

## OBSERVER

### Tribeca's Video-Focused Gallery Shows Reveal the Neighborhood's Cutting-Edge Art Scene

By Paddy Johnson • 04/03/19 11:27am

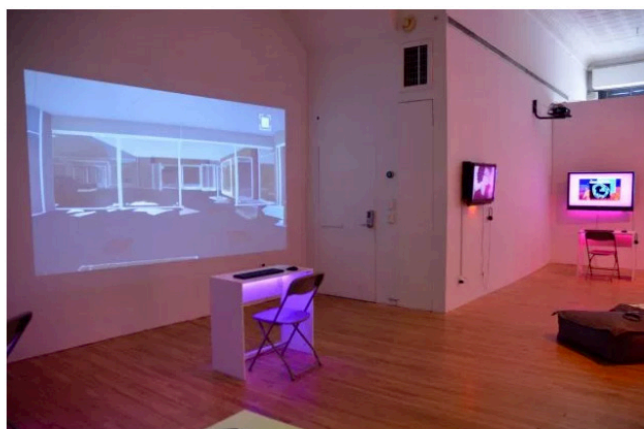


Pussycrew, *The Bliss of Metamorphing Collapse*, 2018, installation view. Postmasters

As all but the mega-galleries empty out of Chelsea, a new arts district emerges—Tribeca. The Bronx Museum set up their satellite residency there earlier this year, Canada and Denny Dimin have each announced plans to open this Spring and James Cohan will land in the neighborhood this fall. They'll be joining a handful of pre-established galleries, including Bortolami, Alexander & Bonin, Postmasters and longtime resident Apexart.

A recent tour of these Tribeca-based galleries offers a slightly different twist on the above narrative. It reveals an arts district in full bloom and one that will only increase in prominence with the arrival of these new galleries.

Let's begin with Tribeca's mainstay, Apexart, which currently hosts "Dire Jank," an exhibition of videogames curated by new media artist and self-designated "dead swamp milf," Porpentine Charity Heartscape. Assembled around the theme of jank, a term the artist defines as "fun, but suboptimal," four artists present games designed to reveal the emotional turmoil of those who live on the periphery of mainstream culture. "In this era of hyper-photorealism, everything leaks jank," writes the game designer, suggesting that representation is merely a veneer that papers over the sadness in the world.



Dire Jank installation view. apexart

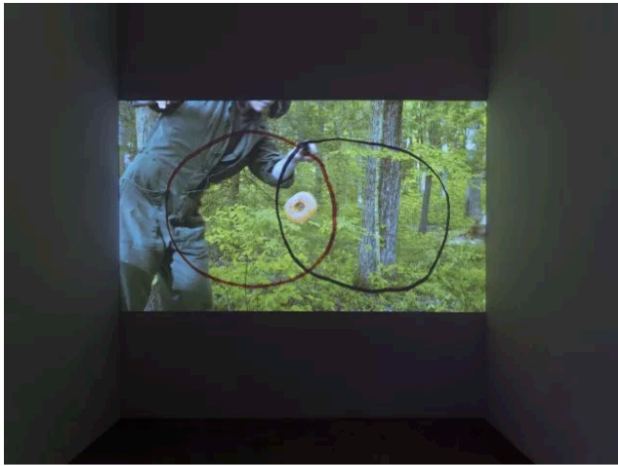
A singular voice and perspective unify the works in the show, as well as a relatively modest approach. Unlike the vast majority of games made by armies of game designers that take months to complete, individual artists created the games and videos on display, which take anywhere from a few minutes to consume to a couple of hours. While playful, most of the material in the show feels emotionally damaged in one way or another. Devi McCallion's music video "Bloodeater," for example, pictures a filtered black, white and red image of McCallion singing against electronic video game music. "I hate every choice I've made, so I have no choice but to move forward," she sings. "I'm going to fucking jump, I'm going to fill my lungs...I'm going to love myself." The desire for self-love barely tempers the will to self-destruct.

Transgender artist Tabitha Nikolai's "Recursion Plaza" may be less angry, but it's crushingly bleak. For this game, a user must navigate a modular labyrinth of 3-D modeled office spaces, empty but for a few garbage bags. There's no evil monster to conquer, but players can't escape. Stretched out photos form the vistas viewed from windows and balconies—real life, distorted. A fall from a ledge lands players back in the same area, and a reset button changes the layout of the space, but not the game. At one point, a gamer will discover a small video kiosk picturing a player navigating rooms, just as they have been doing. It's a profoundly unsettling experience.



Tabitha Nikolai, *Ineffable Glossolalia*, 2018, Installation view. apexart

There are some lighter moments to balance the mood. For example, Thecatamites' *Octopus Decision* begins with the command, "PICK A SIDE MOTHER FUCKER." Two choices exist—"I'm friends with the octopus" and "I'm against the octopus." I only know what happens when you chose the "friends"—users land in the "Friendly Octopus Zone," a peaceful screen of smiling octopus cartoons. Bliss.



Aki Sasamoto, *Past in a future tense*, 2019, Bortolami, New York, installation view, John Berens/Aki Sasamoto/Bortolami

If Pussykrew plays the architect, Bortolami's Aki Sasamoto takes the role of the inspector. Her 20-minute video, *Do Nut Diagram*, begins with a single donut suspended in front of a picturesque forest scene and ends with the dessert lying amongst shattered glass. In between, a performance reveals three transparent sheets of tempered glass separating the viewer and the forest. Early on, a sheet becomes apparent when Sasamoto shatters it. Later, another materializes when she etches out a Venn diagram on the glass and greases it with another donut. By the end, she releases the donut and shatters the last piece of glass, leaving no barriers between the viewer and the forest.

There's a small thrill each time the artist renders an invisible element visible and removes it—perhaps because the act provides a useful reminder that everything we see, no matter how inconsequential, is positioned and framed. Without disruption, there may be no way to discern that the mediation of images exists, let alone how.

In that way, the work has a lot in common with other videos on view in Tribeca, which reject conventional framing in favor of their visions. It isn't all friendly—in fact, Porpentine describes her show as “slightly radioactive”—but it's honest, which might be the strongest recommendation of all.