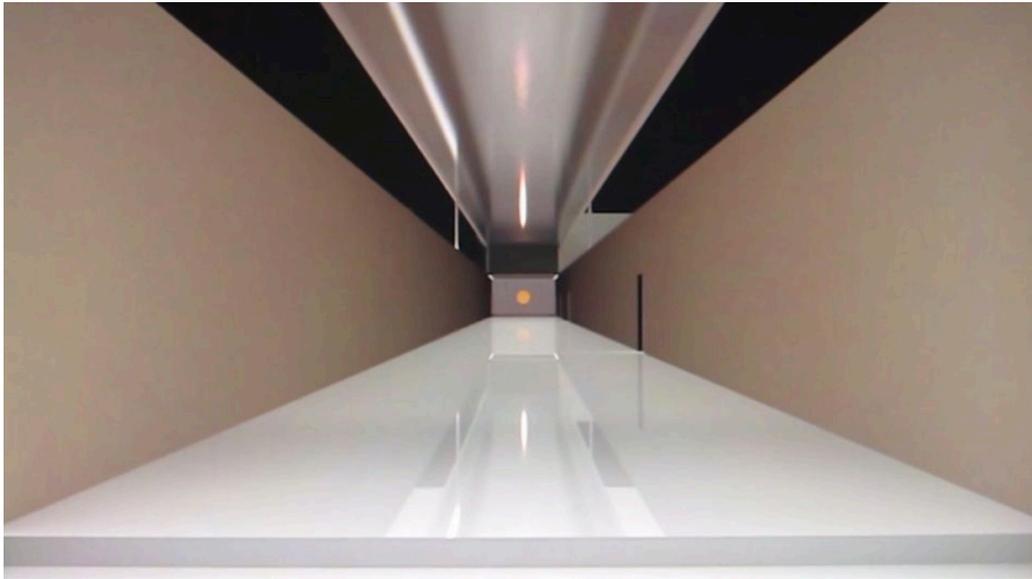


Cleveland Institute of Art explores digitally inspired art in "Portals_Thresholds" (photos)



CLEVELAND, Ohio - School's out at the Cleveland Institute of Art, but the lessons continue, and they're not just for art students.

The institute's Reinberger Gallery is exhibiting "Portals_Thresholds," an excellent small survey show on how emerging artists in Baltimore and New York are using digital media to create artworks that do far more with technology than exploit its gee-whiz aspects.

Organized by Gallery Director Nikki Woods and Samantha Konet, the gallery's project and visiting artist coordinator, the show adroitly combines painting, sculpture, video and a virtual reality installation to provide a sense of the wide possibilities of high-tech art.

Woods said she and Konet organized the show to appeal to students at the institute who are exploring non-traditional media.

Beyond that, the show suggests how the glassy surfaces cellphones and computer screens have produced a new, popular aesthetic. Our screens can bloom with colors of infinite variety and subtlety, or use software to produce imagery ranging from total abstraction to the hyperreal.

It's natural for artists to want to capitalize on widely accessible media and the virtual worlds our devices can conjure.

If one artist in the show whose work embodies most of those possibilities, it's Rachel Rossin, a native of West Palm Beach who now lives in New York.

She's represented by paintings in traditional oil on canvas, paintings printed in hand-molded clear acrylic panels, and a virtual reality extravaganza that takes a viewer zooming through 3-D scenes that

resemble fragments of melted apartment buildings and landscapes.

Rossin's work is unified by an eagerness to use various media to evoke a kind of endless space that surrounds the viewer, extending in all directions, as if one were weightlessly afloat in the infinite.

Her virtual reality piece, "I Came And Went As a Ghost Hand (still), 2015, requires viewers to don a headset that blocks out the outside world and wraps the user in an imaginary visual field. The gallery advises viewers to rest their hands on a conveniently placed table and stand still, so as not to become disoriented.

Once accoutered with the headset, viewers can peer in all directions as the viewpoint in Rossin's software zooms through exploded floors, walls and staircases, or soars over green hills, while catching occasional glimpses of a disembodied hand that finger-walks through the air.

As important as the elusive imagery in Rossin's piece is the infinite whiteness in which her shattered architectural fragments float and spin.

Her work takes the idea of negative space - the traditional background in artworks - and extends it in all directions, suggesting that virtual reality is in infinite universe in which any illusion can appear real. The notion is exhilarating and scary.

And, after a few minutes, some viewers may feel a touch of motion sickness from all the flying around. The cure: Just remove the headset.

Rossin's paintings explore space in novel ways in a two-dimensional format. Amid blue seascapes that have no real up or down, she levitates abstracted shapes and forms that appear to have been torn apart like scraps of paper tossed in the wind.

The paintings project energy from the wall with their emphatically frontality, but also appear to recede with infinite depth, suggesting the same kind of vastness at play in the virtual reality video.

Rossin's paintings on acrylic, which depict exploded floral bouquets, engage the space of the gallery itself through reflections and transparency that make the surrounding environment part of the artworks themselves.

The art collaborative Wickerham & Lomax, based in Baltimore, is represented by two large multimedia works on canvas and an especially engaging video, "Whales SPF 50," 2017, that explores black identity in relation to swimming and marine imagery.

A male voice intones an incantatory poem that explores how African-Americans may be averse to swimming as a legacy of racism expressed through segregated swimming pools.

These words provide a soundtrack to rippling, watery, collage-style images of black men swimming, interposed with whales, jellyfish and other sea life.

The video begins and ends with a solitary black man seated on a rock in a mountain stream, contemplating an Edenic American landscape of the kind depicted in the 19th-century by painters of the Hudson River School.

The work suggests an eagerness by the protagonist to claim landscapes and activities historically declared off limits by a segregated society.

New Yorker Sara Ludy is represented by inkjet prints and video projections depicting architectural interiors that possess a dry, icy majesty.

With soaring rooms, multiple staircases and centrally placed medallions that suggestion clocks or glaring eyes, Ludy's imaginary environments show how architecture can evoke comfort or fear by molding space and light around the human body.

Lastly, Dutch-Brazilian artist Rafael Rozendaal created a series of hypnotic animated graphic images projected on the Cleveland Institute of Art's digital media mesh, visible from Euclid Avenue at East 115th Street.

Rozendaal's artworks are being presented throughout the run of the show, with new works shown each week from 5 to 9 p.m. nightly.

"Falling," scheduled for June 1-7, consists of brightly colored rectangles that crumple inward from their upper corners, creating an endless sequence of what appears to be collapsing sheets of paper falling away from the viewer.

The imagery is made captivating by the transition the contrasting colors of one bright, highly saturated rectangle falling one after another, and by the visual conundrum of entirely flat fields of color that nevertheless suggest three-dimensional forms falling away from the viewer.

Rozendaal's work feels as elemental as a child's game, but also functions as a sophisticated commentary on the history of modernist abstraction, viewed through digital technology.

It's especially appropriate that the Cleveland Institute of Art is beaming Rozendaal's playfully subversive work to the world on its digital billboard.

It's a way of communicating the appeal of an exhibition that richly deserves an audience beyond the Cleveland Institute of Art.