

SEAN KELLY

Schwendener, Martha. "Review: David Claerbout's Video Art via Video Games," *The New York Times*, April 28, 2016.

The New York Times

Review: David Claerbout's Video Art via Video Games



An installation view of "Light/Work," by David Claerbout, at Sean Kelly. Credit 2016 David Claerbout/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York and Jason Wyche/Sean Kelly, New York

Video games emerged in the early 1980s, a decade after video art, but the games' impact on the form has been moderate, compared with their powerful influence on feature filmmaking. David Claerbout, though, is among the artists who have adopted gaming techniques, which you can see clearly in "Light/Work," this Belgian-born artist's first exhibition at Sean Kelly.

The earliest of the five moving-image works here, "Travel" (1996-2013), is a 12-minute single-channel HD animation that features the roving perspective and tight, closed environment of video games as it moves through a lush, "natural" landscape. The video eventually recedes to an aerial view, revealing that the nature scene is inside a copse of trees amid highly cultivated farmland.

The newest work, "Olympia (the real-time disintegration into ruins of the Berlin Olympic stadium over the course of a thousand years)" (2016), is a more austere piece that moves in a familiar (from video games) way, panning perspective around a digitally recreated stadium. "King (After Alfred Wertheimer's 1956 picture of a young man named Elvis Presley)" (2015-2016) remakes a black-and-white photo of Elvis Presley, approaching the images from angles that would be impossible in a still photograph. "Oil workers (from the Shell company of Nigeria) returning home from work, caught in a torrential rain" (2013) uses the same technique, transforming a photo taken from the Internet into a grand, historical image, like an updated 17th-century Dutch or Flemish group portrait.

Throughout, the trick is to translate gaming technology into meaningful art without resorting to gimmicks. Sometimes, as in the bombastic "Olympia," Mr. Claerbout falls short. In other works, though, the technology is used to thoughtful and moving effect.