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Art Reviews

Playing With Video Games and Other Present Fixations

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"The Same Thing We Do Every Night," an exhibition playfully devoted to the theme of "technology addiction," features seven artists who've no doubt spent more than a few late-night hours bathed in the blue glow of computer monitors.

Their work, much of it rooted in the aesthetic and thematic principles of the video game, cultivates a user-friendly atmosphere in the Project gallery, which makes the exhibition a thoroughly enjoyable experience

Andy Alexander's small inkjet prints, most stashed in out-of-the-way locations throughout the room, are clean, futuristic images that lend an element of cryptic science fiction.

Gabriel Fowle's video piece "Revelation I," which dubs an old "Transformers" cartoon with a passage of text from the Bible ("I am the alpha and the omega," one towering machine growls to his followers), is bare-bones simple but startlingly effective in both its humor and its menace.

Janine Cirincione and Michael Ferraro's "The Bloviator"--a complicated installation of small screens, shelves, wires, jars, speakers and mysterious colored liquids--evokes another sci-fi messiah: a round-headed, slit-eyed little creature who preaches a bizarre blend of physics, philosophy and grammar from a submerged video screen to a small crowd of identical plastic figures.

Yucef Merhi's "Atari Poetry" series--in which the artist has reprogrammed old Atari game consoles to produce crudely pixilated fragments of poetic text ("As a dog I look for the bones of my body to bury them again in me," for example)--will surely incite the nostalgia of old-school technophiles.

For the more up-to-date, there's James Bruckhouse's "Tap," a very charming program for individual personal digital assistants (available for download on the Internet) that features the animated figure of a tap dancer. (The piece, which was included in the 2002 Whitney Biennial, appears here on a sample personal digital assistant, alongside two preparatory sketches.)

Jason Salavon's "Golem" is, like "Tap," a product of programming: a digital archive of 100,000 abstract "paintings," which the viewer can scroll through on a computer screen and which are also projected on a nearby wall. Though these are hardly great paintings by traditional standards, there's something soothing about their quantity, their availability. "Why paint when you can program painting?" Salavon seems to be asking.

For a moment or two, it sounds like a reasonable question.

The Project, 962-B East 4th St., L.A., (213) 620-0743, through Nov. 16. Closed Sundays through Tuesdays.

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Intelligent Work Forges Links

In a statement accompanying her current exhibition, Iona Rozeal Brown poses the question: "What does it mean to be linked, connected to someone or something and only feel it or suppose it but not know why or how to even explain it?"

In a shrinking world, where ethnic boundaries are fluid and cultural identification is an ever more lucrative commodity, this is a significant--and tellingly convoluted--question. The specific connection that Brown refers to in her work is one she's observed: contemporary Japanese and Korean youth forging with African American hip-hop culture.

Her flat, colorful paintings are rendered in the Ukiyo-e style of Japanese imagery, a style developed in the 17th century that is generally associated with images of everyday life and leisure. But they also incorporate idiosyncratic fragments of hip-hop fashion.

In addition to traditional Japanese robes, slippers and hair combs, for example, Brown's figures wear Afros, cornrows, caps with logos and brown skin paint. They smoke cigarettes, spin records and gaze coolly at the viewer, as if posing for CD covers.

Implicit in Brown's treatment of this subject is another important connection: her own fascination, as an American, with the behavior of these Asian youth and the aesthetic traditions of Asian culture generally. Her adoption of the Ukiyo-e style is, after all, not so far removed from her subject's adoption of hip-hop.

Although she must be aware of this peculiar reciprocity, she stops short of addressing it directly. Indeed, one senses throughout the work that Brown is far more interested in raising provocative questions than in answering them. Her paintings aim to jar expectations through the unexpected juxtaposition of coded icons, which may be a useful tactic in dealing so frankly with issues of race.

The shortcomings of the work are largely formal and suggest that the project has yet to reach its full maturity. (This is Brown's first solo exhibition since graduating from the Yale School of Art last spring.) For all her researched familiarity with the Ukiyo-e style, Brown's use of line feels tentative and thick, her colors uncomfortably self-conscious. One finds oneself longing for greater delicacy and a sense of spontaneity, qualities admittedly more difficult to acquire than research.

Brown seems considerably more confident of her ideas than her images. That said, this is work of great intellectual energy; her images may just need the time to catch up.

Sandroni Rey Gallery, 1224 Abbot Kinney, Venice, (310) 392-3404, through Oct. 12. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

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Proof of Talent

Lies in the Details

Justin Moore's first solo exhibition is a study of cataclysmic violence on two levels: one geological (enormous and occurring over hundreds of thousands of years), the other vehicular (small and occurring in an instant). Working in a variety of media, he conveys images of both--craggy rock formations on the one hand, piles of crumpled metal on the other--on roughly the same scale, rendering them all but indistinguishable.

It is, on the whole, an intelligent and cohesive project. The highlights are the works that showcase Moore's great talent for intricate detail.

A pair of lithographs on Formica and a digital print (available on the gallery's Web site) depicting junkyard mounds of automotive flesh, buckled and twisted beyond recognition, transcend the grittiness of their subject to achieve a sense of organic unity. In two larger works--an ink drawing and an oil painting, each of which depicts a bird's eye view of a rocky island floating mysteriously in a sea of white--Moore's delicate handling of detail creates a fantastical mood that makes the works thoroughly engrossing.

The show's two installations are somewhat less convincing. "Tectonic" consists of half a dozen video monitors running abstracted images of automobile accidents with an ominous soundtrack. It's a stylish but ultimately underwhelming addition that feels largely unnecessary alongside the more genuinely absorbing two-dimensional works.

The larger installation involves a toy slot car track and a very long acrylic painting--a jungle panorama with a car wreck at one end--that wraps around the track on three adjacent walls. The track is fun to play with but ultimately negligible in its conceptual impact; the painting, which seems to have been all too quickly assembled, is largely generic in design, amateurish in technique and on the whole not nearly interesting enough to justify its size.

The failings of these last two works are largely the failings of ambition, the result, one senses, of an attempt by the artist to move into new media. In a relatively young body of work like this, such ambition can hardly be viewed too critically; it might prove an asset in the end.

Cirrus Gallery, 542 S. Alameda St., L.A., (213) 680-3473, through Nov. 2. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

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Exhibition Details

Eoff's Maturation

In his third solo exhibition at the Patricia Faure Gallery, Jason Eoff has clearly got his game down. The paintings assembled here--square and rectangular fields of rich, glossy color, each encrusted with a small cluster of jewel-like dots in a different color of paint--are pure sensual pleasure, tuned to near perfect pitch.

The works are constructed on wood panels with some combination of modeling paste, resin and oil paint, but they transcend their individual materials.

Each field is liquid smooth and appears, when viewed from the front, considerably deeper than its actual quarter inch. Eoff's clever manipulation of the modeling clay beneath the surface of the resin--though indiscernible as such--gives the impression of swirling movement. The result is a strangely gelatinous quality, as though the work might quiver when touched.

Though roughly similar in design, the works are remarkably nuanced in color and tone. One is a hot harlot red; another a deep regal purple; another an earthy ochre and tan swirl. The surface patterns are considerably less pronounced than those in earlier works, which often assumed concrete shapes like circles and starbursts. Here, they serve merely as accents in either contrast or affinity with their given fields: a cool turquoise on the hot red, for example, or a substantiating mauve atop the purple.

The show on the whole has an air of sublimation. It's difficult to see where Eoff might take this work from here without sinking into repetition; but, in the meantime, it's a pleasure to enjoy his achievement.

Patricia Faure Gallery, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 449-1479, through Saturday.