The Snake Pit links recent developments in ultra-high-resolution display technology and global-network connectivity with aesthetic and social concerns in contemporary art. It has three primary purposes:

- To explore technology's enormous potential to create forums for aesthetic and social engagement.
- To explore issues of mental health care and human consciousness in late twentieth-century urban life.
- To address a significant social issue through innovative uses of technology while expanding the boundaries of traditional artistic media and visitor participation.

Visitors use a simple touchscreen interface to engage with a near-photographic quality, 6.3-million pixel (~3000x2000) greyscale liquid crystal display, driven by extended hypertext markup language (HTML) and a customized World Wide Web browser. Whether they arrive electronically or physically, visitors are not passive participants. Rather, The Snake Pit allows them to add their own experiences as multimedia commentary in the project's hypertext environment and by contributing to the project's online newsgroup (atl.society.mental-health).

With both laser-sharp statistical focus and lyrical abandon, The Snake Pit examines mental health issues through a hypertext of still and moving images, graphics, sound, and text. Its montage-like presentation is inspired by the layered nature of its subject and is driven by the developing potentials of liquid-crystal display technology, which offers the means to effectively present a visually compelling and multifaceted exploration of a complex subject.

The physical installation creates an evocative setting for viewers to experience and participate in the events that unfold on the flat panel LCD. Viewers trigger the events through a simple touchscreen interface. By touching activated areas of photographs, they navigate through a hypertext of digitized video, audio, photography, text, and statistics.

Recent technical innovations allow The Snake Pit to be a catalyst for personal reflection and social action. The striking presentation of the paper-like LCD, combined with extended HTML capabilities, create a powerful medium for artistic expression. Bi-directional hypertext capabilities provide a delivery and participation system for art and information. In order to take advantage of this high resolution and to give the artist more control over navigable space in the hypertext, HTML extensions allow specification of time-based imaging, display-specific rendering of images, and overlapping objects.

The Snake Pit evolved from Xerox PARC's PAIR project, an experimental program in which resident artists collaborate with PARC researchers. It suggests a model for future projects in which technology, art, and social concerns unite to create a participatory, interactive forum linking diverse communities throughout the world.

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