

STEVE BISHOP

Noclip

An exhibition proposed by La Salle de bains

Curator : Caroline Soyez-Petithomme

Institut d'Art Contemporain, 11 rue du Docteur Dolard, 69100 Villeurbanne



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The word “noclip” comes specifically from the world of first person shooter video games, and defines the physically “ethereal” state of a person who is capable of passing through any architectural element. In this context, it is the key word which the Canadian artist Steve Bishop’s solo show borrows as its title. And yet, at first glance, visually speaking, nothing in this exhibition refers to the world of video games. Perhaps “noclip” is more familiar to generations born between the 2000s and 1980s, and in particular to those latest who grew up with the first shooter video games, for example the controversial Doom, whose graphics these days seem archaic, but which, back then, provided the intense pleasure of being able to massacre all sorts of hideous fantastic creatures.

If you turned right...

With regard to a short history of this counterpart of virtual entertainment and some of its technical features, it is possible to turn to Steve Bishop’s essay in the free publication titled Hello, How May I Help You? which is handed out free in the exhibition. It can also be read in the small lounge provided for the purpose.

This publication might also have been titled Logbook of a Lonesome Internet User. But the narrative viewpoint used by the artist, in any event for the title, is situated on the other side of the computer screen, and emanates from real or virtual people (robots and avatars), which whom anyone can potentially converse in order to obtain information. Hello, How May I Help You? refers to those customer services, online assistance, and other chats which claim to reply directly to any kind of request. The artist has in fact had regular exchanges with marketing services for various brands and products, to obtain advice and record these conversations which speak for themselves, which is not meant to be a bad pun. On the face of it, all the speakers are real, but you never really know, all the same, to what degree they are answering freely, by way of behavioural attitudes and formulae drafted by a charter of good commercial conduct. With just rare exceptions, this restrictive corporate framework appears as soon as the questions are on the point of becoming somewhat personal. What results from this stylistic exercise with its many different limitations is a type of literature that is, in the end, quite accomplished, and evokes both the biased dialogue which Joaquin Phoenix has with a voice-over throughout Spike Jones’s film Her, and the capacity of a writer like Georges Perec, who introduced writing rules and told tales about people with an altogether commonplace fate.

From this waiting room which orchestrates more or less all the letdown of an expectation of an extraordinary meeting, it is possible to watch a video found on a single manufacturer’s website who makes these revolving and sliding doors. Made in various entrances, lobbies and showrooms dedicated to this type of product, it pulls the viewer into a waking dream in which see-through doors endlessly slide, like a sort of mechanical ballet accompanied by the throbbing tune of a piano piece. Despite the wink at Dan Graham’s famous installations and architectures made with two-way mirrors, it is rather the wit of another artist, also Canadian, Rodney Graham, which reverberates with this presentation that is as sincerely informed as it is funny.

If you turned left (or if you turned right and are now on the platform)...

Like those automatic doors which operate in a plastic way like potential surfaces for optical effects, intermittently creating illusions of volume, a pet animal's funerary urn revolves on its own axis. This rotating sculpture is placed on a platform and, in addition, on a cheap piece of furniture which raises it higher, thus putting it out of reach, like a mysterious object or an ornament, or simply one prey to many other interpretations. The circular motion is perceptible and it heightens the doubt about a form, for which we struggle to make out whether it is hollow, a volume, or flat like an image. Unlike the see-through doors of the adjacent room, Holding Pattern II is, for its part, reflecting, its convex surface diffracts reality referring to the deformation or de-materialization of the space in "noclip" mode in video games. "Holding pattern" is an aeronautical term describing loops or queues of aircraft waiting for permission to land. Holding Pattern II is thus another way of talking about waiting (or expectation), be it in the daily round or more broadly during life; the funerary urn can easily act as a metaphysical symbol, a vanitas-like still life. But what NOCLIP manages above all to recount with subtlety and aptness is this form of excessive sentiment, loss of scale, and loss of a certain evolution of the affects which hallmark our day and age, and this spirit really does inform the entire show. The exacerbation of personal projections on objects, fetishism and even animism are part and parcel of the atmosphere of NOCLIP and of a change which resides somewhere in this merger between the media-related public place and our private domestic sphere.

The complete hybridness of new spaces and social links can also be read here as a promise of levity, like a possible poetic re-enchantment of the everyday, no matter how uncertain, real or virtual it may be in terms of

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La Salle de bains is a not for profit space (French legal status: association loi 1901) which was founded by Gwenaël Morin, Lionel Mazelaygue and Olivier Vadrot in Lyon in 1998.

La Salle de bains produces contemporary art exhibitions, books, editions and events related to its ambitious annual exhibition programme.

La Salle de bains is committed to widening access to contemporary practice and runs a wide reaching education programme: artist-led projects, visits and activities for individuals, schools and communities within the local area.

The organisation also develops public and private partnerships, and off-site exhibitions.

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