



Featured in Issue 174

### Jon Rafman

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Canada

BY JAMES D. CAMPBELL IN REVIEWS | 25 SEP 15

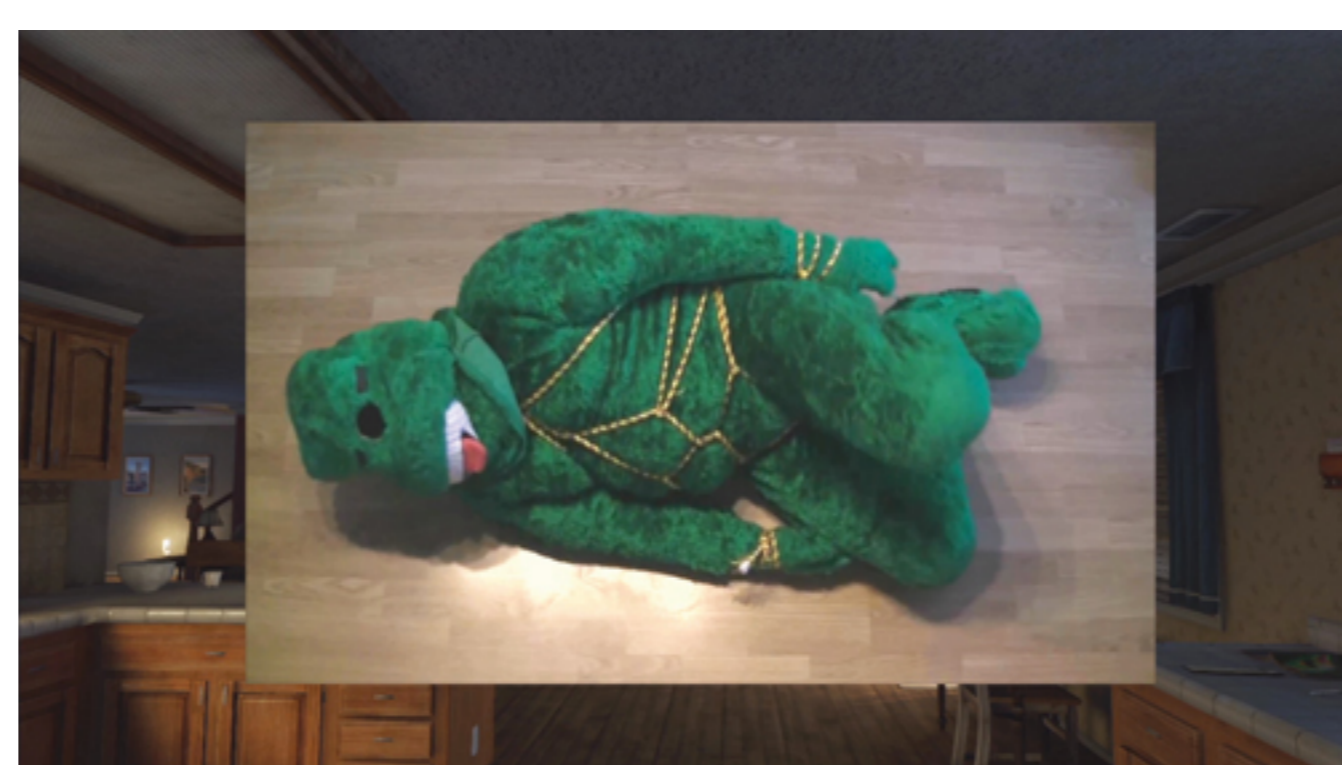


Jon Rafman, *You are Standing in an Open Field (Waterfall)*, 2015, inkjet print mounted on Dibond, resin, polystyrene, 1.3 x 1.5 m

Jon Rafman's first solo museum exhibition in his native Canada was chock-a-block with some of his favourite things. He is a seasoned voyeur and wily scavenger of virtual worlds, both sacred and profane.

His scouring of the internet is systematic. Rafman brilliantly collates his findings into exotic new narratives. He show litter-strewn Mac keyboards against utopian desktop wallpaper: lovingly detailed idylls of living with and consuming the virtual and its wreckage on a daily basis. They are also, of course, highly layered *cochonneries* offering windows that open wide onto internet heaven. Rafman employs video, photography, sculpture and installation to unpack the online sublime and the myriad porn utopias found deeply embedded in the substrata of the internet. His practice revolves around seeking out old and new footage with an eye towards preservation and subversion.

Rafman was an early adherent to the social bookmarking site Delicious and a legendary junkie of internet ephemera, which are integrated into his work in the spirit of sharing, leavened with an adult dose of humour, irony and irreverence. He is obsessed with *Second Life*, the three-dimensional virtual world in which users, or 'residents', can assume whatever guise they favour. His great love for 'machinima' – or real-time in-game filming – is pervasive in his work and we might well call him a machinist, for his work as a fan labourer has certainly kickstarted his mature, visionary work.



Jon Rafman, *Mainsqueeze*, 2014, video still

His reinvention of the iconic Kool-Aid Man is a signature appropriation of the ambulatory and avuncular pitcher filled with red Kool-Aid who first made his appearance in a 1975 TV commercial. Until a computer-generated makeover in 2013, Kool-Aid Man was played by an actor in a foam costume, although an animated version had appeared as the titular character in a 1983 videogame for the Atari 2600 and Intellivision consoles. This history obviously appealed to Rafman. Here, Kool-Aid Man is transformed from advertising superhero answering the calls of thirsty children everywhere to a savvy, convivial wastrel high-tailing it through digital worlds. More notably, he is also, of course, a surrogate for the artist himself, high-fiving his public on the front lines of Rafman's art. Indeed, the Kool-Aid Man is less about nostalgia than about offering a more realistic anti-superhero for our time.

While Rafman is associated with digital artists of his generation, including Cory Arcangel and Ryan Trecartin, the truth is that his real avatar is filmmaker Chris Marker and, beyond that, the vast web and archive of the internet itself, in all its festooned splendour and baroque, libidinal glamour. Marker led viewers beyond the failsafe point into the dystopia of our existence. So, too, does Rafman, even if it now seems clear that he has entered something like heaven. Like Wade Davis, the intrepid ethnobiologist who journeyed up the Amazon in search of psychoactive plants, Rafman the artist/ethnographer has journeyed deep into the heart of our web culture, in search of ecstasy and delivers a full measure of ecstasis, trance, rapture. More than any other artist who uses the web as both canvas and support, he wants to induce euphoria and change both perception and the condition of being here.

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#### TAGS

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