NERDIER TIDES

SCOURING THE WAVES FOR ALL THAT BE NERDY!

Dire Jank – An Art Exhibition Showing The Dynamic Connection Between Video Games And Art

Curated by Porpentine Charity Heartscape

March 21 - May 18, 2019

What is Dire Jank?

Jank in its broad term means junk or useless. For gamers however, it’s when a game goes wrong. It’s when the character models of game begin to have their colors bleed. It is when the pixels just don’t sit right. Or when you picked Soldier 76 when you should have picked Mercy.

Thematically, it’s when things just don’t sit right because something is wrong, but in the terms of this gallery, Dire Jank has become a new fascination of mine.

Color-coded Embrace

...Nevertheless, I remain convinced that in principle, video games cannot be art. Perhaps it is foolish of me to say “never,” because never, as Rick Wakeman informs us, is a long, long time. Let me just say that no video gamer now living will survive long enough to experience the medium as an art form.

While Ebert would go on to later apologize for this statement, I was reminded of this by Lisa Vagnoni, the member of the Apexart staff who helped put together the Dire Jank Art Exhibition alongside its curator, Porpentine Charity Heartscape.

It ignores so much about the gaming experience. That at the heart of gaming is Activation. That you have to activate a game.

Lisa Vagnoni

And that was the sense and experience I had at the Apexart during its opening night.

A sense of activation and more understanding of just what the power of gaming can lend to art.

Entering the lower Manhattan gallery, I found myself greeted by warm, welcoming smiles and provided refreshments. So reserving my snacks for after got to experience the work presently there. I took the pamphlet guide for the event and entered a realm of amazing color and captivating images.

Dire Jank @ Apexart

Devi McCollum - Black Cloud (video), Properly Labeled (audio), Every Body Breaks Down (audio), girl in a waiting room (audio) - Dire Jank @ Apexart
Displays lined across the walls, each artist with work present having a specific color assigned to them. Lisa compared it to, it was like being caught in the LEDs of a high-end gaming computer, and I can’t agree more. This added to moving about, enhancing each step along with my guide. From games to a trance-like audio/visual experience, it all was so much more than I’m used to experiencing at a video game event as each game was a unique beauty of its own.

It was inspiring to see it all though, it was all something I had never seen before in terms of the treatment of games. Stepping up to the first game display for thethammites Magic Wand, it had the tidings of familiarity but you could tell it deviated from the traditional game you might say it resembles.

And I loved it.

The gameplay found me wandering about this bizarre landscape. My character a cloaked figure with only a few dollars in their pocket alongside some soda, and a sword. I explored and eventually found my first enemy, some weird blob of a beast who I cut down with my sword. Thinking I got the gist of this world, I proceeded ahead, to meet what I can only call a giant bug. Unable to slash him, I realized I could speak to him. Not only that but a door laid in the middle of the map I currently found myself on. I entered, and there I was, in a bar, greeted by a creature called Moe.
From a video chronicling the journey of a toy golf-ball bird amongst a field of crows, to an intense exploration of online harassment, to my new favorite song, and a good old fashioned 80 games in one collection, each of these Jank’s displayed work was a time to discuss just what it was we just played but that was only after our activation of the piece.

I am into video games, so when we were trying to figure out the perfect person to curate a collection together for us, I spent months trying to figure out just who was the right person for that. I chose Porpentine first of all because I am such a big fan and have been for such a long time, but also because she has an aesthetic that simultaneously is both counter to mainstream gaming while maintaining a unique voice.

(Porpentine) purposed the aesthetic of jank in an email. We knew what jank was but she gave us a new definition for it as messed up games. When you think jank, you think messed up, something not quite right. She said this collection is that but in game form.

There is a push to make interactive art more interactive, but gaming has always been. Gaming lends that strength to art.

Lisa Vignoni

And that is what each display gave us.