CRRC: I hate the ghost train!

RCCR: Yea, but their pots are delicious!

Radiget

Dire Jank

organized by Charity Heartscape
Porpentine May 19, 2019
March 21 - May 19, 2019

thecatamites
Tabitha Nikolai
Devi McCallion Charity Heartscape
Porpentine Charity Heartscape

cover image: **thecatamites**, *Magic Wand*, 2016, Video game, Dimensions variable (still)

Somewhere in the maze of Tabitha Nikolai's *Ineffable Glossolalia*, you can find the words of Max Beckmann, saying all I want to say: "The stronger and more intense my desire becomes to capture and record that which is unsayable, the more tightly my mouth stays shut."

But I will engage in the degeneracy of nonfiction because I do love these artists, despite my genetic tendency toward keeping secrets. Not for YOUR benefit, heck no, but for the *nebulous intangible benefit*.

Dire Jank is the sublime worlds that blossom in the trash, and if they're a little radioactive, it's because those are the materials we had to work with. Trash has memory, strata. It doesn't disappear when you flush it. It just changes, into a gyre patch or the rings of a tree, or another nation's problem, or a kid's epigenetic traits. On the internet people re-fashion it into something better or at least weirder, until eventually the normies want it back, they're like, "Oh my god feed me that trash that I threw away, that I literally figuratively shat out my asshole, because you're better at working with trash than we are at spending billions of dollars." Pocket worlds to shelter you from the neurotoxin rain, the worlds we deserved as children.


thecatamites, *Magic Wand*, 2016, Video game, Dimensions variable (still)

Radiget

Jank is the inevitable disconnect between real life and systems that simulate life. Jank is when software stutters and a videogame character's face falls off. In this era of hyper-photorealism, everything leaks jank. The harder they try to simulate everything, the more weird and broken it all feels. Nothing has the luxury of simply being itself.

Jank has a wide and foggy etymology, but I've mostly encountered it in gaming culture. It can just mean shitty or busted, but my favorite connotation is "fun but

suboptimal." Like picking a "bad" character in a fighting game because you love their look. Suffering for the aesthetic, for the memes. It's like being me.

I was a janky kid in a cultic small town in the desert, got beat up for wearing what I wanted and having a weird little bug brain. As I grew up I tried to calculate which jank I could afford and which I could not. Fear tempts people to live a purely optimal life, protecting themselves until there is nothing left to protect. But I need to be squishy.
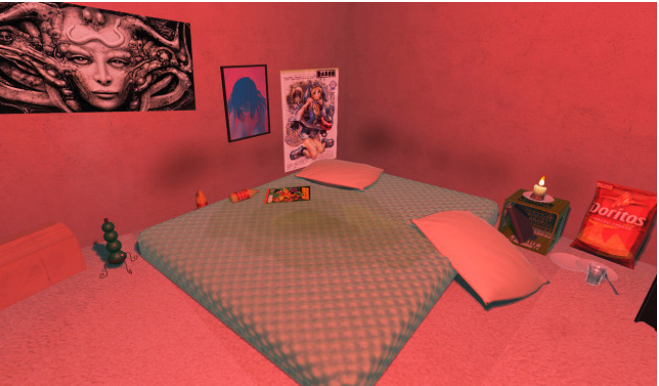
Tabitha Nikolai, *Shrine Maidens of the Unseelie Court*, 2018, Video game, Dimensions variable (still)

Tabitha Nikolai makes mutant artifacts from cosplay, video games, and suburban occult—fragile teen rites to summon, after years of heartache, herself. In her work you can find a power glove encrusted with bismuth, a blue screen of death meteorite, and a reconstruction of her lonely suburban bedroom surrounded by giant spiders.

Ineffable Glossolalia is an architectural fusion of Borges' infinite library with the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, a key structure in pre-war Berlin's progressive landscape, influential in early trans studies until fire and concentration camps consumed its books and inhabitants.

Depending on the graphics card your computer is using, the sky can glitch out, making parts of the game dependent not on the player's movements within the game, but the guts of your machine—much like real life

I think of some of these works—Tabitha's especially—as digital assemblages (she also calls them "set dressing"). I love finding people's first Unity projects (Unity is a common program used to make 3D games) because they're often rudimentary shapes full of random objects they found on their desktop, like a virtual subconsciousness.

The desire to unify an aesthetic is a very expensive desire. I am not against coherence, but I cannot always achieve

coherence. These assemblages are linked to perceptions of time, from the interstices available to us. They're droning, we're drowning.

thecatamites, *50 Short Games*, 2014, Video game, Dimensions variable (still)

thecatamites's work vibrates with the insane consciousness-puzzle of making a thing. His marker games are flat, they don't nest the text inside recesses to pop up like banner ads, and the text is on the same plane as the characters as the world as everything else. Each game in *50 Short Games* was made in a single day, usually on lunch break at work. Some of my favorites include: *Octopus Decision*, *The Quiet Man*, *Voyages of Mogey*, *Cigar Afficionado*, *Which Way*, *Operative Assailants*, and *menacing gaze* every other one of them.

Magic Wand on the other hand is brazenly, toyishly 3D, a conscious act on thecatamites's part to make something more than what could be made in a day. "A game which was all middle, like a hot dog in buns made of meat—the most illegal concept of all, which threatens the whole of our society just to entertain... yet this is where videogame development has brought me... from here on out, I would be 'beyond good and evil' (2003)."

But despite the leap to 3D, the tile-bound aesthetic keeps a comfortably stimmy pattern, a world of legos and toy blocks. thecatamites writes: "And doesn't the tile really represent the true appeal of videogames (repetitive modular closed systems which can be chained indefinitely on top of each other with the promise of endless combinatoric entertainment)..." The overlapping colors are from drawing the art in MS Paint and rapid color-substitution, partially inspired by cartoonist Gary Panter's loosely colored art (*Jimbo #1* to be precise).

Like many of thecatamites's games, *Magic Wand* is a homeopathic distillation of a monolithic experience, a cartoon fast-forward fever dream of *Final Fantasy*, turgid cinematic "classics," pot-boilers, any genre that is more about the repetition of its own delivery mechanism than actual meaning. The murky feeling of playing a 30-hour game as a kid, that slurry of hot dog meat.


Devi McCallion, *Black Cloud,* 2017, Video with audio, (still)

Devi McCallion's songs are awkward and hot, blood, drowning in blood, drowning in god, cannibalized by the world, sick with cop-radiation, full of the sweetness of plants dying. Like the work of every artist in this show, you see the seams in it, the connection to your own hands. *Prayers II Heaven* sounds like a magical girl burning up in the atmosphere, cursed to die beautifully.

Why quote lyrics, they're meant to be heard with music, it would be like telling you about a friend by showing you a print-out of their genetic data.

Devi, like thecatamites, has quickly made and discarded a lot of work over time, the relentless drive of making jury-rigged ad-hoc derringers and shivs instead of, I dunno, the Death Star approach of mainstream canonized art. She writes, "It's not something I go back to listening to and it's honestly not something I want to perform in front of a group of people." Art that fits in the time we have, conducting cursed energy away from our aortas so it can discharge harmlessly (?) into the cyber-abyss.

The high-exposure crunchy saturation of Devi's music videos feels like pixel masks, jaggy veils. Her face is like, what is affect for, the absurdity of having a face and a face signalling anything at all. *Black Cloud* is a new age cyber-meadow of hot death. No, her songs don't sound like death, they sound like the disappointment of not being allowed to live.
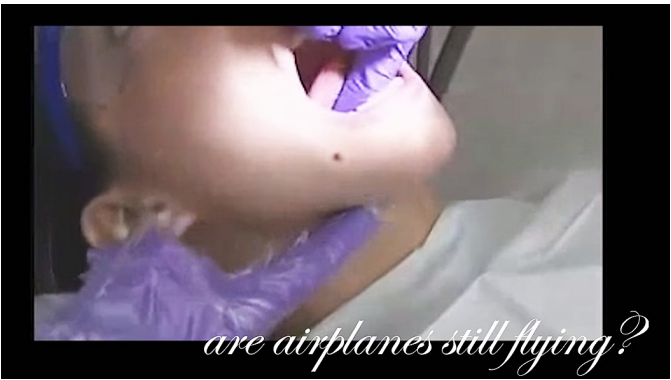
**Devi McCallion**, *girls voice in a rotting mouth*, 2018, Video with audio, (still)

People have been separated from the means to be human. To circulate their feelings through their bodies, to determine their future, to control their housing. In this void, corporations and net idols replace real community, offering a mythical pool where you drink but are never sated.

wondering if there's basically nothing that people can't, you know, relate to or like or carve their own meaningful relationships and ways of thinking out of.. .maybe i've just been ground down by all those articles by people insisting they learned great things from god of war but i sort of feel like if you just broadcast like the videodrome cassette tape of people being electrocuted on a clay wall over and over on every channel, within a year, you'd have insightful clay wall thinkpieces and fanart of wall-chan and multiple distinct communities and genuinely - genuinely! - terrific, new, exciting, creative work being done by people who grew up looking at the clay wall and are now making their own art inspired by the experience. so in that case really what's wrong with the clay wall and why go through all the hassle of trying to create alternatives to the clay wall. i mean it'd be nice if we stopped killing people with it but "be reasonable stephen"!!!
-thecatamites

I think of the pieces in this exhibit as knowing voids, letting you rest with their contradictions until they fling themselves apart like rocks in a washing machine. The willingness of art to break is underrated, when the goal of this century is to keep you hooked to a constant drip of Content that you show Loyalty toward. The willingness to break says, I can't be a surrogate friend, I can't fill the hole in your heart. It leads you back to real life.

Why should you like this stuff? Because if you don't, everyone will think you're stupid, and you will be executed by Caligula.

i keep using the word "owe" here because it's a sense of debt and obligation shot all the way through the more commercial and more respected circles for these things - respect owed,
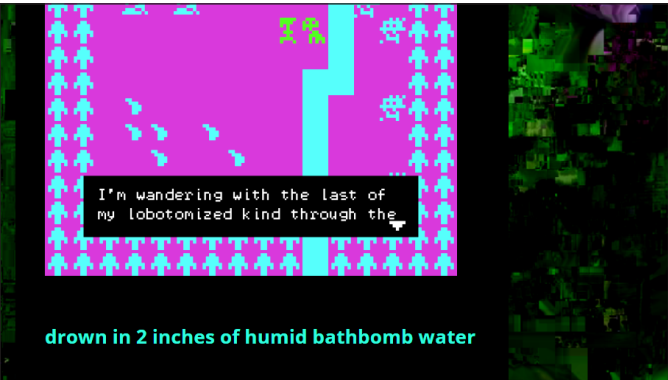
Porpentine Charity Heartscape, *The Shape You Make When You Want Your Bones To Be Closest to the Surface*, 2018. Video Game, Dimensions variable (still)(detail)

attention owed, diligence owed, time owed, on both sides, and where the function of criticism is essentially to correctly allocate and insist upon due payment of the debt.
-thecatamites

The internet is now our infinite library and we anxiously sift through it, Facebook moderators separating images of dead children from influencer's dead smiles. We have the whole world in our phones but it's been babelized, scrambled, shorn of context, torn from the land. We scavenge the astroturf tundra for genuine creatures of information, hoping they speak the same language as our heart. But until then, we put our jury-rigged beacons into the world, hoping we haven't lost too much blood in the rite.
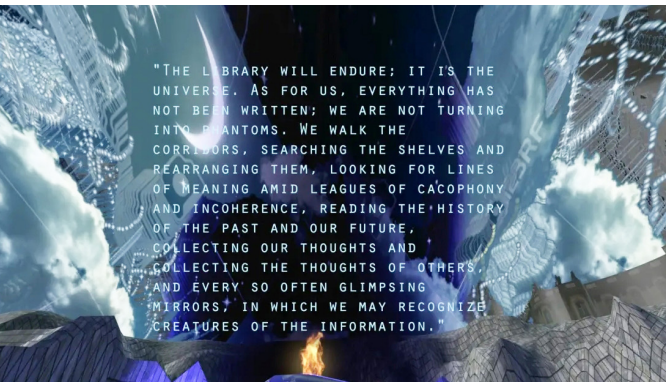
Tabitha Nikolai, *Ineffable Glossolalia*, 2017, Video game, Dimensions variable (still)

These worried, itchy, crystalline extrusions make me happy, far too happy. They make me sad, and I don't know how sad.

Porpentine Charity Heartscape © 2019
apexart Invited Curator Exhibition