



tom moody

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OUTPOST

Last night was the opening of "Outpost," an exhibition curated by Ada Chisholm at Smack Mellon (50 Water St, Dumbo, Brooklyn). Highlights were **Joe McKay**'s big screen video game where players achieve heights of competitive blood lust in order to...match colors, and Cory Arcangel's power-point-presentation-with-Van-Halen-guitar-solo. In the McKay piece, players sit at a console and work simple RGB sliders (levers raising and lowering the amount of red, green, and blue light). Each player is arbitrarily given a "starting color" and must shift the levers until a "target color"--say, a large dot moving around the screen--is duplicated. When one player hits the exact hue (and it takes some concentration), he or she is declared the winner of that round and the game resets. Each new game has a different "op art" pattern--circles, stripes, spirals--and the color-combinations are often quite dazzling. The installation does something often claimed for color field painting that invariably never happens when you look at it: that is, it teaches you about the physical properties, relativity, and context-specificity of color. A few rounds of the game are equivalent to a short Bauhaus course with Albers and Itten, and I love that the competition is centered around Kandinskyesque harmonics rather than blowing apart zombies or whatever.

Cory Arcangel was also in the education mode last night, giving one of his trademark nerdy laptop slide lectures, but instead of explaining some obscure point of 8-bit computing, he delved into a pop-cultural moment of the type geeks enshrine on the internet in mind-boggling detail: specifically Eddie Van Halen's Paganini-like 1978 guitar solo "Eruption." With amusingly clunky graphics Arcangel explained to a somewhat skeptical, slow-to-warm audience how Van Halen put the pickups from a Les Paul into a Stratocaster body so he could play "up high and nerdy," wired his amps to think they were playing at a lower volume than they were, and got Floyd Rose whammy bar effects with a stock, Strat-style whammy bar. (Simulating the sound on his own guitar, Arcangel momentarily got the wrong vibrato and said "Whoops, that sounds more like Steve Vai.") As the minute fanboy details kept coming and coming, the crowd finally started getting the joke, and then was roused to cheering applause when Arcangel ended his lecture with a blistering note-for-note recreation of the solo. Trips to art galleries should always be this fun.

--Tom Moody
