

## TULIPOMANIA / EVERQUEST 2006 - 2007

3 Channel Digital Video Installation, 8:00min  
Audio, Visuals and Adventure: Jennifer Schmidt

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

To date, most of my creative projects have drawn on the use of repeat patterning and symbols as graphic conventions to create images and as metaphorical means to study human behavior and modes of reasoning. I have been consistently working with a vocabulary of themes and motifs inspired by the folk traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch, in addition to exploring the technological translation of symbols and information within contemporary culture, e.g. scantron test forms, ICU life monitors, and the coupon dash. "Tulipomania / EverQuest" represents the next step in my investigation of the historical and contemporary significance of signs within a moving image timeline.

I discovered the historical event of "Tulipomania" by chance while researching the provenance and meaning of tulip motifs in the Pennsylvania Dutch folk traditions of my heritage. There has been little written about the iconographic symbolism and significance of the tulip as an image within Pennsylvania Dutch folk art, and yet, it appears over and over as a symmetrical design, associated with the divine or heavenly trinity, within Fraktur painting, textiles, objects and furniture for the home and farm, and epitaphs on gravestones. The most interesting and logical account of the tulip's presence I happened to find suggested that the Pennsylvania Germans, who were originally from the Palatinate and Alsace Lorraine regions of Germany, were influenced by the fever and mania surrounding tulip speculation in the mid 1600's in northern Europe. The tulip flower was exotic: newly introduced to the continent by way of Turkey (where the tulip originates). The prevalence of the tulip as a symbol within Pennsylvania Dutch folk may perhaps have its roots in a fashion trend and botanical fad of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

I then found myself fascinated by "Tulipomania". As I studied its history, I was less interested in the economic lessons that preoccupy most historians, and more in the subjective desires and visions of value that surrounded the aesthetic and cultural appreciation of the flower, and that influenced its subsequent symbolic incarnations. Contemplating what it would be like to experience "Tulipomania" in the present, I thought of the online multi-player game *EverQuest* and the idea of wish fulfillment through role-playing, navigating a fantastically real universe imbued with a renewed sense of vitality and expectation. The virtual objects and landscapes are evocative of a "future" defined by the lore of the medieval past. Viewed through a postmodern lens, both "Tulipomania" and *EverQuest* involve a transformative history of signification, where the object of identification has been co-opted and re-represented as a sign throughout time, projecting a desire for that which cannot be obtained through symbolic "branding."

### "TULIPOMANIA / EVERQUEST"

"Tulipomania / EverQuest" conceptually explores how human desire imparts value to ephemeral things – in particular, tulips and video game icons – by juxtaposing the sensations of "Tulipomania" in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe and the contemporary video game *EverQuest*, within a graphically animated video.

"Tulipomania" describes the feverish mania surrounding the tulip flower after it was first introduced to Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The flower's aesthetic mutability, rarity, and provenance spurred a sensational fashion trend, and generated an inflated market of historic proportion in the Netherlands and France. With each blooming of neo-color and form, people invented names for the tulip, linking its nobility to kings, queens, generals, and viceroys, as well as with romantic associations of poetic fancy.

*EverQuest* is a contemporary online 3D fantasy multiplayer role-playing game created by Sony Entertainment that takes place in the medieval era. It is incredibly popular, leading devoted players to invent a cash marketplace where virtual in-game objects and characteristics can be sold and bought at will for use in the game. After first discouraging the marketplace, Sony recently legalized the sale of game icons by creating a corporation sponsored "station store" on their website. The virtual characters, items and characteristics are listed along with written descriptions and specs inviting starting bids from \$1.00

to hundreds of dollars. Experienced players can sell their strength, expertise and adventures in the form of characters or objects so that other players can then purchase the ability to access, travel and compete within an advanced level of terra within the *EverQuest* universe. Some players are driven to amass fortunes of virtual wealth and “fantastic” potential that they could never possibly access in the reality of their everyday lives. The ephemeral character identities and objects are tied to monetary value in the everyday market, but their power and symbolic resonance only exist within the virtual world of the video game and the player’s ability to envision a future for its mobility.

Disparate in time and place, the two phenomena strike me as related in their unique relationships of humanistic desire and the attribution of monetary and cultural value to ephemeral objects, thus signifying the role of tulips and *EverQuest* objects as visual icons of projected ideas.

Inspired by these phenomena, “Tulipomania / EverQuest” represents an attempt on the part of the artist, to explore desire through looking and identification. 3 videos compose the project, "Turk Tulipo", "PA-Dutch Tulipo", and "Neth Tulipo", which portray independent scavenger hunts—tracing the presence and symbolism of the tulip within three distinct locations and cultures. Synched in timing and playback: when all three videos display the same animated tulip sequence, a 3-of-a-kind / jackpot "game response" is activated, presenting tulip flowers blowing in the breeze to bombastic music.

## **VISUAL APPROACH AND PRODUCTION STYLE**

“Tulipomania / EverQuest” involves a visual interweaving of images collected and photographed on location in the Netherlands, Turkey, and Pennsylvania, rendered graphics of the tulip as icon, and recorded footage of the actual flower. The still images and time-based footage compose an experimental, non-narrative sequence within a game interface similar to a slot machine, utilizing animation, sound and montage to create a synchronized 3- channel video installation.

## **EXHIBITION SPECS**

- 3 Identical Televisions or Projectors
- Synched for playback using a Davey Jones Synchronizer + 3 DVD players
- Each DVD player will have its own set of speakers, for separate soundtracks

