

ARTFORUM

Tabor Robak

TEAM GALLERY | GRAND STREET

83 Grand St.

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Virtual reality, and its fraught utopian promise, looms large in Tabor Robak's debut solo show, "Next-Gen Open Beta," which sees the New York-based digital artist and commercial designer harnessing programs like Unity, After Effects, Photoshop, and Cinema 4D to visualize four imaginary worlds. That one might use these widely available graphic tools to create a secondary reality of one's own—abetted, of course, by the internet and its endless store of reusable imagery—would appear to be the driving premise behind the dazzling city skyline we encounter in *20XX* (all works 2013) a single-channel work bringing together a composite of the artist's "favorite skyscrapers." It's also there in the impossible roller-coaster scenario of *Algos*, a two-channel work that guides us through a series of geographically far-flung interiors and exteriors, luxuriating in the three-dimensional conceit of the panoramic photograph.

Among the many productive ironies of "Next-Gen Open Beta," these visually breathtaking, painstakingly detailed environments make as strong a case for technological accelerationism as they do for the somewhat old-world values of craftsmanship and painterly illusionism. And yet, the hand-hewn utopias Robak presents are ultimately as alienating as they are immersive. Just as each "scene" within *Algos* ends at the pixelated edge of the ocean view or domestic living space in question, *20XX* is ultimately a testament to its own implausibility, reminding the viewer, with its endless succession of billboards for Game Boy Color and Atari, of its nature as a game world within a game world (and one, no doubt, that has nevertheless been corrupted by the all-too-real logic of capital). As with *Free-to-Play*, a self-playing, emoji-based spoof on games like Candy Crush and Bejeweled, our ultimate impression of these scenes is one of decorative flatness and impenetrability, the collapse of lived, sensible reality into a hyperreality that one can dream up, but cannot enter. It's not a very comfortable place to be.

— Emilie Friedlander



Tabor Robak, *Free-to-Play*, 2013, four channel HD video, custom software, 120 x 50 1/2."