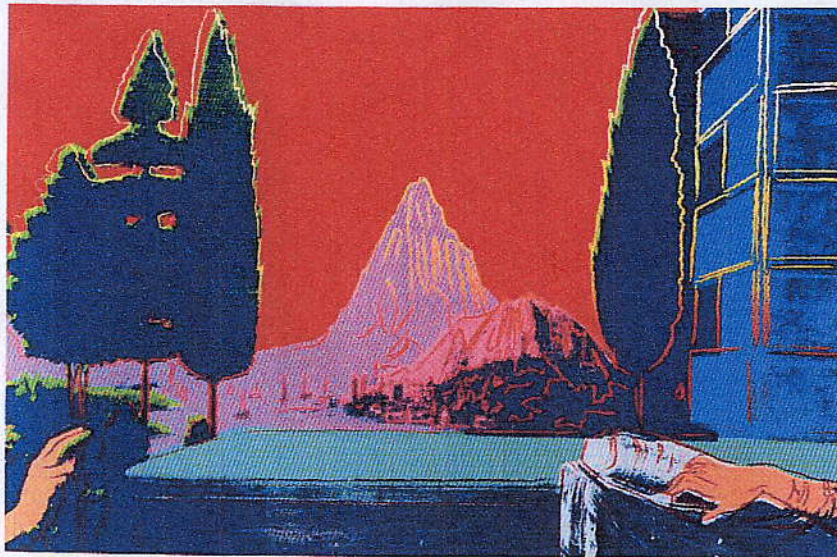


Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC  
in association with D Giles Limited, London



*Michael Bell-Smith*

In his short digital films, Michael Bell-Smith combines the graphic qualities of video games and animated cartoons with a painterly interest in color and composition. Several of his works adopt aerial perspectives, and most are wall-mounted like paintings.

For *Up and Away*, 2006, the artist reversed video-game dynamics by removing what is usually foregrounded, characters that embody aggression, competition, and conflict, in order to focus on the vast horizons, lush skiescapes, and irradiated landscape colors that are usually ignored or seen as incidental. This gesture recalls a series of Andy Warhol prints in which he re-edited masterworks by Renaissance painters and sometimes eliminated the foreground and heightened the effect of the remaining background with outlines and high-pitched color combinations. For both artists, the allure of their stylized landscapes rests equally on conventionality and unconventionality. Warhol's strategy was avowedly to rediscover the spiritual in art. Bell-Smith's appropriations establish a meditative zone.

Images roll up from the bottom like a litany of film credits or the roll associated with the malfunctions of early television sets. The speed for this vertical pan varies slightly, confounding the perspective and relative depth of each scene. *Up and Away* starts to feel like a flight through these various landscapes, a sensation reinforced by the "natural" wind sound that is part of the soundtrack. This sense figuratively implies that gaming represents a kind of a flight of fantasy, but it also literally recalls the whooshing of intergalactic travel associated with such cinematic gamer-godfathers as *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968, and *Star Wars*,