



Jen Liu, *Comfortably Numb* (still), 2006, 12.25 minutes - Courtesy of the artist, Upstream gallery and Virgil de Voldere gallery

Without Sun

Virgil de Voldere - 526 West 26th Street, 4th Floor, New York NY

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Angst marks most representations of adolescents in contemporary art. It jives well with an art world full of individuals who feel misunderstood, excluded, and judged. Almost everyone's memory of adolescence is rich with disappointing and awkward episodes. What is often missing from the imagery and the narratives that frame them is how teens cope. Virgil de Volère's current group show explores fantasy as a coping mechanism. Each work interacts with this impulse to project oneself into an imaginary world of fantasy where the subject embraces an alternate self image.

Playing video games is one such example of fantasy as a coping mechanism. As a superhero in an virtual world, the gamer experience a sense of agency on a level that would be impossible in the real world. Living at home, relying upon the largesse of parents, and accepting the cruel fate of mundane chores pales in comparison to ruling the streets, defeating menacing foes, or shifting the balance of global political power. During a phase of life when parents and teachers constantly remind youth of how much they have to learn, honing gaming skills can offer a refreshing sense of mastery. Small wonder that many teens invest their identities so heavily in such games.



Adriaan Van der Ploeg, *semNL*, 2007, C-Prints on aluminum, Courtesy of the artist, Haas and Fischer gallery and Virgil de Voldere, Gallery

Adriaan Van der Ploeg's photographs capture the facial expressions of boys playing online video games. Obviously, the boys felt self-conscious when the camera first set its sight on them. But der Ploeg patiently watched their awareness of the outer world dissolve as they delved deeper into the drama of their online role playing games. They soon assumed their "natural" expression before a computer. In *semNL*, the light casts thick shadows over one boy's eyes as his eyebrows scrunch, producing an ominous gaze. The pursed lips suggest intense concentration and the slight smile at their corner suggests that he derives some level of delight from his intense inner focus. As the artist remarked to your commentator, "the spiritual self is more important than the real self." The intensity of the facial expression captures the depth of teen's investment in these imaginary identities.

Video games are not the only means to project the self into an imaginary world. Bordy Condon's video *Without Sun* reveals how narcotics can achieve a similar effect of propelling the adolescent self into a dream world. Composed of YouTube clips of various teens on the (legal) drug *Salvia divinorum*, the piece runs about 15 minutes, roughly the length of the intense hallucinogenic state induced by the drug. It follows the same strategy of der Ploeg by offering a mimetic representation of teens seeking an(other) self. During the trip, all energies focused on experiencing the wild dream world into which self awareness propels itself and revels. Just as gamers are no longer aware of their face, these trippers are not cognizant of their contracted expressions or gestures. Although the subjects' ages vary and extend out beyond the phases of adolescence, the work is a telling example of a desire to project the self elsewhere.

Liu's art video *Comfortably Numb* creates its own fantasy world rather than illustrating the interaction between this world its participants. Watching her piece is like entering into the reverie of a lifelong Dungeons & Dragons geek. German teens dress in white hoods and prance through the woods to a soundtrack of Pink Floyd and Latin arias: it is like hearing a joke funny in theory but horrible in execution. Yet, the sheer audacity of this video makes it visually mesmerizing.



Avelino Sala, *Fuego Camina Conmigo* (video still), 2007, 2 minutes - Courtesy of the artist, Espacio Liquido and Virgil de Voldere Gallery

Fuego Camina Conmigo's video on the other hand depicts a flaming soccer ball that dribbles and bounces across the court. It is an apt analogy for the fascination that many teens feel towards sports and their athletes, or perhaps an adult fascination with the combustive and sometimes dangerous energies of youth. Athletics, for many young people, is both a site of refuge and an exhibition platform. Teens cast off their identities and invest their selfhood in the team spirit; the intoxicating excess of victory and the sting of defeat here find their twins in outside social experience.

Many teens escape from bitter episodes by projecting self-awareness into imaginary selves and reveling in fantasy worlds. By making this psychic process the subject of its summer show, the Virgile de Volere gallery has moved the conversation beyond the comparatively stale subject of angst and revealed one of its main causes. Escapism is more of a band aid solution than a permanent elixir. Didn't we all learn to eventually stop running from arguments about incomplete chores and just wash the damn dishes?