

Time Out

New York

Reviews

Michael Bell-Smith

“Focused, Forward,” Foxy Productions, through Sat 3 (see Chelsea)

Digital artists are not generally considered to be sensualists, but that is an apt description of Michael Bell-Smith. In his first solo show in New York—videos made of material appropriated from websites and video games—low-res pixels have all the emotive power of paint.

The self-portrait *Continue 2000* is one of two representations of the artist as a flaneur in Nintendoland, a garishly colorful, block-pixel place. A red-caped superhero stands on a peaked rooftop staring out at the saturated colors of the landscape swirling below him, accompanied by a tinny, MIDI-looped soundtrack: It's Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* cast in a video game.

Bell-Smith's narrative structures borrow more from gaming conventions than Hollywood plotlines, but the best works introduce moods of unease that are distinctly filmic. Gamers viewing

Some Houses Have Pools will be familiar with the recurring icons and diagonally scrolling landscapes, but as the house-fire smoke rolls in, engulfing an aerial view of an L.A. suburb, they are unable to intervene and stave off danger. Likewise, in a country where fear is routinely quantified in color-coded terror alerts, there's a certain bite to the looping image of animated birds (hawks and doves?) circling the nation's capital in *Birds Over the White House*. Despite his chosen medium, Bell-Smith is doing far more than just playing games.—Graham Parker

