Watch: Evan Roth Hacks Wikipedia GIFs, Turning Webpages Into Art Shows

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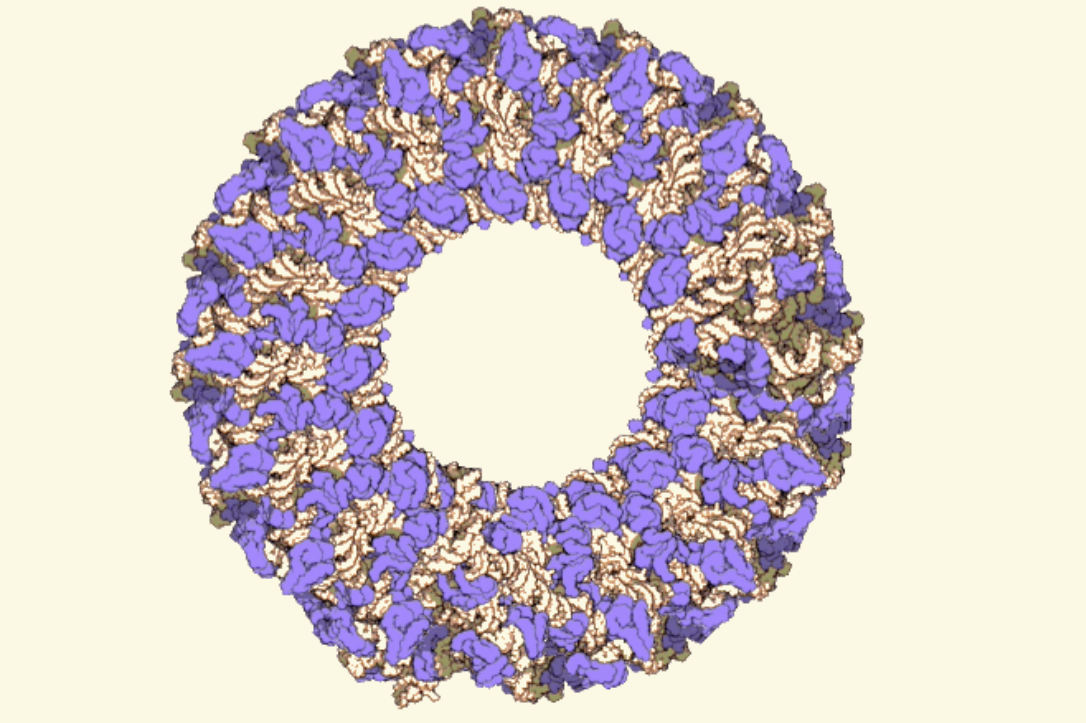
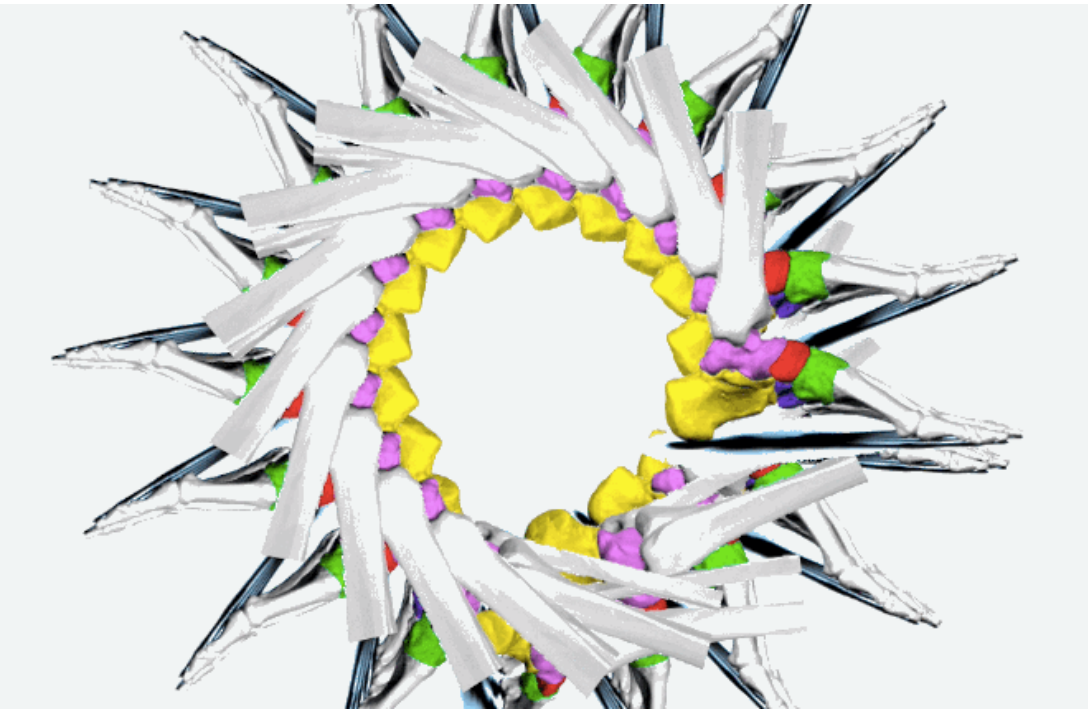
Liz Stinson October 8, 2014

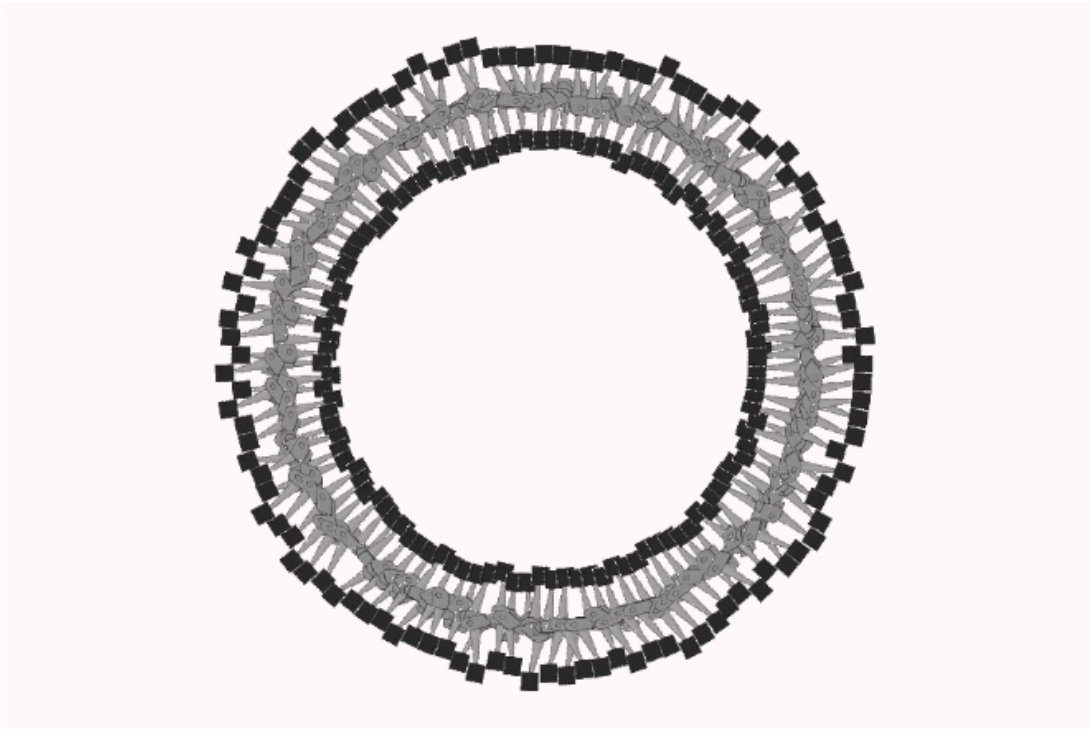


There are plenty of GIF-filled rabbit holes into which a person can wander and never return. Tumblr is perhaps the most daunting maze of all, providing us with enough looping images of a twerking Niki Minaj to co-opt an entire workday. But while the GIFs you find on Tumblr, Giphy and Buzzfeed are great, they've got nothing on the procedural beauty of Wikipedia GIFs.

A couple years back, the website Wikigifs introduced the online masses to the glorious GIFs that accompany Wikipedia entries. It was a revelation---how was it possible that we never noticed the mesmerizing beauty of a boxer engine's churning motion before? Left alone, the GIFs on Wikipedia are pure art. But in the hands of Evan Roth, they're high concept.

Roth, whose touchscreen artwork we recently featured, is back with another project inspired by our digital lives. This one, titled *No Original Research*, takes GIFs found on Wikipedia and turns them into single-serving websites. Click on a title like catenary-on-azure, and you'll be directed to a webpage where a single catenary chain multiplies into dozens and then hundreds, forming a beating circular GIF made from hundreds of individual GIFs.



Each composition is made by copying an individual GIF hundreds of times. Roth gives each GIF a separate file name, so when they load into a web browser, they load sporadically. “When the browser tries (and fails) to load all of the files simultaneously they become out of synch, creating an animation cycle that visualizes the latencies specific to the viewer,” writes Roth. “Each viewing is a unique experience dictated by the speed of the network, the browser used and the speed of the computer.”

No Original Research is a riff on Roth's earlier net art series, *A Tribute to Heather*, in which Roth creates similar webpages using animations from early web animation database Heather's Animations. Roth says the work is partially a reaction to the self-centric atmosphere of the web. So often the GIFs we see are an attempt of self-expression, another way of demonstrating who we are and what we know. “Wikipedia is one of the few places on the web that's really free of ego at the moment, right?” he says. “All these animated GIFs on Wikipedia that aren’t about people posting cool animated GIFs on their tumblr blog---its just like someone needed to describe how that hinge worked or how that engine worked, so they made these animations that have a reason for being there.”