

## Mathew Zefeldt – Vistas

The vividly complex virtual world of Grand Theft Auto V (GTAV) is both workplace and source of entertainment for the artist Mathew Zefeldt. For his exhibition at Celaya Brothers Gallery (CBG) Zefeldt has continued to mine the State of San Andreas, creating a number of new, painfully elaborate acrylic paintings, inspired by screenshots generated playing the popular video game.

The new work obsesses over the smaller details from within the virtual world, alongside the strength of the uncanny valley like simulation. Each painting depicts a scene or moment from within the game, arranged in perfectly coordinated tiles and duplicated on the canvas. Some images are copied twice, whilst others are reproduced up to twenty-five times. This fascination with repetition and the laborious nature of creating each painting imitates how players continue to interact with the world of GTAV, even after being released over five years ago with over 110 million copies sold. Although, as any player of the popular video game knows, it's incredibly hard to re-enact a unique moment that occurs whilst playing within the open world. So, although when viewed from afar Zefeldt's paintings seem to be perfectly duplicating a distinctive moment, in reality, once you move closer and observe the intricate brush strokes, you begin to see subtle variation and a warmth of painterly gesture, rather than an emotionless, robotic precision that you might assume when first encountering the artist's work.

The instances captured within the new paintings are endless and varied, from a solitary bird squatting in a marsh to a red pickup truck driving down a country path. The labour-intensive act of repeatedly painting these screenshots, creating each tile almost identical, adds weight to these small moments of reflection, captured within the open world of GTA5, approximately 100 square miles in size.

Zefeldt's in depth work makes me want to return to the world of GTAV, to cruise through the computer-generated streets, creating my own distinctive narrative within the lifelike simulation. Although, with the recent implementation of an in-game casino, where players can exchange real world currency for in game dollars, I worry for the future of video games and what was once a safe space for virtual escapism. These digital experiences are being quickly capitalised on by corporate entities, decision makers who are disconnected from the players, and the real reasons why people love to escape into these immersive game worlds. However, rather than being horrified by this detailed, lifelike simulation of our physical world, Zefeldt immerses himself within it, playing the videogame as a near identical version of himself. Rather than playing the game's main missions, controlling a group of criminals, robbing banks and committing crimes around the city, Zefeldt prefers to play the game in his own way, ignoring assignments and enjoying the counterfeit copy of Los Angeles. Having grown up in California, the scenes that play out whilst he roams the open world, from bird watching to driving into oncoming traffic, are familiar but oddly uncanny.

The world of GTA5 is one without consequence. If you get hit by a car or jump from a plane, you'll find yourself waking up the next morning, refreshed and ready for another digital day, free to do anything you can think of. Perhaps this is why Zefeldt is so intent on duplicating what he experiences within this world, dedicating hours of time in his studio to creating stereogram esque images, obsessively documenting every detail. Through the paintings we are invited into Zefeldt's memories, experiences and discoveries. For centuries artists, and particularly painters, have been documenting the world's they inhabit through their art, and Zefeldt is continuing that tradition, albeit in a more contemporary context. As the video game industry has grown larger than the music and movie industries combined, the experiences and worlds that are being created are growing larger and more detailed, offering an increasingly seductive escape from reality, with Zefeldt's style and subject matter acting as an enthralling invitation into these virtual worlds.

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Mathew Zefeldt (b. 1987, Antioch, CA) is currently a professor of painting and drawing at University of Minnesota. He received his MFA in studio art from UC Davis in 2011 and went to undergrad at UC Santa Cruz. His work has been exhibited at Joshua Liner Gallery, NY; Big Pictures, Los Angeles; Celaya Brothers, Mexico City; and MOHS Exhibit, Copenhagen.

Bob Bicknell-Knight