

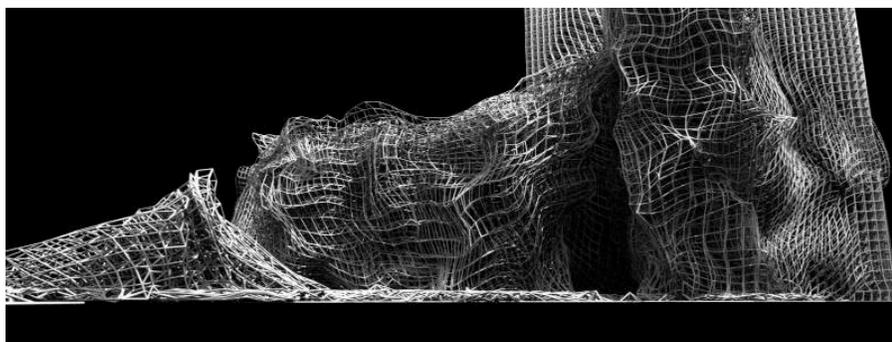


Things Fall Apart: Brandon Morse's Digital Demolitions

kriston capps 02/28/09

Critic Kriston Capps considers artist Brandon Morse's video catastrophes as commentary on the current economic crisis. *The Shape We're In* remains on view at Conner Contemporary Art in Washington, D.C. through March 21st.

Brandon Morse's work may inspire associations with terrorism -- specifically, the World Trade Center attacks of September 11th, 2001. In video projections of the artist's digital media animations, skeletal architectural structures succumb to great cataclysms, falling and tumbling according to the systemic rules designed by the artist. The seismic or catastrophic event that brings down his digital towers goes unseen-his videos seem to project a more passive form of destruction, with the emphasis on the collapse itself.



Displayed via wall-filling digital projections at Conner Contemporary's new gallery space—a warehouse-sized site better suited to W. 24th Street in Manhattan than the smaller D.C. art scene—Morse's works inevitably take on a different context: the financial crisis. *Achilles*, a two-channel video piece, is projected along two walls. As the camera in the piece pans horizontally, a building is seen collapsing downward and splaying across the corner of the room; a tangle of splintered wire architecture is all that remains. As an object, *Achilles* seems almost brash in the current economic climate. Put another way, the piece is better suited to institutions, rather than collectors. Institutions—the interwoven geopolitical and financial systems that connect nations and led to the current global recession—seem like a viable context for Morse's work. *In The Brownian Motion of Collective Woe*, gargantuan block-shaped forms fall from the sky. The viewer witnesses the impact at ground level, as the seismic effects cascade outward.

Another piece, *More Destruction*, depicts a tower falling over and over again. The mechanism for the destruction differs in each case. In one instance, the tower seems to buckle from its side. One point loses coherency, leading to the destabilization of the hole; the same tower is seen crumbling end over end, imploding as if in a demolition. The passive (and perhaps, helpless) viewer might be witnessing parallel institutions suffering a similar fate. In the same way, flaws in seemingly impervious economic systems have a so-called "domino effect" on one another—consider the financial crisis, then called the "Asian flu" that spread during the 1990s, a strain that economists denied were even possible after the Great Depression.

Structurally, every vertex forming Morse's forms function as an event site, regulated by a complex system of physical rules. His pieces are as much patterns as they are animations triggered by one errant point that in turn effects every adjacent point—a process that proceeds exponentially toward collapse. The reference here isn't the machinations of singular individuals, terrorists bent on an ideological course, but unseen laws—systems, in a sense—that regulate, or predict, or flow from the behavior of many individuals.



Exit Strategy posits this economic model of collapse more plainly. The camera rotates around a city form, with block-shaped, three-dimensional structures resembling skyscrapers rising into the sky. Slowly, their tops

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begin to inflate, as if they were smokestacks capped by exhaust-trapping plastic bags. As the camera slowly revolves around the scene, documenting the degradation, more and more of the structures begin to ripple upward and outward. The stolid symbols of free enterprise become obscene and unstable-filled, in essence, with hot air.

From the top: *Achilles* (2008-09), 2-channel video, 9 minutes, 26 seconds, edition of 3; *Exit Strategy* (2008) single-channel video, 17 minutes, 30 seconds, edition of 3. All images courtesy Conner Contemporary.

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