

Through the Eyes of an Artist: The EyeWriter (Premium Article)

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By Marci Wise

The Man



Legendary LA graffiti writer, publisher and activist Tony Quan, aka “Tempt One,”

In the 90’s, legendary LA graffiti writer, publisher and activist Tony Quan, aka “Tempt One,” was leading the charge to affect community change at a grassroots level – when suddenly his work, his art, and his world came to a screeching halt. In 2003 he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease (ALS) and within two years was completely paralyzed. He found the loss of mobility and personal freedom devastating. “Prior to my paralysis, I felt a profound sense of fulfillment being of service to the community, and that – coupled with the loss of my ability to paint and draw – left me with a sense of emptiness” says Tempt One.

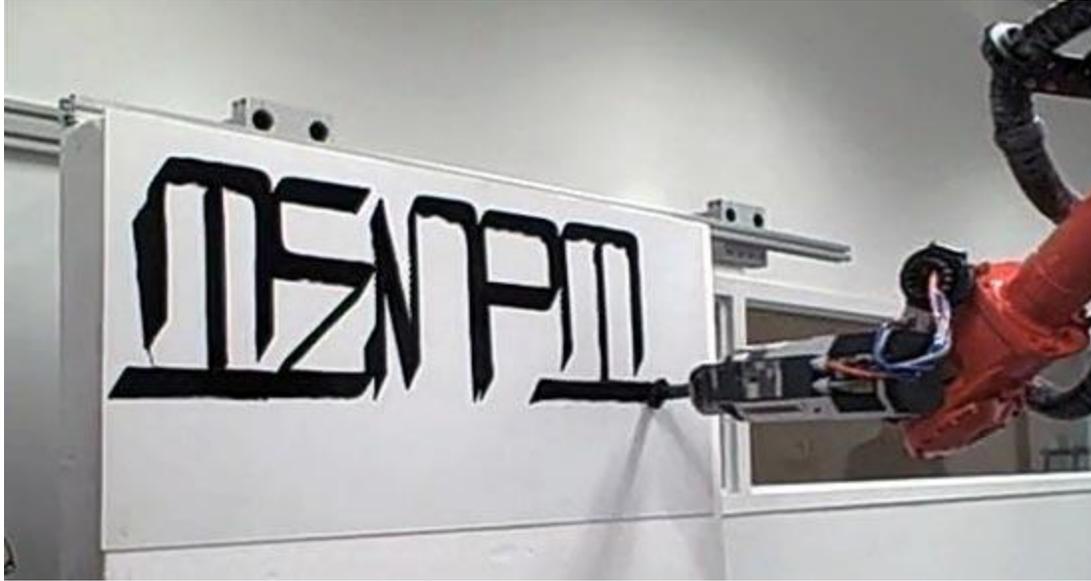
The Mission

For the next several years his artistic expression was silenced – until a group of forward-thinking friends and colleagues came to the rescue. Mick Ebeling, the mastermind of the project, compiled an impressive group of visionaries consisting of artists, scientists, programmers and hackers. After an intensive 10-day collaboration, they collectively came up with a way to reconnect Tempt One with purpose. They created the EyeWriter, a low-cost eye-tracking apparatus with custom software that allows artists to draw using only their eyes. The invention allowed Tempt One to draw his tag for the first time in over 5 years, and then transmit and project the image outside on a wall that he could see from his hospital room window. Ebeling recalls that powerful moment and Tempt One’s heartfelt response, “he said he felt like he’d been held underwater for 5 years and someone finally reached down and pulled him up so he could grab a breath.”



Eyewriter Gallery

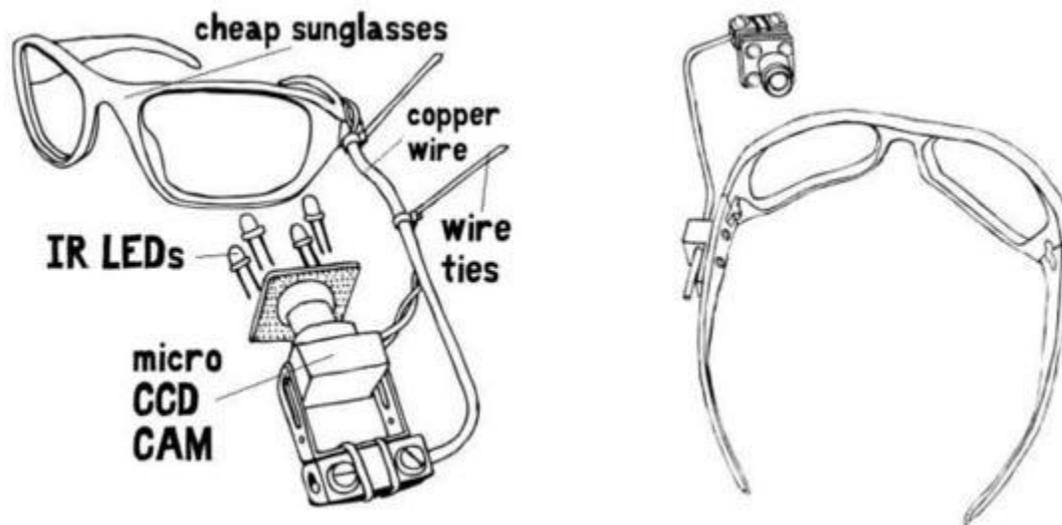
So how did they do it? The EyeWriter software consists of two parts – an eye-tracking software designed for use with low-cost glasses, and a drawing software for drawing with eye movements. First, the eye-tracking software detects and tracks the position of a pupil from an incoming camera and uses a calibration sequence to map the tracked pupil coordinates to positions on a computer screen or projection. Then the eye-drawing software allows you to draw using a time-based interface so that triggering buttons or creating points for drawing is achieved by focusing on the position for a given amount of time. By using the EyeWriter technology, Tempt One has since participated in art shows in Norway, Tokyo and Vienna. Tempt One friend and collaborator EYEONE adds that “having the ability to draw, write and be creative again has been incredibly uplifting for Tempt. The EyeWriter project has inspired many people around the world.”



Tempt Robotagger

The Dream

For those who've lost the ability to create with their hands, the EyeWriter is indeed a dream come true. Its developers have created an affordable solution (around \$50 dollars) that allows the human desire for expression to survive despite circumstance. They even provide do-it-yourself instruction for building your own EyeWriter on their website, www.eyewriter.org/diy.



Eye-tracking headset example

But its creators don't intend to stop there. Spurred on by the amazing success of the EyeWriter project, Ebeling has created the "Not Impossible Foundation" that acts as a social network for

causes. He's convinced that "extraordinary problems can be solved by ordinary people when they can bring together their resources."

The Reality



Tempt Graffiti Art

This new innovation not only unleashes creativity but also paves the way for a new way of thinking. Just as graffiti has long been a tool of empowerment and social change, the invention of the EyeWriter sends a powerful message – to not accept excuses, but instead look for solutions. It shows us that the impossible is not only possible – but happening – today. So, what's your vision of the future?

If you'd like to support the creation of a new collection of original Tempt One artwork and further the research and development of the EyeWriter system, visit www.eyewriter.org