List Projects 30: Jeremy Couillard
Bakalar Gallery
July 18 – October 6, 2024

The MIT List Visual Arts Center is pleased to announce the opening of *List Projects 30: Jeremy Couillard*.

Cambridge, MA, June 4, 2024 — This summer, the MIT List Visual Arts Center will present Jeremy Couillard's first solo museum exhibition.

Trained as a painter, Jeremy Couillard is self-taught as a coder and digital artist. His projects exist as playable games, web projects, and video installations—often spanning multiple forms simultaneously. His games are characterized by inventive character design and absurd premises: in one, alien terrorists steal the machine that powers reincarnation, trapping the player in the bardo (*Alien Afterlife* [2017]); in another, the rat-dog-witch player escapes their job through a hidden vault, only to find that the

way back has been absorbed inside a Sasquatch sex amulet (*Fuzz Dungeon* [2021]). What unites his projects as they circulate between art and game contexts is a sensibility of disarming surprise and irreverent critique.

Couillard's exhibition centers around his newest game, *Escape from Lavender Island* (2023). It begins with the player dreaming about a dystopian city before waking up and finding themselves in the city they saw in their sleep. The city—divided into neighborhoods like the “Corporate University Prison Town” and the “Clown Crypt Renovation Zone”—is controlled by a nefarious entity called the Lavender Corporation. Its landscape is dense with bizarre quests, enigmatic public sculptures, fragments of language, and dirty jokes. The player's progression through the neighborhoods of Lavender Island is enabled by a succession of masks, each associated with a power, like shooting pharmaceuticals at passersby, viewing alien billboards, and walking through walls.

The playable game is joined by Zede's Dream, a continually generated video simulation that travels the streets of Lavender Island, accompanied by the game's soundtrack (composed by Chris Parrello) and narrative vignettes that offer brief glimpses into the lives of the city's residents. Couillard's paintings and installation elements serve as material analogues for objects and assets in the game: wooden sculptures of digitally rendered flowers are planted along the edges of gallery, while his acrylic paintings are based on modular digital "tiles" that compose building facades in the city's alien colony. Their lush yet plasticky surfaces underscore the psychedelic artificiality that permeates the artist's world. *Lavender Island* is an experiment in impossibility, but Couillard—drawing on the ideas of the anthropologist David Graeber—suggests that its imaginative world can help us see the contingency and hallucinatory quality of our own social arrangements.

List Projects 30: Jeremy Couillard is organized by Natalie Bell, Curator, with Ramona Ngin, Curatorial Assistant.

Jeremy Couillard (b. 1980, Livonia, MI) lives and works in New York. Previous exhibitions include solo presentations at Denny Gallery and yours mine & ours Gallery in New York, among others. His work has been screened at venues in New York like Times Square Midnight Moment, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Flux Factory, and the New Museum, as well as Rotterdam Film Festival. He received an MFA in Painting from

Columbia University in 2012, and he teaches New Media at LaGuardia Community College in Queens. Within the world of games, his achievements include two recent nominations for the Independent Games Festival Awards in San Francisco as well as a nomination for the Most Amazing award at A.MAZE fest in Berlin.

SUPPORT

General operating support is provided by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the Council for the Arts at MIT; Philip S. Khoury, Vice Provost at MIT; the MIT School of Architecture + Planning; the Mass Cultural Council; and many generous individual donors. This exhibition is also supported by generous donors to the 2023 McDermott Award Gala, hosted by the Council for the Arts at MIT. The Advisory Committee Members of the List Visual Arts Center are gratefully acknowledged.

ABOUT THE MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

The List Visual Arts Center is a creative laboratory that provides artists with a space to freely experiment and push existing boundaries. As the contemporary art museum at MIT, the List Center collects, commissions, and presents rigorous, provocative, and artist-centric projects that engage MIT and the global art community. Exhibitions are accompanied by a broad range of educational programs for the public and the MIT community, special events, and scholarly publications. The galleries and all programs are free and open to the public.

IMAGE CAPTION:
Exhibition view: *List Projects 30: Jeremy Couillard*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2024. Photo: Shane Godfrey

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