

Toronto Exhibition

Jon Rafman

Jan 28 – May 27, 2017

Opening:

Saturday, Jan 28, 2017



Arsenal is proud to present key works of Montreal-born Jon Rafman, selected from Anne-Marie and Pierre Trahan's Majudia Collection. The filmmaker and visual artist chronicles moments of beauty and horror from the collective imagination of digital natives, as a nineteenth century ethnographer would record the ethereal wilderness of networked frontiers.

Often too troubling to watch from the neutral settings of 'white cube' galleries, Rafman's celebrated videos are staged in dramatic light and viewing pods that resemble dioramas and cabinets of curiosities. So do the claustrophobic confines of Cockpit simulate the dwellings of trolls, otakus and other computer geeks, inflicting a sensory deprivation from the real world to better immerse the viewer in prerecorded images. The video on playback within Cockpit, entitled Mainsqueeze, aggregates Rafman's findings of obscure, violent and sexually charged web footage, and ponders on the ease-of-accessibility of disturbing online content. This deluge of twisted but timely obsessions encapsulates the artist's appetite for the sensational driven to extreme conditions, to index a subculture of deviant and pubescent underdogs.

Rafman's fascination for computer-oriented subcultures is fleshed out in You Are Standing in an Open Field, when presenting overgrown postcard images that portray the desktops of internet addicts buried under mounds of junk food, cigarette butts and other quick consumption items, set against wallpaper backdrops of Niagara Falls and other facsimiles of romantic landscapes.

Also migrating in the direction of tangible objects, his 3D virtual models from New Age Demanded have been materialized into graphite and polymer busts, to even employ robotic tools that accurately carve the human-scale sculpture Alien Letter out of Carrara marble.

Contrasting against the onslaught of sinister images in Mainsqueeze, Sculpture Garden introduces soothing and mysterious sceneries in Rafman's work. More ambitious in scale, this

installation was inaugurated at the Zabudowicz Collection to incorporate no single channel videos but a virtual reality animation within a full scale labyrinth made of Astroturf.

Smaller busts adorn the dead ends of the maze, while the VR headset lies in its central chamber, escorted by the colossal Manifolds statue, another 3D figure that seemingly fell victim to a digital glitch before changing into material form. As the partitions between night and day have disappeared in the 24/7 consciousness of world wide web junkies, so are the VR users here transported to a parallel set of corridors that blur the threshold between real and virtual worlds, both populated by Rafman's sculptures and objects.

Text by Oli Sorenson

Information:

Jenna Faye Powell

Associate Director

+1 647 346 9082

j.powell@arsenaltoronto.info

www.arsenalcontemporary.com