



BRODY CONDON
TAMPA, FL

It's 1973. Clad in blue jeans and a button-up shirt, an actor lies on the floor of a room as a video camera records his movements. For an hour, he struggles—at the behest of an artist whose concept guides the exercise—to dissolve the barrier that separates his body from the floor by achieving an altered state of consciousness. It's an internal struggle, mostly—which we must deduce from his shifts in position and the strange intensity of this otherwise unremarkable act. As the actor probes the possibility of his mergence with the floor, we experience our own mind-body warp by projecting our awareness into the scene.

Fast-forward more than thirty years, and Bruce Nauman's *Tony Sinking into the Floor, Face Up, and Face Down* has entered the canon of performance art. Following his exposure to the work of Nauman and other pioneers of performance at the University of California, San Diego, Brody Condon locates a confluence between the pursuit of body transcendence in 1970s performance and a childhood obsession: computer and role-playing games. Earlier in 2008 at Machine Projects in Los Angeles, he invited nine dancers to channel the Nauman performance: lying on the gallery floor in medieval fantasy armor costumes—worn by players of live-action role-playing games—the dancers enacted “death animations” inspired by the crumpling motions of dying computer game avatars. A soundtrack plays binaural beats, designed to manipulate brainwave frequency and alleged to stimulate out-of-body experiences.

The video of *Death Animations*, 2008, and *Suicide Solution*, 2004, a video documentation of the artist committing suicide as an avatar in dozens of first- and third-person shooter computer games, introduce Condon's work in *Modifications* [University of South Florida (USF) Contemporary Art Museum (CAM); October 24–December 13, 2008]. In *650 Polygon John Carmack*, 2004—a multi-faceted sculpture that plays on the imperative within 3-D animation to build characters with only as many facets as the game engine

can efficiently process—he pays homage to iconic game programmer John Carmack. He also riffs on Chris Marker's canonical *Sans Soleil* with a montage of YouTube videos of youth under the influence of mind-altering substances—a fragmented, out-of-body journey.

Modifications reaches a fascinating complexity in three self-playing computer games developed by Condon with a small team of animators. The games frustrate expectations of interactivity; instead of inviting conventional play, they exhibit a continuous, low-grade liveliness reminiscent of the zombie-like movement-in-place of video game characters awaiting player input. Here, each character or environmental element is on a separate time loop. Visually, Condon's games take their cue from the achievements of mass-market games, aiming for a comparable naturalism. That eye-popping naturalism, in turn, links back to the historical subjects that inspire the artist: a trio of late medieval Netherlandish paintings with religious themes—Hans Memling's *The Last Judgment*, Dieric Bouts' *Resurrection* and Gerard David's *Triptych of Jean des Trompes*.

In the three games, the hyperrealism of the late medieval paintings—whose original figures are replaced by artist-conceived characters—dovetails with Condon's exploration of constructions of space and projections of self in computer games as well as performance art. As modified paintings, the games mimic the representation of pictorial space found in the Northern European originals, which in contrast to Italian Renaissance paintings that employ linear perspective place us *within* the canvas, much like the first-person shooter games pioneered by John Carmack. The games invite us to project ourselves into a performance of transcendence akin to Nauman's *Tony* by way of our avatar surrogate—an angel doing yoga; a timid, loin-clothed figure being baptized. As mash-ups of the artist's multifarious interests, these games travel breathlessly—and bodilessly—between past and present.

—Megan Voeller