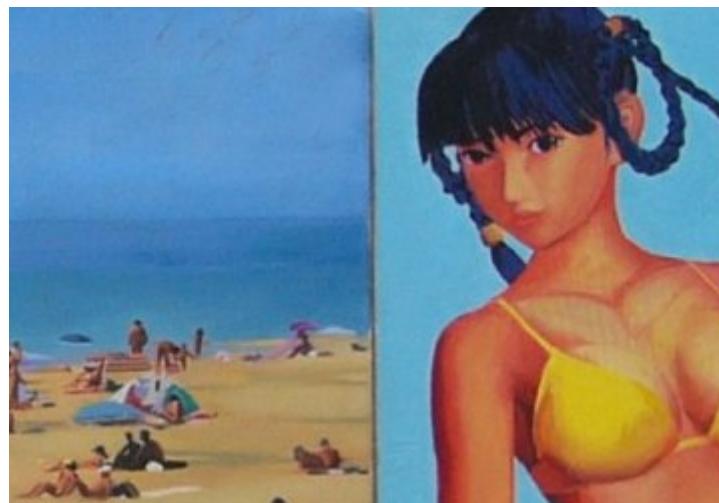


Jose Quesada

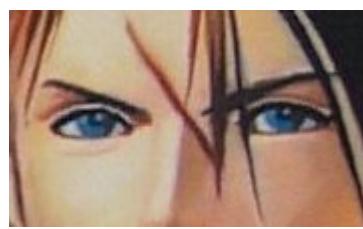
proposal for an exhibition at [Future Tenant Gallery](#), Pittsburgh, 2005

Note: this is an exhibition project. There are completed paintings, unfinished paintings, and preparatory photos with descriptions of the final work. This proposal is also presented as a web site, of which you are holding a paper version now. The preparatory photos are marked as (in preparation*). There isn't really that much difference between the final painting (oil on canvas) and the photo, so I have presented the photos to give a better idea of what the exhibition is all about. I think the topic treated in this proposal can be particularly appropriate for the Future Tenant art gallery and its expected audience in the technological and cultural environment of Pittsburgh.



beach(2000). detail

I paint video-game characters. They are carefully designed to be *cool*, sexy, appealing in any way imaginable. Since they are part of a virtual reality, their whole environment can be created and recreated at whim. If they are 'transplanted' to the frozen, time-less world of the 'oil on canvas', something magic happens: they are no longer that different from the flesh-and-bone people that inhabit reality characters, movie characters, etc have a very short life span: they are ephemera. However, people associate traditional forms of art (e.g., oil on canvas) with transcendence, historical value, immortality. In my work, I play with the juxtaposition of these stereotypes.



Untitled (2000). detail

Reality, and lies that we buy into

See the following definitions from dictionary.com :

Sophistication

1. To cause to become less natural, especially to make less naive and more worldly.
2. To make impure; adulterate.

3. To make more complex or inclusive; refine.

cool

1. Fashionable: conforming to the custom, fashion , or established mode
2. NONCHALANT stresses an easy coolness of manner or casualness that suggests indifference or unconcern
3. dandy, divine, glorious, groovy, hunky-dory, keen, nifty, sensational, swell.

Art has become more sophisticated with evolution, and as such, more dependent on the context. Recent pieces of art have no meaning unless they are understood in their cultural context, e.g., John Cage's allegoric compositions. Current exhibitions in main modern art museums are not understood by people with no background in history of art (context). Installations, videos, conceptual art... are strange to people, who enjoy more their newspaper comic strips. Since other modern, non-artistic cultural phenomena of our time are very context-dependent too, art is losing its privileged status and becoming mainstream in those popular elements: movies, comics, and lately, videogames. The amount of effort invested in research on human behavior and design in videogames is surprising. The final objective of these efforts is to fabricate *cool*: a temporal, perishable good that is easily understood and appreciated by the general public that doesn't understand what's inside the museums.

This is an after-pop and after-Kitsch criterion for art value.

Current art merit criteria have less to do with beauty and more to do with *cool* .

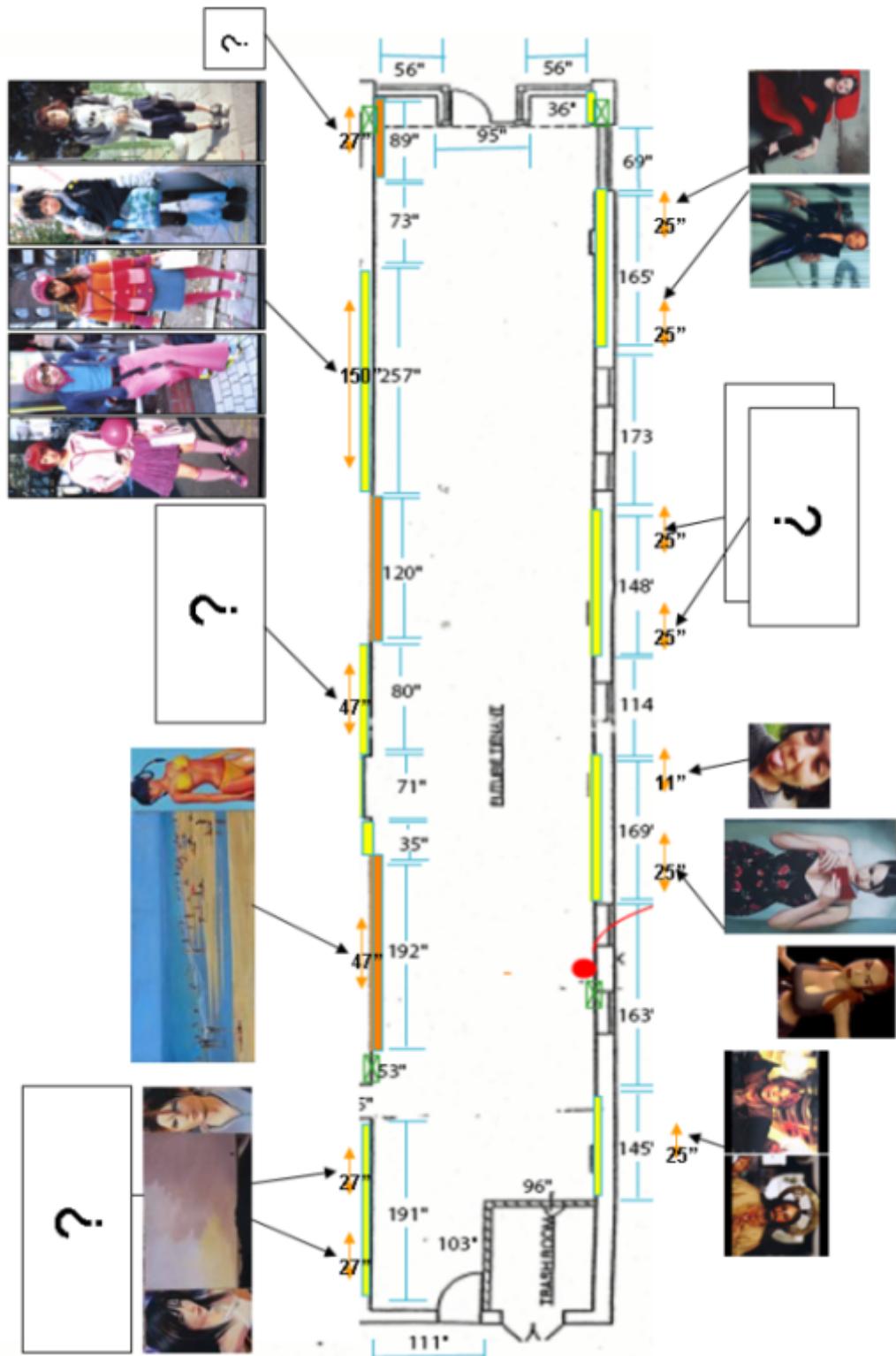
I'm interested in the contrast of "*coolness*" and "beauty". Most people, if asked, would agree in that art should be beautiful. Kitsch art has the most powerful reflection on "beauty", showing that extremely ugly things can "turn around the score" and become beautiful. Contemporary trends in TV (Reality shows, variety shows with "freaks") show that people may tire of prefabricated, highly-selected objects of desire (e.g., top models), and may enjoy their selves more when the display shows mundane, somewhat ugly, but closer, "normal person". That is, bad taste could easily become mainstream, and in some countries (for example, Spain) is.

On a related topic, I'm interested in the process of selection that happens when the artist presents some object to the public. Richter postulated that we could eliminate the selection process in painting. He showed that he apparently didn't care about what topic he was painting. In my opinion, Richter's work is not a discourse about the idea of selection, but a reflection on representation, and why it is still worthwhile to paint in the 21st century.

In my work, I use photography too. It can be my own, or any other published picture, from fancy fashion photography to amateur out-of-focus, red-eyed shots of best friends in parties. They can also be screen captures of videogames or other virtual reality situations that are heavily designed for a sophisticated public that consumes them in huge amounts. I'm interested in the borders of the concept of reality, or 'realistic representation', and how people buy consciously this lie. For example, today we all look at photographs, movies, vector graphics, etc. and get caught in the fiction without asking; this was absolutely impossible in the 18th century, where painting was the only mean to represent reality visually.

One basic motif how art can make the most real-life of situations unreal: for example by grabbing real people and make them look as sketches of fiction anime characters, in the 'japanese teens' series of drawings. These people are real, but they have internalized so many stereotypes from the fictitious world of Manga and design in their attempt to be '*cool*', that they look unreal.

Most of the work I present here are representations of representations. I like to play with the concept of representation (as presented in Palmer, 1978), and I use painting and drawing because they come with a huge collection of preconceived ideas that can be exploited in the spectator to produce the effect that I want.



[Enter the exhibition](#)

References

Palmer, S. E. (1978). Fundamental aspects of cognitive representation. In E. Rosh & B. B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Cognition and categorization* (pp. 259-303). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Favorite artists: [Gerald Richter](#), [Andreas Gursky](#), [Don Hertzfeldt](#), [William Wegman](#)

Favorite Galleries: [saatchi](#)

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<http://lsa.colorado.edu/~quesadaj/FTexhibitionProject/>



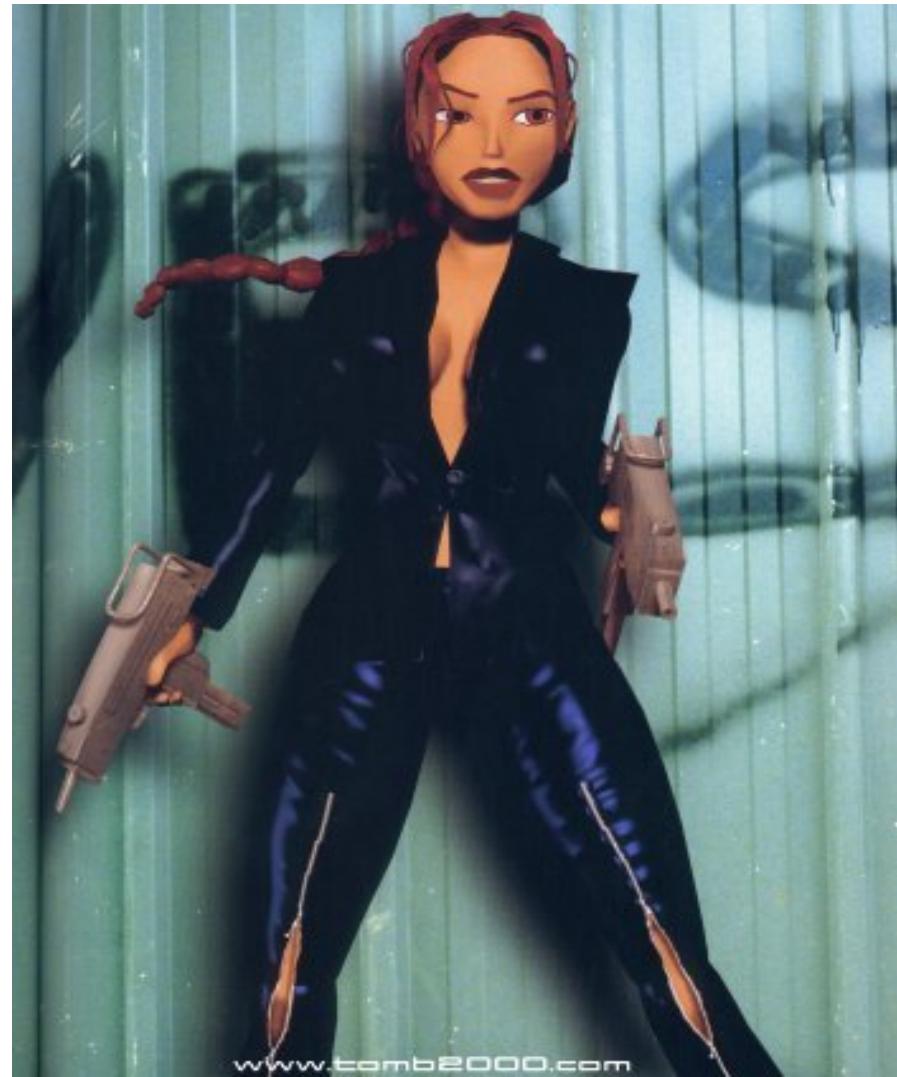
[TOP] Jose Quesada, High-five (in preparation*) two pieces of 30 x 30cm. 11 x 11 inch, Oil on canvas

The figures in this picture are loaded with meaning for completely different reasons. They are both related to ideal worlds that are substitutions for reality. Here we find two figures in similar pose, but in very different surroundings. One is scaping some kind of war robot that chases him; the other bless the emptiness of a living-room in a completely static setting. They are both crafted, designed objects.

Imaginity has been exploited by kitsch artists to satiety. One of this images could be easily found on top of a TV set, while the other takes place inside. They both sacrifice the desires of trascendence, eternity, etc... of the different people who inhabit the living-room.

The black borders fulfill two fuctions: (1) it just makes the picture square, and (2) brings back the stereotypes associated with the film industry (cinemascope), as if we were watching two stracts of some strange movie. It also help to relate both paintings, emphasizing what they share.

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[TOP] Jose Quesada, Model in red chair (2000), 30 x 42 cm, 16 x 11 inch, Oil on canvas (left), in preparation* (right)

This is a picture taken from the ads of some famous boutique in London about 7 years ago. It will be hung together with a painting of Lara Croft (an example, not the final picture, is shown right). It is an elaboration of this [previous](#) idea.

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[TOP] Jose Quesada, Untitled (2000), 68 x 28 cm, 27 x 10.6 inch, Oil on canvas

The couple depicted is taken from "Final Fantasy VII". They are videogame characters, painted using the most traditional technique (oil on canvas). The middle landscape is a copy of a Richter painting. He used a photography to create his painting. The three parts are, then, representations of a representation.

As you probably know, Richter claims to be "indifferent" to subject matter. However, following his work in his atlas project and in what he actually ends up painting, one can see that this indifference is utopic. Richter did select his themes, although his criteria may be really obscure. In my case, I just found the whole "romanticism" of the Richter painting funny when put in between these two virtual reality lovers. In an stretch of the Kitsch ideals, everything in this painting is exquisitely "artificial". We all (the designers of the characters, Richter, me) fake not to care for some ideals, but we do.

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[TOP] Jose Quesada, Model with Red book (in progress), 30 x 42 cm, 16 x 11 inch, Oil on canvas

This is a picture taken from the ads of some famous boutique in London about 7 years ago. The painting is unfinished. It will be hung together with a painting of Lara Croft (an example, not the final picture, is shown right). Lara is a sociological phenomenon, with plenty of fan sites where designers around the world recreate her vectorized curves in millions of different poses and situations. Lara was designed to be sexy, appealing. She is virtual. She is the maximum exponent of what a woman means for a certain sector of the population. She is, of course, unreachable, just an idea (Note again how romantic ideas are still disguised in our cyber-world). It can be represented as a few equations that describe her volume, and by a matrix of colors that describe her skin. Sometimes, her rendering is not even very realistic. But she is sexy.

Next to her, our human model (probably selected from a pool of millions) looks shy, self-centered, ...
insignificant.

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[TOP] Jose Quesada, random-silly-pic-001, (in preparation*), Oil on canvas, 30 x 30 cm, 12 x 12 inch

I don't know the person on the picture, nor the photographer, it is simply a really bad photo with no artistic pretensions. Transforming this subject into an artistic object (classical oil-on-canvas) transmits the ideas that the theme is not important, anything is "paintable". My idea is to collect several amateur pictures, possibly online, and use convert them into paintings.



[TOP] Jose Quesada, Beach (2000) 120 x 42 cm, 47 x 16.5 inch. Oil on canvas

The virtual girl (from the videogame "dead or alive") stares nonchalantly towards a spanish beach. The contrast between her perfect, designed body and the mundane images of fat ladies under horrible umbrellas spreading lotion over their voluminous bodies is striking. The whole composition takes the attention of the spectator to the right, but the gaze of the girl returns it to the center.



"fruits", (in preparation*) graphite on paper, 48" x 22"

These are real people in the streets of the neighborhood of Harajuku, Tokio!

Many say their parents don't approve so they meet and make a performance out of transforming into their characters with make up and costume. These Japanese, who are traditionally shy, completely become someone else being in public (which is raised to a performance art). In Western countries, the closest thing that we can enjoy to this display are Drag Queens. But I digress. These people are manga -fied. The idea here is to try to draw them in an sketchy but realistic way (simply pencil on white continuous paper). They will be drawn in real-life size. Although they are real people drawn in real-life size the spectator will still probably assume that they are just some large sketches for some manga characters. That is, we are playing with the fact that drawing (sketching) is easily associated with invention, a way of materialize things that are only in the mind. This people may look invented even when drawn very realistically.

NOTE: This pictures are not mine, but photographer Shoichi Aoki's. Technically, I shouldn't even have them online. They will be replaced with the drawings as soon as I complete them, or the publisher's lawyer calls :). These are not the final figures, I may change them