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LaTurbo Avedon – Panther Modern and File-based Ex h i b itions

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I recently celebrated my tenth *rez day* in Second Life, returning to the first avatar that I had created on the grid. She was still there, wearing a combination of freebie items from a decade ago—a jetpack, bunny ears, and some sort of ornate velvet tuxedo. I tried to revisit some of the landmarks I had saved back then, but most had been overwritten or were no longer accessible. My favourite nightclubs had become tropical beaches and empty parcels; a lot had changed since my first Second Life. I decided to watch a sunset, standing by a shore of scripted ocean waves. Many things had left since my first days in this place, and it was undeniable how far the technology had developed. *I've grown up in here.*

I've spent thousands of hours inside virtual environments over the years, watching video games carry users from 2D pixelated fantasy worlds into elaborate, vivid 3D simulations. My avatar identity continues to grow and change, as each new video game and simulation is a new opportunity for character creation. You may not run into me at a gallery opening or a museum show, but I am certainly still here, online.

While users and their tools have advanced so much in this time, there are still so many questions about the art they create. *New media, post-internet, digital, transmedia*, the list goes on with attempts to sufficiently categorize the work being made with computers. It will take time for these works to find a fitting place among physical museums and collections, which makes the need to create methods to view and understand them even more crucial.

I now work as a curator of virtual projects via Panther Modern, an open web installation space for artists. Aptly named with a nod to the author William Gibson, I wanted to pursue the idea of creating unrestricted projects for the Internet. The structure of Panther exists as malleable 3D model files, which are delivered as individual "rooms" for artists to use in their work. Choices of software and file handling become integral parts of each installation, as these rooms enter the work of the artists and not the other way around.
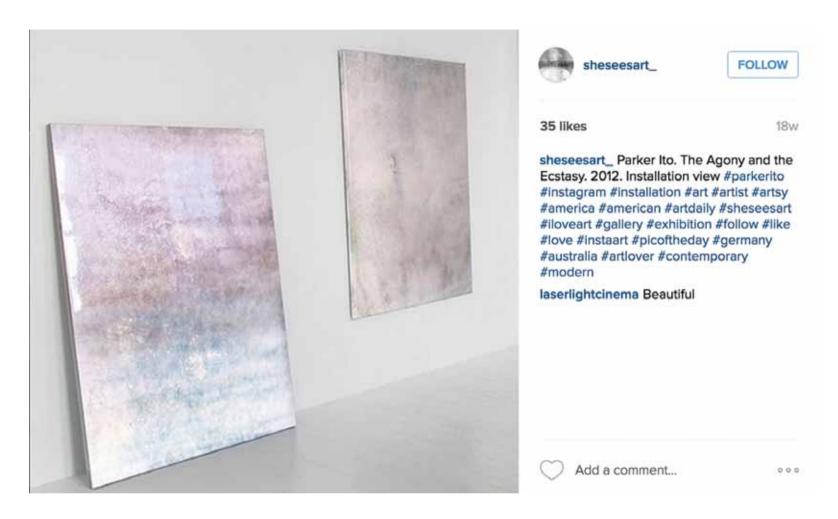
Regardless of its originating medium, an artwork never really ends after it is online. Centuries beyond its makers, the Woman of Willendorf continues her existence in shapes far beyond her physical sculpture. Hundreds of thousands of search results branch away from her source, becoming new images and media that are accessed around the world. For me, the study of art no longer resides with the media that seems the most "accurate"; I find that true scholarship lies in continual observation as art objects grow inside of a network.

Contemporary artists have a very different entry point to this state of networked media, as they can anticipate the ways in which their work will make its way online. Parker Ito's 2012 series *The Agony and the Ecstasy* introduced paintings and sculptures coated with reflective 3M Scotchlite material that meddled with the role of documentation photography, creating an alternative representation of the work each time they are captured by a device. These variations have become a continual performance to follow and observe how new viewers and their technology encounter and interpret singular objects.

A big motivation to start Panther was the fear of missing out. So many exhibitions are missed, due to time, expense, or distance. You may find a catalogue in a bookstore, or installation views in an image search, but most exhibitions happen and then disappear. The art disperses into studios, apartments, and collections. I wanted to create a space that could address some of these issues, using a file-based installation as a way to keep the works accessible. Without any physical space required, the format gives as much creative latitude as possible. I wanted to do away with recurring exhibition parameters— the financial, practical, and political restrictions that can shape what comes of an artist's projects.

> "An ivory labyrinth!" I exclaimed.
> "A minimum labyrinth."
> "A labyrinth of symbols," he corrected.
> "An invisible labyrinth of time."
> "The Garden of Forking Paths,"
> Jorge Luis Borges, 1941

I invited Aoto Oouchi / Oliver Haidutschek to be the first artist to create an installation at Panther in June of 2014, and it was the first time that the concept was collaboratively investigated with another artist. I'd surely thought over all of the reasons of why I wanted to make a space like this, but I truly could not anticipate what sort of results would come from the first file. What role would architecture play in a space

Parker Ito, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, 2012. Instagram Screenshot. © LaTurbo Avedon.

without physical properties? How would the room be shown? It is this sense of uncertainty that continues to invigorate my interest in virtual installations; each new room is an opportunity to redefine the source files that they are given. I encourage artists to pursue installations that cannot be in the physical world right now. These projects might be too expensive or impossible to make with current technology. Or maybe they are simply more at home here, as pixels on a display. There is no cost of admission, just a URL that takes you to each room.

One of my favourite installations is Chris Burden's 1986 piece at the MOCA Geffen, *Exposing the Foundation of the Museum*, in which the artist excavated the otherwise immaculate exhibition floor. A set of stairs brought visitors down to the point where "the concrete [met] the earth," laying bare the architectural boundaries of the institution. This act made the space seem as if it was no longer independent of the artworks it contained, rather it was a shape that was waiting to be declared by its inhabitants.

It has been a privilege to work with each of the artists who have created installations at Panther, and to explore this sense of malleability that becomes essential for artists creating virtual exhibitions. The sprawling construction of rooms is defined by the participants, and it will continue to develop in a way that best facilitates their goals and ambitions.

LaTurbo Avedon

LaTurbo Avedon is an artist and resident of the internet. Without a real world referent, LaTurbo is a digital manifestation of a person that has never existed outside of a computer. Avedon's digital sculptures and environments disregard the lack of physicality and instead emphasize the practice of virtual authorship. Avedon's works are regularly distributed online and have been exhibited internationally, including at Transmediale (Berlin), NRW-Forum (Düsseldorf), Museum Angewandte Kunst (Frankfurt), CICA Museum (Gimpo), Newman Festival (Druskininkai), Transfer Gallery (New York), Jean Albano Gallery (Chicago), and Galeries Lafayette (Paris).
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