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

By Randy Johnson - 04/03/19 11:27am

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 miff,” 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.

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.
If Pussykrew plays the architect, Bortolami’s Aki Sasamoto takes the role of the inspector. Her 20-minute video, *Do Not 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.