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Adobe to Launch a Virtual Museum Online, Headed by Tony Oursler

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SAN JOSE, Calif.— For years artists have employed Adobe Photoshop to create their work, using the program to retouch images and create often copyright-infringing pastiches. Now the software company is going to give these artists and others a place to display their work: on October 6, the company will break digital ground by unveiling what it calls the first-ever Internet museum, a free online exhibition space that will be open 365 days a year. Called the Adobe Museum of Digital Media, the digital institution will open with an exhibition by video artist Tony Oursler, followed by a show this winter by Japanese artist Mariko Mori.

The museum itself will occupy a virtual building designed by architect Filippo Innocenti and digital producer Piero Frescobaldi, who mapped out the plans precisely enough to allow the premises to be structurally sound, in theory, if erected in the physical world. To allow visitors to move through the museum, Adobe has designed virtual "eyes and ears" that float on the screen, a suspended translucent eye — akin to Emerson's "transparent eye-ball," and resembling something between a jellyfish and flower — that moves through an external atrium and travels upstairs to the exhibition space. Tall pistil-like towers rising above will house an archive of past shows that will remain available to the digital gallery-goers long after their official "close" date.

Oursler's inaugural exhibition, titled "The Uncanny Valley," aims to explore man's relationship with Internet, and the effects of human consciousness unleashed from the constraints of the physical world. In the show, the Internet will be represented by an interactive 3D flowchart that can be probed and explored by museum visitors. The exhibition is being organized by Bard College Center of Curatorial Studies director Tom Eccles, a digital facsimile of whom will pop into the virtual experience now and then to posit different meanings and theories about the Web.

The title of "Uncanny Valley" refers to the theory of Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori that humans respond with increasing positivity to machines that are made more and more anthropomorphic, until a pivotal breaking point where the robot begins to resemble the human form too closely. In that "uncanny valley," perception of the robot dips drastically into revulsion, a response that greatly inhibits interaction between man and machine, according to the article Mori published in a 1970 volume of Energy magazine.