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Climbing "Internet Mountains": A Conversation with Clive Holden

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oronto-based artist Clive Holden engages the prospect of chance in various random compositions through his use of randomization algorithms. Combining new digital technologies with lo-fi analog formats, these sequences of possibility literalize Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the *rhizome* (a philosophical concept relating to representation, among other things), which they describe as having "no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*."[1] As such, Holden's work presents a strong challenge to the very idea of the static, immobile image because the work dramatizes the simple drift of time. For this reason Holden's images remain performative, quite literally making themselves anew every moment *ad infinitum*, a kind of controlled chaos. Recently, Holden has drawn his attention to random compositions created for media lightboxes, media walls, and projections, making them with web technology that's been modded for offline purposes. But he has also been addressing the internet more generally by creating digital paintings, website artworks, and videos. In his latest series *INTERNET MOUNTAINS* (2014–present), he appropriates found imagery from the World Wide Web to produce fantastical digital landscapes and accompanying moving image works. Similar to his earlier work, these too depend on randomization processes to determine their visual trajectory, yet their approach is radically different. In both the digital paintings and internet videos, sunspots, orbs, and other abstract forms traverse the frame in a collision of analog and digital, real and surreal. I spoke with Holden via email exchange in May and July of 2015 about his recent projects and whatever else came to mind.

MATTHEW RYAN SMITH: I'd like to begin by trading how you arrived at your recent series INTERNET MOUNTAINS. What concerned you then, and how did that translate into now?

CLIVE HOLDEN: *INTERNET MOUNTAINS* showed up as an idea last

thinking about this growing tension between objects and the ephemeral. It's one of the most interesting border zones for making art; there's lots of energy to work with there. Today, we're seeing a battle between the older world of art forms with mass and texture—everything from sculpture to works on paper—versus fleeting or weightless forms on the other, including post-cinema, website artworks and net.art, conceptual data-based work, and even "social media art." It's all performance in a way: work that's dynamic and continually producing unique moments.

A year into the project, I know it has enough fuel to keep me interested until it's all made. Which is one of the ways I decide if I should make something. The project should be completed by 2017. We've always lived somewhere between mountains and idea. That relationship is basic to how we live, but now it's being expanded. We live partly online, but we still need food, air, some exercise, and physical human contact to function.

MRS: Chance has driven your practice for several years. In 2013, I reviewed your show of *Media, Mediated* (March 2–30, 2013) at Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto for *Afterimage* [Ed. note: See the review in *Afterimage* 40, no. 6] and noted that "utilizing the randomization and dynamism found in nature serves to unsettle and reconfigure [your] installations, transforming them into ever-evolving media." Was this an accurate description, and how is your new work engaging chance through algorithms?

CH: Nature is full of models for chance-based and dynamic structures. Ecosystems, for example—the way they continually adjust in response to events. Or a tree moving in the wind, where randomized movement is part of its strategy for balance and strength.

Both of my concurrent projects, *INTERNET MOUNTAINS* and *Media, Mediated* (2013–present) use nature, in the form of chance, as a making partner. My random com positions and website works use chance to complete themselves as we view them. I stand back and watch them too. These works give me ideas to use in object-based work like my digital paintings on paper. So I work in the middle of a conversation across big divides: between object and non-object; time-based and non-time-based or plastic; analog and digital; and 2-D versus 3-D.

MRS: Do you see randomized algorithms as chaotic or harmonious?

CH: It depends on whether they're used to create one state or the other. Algorithms aren't mysterious, they're just lines of instructions. They tell a computer what to do. Code can be seen as a musical score for algorithms instead of musicians. And if the algorithms include randomization as part of their sets of instructions, then it's like a score that includes rules for improvisation.

A simple algorithm might ask a computer to display an image *and* make it spin clockwise *and* do so every four seconds. When I add randomization to that algorithm, I'm just adding an "or" to the list of instructions—asking the computer to do this *or* that every four seconds. It means I'm letting go of some of my control in the realization