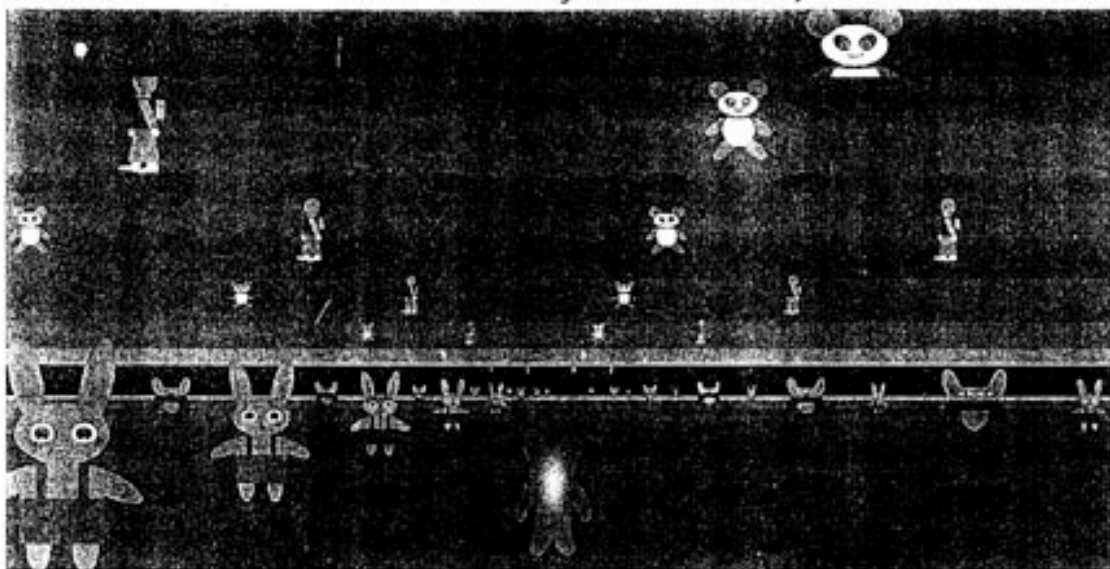


ART feature

"Nown" curated by Michele Thursz, Wood Street Galleries Pittsburgh



For those who spent endless, idle days in front of a television or computer monitor trying to figure out "how to get to the next level" or following the narrative of animated creatures as if they were our friends, *Nown* will hit home and jar some recognizable feelings.

Video Game Plans

HOW NINTENDO MADE ITS WAY INTO THE WORLD OF HIGH ART

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In Michelle Handelman's "Candyland," a new media video piece, a half-naked, blue-haired woman crawls on all fours, slowly and with intent, toward a pile of colorful candy. She practically saunters as she makes her way toward the camera — made known by the circular frame. Once she arrives, the woman (who is actually Handelman herself) picks the candy up from the floor using only her mouth and, with the rhythm of a poem star, chews each piece deliberately — so deliberately that she sometimes drools saliva all over the place, along with clumps of the now goopy substance she savors. Handelman goes on like this for the duration of the piece against the backdrop of a strange chant and an electronic backbeat. "Candyland," which could easily act as fodder for an adolescent's fantasy, is one of several experimental video projections in the Wood Street Galleries' upcoming show, *Nown*.

Most of the works here have a similar quality — where voyeurism and the virtual come together to represent one resounding consequence of pop culture: a simulation we have come to know as experience. The title itself proposes this: a combination of the words "noun" and "now" so that the question becomes, "What is real?"

Few who grew up in the midst of video-game culture would question the authenticity of childhood memories that for an entire generation are as real as playing hockey in a cul-de-sac with the neighborhood kids or waiting for an ice cream truck on a Saturday

evening in the summer. For those who spent endless, idle days in front of a television or computer monitor trying to figure out "how to get to the next level" or following the narrative of animated creatures as if they were our friends, *Nown* will hit home and jar some recognizable feelings. Wood Street's three floors are filled with installations that are accessible in the same way — you can play them, watch them and understand what's being referenced at on various levels.

The works here are attractive and smart. Mumbleboy — a.k.a. artists Karl Ackemann and Kinys Hanata — have created Mumblehop, an interactive piece that visitors can try out by hopping onto floor pads in order to "play" the game. The projected animation consists of adorable characters (à la Takashi Murakami, whose work, coincidentally, is currently on display at the Regina Gouger Miller Gallery at CMU) that are activated as one moves around. Likewise, Cory Arcangel hacked an 8-bit game to create "I shot Andy Warhol," in which players are asked to shoot 8-bit versions of Andy Warhol, while avoiding other characters such as the Pope, Flavor Flav and Col. Sanders. His "super mario clouds" is a modified version of the popular Nintendo game, Super Mario Brothers; for this piece, Arcangel has erased the entire game but for the clouds and sky.

Not all the works in the show rely upon technological savvy to make a point. Photographer Craig Kalpakjian photographed different elements of a dark room — a door,

the view from slanted blinds, from a monitor — with a light emanating from a slit in each. The result is a haunting image that suggests something larger just beyond our field of vision, just beyond what we're able to simply observe from our small, metaphorical vantage point. And probably the most well-known piece in the show is the most subtle, but speaks volumes about the reality of what we see: Robert Rauschenberg's sculpture of a skull that, when viewed from different angles, takes on vastly different dimensions. Look at it straight on and it's a flat piece of resin and bone; from the side, it's a three-dimensional head.

Nown is one of several shows this year for which Wood Street curator Murray Horne will

bring in a guest curator such as Thursz. "I don't pretend to know a thing about this stuff," he says of animated works. Thursz, on the other hand, is a household name in the field, for her work with new media and as founder of Moving Image Gallery in New York — a gallery that focuses on the practices of new media.

The works in this show are striking not just because they call attention to the fact that these days artists are just as technologically-minded as those who work in computer-related fields — but because they also point out how immersed our lives are in the world those fields create. It's the stuff of our memories, our thinking, and our leisure. It only makes sense as fodder for our art as well. ☞

Nown runs Jan. 24-March 15 at the Wood Street Galleries, Sixth and Wood streets, Downtown.



gestures, an exhibition of small site-specific works.

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