JON RAFMAN

Press Clippings

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

THE NEW YORK TIMES
THOUGHT CATALOG
TIME OUT CHICAGO
PAINTED, ETC.
THE GUARDIAN
FILLIP
HARPER`S MAGAZINE
ART:21
BUSHWICK BK
ARTINFO
THE ATLANTIC
FRIEZE
THE TELEGRAPH
MODERN PAINTERS
POST-INTERNET
THE L MAGAZINE
HUFFINGTON POST
LE DEVOIR
LIBÉRATION
TAGES ANZEIGER
DER SPIEGEL
KALEIDOSCOPE
PAINTED, ETC.
BOMB
TANK
LODOWN

Jon Rafman (1981) is an artist, filmmaker, and essayist. He holds a B.A. in Philosophy and Literature from McGill University and a M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His films and new media work have been exhibited internationally including at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome and the New Museum in New York City. Rafman's *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* has been featured in Modern Painter, Frieze, Der Spiegel, Libération, The New York Times, The Guardian, and Harper's Magazine.

Rafman's art explores the paradoxes of modernity by mixing irony, humour, and melancholy. As an artist using digital media, his work is informed by the rich potential provided by contemporary technology in its possibility for celebrating and critiquing contemporary experience. But as an artist, whose subject is the human experience, he aligns himself with the artist's historical role in capturing the moral dimension in ambiguous contexts.

The New York Times Magazine

CONSUMED

Global Entertainment

By ROB WALKER
Published: December 30, 2010

Part of what's different about this version of map-based enjoyment is that technology has brought it into a realm that occasionally crosses the border of voyeurism. It's one thing to speculate about distant lands; it's quite another to zoom in for a better look at a random pedestrian in Taipei. (Street View blurs faces and license-plate numbers.) And as the artist Jon Rafman has demonstrated with his astonishing "The Nine Eyes of Google Street View" project, which culls compelling images that the company's roving cameras have unthinkingly captured, Street View produces images that are as unexpectedly beautiful, beguiling or disturbing as those of any traditional street photographer.

The New York Times

Tragedy and Comedy, Starring Pac-Man

By SETH SCHIESEL
Published: July 15, 2010

The Game Play festival has something for both adult gamers and children. At one extreme: on Saturday evening the new-media artist Jon Rafman led a somewhat boozy crowd through a guided tour of some of the exotic sexual subcultures in Second Life, the popular virtual-reality system (which insists that it is not a game).

Thought Catalog™

A THOUGHT CATALOG GALLERY

Jon Rafman's Google Street Views

MAR. 7, 2011 *By* **JIMMY CHEN**

« PREVIOUS

NEXT »

Jon Rafman is a lucky man for at least two reasons: (1) his priceless sensibility is a veil through which he sees a more beautiful world, a precious one that reaches such a state through the very aesthetic of non-preciousness; (2) he, through scouring the near infinite territory of Google street views, is statistically even able to consistently find universal moments of "condensed being" which would make the greatest haiku poet weep.

Under the auspices of conventional photography, these images — a dog struggling to transgress a gate whose holes are barely larger than its own skeleton; an infant crawling alone in front of a seemingly "fake" Gucci store; a derelict horse gnawing away at urban detritus for food — point to a kind of surreal alienation incurred, unconsciously, by a negligent modern world. These Lynchian moments are informed by their very verity, beyond cinematic or narrative agenda generally imposed by the invoked director, or those like him. The idea of art somewhat cheapens this enterprise.

The lazy and easy answer is that God, his canvas our flesh and the space between us, is a great artist, perhaps a stunning genius so misunderstood that half the world despises him. This is a lesson in entropy, the soft arbitrariness of life, that when finally punctured by a sudden moment, oozes meaning. And yes, our friends at Google may have something to do with this, but their voice is muted, neutral, and merely incidental. Their camera is blind, even glib, in their profit-fueled survey of the known world. And God has yet to sign the gallery consignment, so this leaves us with you, me, and dear Jon, polishing these turds of absurdities into shiny diamonds.

One motif we see over and over again is the prostitute between solicitations, just standing half-naked by a truck, her face blurred out. Such illicitness lends itself to the power of Jon's either somber or enthralled voyeurism. It is difficult to read Jon, his sense of humor, sadness, cynicism, or irony; perhaps he is merely presenting us a version of a world as a journalist might. The unmarked story, if we are to engage ourselves with these prostitutes, is the explicit trade of sex. The invisible money shot only visible between the two participants. Our role, here, is to not see. But it is not just these whores whose faces are obscured, but everybody's, as if simply being human is a derogatory act.

These photographs, or I should say curation, are less about seeing than imagination, fueled, ironically, by the boring empiricism of life. We understand perfectly the preceding and subsequent moments of each image. A man crashes his car and lol calls his cell phone. A dog pisses legs raised on a wall, cognizant of and shamed by its non-humanness. A man vomits next to a pay phone, barely missing his shoes. The formal compositions of the photographs barely matter, and after a while, the subjects — the unwitting representatives of our race — seem to blur into one. All the drama — the car crashes, the indignant moonings and middle fingers, the near or imminent deaths, the police arrests, the mysterious fires — are slowly taken for granted, soon to reside in a shallow past, a pool in which we put our own shady memories.

But I never want to forget that butterfly, the orange winged floating period that could end this sentence, if only this sentence marked my end. But I'm still looking, grateful for everything and everyone who might be responsible for this: Jon, God, Google, the butterfly, and maybe even me. People are ugly to one another, yet life, in its ultimate punkdom, is quietly beautiful. It's ridiculous if you think about it. An OJ-esque white unmarked van with a 360º aggregated view drives around the world to visually dictate the flayed mark of road, passing whores, car crashes, kids on bikes, misguided animals, punks with guns, dying great wide landscapes — passing it all with a billon dollar budget right under our noses, in order to make a timeless appointment with a butterfly, who as a pair of floating lips, was able to muster a silent smile for me.

Published on *Time Out Chicago*

Issue: 299
"The Age Demanded," Golden Age [1], through Dec 10.
Art review
By Jonathan Kinkley

Jon Rafman roams Google Street View like a contemporary Robert Frank, discovering in street photos a rich narrative of life around the world. *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* snatches screenshots of Irish toughs flipping off the camera and of a naked woman standing on an Italian beach, personalizing Google's all-seeing eye. By emblazoning the Street View navigational tool and Google's logo on each print, the Montreal-based artist nods to the images' coproducer. Yet he also reminds us that we can use this tool for purposes other than Google's. Many new-media works look outdated fast. Rafman's work is much more substantive: He's the rare digital native who's cognizant of the artist's role in the world and of art history. Though his experiments involve the latest technology and Web trends, such as crowdsourcing and viral memes, his attempt to celebrate and humanize digital media has staying power.

Adept at making machinima (videos shot in virtual worlds), Rafman created *Woods of Arcady* in Second Life, linking pastoral scenes of real-life ancient statues and monuments that have been transformed into rudimentary virtual 3-D models. A Yeats poem lamenting the end of the classical era and the beginning of the modern narrates the piece, ironically, given that modern technology made this digital arcadia attainable.

It's a shame that Golden Age's tiny quarters require Rafman's work to be sandwiched between bookshelves and hung in a hallway. But this solo show breathes life into so many different aspects of online culture it could speak for a wide swath of new-media artists.

Publish Date:
11/17/2010

Ongoing collection to chart the passage for painting in the continuous current, with writing for work informed by or informing painted practice. Images, modelled and actual paint all twisted like a vine, etc.

PAINTED,ETC. is a broad research initiative currently produced by artist Ry David Bradley to document the practice, understanding and lineage of painting and its descendants in the internet age...

PAINTED,ETC. accepts contributions, brief reviews, short artist essays, statements and images.....

To send work click here •

PAINTED, ETC.

Jon Rafman, Fernand Leger Bomb, 2010

Some recent works over on Jon Rafman's excellent piece Brand New Paint Job. Here so many crossovers are brought into proximity… the post-gallery, post-exhibition reality of a collectable painting largely as an adornment to the interior decor of the collector, bent around their objects like a kind of philosophical wallpaper, but in Rafman's handling such a suggestion occurs skinned upon 3d alreadymades from Google 3D Warehouse. In this way the project may also wryly tackle one of painting's most hotly defended and greatest historic fears: the decorative.

Each instance is a consideration between an object and a painting, potentially pitting the uselessness of paintings against the function of objects, dialing that hallowed and receding ground between art and design. Or casting painting in the lead role of Tradition for the visual, a position that blankets current image based material found within the internet. Seen in this way as an ancestor, out of context and sampled, Rafman may seem to suggest history is ultimately wrapped around whatever we do. This is interesting, particularly as history is a cumulative process, you know, history is actually increasing. The further into the future we go, the more history we must carry. We might not have to carry it as much as before if *history is online*, because now it's just chilling in your pocket. In any case we could, like they did 100 years ago, always dump history by the wayside to lighten the load. Break free. Or as we see in these works by Jon Rafman, we could just continue to carry our burden awares - and do it with equal parts style and wit.

In each piece iconic proponents from the history of painting are summoned in the house of Google, relegated to the status of add-on surfaces, custom bitmap textures, literally shrink wrapped around pieces of online community objects. Is history fitting the current or is the current fitting history? Positioning painting in this way brings it into the realm of an exclusive wallpaper, a humorous play with interior designer chic. In some of the interior living spaces where Rafman has completely covered every object in a room with the repetition of a single painting, the room becomes a domestic shrine to a work, it's facets a vortex, as objects are lost to and within a mutation of planes. Is this a new painting? Or a new paint job? With the critical Auction House Heights (AHH) of painting now represented also as google Image Search Stock (ISS), history can be understood as layers applied over or under the present, like a paint job.

by Ry David Bradley

—

Some of Jon's work is on view in New York at the latest offering from the New Museum, a show entitled FREE which opens tomorrow. For your reading delight, Jon may write a mini-essay for PAINTED,ETC. in the close of this year.

An excerpt from the show text, curated by Lauren Cornell:

Today, culture is more dispersed than ever before. The web has broadened both the quantity and kind of information freely available. It has distributed our collective experience across geographic locations; opened up a new set of creative possibilities; and, coextensively, produced a set of challenges. This fall, the New Museum will present "Free," an exhibition including twenty-three artists working across mediums—including video, installation, sculpture, photography, the internet, and sound—that reflects artistic strategies that have emerged in a radically democratized cultural terrain redefined by the impact of the web. "Free" will propose an expansive conversation around how the internet has affected our landscape of information and notion of public space. The philosophy of free culture, and its advocacy for open sharing, informs the exhibition, but is not its subject. Instead, the title and featured works present a complex picture of the new freedoms and constraints that underlie our expanded cultural space.

• 18 October 2010

theguardian

The street views Google wasn't expecting you to see – in pictures

Artist Jon Rafman's photo project The Nine Eyes of Google Street View, named after the nine lenses mounted on a Google Street View car, collects the strange and beautiful images they capture by accident from around the world

guardian.co.uk, Monday 20 February 2012 12.58 GMT

8 Rue Valette, Pompertuzat, France

Photograph: Courtesy of Jon Rafman

Fillip

Gabrielle Moser

Exhaustive Images: Surveillance, Sovereignty, and Subjectivity in Google Maps Street View

*Further expanding the already large class of Foucauldian apparatuses, I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.*1 —Giorgio Agamben

For a technology that is purportedly meant to aid in the description and representation of geographic space, the Google Maps Street View program manages to capture a remarkable number of human subjects. Employing an automated, nine-lensed camera, mounted on vehicles ranging from a large utility van to, more recently, a modified tricycle, Street View creates a 360° horizontal panorama of public streets, paths, and hiking trails in more than a dozen countries, all accessible through an interactive Web site.2 Buildings, roads, and major landmarks are among the utilitarian, even banal, fixtures in Street View's roster of subjects, but it is the regular appearance of human figures that continuously draws my attention away from the urban landscape: people walking, talking, working, fighting, leaning, gesticulating, reclining, and, above all, looking, at one another, at the camera, at us. In Street View, subjects caught unaware, continuing their everyday tasks, subjects encountering unexpected calamities and conflicts, and subjects acknowledging and even responding to the Google camera are captured alongside one another. Though he could not have anticipated such a development (or perhaps it was his worst nightmare, given its realization as the ultimate iteration of a virtual panopticon), Street View is a context that pro-vides compelling insight into Michel Foucault's notion of biopower, a technology of power centred on the management, distribution, and surveillance of human bodies and the regulation of their basic biological functions.3

Foucault argued that biopolitics heralded a movement away from a society of discipline (where the management of human bodies is maintained through firm rules, standards of normalcy, and institutions such as the prison, school, and the panopticon) and toward a society of control (where control over human behaviour is enacted outside the structured sites of social institutions, through the "flexible and fluctuating networks" of capitalism, democracy, autonomy, and self-regulation).4 In the biopolitical context of a society of control, therefore, the direct surveillance of human behaviour afforded by the panopticon is augmented and replaced by modes of self-regulation and self-surveillance, such as Google Maps Street View, that centre on the management and maintenance of human life. In biopolitics, human subjects cooperate and participate in their own regulation both inside and outside of state-run social institutions through the rhetorics of democracy, the autonomous subject, and physical well-being. But the society of control also differs from the earlier disciplinary society in its insistent and insidious focus on regulating processes of subjectification, as well as the processes of biological life. Expanding on Foucault's work, Giorgio Agamben argues that modern biopower's supreme ambition is to produce, in a human body, the absolute separation of the living being (the body's biological functions) from the speaking being (the ability to speak and relate to others that constitutes subjectivity).5 For Agamben, one of the most terrifying aspects of modern biopower is its ability to force the human body's biological life to continue, in a state of survival, long after the subject has lost the

ability to speak for or represent itself, existing in a position of desubjectification he terms “bare life.”

The modern biopower that Street View exemplifies is also marked by the characteristics of global capitalism.6 As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have asserted in their landmark book *Empire* (2000), one of the defining features of global capitalism is its ability to harness processes of (de)subjectification for the creation of wealth in the global economy. They write: *In the postmodernization of the global economy, the creation of wealth tends ever more toward what we will call biopolitical production, the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another.*7 For Hardt and Negri, as well as for other Marxist scholars, global capitalism functions by separating human bodies into those who can actively, consciously, and relationally participate in the global production of capital as legitimate subjects, and those (usually living in the global South) whose biological functions are harnessed to create capital (sometimes literally, in the case of reproductive labour and transnational adoption) but who will never benefit from economic globalization because of their non-subject status. Forced to survive in a state of subsistence, or “bare life,” those who global capitalism positions as non-subjects do not need to be recognized or protected by the global economy. Bare life and desubjectification are therefore revealed to be more than the byproducts of a globalized economy: they are necessary, constitutive features of everyday life in the age of biopolitics.

Keeping in mind these distinctions between the disciplinary, panoptic society and the society of control that is accelerating within the current, globalized conditions of biopolitics, it becomes clear that Street View functions as a photographic version of Agamben’s notion of the apparatus: a tool for capturing, orienting, determining, intercepting, controlling, and securing the everyday gestures, behaviours, and maintenance of human subjects. Because of the enormity of visual information about human bodies that Street View provides to viewers, analyzing its photographs is an overwhelming project. Compiling tens of millions of images, each checked by computer software for human faces or license plates, which are usually blurred to prevent identification (although the software sometimes “misfires,” accidentally revealing a face), Street View exemplifies one of the key contradictions about photographic images: that they simultaneously reveal more and less than we, as both producers and viewers, expect from them. As photography theorist Ariella Azoulay aptly puts it: *The photographed image produced out of an encounter invariably contains both more and less than that which someone wished to inscribe in it.… The photograph is always in excess of, and always bears a lack in relation to, each of its protagonists.*8 It is this tension between excess and lack, the control of the apparatus and the unpredictability of the everyday, in Street View images that I want to focus on here in order to examine how Google’s program reveals the way that photography participates in the quotidian processes of subjectification and desubjectification that mark biopolitics. While much recent writing about photography has focused on the medium’s role in limiting and policing particular subject positions and on the ethical implications of this process for photographers, subjects, and spectators, the focus of these studies tends to be moments of crisis and trauma. In particular, the work of Judith Butler on photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib9 and Azoulay’s book-length study of images from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), concentrate on extraordinary moments of abjection and catastrophe.

While Butler interrogates the photographs of tortured Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib through terms of subjectification and desubjectification, Azoulay uses the lens of citizenship to analyze photographs from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although issues of literal citizenship, such as who can carry a passport or rightly live on one side of a border or another, are obviously at stake in the disastrous conditions of the Middle East, Azoulay is interested in how the notion of citizenship might be more broadly defined and linked to issues of subjectification. For Azoulay, citizen status has less to do with national or political allegiances and more to do with how human bodies are separated into those subjects who belong to a distinct collective that is protected through state governance (citizens) and those non-subjects who do not belong to the collective, are perceived as a threat to the collective, and are therefore left vulnerable through state governance (non-citizens or “the stateless”).10 The position of non-citizens is particularly volatile because they continue to be invisibly governed by the same state that governs citizens but do not receive the same protections of and rights to viable subject positions. The state that simultaneously defines, protects, and neglects citizens and non-citizens can operate at the level of the city or the nation, or even globally, through governing bodies such as the United Nations or the World Bank. But beyond this binary distinction between citizens and non-citizens, Azoulay also distinguishes those who experience forms of weak or impaired citizenship: subjects such as minorities, people with disabilities, and women who, under everyday circumstances, are supposedly protected through state governance but who are quickly made vulnerable once disaster strikes.11 *The Civil Contract of Photography* uses photographs of disaster to show how moments of crisis make apparent the simultaneous but unequal governance of the citizen, the weak citizen, and the non-citizen when this inequality might otherwise go unmarked and unrepresented. Disaster, torture, and atrocity, when depicted photographically, reveal the always already tenuous citizen status of photographers, subjects, and viewers. Azoulay’s book engages in the debate about photography, torture, and subjectivity that Butler also addresses in her work, but, by analyzing it through the lens of citizenship, Azoulay avoids the potentially patronizing tone of human rights discourse and instead underscores the *relational* way that citizens, non-citizens, and weak citizens are governed (a point I will expand on shortly).

Although Butler and Azoulay’s studies have made important contributions to understanding how photographs of crises reveal conditions of weak or non-citizenship, I am interested in how these authors’ ideas might be applied to more banal, everyday arenas. As Agamben has convincingly argued, in the society of control that characterizes global capitalism, where processes of subjectification are no longer enforced by external institutions but are interiorized and policed within subjects themselves, it is important that we analyze not only those apparatuses whose investment in power is more or less obvious (such as schools, prisons, asylums, and factories), but also, as he lists, “the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and—why not—language itself.”12 Given the ubiquity of digital and online photographic technologies, which allow us to surveil others and encourage extended forms of self-regulation and self-surveillance, and considering photography’s unique ability to powerfully “capture…the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings,” its role as an apparatus of biopolitics is an important, yet under-theorized, aspect of critical photography studies.13

Departing from Azoulay’s concept of photography as a “civil contract” among citizens—those depicted in the photograph, those taking the photograph, and those looking at the photograph—that demands we recognize one another’s status as (non-)citizens, I want to ask how these theories of photography, ethics, and subjectivity might be applied to the everyday through the lens of biopolitics. How well do the theories put forth by Foucault, Agamben, Butler, and Azoulay travel when they are moved away from a focus on subjectivity in “states of exception” and toward the everyday status of the citizen-subject in global capitalism? How might a reading of Google Maps Street View that attends to the civil contract of photography and to photography as an apparatus of biopolitics reveal new patterns of relations and ethical obligations among photographers, subjects, and viewers?

Digital Citizens

In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Azoulay outlines a model for photographic spectatorship that treats images as relational, as objects that “bear the traces of the meeting between photographed persons and the photographer” and that continue to speak to that set of relations long after the moment of photographic production.14 Examining images of violence in the Middle East, Azoulay suggests that, as viewers, we need to stop “looking” at photographs and begin to “watch” them instead, with attention to the civil status of the photographed subject before, during, and after the moment in which the image was made. Her concern is with the way that photographed moments of catastrophe reveal the contingencies of citizenship, moments of crisis that allow the state to move subjects from the status of citizen to weak or non-citizen through the way they are made vulnerable or neglected in the aftermath of disaster. But, importantly for Azoulay, photographs of disaster also offer weak or non-citizens the possibility to negotiate and make claims for their rights to citizenship to the viewer: to use their mistreatment or neglect to try to change the conditions that divide citizens from non-citizens, the protected from the vulnerable. By emphasizing the role of time and duration in watching photographs, Azoulay hopes to establish a “civil spectator” whose duty is to encounter photographs and recognize the injuries of the citizens that they depict and to use the images “to negotiate the manner in which she [the spectator] and the photographer are ruled.”15

The implications for the viewer/watcher of photographs here are important. For Azoulay, it is the viewer’s ethical obligation to recognize photographs of disaster as a civil contract among subject, photographer, and viewer. As she notes, the role of recognizing the civil contract of photography is to not only take account of the subject’s pre-photographic status of impaired, weak, or non-citizenship but to also recognize that, as viewers, we too might suffer from an impaired civic status because of the way we are similarly governed. Unlike Susan Sontag’s strident insistence in her writing (in 1975’s *On Photography* in particular) that to photograph a subject is to automatically do damage to his or her rights, Azoulay does not see photography as inherently damaging to civic status, but as a radical tool for political and social action. By insisting that viewers acknowledge the ways we are implicated in and affected by the state’s processes of subjectification and desubjectification, Azoulay’s civil contract makes citizens responsible to themselves as well as to one another; it charges photographers, subjects, and viewers with changing the conditions that make the division of citizens from non-citizens possible.16 For Azoulay, this challenge that photography levels at viewers to change the current conditions of governance and subjectification is directed not at an existing community divided into citizens and non-citizens by the state, but at a virtual or presupposed one. Photographs speak to a yet-to-be-formed coalition of subjects that should emerge when we recognize the civil contract of photography. Unlike existing citizenship boundaries, which are often drawn along the borders of the nation-state, this photographic community will be deterritorialized: a collective of citizens and non-citizens, across the borders of nation-states, that could work together through the civil contract of photography. Such a community would be defined by photographic space rather than the space of the nation-state.17

The proliferation of digital and online photographic technologies ostensibly promises to make watching images of citizen-subjects in this photographic space easier, moving Azoulay’s civil contract into the arena of the everyday. In the case of Google Maps Street View, users can follow human subjects over several frames, as they move through the landscape or are passed by the roving camera. But the dispersed, deterritorialized nature of online viewing spaces can also lead to a sense of distance and disconnection between the subject and the viewer, who may be governed by equally dispersed, unidentifiable networks of power. Although digital and online technologies seem to offer democratic access to information through their flexibility as networks, as Hardt and Negri have asserted, elastic, democratic, and autonomous networks are also the hallmark of a new stage of global capitalism and a contemporary society of control.18 “When power becomes entirely biopolitical,” they warn, “the whole social body is comprised by power’s machine and developed in its virtuality. This relationship is open, qualitative, and affective.”19 Digital photographs, especially of everyday events and interactions, therefore trouble any simplistic, cause-and-effect relationship between viewership and sovereignty. They also raise questions about how viewers can work to change their conditions of rule and subjectification when communities are increasingly deterritorialized and geographically unmoored.

The photographs of Iraqi prisoners being tortured and humiliated by American troops at Abu Ghraib, which circulated as digital files over cell phones and the Internet before being made public in newspapers and television broadcasts in 2004, seem to exemplify the fraught conditions of recognizing citizenship and subjectivity through photography in an age of biopolitics. While online and communications networks allowed these photographs, and the desubjectification they bore witness to, to come to light, these same networks also implicated viewers in a way that made it difficult to effect any kind of rapid, tangible change to the rules that divide subjects from non-subjects, citizens from non-citizens, those that are protected by and made vulnerable by state and international rule. Although the depiction of the torture of prisoners was alarming in and of itself, critiques of the Abu Ghraib images also increasingly drew attention to the ways that American troops, as photographers, subjects, and viewers, were represented and implicated in the photographs. In many of the images that circulated, American troops posed for the camera, smiling, giving thumbs-up gestures, and smoking cigarettes. The discrepancy between this goofy hamming for the camera and the abjection that it framed was disturbing, but even more telling was the implication that, at Abu Ghraib, torture had become so commonplace that it could acceptably be photographed alongside candid snapshots and group portraiture. In an unedited version of one of the most iconic photographs to circulate in the outrage that followed, depicting a hooded prisoner balancing atop a box with wires attached to his outstretched arms, a male officer can be seen to the right of the frame, calmly looking down at the display screen of his own digital camera. This deferral of viewing by the pictured officer, who chooses to distance himself from the represented, tortured subject by looking at a photographic representation of, rather than directly at, the torture that is happening in front of him, led Susan Sontag, in her *New York Times Magazine* editorial “Regarding the Torture of Others” (2004), to write that “the [Abu Ghraib] photographs *are* us.”20 Although Sontag was lambasted for her comment in several letters to the editor that followed, Judith Butler, writing a year later, cogently rearticulated Sontag’s argument along lines that follow Azoulay’s call for a model of civil spectatorship that implicates as well as empathizes. Butler writes, “Perhaps she [Sontag] means that in seeing the photos, we see ourselves seeing, that we are the photographers to the extent that we live within the visual norms in which the prisoners are rendered destitute and abject.…”21 Azoulay’s insistence on citizenship as a model of photographic analysis is particularly apt in the case of the Iraq war, an invasion that began under the pretenses of delivering democracy and global citizenship to Iraqi subjects but that instead, as the Abu Ghraib images reveal, created states of abjection, desubjectification, and a new category of radically stateless non-citizens who were vulnerable to torture.

SEE FILLIP FOR FULL ARTICLE

[Views]

SEARCH AND DESTROY

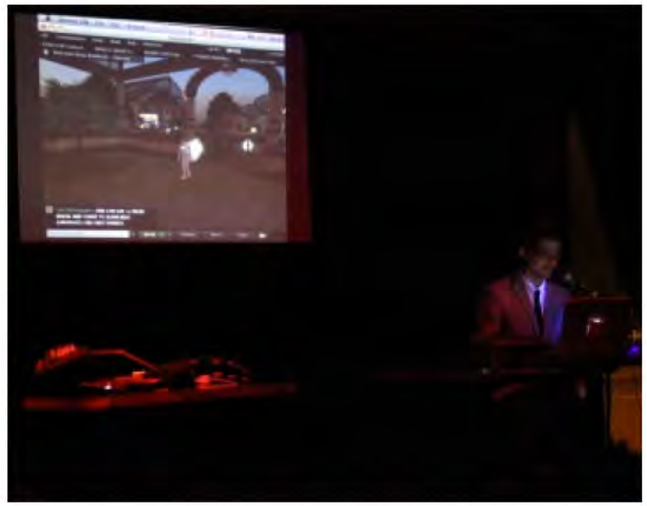
From a series of Google Street View images collected by Jon Rafman at googlestreetviews.com (top to bottom): "526 7th St., Rapid City, South Dakota," "Eagle Point Dr., Sherwood, Pulaski, Arkansas," and "2104 S. Lamar Blvd., Austin, Travis, Texas."

Calling From Canada: Virtual Reality Bites

December 20th, 2010 by Raji Sohal

> "Maybe the Internet is for me what Paris in the 20s was for Joyce, Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein or New York in 50s was for Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg." — Jon Rafman

Canadian new media artist Jon Rafman may be best known for his Google Street View project and his clever and poignant web art series *Brand New Paint Job*, in which recognizable 3D objects (and entire rooms and scenes more recently) appear to be wrapped in famous paintings as though the paintings themselves were wrapping paper. Because of the easy, crude techniques used to produce some web art, along with its reproducibility and disregard for the original copy (but we'll leave that Pandora's box for another post!), web or net art is still finding its sea legs in the fine art world. However, as a conversation with Rafman maintains, and as his live virtual tour project *Kool-Aid Man in Second Life* (see promo video here) in particular reveals, these conceptual works are as relevant as art gets today: they arise from our decentralized Internet age and draw attention to how contemporary subject formation is increasingly co-constitutive of the virtual, the actual, and the real.



Jon Rafman, "Kool-Aid Man in Second Life," installation view, 2010. Courtesy the author.

I caught Rafman's presentation of a live virtual tour of Second Life as it was delivered to an audience at Montreal performance venue, Il Motore. The presentation, which has happened in numerous cities now (and received much press), entails Rafman's live navigation of Second Life with his avatar, Kool-Aid Man, as in *The* Kool-Aid Man — that exaggeratedly large jug of toxic-colored "drink" whose weird deep-voiced proclamations of *oh yeah!* and penchant for jumping through brick walls you may remember from marking commercial breaks on Saturday morning cartoons in the eighties. According to Rafman, Kool-Aid Man is identified with a specific demographic, one which grew up before the Internet age. Kool-Aid Man also represents an empty signifier from the decade that defined excess: "you can inscribe whatever you want onto Kool-Aid Man." Much like Second Life itself, the reappropriation of Kool-Aid Man here, is both a source of ironic humor and a place for self-conscious critique: what is he and what does he represent, if anything?

Source: http://koolaidmaninsecondlife.com/

Rafman refers to the project as "virtual ethnography." The tours are interesting as anthropological studies and sociological vignettes into today's subcultures too. Rafman's Kool-Aid Man mingles with furries, medieval fetishist avatars, and every kind of kitsch reference imaginable in Second Life. Teleporting from one NSFW scene to another, audiences don't know whether to mock what they see or take it seriously. After all, behind each avatar and each fabricated scene in the virtual online world exists a human being, probably on a home computer or in a cubicle at an office. Hypothetically, you and I could sign up to Second Life any time and navigate in the privacy of our own homes, but Rafman's virtual tours' re-presentation of this phenomenon occurs in a special context: a public group setting. The group setting pushes people's understanding of Second Life. The audience amplifies the social awkwardness, self-consciousness, and curiosity of the themes explored in Second Life, leading one to wonder, how real is virtual reality? At one point an audience member sitting by me referred to the "fake fantasy: we were exploring on Second Life tour, to which Rafman retorted, "But it *is* real. I mean, this is actually happening."

According to Rafman, it is the live navigation of Second Life that constitutes "the performance," which goes down something more like an experiential, group lecture that favors extroverted participants. It is Rafman who navigates Kool-Aid Man; however, he asks attendees for their input on what to do, where to go, and what to say to other avatars while perusing the program. Like a physical tour with an informed tour guide, Rafman invites the audience to ask questions throughout the tour. During the performance, we stumbled upon virtual parties, orgies, dystopian wastelands, and the most bizarre social encounters occurring between other avatars. Rafman warned us, "if you can imagine it, it exists in Second Life." At one point, another avatar even discovered that Rafman was giving a virtual tour of Second Life to our group and allowed us to interview him. He also told us about some cool places to check out in Second Life and teleported with us to a few of them. Chance and improvisation are the opportune words in this performance. Neither Rafman nor the audience knows what will happen when the artist logs in Kool-Aid Man. What ensues for sixty or so minutes raises myriad questions that deal with how we live and where agency lies in virtual reality — can the web, and a virtual game specifically, have agency?

If Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, in which he postulates the agency of objects, is extended to include the net and the web, then living online with different and various selves – through Second Life and other social networking programs and applications – is to be given more credence. Latour states:

> For the thing we are looking at is not a human thing, nor is it an inhuman thing. It offers, rather a continuous passage, a commerce, an interchange, between what humans inscribe in it and what it prescribes to humans [...] What should it be called neither object nor subject. An instituted object, quasi-object, quasi-subject, a thing that possesses body and soul indissociably.

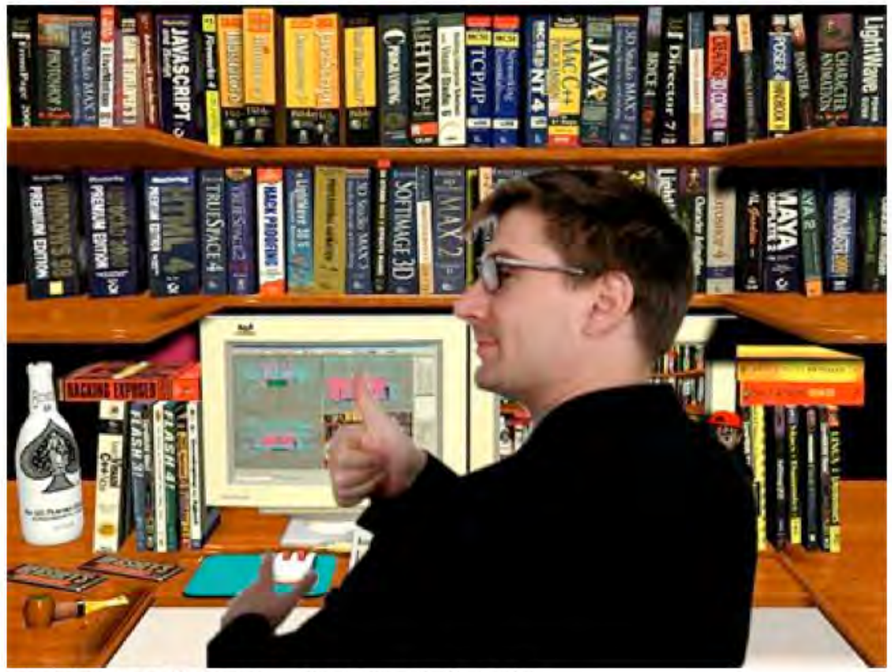
This is the very philosophical stuff we're grappling with in our digital era now, and that art is being made to draw some of these connections together. To provokingly represent them through recontextualization is exciting to me.

With net art gaining popularity, it is becoming clearer that virtual reality cannot be reduced to being phony nor fake, insofar that it is happening; it occurs, it occurs in the virtual realm, and the virtual folds into the actual, although sometimes through subtler manifestations. Take, for example, how virtual-reality has been experimented with in healing burn victims in physiotherapy; the victim watches an ice cold scene on a screen which in turn, actually lowers his or her body temperature. In this case, the incorporeal event is virtual *and* actual (in the actual is changed because of the virtual). Too heady yet? Bear with me. This idea stems from philosopher Constantin V. Boundas's idea that "the virtual is the real that has not yet been actualized." In the realm of Facebook and avatars, subjectivity is the constitution of dynamically constructed virtual and actual aspects creating reality as we know it. Fifty years ago, this notion would be some far-out scene in a Kubrick flick. But Rafman's recontextualization and presentation of one aspect of the virtual web world brings it home.

Posted in: > Calling from Canada, Canada, New Media, Performance

Bushwick Artist Profile: Jon Rafman

by Mimi Luse | March 13th, 2009



Jon Rafman at his virtual desk. — Photo courtesy of the artist.

Every day the artist Jon Rafman wakes up, drinks a TwinLabMass Fuel Gainer Vanilla Power shake, checks his three email accounts, five online social-utilities, the forty-eight blogs that he contributes to, makes some internet-aware art, brushes his teeth, and goes to sleep. He wouldn't let me meet with him IRL (in real life), but sent me a portrait of himself in his Bushwick studio.

Segway parade. Click for more.

That he lives and works in the neighborhood might not seem so relevant since much of his work is inspired by, made from, and often consumed in cyberspace. Since obtaining his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, his work has been shown at the Slamdance Film Festival, Rhizome.org, Clubinternet.org and in physical galleries both here and abroad. But the majority of what Rafman does has less to do with his own place and more to do with where everyone else is (i.e. online all the time). His daily work involves surfing the internet for epic finds and inspirational banality, and much of his oeuvre involves compiling the serendipitous moments of web pathos and comedy that he stumbles upon. He places his new media work in contrast to other artists who hack software counter to its original uses, or guys like this, who use the internet as a marketing tactic for the sale of very analog paintings. Currently, his biggest influences are fellow net artists he discovered through his del.icio.us network, like Guthrie Lonergran, Oliver Laric, and Harm Van Dendorpel.

One of Rafman's projects is an impressive selection of Google Street View images that he has collected; viewable here and here. Captured by the Google-cam at random, and then captured by Rafman as screenshots, the images are either bizarre abstractions (thanks to blips in the digital photography) or surreal scenes like a Segway tail gate party. With the Google Street Views, Rafman creates surreal narratives using a medium intended for neutral mapping. He says, "The individual Street Views are like photographs that no one took and memories that no one has." The work is presented as a PDF pack of images online, or, in a gallery setting, he can present large-scale digital prints (which you can see at his show this weekend).

Rafman's Google Street Views are about the act of surfing the web, and how the deeper you go, the more likely you are to come across some pretty out-there stuff. Often scouring for hours, sometimes days, it's a trial-by-fire search, ("I'll drop the little yellow Street View man icon randomly somewhere on the planet and start exploring,") while other times he's tipped off by friends, but ultimately, he says of his images, "it's the act of framing itself that gives things meaning."

Rafman is like a roguish anthropologist or explorer, documenting his adventures on the World Wide Web. For another work in progress, Rafman gets even deeper. Setting up an avatar for himself on Second Life in the guise of the Kool-Aid Man, Rafman wanders its underworld like an internet flaneur. Of course, the often clichéd graphics and CG stock characters of Second Life are no Weimar Berlin, but Rafman still takes considerable psychological risks, entering into some of the most out-there fantasy lands, sexual and otherwise. Sometimes a voyeur, other times an annoyance to those who play SL in earnest, in his absurd rotund costume, he positions himself as the anti-avatar, in complete opposition to romantic characters (pneumatic babes, furries, extreme Goths) that the majority of players fashion for themselves. Like a tourist, Rafman's Kool-Aid (username: Theodore Hartono) documents his travels, and over time, the artist has compiled a hilarious album of snapshots. In each, Kool-Aid Man's indefeatable grin renders the role-playing a little absurd, proving that context is everything, even in the artificial reality of Second Life.

Taking up the mantle of the artist as an interpreter and medium of popular culture, Rafman sees his work in Second Life and elsewhere as an in-depth examination of our social consciousness and the way that technology mediates and affects our interactions.

"Throughout history, artists' have celebrated and critiqued the world around them. The world I live in cannot be critiqued without confronting the ubiquity of the internet in our society… I don't want to fetishize these new media, I by no means think they are our salvation (for example that they will lead to a more 'authentic' democracy). But I feel the need to understand why the internet and all the social networks associated with it have become so damn popular. Like Siegfried Kracauer's analysis of cinema in the last century, I'm attempting to understand what the success and popularity of the internet reveals about our consciousness today."

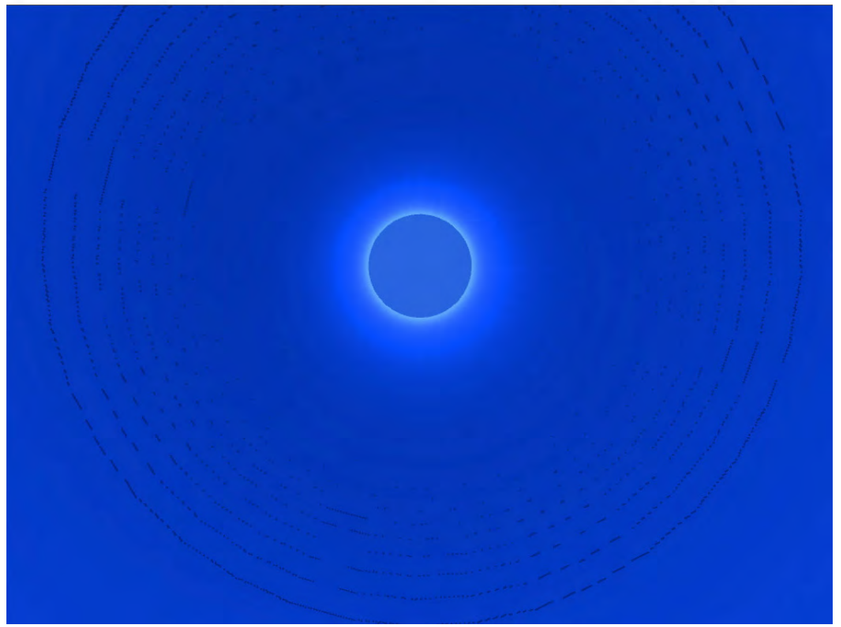
"Ready Made or Not" Group show opens this Saturday, March 14th at Video Gallery, 10 Goodwin Place. Reception 6-10pm.

ARTINFO
INTERNATIONAL EDITION

IMAGE CONSCIOUS

FEBRUARY 9, 2011, 4:30 AM

Featured Review: Lauren Christiansen on Jon Rafman and Tabor Robak's Bnpj.exe



Should you find yourself on the website of Philadelphia-based gallery Extra Extra, you'll be prompted by a cryptic text to ingest the synthetic resin making up Yves Klein's signature International Klein Blue. Appearing similar to a conversation found on a role playing game emulator, the text incites its viewer to download *BNPJ.exe* and charge down a hallucinatory rabbit hole into a virtual environment designed by new media artists Jon Rafman and Tabor Robak.

The gallery's first web based release, Bnpj.exe, combines past projects of both artists, notably Rafman's Brand New Paint Job series and Robak's Mansion project. For those unfamiliar, Rafman's Brand New Paint Job pairs computer generated 3D renderings of objects with the signature aesthetics of art historical greats. Robak's *Mansion* is a nearly inescapable, theatrical digital environment reminiscent of a haywire screensaver. BNPJ.exe invites the viewer into the combined habitat of Rafman's renderings and Robak's immersive and seemingly infinite Mansion project, mimicking the user functionality of a Y2K era role-playing game such as Counterstrike. Distinct from such-role playing games, BNPJ.exe allows for little to no user interactivity, perhaps spare knocking over a chair or witnessing a wayward military tank. In the absence of interactivity, the pair has produced an engrossing virtual world, maintaining the aesthetics of a videogame without the clear objectives usually incited through interactive narratives.

Turning the viewer into participant and art's history into immersive visual environments, the multi-level interactive project feels like a contorted inversion of the Google Art Project. Creating digital walls out of paintings rather than digitizing environments out of walls, Google Art Project coincidentally was released only hours earlier the same day. The result is an illusorily self-determined investigation, with the participant left to explore each environment until they find the next hidden entrance. A disorienting series of IKB corridors opens into a vortex of Ellsworth Kelly's Spectrum Colors Arranged By Chance. After a free fall through space filled with blimps patterned in Kelly's works, Jackson Pollock's Number 31 follows the contours of a mountainous seemingly militarized zone. Using arrow keys to navigate, the next level is found through traversing the sharp peaks and scaling a ramp into a sci-fi portal (a "stargate" specifically) with yet another environment framed in the history of modernist painting found through the threshold. As the environments mutate participants become more mentally—and almost physically—immersed in the digital environment. The virtual tunnel vision subsides only after participants find themselves at the bottom of an IKB well with no exit and the final phrase from the prefacing text becomes prescient, "As though in a trance, absorbed into the static blue all around you, swallowed like a ghost into its thick haze, you are no longer able to determine how much time has passed, how quickly it is passing, and how long you will be trapped here…" Slowly regaining critical consciousness it becomes apparent that Robak and Rafman lived up to their warning. BNPJ.exe swallows participants whole and leaves them in a virtual purgatory with no clear escape.

Perhaps trapped in the blue abyss, just before consciousness returns, BNPJ.exe most clearly executes its ability to diminish one's physical self in exchange for its virtual surround. But for all its potential to lure the participant into an artificial environment through their computer screen, BNPJ.exe refuses to entertain. While its pretty necessary to understand the vernacular of videogames in order to navigate from room to room, the project does not offer the entertainment features its chosen medium often facilitates.

What looks and feels a lot like an allegorical techno phobic scenario from a mid '90's movie about the dangerous encroachment of cyberspace into our daily lives may not be such a nostalgic one liner as it may first appear. Being trapped in the bottom of a virtual well evokes an undeniably sincere sense of disorientation and panic. But this sense of psychological entrapment seems to imply something greater, pointing toward the politics surrounding the digitization of aesthetic experience. BNPJ.exe shouldn't be mistaken as a billboard for the collaborators' technological know-how and proclivity for Modernist painting, though it remains dubious that the painting referents bear any relationship to the objects they inhabit.

Outside the spectrum of the computer screen, the hypothetical ingestion of IKB's seminal component, Rhodopas (whose title seamlessly blends sci-fi with art history), seems to indicate BNPJ.exe's underlying implications. Hot on the heels of Google Art Project, its clear that art distributed through the web has already offered its rebuttal to those fearful that digitization implies the loss of our true ability to experience art. While we may not be at a point where we can re-imbue whatever is lost from art's history digitally, BNPJ.exe proves the experiential in art is not lost with technological advancements, its more real than ever before.

Editor's note: Lauren Christiansen is a guest contributor to Image Conscious

November 9, 2010

The Portraits of Google Street View

Nov 9 2010, 2:22 PM ET By Alexis Madrigal

The New Museum in New York has a fascinating exhibition up through January called Free that takes "explores how the internet has fundamentally changed our landscape of information and our notion of public space." The catalog from the show is online for all to see.

My acquaintance Joanne McNeil wrote an essay for the book that I love. She looks at what several works from the show say about how we see our collective future. Jon Rafman's *Selections from 9 Eyes of Google Street View* underpin her analysis. Rafman culled unintentional portraits of people going about their lives as the Google van rumbled by. He found the art embedded inside this decidedly prosaic mapping exercise.

McNeil, for her part, thinks hard about Google's project through the years. She projects a time when the image quality of Google's technology will plateau. Without timestamps or physical markers of their era, the site "will achieve a perfect atemporality."

Time is just another thing to scramble and remix on the Internet. Now Google is in the process of reshooting everything in higher resolution, creating the possibility of an enormous geomatic archive if they continue the project. There are reports that the company intends to "refresh" the data every year. Eventually the quality of Street View photography will peak and the website will achieve a perfect atemporality. The image quality of 100 Oak St in Google Street View in 2015 will look no different from a 2025 representation. Date is then determined by recondite indications of the landscape and architecture transforming. No sepia tone, no lens flare occurs to sort these images into their respective moments in history.

Her conclusion about the networked world is not unlike Bruce Sterling's. We live in atemporal times, he's been telling us. The real world of the future has, in the important senses, frozen in our imagination, McNeil says.

The future was once represented in fantastically romantic ways: white spacesuits, buildings infinite in height, interplanetary travel, alien interactions, an abundance of wealth, and robot servitude. Now the future is represented as something more compressed and accessible. The future is on the Internet, in those screens we glance at intermittently at all waking hours of the day. Our expectation is the "IRL" world will look not much unlike what we see today. It is a future of gradual changes, incorporating familiar aspects with new but not too crazy updated technology. What is in abundance is not wealth but information.

The idea of the future is now a distorted mirror. It is the future of screens. Like the daguerreotype, screens contain memory and reflection, as well as an unknown difference only discerning eyes can see. We are overfutured. We've reached the point where the past, present, and future look no different from one another.

frieze

Down the Line

The last 20 years have seen revolutions in technology that have transformed our lives. How have art and its institutions reacted?

In the Nostalgia District

Lauren Cornell is executive director of Rhizome and adjunct curator at the New Museum, New York, USA.

The 16 May 2011 issue of *The New Yorker* featured a cartoon titled 'In the Nostalgia District'. It depicts a row of run-down buildings. Their facades read: 'Joe's FIX-IT shop', 'Photo Developing', 'Stationery Supplies', 'ACME Travel Agency' and 'Kwik Konnect Internet Cafe', all businesses that have been replaced by online services. Yet their storefronts remain: whiplashed by a world that's changed around them, sudden relics, out-of-sync but resolute. It struck me that there's a connection between the 'Nostalgia District' and what we might call the 'art district', for both have experienced seismic technological change and have been reticent or slow to respond.

Since 2005, I've been the director of the online organization Rhizome, and have spent a considerable amount of time thinking about why 'Internet' is such a gauche word in contemporary art. Here are a few simple reasons I've come up with. First, medium-specificity is out of style and the word 'Internet' suggests a medium – something separate, something cyber – even though the term can really be used now to describe the experiences that come with an expanded culture and communications system, not just its underlying network protocols. However, this perception of the Internet as a separate artistic territory persists, with its roots planted firmly in the 1990s. In step with Clinton-era rhetoric around globalization, and excitement for new information technologies, the first Internet bubble swelled in the '90s and burst in the early 2000s, as did patience with ambitious but under-resourced 'net art' exhibitions (read: faulty browsers and error signs). Quickly, it was all but abandoned by the art world save for a few ambitious museum media lounges. It's important to note that much of this '90s-era 'net art' was preoccupied with the technology itself, not with celebrating it,

About this article

Published on 18/08/11
By *Lauren Cornell and Kazys Varnelis*

Jon Rafman *Polán, Spain* (2010) C-type print

Back to the main site

but considering and subverting it. This focus made it somewhat impenetrable for the non-technologically inclined and challenging to exhibit off-line. In the last few years, however, the field of art engaged with the Internet has expanded to being both about new tools and simply how we live our lives – the humanity on top, so to speak.

A second reason for the slow response is that, unlike other industries, such as music and publishing, the art world wasn't forced to react to cultural shifts wrought by the Internet because its economic model wasn't devastated by them. The quality of Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010), for instance, isn't dependent on YouTube votes or the extent to which it circulates virally, and nor can one download and install a BitTorrent of a Rachel Harrison sculpture. The principles that keep the visual arts economy running – scarcity, objecthood and value conferred by authority figures such as curators and critics – make it less vulnerable to piracy and democratized media. The difference between these models belies a more fundamental opposition in values that might give us a third and final reason why the art district and the Internet are polarized: broadly speaking, the art world is vertical (escalating levels of privilege and exclusivity) whereas the web is horizontal (based on free access, open sharing, unchecked distribution, an economy of attention). Furthermore, technology is bound to what we could call a Modernist narrative of cultural progress, innovation and mastery, whereas art is no longer tied to this model. As the artist Michael Bell-Smith put it: 'Technology is about fixing problems, art is about creating them.'1

These points describe positions that have begun to break down. By now, every kind of artistic practice has been touched by the Internet as both a tool and as something that affects us in a broader sense. This can be seen in the ways it has seeped into painting or print (as in the work of Tauba Auerbach, for example, whose abstractions can at times look algorithmically programmed), opened up new territories within which to work (such as with Cao Fei or Jon Rafman, who direct films within virtual worlds), served to invigorate Luddite tendencies, or simply changed the way we live, find things out and talk to one another. The novelist and critic Zadie Smith recently deplored Facebook for leading her students to behave in ways that were beneath them, such as 'poking'.2 Similarly, Jonathan Franzen has come down on the idea of 'liking', saying it discourages us from engaging with the wholesale, hard realities of love.3 I don't think Franzen has a Facebook account, but he and Smith have valid points: the way our communication is structured online doesn't always encourage behaviour we feel good about. Artists are continually finding ways outside of these prescribed behaviours, whether by critiquing the systems themselves – for instance, in Joel Holmberg's *Legendary Account* (2007–10), a performance in which the artist asked profound, existential questions, such as 'What does it feel like to be in love?', in the user-generated forum Yahoo! Answers, which is commonly used for questions such as 'Where is the nearest pet store?'– or by recontextualizing these new ways of being into their work, as in Ryan Trecartin's performances and videos. Some of the most influential work being made today takes the problem of free distribution as a starting point, or considers the economy of images in which visual culture circulates.4 Artist collectives such as honf in Yogyakarta, dis in New York and vvork in Berlin that have strong online presences have fostered international artist communities that have incredible resonance for younger artists. There are countless examples that would demonstrate how artists have quickly appropriated the possibilities of the web, both philosophically and in terms of how they make work, create communities and present projects.

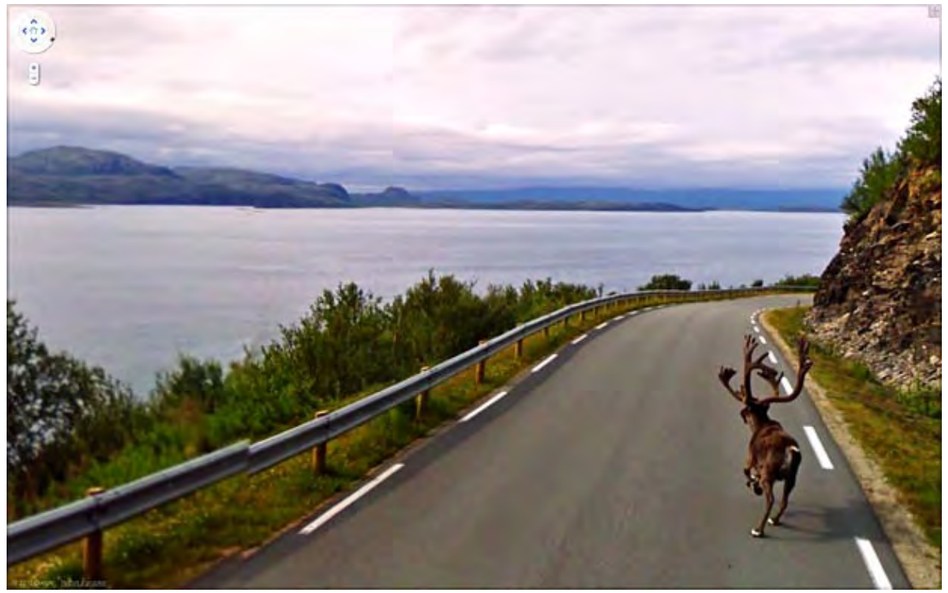
And yet, the structural model of the art world remains relatively unchanged. In the art district, we still commute to museums and international biennials, pay for admission and revolve around large-scale, in-person events. These are the art world's prescribed behaviours, and the problem is that they are insular. Although performance and moving image have made major inroads into exhibition programmes, institutions have traditionally been less supportive of works that don't take the form of objects, and they take little advantage of the publishing potential of the Internet. Social media are useful, but content drives the web. When art institutions note how many Facebook friends or Twitter followers they have, I fear they are missing the point. There is a disconnect between having social media resources and actually employing them to engage various audiences, from specialists and academics to those unfamiliar with art-world debates. Wall text has historically been the designated area in which to explain art to the public, but institutions could amplify their educational and social role by publishing – daily and online – a great deal more history, opinion, context and anecdote around their activities, rather than just issuing press releases and visitor information. At the moment, institutions are relatively silent amidst conversations online, when it would really be so helpful to have staff (directors, curators, educators) be conversant outside of physically printed catalogues.

In recent years, contemporary art museums and arts organizations have begun to initiate online programmes, from exhibitions or fundraising initiatives to thoughtful shows (such as the social media around Marina Abramovic´'s 2010 exhibition 'The Artist is Present' at the Museum of Modern Art, New York), and this will only increase in years to come. (Amongst others nationally and internationally, US institutions including the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney and New Museum in New York – at which I work – have been involved in such programming since the mid-'90s.) One reason why it hasn't begun sooner is that institutional resources are traditionally so tied to exhibitions. It is now not just important, but essential, that institutions stop marginalizing online or non-object-based practices. I find it constantly disheartening to speak with young artists who feel compelled to translate performance, video, web-based projects or sound works into something gallery-ready, because physical exhibitions still remain the dominant way that art is named, seen, reviewed and converted into saleable asset. This issue is connected to one of the most significant questions that institutions with admission fees now confront: how to continue attracting visitors, when everything is seemingly available online for free. This problem is all the more reason for institutions to make a better and more widely available case for the art itself and the experience of the museum, and also better balance exhibitions with other initiatives that usually hang on the periphery of institutional art programmes, like theatre, online curated projects or festivals. Institutions need to figure out how to reconsider their models and coordinate the values of the art district with an expanded public sphere, rather than the values of the nostalgia district.

1 'Do Artists and Technologists Create Things the Same Way? Seven on Seven Guests Respond', survey published on rhizome.org, 11 May 2011, http://bit.ly/mzUIWf
2 Zadie Smith, 'Generation Why?', *The New York Review of Books*, 25 November 2010, http://bit.ly/bAUO7Z
3 Jonathan Franzen, 'Liking is for Cowards. Go for What Hurts', *The New York Times*, 29 May 2011, http://nyti.ms/ijV5UC
4 For example, Seth Price's essay 'Dispersion', http://bit.ly/c4mguw, and Hito Steyerl's essay 'In Defense of the Poor Image', http://bit.ly/5AwXpU

The Telegraph

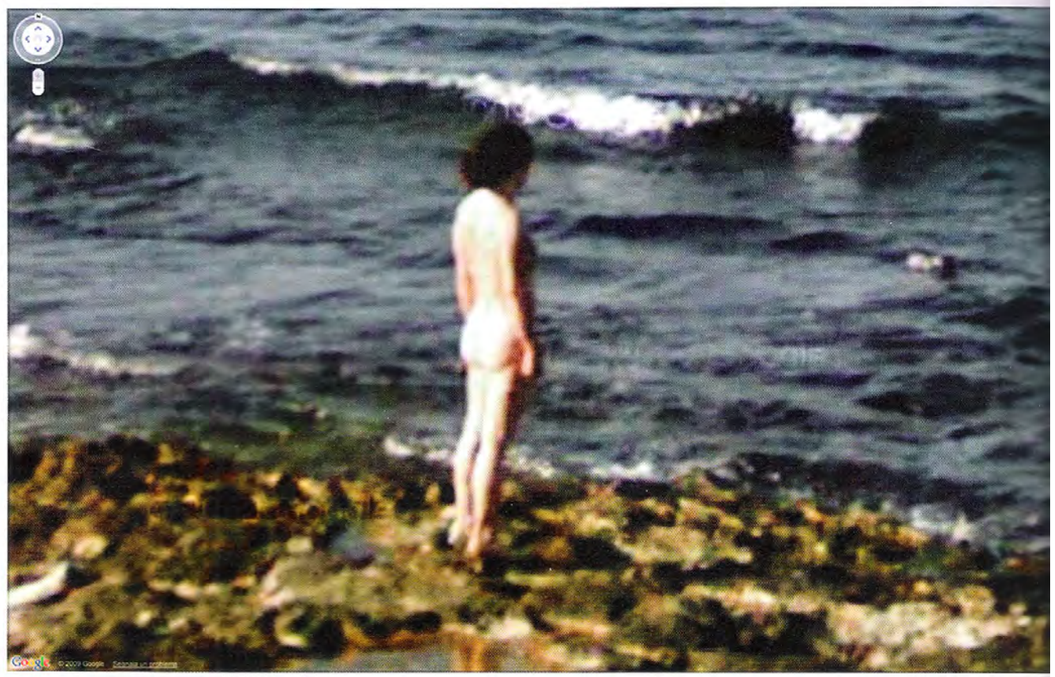
The Nine Eyes of Google Street View: a photo project by Jon Rafman



In his photo project The Nine Eyes of Google Street View, Canadian artist Jon Rafman collects the bizarre and beautiful sights captured by the nine lenses on Google Street View camera cars as they photograph scenes around the world. The project has now been published as a book featuring hundreds of the images he has found through Street View blogs and his own searches. We publish some of our favourites here. Visit Jon's website or order the book to see many more.

Above: A reindeer running down Rv888, Norway, 2010

Picture: Google Street View . Courtesy of Jon Rafman



JON RAFMAN, *58 Lungomare 9 Maggio, Bari, Puglia, Italy*, 2009. Digital C-print, 45 x 72 in.

OUT THERE

TAKING IT TO THE (VIRTUAL) STREETS

"I have to mentally prepare myself before I go Street View surfing," says Jon Rafman, one of several new-media artists who are harnessing Google's visual-mapping technologies to make fine art. "The process requires intense endurance and concentration. Once I'm in the groove, I enter a trancelike state." Rafman trawls Google's archives to locate digital shots capturing dramatic moments, which he then blows up, in some cases to nearly 6-by-10-foot formats. When hung in a gallery, the enlarged scenes take on a significance not conveyed on the computer screen: "The degradation that occurs gives them an almost painterly quality," he says.

Given that Google technology is available to anyone with an Internet connection, it's not surprising that other artists have exploited the creative potential of Street View and Earth. Michael Wolf, who lives in Hong Kong, trains a tripod-mounted camera on the images on his computer monitor; Andreas Rutkauskas, in Montreal, produces richly detailed virtual mountain landscapes using Google Earth; New York's Hermann Zschiegner rephotographed Ed Ruscha's 1967 *Thirty-four parking lots in Los Angeles* using Google Earth satellite shots.

Google artists herald a new stage in the evolution of appropriation art. Zschiegner makes this explicit in his book *+walker evans +sherrie levine*, a collection of all 26 images of Allie Mae Burroughs, Walker Evans's most famous subject, which turned up in a Google Image search on the names of Evans and Sherrie Levine (an earlier rephotographer of Evans's work). With this new evolutionary stage comes a new crop of thorny intellectual-property issues. Since the artists using Google technology have obviously not produced the digital source material they're employing, how can they claim the work they make as their own? "The part of the process that makes it 'my' work is in framing and reframing the images," Rafman asserts. "By reintroducing the human gaze, I reassert the importance, the uniqueness of the individual." Michael Wolf—who started photographing Street View shots of Paris while living there—agrees. "It all boils down to what I notice and how I crop the image," the artist says, noting frequently seen details that he tends to fixate on: "extreme Google face erasures," the company's watermark hiding in clouds, urban pigeons.

Recently Rafman has been editing together stills plucked from Google Street View with swooping Google Earth aerial shots of iconic locales like Machu Picchu and Stonehenge for a digital film, *You, the World, and I*, which pays homage to the French filmmaker Chris Marker. The appropriated images illustrate a story about seeking lost love around the globe, told by a poetic narrator. "Each Street View was a sphere," he intones. "Each little sphere contained a potential memory, the possibility of finding her." Like artists such as Eva and Franco Mattes, with their interventions in Second Life, Rafman lands an emotional punch using a technology that seems horribly ill suited to earnestness.

The narrator of *You, the World, and I* is able to find but a single low-res Street View capture of his beloved, standing naked at the edge of a body of water. When he later returns to the same coordinates, the fickle current of Google technology have swept away even that: "This image is no longer available." –SCOTT INDRISEK

Jon Rafman's photographic and video work using Google technology will be showcased at the ARS Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria, September 2–11, and at the Fotografia Festival in Rome, September 23–October 24. For an online roundtable discussion of Google-based art, visit artinfo.com.

Post Internet

Archive for the ‘paintfx’ Category

Sunday, September 5th, 2010

Painting

1.

Painting is a meme.

What is a meme?

Meme is a term coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* to refer to units of cultural data which act like genes–replicating, spreading, and mutating in response to the selective demands of the culture in which they develop. Many things count as memes–political slogans, film dialogue, emergent philosophical perspectives, technological breakthroughs, advertising brands, economic principals, fashion trends, viral YouTube videos, the very idea of a meme itself, the list could go on. What matters is that it is an idea which has the power to replicate itself from one mind to another to another and sustain itself through a stretch of cultural time.

So, if one is to take the history of painting as a meme spreading from mind to mind through its history—from cave paintings to Piero della Francesca to Thomas Gainsborough to Nancy Spero and beyond—each iteration in the history of the meme mutating itself in response to its own context—then what would it mean to extend the painting meme into the context of digital computer networks? That is, assuming that painting did not, in fact, die sometime in the early 1980s, what would it mean to respond to the continually evolving painting meme in the context of ubiquitous computing in 2010? How would the painting meme be translated when a painting is still an object, but an object dispersed through the network as a mutable digital photograph, as well? This is not to say that all relevant painting must take this question of the network into consideration, but that it could be a pressing and fruitful intellectual question for at least some painters.

One way to think through an answer to this question is provided in the art historian David Joselit’s recent *October* essay “Painting Beside Itself.” In this essay, Joselit suggests that recent painters such as Julia Koether, Stephen Prina, and Wade Guyton have developed practices which allegorize their objects’ own “transitivity” or continuous in-between-ness as they shuttle from one node of the network to another—from object, to photograph of object, to source material for another artist’s appropriation and re-circulation, and back again, in an ongoing circulation. Works of art—here—are never situated in a static context; rather they are situated in continuous state of *passage* between contexts in a broader network of multiple contexts.

An alternative response to the question of the painting meme’s life in the network is being developed by young artists working on or around the Internet. For these artists:

1. The computer screen is the primary surface on which painting will be viewed and, because of this, a new suite of phenomenological effects occuring between painting and viewer are opened for exploration.

2. The rate of speed at which paintings travel is atrophied when uploaded directly to computer networks and this increase in speed allows one to, then, view the flow of painting in time.

In what follows, I’ll say a few more words about the relationship between painting and the computer, describe a recent

trajectory of the painting meme amongst a group of Internet artists, and, then, focus, in particular, on the work of the PAINT FX collective.

2.

It's possible that an "actual" Abstract Expressionist painting produced in the 1940s and a "fake" Abstract Expressionist painting created through the application of digital effects in a piece of software could be effectively indistinguishable when viewed through the light of the computer screen. With this in mind, some painters have shifted their concerns from those native to the paradigm of the white cube to, instead, those native to the paradigm of the computer screen. This shift has repercussions, though. For example, the phenomenological effects of painting shift from the materiality of paint on canvas to the light spilling from a computer screen. This bias towards the surface of the screen, then, nudges artists towards exploring different types of bodily shock effects. The relationship of the body to the computer screen after all is different than that of the body to the physical painting in space–computers are open circuits in which cybernetic feedback relationships between computer databases and users allow users to actively shape the mediascape they inhabit. These cybernetic relationships create a desire for clicking, scrolling, and following—dynamic motion premised on sifting through an accumulation of data rather than gazing for very long at a single pattern of light. The Internet painter, then, begins to think in terms of multiplicity, the aesthetics of the surfeit, and, crucially, a strong temporal element which transforms painting into a variation on performance art. Furthermore, jpegs, as digital files, are mutable, meaning that they can be radically transformed instantaneously at the level of code. If one wants to merely touch up a single brush stroke or slap a picture of a sea shell on the top layer of the painting, the technology is agnostic in regard to the amount of variation each of these types of alterations suggests. This mutability means that once it is part of the network, other artists and non-artists, as well, are given free reign to appropriate the image and alter it themselves, re-disseminating the mutated image through alleyways of the network which the painting's original creator could not anticipate. In other words, paintings here are a network of versions; a stream of evolving memes.

3.

The meeting of painting and the computer is not new. MS Paint, for example, has long been mined for painting effects. In the context of the Internet, the artist Tom Moody (a former "actual" painter) has built an important practice at the interface of painting and the computer screen which has evolved into making animated gifs and placing them on his own blog and sites like dump.fm. This is not meant to be an authoritative history, though, so I'll focus on the life of one strain of the painting meme as I've witnessed it over the past two or three years.

I first began to notice artists working on painting at the tail end of the surf club phenomenon. Artists like Will Simpson, Thomas Galloway, and Travess Smalley on the surf club Loshadka, for example, were moving away from appropriated content derived from Internet surfing and towards original content created in painting software programs.

Around this time, the artist Charles Broskoski began increasingly focusing his work away from conceptual art pieces to a painting practice premised on volume, performativity, and innovations in presentation which were native to the computer screen. The artist Harm van den Dorpel was working on a similar project, in which he straddled the borders between a computer model of a work and a work in physical space and allowed that very tension to become illuminated *as* the work. Along the way, he raised an interesting set of questions regarding artistic deskilling and the borders between hand-made effects and automated effects. In short, the "hand of the artist" was, on the Internet of all places, becoming an interesting area to explore. Soon enough, there seemed to be an internal logic and momentum to this digital painting meme and the Supercentral II surf club and Poster Company by Travess Smalley and Max Pitegoff, pushed it further, actualizing what was in the air. A slightly younger generation of artists working on the tumblr platform and the emergence of a body of critical reflection by artists such as Ry David Bradley on his PAINTED, ETC blog continued to sustain the evolution of the meme, polishing certain presentational elements and building a community of people interested in these ideas. Painting in the network was about fast-paced collective dialogue and mind-bending abstractions. It was also about *painting*. The imagery of these works are often collisions between digital gestures and painterly gestures, but, generally speaking, the concern is

with the tradition of painting–pre-Internet–as opposed to the animated gif scene whose roughly concurrent rise (in the net art context) posed as a nice counterpoint to the painting meme.

If one was watching, one could view the evolution of the meme as it started in a sort of experimental phase, gained some steam, developed a community, and achieved some sort of level of self-consciousness about itself. The meme here takes on its own form of life which one can watch live on the Internet.

4.

Recently, the PAINT FX collective composed of Parker Ito, Jon Rafman, Micah Schippa, Tabor Robak, and John Transue, have developed a new mutation of the painting meme. Looking closely at what had been accomplished in the work mentioned above and also ideas at the intersection of photography, sculpture, and performance which the Jogging collective (Brad Troemel and Lauren Christiansen) was working on, PAINT FX designed an environment to both experiment with performative voices as painters and develop micro-versions of the painting meme in one ongoing stream of paintings.

Although the paintings are not explicitly associated with particular artists (there's no supplementary text on the site, at all), one can view unique voices develop as each painter builds a vocabulary of specific paint effects he's working with. One views both the development of these effects and the exploration of their usage through these unique voices. Additionally, one views both the artists engaged dialogue with the other members of Paint FX collective and the flows of specific memes threading in and out of the broader image stream.

There are, to date, just under three hundred paintings posted on the collective's very lengthy single web page–paintfx.biz. One can experience this body of work in multiple ways. There is this performative element—a fast paced call and response game in which the members of PAINT FX evolve memes. There is also the trace of this performance which exists as a totally different type of effect. The artists chose to not divide their archive up into multiple pages which one would have to click through, but instead as one very long scroll. What this choice nudges the viewer to do is consider the flow of images as an ongoing development—a long poem, say. This effect, though, is open to further versioning in relation to the type of device one uses. So, for instance, scrolling through Paint FX on an iPhone is going to be a different type of effect than scrolling through it on a flat screen computer monitor in the comfort of one's living room. PAINT FX, though, has created a platform robust enough to be dynamically experienced in a multitude of viewing contexts.

There are also other variations in how the work will be experienced which are dependent on the user's context. Let's say that one chooses to let the entire page download and start at the earliest painting, scrolling up to the most recent. One could, on the one hand, just hold the scroll button down and watch the paintings zoom by like objects outside the windows of a moving car. The style of the paintings and their sequencing on the page are instantaneously visible enough to provide an ongoing series of shock effects which increase as one continues to ride out the scroll (which lasts for several minutes bottom to top). By rapidly scrolling through this way, one gets a broad overview of the way the voices of the artists, the various vocabularies of painting effects, and various bursts of smaller memes each develop. On the other hand, though, one could also go through and carefully consider each painting. This, too, can be effective as the paintings are not merely eye candy. They are generally each labored over and carefully considered from multiple points of view before they are uploaded. Also, oftentimes, the phenomenological effect of looking at a static image on the site for a more extended point of time can be powerful. Through the practical experience of simply looking carefully and observing their own reaction to consuming images on computers, these artists have become discriminating in relation to the types of effects possible through the light of the screen. In turn, they have developed unique skills for crafting particularly optically-charged images.

Finally, the project is also a robust space for painting memes to accelerate and disseminate in the most efficient possible modes. On PAINT FX, the viewer watches the lifeform of memes develop in a sort of real time. On the one hand, this is frustrating because one can't hold out much hope for an individual painting to maintain a level of qualitative power after a few days and weeks as it becomes swallowed up in the flow of the entire project. On the other hand, if one refocuses the way they view the project in terms of following this flow, new categories of aesthetic experience are opened up.

5.

On the Internet, the meme of painting has developed ways in which to increase the efficiency and acceleration of the dispersal of its own versions. Keywords here are “speed” and “immediacy.” A question which the Internet hasn’t effectively explored as of yet, though, is related to the ethics of this acceleration. Now that one can view painting in motion, a question and a way to perhaps further evolve the meme may revolve around where this acceleration is headed and why.

Tags: digital, internet, meme, paint fx, paintfx, painting
Posted in paintfx, Uncategorized | Comments Off

‹THE L MAGAZINE›

ART » GENERAL December 23, 2009

Art: Best of 2009

Jon Rafman

Undoubtedly the strongest net artist without representation today, Jon Rafman describes himself as a storyteller. It's an apt description, though I'd add that he's a bit of a digital wanderer as well. The countless hours spent in Google Street View collecting screenshots are a testament to this, as is his Second Life Tour, given by none other than the Kool-Aid Man. Undoubtedly my favorite, zany aspect of this video is the amount of time Kool-Aid Man spends underwater without losing any of his ice cubes or colored drink.

Time Out Chicago

Art & Design

10 Best Art & Design shows of 2010 in no particular order

By Lauren Weinberg

"Jon Rafman: The Age Demanded," Golden Age, Oct 29–Dec 10. TOC contributor Jonathan Kinkley believes Rafman roams Google Street View "like a contemporary Robert Frank…[His] attempt to celebrate and humanize digital media has staying power."

March 5, 2012

HUFF POST ARTS

Like
16k

This is the print preview: Back to normal view »

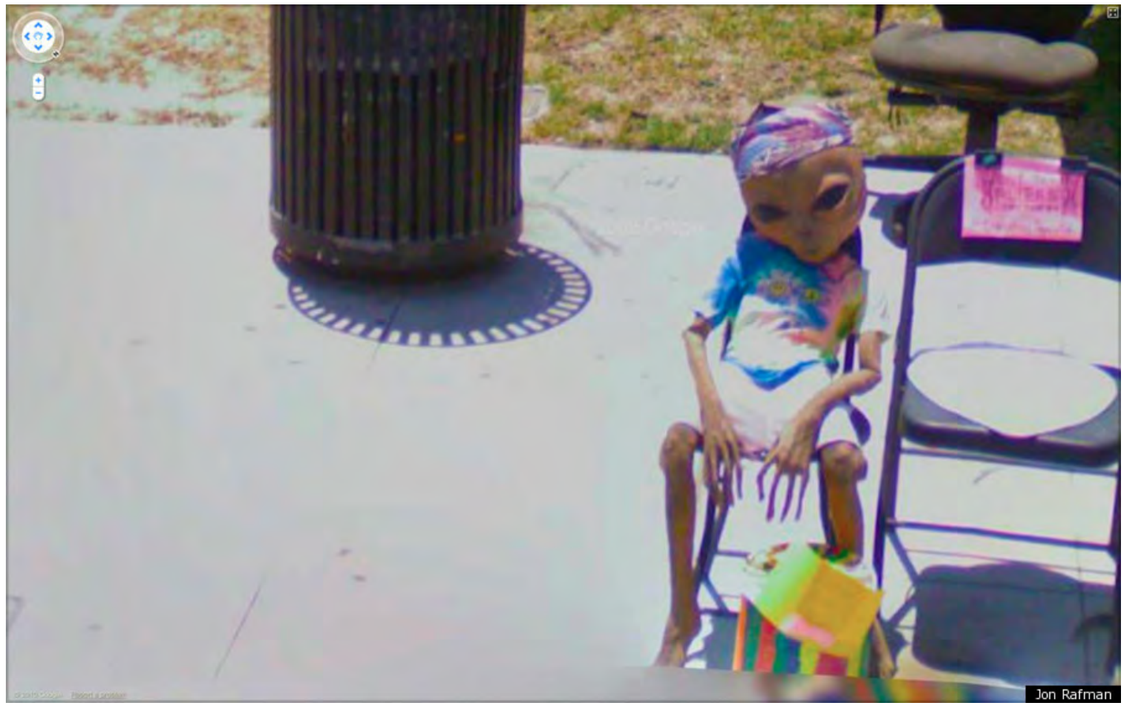
Jon Rafman's Surreal Google Street View Accidents (PHOTOS)

Follow

Google , Photography , Art Fag City , Google Street View , Jon Rafman , Google Street Art View , Google Street View Art , Jon Rafman Google Street Accidents , Map Art , Surrealism , Technology , Arts News

In 2007, Google released Google Street View, in which a computer user could access a virtual panoramic image of many streets in the world. House or apartment hunters could check out properties from the comfort of their kitchen table before they made the trek out to visit a potential place.

In order to accomplish the giant task of capturing images from streets across the world, cars drove around with nine cameras in tow. But problems soon arose with respect to privacy issues, which is why when people intrude in the shots, their faces are blurred. And a new art form was born. Jon Rafman curates choice images from the Google Street View all-seeing machine, capturing surreal moments in time.



The gap between the camera's indifference and the human eye's inclination towards narrative is where Rafman takes interest. In his words: "This very way of recording our world, this tension between an automated camera and a human who seeks meaning, reflects our modern experience. As social beings we want to matter and we want to matter to someone, we want to count and be counted, but loneliness and anonymity are more often our plight."

Rafman's images are full of dark comedy and wondrous beauty. Ripe with prostitutes, bums, kisses, car crashes and sublime natural forms, the collection shows how technology has not succeeded in reducing the world to a knowledge base. Call them accidents or glitches or simply the human need to find meaning in the world. Whether or not we live in an indifferent universe, we live in a richly mysterious one.

Check out Rafman's stunning images below and let us know your thoughts in the comments section. Is this an intriguing window into another world, or do you think Google has gone too far?

LUNDI 5 MARS 2012

LE DEVOIR
Libre de penser

Photographie - Les oeuvres très Net de Jon Rafman

L'artiste montréalais revoit le monde de Google Street View

Jean-François Nadeau 5 mars 2012 Arts visuels

Photo : Jon Rafman/VU
Une scène captée par l'une des neuf caméras de Google Maps Street View, dispositif qui, à la différence de l'œil du photographe, enregistre automatiquement tout ce qui se présente à lui, sans donner de sens par un cadrage particulier.

À RETENIR

The Nine Eyes of Google Street View, de John Rafman. Au Centre VU (550, côte d'Abraham, Québec) jusqu'au 18 mars 2012.

Sur la base de l'immense répertoire d'images offert par le projet Google Maps Street View, on trouve désormais quelques artistes qui proposent des captures d'écran recadrées et transformées en oeuvres d'art. C'est ce que propose le travail du Montréalais Jon Rafman, né en 1981, dont les oeuvres très Net sont présentées ces jours-ci au centre VU à Québec.

L'an passé, Rafman était invité à exposer son travail aux Rencontres internationales de photographie à Arles (France), un des plus importants événements du genre. Dans ce cadre, Rafman s'est trouvé parti prenante de From Here On, un manifeste iconoclaste qui met de l'avant une liberté totale dont des artistes comme lui se réclament aujourd'hui face aux images qui circulent sur certains canaux du Web. Plutôt que d'être en prise directe avec le réel, Rafman est de ceux qui réclament le droit d'un regard indirect à travers l'éther du Net.

Ce brouillage des références par rapport à la photographie traditionnelle fascine aujourd'hui même des photographes réputés comme le Britannique Martin Parr, par ailleurs un anticonformiste notoire. Après tout, Jon Rafman est-il photographe, lui qui ne manipule jamais un appareil photo? Est-ce donc la mécanique de la photographie qui assure son existence, ou plutôt le résultat obtenu par l'un pu l'autre procédé de cadrage?

Possibilités infinies

Rafman ne se considère pas du tout comme un photographe, précise le centre VU. À l'heure du coupé-collé-remixé-téléchargé, il appartient à une génération pour qui, selon le manifeste From Here On, «les possibilités sont infinies» puisque nous avons «Internet gorgé d'inspiration». Est-ce là une simple vue de l'esprit, un simple jeu rhétorique?

Google Maps Street View est un dispositif qui, à la différence de l'oeil du photographe, enregistre automatiquement tout ce qui se présente à lui, sans donner de sens par un cadrage particulier. L'artiste qui décide d'isoler une image de cette matière brute, de l'agrandir, de la recadrer opère quant à lui, à la manière de tout photographe, un choix.

La richesse des images qui résultent du travail de Jon Rafman est incontestable. Voici un jeune garçon caché derrière une poubelle, une prostituée qui sort d'un camion-remorque, une bête sauvage paniquée au milieu d'une route, un étrange coucher de soleil avalant une scène de banlieue, et quoi d'autre encore? D'un univers en apparence pauvre, celui d'un oeil mécanique, Rafman sait tirer des richesses dans lesquelles il se met lui-même en scène, évoquant dans une vidéo volontairement kitsch les dérives esthétiques auxquelles donne lieu Internet.

Dans l'historie de la photographie, l'accumulation d'oeuvres anonymes a pu finir par constituer des ensembles significatifs. Marin Parr, un des commissaires de l'exposition à Arles, a su par exemple accumuler une impressionnante collection de photos de cartes postales aux couleurs saturées dont l'ensemble restitue au final le climat même d'une époque et d'un monde social.

Aujourd'hui, il est évident que des artistes comme Jon Rafman, en explorant des aspects nouveaux de la technologie, font reculer les limites de la photographie par l'intervention d'un oeil intermédiaire qui, à l'évidence, demeure toujours moins vif que celui de l'oeil humain, fût-il celui d'un photographe qui affirme ne pas l'être.

photographe, photographie, Internet, Google

MÉDIAS Le 23 octobre 2010 à 0h00

Avec view sur la vie

L'artiste canadien Jon Rafman puise dans Google Street View la matière à l'élaboration de ses fictions.

Par **MARIE LECHNER**

«*Je n'ai pas une seule photo d'elle, alors que nous avons passé notre jeunesse ensemble, à parcourir le monde.*» Le narrateur du film *You the World and I*, qui se déploie sur le globe virtuel Google Earth, déplore n'avoir aucune trace de cette amie qui refusait obstinément de se laisser prendre en photo. Puis se souvient que, lors d'un séjour sur la côte italienne, la voiture Google était en maraude. Il sillonne comme un forcené Google Street View et finit par la trouver. Une photo floutée d'une jeune femme de dos, face à la mer, qui rappelle ces clichés de famille passés, empreints de nostalgie. L'image qui a inspiré cette intrigante fiction, l'artiste montréalais Jon Rafman l'a effectivement trouvée sur Street View. Ces photos prises automatiquement par des voitures Google le fascine. En 2009, Rafman a collectionné une étonnante série de captures d'écrans extraites des vues panoramiques de Street View pour le blog Art Fag City, intitulé «Nine Eyes of Google Street View». «*Au début, j'étais attiré par l'esthétique amateur de ces images brutes, écrit Rafman, Street View évoquait cette urgence que je ressentais dans la photographie de rue ancienne. Avec son regard supposé neutre, la photographie Street View a une qualité spontanée qui n'est pas altérée par la sensibilité ou les arrière-pensée d'un photographe humain.*» Une vraie photographie documentaire, donc, capturant des fragments de réalité débarrassés de toute intention culturelle. Tous les 10 à 20 mètres, les neuf appareils photo enregistrent automatiquement ce qui passe dans leur champ puis un logiciel assemble les images pour en faire des panoramiques, d'où Rafman extrait différentes sélections, faisant référence à l'histoire de la photographie ou critiquant le mode de représentation de la vie moderne formaté par Google. Certaines captures évoquent le réalisme brutal de la vie urbaine, réminiscence du travail des photographes de rue américains (comme cet homme armé d'un fusil d'assaut dans les rues d'une ville du Dakota), des scènes de crimes, des incendies mais aussi des instantanés façon carte postale, tel ce baiser volé rue de la Huchette à Paris, qui évoque Doisneau, capturant ce que Cartier-Bresson appelait «*l'instant décisif*». Ou encore cet homme entraperçu par la porte entrebâillée d'une pissotière rue du Faubourg-du-Temple, qui rappelle à Rafman les mises en scène du Canadien Jeff Wall. Sa collection recèle des vues inespérées, tel cet arc-en-ciel formant une arche autour d'une route déserte de l'Iowa ou ces paysages psychédéliques provenant d'erreurs de caméra.

Si Street View propose une variété de styles, c'est dans une grammaire visuelle qui lui est propre, dictée par le mode de production de l'image : les visages floutés (façon photos volées de paparazzi), la texture numérique et une perception faussée de profondeur, analyse Rafman. Par ailleurs observe-t-il, si nous avons une chance égale d'être photographié par la machine, en réalité, ce sont souvent les pauvres, les marginaux, les prostituées qui tombent dans l'œil de Google. Cet œil intrusif provoque d'ailleurs, à son passage, des doigts d'honneur quand ce ne sont pas des culs, des mains qui recouvrent le visage et des têtes qui se baissent.

«*Bien que l'image soit obtenue par un appareil photo automatique*, estime l'artiste, *le spectateur ne peut s'empêcher d'interpréter l'image, et d'y chercher du sens.*» Or Street View enregistre tout sans accorder de signification à rien, observant le monde d'un regard détaché et indifférent. «*Nous sommes bombardés d'impressions fragmentées, noyés sous les données, mais souvent nous voyons trop de choses sans rien en retenir»,* constate l'artiste qui questionne la prétention impérialiste de Google à ordonnancer l'information pour nous, fixant le cadre de nos connaissances et perceptions.

googlestreetviews.com youtheworldandi.com

Tages-Anzeiger KULTUR

Gott Google

Von **Hannah Zillessen**, **Boris Müller**. Aktualisiert am 29.02.2012 **8**

Der Kanadier Jon Rafman sammelt Google-Street-View-Aufnahmen und setzt aus den Bildern seine ganz persönliche Sicht auf die Welt zusammen.

Die amateurhafte Ästhetik roher Bilder: Jon Rafman sammelt Street-View-Aufnahmen und bastelt daraus seine eigene Interpretation der Realität.
Google Street View / Jon Rafman

Dossiers

Google Street View
Deutsche können Microsoft-Bilder verbieten
Klick, jetzt Paris. Klick, jetzt Sydney
Google geht vor Bundesgericht
Blickpunkt Fotografie
Die Modefotografin Lillian Bassman ist tot
Durchschlagende Wirkung
Stirbt die Kultur an Überdosis?

Am Anfang stand der Entdeckerdrang. Jon Rafman, seines Zeichens Künstler und Blogger aus Montreal, sah mit dem Aufkommen von **Google** (GOOG 614.25 -1.13%) Street View die Gelegenheit gekommen, eine «neue Welt auf eine neue Art und Weise» zu erkunden, zu interpretieren und schliesslich aufzubauen. Er ergriff sie und erschuf mit der Website «9-Eyes» eine in sich geschlossene, parallele Realität als Gegenstück zu unserer.

Beinahe fünf Jahre ist es her, dass Google erstmals eine Armee von Autos mit aufgesetzten Kameraarmen auf die Strassen losliess, um nach eigenen Angaben «die Informationen der Welt zu organisieren

Google
«Ein von Microsoft finanziertes Geschmiere»
Wasserdichte Computer und vernetzte Autos
Die Wolke – Schritt für Schritt erklärt

Artikel zum Thema

Jungle View
«Für Google sind wir Datenschützer nur Statisten»
Mit Google durch die Masoala Halle
Wo sind eigentlich die Tiere?

Stichworte

Google
Google Street View
Fotografie

SwissquoteExklusiver Trading-Partner

Google
Trade it

und allgemein nutzbar zu machen». Alle zehn bis zwanzig Meter fotografierten die neun an einem Arm installierten Kameras, was immer ihnen vor die Linse kam. Am Computer wurde aus diesen Bildern die typische Panoramasicht zusammengesetzt. Um die Privatsphäre der jeweilig Porträtierten zu schützen, machte Google ihre Gesichter weitgehend unkenntlich.

Mit den Augen einer Maschine

2008, ein Jahr nach der Lancierung des Projekts, begann der ehemalige Philiosophie- und Literaturstudentdamit Rafman, einzelne «Street Views» zu sammeln. Er machte sich dabei nicht nur selbst auf die Suche, sondern bediente sich auch bei Blogs zu diesem Thema. Die Auswahl der seiner Meinung nach aussagekräftigsten Bilder stellte der Künstler in einem Blog zusammen, den er in Anlehnung an die neunäugigen Kameraarme «9-Eyes» nannte. Auf dieser Website präsentiert Rafman seitdem regelmässig seine neuesten Entdeckungen und bietet so einen immer neuen Blick auf die kleinen Begebenheiten des Alltags weltweit.

Rafman erklärt auf der Seite Artfagcity.com, einem Blog über aufstrebende und unterrepräsentierte Künstler, er sei gerade wegen ihrer «amateurhaften Ästhetik» so von den «rohen Bildern» fasziniert. Der neutrale Blick einer Maschine, die nicht von Emotionen getrieben werde, reize ihn ebenso wie die Möglichkeit, «Fragmente der Realität» einzufangen, ohne dabei auf einen Fotografen mit persönlichen Motiven als Mittler angewiesen zu sein.

Diese «rohe» Qualität der Aufnahme bleibt jedoch dem Ausgangsmaterial, den zufälligen Street-View-Bildern, vorbehalten. Denn sobald der Kanadier ein Bild als der Veröffentlichung würdig erachtet, beginnt der kreative Schaffensprozess.

Kunst durch Selektion

In seinem Gastbeitrag auf Art Fag City erklärt Jon Rafman, wie er über die Eignung der einzelnen Fotos entscheidet. Ästhetische Überlegungen würden die Basis seiner Beschlüsse bilden. «Ich achte immer sorgfältig auf formale Aspekte wie die Farbe oder den Bildaufbau.» Davon ausgehend lässt der Kanadier sich von verschiedenen Dingen beeinflussen. So kommt es, dass sich Fragmente entweder aufgrund ihrer Ähnlichkeit mit bekannten **Fotografien**, gerade wegen ihrer treffenden Darstellung der Gegenwart oder aber, weil sie schlicht ergreifend sind, auf 9-Eyes.com wiederfinden.

Gemeinsam ist all diesen Aufnahmen die Art ihrer Entstehung. Die stets gleichbleibende Perspektive von der Mitte einer Strasse aus, das obligate Google-Logo und der Kompass in der oberen linken Bildecke machen die Wirkung der Strecke aus. Diese wiederkehrenden Elemente erwecken den Eindruck, bei den Fotos handle es sich lediglich um eine Dokumentation von Strassenszenen ohne künstlerische Hintergedanken. Es ist diese ganz eigene Bildsprache, die den Künstler interessiert.

Totale Autonomie

Für Rafman steht die «ästhetische Erfahrung» im Mittelpunkt. In einem Interview für die Onlineausgabe des Kalaidoscop Magazins erklärte er, Kunst habe zwar die Aufgabe zu reflektieren, sie solle jedoch keine aktive Rolle spielen. «In dem Moment, in dem die Arbeit eines Künstlers offenkundig didaktisch wird, verliert sie ihr wahres kritisches Potenzial.»

Im Namen der «totalen Autonomie» des Künstlers wehrt sich Rafman denn auch gegen Kritiker, die ihm vorwerfen, die Porträtierten – die ohne ihre Einwilligung zum Gegenstand der Kunst wurden – auszubeuten. Zwar bilden «seine» Fotos reale Situationen ab, die Aufnahmen sind im Zusammenhang mit der Website jedoch in erster Linie Teil eines Kunstwerks. Er gehe davon aus, dass Entscheidungen, die auf dem Wunsch nach politischer Korrektheit basieren, unausweichlich zum Verlust dieser Eigenständigkeit führen würden.

Gott Google

Der Widerspruch zwischen Dokumentation und kreativem Akt macht den Reiz der Bildstrecke aus. Eben dieser Widerspruch besteht laut Rafman auch schon im System Street View. Die «von Google eingefangene Welt» erscheine zwar ehrlich, sei jedoch ein von Menschen entworfenes Gebilde, in dem die Suchmaschinen des Unternehmens gottähnliche Züge annähmen. Sie träten als ordnende Instanzen an die Stelle herkömmlicher Institutionen wie zum Beispiel der Kirche.

Diesen Anspruch auf uneingeschränkte Autorität, den Jon Rafman bei Google vermutet, möchte er der Firma streitig machen. Indem er aus der Masse der Bilder wenige Momente aussucht, kommt er den Suchmechanismen zuvor und erinnert den Betrachter an seinen begrenzten, menschlichen Blickwinkel.

Tagesanzeiger.ch/Newsnet zeigt in der anhängenden Bildstrecke eine Auswahl von Rafmans Bildern.
(Tagesanzeiger.ch/Newsnet)

Erstellt: 29.02.2012, 14:04 Uhr

SPIEGEL ONLINE
26. Dezember 2010, 15:49 Uhr

Kunst mit Google

Angriff der Monsternadeln

Von Laura Reinke

Obacht: Das Schlangenlinien fahrende Google-Street-View-Auto vor Ihnen könnte ein Kunstwerk sein! Die Künstler Aram Bartholl und Jon Rafman machen aus dem Informations- und Bilder-Overkill des digitalen Zeitalters clevere Installationen und Interventionen.

Manchmal entstehen Kunstwerke aus Zufällen. Aram Bartholl zum Beispiel schaute ganz zufällig an einem Tag im Oktober 2009 aus dem Fenster des Café Mörder in der Berliner Borsigstraße, als gerade ein Google-Street-View-Auto vorbeifuhr. Spontan rannte der Künstler auf die Straße - mit beiden Armen über dem Kopf winkend, dem Auto mit der neunäugigen Kamera auf dem Dach hinterher. Als "Street View" in Deutschland startete, hatte Bartholl sich in der Bilderflut schon längst entdeckt und weiterverarbeitet. Seine "Google Street View self portraits" sind sein Einfluss auf das Abbild der Stadt. Er hat sie aus der digitalen in die analoge Realität geholt: Sie hängen eingerahmt in dem Café, das den Ausgangspunkt ihrer Entstehung darstellt. "15 Seconds Of Fame" heißt die Ausstellung.

Das physische und das digitale Leben, online und offline, der öffentliche und der private Raum: In seinen Installationen und Performances zeigt der in Bremen geborene Künstler die Spannungsverhältnisse zwischen diesen Welten. "Mich interessiert, in welcher Form sich die Netz-Daten-Welt in unserem alltäglichen Lebensraum manifestiert und was aus dem Cyberspace zurück in unseren physischen Raum kommt", sagt er. Google spielt in diesem Themenkomplex eine größere Rolle, auch Bartholl beschäftigte sich in den vergangenen Jahren öfter mit "dieser weißen Seite, die so selbstverständlich sein will wie der Strom aus der Steckdose".

So holte der Künstler zum Beispiel die Google-typische rote Markierungsnadel aus der virtuellen in die analoge Welt: Bei Festivals in Berlin, dann in Stettin und zuletzt in Taipeh markierte er auf diese Weise Orte. Im kommenden Sommer geht es in Tallinn weiter. In Stettin stand die große, tropfenförmige Nadel genau an dem Fleck, an dem Google Maps den Mittelpunkt der Stadt markiert, wenn man als Zielort nur nach "Stettin" sucht. "Mit welchem Recht und nach welcher Methode legt Google überhaupt fest, wo sich das Stadtzentrum befindet?" fragt Bartholl.

Touren mit einem nachgebauten Street-View-Auto

Er ist Mitglied der Künstlervereinigung Free Art and Technology Lab, kurz F.A.T. Lab. Die 20-köpfige, auf drei Kontinente verteilte Truppe thematisiert aktuelle Entwicklungen aus der Netz- und Medienwelt. Zur Transmediale, einem internationalen Festival für zeitgenössische Kunst und digitale Kultur in Berlin, organisierte F.A.T. Lab eine Themenwoche mit dem charmanten Titel "FuckGoogle". Der 37-jährige Bartholl betont, dass Google kein Feind sei - er sieht die Aktionen nicht als Protest, sondern als Sensibilisierungskampagne.

Die Gruppe baute ein Google-Street-View-Auto nach und hielt die damit unternommenen Touren durch Berlin auf Video fest. "Es geht darum, Sachen auszuprobieren und zu sehen, was passiert", so Bartholl. Die falschen Google-Street-Viewer fingierten Saufgelage hinter dem Steuer, Unfälle mit Fahrrädern und Randale.

Die Reaktionen waren unterschiedlich: Passanten zeigten freundlich winkende Hände oder manchmal einen ausgestreckten Mittelfinger, machten Fotos oder stellten Fragen: "Dürfen Sie das denn überhaupt?" Neben einem extralangen Stopp vor der chinesischen Botschaft legten Bartholl und die anderen F.A.T.-Lab-Mitglieder auch die eine oder andere kurze Pause mitten auf Kreuzungen ein. Oder krochen mit Tempo 20 durch die Straßen von Berlin Mitte. Gehupt hat keiner - offensichtlich reicht ein Google-Schriftzug auf dem Wagen, um für Respekt zu sorgen.

Wer möchte, kann es selbst ausprobieren und sich mit Hilfe der peniblen Materialauflistung und der detaillierten Step-by-Step-Anleitung von F.A.T. Lab sein eigenes Street-View-Auto zusammenbauen. Neben Themenwochen machen Aram Bartholl und die anderen F.A.T.-Lab-Mitglieder Projekte, die nicht länger als acht Stunden dauern dürfen. Dazu gehören auch die "Speed Shows", bei denen auf allen Computern eines Internetcafés gleichzeitig Online-Kunst gezeigt wird. Bartholl präsentiert dort auch die Arbeiten von Jon Rafman aus Kanada - noch ein Digital-Künstler, der sich mit Google Street View beschäftigt.

Der kanadische Künstler stellt in seinem Blog "Nine Eyes" besondere und kuriose Ausschnitte weltweiter Street-View-Aufnahmen zusammen: Möwenschwärme und Bordsteinschwalben. Menschen, die auf der Straße liegen, im Kofferraum sitzen, oder gerade von der Polizei gefilzt werden. Er wolle mit seinen Werken die "Spannung zwischen einem kaltschnäuzigen, abgestumpften Universum und unserer Suche nach Verbundenheit und Signifikanz" ausloten, sagt Rafman. Die Kreativität von Künstlern und Kuratoren bestehe im Informationszeitalter vor allem darin, "Gefundenes einzurahmen, einzuordnen", sagt der Künstler. "Ich bin nicht mehr der Urheber der Bilder - sondern des Bildausschnittes, des Kontextes."

Mit Google ins Museum

Ein romantisch anmutendes Foto aus Rafmans Blog hängt momentan großformatig im New Yorker New Museum, es erinnert ein wenig an Caspar David Friedrichs "Wanderer": Eine am Meer stehende Frau, nackt, in Rückenansicht - die Street-View-Bedienelemente sind deutlich sichtbar. Schnappschüsse 2010.

Rafman und Bartholl sind sich einige Male begegnet. Rafman findet die Projekte seines Kollegen "phantastisch" und entdeckt eine Seelenverwandtschaft: "Wir sind beide auf der konstanten Suche nach künstlerischen Werkzeugen und Methoden, die das moderne Empfinden offenlegen und abbilden. Googles Technologien ermöglichen durch enorme Materialvielfalt das Erleben, Interpretieren und Kuratieren unserer neuen Welt auf eine neue Art."

Auch Bartholls "Google Portraits" werden im Museum zu sehen sein. Für die ungewöhnlichen Selbstporträts hat er QR-Codes abgezeichnet - jene pixeligen, quadratischen Schwarzweiß-Abstraktbilder, mit denen z.B. Bahnschaffner Online-Fahrkartenausdrucke in ihr mobiles Gerät einlesen. Wenn man Bartholls Bilder mit einem solchen Lesegerät einscannt, kommt man auf die Google-Suche nach dessen Namen - auf vier verschiedenen Sprachen. "Was ist überhaupt ein Porträt heutzutage? Wir googeln Leute, bevor wir sie kennenlernen, doch was sagen diese Suchergebnisse über eine Person aus?", kommentiert der Künstler. Das Portsmouth Museum of Art zeigt die Serie ab Ende Januar in der Ausstellung "iImage: The Uncommon Portrait".

Aram Bartholls Solo-Show "15 Seconds Of Fame" im Café Mörder; Borsigstraße 1, Berlin Mitte; noch bis 8. Januar 2011.

URL:

http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,731358,00.html

INTERVIEWS

JON RAFMAN interviewed by AIDS 3D (Daniel Keller and Nik Kosmas)

9-Eyes.com, ongoing

Aids3d: As an artist you've got a lot of different things going on. Do you think it's important as an artist to have a seemingly cohesive body of work, or at least some kind of delineation between different sub-practices. Could you outline some structure that organizes your practice as a whole?

Jon Rafman: What ties my practice together is not so much a particular style, form, or material but an underlying perception of contemporary experience and a desire to convey this understanding. One theme that I am continually interested in is the way technology seems to bring us closer to each other while simultaneously estranging us from ourselves. Another one is the quest to marry opposites or at least have conversations between them, the past and the present, the romantic and the ironic, even though these conversations often end in total clashes. All my work tends to combines irony, humor and melancholy.

A3D: What for instance connects Brand New Paint Job to say Codes of Honor?

JR: We live in an age in which the new is constantly sweeping away or destabilizing history and tradition at faster and faster rate. But in the past, situating oneself within history and tradition was a classic way by which an individual redeemed himself or built a coherent self. One of the connections between Codes of Honor and BNPJ is that each one in its own way examines the implications of this loss, this changing role of history and tradition. In BNPJ there is a clash of cultural weights between the texture (2d painting) and the underlying structure (3d object). History (like a BNPJ) is ultimately wrapped around whatever we do. In Codes of Honor, the narrator is profoundly sad that the time when his life had meaning, solidarity, and achievement is now irrevocably over, but the lack of tradition and history inherent to a video game blocks his path to give life new meaning.

Codes of Honor, 2011

A3D: How do you think an idea of territorialism fits in to your work.? I mean this in a few ways, 1st literally, in Google Street Views and Second Life tours, you're literally exploring pubic spaces and sorta claiming them for your practice.
JR: If I use a public space for a critical or creative purposes, I view it as "my territory." Yet it is mine no more or no less than that of any other

THE ONLINE SUPPLEMENT TO KALEIDOSCOPE MAGAZINE, THIS BLOG OFFERS REGULAR UPDATES ON CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE.

Editor: CHRIS SHARP
Assistant Editor: MARGARIDA MENDES

artist.
A3D: But I also wonder about whether or not you believe in any idea of artistic territory, or is this an increasingly outmoded way of categorizing artistic practice? (In the sense that Seth Price owns vacuum sealed ropes or Cory Arcangel owns Nintendo hacks)
JR: Personally I find it outmoded, but as an artist it is very important to be aware of what came before you, otherwise you might make references in your work without being conscious of it. I do think it is important to 'own' your work in that sense.
A3D: Being a bit open and dilettantish is obviously easier than ever, but do you think that it is a good move for a young artist just starting a career? I wonder this myself, as we've jumped around a whole lot in 5 years of work, and I've heard many times that its hard to see a visual continuity within aids-3d.
JR: I don't quite see it that way. I see a definite continuity, both visual and conceptual, in Aids-3d. But I think we struggle with similar issues of not fitting easily into an artistic type or genre. The themes running through our work are consistent, yet we are just always looking for different modes of expressing them? I am constantly searching for an ideal, be it a girl, a mentor, the sublime, while simultaneously trying to reveal the sadness that accompanies the loss of these ideals or the failure to achieve them.

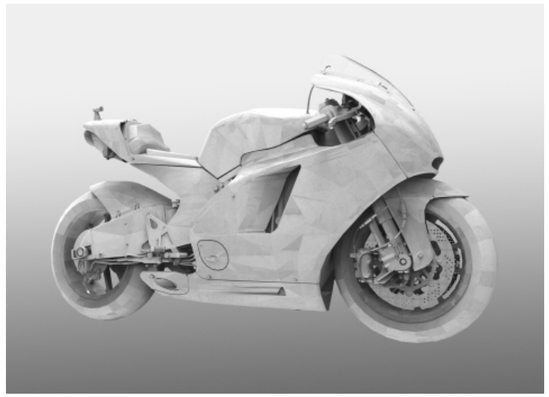
Codes of Honor, 2011

A3D: You've started getting some success in the art market in the past year or so, do you think that the "market forces" will lead you towards a more crystalized and apparent Jon Rafman style, or do you think that commercial support could allow you to be even more experimental?

JR: I don't think I will ever be able to settle on any one way of making work even if I ever have huge market success. If a Jon Rafman style develops it won't be the result of a conscious effort. Although financial success would help make it easier for me to afford to make things that I would not otherwise be able to. For example, I would love to create a real life Malevich Ducati or make a feature length film. Money would allow me to be more experimental in that way.

A3D: I think that maybe the most crucial element in your work, do you have different rules when you're exploring Second Life versus Google Street View?
JR: The rules are constantly evolving and changing and I often only become aware of them in retrospect. This may not be what you have in mind, but if I were to give any rule I think the main one that guides me is the desire to find or produce something genuinely new without necessarily knowing what it is in advance. I really want to create something that can both act on the future and the past; an art that is new and yet finds continuity with art history. I think that a new art re-works and transforms, retrospectively, the history of art.

We went to see an excellent Post Modernism exhibition at the V&A in London together and I remember you reached a point when you started getting depressed because it was so clear that so much of the stuff going on right now amongst our peers was a just a repetition of what had already happened. Now I think that gloomy feeling is valid because, on one level, repetition is a form of regression, for as we move further and further away from the original source our consciousness of the historical condition lessens. But there is also an emancipatory character to repetition if the repetition is made explicit. Maybe as artists we are continually driven to re-attain lost moments in art history but in new ways.



Malevich Ducati, 2011

A3D: I can see how one might take the poignant and sometimes tragic subject matter of your Google Street Views as being a bit exploitative (clearly the people depicted have given no consent). Do you feel that you have the same responsibilities towards your subjects as a traditional street photographer might have? Does the technological mediation give you a free pass to depict whatever you find?

JR: I believe I advocate the total autonomy of the artist to capture or create whatever he or she may please, even though I know that this is an aspiration rather than an achieved state. I think it is important to be conscious of the potential exploitative nature of one's art but I also think that, if you start making decisions based on political or moral correctness, your art ceases to be autonomous.

Yet, I think all artists have to take responsibility for their creation. And that it is very possible for an artist not to actually see the truth in their work, it is possible for a photographer to be blind towards what he is photographing. A classic example of this in film is in the movie Blow Up. At first, the protagonist does not see the actual murder taking place in his photo. In order to see the reality in your work, you have to be worthy of it and truly to committed to the your creations. The moral and epistemological perspectives are intertwined. For me, that means that in order to see the truth in my Street View photos, I have to be open to the inherent violence in them. I think whenever you capture something in art or writing you are doing violence to a certain extent because you are wrenching it from the constant flow of inchoate reality.

9-Eyes.com, ongoing

A3D: Recently, we both attended the #OWS protest in London. Maybe we can detour and talk about that for a little bit... I've always been especially taken by this one Critical Art Ensemble quote from their text Electronic Civil Disobedience, "CAE has said it before, and we will say it again: as far as power is concerned, the streets are dead capital! Nothing of value to the power elite can be found on the streets, nor does this class need control of the streets to efficiently run and maintain state institutions."

JR: I think if the streets had a coherent ideology with a revolutionary consciousness that assertion would be untrue, but the truth is that a politically effective Left has been dead for a long time now. I think this supposed renaissance of the Left can easily lead to a even further disintegration or splintering of what remains of the Left. But just to back up a little bit, I think it is important to talk about the roots of the #OWS movement and recent leftist history in order to grasp it clearly. For me, the #Occupy movement shares many similarities to the anti-globalization movements of the 1990s, most clearly expressed in the anti-WTO protests in Seattle at the turn of the millennium. For instance both movements were spearheaded by anarchist groups and have been supported by the labor movement. Both movements were "leaderless" and expressed a populist discontent. A major theme of the "post-New left", "post-ideological" 1990s-era Left was, as in the current #Occupy movements, resistance/reaction rather than pressing for concrete liberal reforms let alone real revolution.The standard narrative is that the 90s anti-globalization movement faded out after the 9/11 attacks and became focused on attacking the Bush administration and Israel during the "War on Terror" era. But the #OWS movement is not objecting to neo-conservatism and US imperialism as in the 2000s, but to neo-liberalism and capitalism in general. While I do think that the shift away from a politics based on opposing US hegemony towards one that is based on critiquing capitalism as a whole is a good one, I do not think that any form of coherent emancipatory politic is guiding the movement. Over the past half century there has been a profound banalization and degeneration of revolutionary politics. All problems cannot simply be blamed on corruption or greed. The anti-intellectual strain in anarcho politics coming out of the #OWS movement is partly a result of the desire to reject the grand-narratives of the Old Left. There is now a conflation of lifestyle choices with political action and very little attempt to form structural critiques of capitalism. Micropolitics have totally supplanted macropolitics. I understand that there is an appealing optimism to the localist impuse, but I think behind the lightness of culture jamming and everyday politics of resistance lies something darker, a profound cynicism and sense that there is nothing 'outside' the current social order. There is a real despair at the failure of past revolutionary struggles which has resulted in a almost inescapable skepticism of any totalizing politics. The practice of everyday resistance (buying local/organic?) seems a lot easier and safer than methodological struggle of building a sustained alternative ideological world view. But that said, there is definitely a new possibility to articulate the current situation that I don't think was possible while the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were raging. Yet I have seen no clear articulation of the situation by any political leaders or movements. The #OWS movement is raising some issues that have been out of the public sphere for a little while. Like what would it mean to challenge the very structure of society? It is clear that we do not live in the best of possible worlds. Yet how could a new global political movement meet these concerns in practice? At this moment in time, I cannot imagine an revolutionary ideology good enough to meet the historical possibilities of our moment. Even conceiving the possibilities for radical transformation today is truly challenging for me.

9-Eyes.com, ongoing

A3D: Continuing from that, this work to me seems to be your most overtly political, if for no other reason than its engagement with the "real world." Do you think we have any responsibility to engage with the political issues that the world is currently embroiled in?

JR: Whenever I am confronted with the question of the role of the artist in their relation to social change, I am reminded of this essay by Walter Benjamin "The Author as Producer." In it Benjamin argues that no art can be of correct "political tendency" unless it is also of good aesthetic quality. The moment an artist's work becomes overtly political or didactic it loses its true critical potential. Aesthetic experience for me is self-justifying. I believe that aesthetic experience reveals the critical elements of subjectivity. In the aesthetic experience, the subject recognizes not the power of experiential capacities and the transformative freedom of the human faculties, but rather their constraint and un-freedom, their self-contradictory and self-undermining powers. I think the single most important demand of the artist is to reflect. Art should provoke recognition. I think art objects have the power to 'do' things, and to promote social change in the "real world," but only indirectly. Art has a role of reflection, critique and investigation of social reality, but no 'active' role. In this way, art is a discursive space through which it is possible to read social change. I am against the reconciliation of theory and practice or art and politics. The separation of art into its own autonomous domain is a hallmark of our freedom. The separation of theory and practice that emerged in Modernity was progress. So for me this romantic desire to dissolve the distinction and critical relationship between theory and practice, art and politics, is a sign of regression. It is very important for me to maintain a separation between art, as a non-conceptual form of knowledge, and politics and critical theory, which is informed by conceptual knowledge.

9-Eyes.com, ongoing

Ongoing collection to chart the passage for painting in the continuous current, with writing for work informed by or informing painted practice. Images, modelled and actual paint all twisted like a vine, etc.

PAINTED,ETC. is a broad research initiative currently produced by artist Ry David Bradley to document the practice, understanding and lineage of painting and its descendants in the internet age...

PAINTED,ETC. accepts contributions, brief reviews, short artist essays, statements and images.....

To send work click here •

PAINTED, ETC.

PAINT FX (www.paintfx.biz) is a painting collective/ club/ company/ brand/ website/ blog/ party currently produced by artists residing at various locations of the internet: Jon Rafman, Parker Ito, Micah Schippa, Tabor Robak & John Transue.

For your reading pleasure, the **PAINT FX** crew took time out to participate in the following *INNERVIEW* for *PAINTED, ETC.*

American Abstraction arose as artists struggled to portray a distinct cultural identity in the shadow of European painting. European Abstraction was linked to scientific, industrial and musical evolutions. Throughout the 20th century all of these tenets of painted Abstraction became a combined vehicle to measure fundamental changes against the artist, whether or not they were possible. It was said that while representational painting gave an image of how the world looked, non-representational painting displayed something of how it felt. In the wake of all this, is the history of abstract painting of importance to PAINTFX.BIZ? Are there any parallels between those histories and what is occurring online now?

American Abstraction marked a shift from Europe to NY as the center of the avant garde. We don't believe in avant garde cause it's fucking borking (sic), but in the coming years the Internet will become the main focus/obsession of the art world. Abstract painting is all about emotion and PaintFX explores these same emotions for a post-Two Girls One Cup culture. Sure there are classic emotions displayed in many of the works we post — life, death, whatever — but the most interesting posts explore a new unnamed emotional territory that is rising out of digital culture: (Post) Post-Irony, sexy Disney tweens, Punk-Minimalism, Defaultism, and anything else you want to make up on the spot. It is also an intentionally banal experience with software. It's about connecting with these wares that are intended for glossy commercial image-making and doing the simplest, most natural thing with them. That is where the biggest historical connection might be made, to the Californian Finish Fetish guys. The idea that depth and meaning can be on the surface of a thing is really important. If you think of culture as a type of software, or programming, the way they were exploring default materials feels the same as the way we are exploring default materials.

Volume and output seem to be of importance to the project with over 200 works to date in a relatively short amount of time, is the focus on quantity part of a search, perhaps to turn over as much visual ground as possible? Or is it more aligned with representing the massiveness of the internets? Is this quantity a statement of ease, a self-evident reality, or subject purely to the expectations of a blog format, that it must be continuous and

regular?

We don't have to wait for paint to dry, we don't have to woo curators and gallerists; the throw a bunch of shit at a wall and see what sticks approach works great online. The more work you make the more your voice grows. The more you blog the more your audience grows. All of these things are very present and embedded in the project and culture at large. Part of it is sport, or exploration; a quantity for quantities sake situation akin to image boards, tumblr, dump.fm etc. Part of it is communication, dialog. With every new post you get an insight into where your peers are going, it's the subtleties that expose their working methods that get you excited to respond. Then there is, in a personal way, a deep connection to the way quickly or easily produced images can be meaningful and complex, almost sublime. Art Rage is a very fun and addicting program. One taste and you're hooked on it's luscious, juicy, gestures.

Is it possible to discuss the content of just one of the works displayed, or must it be considered specifically as a fraction of the whole project? Are there 'Fillers' & 'Killers' in the work produced?

Hell na. It would be possible, but not necessarily compelling. The dynamism that is born from collaboration in context to 'performance in isolation' (the internet) is what really creates the magic. But at the same time, we wouldn't consider any piece a 'filler' because the existence of each piece is integral to the whole. The entire project is more interesting than any one of the individual pieces. The only thing that has a title is the project as a whole, although the individual pieces do get a cool string or random numbers and letters assigned to them by tumblr. [It's] a hard time addressing Fillers and Killers in anything today because often stuff that sucks is good because it sucks.

What is the significance of 'FX'?

The 'fx.biz' helps point to the projects awareness of commercial schema and methodology. A little wink that reveals the projects self-awareness. 'Effects' took too long to type.

Do the limitations of the various software programs employed hinder the options for the PAINTFX.BIZ artists? Or does the work seek to lay bare some of these defaults and hence exploit them?

Limitations are good, they create depth out of breadth. Traditional paint in a tube doesn't get upgraded every two years but people keep doing new things with it. Or is PaintFX the upgrade? It's both. It seems obvious, or perhaps of no interest, that you can't really move beyond the capabilities of your wares. So that is what becomes important. You're given this palette, designed by commercial engineers, and you have to choose how much you buy into them or desire them, questioning them. There's this relation to Constant Dullaart's work and this idea of defaultism, or the exploration of defaults. In the end, I like being trapped, I think it is important. You have to recognize how you use or relate to the architectural or infrastructural systems around you in order to change them. We are seeking to break down what could be called "software invisibility planes" (until someone else comes up with a better name), which is a term to describe using software in a way that doesn't conceal the software's involvement. So defaults are ideal for revealing shit.

Having four artists produce work as a single entity increases everything, perhaps displacing the idea of an aesthetic 'style'. Or is that taken care of by the blog stylesheet? Between the blog posting producers, are four styles inevitably emerging?

Styles are over. All hail the brand. By posting anonymously we're branding more transparently than our own projects allow. The most exciting part is watching individual styles evolve and then responding to them. PaintFX is very much an evolving conversation. We do not even know who creates what piece since everything is made anonymous by tumblr. This helps us become a homogeneous unit by eliminating competition.

Where does PAINTFX.BIZ see the project developing? Are we heading towards a broader movement of software/online painting?

The idea of digital painting gets better the more people there are doing it. People like Charles Broskoski, Harm van den Dorpel, Tobias Madison, Travess Smalley and Max Pitegoff put a lot of thoughtful time into making this conversation possible. Digital painting was something the theorist-critic institution assigned to 'folk' (vernacular) web art because it wasn't understood as something performative or because they didn't understand it as material. We are all rearranging value systems to create a healthier image of art production. It's about leveling the playing field and getting rid of antiquated notions of the 'other' or the 'non-artist. One of the many goals of this project is freeing the word painting from its traditional use because it is very functional. We are headed towards a larger movement of digital painting and digital work that reveals the hand of the artist. Everyone who has tried Art Rage has been hooked on it.

Is the reliance on software developers and technology worth considering or can we just accept it and move on?

C U L8er. Yeah, move on. [We] don't really care that a sculptor doesn't get his own clay from the ground. Software developers are highly creative. I think there are a lot of people who sit perfectly in between the art-engineer zones.

Although PAINTFX.BIZ exists in an online blog context, an upcoming solo show is

planned at Antena Gallery in Chicago next year, while an exhibition is being staged at The Future Gallery in Berlin this month. How will the work function in the gallery space as objects?

The site is only 1 component of the project. To fully understand the project everyone will have to attend the exhibition in person or look at the pics of the exhibition online. The way they are being produced, again, acts to question production methods and values. There will be at least one painting that is outsourced to China for production. The gesture reflects the same removed but empowered relationship we have with the software.

Is it an objective that this work eventually be collected and exhibited in the manner of Contemporary Art? For example, will we be able to buy one?

People [could] just find cracks of whatever image making tools they can get a hold of to make their own paintings. Software for all. PaintFX has a dialog with art history and being collected is a part of that conversation. It is contemporary art. Everything is for sale, just send us an email - paintfxstudios@gmail.com

What do we call them, if not paintings?

Paint Effects. Drawings. Just paintings.

What artists or works inspired the PAINTFX.BIZ model?

Charles Broskoski, Harm van den Dorpel, Tobias Madison, Travess Smalley & Max Pitegoff. Josh Smith. Abstract expressionists, post-modern pop artists, and the netart tumblr/flickr/rhizome crowd.

What don't we know about PAINTFX.BIZ yet?

Nothing! Nothing we don't know. John Transue is the newest member.

by Ry David Bradley

• 5 September 2010

BOMBLOG

ART

Revealing Jon Rafman

by Lindsay Howard Jul 08, 2010

Netartist Jon Rafman's Kool-Aid Man avatar is one of his primary characters, taking appointments and leading tours through Second Life worlds both utopian and fetishistic, as well as starring in still images and films directed by Rafman himself, which humorously contrast the avatar's round red body with the super-sexy alter egos more commonly seen in Second Life. He speaks with Lindsay Howard about his work. Featuring an original Kool Aid Man in Second Life video!

Jon Rafman, KOOL AID MAN IN SECOND LIFE, 2009.

via Kool Aid Man in Second Life.

"People make crush art about you all the time, don't they?" That's the first question I asked Jon Rafman one month ago after he discovered I was embarking upon an ongoing multi-media performance inspired by his work. Our conversation provided my first hint into Rafman's process. He wanted to know what I'd done between the time I left work and the time I arrived at home, the name of the office building, where my roommate was born, the details of my relationship to certain net artists, and a host of other very specific questions which I later saw as part of his process for, and reverence toward, the construction of one's personal narrative. The truth, though he wouldn't admit it, is that Jon Rafman is one of the net art community's most respected and beloved figures. This prestige, it seems to me, relates to his ability to position himself in shamanistic roles, as director, storyteller, and tour guide, as the middle man exploring essential concepts of modernity/contemporary experience, and then processing and framing them into narratives. His work is concerned with virtual worlds, self-identity, and the collapse of high/low art. He is the artist/curator behind Googlestreetviews.com and the cartoonish internet *flâneur* directing tours through Second Life as Koolaidmaninsecondlife.com.

Rafman's Kool-Aid Man avatar is one of his most primary characters, taking appointments and leading tours through Second Life worlds both utopian and fetishistic, as well as starring in a collection of stills and films directed by Rafman himself, which humorously contrast the avatar's round red body against the super sexy alter egos much more commonly found in Second Life. The tours are primarily directed between virtual avatars, however Rafman also performs the tours live,

inviting audience members to directly interact and inform the journey, as he subtly contextualizes and frames the experience. The Kool-Aid Man avatar, as it relates to Rafman's body of work as a whole, is an externalized representation of Rafman's honest and committed artistic struggle to construct and examine self in virtual culture.

When Rafman agreed to do this BOMB interview, our collaboration began with a series of ideas and links shared over g-chat conversations, emails, late-night video chats and Skype calls. We discussed constructing a short film inspired by Jean-Luc Godard's interview of Woody Allen or designing a text interview where every word or phrase hyperlinked to another obscure place on the web (à la the early papperad website). Ultimately, I confessed that my true intention for this interview was to reveal "the real" Jon Rafman. Our discussion over Skype (transcribed below) proposes that perhaps "revealing the real" is… well, I wouldn't want to give away a story right at the very beginning.

Lindsay Howard Do you think about Kool-Aid Man as an extension of yourself? Is there an evolution there toward the fragmented virtual self and physical self? How are you considering that?

Jon Rafman I think underlying that question is the unease consisting of where, how, and what is my physical self when I am in a social relation in cyberspace.

The Kool-Aid Man avatar relies on me to exist. If I don't log into Second Life, he is not out there somewhere in the world. He makes it clear to me that it is not necessary to have a computer chip implanted into your brain in order to become a man-machine. To fully connect physical existence with digital existence, it is not necessary to alter one's body. Perhaps Kool-Aid Man is a cyborg in the fullest sense in that he is combination of computer programming and human agency.

Even more important is that the cyborg/avatar demonstrates there is no such thing as a pure physical self. What we take as the most fundamental aspects of self are mediated through the lens of culture. I don't think identity is bound to our physical composition. How we feel and perceive ourselves, the roles we play are all socially mediated.

The internet includes social worlds in which an avatar is required in order to navigate and interact with other people. In these virtual worlds, be it Facebook or Second Life, our avatar is our social representative. What we choose reveals many ways in which our physical or 'real' self is constructed. So perhaps choosing an avatar makes manifest our fragmented and multiple selves.

Jon Rafman, KOOL AID MAN IN SECOND LIFE, 2009.

Although, having an avatar in Second Life need not change your understanding of selfhood. After all, we are always inhabiting or sending forth avatars in our day-to-day lives. I definitely feel, however, that the way the internet is transforming how we construct our identities deserves more attention. I think the notion of even going on stage has changed with the many varied vehicles the web has provided us.

To me, what is even more important than a fragmented self is, how does this lack of physicality in interaction affect us? Like, what is the impact of the lack of the tangible touch?

LH I want to read a J.G. Ballard quote that I've seen you reference before:

> "I believe that organic sex, body against body, skin area against skin area, is becoming no longer sufficient… What we're getting is a whole new order of sexual fantasies, involving a different order of experiences, like car crashes, like traveling in jet aircraft, the whole overlay of new technologies…These things are beginning to reach into our lives and change the interior design of our sexual fantasies."

I'm curious to know whether or not you agree with him, and how you're thinking about this subject as it relates to your experiences in Second Life.

JR I agree to a certain extent. I definitely think that our engagement in cyberspace can be seen as an erotic act. An extreme metaphor and example for this is the fetish known as Vorarephilia, or "vore" for short. Vore is a condition wherein one is sexually aroused or obsessed with one living being devouring another. On one of my tours, I showed my friend, Matt Wiviott, a thriving Second Life vore community. Matt subsequently wrote a fascinating article in which he devotes some time to analyzing the fetish. He argues, and I totally agree with him, that despite vore being a marginal fetish in Second Life, it is helpful in understanding the nature of virtual existence and digital mediation.

The fetish can be compared to the desire to return to the womb. The desire to be consumed entirely, to be completely engulfed by a totalizing feminine body is fundamental to the desire to inhabit cyberspace. Making the voyage home into the womb and analogously the process of being swallowed alive is powerful metaphor for the process of fully immersing oneself on the internet.

The state of being in the womb, however, can be considered one of bliss, but also simultaneously one that very closely resembles death. Still, there is a strange comfort in this form of death. Like the cyborg, the act of losing oneself in cyberspace evokes both dread and desire simultaneously.

Technology has given us many new symbols to play with, and our fantasies are becoming more and more divorced from our physical bodies. But I think that, at the core, there are certain impulses and drives that have not changed and are simply expressing themselves in new ways.

Kool-Aid Man in Second Life – tour promo 2010 from jonrafman on Vimeo..

LH I'm thinking about your internet experience and the different worlds that you inhabit on the web. I guess I'm thinking about them in terms of neighborhoods: there's the Second Life world you inhabit, then there's the net art community where you're a social figure interacting with others and others are interacting with you, then there's the accumulation of items from the deep internet that you bring to the social sphere through mediums like your del.icio.us, tumblr, or Facebook, and then you have your artist site, which essentially functions as a business card. How do you consider the relationship between these neighborhoods? What are your goals for each?

JR The initial joy at finding two successive virtual worlds to explore (Google Street View and Second Life) led inexorably to my critique of the real world in which we are trapped. At times I adopt the the role of a member of the community at other times I just re-frame what I find, if not so much in liberating us but in revealing the conditions of our enslavement.

LH Your work is often presented through the voice of an authoritative (if at times unreliable) narrator, whether you are giving a tour in Second Life, directing a film, writing an essay, or performing live. How did you find this role?

JR I was influenced by literary and essay models, but mostly I am drawn to

exploring the relationship between memory and identity, both historical and personal. The mix of authority and the faultiness of memory has a particular pull.

Memory is both the basis and the confirmation of selfhood, but it is also unreliable. I am interested in how self-narratives are used to construct the self, but I am also struck by the variety of ways memory seeks the narrative form and fails.

Jon Rafman, 58 LUNGOMARE 9 MAGGIO, BARI, PUGLIA, ITALY. 2009. Installation in the artist's studio.

LH Kool-Aid Man in Second Life necessitates a relationship with your audience, whereas with a lot of net art, or art in general, the audience doesn't have to be so specific. How does the requirement of a participatory audience impact the way you consider and construct a story?

JR There is a more direct conversation going on with audiences and other artists because of the internet. I very much value the immediate feedback I get when I exhibit something online, post a video to my Arcade Hustla youtube channel, or give a tour in Second Life, compared to the endless waiting when submitting films to film festivals or grant applications to government agencies, etc. This new directness is energizing. I feel even more motivated to make work.

LH How do you see net art existing in the marketplace, and how do you reconcile that with your personal artistic goals?

JR Good question. I don't really have an answer to that. In its original spirit, putting something up on the internet meant making it accessible to all which nonetheless raises the question of how the artist is to live.

I think that artists using any form, medium, or technique in its early infancy tend to be idealistic about it. Whether this is true or not, there is nonetheless the sense that new ground is being broken, and this imbues everything with a certain energy.

One likely path is that netart takes the same path as performance art: it will be assimilated into existing institutions. But like performance art, the issue of selling the work will be a touchy subject. Perhaps video and other sort of documentation of the work will be be sold, but I don't know.

I also have the sense that a lot of the serious artists that are using the internet are very reluctant to call themselves "netartists," and I understand why. The label carries baggage with it. There is a triviality that often is associated with the word "netart," a certain feeling that netart is somehow reducible to either retro animated gifs or a certain kind of ironic kitschy humor or in-jokes that employ a mix of pop-cultural and obscure internet references.

LH Does the internet subvert the idea of a 'master narrative'?

JR No, I think the master narrative was subverted way before the internet became popular. I think it had more to do with the failure of major ideologies.

But I also think that we live in one world and we are not so different from one another, and that a universal discourse exists. If I experience fragmentation due to being overwhelmed with data, it may well represent contemporary reality and consciousness. Perhaps our subjectivity changes over time, but it is ultimately part of our shared human history. We are narrative creatures. No matter what, we will create stories that have patterns and arcs and consist of a series of events that can be recounted.

Jon Rafman will be showing original work in a one-night-only group exhibition, titled *Area/Zone*, at Bruce High Quality Foundation University this Friday, July 9th at 7pm. On Saturday July 10th at 10pm, Rafman is performing Kool-Aid Man in Second Life at the Brick Theater in Williamsburg as part of the Game Play Festival. To schedule a guided tour of Second Life contact: koolaidmaninsecondlife [at] gmail [dot] com.

Lindsay Howard is an independent curator and researcher based in New York. She acts as the Curatorial Director of 319 Scholes, a Brooklyn gallery dedicated to promoting works at the intersection of art and technology.
www.lindsayhoward.net

JON RAFMAN TALKS TO DEAN KISSICK

Montreal resident Jon Rafman is at the forefront of a new wave of internet artists and filmmakers from around the world. He's best known for his tumblr blog *The Nine Eyes of Google Street View* – a collection of found photographs – and for his narrative films made in Second Life, and he has just finished a new film about professional video gamers. Rafman spoke to Dean Kissick via Skype about finding Shangri-La in a run-down Chinatown arcade, and finding '20s Parisian café culture on the internet.

DEAN KISSICK: Why did you decide to make a piece about an arcade?

JON RAFMAN: It started about four years ago. I was hanging out at this arcade in Chicago, where I was going to college at the time, and I met this gamer who had reached a certain pinnacle in his short career that was so high – you're at your best when you're still in your teens, because your hand-eye co-ordination is at its peak – and from that moment on he lived in the past. I liked the idea of this character who was reminiscing about his glory days at the joystick, and I had always wanted to tell the story of the end of an era. So the film would be an elegy to the arcade era, and also to a person living in an age where everything is so accelerated that you can be outmoded when you're still in your 20s.

Then I moved to New York and I discovered this arcade in Chinatown: just this little smelly hole in the wall, packed with teenagers, reeking with sweat and bad Chinese food, and all the machines were dilapidated. But at the back there were four new machines playing *Street Fighter 4*, with massive amounts of kids crowded around the machines, betting money and competing against each other. And it turns out it was considered the last great arcade on the east coast, and it's where all the greatest east coast players emerged. I already wanted to tell the story and I had started playing around with it, and shooting stuff with actors, but when I found this place it was like, everything's so much more real – my fantasy of this world didn't even come close to the richness of the reality of it. Every day I'd go there and hang out at the arcade.

DK: So what happened?

JR: I learnt about one guy who was considered the first east coast champion: his name was Eddie Lee and he pioneered the New York style of gameplay, "turtle style", an extremely defensive form of fighting where you just constantly run away. Anyway, he disappeared after a while, and everyone had different stories, but apparently he was picked up by these Wall Street types who thought that pro video gamers would make amazing day traders, because it requires the same skills: fast-paced decision-making and just going with your intuition; understanding these limited rules and working within them, and working fast. So he became a day trader and made millions of dollars, and he hasn't returned to the game. And everyone wants him to return, but he's moved on. He was an inspiration for my film, which uses the interviews that I've shot at the arcade and "machinima" – basically, using video games to make movies – shot in Second Life. The whole movie takes place in Second Life, and the story's told in a nostalgic voiceover from a character who was once a great video-game player, but is now thinking about his past, and whether anyone will actually remember him. Ultimately, gamers are not playing for money, so a huge part of it is playing for respect and having their legacy live on.

THE AGE DEMANDED #1 (2010). COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

DK: Did you have any filmic influences?

JR: Structurally I'm most influenced by Chris Marker, who uses montage and found footage to weave together narratives.

DK: I've heard that he uses Second Life himself, that he's constructed his own virtual archipelago and museum.

JR: I have a feeling he got help building that world, and he's in his 80s now so I wonder whether he actually hangs out in Second Life. But he was one of the pioneers of interactive models of art back in the '90s, and he very much embraces new technologies. I think he's a modernist in a postmodern world, which is kind of how I feel. There's this fragmentation that's occurred, and it's taken to new levels with the increasing amounts of information that we're constantly processing every day, and as artists we need to confront that. There's a sense of loss in Marker's films, but it's never nostalgic to the point of pure pessimism. His magnum opus, Sans Soleil, is all about in Japan in the '80s, which was the most technologically and economically advanced culture of the time, so he's definitely interested in the future as well as the past.

DK: Are you nostalgic for the past?

JR: Every generation migrates to a new centre, and I think the internet is the equivalent of Paris in the '20s – with all the great expatriate writers from Ernest Hemingway to James Joyce to Gertrude Stein – or postwar New York. I can't visit my friend's studio, or meet in a café, but I can communicate through Skype, like with you right now. The "net art" community that I found online is who I'm in dialogue with, and they're basically providing the inspiration and audience that is helping forge this new vernacular that is very much tied to the internet. You don't have that tangible touch and physicality of hanging out in New York in the '50s or Paris in the '20s, but at the same time it's way more international, and I'm able to reach way more people – it's reflecting the modern experience, which is extremely tied down to the computer.

DK: On that note, can you explain the process of exploring the world through Google Street View?

JR: I'll usually go to places that I really want to go in real life, or places that the Google cars are exploring at the moment, because often if there's something crazy in these photographs it won't have been caught or deleted yet. On the Street View website it tells you where the cars are at the moment – so right now, Romania and Brazil – and it's great because they're progressively moving towards the less developed countries, and those are often more exotic and less documented. For instance, I now have a far better understanding of the geography of a Brazilian favela than I ever did before. And when I first started, I would go on these marathon Street View runs where I would almost enter a trancelike state of just clicking and gathering and not stopping until I found an incredible image.

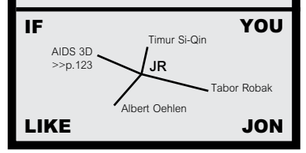
JONRAFMAN.COM

>>I still agree that certain formal aspects are important BUT new technological and artistic developments create a new freedom and re-infuse a new energy into the old mediums.<<

http://www.brandnewpaintjob.com/ http://www.jonrafman.com/

JON RAFMAN

JON RAFMAN IS A MONTREAL-BASED ARTIST THAT SOMNAMBULATES BETWEEN DIGITAL WORLDS AND MULTIPLE MULTIMEDIA CHARACTERS THAT RECENTLY RAISED A LOT OF ATTENTION THROUGH HIS GOOGLE STREET VIEW SERIES.



Alright, let's be honest here: if it wasn't for our guest art director I still wouldn't have the slightest idea who Jon Rafman is. Maybe it's because I've become more reclusive and ignorant with every new year. Maybe it's because I stopped following any kind of feuilleton a while ago already. Maybe I'm more fascinated by any kind of ephemerality than by persistency and substance these days. Maybe my own little universe and its inhabitants were too busy with trying to establish a weird kind of significant independence apart from a system of labour, capital and time. But most likely: maybe it's because I used to run in the other direction as soon as terms like "internet art" or "digital artist" occur. Not necessarily because I think executing ideas in an analogue way is more elaborate or automatically more meaningful, but because I'm generally scared of 72dpi and its associated accessibility for each and everyone.

It's in the nature of things: digital art tends to be more experimental and subversive than any other art form these days due to its immediate effect and easy ways of distribution to spread the results, regardless how high or lo-brow they might seem. And Montreal-based artist Jon Rafman is one of its finest and most outspoken practitioner of his craft. He lately got a lot of attention through his rather brilliant Google Street project, a series of intriguing and odd images he sourced from Google's street view map system. The rest of his catalogue comfortably sits between impressive and thoughtful ways of renderings (like his Brand New Paint Job project, e.g.) and instantaneous works with the character of elaborate pranks. Time for Lodown to invest a little further.

Jon Rafman

Jon, we've just slipped into 2011... would you say it's still important to discern between analogue and digital or is there an almost restrictive and hypocritical ring to it as soon as you want to clearly separate these concepts?

My own attitude towards a purist who insists on making the distinction between analogue and digital is a combination of respect and challenge. Respect because I prize their emphasis on formal and tactile aspects such as colour, texture, and composition. I see this as core to the artistic value or quality of the work. I have learnt from this formal rigor and try to achieve it in my own work. What I challenge, however, is an excessive emphasis on what purists, especially photo purists, see as intrinsic or inherent aspects of their craft be it the emulsion or the brand of camera or components. At one point in history, that view may have been relevant but to me it no longer carries the same relevance.

To me it seems like they are fetishizing what they view as being true to the medium. I feel that by doing so they are diminishing the artistic value or potential quality of digital forms or new languages that integrate the still image. I still agree that certain formal aspects are important but new technological and artistic developments create a new freedom and re-infuse a new energy into the old mediums.

I question the type of "purism" does not allow us to incorporate new forms and developments. Perhaps with some arts like painting it is a lot about the actual materials. In my view, you can be a purist but the purity or perfection or quality is no longer tied completely to the material aspects of the work. I developed this attitude in part because internet culture encourages a sort of lightness or nonchalance, and disrespect towards the precious physical object and this has been liberating for many artists.

Why is the term "internet artist" still handled as a dirty word, even though the internet has existed for decades already?

I think the negative association with net.art has developed in part because people tend to reduce it to either boring '90s hacker art or retro web 1.0 animated or a distinct type of ironic kitsch and in-jokes that employ a mix of pop-cultural and obscure internet references.

So would you consider yourself to be an internet artist?

Yes, in that, the internet is one of the primary spaces in which I exhibit my work. Although I do make work that is not exclusively made for exhibition on the web. I prefer using the term Gurthrie Lonergan coined "internet aware art". And with each progressive generation the internet is increasingly integral to everyday living. And so dialogue amongst internet aware artists is steadily turning into less and less of a conversation limited to the signs and symbols of the web. It is transforming into a conversation about everyday reality.

The very majority of art forms aren't only positioned in time, but by geographic coordinates as well. Would you say that the internet and its related blog/tumblr-culture is our new Esperanto, a new kind of international folklore?

Definitely! I think there is a real dialogue that is taking place between artists all over the globe. Back in 2006, group internet surf blogs like Nasty Nets first began to highlight this new vernacular, but since then it has transformed and become increasingly complex. This blog culture allows for individuals to respond instantaneously to each others no matter where one is based, fostering a culture of direct response that often resembles a real-time conversation where fast paced conceptual and aesthetic exchanges can occur. Sometimes I sense that me and the other internet-aware artists are all collaborating in the search for structure in this seemingly formless overflow of information that we are bombarded with everyday. Other times I feel like we are all simply attempting to highlight the contradictions and chaos of the digital age, revealing a world in which we are constantly being bombarded by fragmentary impressions and overwhelmed with information, a world in which we see too much and register nothing.

Likeminded artists like Oliver Laric for example made the transition from virtual to tangible/physical art. Were you ever tempted to do the same... I can imagine it's a lot easier in terms of a quick cash-in.

In away I've already made the transition from virtual to physical since I've been making large format prints of my Google Street View images. The desire to create something that occupies physical space is tied to the desire to see ones work in a new context away from the computer screen. When I first saw my Street Views hanging on a wall, I noticed new aspects of the image that hadn't seen when they were purely digital. I think a lot can be gained and learned about ones work by materialize it... also artists have to feed themselves somehow.

I once read you were interested in trying to use a new kind of 3D printer for a certain series of yours. Please tell me a bit more about this project.

Yes, I see each one of my "Brand New Paint Job's" (BNPJ) as both a stand-alone work and a proposal for a physical object. Right now 3D printing technology is available, but printing at large scales is prohibitively expensive. I imagine, however, that in the not so distant future it will become affordable and one day we will have 12 years old boys designing 3D models of their dream cars in their parent's basement, uploading the models to an on-demand 3D printing website, and receiving the life-sized prototype shipped to them within the week. Until then, I've been exploring different strategies to realize my BNPJs in new ways. Currently I'm working with Tabor Robak to create a totally immersive 3D environments where you will be able to interact with my BNPJ models like in a first person shooter. **(>>1)**

Gerhard Richter Car Scene, 2010

>> One [...] theme in my work is contemporary ALIENATION expressed through the tension between the ideal and the real and the romantic and the ironic. <<

I'm heavily fascinated by your Street View series (>>2)... for me it kinda disables the common preconception that the very majority of what you find in the depths of the Interwebs is either gnarly or devoid of meaning. How much time do you usually have to spend before you find an almost perfect picture?

I have to mentally prepare myself before I go Street View "surfing". The process requires intense endurance and concentration. When I first started off, I would regularly go on 12 hour Ritalin-fueled marathon runs and about half way through the session I would enter an almost trance-like state. Usually it would be hours upon hours before I'd find anything worth screen capturing. These days, however, I'm less interested in finding the "perfect picture" and more fascinated by the idea of the Street View collection as an incomplete whole or as an ongoing stream of images. I've gotten into the habit of analyzing reoccurring motifs and patterns, comparing all the different methods people have of flicking off the Google camera.

Do you sometimes have the feeling that you're the very first person who ever laid eyes on this scenario? Is it like voyeurism without the sleaze?

I often start a session by going onto the official Street View homepage to see where the Google cars are currently located across the world and begin surfing from those points. I thrive off the idea that I may be the first person to ever have gazed upon the given scenario. And it is this joy in exploring the virtual world that led inexorably to a critique of the real world in which we are trapped. The 9 Eyes project both celebrates Google's technologies and critiques the culture and consciousness it reflects. We want to matter to somebody but loneliness and anonymity are often our plight. At times, I introduce a moral perspective at times by adopting the role of a member of the community. At other times, I alter or undo familiar conventions by reframing or by introducing the human gaze. In this way, I align myself with the historical role of the artist who not so much liberates us as he reveals the conditions of our enslavement.

Do you necessarily divide between aesthetics and statement... I'm asking because your Brand New Paint Job (BNPJ) series seems to flirt with the fascination of triviality (or kitsch).

No, I am as much influenced by a terrible kitsch I consumed growing up as the great works of literature and art I read and experienced. I think this mix of high and low influences is just part and parcel of modernity. Brand New Paint Job was born out of the desire to discover the formal result of the juxtaposition of a two-dimensional image with a three-dimensional model. I wanted to start conversations between surfaces and their underlying structure. So I forced collisions between the 3D model and 20th century painting to create a two-way road of meaning in which the model says something about the painting and vice versa. In this way, the clash of the cultural weight of a high modernist paintings and a mass produced vehicle is not simply another example of the blurring of the distinction between high and low culture. The object may have a cultural significance on one level (e.g. a tank) and the painting (e.g. a Pollock) on another level so that the questioning of the meaning of the signs unsettles us in yet another way. BNPJ attempts to confront paintings historic fear of becoming a decorative object. BNPJ begs the question has painting becoming just an exclusive wallpaper for the designer chic? The tension between the uselessness of the painting and the instrumentality of the object highlights the diminished division between art and design these days. I think more and more important to look at the world with a historical consciousness. History is "wrapped" around us at all times, even if it has been relegated to the status of surface textures or a glossy layer of paint simply applied over everything, like a paint job. Some people interpret BNPJ as wryly mocking art history, but one can equally see BNPJ as paying genuine homage to it. When I cover a room from wall to wall with a repeating painting, the room becomes a shrine to the painting.

A rather twisted sense of humour and a soft spot for the slightly absurd can be found in a lot of your series. Would you say this component is an integral part of your body of work?

From Duchamp's ready-mades to Cory Arcangel's Photoshop gradients, humour has played a prominent role in the history of art this past century. In my search for how to best critically examine and represent modern experience, I also tend to arrive at ideas that contain an element of the absurd. One reoccurring themes in my work is contemporary alienation expressed through the tension between the ideal and the real and the romantic and the ironic.

What's next for Mr. Rafman?

I just finished up a short film titled Codes of Honor about a pro video game player. The film emerged out of my time spent investigating pro fighting game culture. I was living in New York spending every day in Chinatown at the last great East Coast video game arcade. I bring my camera and interview all the regulars and put the interviews on my YouTube channel (>>3) dedicated to documenting the subculture. It was great, the YouTube videos triggered all these debates about who was the greatest Ken or Ryu back in 1998. The film combines interviews I captured at the arcade and Second Life macinima to tell the story of a fallen video game player reminiscing his glory at the joysticks.

MORE LINKS:
1. http://eexxttrraa.com/
2. http://googlestreetviews.com/
3. http://youtube.com/arcadehustla/

Words: Forty

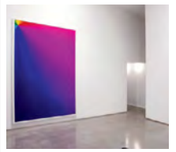
International Klein Blue Prius, 2010

Basquiat Zeppelin, 2010

Pollock Tank, 2010

JON RAFMAN'S PICTURE COMMENT

of **Cory Arcangel's** "Photoshop CS: 110 by 72 inches, 300 DPI, RGB, square pixels, default gradient "Spectrum", mousedown y=1098 x=1749.9, mouse up y=0 x=4160 (2008)"



>>Museum goer1: "I wonder how he made this?" Museum goer2: "My mother always wanted me to marry a gradient." Museum goer3: "CS4 totally sucked.<<

CONTACT

jonrafman@gmail.com

http://jonrafman.com