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WHITNEY BIENNIAL | DIAL #7 IF YOU FEEL YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER

BY OLIVIA NOVATO

Trinh T. Minh-ha. "What about China? (Still)" (2021). HD video, color, sound; 135 min. © Moongift Films. Courtesy the artist and Moongift Films.

Quiet as It's Kept: a secret uttered from the other end of the line. A secret not so surprising in one's ear. This hushed colloquialism informs the latest Whitney Biennial, on view from April 6th through September 5th, with select portions extending through October 23rd. Relegated to secrecy, the phrase is notable for its usage in the works of novelist Toni Morrison, Jazz drummer Max Roach, and artist David Hammons. Co-organized by curators David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards, the eightieth iteration of the Biennial brings together a host of artists, seasoned and on the rise, to occupy the museum's fifth and sixth floors. Cross cultural, cross generational, cross aesthetic.

"Deliberately intergenerational and interdisciplinary, the Biennial proposes that cultural, aesthetic, and political possibility begins with meaningful exchange and reciprocity," Breslin and Edwards note in the Biennial's press materials. "Rather than proposing a unified theme, we pursue a series of hunches throughout the exhibition: that abstraction demonstrates a tremendous capacity to create, share, and, sometimes withhold, meaning; that research-driven conceptual art can combine the lushness of ideas and materiality; that personal narratives sifted through political, literary, and pop cultures can address larger social frameworks; that artworks can complicate what 'American' means by addressing the country's physical and psychological boundaries; and that our 'now' can be reimagined by engaging with under-recognized artistic models and artists we've lost."

Organized before the catastrophe beginning in March of 2020 and the social upheavals of that summer, this Biennial feels particularly prescient—preemptive, perhaps. The 63 artists' works interact with one another, offering alinear, yet continuous conversation through the psyche and also the pits of our stomachs.

Flaunt conversed with participating artists Trinh T. Minh-ha, Jacky Connolly, Rick Lowe, and Andrew Roberts to explore their works in this year's Biennial.

Jacky Connolly. "Descent into Hell (Still)" (2021). Multichannel HD video, color, sound. Courtesy the artist.

JACKY CONNOLLY

BY VANESSA BLASI

Endless winding roads, twists and turns and obstacles, red lights and stop signs fill our minds, yet Jacky Connolly depicts our imaginations' exigent desire to run wild, our inclination to escape reality whenever and wherever we may be. Freedom in the mind exists much differently than freedom on the ground. Yet this Brooklyn-based artist designs an alternate reality, satisfying the adventurous and impulsive parts of us awaiting to break free. Connolly's animation, "Descent into Hell" draws inspiration from Doris Lessing's novel, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971). The artwork portrays a character as valiant, lost, and dangerous as our minds' can often aspire to be. Similar to Lessing's novel, this story transports viewers to an alternate timeline along the broken and dystopian city of Los Angeles in which anything is possible.

With degrees from Bard College at Simon's Rock, Connolly flipped her tassel in 2011 with a BFA in Photography, Art History, and Critical Studies. Taking her studies further, she also received her MFA in Digital Arts and an MSc in Library and Information Science from Pratt Institute in 2016. Undeniably, Connolly's brilliance in gaming technology and natural talent for artistic expression gained true recognition in recent years when she was featured in exhibitions such as the Whitney Museum of American Art; Interstate Projects, Brooklyn; Kimberly-Klark, Queens; Et al., San Francisco; Land and Sea, Oakland; and Bus Projects, Melbourne.

Illusive, harrowing, alluring, and liberating—"Descent into Hell" bridges the cavernous gap between knowledge and imagination. By depicting the epitome of a fantasy life, she minimizes the concept of existence to a pixelated screen, while more purposefully expanding the possibilities of a "happily ever after"… or not.

Where do you think this sense of a meandering, lost feeling comes from?

As the world has felt so alien and ungrounded for the past few years, I also became a bit of a wanderer for the duration of creating this work. I went from upstate New York, back to New York City, and now I'm living in Amsterdam (NL). I started "Descent into Hell" in the autumn of 2019. I was living in a small house in the Catskills for a few years, after a decade in the city. When I lived in New York, I found myself drawn to virtual settings (with *The Sims* games) that emulated the suburban-rural world of the Hudson Valley, where I grew up. Living in solitude upstate, I was drawn to the reverse; I found myself working in virtual environments that captured a feeling of urban alienation and dissonance.

Of course, 2020-2021 only heightened a feeling of separateness from society, as I spent the weeks virtually "roaming" a simulation of a world that suddenly had ceased to exist. I also found myself voyeuristically reading an online forum for "vagabonds"; people who live as modern hobos and drifters, hopping trains or living out of a van. Feeling so homebound during the pandemic definitely stimulated my pre-existing fascination with the people who disappear, or drop out, and live a totally different existence.
In the summer of 2020, we had a fire at our house in the Catskills and spent some time living in a hotel. It was the second house fire that I've been through in my life (the other was during my childhood); a lot of the elemental fire (and water) imagery in the videos came up through that experience. Simultaneously, the world has quite literally been on fire in parts of America, some of the worst forest fires in US history. So, in my virtual California, the world is on fire and the people are strange and disconnected from one another.

Do you think that video games, virtual reality, etc. is humanity achieving some sort of cross-universal travel?
I think that the experience of virtual teleportation does exist, in a sense. I have only ever spent a few weeks in Los Angeles—I did not know the city geographically through any real, lived experience. But the accuracy of *GTA*'s [*Grand Theft Auto V*] virtual LA map is striking. When I flew out there in the middle of creating this work, from the moment that I arrived at LAX,

I recognized every detail of the roads, the placement of trees along the highway and the passing landmarks. Definitely an uncanny experience. I will say that virtual "travel" does have some sort of aura, especially the way that virtual light hits on certain surfaces can evoke a feeling of place for me. But I think that this sensation pales in comparison to lived experience—of actually

feeling lost in a real, unfamiliar place. To me, game worlds cannot compare to real-world experiences of mystery and wonder.

Do you think that this idea of "reality shifting" is a coping mechanism or an addiction? Is it something we opt into or something we are fed?

I think that the Gen Z reality shifting trend is fascinating, but I also see a lot of darkness there. It's a form of fantasy or play, but then most of the realities that are popular to "shift" to are sort of fan fiction universes—Hogwarts, for instance. The message seems to be: hypnotize yourself into a sort of psycho- sis, and commune with these mass cultural artifacts in that "other" place. But maybe not any more psychically unhealthy than looking at social media every two hours, or playing *Animal Crossing* for 8 hours a day...

How does this work connect to the Biennial's colloquialism: *Quiet as It's Kept*? Is there a secret present in the work?

There are secrets, puzzles that lead nowhere, and mysterious events are left as loose ends, with no resolutions. The majority of my avatars always stand as silent vessels, witnesses looking over the film's wreckage without a voice. Though there is a moment when one character "breaks through" and finds a voice that I'm particularly happy about, but her vocalization is more of a guttural scream.

JACKY CONNOLLY'S COMPUTER-GENERATED DOOM

By Josie Thaddeus-Johns   March 28, 2022 3:57pm

Something terrible is happening in Jacky Connolly's new CGI video, *Descent into Hell* (2022). A house burns down, people on the street drop to the ground en masse, and an airplane nosedives into a mountain, twirling in slow motion. The reason for this chaos is never named; doom permeates the sparse narrative.

The four-channel, thirty-minute work—which will premiere next week in the Whitney Biennial—is, the artist explained via Zoom, a reaction to the events of 2020: the isolation of lockdown, constant protests, and police violence against people of color, and the resulting mental health crises that claimed the lives of several of her friends.

When the pandemic hit, Connolly was living in a cabin in Woodstock, New York, near where she grew up. Like many people, she felt cut off from the outside world. So she lost herself in a digital realm—specifically, in the video game Grand Theft Auto V (GTAV).

Instead of playing through the game, she downloaded a file from the internet that allowed her to bypass the game's central narrative—criminals stealing cars and staging other heists—against the backdrop of present-day Los Angeles, dotted with 7-Elevens, freeways, and five-star hotels. The world of Descent into Hell, edited from in-game footage, focuses on pockets of the game environment that players usually zoom past, a depressing microcosm of American inequality. Unhoused people sit on moldy sofas in half-finished buildings or hop trains in deserted train yards as flashy sports cars roar past. In the final scenes, as the sky turns red—recalling the orange skies that hit real-world LA in September 2020—the doom seems to climax.

Interplay between the physical world and computer-generated environments is of deep concern for Connolly, who received an MFA in digital arts from the Pratt Institute in 2016. Several of her early works use the suburban life simulation game The Sims, including her fifty-minute video Ariadne, which premiered in a 2019 solo exhibition at Downs & Ross, New York. This work juxtaposes screen-captured scenes with footage of furniture IRL; uncannily similar objects, like a heart-shaped bathtub, appear in both realms. A series of stained-glass and steel lamps set on pedestals in the gallery also depict characters and motifs from the game.

Slippage between the real and the virtual gnawed at Connolly intensely these past two years, as the pandemic curtailed real-world experience. Descent into Hell was born of the alienation of this time, of "the loneliness that comes from being inside all day on the screen totally dissociated from other people for however many hours," the artist said.

As the two worlds muddle, it can be hard to pinpoint authenticity within the artificial. In Descent into Hell, a modded character resembling actress Emma Watson is depicted watching a more photorealistic porn film that features a deep-fake version of herself. The porn film, which Connolly found online and digitally enhanced, superimposes an AI-generated version of Watson's face on that of the porn actress. The scene-within-a-scene Watson appears more lifelike than the GTAV one, prompting the question, which is more "fake?" Even as virtual reality and 3D graphics become ever more sophisticated—as is evident in tracing Connolly's use of video games over the past half decade—Connolly conjures the loneliness and dread that follow us as we traverse these boundaries. No matter how lifelike the simulations get, they remain hollow and unnerving.

ON THE CALENDAR: Work by Jacky Connolly in the Whitney Biennial 2022: "Quiet as It's Kept," at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Apr. 6–Sept. 5.

JC: There is something immersive about watching avatars, I find that even in a crowded gallery, people watch them for longer than they'd typically do with most video-based artworks. The video has a strange relationship to interactivity in that it captures an interactive place and flattens it into an image. I essentially want to leverage virtual realities —not toward VR headsets and other applications currently in vogue, but toward new cinematic vocabularies and literary modes of world-making, reenactment, and storytelling that can be utilized from the desktop.

Credits

Produced by Jacky Connolly
Courtesy the artist and Kimberly-Klark, New York

Here Are the 63 Artists and Collectives Participating in the Closely Watched 2022 Edition of the Whitney Biennial

The 63-strong list of artists and collectives chosen by curators David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards encompasses three generations.

Artnet News, January 25, 2022

Jacky Connolly, still from *Descent into Hell* (2021). Courtesy the artist

The Whitney Biennial, one of the most closely watched—and fiercely debated—exhibitions in America, has revealed the lineup for its next edition, which opens in April. The 63-strong list of artists and collectives chosen by curators David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards encompasses three generations and suggests that the first pandemic-era iteration of the show will have a decidedly conceptual and interdisciplinary bent.

In addition to the participants, the curators have also revealed the show's title: "Quiet as It's Kept." The colloquial term—invoked in the work of novelist Toni Morrison, jazz drummer Max Roach, and artist David Hammons—usually precedes a statement that is traditionally left unsaid.

The show, originally due to open in 2021, was pushed back one year. It will now run from April 6 through September 5, 2022.

Frieze

The Shows You Need to See in New York this July

There's impressive and unexpected art in the city, even during the summer doldrums

Jacky Connolly, 'Ariadne'

Downs & Ross

19 June – 2 August

At the entrance to Jacky Connolly's show, a series of Tiffany-style lamps with titles such as *The Lightning Flower* (all works 2019) and *Our Lady of the Highways* are displayed on white plinths. Their hand-painted, stained-glass designs reference the artist's new animated film, *Ariadne*, which was created using computer graphics from The Sims. Recognizable environments – a teenager's bedroom, a diner, a suburban home, a porch – are imbued with gothic darkness while the characters that inhabit them never converse. The convoluted narrative arc of the 50-minute video only contrives to make the atmosphere more foreboding.

PASTE

Sims 3, Suburban Horror, and the Sinister Genius of Jacky Connolly

By **E.C. Flamming** | January 15, 2017 | 11:00pm
Photos courtesy of Jacky Connolly

At 26-years-old, filmmaker Jacky Connolly has become an expert puppet-master of the Sims 3 computer graphics by creating absurd domestic scenes with troubling narratives. Like many teens growing up in the early 2000s, she frequently played the alternate reality game that allows players to create their own characters and experiences. As an adult, Connolly began using the Sims 3 game to create compelling short art films. The pre-existing graphics engine allow her to be set designer, director and producer all at once. In an interview with *Rhizome*, Connolly discussed the transition from playing the game to utilizing the game to create films:

> I am no longer enacting an imagined future, but reenacting the traumas of earlier life stages. In my scenes, the nightmares of childhood and the traumas of adolescence serve as an anteroom to hell. Anxious and foreboding nights spent in a suburban bedroom have shifted from being the context in which I was playing (as a preteen) to the subject of my film scenes.

There is certainly something nightmare-ish about her latest work, *Hudson Valley Ruins*, which showed at Atlanta Contemporary from Dec. 20 to Jan. 8 of this year. The video was hidden in a gallery space behind a large translucent curtain. A single bench sat in front of a large wall, empty except for the projected video. As secluded as the area was, it was hard to ignore the intermittent chiming and dinging of JD Walsh's *Triangular Motif* just beyond the curtain in a separate exhibit—though it should be noted that at times, the tones of the clinking triangles actually seemed to weirdly fit in with *Hudson Valley Ruins*. Connolly's film, at 30 minutes long, occasionally skips and lags slightly, and it was

Two of the most successful elements of the piece are the use of sound and color. With Sims 3, Connolly was especially drawn to now, toxic purple sunsets, rhythmically swaying branches and falling orange leaves introduce a more haunting, evanescent ambiance." It is also distinctly suburban. Curator Daniel Fuller told *Paste*, "I think a lot of people connect to this suburban malaise. Being so close to the city, so close to action, yet being incredibly removed. For those of us that are restless, it's a fairly timeless story." As those familiar with The Sims games know, there is no dialogue, but an array of in-game sounds such as wind rustling through trees, a keyboard typing, a rusty swing-set or the clanking of playing a game of foosball—all uncomfortably amplified by the lack of dialogue. When playing The Sims, it's easy to tune out these sounds, but in the context of *Hudson Valley Ruins*, they are unsettling, especially as the story takes a sinister turn.

While the film's title draws from a website chronicling the disappearing historical architecture of the area, Connolly has said that it really refers to ruined people, not places. Through a series of disjointed domestic scenes, *Hudson Valley Ruins* primarily follows the story of two girls, one a rebellious teenager and the other on the cusp of becoming one. We see the younger girl witness her father's extramarital affair, and the teenager neglected by her alcoholic mother. Later, the teenager, dressed in a Red Hot Chili Peppers T-shirt, experiences a rough sexual encounter with a classmate, after which her mother takes her to a clinic with a large "Safe Sex" poster to talk with a therapist. The teenager's traumatic experience is paralleled with the young girls exposure to her father's sexual exploits.

Throughout the film, other characters who resemble the two girls' doppelgängers flit in and out of scenes. The teenager girl's binate is a tired, single-mother caretaker living in poverty—perhaps foreshadowing what's to come. The film reaches its inevitable climax when, one night during an intense thunderstorm, the younger girl leaves the confines of her suburban home and runs through a landscape resembling the Hudson River Valley, disappearing in a roar of sound and darkness. The teenager also removes herself from the narrative by swimming out into dark water during the storm, and is shown again in the final shots of the film, lying on a river bank at dawn, presumably dead.

There's something terribly disconcerting about seeing your favorite childhood game used to play out such disturbing stories. Perhaps for this reason, *Hudson Valley Ruins* makes you feel as if the character's loss of innocence is your own. You leave the film feeling unsettled and a little sick—but also curious to see what's next. If Connolly can make you feel that freaked out in a brief 30 minutes, what else can she do?

You can catch *Hudson Valley Ruins* at The Whitney Museum of American Art on Sunday Jan. 15 at 3 p.m. as part of "Dreams and Nightmares," a series of five short animations from contemporary artists. Tickets are $12 for adults, students and seniors, and free for members at other times.

JACKY CONNOLLY
THE GRASS IS
ALWAYS GREENER

BY FIONA
ALISON DUNCAN

For years I've been trying to come up with a way to describe the metallic ting of human voices on Skype. Not when we go robotic, this glitch is subtler. It sounds like chewing on aluminum foil might for the doer, a hearing that tastes irritating. The sound is similar to one that accompanies many effects in 27-year-old American artist Jacky Connolly's Sims-filmed videos, particularly the raking of leaves.

In one of Connolly's first videos, *Fawn's Leap* (2015), a young woman with pale skin and dark hair rakes autumn leaves in the rain. As the day darkens and the leaves come to be piled horse high, a young girl—she could be the sister of the woman, or an adolescently-had daughter, or the same individual, years prior—plays in these piles. She throws leaves up like confetti and jumps into their ideal mounds, all the while it sounds tinnily crinkly like Connolly did to me when we spoke over Skype; a wind whines in the background.

After Skyping with Connolly and re-watching her videos for days into night, I started to notice the sounds surrounding my home. Connolly makes her work by designing a Sims-world, playing in it, filming her play, then editing that footage to tell a story. Her soundtracks consist of ambient noise and action effects, often employing footsteps, crickets, and cushions of silence. Relaxing Sounds. 24 million views on YouTube.

Connolly's lo-fi effects attuned me to my life's own. Suddenly, there was my 22-year-old sister's stress droning through the walls. There were ice cream trucks and incessant tweety birds whose nests I couldn't place between all the high rises. And there were helicopters, whose surveillance I'd come, in 19 months of living in Los Angeles, to unconsciously mute.

They're so oppressive, it's banal to complain. LA's choppers beat louder than our traffic waves oceanic, and while you may learn to forget them, I guarantee: we register their threat regardless. Because attention is more diffuse than a surviving mind might have it. It's why we can have repressed memories, summoned by a smell. Or why, after spending two months in a rural cabin, then coming back to Manhattan, I felt the pavement shake from underground as if for the first time, and finally understood I'd been living with it for years. We can take our environments for granted until we experience difference. Like a computer neck crane. We may temporarily forget the awkward postures we take, but the body won't. If you're lucky, you'll ache later. If not, you won't even notice that you're in pain.

In Jacky Connolly's world—four of her five videos are set in the same world, a recreation of New York State's Hudson Valley region, where the artist grew up—most characters look like they're in pain. Their average expression is vacant, maybe it's boredom or depression: something is missing. These women and girls—they're mostly women and girls—wear forlorn faces with dim or squinting eyes. It's like a force, like gravity or some other given is oppressing them, and if they're resisting it, it's an inner struggle and part of the struggle is to keep it in.

Anhedonia is the title of Connolly's most recent video. Derived from Greek, the word means without (*an-*) pleasure (*hēdonē*). It's when you can't enjoy life's presents. Sunsets, shopping, sex, whatever your usual pleasure, it feels dull, inaccessible. Leaves might as well be colored pixels that tickle in their shitty sonic frequency.

The cavst of *Anhedonia* live in eccentric homes designed, presumably, to reflect their

interiors. Their tapestries are heavy, their art is *woe is* or *save me* (spiritual), and their palettes consist of aged bruise, blood, and lint. Meanwhile, outside, God's light shines lens-flare bright. *Anhedonia*'s women look dejected, or low key pissed. They look at tablets, phones, and computer screens. They spa, workout, and mill about their homes; tattooed, in clown shoes.

Connolly uses the money cheat, so none of her characters work. She custom designs almost all of her objects. Fall leaf print leggings. Angel wing mirrors. A pretzel couch. These furnishings are as fantastic as the nature in Connolly's simulation, where purple and apricot and heaven's gate blue skies reflect in ponds and pools and up windows and walls. Light dances. Stars! Rivers rush and waterfalls and there are palm trees where there shouldn't be. Mushrooms sprout around climbing trees like those in *Fern Gully*. Vines flower on monkey bars. A roller coaster loops in the woods. And there's a ice skating rink by grass still green.

Six words are presented as chapter titles throughout *Anhedonia*. After the first title-A, there's "Anemia," "Alexithymia," "Amygdala," "Anorexia," and finally "Amnesia." All gesture towards pathology. What's wrong with Jacky Connolly's world? Anemia, Amnesia, and Anorexia are lacks: of iron, memory, and appetite. Alexithymia refers to the inability to identify and describe emotions of the self; from the Greek: "no words for mood." While the amygdalae are two clusters in the brain associated with memory, decision making, emotional regulation, and fear conditioning (trauma).

In versions 3 and 4 of the Sims that Connolly uses to make her movies, you get to select five personality traits to define your characters', "quirks, intelligence, talents, and general dispositions," like, Connolly lists: "Genius, Hot-headed, Kleptomaniac, Brooding, Childish, Supernatural Fan, etc." What traits you select will determine your gameplay. Kleptos can "swipe" things, for e.g. Connolly tends to go for

Brooding Sims, who sigh and pout; Neurotic Sims, who suffer random anxiety meltdowns; Loner Sims, who become unhappy around too many people; and those that Love the Outdoors. Connolly says that she modeled her "protagonists insides after the 'traits' I found to be the most resonantly 'Hudson Valley.'" Her movies are based on real memories, her own, and those of friends, such as the late Gabrielle Tillman.

"Gabrielle Tillman was," Connolly explains, "my soul-mate and best friend who passed away after struggling with the onset of mental illness for about 6 months."

Tillman was an artist as well, 23 when she died. In 2014, she made an autumn leaf print quilt. She would photograph still lifes of food arranged within real life, like Sfogliatelle in sand, and rippled potato chips, pretzels, and a transparent toy spider on a cake titled *Demons of Noon 12am Midnight Cake*.

Jacky Connolly's *Tales From the Borscht Belt* (2016) is dedicated to the memory of Gabrielle Tillman. It's the only movie of hers with narration: "A delayed reaction to icicles / Smashing against the pavement," a monotonous voice recites lines lifted from an abandoned Livejournal. "They could cling to the roof no longer / I can cling to reality no longer."

Of all of Connolly's films, *Borscht Belt* depicts the most nonviolent togetherness. Hugs and girls sleeping over. Women gathered round a fire. A teen holds a toddler in her arms, given the kid looks like Chucky. Horror seasons Connolly's supernature, where it is always, as per her Instagram handle, @permanentautumn. She sets everything then. Before the naked trees and white of winter, lored as death, or regeneration. (Is depression hibernation?)

"Set me free / And I'll come smashing down," it's Connolly reading—reticently, and I swear I hear humor: "And as I hit the ground / I'll wake up and start living."

For the Occasion of:
Jacky Connolly's *Hudson Valley Ruins*
Presented by Kimberly-Klark
@ Interstate Projects, June 19, 2016

Text by Shelby Jackson

Jacky Connolly's *Hudson Valley Ruins* is a machinima film produced entirely in the life simulation computer game The Sims 3. The film represents Connolly's first attempt to explore, through conventions of narrative cinema, the rural-suburban virtual world that she's crafted over the last three years.

Hudson Valley Ruins is a multi-diegetic ensemble film. Its plot follows two central characters (the young girl and the teenage girl) and their uncanny doppelgängers (the grey-haired child and the "Caretaker"). It extends to encompass four family units; those of the two protagonists (the adulterous father, the alcoholic single-mother), that of the teenage girl's villainous boyfriend (the unnerving blond twins and their mother), and that of the Caretaker (the mother of a battered looking child). Throughout the film, the story lines following the two protagonists intersect briefly if at all. Instead, what the two girls share is a certain space or proximity and an affinity that neither they nor we quite understand.

The virtual world of *Hudson Valley Ruins* was created far before the production of the film and served as the context of a number of shorter video pieces. This sheds light on the significance of the film's narrative structure. With *Basement Puzzles/Rune Rooms* (2014) and *Fawn's Leap, NY* (2015) Connolly composed scenes from her virtual world in the form of looping tableaux. In the former, the repetition of the digital assets forming the interior *mise-en-scène* (the wallpaper texture, the linoleum floor tiles) conspires with the algorithmically looping gestures of the figure (also a young girl), and the looping of the video itself, to create the effect of a radically de-temporalized moving picture. Connolly employs this effect to simulate the experience of encountering the enigmatic totems a deracinated stretch of personal history—highly cathected objects of adolescent suburban life are split-off from their personal-historical context; like runes, they both solicit and deny attempts at their discursive, narrative emplotment. They thus repeat themselves vertiginously—refusing, time and again, their relegation to the past. Simulating these repetitive encounters, *Basement Puzzles/Rune Rooms* intensifies the predominant affects hounding both the Sims characters and their game-players alike. Feelings of isolation and alienation accumulate in the dead, spatialized time of the Sims tableaux.

With *Hudson Valley Ruins*, Connolly sought to preserve or recreate this strange de-temporalizing effect while producing a work recognizable as one of narrative cinema. It was the tension between these two concerns that lead Connolly to adopt the form of the multi-diegetic ensemble film—a form that Allisa Quart tellingly names "hyperlink cinema". Exemplary films of this genre include Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1973), *Shortcuts* (1993), Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999), and recently, David Cronenberg's *Maps to the Stars* (2014).[1] Most generally,

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[1] Its no coincidence that a good deal of these films take place in L.A. nor that they often end in a kind of *deus ex machina*— some mysterious force abruptly invades the scene whether in the form of a natural disaster, an eruption of collective madness, a stroke of fate, etc. In the context of the pure horizontality of the hyperlink film—a horizontality emblemized by the landscape of LA as much as by the psychic life of subjects "leveled" by the culture industry—it takes nothing less than a kind of apocalypse to introduce a common diegetic time-marker into the numerous

hyperlink cinema is characterized by the preponderance of the horizontal axis of film over its vertical axis. In terms of narrative structure, the horizontal represents the spatial, synchronous relations between events and characters while the vertical represents the temporal, biographical, and traditional aspects informing a cinematic narrative. In most cases, a film is identifiable as belonging to a specific *genre* by virtue of its vertical axis. More generally still, V. F. Perkins has argued the horizontal axis of film has its roots in the mediums constitutive dependency on the still image—the photographic substratum from which film arises but never departs. The vertical axis of film represents its reliance on what Perkins calls montage, that is, the differential relationships between individual images that provides them with their context and signifying function. The horizontal axis *qua* image, accounts for a film's raw visual content while the vertical axis *qua* montage is the seed-germ of a film's encompassing narrative form.

As a piece of hyperlink cinema, *Hudson Valley Ruins* exploits the tension between the horizontal and the vertical, the multi-linear and the biographical, the imagistic and the diegetic, by playing the latter set of terms off of the former. Its topical and thematic features insinuate a coming-of-age story (a kind of *bildungsroman*) while its form consistently resists devices of novelistic composition and closure. The horizontal does the work of storytelling, while the vertical is employed to reduce narrative back into its constituent images—a mechanism for exploring the world of the film. This accounts for one of the reasons why Connolly draws on the scenic tropes of melodrama and gothic horror— at a glance, such thematic elements point up at the genre to which they belong. Like the isolated article (an earring, a glove, a key) finally disclosing the story behind a murder mystery, such tropes consolidate a whole history of cinematic storytelling into an individual image.

But the plot (or plots) of *Hudson Valley Ruins* never culminates into something like a story. Earlier events are never finally revealed as significant and continuous with later developments. While the general sequence is indexed to the perspective of the characters, these characters are more witnesses to whatever happens to be transpiring than motivated participants. What we witness is not a significant and cohesive stretch of their "life stories" but a sequence of activities that for all of their monotony, or perhaps because of it, exude a sense of happenstance. The narrative schema of *Hudson Valley Ruins* borrows more from the pre-modern chronicle than from the 18ᵗʰ century novel—it is precisely through a repetition of short, happenstance episodes, resistant to a principle plot line, that the film anticipates a sudden climax.

What's more, the shots that do conform to the perspectives of the characters shade into those setting the general scene, the establishing images of the town and natural landscape, the B-roll. This gives the impression that the dramatic action occurs in a low relief from the general *topos* of the film. What the plot sequences and establishing montages share is a sense of intense contemplative indifference— an indifference mimetically expressed in the features of the

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disparate plot lines. Latent in Connolly's film is a hypothesis concerning a salient aspect of the genre itself; the hyperlink form reflects a social condition in which collective anomie has become so intense that a desire for renewed solidarity, or at least a sense of proximity, can only take the form of a death wish. Recall the storm sequence that rounds off *Hudson Valley Ruins.* The climactic moment is itself as ambivalent as the films images of nature. It hovers somewhere between a representation of communion through death—that is, the fulfillment of a drive to mimetically merge with lower animal and vegetable life forms (recall the shot of the parrot in the therapist's office) and an image of impossible consolation.

landscape itself; the rapid elapse of the sky textures, the dreadful repetition of the (at times ambiguously) diegetic wind sounds.

These techniques of collapsing cinematic verticality into the horizontal make the experience of *Hudson Valley Ruins* essentially the experience of a landscape or inscape. In it, first nature and second nature (reified culture and custom) ensconce one another in turn; recall the opening montage of a ruined barn, farmland, and its internal duplication in the decorative outdoor sign.

First nature ultimately appears as dead nature (in the world of *Hudson Valley Ruins* it is permanently autumn). With the exception of the climactic storm sequence, nature will not bend to express the psychic states of the characters populating it; rather, *they* become the provisional vessels of some ambiguous force best expressed in weather and landscape. Nature's indifference to human purposes, its deadness, is made all the more palpable by its reanimation as a picturesque set piece saturated with mood—and indeed, this mood mimics nothing other than that expressed in the hauntingly inert décor of the suburban home, office or yard. The sense of dread saturating the images of nature in *Hudson Valley Ruins* latently registers the violent pre-history of the contemplative, bourgeois appreciation of natural beauty.[2] This violence is refracted at the level of personal history. The depressed adolescent's indifferent gaze—no doubt close to one of aesthetic disinterestedness – as well as her withdrawal into phantasy play, bear witness to the quotidian violence of patriarchy. But the landscape/inscape of *Hudson Valley Ruins* is also, perhaps primarily, a survey of second nature. The images of the many interior artifacts of *Hudson Valley Ruins*, the exotic figurines, the faux Tiffany glass windows, the upstate-nouveau motifs on sconces, appear as so many natural encrustations. From the perspective of the landscape surveyor, their patterns are menacingly regular but we've forgotten what they signify, lost the code, or perhaps never had it.

No doubt, the film reflexively elaborates the process through which it was conceived and crafted. But it isn't straightforwardly biographical, or only to the extent that the plot could be said to follow the biography of any one of its characters. It *does* encode aspects of Connolly's own personal history that anticipated its making, but its not a story leading up to the moment of its telling. Instead it's a kind of mythic pre-history of a highly developed form of phantasy play. Mythic, because these aspects of personal history are radically estranged, objectified, apprehended like figures of a natural landscape. By enfolding the vertical axis of montage into the horizontal axis of the quasi-photographic image, Connolly thus forestalls a lapse into the ironic, hyper-reflexive techniques of medium-building that characterize early video art— indeed, medium-building techniques that one would expect from a film composed in the purely synthetic world of The Sims. Instead, it's the enigmatic images and objects of *Hudson Valley Ruins*-- in which the narrative is forever estranged—that betray the work's medium, and this medium is manifestly that of film i.e. *genre*.

Connolly thereby creates an effect similar to that of *Basement Puzzles/Rune Rooms*, but at a level of greater complexity. Puzzled out of dissociated elements, the imagistic landscape of *Hudson Valley Ruins* solicits an attempt at narrative emplotment that its formal structure abjures. She thus captures the experience of groping after that which, by definition, circumvents our capacity for narratable experience, namely, trauma. If the mysteries bound up in the landscape

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[2] Here Connolly is pulling from the Hudson Valley River painters- for whom nature's sublimity was nothing other than a coy invitation to, and a preemptive celebration of, nature's ongoing domination by "man".

of *Hudson Valley Ruins* never accede to being experienced in full, the process of puzzling them together, in ever-new cinematic configurations, can be experienced as a form of productive *iteration*. This iteration is not the dead repetition of a compulsion—the repetition of the looping tableaux, the repetition of dead nature, the algorithm of the Sims themselves– but is instead akin to the process of learning a new, insipiently common language– call it film.

All images courtesy of the artist.

Jacky Connolly's "Shadows on the Hudson"
by Tim Gentles
October 22–November 20, 2016
Kimberly-Klark, New York

November 17, 2016

A source of artistic fascination since the nineteenth century, when it became the subject of the Hudson River School of landscape painters, the grandeur of Upstate New York's Hudson Valley also figures in Jacky Connolly's first solo exhibition, at Kimberly-Klark in Queens, New York. The exhibition's centerpiece is a video projected against the wall of the darkened gallery—for the duration of the show, the gallery is only open during the evening. Entitled *Hudson Valley Ruins* (2016), the video, as with all of the artist's, has been constructed entirely within the computer game *The Sims 3* (2009). Named after a website that chronicles the region's abandoned architectural landmarks, it is set in a virtualized Hudson Valley with an ambience that might best be described as rural-suburban Halloween macabre circa 2004. *Hudson Valley Ruins*'s opening sequence clearly situates its aesthetic coordinates—cartoonishly gothic red lettering displays the title over a shot, at dawn, of rolling hills, fall foliage and, in the foreground, a weather vane on the roof of a lone house. The wind whistles threateningly, a motif that persists throughout the video's half hour. Then, it begins to rain.

Like *The Sims*, *Hudson Valley Ruins* contains no dialogue, but is accompanied by in-game sounds, such as the eerie, unrelenting wind and the incidental sounds made by its characters—the clicking of fingers on a video game console or the noise of a child on a rusty swing set, for example. Featuring an ensemble cast organized around two protagonists, a young girl and an adolescent one go about their days in a contemporary, suburbanized Hudson Valley. Much of the detail is mundane, such as eating, exercising, or going to school, but more sinister undercurrents can be picked out of the video's disjointed narrative. Early on, the adolescent can be seen sitting at a desktop computer chatting to a boy online and banging her hands on the desk in seeming frustration, while later she pulls reluctantly away from the same boy as he gropes her on the couch. They can then be seen having aggressive sex, followed by a trip for the adolescent and her stern-looking mother to a therapist with a prominently displayed safe sex poster. Broken homes are a common thread—the adolescent is raised by a single mother, while the younger girl is witness to her father's extramarital affair. The titular ruins, as Connolly herself notes in an interview, refer to people rather than architecture: "Instead of ruined buildings, this film contains ruined people who seek refuge in imaginary/disappearing places."[1]

And yet a sense of collapse, or of never having had a solid foundation to begin with, is deeply inscribed on the built architecture of the video's setting. Surreal juxtapositions abound in Connolly's elaborately detailed interiors, which could be read as taking the consumer object fixation of *The Sims* to subversive excess, and feature oddities such as inexplicable Chagall paintings in a suburban living room and a pretzel-shaped bench on a front porch. Nothing, however, feels like a massive leap from the already highly elastic principles of postmodern suburban design. (This free-for-all wresting of signifiers from any historical mooring is cannily alluded to in an installation feature of the exhibition—two benches fabricated in the sort of faux-Greco-Roman style that is a ubiquitous feature of suburban non-places provide the gallery seating for the video.)

A connection can be established here between the domestic settings that the characters inhabit, and are determined by, and the game through which they are rendered, in which one can escape from real life with a highly circumscribed simulation. Both are spaces of respite, where fantasies can be acted out, and both can become stifling and dull if one remains in them for too long. For an artist of the first generation "raised by the internet," digital and domestic space have perhaps become one and the same thing—deeply tied to one's sense of identity and personal narrative, and capable of evoking a similar sense of homeyness and belonging.

All of this situates Connolly's work in the context of peers such as Bunny Rogers, Flannery Silva, and Maggie Lee, where signifiers of the domestic and of childhood (specifically girlhood) are redeployed as markers of personal identity and cultural affiliation. While the video's setting matches Connolly's biography almost exactly (she grew up in the lower Hudson Valley), its aesthetic concerns suggest a more performative exploration of identity enacted through highly specific sociocultural markers. *Hudson Valley Ruins*'s formal peculiarities create slippages between fantasy and reality that radically depersonalize its subjects, such that their personal trauma, malaise, and alienation aren't expressive so much as they are built into the environment. In this world, whose characters have been rendered mute, the looming, overbearing presence of their surroundings—whether that be the howling wind or the hum of the refrigerator—speaks on their behalf.

On its surface a story of suburban angst, the video speaks to the sometimes debilitating intractability of place and past against the escape promised by virtual life and the avatar. On the two walls opposing the projected video are three light boxes, (*Majella (Dirty Fill)*; *When The Wind Blows (The Adoption)*; and *Strange Weather (The Divorce)* (all 2016), depicting scenes from the world of *Hudson Valley Ruins*. While an unnecessary corollary to the show's cinematic centerpiece, in recalling the backlit promotional movie posters often found at theaters, they remind that nostalgia most often serves to transform personal narrative into commodity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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RHIZOME

Artist Profile: Jacky Connolly

By Emma Hazen
Feb 05, 2016

The latest in a series of interviews with artists who have a significan[t] body of work that makes use of or responds to network culture and digital technologies.

Emma Hazen: You're working on *Hudson Valley Ruins* (2016), your forthcoming machinima film produced in the life simulation game, *The Sims*. What prompted you to start using *The Sims* as a tool to make your work?

Jacky Connolly: I started using *The Sims* out of a desire to work in 3D before I had learned any modeling. After a decade-long hiatus from the game, I had a serendipitous experience as I unearthed a forgotten toolkit of customizable assets and building tools.

I played the first iteration of *The Sims* obsessively between 2000-2003, aged ten to thirteen. *The Sims* was my window onto an inaccessible realm, a fantasy theater for enacting my imagined late teen years and early adulthood–a world without school where you could drive, sleep at a man's house, or try out his heart-shaped hot tub. I would frequently role play as older women that I wanted to emulate, an amalgamation of various movie and book characters and cool teens that I would see at high school. I envisioned adulthood as a world of intrigue and possibility, a release from the ensnarement of a middle school nightmare. Real life could only disappoint these optimistic projections.

I am no longer enacting an imagined future, but reenacting the traumas of earlier life stages. In my scenes, the nightmares of childhood and the traumas of adolescence serve as an anteroom to hell. Anxious and foreboding nights spent in a suburban bedroom have shifted from being the context in which I was playing (as a preteen) to the subject of my film scenes. As an adult, I can now use this world for my own private film production. This is how the intrigue and possibility of the game lives on, in the sandbox world's potential for mastery through reenactment.

EH: We spoke about The Sims 1's oppressively tedious structure— without cheats your Sims age, commute to work every single day, and have to perform routine tasks such as sleeping, eating, and cleaning. You are working in The Sims 3, where there is more freedom to input your own designs and reconfigure the game so that the season is permanently autumn or that your Sims don't have to go to school or use the bathroom during a take. Even though The Sims 3 offers more flexibility, the enclosed suburban environment of the game seems to be central to your work. I was wondering if you could discuss how the environmental and structural limitations of The Sims are important for you, as opposed to the reality of an open virtual world such as Second Life?

JC: The game franchise demands that its participants to simulate the "rat race," earning Simoleons, remodeling their homes, and buying properties. More expensive items improve the Sims' moods. There are hardly enough hours in the day for Sims to do anything in a leisurely way; they are perpetually struggling and dissatisfied. The intended game-play is worlds away from the utopic playground of *Second Life*. *The Sims* is closed off and hermetic, the player is a master of puppets in a virtual world local to their desktop. *Sims* neighborhoods are not uncanny landscapes with impossible architecture. Rooms have four walls and houses are built on a foundation, the setting is plastic and suburban. The familiar, imprisoning domestic interiors of this game engine are pertinent to the quiet terrors and awkward social encounters of my suburban-horror film scenes.

The Sims 3 allows for cheat codes that override most of the game's built-in nuisances. One thing that cannot be "cheated" is the time of day. If I am shooting a scene during the golden hour and the sun goes down, I have to wait for another game day to pass to continue filming. I enjoy this constraint, as it heightens my own temporal disorientation. I spend thousands of hours sitting at my desktop, virtual hours melting into real hours of my life passing by.
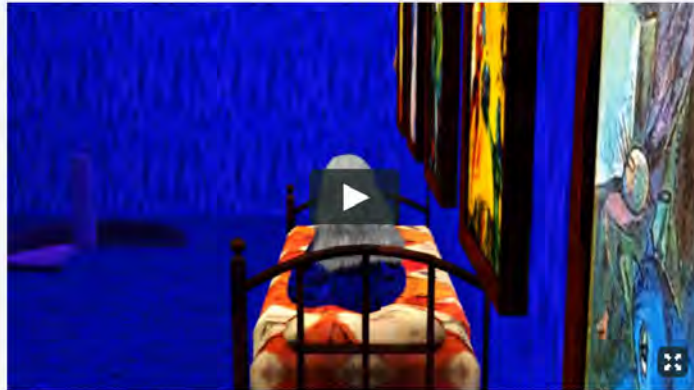
Jacky Connolly, *The Rosh Hashanah Room/The October Anteroom* (from *Basement Puzzles/Rune Rooms*) (2014)

EH: *The Sims* is designed to include instances of unreality within its stereotypical suburban narrative; A genie can be summoned by cleaning the antique lamp and the Grim Reaper appears to take Sims on the edge of death. Your films seem to relate to this, interspersing the mundane with macabre and fantasy. In *Hudson Valley Ruins*, some of the architecture is based on abandoned resorts in the Hudson Valley Borscht Belt. You also mentioned, towards the end of the film, that he characters access another reality connected to your earlier vignettes from *Basement Puzzles/Rune Rooms* (2014) through a portal. I am interested in how you work with real historical and geographical elements and instances of the surreal, absurd, or supernatural, and how these different realms intersect within the world of *The Sims*.

JC: In the original version of *The Sims*, the supernatural and macabre elements were an afterthought, only introduced in later expansion packs for the game. *The Sims: Makin' Magic* introduced a hole-in-the-ground portal to Magic Town, an autumnal neighborhood with circus folk, witches, faeries and magicians. *Basement Puzzles/Rune Rooms* and the *Fawn's Leap, NY* videos definitely connect to this afterthought, the intrusion or re-insertion of fantasy and the supernatural into a more coherent environment. I am interested in portals in the psychoanalytic sense, moving to "another scene" or a virtual theater where fantasies are played out.

The main reason I use the third *Sims* iteration is the way that the landscape is rendered in this release. The toxic purple sunsets, rhythmically swaying branches and falling orange leaves introduce a more haunting, evanescent ambiance. *Hudson Valley Ruins'* title is taken from a website of the same name, a catalog of the region's forgotten architectural landmarks. I am drawn to the past lives of the Hudson Valley and its ruined remnants, which are now being demolished one by one. Instead of ruined buildings, this film contains ruined people who seek refuge in imaginary/disappearing places.

EH: Without dialog between characters, sounds, such as the wind, pizza dough crackling in an oven or a toy choo-choo train, set the tone and pace in your films. For your exhibition, *Fawn's Leap, NY* with Flannery Silva, the surround sound on *Hudson Valley Rock Chick* (2015) and *Forever Alone Calzone* (2015) permeated the gallery space. Working outside of a cinematic linear plot, how do you consider sound and its connection to narration?

JC: The algorithmic weather patterns, animal noises, and wind intensity sounds are omnipresent while playing the game, and are exaggerated by the absence of Simlish voices. The repetition and variation of sound creates a sensory experience, when a storm comes the rain and thunder is overpowering. This was especially effective with the surround speakers in *Fawn's Leap, NY*. So far, I am only using in-game sounds, music and Foley/sound effects included. I sometimes use cheats to control the weather while I am filming, so that a storm is brewing in climactic moments. I edit my scenes to the pace of the diegetic sound. *Hudson Valley Rock Chick / Forever Alone Calzone* are my most successful use of sound to date. The repetition of certain noises (the train) and the in-game guitar playing become recurrent musical themes that highlight significant moments of action.

EH: Along with your art masters, you are getting a dual degree in library science, which essentially deals with the science and methods of collecting and organizing information. When watching your vignettes *Basement Puzzles/Rune Rooms* (2014), there is a feeling of walking through someone's memory palace— artifacts put in unfamiliar places in order to derive new meaning as elusive or personal signifiers. Would you say there is any correlation between organizing information and the idiosyncratic logic to some scenes, such as a a grey-haired girl floating in an indoor carpeted pool or the same character inhabiting a windowless room adorned with blue velvet and Chagall paintings?

JC: Creating an elaborate collection of virtual homes and rooms, I have definitely been informed by my LIS education. *For Basement Puzzles/Rune Rooms*, I initially created a database diagram of rooms and the virtual objects contained therein. My dual-degrees have often connected in this way, I was learning about database models while studying Lev Manovich's database cinema. If you envision virtual places and sites of action as a cinematic database, a film moves away from a traditional, linear narrative structure: relational databases contain a large list of items with no imposed order.

Cabinets of curiosities/memory theaters have also served as an inspiration. The basement rooms were envisioned as microcosms of the surrounding Hudson Valley, containing plants and ornaments from the surrounding landscape. These relics are enigmatic copies of real world phenomena, simple meshes and textures assembled by the game to evoke memory. The placement of apparently unrelated Sims ephemera in a room stimulates curiosity by hinting at unseen interconnections and associations.

Questionnaire:

Age:

25

Location:

New York

How long have you been working creatively with technology? How did you start?

When I was 6 or 7, I would use Kid Pix Studio to create gif mise-en-scènes. A few years later, I used American Girls Premiere, a game for creating animated stage plays using American Girl cutout dolls.

Where did you go to school? What did you study?

Where did you go to school? What did you study?

I went to Bard College at Simon's Rock, an early college in the Berkshires of Massachusetts, where I studied Photography and Art History. I am currently finishing my MFA in Digital Art and MS in Library and Information Science at Pratt Institute.

What do you do for a living or what occupations have you held previously? Do you think this work relates to your art practice in a significant way?

I am studying to work in the library and information field. I have been a babysitter for the past three years, which keeps me up to date on video game trends and actively engaged in the realm of childhood.

Vdrome

Jacky Connolly
"Hudson Valley Ruins"

Introduced by Orit Gat

HD video, sound, 30'   Year: 2016

Depicting various domestic spheres of a suburban north American context, *Hudson Valley Ruins* is a machinima video that relies on *The Sims 3* computer graphics engine to depict the absurd, alienated, and often uncanny lives of several characters, focusing on two young girls and their visions, experiences, and fantasies.

Orit Gat: Let's start with the title: *Hudson Valley Ruins.* The Hudson Valley is a suburban/rural area north of New York City, which is where you grew up. The video hints at some of the area's tropes like autumn foliage, though it mainly takes place in interior environments like a suburban home and a school. Can you explain the name? What is in ruins here?

Jacky Connolly: The film's title is taken from a website of the same name, http://www.hudsonvalleyruins.org/, a project by Tom Rinaldi and Rob Yasinsac that catalogs the Hudson Valley region's forgotten architectural landmarks. The website has a demolition alert, as these landmarks are rapidly disappearing. My film environments' depict structures that are built on top of the region's past layers—sterile, prefabricated suburban homes that contain ruined families. I am attracted to horror tales such as *The Shining and Poltergeist*, where hotels or suburban homes "shine" their past lives and the violence that has occurred on the land underneath. A similar history is what designated the Hudson Valley as a hotspot for ghost stories, the Headless Horseman, and UFO sightings. The film combines genre elements of gothic horror (the haunted house, the ruined building, the secret passage) with a domestic melodrama.

OG: You designed this series of environments in the computer game *The Sims 3*. You've made a number of videos using this technique. What led you to it in the first place? And what do you think it allows you?

JC: Besides my own personal history with playing the game as a preteen, I began this technique out of necessity, to create computer-generated animations beyond my technical abilities. Using a pre-existing graphics engine, I am able to build quickly and amass large amounts of footage in a short time. Even still, using *The Sims* technique is quite labor intensive and has required thousands of hours of gaming and filming. What I enjoy the most about this method is how it is more akin to an actual film production than an animator's studio. I am the set designer, but also the director, and I am able to film scenes more intuitively than if everything was storyboarded and created from scratch.

JC: The film's narrative structure was inspired by works of Hollywood hyperlink cinema such as Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) and David Cronenberg's *Maps to the Stars* (2014). The virtual animated characters are seen in a series of parallel vignettes that depict their loneliness, alienation, and eventual flight into fantasy, culminating in a natural disaster. The characters do not speak, and the significant moments of action are highlighted through pantomime, gesture, and the ever-present weather sounds of the world in which they reside. The iterative and algorithmic processes of the game that are captured (such as idle breathing loops, swaying trees, the cycle from sunrise to sunset, and weather patterns) are as significant to the film's meaning as the mysterious story that unfolds. I wanted to blend moments of familiar narrative with more fragmented, uncanny instances. The final narrative was largely dictated by a metonymical use of sound (dogs baying, a cockatiel screaming, wind and thunder).

OG: The two main characters are a suburban teenage girl and a younger girl. They enact familiar feminine traits, for example, the adolescent wears a Red Hot Chili Peppers T-shirt and the younger a set of pink pajamas, but they also witnesses or experience aggressive sex and seem lost in their surroundings. How do you think about gender in this work?

JC: I wanted to depict the nightmares of both middle childhood and adolescence, so it was important to have two main characters who encounter distinct but parallel traumatic instances. The younger girl witnesses her father's affair, and the teenager girl has her own run-in with a sexually aggressive classmate. These events all happen at night, in tucked away areas of the house. Nighttime is the time of suburban terror and childhood anxiety, and the child's frightening nighttime exposures to her father's affair were inspired by E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* story (1816). At the film's climax, the teenager's sexual encounter is juxtaposed with the young girl's parallel storyline, the traumatic discovery of her father's illicit affair. In the same way that I wanted to show both the nightmares of childhood and adolescence, I wanted to depict archetypal male villains of both ages as well: the "Anal Father" and the tyrannical brother.

OG: It feels very natural to watch *Hudson Valley Ruins*—a video created in a computer game—on a laptop. But it's also a very cinematic work: What do you think is the video's relationship to the screen and to interactivity?

What does your desktop or workspace look like? (Pics or screenshots please!)

ARTFORUM

View of "Jacky Connolly and Flannery Silva," 2015.
From left: Jacky Connolly, *Hudson Valley Rock Chick*, 2015; Flannery Silva, *Angels' Den*, 2015; *Chloé Doll*, 2015; *Valley Basket*, 2015.

NEW YORK

Jacky Connolly and Flannery Silva

KIMBERLY-KLARK
788 Woodward Avenue
October 10–November 8, 2015

The scene is twilight, the leaves are turning, and a girl logs practice time on her acoustic guitar in an animated world shot within the 2009 PC game *The Sims 3*. Tear-like droplets ambiguously fall from characters' limbs throughout. Living in a house upstate with a smaller, surlier missy in Jack Skellington logo apparel, no one speaks, but they do bake calzones in their living room and have an ice-skating rink in the picturesque backyard. Jacky Connolly's two videos—articulating this rustique mise-en-scène of lonely utopia—*Hudson Valley Rock Chick* and *Forever Alone Calzone* (all works 2015), are mirrored by Flannery Silva's sculptures of a ready-loaded doll and American Girl brand accessories. The show is a tag-team adoration of materials and references straight out of the attic-stored pasts of artists who spent some crucially formative years far from IRL, burrowing deep by turns into commercial and intimate fantasies.

To wit, see Silva's *Chloé Doll*, whose titular figure is nestled in a similar Jack Skellington sweatshirt to that seen in *Hudson Valley Rock Chick* and sits frozen in the act of needlepointing an anarchist *A* onto a quilted satin blanket on the edge of an autumn-leaf patterned tablecloth from Rite Aid sporting finessed (and fake) cigarette burns. The personal pastoral as commercially inflected ready-made: Just plug in your own memories, and the work will get to work on you. A constant wind blows throughout Connolly's videos of roughly rendered characters uneasily coexisting each evening, while Silva's woven *Valley Basket* sits empty on the aforementioned seasonal spread—these pieces are cold. But the show's lighting bathes the floor-bound sculptures and ceiling-suspended, wing-shaped mirrors in a warm, lilac twilight. A liminal mood for those not bound on forgetting the waning textures of yesteryear.

— *Paige K. Bradley*