

Peter Burr: Labyrinths

April 25, 2019 — Artists' Television Access

Peter Burr in person

this program is co-presented with Headlands Center for the Arts

"A mix of intricate patterns that vibrate, flicker, and hypnotize. Viewing Burr's work feels like entering into a dark, digital cave." (Alex Ginsberg, Electric Objects)

"I make infinite dungeons." (Peter Burr)

Working extensively with computer animation and the tools of the video game industry, the digital works of Peter Burr present infinitely sprawling landscapes and environments which vacillate between abstraction and figuration and describe dystopian narratives of endless questing. Recent work explores the video game trope of the endlessly mutating, self-constructing labyrinth. Visiting from Brooklyn as an Artist in Residence at Headlands Center for the Arts, Burr appears in person to expound on his process and radical synthetic aesthetic and to present a retrospective of works 2012–2017, including a work-in-progress preview of his latest immersive environmental video Dirtscraper.

"Burr's art conjures the future—projection screens picturing high density structures that resemble malls populated by people who move in slow motion; text by video game designer Porpentine that describes opinionless cultures; undulating black and white patterns designed to mesmerize the viewer. Unlike movies, though, which tend to center around heroes and villains, there's no morality attached to this environment. It's not good, or bad. It just is." — (Paddy Johnson, Art F City) www.artfcity.com/2016/09/23/hot-as-hell-peter-burrs-subterranean-utopias/

Alone with the Moon (2012) by Peter Burr; digital video, color, sound, 13 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

Burr creates a slow, liminal illusion in black-and-white, switching perspectives and matrices and crescendoing in time with Christopher Doulgeris's portentously pulsating soundtrack. (Peter Burr)

Special Effect (2014) by Peter Burr; digital video, color, sound, 22 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

Channeling Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), this film's fractured and spiraling narrative is traversed through a hypnotizing blend of live action and various digital animation styles. (Peter Burr)

The Mess (2016) by Peter Burr; digital video, color, sound, 14 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

This film follows the perspective of a solitary woman who descends into an abandoned subterranean 'arcology.' She is tasked with cleaning up the mess that has spawned from this feral structure, becoming lost in the process. (Peter Burr)

Pattern Language (2017) by Peter Burr; digital video, color, sound, 11 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

Architect Christopher Alexander's design theories are applied towards a generative video game labyrinth, resulting in this rhythmic animation made of rippling, skipping, and strobing arrays of light infused with programmatic digital pixelation. (Peter Burr)

DIRTSCRAPER (excerpts) by Peter Burr; digital video, color, sound, exhibition file from the maker

Dirtscrapper simulates an underground structure whose 'smart architecture' is overseen by artificial intelligences—spatial and social designers that observe, learn, and make changes to the system. Unaware of the control exerted by these entities, residents move through spaces that reflect varied economies and class hierarchies. Periodically this system will interject one of 48 cinematic interludes that reveal different facets of life in this decaying arcology. (Peter Burr)

Descent by Peter Burr; desktop performance; color, sound, from the maker

In 1562, Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder completed a painting called *The Triumph Of Death*. In this panoramic landscape the sky is blotted out by black smoke; ships and dead fish litter the ocean shore; and an army of skeletons experiment with myriad death techniques. The living are badly outnumbered and the variety of fated tortures seems endless. There is little room for whimsy in this tableaux.

Over 200 years earlier, a nasty plague, commonly known as the Black Death, left a cruel and massive mark on European civilization, wiping out half of Europe's total population. This was a quiet pervasion of death—an invisible pathogen carried by herds of tired rats. This plague triggered a series of social and economic upheavals with profound effects on the history of medieval Europe, guiding its survivors into the sort of self-inflicted darkness pictured by the Elder Bruegel.

Looking back at this historical trajectory alongside Mark Fingerhut and Forma I created a spiraling digital virus aptly titled *Descent*—a meditation on one of humanity's blackest hours. Taking the form of a desktop application, *descent.exe* gives the user a brief glimpse of a world descending into darkness—an unrelenting plague indifferent to the struggles of the user. There is a silver lining, however, tucked into the software's final sweep. An equanimous watcher, reduced to a single eye, looks on as the plague of rats that has infested your desktop destroys itself. (Peter Burr)

Drop City (2019) by Peter Burr

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