

## **Artist's Statement, Neal McDonald, January 2012**

### **Concerning Games**

In the late 1990's, watching the development of the video game industry into an economic force comparable to film, I concluded that the development was not merely economic-- the growth of digital art into its own had been achieved, and video games were both the popular and the mature forms of these practices-- though usually not at the same time!

There is a profound generational divide on the topic of video games. If you were too old for Atari, then you probably think video games are puerile. If not, then, not. Social stigma related to gaming can be linked to sexism (games as childish and therefore women's work), socioeconomic status (nerddom and resentment over educational opportunity / sports culture and its prole brutalities), cosplay, homophobia, and fear of sexual expression-- they all run together.

Video games are games. Every culture has a game tradition whose origins are lost in antiquity. Every new technology is commandeered for play. Digital games are in this tradition, but they also transform it, and the transformations are ongoing. This is a golden age.

My latest effort is "Meditations", a game built out of a set of metaphors for meditation. Games focus concentration, which affects time perception; the link to meditation is clear. The art style is a version of the Jain painting style, which also suggested a set of "stream" images and metaphors-- so many things end up looking like paramecia.

I am also interested in developing non-digital improvisational games. I am researching actors' training games and relating them to the improvisational play of role-playing games.

### **Concerning the "Installs"**

The hallmark of Postmodernism is a concern with art history. The "Installs" are a series of installations inspired by modernist paintings. My response to these works, when I was a child, was always some form of surly outrage, the classic "I could do that; why is it in a museum?" These works embody that exact juvenile triumph—not only have I made the works, I have made works that make the works, and *have even gone so far* as to make works that make the works that make the works.

The adult's answer to the childish question is partially philosophical and endlessly political, which opens up a second set of vistas for one-upmanship, which I have also pursued. The exhibition space is modeled after the Whitney, and each installs, as shown, takes up a quarter of an entire floor, because you can't stop me.

The “Installs” exist only in Autodesk Maya, which is the computer animation software used by the movie industry.

The “Installs” shown are comprised of machines and their output. The machines depicted are imagined as fabricated from a small machine shop, from folded, bolted, and welded sheet steel, electric motors, lamps, and some lens assemblies taken from slide projectors. The movements of the machines change how the lamps illuminate a white canvas. Provisions are made, in the mechanism design, for the minute adjustments demanded by the specific geometry of each installation venue-- should the works require installation in multiple simulated venues.

The machines are realistic; they have a chance of working, were they to be built—but they have not been built, other than in the program—but they work (demonstrably: they color their walls), so, in a sense, they have been built. I will never build them.

There are a variety of modernist reference modes. The canvas continuously acted upon, the framing mechanism of the room in which the objects are shown, and its primacy, the ladder, helpfully, democratically left for accessibility’s sake (yet oh so unclimbable), the Eames Compact sofa. The works exist only as actions on the canvas. The machines enacting shadow plays, formalist referencing of the history of animation—you got that they were animations, right? An enormous intellectual candy wrapper, layers and layers of showmanship, staging and self-mediating in the service of very simple, abstract material.

The “Installs” exist as documentation only, this being the information age. Is the work the images made, the machines that make them, the video that documents it all? Would these installations benefit from realization, which, after all, would just be taken down in a month, leaving us only with documentation? How does the level of accessibility of this work compare with the usual, fleeting, indifferently-photographed gallery show?

### **Concerning the prints:**

The prints are a collection of works inspired by the act of drawing. All of the works have in common the fact that they are “generated” works—works made by running a program. The subject matter of the images is generic difficult-to-represent complexity, with some emphasis on texture-rich images. They also all depict ephemera: clouds, water, flowers: *memento mori*.

The first step in the process is photographic. Images are then given to a program—one that I wrote myself. The program draws the images using the same particle system techniques seen in video games and movies.

The output of the program varies, which makes identifying the medium a bit of a game. If a single, final image is used, it’s a print, and if many interim images are used, it’s an animation. I have projected animations, framed the prints, and shown combination works

that juxtapose still images with the process of their construction. I have printed piles of unique objects, frames of the animation.

**In general:**

I return often to the idea of the small life, the human life bounded tightly by resource scarcity, politics, and ethics that is nevertheless whole, sufficient, and satisfactory.

Computers are central to this; they can be seen as an incarnation of Hamlet's infinite space, bounded in a nutshell-- and the smartphone phenomenon has occurred since I first noticed this. Their communications uses, overhyped as they are, certainly appeal to me, but also simply their ability to simulate space, and enable the building of imaginary objects on arbitrary scales.

**Neal McDonald**  
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