

The White Cube of the Virtual World Art Space, part two

By Lythe Witte/Christy Dena



In [part one](#) of this series I asked the question: is there a new way to experience art in SL? Using Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's types of remediation I showed examples of how, at present, the real life art space (particularly the 'white cube' aesthetic) is mimicked and refashioned in SL. In part two of this series I explore aspects of SL that have the potential to be a new

way of experiencing art specific to a virtual world.

Four: Absorption

Bolter and Grusin describe this type of remediation as when the new medium tries to 'absorb the older medium entirely, so that the discontinuities between the two are minimized' (p.47). However, they argue that there is no way a new medium can completely disengage from an old medium, for the new medium will always be 'dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways'. But, the search for a virtual world specific experience of art is a mighty goal. [Henrik Bennetsen](#), a visiting researcher at the Stanford research project into creativity in SL, posted this proclamation at the project blog: [Life to the Second Power](#):

'We started this project with a sense of excitement arising from the potential of the digital achieve to change how art is created and experienced. [...]Let us try to do one better than merely translating Lynn's [Lynne Hershman] art into something virtual. Let us discuss and investigate how we may come with a suggestion for a new language for art in virtual space. Because art that is native to this new medium deserves the respect its own language implies. This is what I believe we should be doing here.' ([What Are We Doing Here?](#))

So, how have artists/programmers completely absorbed the old and created something new? In order to create something specific to SL we need to know its affordances (what the technology lends itself to).

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Experience is the Artwork

Rather than persist the static notion of an artwork and an art space, the performance and installation aspects can be explored. Thea provides a short but [alluring review](#) of DanCoyote Antonelli's *ZeroG Skydancer* at [Second Life Art News](#):

If you have never seen DanCoyote Antonelli's Zero G Skydancers, you have not lived in SL...scratch that, you have not lived, period.. A combination of mystical atmosphere stemming from the background music of Mic Mahoney and the elegant dance of the sky performers unites in creating a totally new experience of the virtual space.



DanCoyote Antonelli's *ZeroG Skydancers*
([picture sourced from SL Art News](#))

I have not had the pleasure of experiencing DanCoyote Antonelli's ([DC Spensley](#)) art performance but the work does obviously point toward an aesthetically pleasing experience. Perhaps the virtual world equivalent of the 'white cube' is fog (see next artwork) or darkness? The same principle applies: the removal of visual interference, but instead of a 2D wall you have a starring night or mysterious cloud.

[Davan Camus'](#) *Cubes* ([SLurl](#)) takes the installation experience to another level. In this work you teleport to a steel room with no windows or door. This isn't an entrance to a gallery, it is the artwork. You teleport inside in the artwork. And the experience? Figuring out how to get out, or further into, the artwork. I will not describe in detail this wonderful work as I don't want to spoil the joy of discovery *Cubes* affords. It is more a game, having elements of play that evoke Espen Aarseth's 'aporia' (where the person experiences difficulty, confusion, is seeking) and then the 'epiphany' (when there is a finding, a link out).

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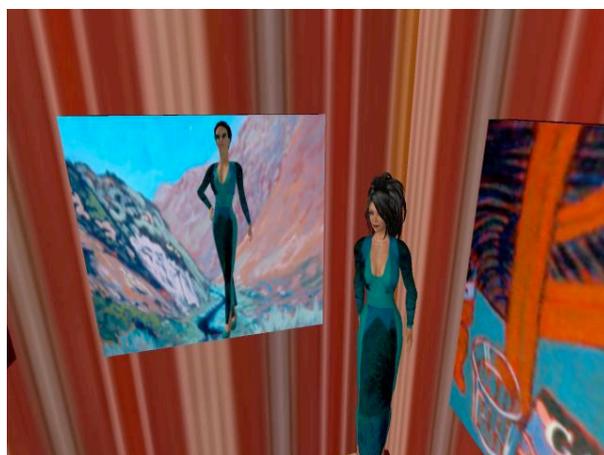
Lythe Witte in Davan Camus' Cubes

(see also the image at the head of this article)

All Pixels Are Created Equal

Continuing on this theme of moving closer to an artwork and removing the need for a space at all is the potential merging that can happen in a virtual world. A real world art space cannot offer the merging of artwork, space and self (beyond the mental experience). In a virtual world, artwork, art space and experiencer share the same atoms: pixels (representing code). There is no distinction between paint, canvas, flesh and light.

One of my favourite pieces that leans towards the potential of this shared cell structure is Enjah Mysterio's *Wearable Art* ([SLurl](#)). In Mysterio's paintings is an avatar, wearing a dress that persists the colours and style of the surrounding images. You can then wear that same dress yourself, as you can see in the picture of me (Lythe) wearing the Rio Grande Outfit. This notion could go a lot further though, and I look forward to finding out about experiences that do explore this.



Lythe Witte wearing Mysterio Wearable Art

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Plot your Path

A third-party service that augments SL provides an opportunity for a unique way of sharing and experiencing a journey into an art space. Cristiano Midnight's [Snapzilla](#) allows you to upload 'photos' (screenshots) you take inworld to a website for all to see. You can annotate and tag them, people can comment and the image links directly (with a slurl) to the location you took the photo. This means you can document your path and provide the means for others to share your experience either in real time or posthumously.



So, I started my own tour, documenting with photos and text my experience entering a space and my thoughts about it. I've had people comment and say they are eager to log in a check out the places I've been too. I tag my journey '[lythes art and entertainment tour](#)'; but why not start your own? In fact, I've created a '[slatenight tour](#)' tag that I encourage you all to use so that we can aggregate the different paths residents are taking. Share the experience in any way you like...let's see what happens.

I haven't covered even the tip of the iceberg of art spaces in Second Life. There are many I'm aware of that aren't included in this article and many I am yet to discover. Indeed, SL is so big it is not possible for any single person to see everything. So, let's pull our collective intelligence. I've started a thread in our forum to explore this further: *What examples of or ideas do you have for a new gallery experience or artwork in SL?*

[Have your say at the forum now](#)

Acknowledgements

Thankyou to [Stephen Jones](#), who when I rambled on about art in SL, steered me to Brian Doherty's work.

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