



Cultural Olympiad Features

Explosive material

Karen Pinchin, Jan 19, 2010

When Berlin-based artist Don Ritter bought the heavy-duty green army vest used in his installation piece *Vested*, the German man behind the counter asked what kind of gun he owned.

But this particular piece of military equipment wasn't bound for the shooting range. Instead, it became the central aspect of Ritter's daring interactive exhibition that will get its Canadian debut February 4 at Great Northern Way Campus (near the Olympic Village Vancouver) as part of CODE Live, an 18-day exhibition of interactive digital art installations.

In Ritter's piece, a participant dons the modified vest, which has been loaded with batteries, infrared sensors and a red detonation button and is tracked around a large dark room by two eerie green spotlights. Flanked by towering high-definition screens depicting political buildings, churches and temples, famous art museums and ancient structures, the "vested" person navigates around this virtual environment until they decide to press the button.

That is, if they decide to press it.

"I don't tell you that you have to press the button," says Ritter, although he admits participants, as well as the audience, generally want to experience the spectacular explosion that is the climax of the piece. In some ways, that's the whole point.

"There's a German word, 'Schadenfreude,' which roughly means 'a gathering of people to watch other people suffer.' This is a peculiar behaviour that humans have been doing for thousands of years, the best-known of which is probably the gladiator events of ancient Rome," says Ritter.

A similar process occurs in the attention given by audience members during *Vested*. Without realizing it, the apparently passive, observant audience is actually playing an active role in this virtual, but still very real, social narrative.

"The person is pretending that they're a suicide bomber. Some people love it, and start running around, hitting the button over and over and laughing," he says. "But the main participant is not the person wearing the vest. It's the people who are standing around and watching, waiting for that explosion."

While participants may find the piece fun and interactive, Ritter says he doesn't want audiences to think of it as a video game or find its premise intentionally offensive.

"Initially, I was wondering if someone was going to be offended by this," he says thoughtfully. "That's really not what I want to do; I'm just trying to reflect what people are already doing."

http://www.vancouver2010.com/more-2010-information/cultural-festivals-and-events/news/explosive-material_232808gt.html



VESTED

DON RITTER

There has never been a time in the history of civilization where daily global travel is so ubiquitous. Every day, tens of thousands of people cross time zones, continents and oceans. The constantly migrating tourist is one of the predominant figures of the 21st century as well as the electronic nomad. Here, the two figures are constantly in touch, literally or metaphorically, with the exotic monuments of other cultures: prestigious art museums, government buildings, ancient architecture, towers, or well-known churches and temples. Designed as a wearable technological vest, *Vested* immediately transforms the visitor to this cross-cultural world of images, journeying from Vishnu's temple at Angkor Wat to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art. Displayed on a three-screen array, and responding to sensors and cameras set up in the space, participants see themselves in these vast and varying cultural spaces. They can affect the panorama by pushing a red button which dramatically alters the images to produce new panoramic views. Questions of history, life, death, perception and identity are raised through this experience. What is civilization? What is worth preserving? What are our choices?

Jamais dans l'histoire de la civilisation les gens n'ont autant voyagé à travers le monde au quotidien. Chaque jour, des dizaines de milliers de personnes traversent les fuseaux horaires, les continents et les océans. Le touriste en constant déplacement est l'une des figures dominantes du XXI^e siècle, de même que le nomade électronique. De façon littérale ou métaphorique, ces deux personnages ont constamment accès aux monuments exotiques d'autres cultures, aux édifices gouvernementaux et musées d'art prestigieux, à l'architecture ancienne, aux tours ou aux églises et temples célèbres. Veste technologique prêt-à-porter, Vested transporte immédiatement le visiteur dans un monde interculturel d'images, un voyage le menant du temple de Vishnu, à Angkor, au Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art de New York. Leur image étant projetée sur un ensemble de trois écrans, grâce à des capteurs et à des caméras suspendus, les participants se voient dans ces espaces culturels vastes et variés. Ils peuvent modifier le panorama en appuyant sur un bouton rouge qui change de façon spectaculaire les images projetées afin de produire de nouveaux paysages. Cette expérience soulève des questions d'histoire, de vie, de mort, de perception et d'identité. Qu'est-ce que la civilisation? Qu'est-ce qui vaut la peine d'être préservé? Quels sont nos choix?



DON RITTER

CANADA

Berlin-based Canadian Don Ritter creates large, interactive installations that comprise social portraits of his audience. He completed his MVA at MIT, cinema studies at Harvard and has been exhibited at festivals and museums throughout Europe, North America and Asia, including SITE Santa Fe (USA), Metrònom (Barcelona), Exit Festival (Paris) and Ars Electronica (Linz).

Canadien établi à Berlin, Don Ritter crée de grandes installations interactives qui dressent le portrait social des spectateurs. Il a obtenu sa maîtrise en arts visuels à la MIT, a étudié le cinéma à Harvard et a vu ses œuvres présentées dans des festivals et des musées un peu partout en Europe, en Amérique du Nord et en Asie, notamment à l'exposition de SITE Santa Fe (É.-U.), au Metrònom (Barcelone), à l'Exit Festival (Paris) et à l'Ars Electronica (Linz).

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