

## Enter Mind-Bending Simulated Realities at a New Exhibition

By DJ Pangburn — Jun 23 2015



UNSOLICITED MEMORIES; ARCHIVAL EXERCISES (<https://vimeo.com/93210649>) from andrea wolf yadlin (<https://vimeo.com/andreawolf>) on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com>).

In Argentine author Adolfo Bioy Casares' hallucinatory 1940 novella, *The Invention of Morel* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Invention\\_of\\_Morel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Invention_of_Morel)), a shipwrecked fugitive washes ashore on a deserted island. There, he finds islanders who mysteriously appear and vanish without ever noticing him, and two sets of suns and moons. A recording clues him into a mesmerizing truth [*Spoilers ahead*]: The islanders are dead, and an inventor named Morel has created a device that can record a deceptive simulated reality of the island, including its former lifeforms.

In *Memory Burn* (<http://www.bitforms.com/exhibitions/memory-burn>), a new Bitforms Gallery exhibition curated by Chris Romero, *The Invention of Morel* serves as a starting point for art that treads similar conceptual territory. Romero, who first came across *The Invention of Morel* two or three years ago—after reading other Latin American magical realists Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges—was intrigued by the novella's photographic device.



Canogar, *Enredos 1 (small)*, 2007 Kodak Endura photo mounted on aluminum 40" x 60" / 100 x 150 cm, frame

“It isn't film, and it isn't necessarily virtuality or the internet, but it is similar,” Romero tells The Creators Project. “The device is able to perpetuate images and actions essentially forever (long enough for another device to come along that could transfer someone's consciousness).”

Romero is drawn to artworks, often in the new media realm, that focus on “creating worlds or mythologies and documenting or preserving something.” He says this is strongly connected to art history, specifically in photography, film, still life and portrait painting, as a representation of what was or is. Romero is interested in how humans confuse simulations of reality—social media, for example—with the real.

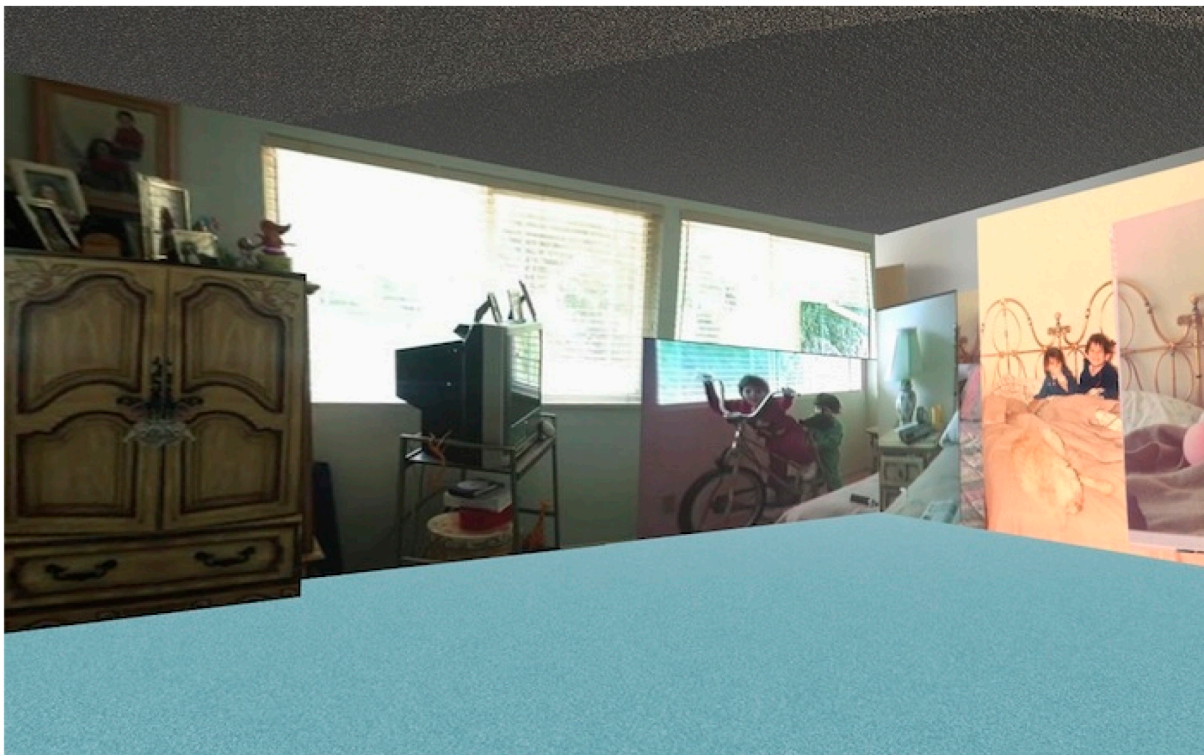


exonemo, *Body Paint - 50inch/Male/White*, 2015 50 inch 720p plasma screen, acrylic paint, video screen: 48 x 29 x 2 in / 121.9 x 73.7 x 5.1 cm video: 2 minutes



“That is where the translation began, reading Casares' text and seeing the characters confront this strange device and how it affects their perception of love, desire, mortality, eternity and so forth,” Romero says. “I wanted to explore what was happening in the present with these concepts.”

With contributions from Daniel Canogar (<http://danielcanogar.com/>), exonemo (<http://exonemo.com/>), Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (<http://lozano-hemmer.com/>), Sara Ludy (<http://www.saraludy.com/>), Sarah Rothberg (<http://sarahrothberg.com/>), Angela Washko (<http://angelawashko.com/>) and Andrea Wolf (<http://www.andreawolf.org/>), *Memory Burn* features art that explores ideas of the tactile and immaterial or presence and absence. Because his background in curating and conserving media art creates complexities when it comes to the work's longevity, emulation, and reproduction, these concepts, Romero says, drive *Memory Burn*.



Rothberg *Memory/Place: My House*, 2014-2015 virtual reality environment, Oculus Rift headset, swivel chair, CRT television monitor dimensions variable

"A common thread in the exhibition is, of course, memory and death," Romero notes. "The artists in the exhibition were ones I have wanted to work with for some time. Many of their works related closely to memory and death in relation to contemporary recording devices. The artists play with photography, video, film, and virtuality in ways that connect to Casares' text.

Some of the work, such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Please Empty Your Pockets* ([http://lozano-hemmer.com/please\\_empty\\_your\\_pockets.php](http://lozano-hemmer.com/please_empty_your_pockets.php)), grew out of specific awareness of *The Invention of Morel*. Japanese net artist duo exonemo, on the other hand, unwittingly evoked Casares' novella.





Sara

Ludy, *Fire Beach*, 2014 GIF file, website: [www.saraludy.com/firebeach.html](http://www.saraludy.com/firebeach.html)  
(<http://www.saraludy.com/firebeach.html>) dimensions variable

Exonemo created a new work from their *Body Paint* series that features hand-painted LCD screens displaying video of an individual painted in identical tone. “Kind of a poetic way of conveying that we live ‘forever’ through our devices,” Romero says.

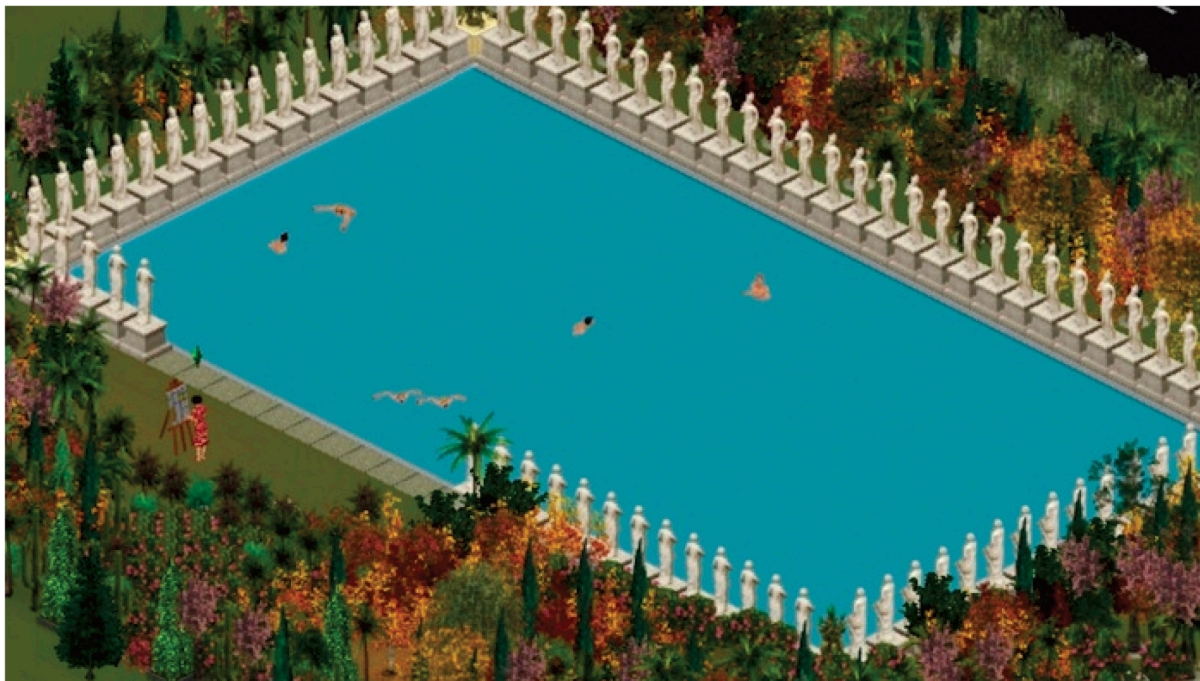
Sarah Rothberg, whose work relates to Casares’ text, continues her *Memory/Place* project in *Memory Burn*. Romero says she is building on her existing virtual construction and adding real-world components to it. Romero and Rothberg are also working on creating a virtual reconstruction of the exhibition that visitors can explore online.



"Level of Confidence" (2015) by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (<https://vimeo.com/128678514>) from bitforms gallery (<https://vimeo.com/bitforms>) on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com>).

"As images we exist long after our bodies decay—one consideration is virtual reality and uploading the mind, but it can be more simple than that," Romero says, noting that this is realized through selfies, digital calendar reminders, and mundane things stored on devices approaching full storage.

"We project ourselves into our devices, and use them as a surrogate or appendage for the self. There are also virtual worlds people explore or navigate through, creating a life for their avatar that is imbued with their spirit or essence. These things aren't necessarily good or bad, but they can be fun to play with," Romero adds.



*Washko, Disposable Muses (Or: Your Turn Now, Fuckers), 2013 Free Will Mode #1 HD 720p video 12:24 minutes*

*Memory Burn* opens at Bitforms Gallery (<http://www.bitforms.com/>) on July 10th and runs until August 16th.

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