

## **Behind the scenes with *The Listening Post***

*From Real and Hyper Real, Saturday, January 30, 2010–Sunday, August 1, 2010*

This monumental new-media artwork from the museum's permanent collection is composed of 231 screens, over 1,000 feet of cables, three computers, nine speakers, and numerous other devices and materials. Transported in nine crates that weigh a total of 2,200 pounds, *The Listening Post* just returned to the museum from a European tour to the Reina Sofia in Madrid and the ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Denmark. The staff at the San Jose Museum of Art spent over 300 hours to install *The Listening Post* as part of the celebration of our fortieth anniversary.

*The Listening Post* features seven distinct sections or "movements" in a cycle that lasts about twenty minutes. The actual content within the movements never repeats, as it reflects "live" (with a one-to-two-hour delay) and uncensored Internet data.

### **Movement #1—Wave Cycle**

Incoming messages are sorted by their length to create visual and aural "waves" of text that surge across the screens. The screens tick very quietly for a short message and louder for a longer one.

### **Movement #2—Topic Clusters**

Thousands of simultaneous conversations are scanned and arranged by content. When a related message is found, the text freezes on the screen with an audible "snap." A synthetic voice reads the message, together with a pitched tone, and overlapping sounds and visuals gradually reach a cacophony.

### **Movement #3—Scrolling Text**

Two hundred and thirty one incoming messages wash across the display in a random pattern, forming a moving curtain of text. A metallic tone announces the onset of words.

#### **Movement #4—Least Used Words**

The last two hours of messages are scanned to isolate about 200 words occurring only once in the data set. This collection of odd and unusual words, including typos and non-words, scrolls rhythmically upward on the screens.

#### **Movement #5—Screen Names**

Starting at the lower left, the display grid steadily fills with randomly selected “screen names” of the chat room participants, accompanied by the sounds of distant, reverberating footsteps.

#### **Movement #6 – Four-Letter Words**

The screens display a sequence of four-letter words selected at random from recent chat text. The words are displayed letter-by-letter with a mechanical clatter in a manner reminiscent of train station arrival/departure boards.

#### **Movement #7—I Am (I Like / I Love)**

The last 100,000 messages received are scanned to find eighty-five messages beginning with the words “I am.” The phrases are then sorted by length, starting with short and simple to the more complex. With each cycle of the seven-part composition, this movement rotates in alternative phrases beginning with “I like” and “I love.”