



WHEN IS THE REAL UNREAL?

*Vanguard Israeli
artist **Eyal Gever** tells
Dominic Rodgers how
he sees 3D computer
simulation as invention*

WORDS
Dominic Rodgers

PHOTOS
Eyal Gever

The first thing Eyal Gever does is show me the view from his friend's hotel where he's on holiday with his family at Hotel Principe delle Nevi in Cervinia, Italy. Then he points me in the direction of an article he read in Forbes about the 12 similarities between artists and entrepreneurs by John Maeda, president of the Rhode Island School of Design, on what leaders can learn from artists and designers. He's not avoiding turning the discussion on to his work, but he's clearly passionate about a lot of different things and people.

Particularly about pushing the boundaries of art, and technology, and the two combined. He's looking for further collaboration whenever he can. We were introduced by Robert Norton with whom he is good friends and later on he suggests I speak to Saul Klein, a venture capitalist at Index Ventures, who is a close friend and long-time collaborator.

He's been focused solely on art for two years now, but it's been something he has worked towards since studying art after leaving the Israeli army and before he went into the tech scene in the early-90s. While serving as a paratrooper, he was taken ill with a kidney infection and, once he had recovered, he spent a year in Israel's defence force's central computing system unit where he learnt about 3D simulation.

Although he went straight to Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, in Jerusalem, he had set up his first business before the end of his first year and left after his third year to focus on building it. It was called Zapa Digital Arts. It was 1994. He was 24.

Impressive though it is, Gever doesn't refer much to his 17 years as a hi-tech entrepreneur. He's laser focused on his

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art, what he is working on now and his projects over the last two years. Even when he’s on holiday.

I ask him what he thinks about the contrast between art and business, and the paradox that artists must have no objective to express themselves freely, without tether, but businesses need objectives in order to achieve their goals and sustain themselves.

“There is a fundamental difference between art and business, but these days you need to operate as wisely and smart as a business, otherwise you’ll fail,” he says.

“On a higher level though, artists value creation, whereas entrepreneurs’ mission is to create value. Artists don’t do anything anybody really needs – nobody needs your art. It doesn’t solve any problem, it’s not a utility, but when you build a business it serves a market or solves a problem, it has an immediate impact.

“Your art, as an artist, needs to fulfil one goal, which is the hardest of all, to create a masterpiece – because nobody needs it. If you value yourself as an artist, and your craft, you would dive into the very tedious, intense research process eventually with the aim to create something which is true to your philosophy, your vision, and without any compromises.

“In business you always have deadlines, constraints of budgets, and you always have customers and partners. Although you have these in art, nobody minds if you compromise. When you present your art, they will judge you to death.”

🗯️ Don’t you think that if businessmen and women took that sentiment of the masterpiece, of making something perfect, it would enhance business?

❗️ “No, I think one of the smartest things that has happened in the last ten years is the quick and dirty approach; to get to market very, very quickly and be responsive to your audiences’ feedback and reactions, and release versions in very small gaps. You release many, many iterations of your software; whereas, if you remember in the 90s, you built something for a year, you release it and everyone would have to wait another year for a new release.

“So this is a fundamental difference between a piece of art and a utility, and I don’t think utilities need to be in a lab for a long time before they’re released into the market because you’ll miss the market and the market needs it.

“However there is a fundamental similarity in the way you look at things – artists and entrepreneurs are very similar in the

way they look at the world, and they want to execute their vision in a relentless way. For true artists, art is at the core of our life. Like when an entrepreneur has an idea and they are going after it, it’s like they’re hunted by it until they make it happen.

“Artists need to know how business works in the art world in order to be successful, just as business entrepreneurs do, otherwise they’ll fail. You’ve got to have a strong work ethic in both worlds and be resilient – artists know things take time, it doesn’t happen overnight, it always takes much longer than you think. You make mistakes and you need to keep focus and find solutions to challenges; it’s exactly what entrepreneurs go through.

“Just being in your studio every day and kind of inventing what the heck you need to do tomorrow, and the day after and the day after. Nobody tells you. But it’s the same for entrepreneurs. I’ve been an entrepreneur for 17 years and no one ever told me what I had to do – it just comes through the process.”

With the difference between art and business being the slow process of making a masterpiece for artists, and the fast-paced, interactive, trial and error, failing fast and often, creating lots of different versions so you’re constantly improving and answering clients’ needs, it’s similar to the rapid prototyping methods often used with 3D printing – and you use these a lot in your art, he says.

“This comes from the similarity between artists and entrepreneurs being hunted by their idea, and making something tangible out of the intangible. At the very beginning you don’t have anything apart from your idea. They either use resources, invent tools, or find tools or people who have the craft to make the idea into a finished product. So they’re both creating something out of nothing. The difference is that one is fixed to the artist’s vision and the other has to be flexible to the need of the market.

“With my art there are two aspects. One is capturing a sublime moment and the second is the confusion between what’s real and what’s not real. We’re very close to the singularity moment and you won’t know what is real and what’s not.

“CPU processors are getting to such a fast rate and software is becoming so smart, what you’re able to simulate is getting so powerful. We’re entering an era when it’s going to be pretty blurry between what is real and what is virtual. Is what we’re looking at the source or has it been manipulated by the media, by people or everybody around us? So my art is capturing those radical moments and

LEFT
Collisions:
Bus vs Car

RIGHT
Nuclear Bomb
Ten multi-
layered UV LED
inkjet prints



Artist: Eyal Gever
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finding a way to fabricate them without human intervention, so I develop code where I can do those crazy events; they could be sublime moments or moments of beauty, or catastrophes.

“Then without any human touch, I send it to print, if you will. Then from the code there is an output which is physical and, when the audience enter into a space with these moments and sculptures, it’s uncanny because you’re looking at something photorealistic; it looks really real, like a waterfall, but it also has a sort of alien aesthetic and you can kind of tell if comes from a computer. I like this tension.”

It operates on two levels though. You’re making physical representations of digital representations, but at the same time you’re using the simulation to express real sentiments, Gever says.

“As an artist, I chose a subject matter, say a nuclear explosion. I start with doing a massive research project and then writing the code and the engines, and I will run thousands of simulations, variations and test after test, but as soon as the code is ready, I will not interfere with the end result, I won’t manipulate it. I just let the physical engine eventually create its own explosion.

“My approach is that my role as an artist is kind of to play a mini god. If you look at the *Collisions*, I wrote thousands of variations there, but eventually the final ones I chose, I didn’t touch anything; I didn’t beautify anything. I just used it. The struggle is just the process. It takes years for someone to express themselves, focus, find what’s unique and create their own language or philosophy. The same happens in business. Yeah, sometimes it happens when you’re young like Mark Zuckerberg [co-founder of Facebook], but sometimes it takes you years to develop your own language and approach.

“When you look at two objects colliding with each other, you can look at them as two trucks colliding with one another; they

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could be two masses colliding together. I don't need to feed you as the viewer with pornographic elements so you figure out that there's someone who's getting killed here; no, it's putting you as the viewer in the position of taking part. It's as though I've created a 3D camera and it's up to you to visualise exactly what the scenario is you're witnessing.

"For example, I actually created a tsunami crashing into a skyscraper two weeks before the tsunami in Japan. I don't know why, but I did it in black, like oil black; it was almost prophetic. You look at photos after the catastrophe and the tsunami is so dark, intense, strong and black, exactly the way I did it. But it's weird because I did it a long time before it happened."

What other projects have you been working on?

"The last year and a half, I've been very focused on creating moments based on music and dance. I'm developing technologies for how a music piece or sound wave with physical parameters would look in a 3-dimensional series of sculptures, then moving on to dance and combining it with physics, and looking at holograms and Musion Eyeliner [3D holographic projection system].

"I'm looking into creating a show that I will digitise and scan in 3D and offer a limited edition number of frames from it – each one could be made into 3D sculptures of different sizes. People can consume them online or they'll be able to see them in a gallery where there'll be an installation of some of the sculptures. I envision that I can provide snippets of the show and repurpose some of the technologies I've developed and people can enjoy it on their iPads or HD, 3DTV screens at home.

"This is how my art is evolving. I try to be this fusion of developing my own tool, my own technologies and mixing media

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together. It's the role of the artist to not do more of the same but better; to do something brave and radical and different.

"In this case it was a natural evolution for me having worked for a year on the sound simulations and sculptures to create a scenario where you have amaz-

ing dancers who are at the top of the craft of body movement and dance, and then you have music – it could be live music or a DJ set, whatever – and then you have my technology, which would be responsive to the music and responsive to the movements of the dancers, and everything will impact on one another. By providing these rules, I create new art, exactly as I did a few years before with collisions or liquids. Every time I enter into a new series, I provide myself with rules, and then I start to envision and work in a very methodological process.

"It's about creating a new form of art, which is not going to be like going to a museum, but it's still high art. It's not going to be like watching contemporary dance because it's something different, but it will combine collaborations with that and with people like DJ Shadow. It's going to be a new form of high-art experience.

"Cirque du Soleil have an amazing business model and know how to make money from it. You look at Damien Hirst and Andy Warhol or Murakami and others who have found the right business model for their art. Having the business experience, plus art, I can think about this kind of ambitious project. I understand how I can pull off the technology and aesthetics and the people, and bring the financial resources, and make sure that it's going to be impactful in the art world, but also successful and something I can monetise."

Would you feel comfortable working with brands on the project?

"Because it's high art, I want it to be kept very autonomous, but I definitely want to collaborate with companies or people who can piece things together to make it more. So it would be great to have the opportunity to work with someone like Musion, to make something that has never been seen before, then that's attractive to me and could be for them.

"I've looked at working with other companies, such as Autodesk, to join together; we could show what the future will look like and out of that we can provide a tool set for other artists to use. I don't have a problem at all with providing other people with access to the tools and technologies I develop. I want to push the future of art and invite any artist who doesn't understand or have access to tools or technologies to enable them to be extremely creative with what used to be technically complicated.

"Partnering people is a huge opportunity for me and others because we have the same passion of pushing the language forward. In my case it is for art, but in their



ABOVE
Break Wall 1,
2012,
3D print
polymer jetting
technology

RIGHT
Waterfall
Sculpture
created using
fluids simulation
particle based
simulations

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case it is showing the world or their marketplace or industry what's possible.

"I can definitely see myself collaborating with brands, but I don't want to put it in the context of sponsorship, rather creating something together. I can definitely see myself collaborating with haute couture and showing what's possible, pushing the future of our visions of the human body. I can see myself working with robotics or car companies; I don't know what we would create together, but something in this ecosystem of our views of the future."

Do you think creativity is becoming an increasingly valuable commodity for the business world?

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"If you look at the most successful entrepreneurs through history, all of them have looked at the world with a very fresh and unique point of view. Great artists have to keep a very fresh, creative approach. Whether it's Skype, Google, Facebook, whoever you pick, they have really focused with unique, radical thinking – like great artists. You have to be clear in your thinking, very ambitious, and work hard to make stuff happen, but also be unique; nobody will give a damn if it's more of the same old stuff. It has to be really impactful.

"Businesses are adopting artistic values by building products and services that really matter to people, not just aesthetically but in terms of their use. Whether it's Zuckerberg creating a plat-

form to share experiences, or Steve Jobs creating iPhones and iPads for those platforms, suddenly we see businesses asking themselves: 'What purpose do we serve?' "Businesses are asking themselves: 'What is the value of our business – not in share price, or number of employees and profit margins, but in terms of social value?' This is where it's interesting to consider how artists work – and their integrity could be really valuable for business.

"Like iTunes control the App Store, but you have millions of people making great businesses out of that. Then you have Zynga, one of the first game developers on Facebook, when it was already a mega company, which took advantage of that and now is a multi-billion-dollar company.

"The world is changing – new media art will become more popular as more artists feel more comfortable with new technology. More and more smart screens will be around us. I believe in the next five to ten years there will be a huge evolution in the way we grasp space due to projections and lights and sound. It will be responsive to our movements and data.

"Just a few weeks ago, I met this amazing guy called Dominic Harris who is a light architect. We were introduced by Neil Rimer, another venture capitalist at Index Ventures, and he showed me this project he did with his team in Peru where he worked with the national stadium in Lima. They placed sensors that analyse the sound made by the crowd in real time and covered the outside of the stadium with LED lights that light up more with the volume of the crowd, so during a game when everyone is shouting, the building is illuminated. It's becoming alive, it's breathing. When I heard that, I was mesmerised. You can see the future of creativity."

So what's next for you?

"Everything leads to another thing and another thing. Focus is the thing. I'm working on pushing the limits. I can't tell you what is coming in four to five years' time because it will be a result of what I'm working on now. I've only been an artist for two years, so I really hope I can show my work to lots of people and show it in some more traditional institutions, and blur the lines. I want to create a new easel, new art, a new force that doesn't exist yet."