

**Michael Nardone**

TEXTS  
PROJECTS

+

## REVIEWS

Jon Rafman (2015)



**Jon Rafman**

**Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal,  
20.6.–13.9.2015**

Heather Davis + Michael Nardone

Entering the gallery space, viewers confront a glass cabin. There is a single seat inside. Speakers are installed at ear level, a screen is placed at eye level. A cycle of videos play – Rafman's *Kool-Aid Man in Second Life* (2009), *Le Guignon (Ill Fate)* (2011), *In Realms of Gold* (2012), *Woods of Arcady* (2012), and *Roi d'un pays pluvieux* (2012) – that portray the militarized, sexualized, and misogynist virtual spaces of online gaming. The cabin's immersive space is both intensely private and simultaneously subject to voyeuristic display as museum-goers can watch the viewer absorb the barrage of explicit imagery. Similarly, in Rafman's *Oh, the Humanity* (2015), individual viewers recline upon a bloody water bed, with a box covering their heads. Inside the box, a

**Michael Nardone**TEXTS

## PROJECTS

+

looped video of a wave pool crowded with blurred swimmers plays, as the viewer's body bobs on display for the museum crowd.

*Still Life (Betamale)* (2013) and *Mainsqueeze* (2014) pay similar attention to their installation, as viewers watch from a vinyl rectangular couch, while *ERYSICHTON* (2015) plays in a private viewing booth, a contraption that seems as though it were modeled after a child's fantasy spacecraft. The video works present a barrage of imagery culled from chat rooms, fetish sites, and the array of human expression found on the deep web. Oscillating between repulsion and hilarity, it is hard not to feel nauseous.

Another room hosts three video installations: *Codes of Honor* (2011), *A Man Digging* (2013), and *Remember Carthage* (2013). Whereas *Codes of Honor* is anthropological, based on stories of people embedded in gaming cultures, *A Man Digging* and *Remember Carthage* are archaeological in their reproduction of worlds salvaged from video games. The latter two films, looped one after the other, both portray a lone protagonist narrating his journeys, or walkthroughs, among locations such as deserts, orientalist village squares, ancient ruins, abandoned dancehalls, a ship's hold – each site emptied or occasionally strewn with crumpled dead bodies. The relationship between the military, colonial fantasy and romanticism becomes explicit in these videos. “I had been drifting across the metaverse aimlessly,” the protagonist in *Codes of Honor* declares, while the narrator of *A Man Digging* proceeds to “the far edge of the real.” Here, the romantic wanderer –

**Michael Nardone****TEXTS**  
**PROJECTS**

+

a trope in many of Rafman's works – no longer finds pleasure, even ironic pleasure, in the dark recesses of virtual worlds. He, instead, succumbs to exhaustion, greater alienation, and despair in the digital expanse.

The works from the *New Age Demanded* series contrast these feelings of overwhelming alienation. The works are less chaotic, less cluttered, and absent of overt the militaristic and sexual references (and are also, noticeably, absent of people). *New Age Demanded (S-Curve Marble)* (2015) and *New Age Demanded (Tuskface Marble)* (2015) are ink-jet prints of abstract marble sculptures that may or may not exist outside of the photograph. *New Age Demanded (Futurism Gold)* (2015) and *New Age Demanded (Waverider Silver)* (2015) are sculptural installations that act as a portal to *Sculpture Garden (Bog, Desert)* (2015), a 360° video using a Oculus Rift virtual reality headset. The viewer is led through a forest, littered with sculptures, only to be lifted up above the canopy into the night sky.

The works introduce a sense of simple wonder into Rafman's artistic production. Curated by Marc Lanctôt, this is the first solo show in Canada for the Montréal-based artist, one that emphasizes not only his intense interest in and knowledge of digital milieus, but also his engagement with questions of art history, sculpture, design and viewership. It proves to be one of the most interesting examinations of the relationship between virtual, curated, and abstract space, and the persistent questions of militarization, voyeurism and violent

observation that currently mark our networked culture today.

**Michael Nardone**

TEXTS  
PROJECTS

+

PDF

Originally published in *Camera Austria*, 131 (2015).