior lecturer in digital interactivity at Vega School and the University of the Witwatersrand, where she graduated with a degree in fine arts. She discovered digital media as an art form through complementary training, and her stay in London allowed her to further her understanding of new media, as she confronted its many artistic applications.

While pursuing her artistic career, she finished her master's degree in Interactive Digital Art and Media in 2011, adding a practical component to her research. Her memoir explored the practice of South African digital art through Altermodernism<sup>(1)</sup>, which examines how South Africa's digital culture and artistic practices are developed, managed and made accessible in other countries. *The more I researched, the more I felt that a critical engagement with this topic was necessary.*

Name, comment, #tag.  
Carly Whitaker.  
2011.

A large part of Carly's practice focuses on digital interactivity, as it allows her to forge a specific relationship between the

artist, the work and the public viewer/user. This tendency is expressed by the use of computers, dressed-up technology (interactive clothing) and networked installations. In the networked environments, viewers, as "users", see their role within the artwork changing. *The relationship between "input" and "output" is often addressed in my work, as is their way of creating dialogues within the work, as well as between the user and the artist, which necessarily affects the role of this user. These fields of interest and themes are directly linked to digital media and the way I inhabit the world I live in. The themes will continue to change, whereas I will progress in my own practice. Digital media is synonymous with everything that can be explored in our current culture. It acts as a voice and a channel that reconstitute the way I experience the culture in which I evolve.*

Carly has noticed that technology and digital media, and especially digital art practices, have developed in Africa thanks to the emergence of communities that share and collaborate, thus generating awareness. *It's this awareness of what we're doing here in Africa, and particularly in South Africa, but especially the awareness of our process, that allows us to be involved from a critical point of view in our actions and our productions.*

The prospectives of digital media and its intrinsic artistic potential cannot be defined or limited, as they are always changing to the rhythm of this constantly evolving medium. *The most magical aspect of digital media is probably how it provokes us, as artists confronted with its capacity, to continuously question ourselves.* ■

(1) See Carly Whitaker's article in this issue.

> **NAME, COMMENT, #TAG, THE PRINCESS, THE DREAM KEEPER, THE GUARDIAN.**  
Carly's main works, developed for her master's degree in



*The Dream Keeper.*  
Carly Whitaker.  
2011.



*The Princess.*  
Carly Whitaker.  
2011.

2011 are: *Name, Comment, #Tag, The Princess, The Dream Keeper and The Guardian.* In order to establish a dialogue, she addresses various themes, ranging from multi-user interaction with an artwork to the association of fashion and digital technology. A networked environment that is both virtual and tangible allows several users to interact. Digital media requires this attention to multi-user objects, it allows users to type their name, a comment, and to select a specific #tag, derived from their own experience on social media. These are projected onto a light and futile summer dress, which incarnates the interaction. The trending hashtag is then displayed with specifically arranged LEDs. This circle, and information transposed between the tangible world and the digital field, in turn create a dialogue between the user and the artwork. This dynamic is mirrored in the trending hashtags and comments on *Twitter* and *Facebook*.



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