

# Focus: JONATHAN MONAGHAN

## HEADSPACE:

STRATEGIES FOR EXPLORING DIGITAL ART

By Kelly Gordon

*Looking at Time-Based Media incorporates many of the same strategies that are useful for investigating painting and sculpture, as well as extra dimensions available only in media art. To consider the subtleties in these works:*

- 1 | *Examine how light functions in the work. Is a familiar time of day, time of year indicated, suggested by consistent shadows OR has the artist implied a place immune to the physical aspects of everyday reality and lighting. How would you characterize the lighting?*
- 2 | *Note the vantage point. Is it from above? Below? Is the camera-eye stationary or does it move? What suggests conventional perspective, horizon lines, relative scale and the usual speed and scope the eye has, to intake what it is beholding? How does the artist provide the viewer with superpowers - to see a wider vista, to move quickly through a place, to look from above, on high, gods'-eye like, as his scenarios unfold.*
- 3 | *Consider how Monaghan's work exploits the ancient and ambiguous "meanings" of animals and architecture as projections of human ambition and vulnerability. Are the Lamb, the Lion, the Stag, stand-ins for ourselves? Projections of our leaders? Presented as victims of sacrificial entities? Evocative of some obscure folklore? Note he has chosen animals with innate appeal, but also those who have possessed specific attributes - on heraldic, in folklore, in religion. Here he "harvests" viewers' agglomeration of associations and teases various implications.*

- 04 | *Many of Monaghan's allusions are to older periods of art -from the lacey baroque jewel- like architecture to the pat, styles of early modern interiors. Note what surfaces and textures are like and unlike these inspirations.*
- 05 | *What still frame would you select to represent each work and why? How would you describe it over the phone without images? What's is most puzzling? Most obvious? Most memorable?*
- 06 | *How consistent (or not) is the force of gravity throughout each work? What passages seem to insist that gravity is operable as it is in our everyday physical world and what scenarios signal the space we are observing is not subject to physics so much as fantasy?*
- 07 | *The tenets that defined 1930s-40s Surrealism include the depiction of floating and flying, fluidity, oozing and dripping, interpenetrating holes and planes, switch-ups of relative scale, an odd, slightly menacing sensibility, gloss, disjunctive human and animal forms, psycho-sexual and power-play dynamics, all of which hover above specific interpretation. What in Surrealism constituted it's power to shock and beguile and on a scale of one to ten, how Surrealistic is Monaghan's oeuvre?*
- 08 | *Catalog the spaces, surfaces, scenarios that underscore the chilliness suggested in these works. What aspects of everyday life, do they feel drained of? What aspects do they oddly evoke?*
- 09 | *Consider the edge of the work like the frame of a painting. Mentally "entering" the space, what would your nose hit first? What's closest? What's farthest away? What is the "amount" of space each scenario unfolds in? What does the artist use to reveal space -consistent perspective? Shadows and shading? Conventional indoor and outdoor signifiers of dimensions?*
- 10 | *What is within the music that underscores the visuals?*
- 11 | *Within and between these works- what repeats? What unifies the works? Which five or more characteristics would you expect to find in the future work by this artist?*