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Art in Review; Eva and Franco Mattes

By ROBERTA SMITH

13 Most Beautiful Avatars
Postmasters
459 West 19th Street, Chelsea
Through March 17

Eva and Franco Mattes have gone relatively legitimate and, it should be added, salable. The duo, also known as 0100101110101101.org, is expert at various forms of duplicity and intervention. They have mounted an extensive ad campaign for a nonexistent movie, "United We Stand"; briefly kidnapped the Nike logo for a public installation in Vienna; created a fictional artist with a real career; and executed various forms of media hacking and culture jamming.

Now they are making portraits, or, more accurately, digital prints on canvas of the avatars -- digital surrogates -- that people create to become part of the online virtual world called Second Life.

What's remarkable is the eerie effectiveness of these works as paintings in the nonvirtual world. With their flat colors, slightly blocky features and assertive hair, these images of men and women exude a sexy artifice that is both seductive and a parody of seductiveness. They also evoke Ann Lee, the manga character featured in videos by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno, and the portraits of Alex Katz and Richard Phillips.

It may be that the technical imperfections of the Second Life software make up for the lack of facture. Such kinks will eventually be ironed out, and the avatars will be completely realistic -- at which point, these works could verge on unique. ROBERTA SMITH