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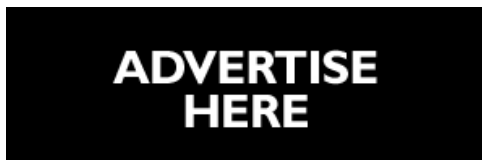
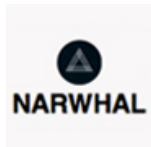


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## Interview: Alex McLeod Monday, August 15, 2011



For the past two years, it has seemed like Toronto-based Alex McLeod's work is everywhere; he has had recent shows internationally in New York, Barcelona, Sao Paulo, Denver, Philadelphia, San Jose, Rio de Janeiro, and New Zealand. Back home, his work was included in the *Cart Blanche 2* catalogue (published by Magenta Press in 2008), functioned as the primary promotional imagery for the *Art Toronto* in 2010, and featured prominently in Toronto's Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art 2010 summer group show, *Empire of Dreams*.

Since graduating from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 2007, McLeod has become best known for his computer-generated digital images of fantastical fabricated landscapes. On August 25, [Angell Gallery](#) will present their second solo exhibition of his work in a show titled "Distant Secrets".

[The Ministry of Artistic Affairs](#) invited Angell Gallery Associate Director Gareth Brown-Jowett to interview McLeod about his work, his working process, and his upcoming exhibition.

## The World's Best Ever

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GBJ: Let's start with the basics. What materials/programs are you using to create your latest body of work?

AM: I'm still using the same ones I've always used, a mix of 3D rendering/modelling suites and a tiny bit of Photoshop. Actually this time around I've been using UDK (Unreal Engine 3 – a professional development framework used to create video games, advanced visualizations and detailed 3D simulations on the PC and iOS.) to build the interactive video installation. It's free and pretty simple to get started in, but can get incredibly tricky. At least for me.

GBJ: You studied Painting and Drawing at the [Ontario College of Art and Design](#) and now your practice is based solely in the digital realm. What was the catalyst for this shift?

AM: Getting sick of paint under my nails was a major motivator. Nah, not really, honestly I only ever painted because I couldn't get my ideas out there any other way. I built all of my prep sketches on the computer, and once I was comfortable going full digital I did.



GBJ: Related to the previous question: I've never seen a painting or drawing by you that wasn't done on the computer –

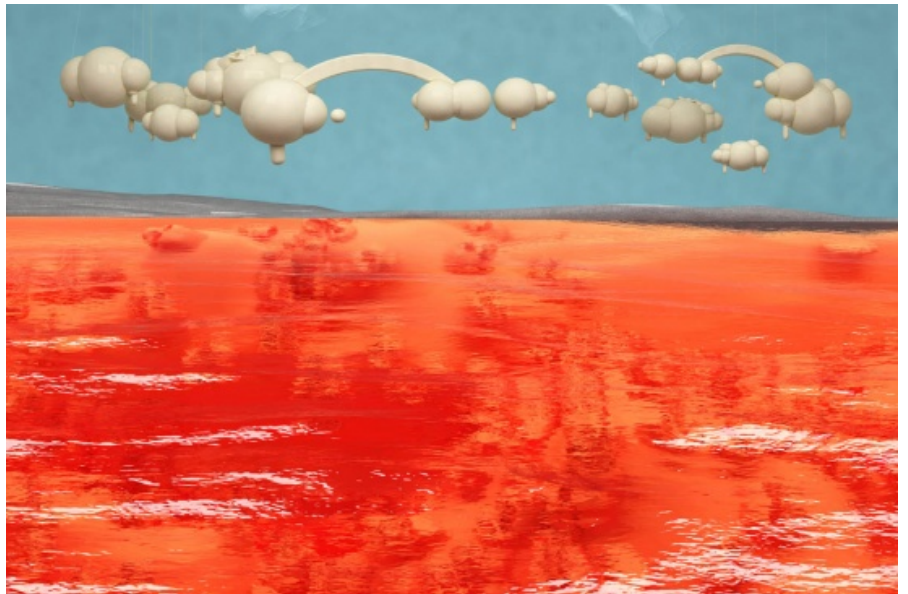
do any exist? If so, have you ever exhibited them or are they sitting in boxes in your parent's basement?

AM: Oh for sure, they are out there, in college I did the art fair and sold drawings starting at like \$7.



GBJ: In 2010 you had your first solo exhibition, "Spectral," at Angell Gallery - how has the work progressed from that exhibition to what you've created for "Distant Secrets"?

AM: "Spectral" was done just when a new version of my software was released, so I was able to cram a lot of stuff in the scenes that I couldn't before. Because I was so enamoured with how dense I could make the pieces I never let myself pull back. So this time around I made a point of producing a couple of simple images. That would be the major one for me, that and some new materials and assets.



GBJ: "Distant Secrets" will include an interactive piece – can you tell me a bit more about this work and its functionality?

AM: It's kinda like DOOM but made with my assets, and no shooting, or other players. I don't really want to call it a video game because it's non objective but it's pretty much a video game. I hope people like it!

GBJ: Why do you choose not to include people within your work even though the work clearly suggests the presence of a human influence?

AM: Because I want the work to exist within a vacuum of time and space. As soon as people are in a work they tell of their time and place by clothing (or lack thereof) and activities.



GBJ: I've noticed in many of your works that you include a hidden skull. What's the deal with that?

AM: I use them as symbols for the transformation of matter, which is what the work is about. Death and rebirth, how our loved ones in a cemetery are still alive through the grass that grows above them.

GBJ: When Angell Gallery displayed your work at the Pulse New York Art Fair (2011) I encountered more than a few people who thought that your work was a photographic print of an elaborate maquette. Digitally generated clouds appear to be suspended by string, faux walls and backdrops are included in many of the works. Are you intentionally attempting to have viewers perceive the work as something non-digital? Is there significance to what many would perceive as deceptive elements in your work?

AM: Yeah there's a few reasons, mainly I really like that artificial aesthetic. Nothing is rendered literally, but rather through a placeholder (fake versions, like clouds on strings) that represent something that really exists in the world. It being digital further separates the real - unreal. It would just be the worst if I rendered real looking clouds. Richter owns clouds anyways.

GBJ: How much consideration do you give to the titles of your work? I've noticed over the past few years of working with you that they tend to be 1 or 2 word titles. Do they have a significant connection to the work itself or are they more an afterthought?

AM: This past show they are all working titles. Usually I would go in and rename them with **Bob Ross** inspired titles, mix of

grandeur and cheese.

GBJ: What new avenues do you plan on exploring with your work throughout the remainder of 2011 and 2012? How do you see your work expanding beyond the association of the digital "Candyland" world?

AM: I'm going to make really boring tiny black and white paintings. And music/karaoke videos with 3D people and rappers.

GBJ: I know that you spend a significant amount of time on a computer. You're always the first to respond to an email and the first to comment on Facebook posts. Your work is also heavily discussed in the blog realm. Having said that, if you are that plugged into the digital world and if you create your work digitally through the use of completely digital elements then why present your images in an analog way, eg. a print?

AM: For a few reasons, first that prints are sharper than monitors. And once they are printed they require no energy or technology to be viewed. Also since the work so heavily emulates photographic characteristics it's only appropriate for its output to match.

GBJ: Do you ever see your work transferring over into the real world through sculpture or installation?

AM: Yeah for sure, I've established some fabricating contacts this year, so whenever I've got the time and appropriate project it'll happen.

Alex McLeod  
"Distant Secrets"  
Angell Gallery  
12 Ossington Avenue, Toronto  
August 25 - September 24, 2011  
Opening Reception August 25, 6-9pm

Interview by Gareth Brown-Jowett for The Ministry of Artistic Affairs. All images courtesy of Angell Gallery.

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