

locustprojects

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Locust Projects presents

PROJECT ROOM:

Jen Clay: *Eyes of the Skin*

Exhibition Dates:

Sept 16 – Nov 4, 2023

Related Programs:

ARTIST TALK: *SOFT SANITY*

Followed by

RECEPTION: *CUDDLE*

Saturday, Sept 23 | 11:30am-1:30pm

PERFORMANCE: *THE CHASE*

Saturday, Oct 21 | 7-8:30pm

OPEN STUDIO HOURS:

Wednesdays and Thursdays 1-4pm

or by appointment

Sept 22 - Nov 2

Public Hours:

Wednesday to Saturday

11am – 5pm

Tuesday by appointment only

email galleries@locustprojects.org

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Press kit and images:

[Available here](#)

Eyes of the Skin

Newly commissioned installation and interactive video game
by Miami-based artist Jen Clay



Jen Clay, *Eyes Of The Skin*, screenshot of game play, courtesy of artist

[Miami, FL] Locust Projects presents *Eyes of the Skin*, an installation and interactive video game created by Miami-based artist Jen Clay in which viewers can explore a dense, alien-like forest inhabited by monsters. Primarily known for textile sculptures and performances, Clay spent months quilting tree-monsters, which she then photographed, montaged and animated to create the first video game made entirely of quilts. In keeping with Locust Projects' mission to provide artists with opportunities to experiment and create new work, the artist delved into learning how to translate her aesthetic digitally using video game technology. The exhibition, which Clay has made to be sensory inclusive, opens for public viewing on Saturday, September 16 with a public artist talk and celebratory reception on Saturday, September 23, 2023 from 11:30am to 1:30pm. *Eyes of the Skin* is supported in part by a Knight Arts New Work Grant by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Conceived as a visual novel, Clay's video game is the first chapter in what will become a long visual novel, one inspired by the popular children's book series *Choose Your Own Adventure*. Influenced by the theoretical framework of Cosmic Pessimism, a pop culture philosophy of horror, Clay's monsters are a hybrid of alien and natural forms whose pastel palette and cushioned fabric surfaces distract from an existence that is indifferent and even menacing to human exceptionalism.

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Within a decision tree coding structure, player's avatars can choose from a list of prompts to each manipulative encounter with the trees, who communicate via text on screen. The monsters' choppy movements recall nineties' video games and children's shows. The game's title refers to Juhani Pallasmaa's book *Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, an architectural theory classic that advocates trusting one's senses. This nearly therapeutic philosophy echoes positive self-talk Clay adopted as a child who hallucinated monsters. Her work represents that experience and the work of managing it. Clay's work also helps viewers who have not had this experience to empathize with this condition of near constant uncertainty. Of course, as more and more monsters prove themselves to be all too real, she lets us widen our acceptance, in her work's soft cuddly embrace, of all that might be.



Jen Clay, *Eyes Of The Skin*, screenshot of game play, courtesy of artist

RELATED PROGRAMS:

Saturday, September 23, 2023 | 11:30am-1:30pm

Artist Talk: Soft Sanity followed by Reception: Cuddle

Join Clay for her talk titled *Soft Sanity* about how she arrived at the intersection of video games and textiles. There may be surprise elements followed by a breakfast with the artist.

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Saturday, October 21, 2023 | 7-8:30pm

Performance: *The Chase*

Inspired by Scooby doo monster chase scenes, *The Chase* is a performance where a group of people is slowly chased by two ambiguous forms with a live soundscape by Elise Anderson to represent being constantly chased by the alien inside that, to Jen Clay, is anxiety, depression, and mental illness. Runner groups will be sought out to participate in this “fun run” that will encircle the street outside of Locust Projects.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Eyes of the Skin is funded in part by a Knight New Work Grant awarded to the artist in 2022 by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The exhibition’s realization at Locust Projects is presented as part of Knight Digital Commissions.

In addition to being supported in part by a Knight New Work Grant, Jen Clay’s project *Eyes of the Skin* involved the support of several individuals and organizations. Above and beyond providing support for the exhibition, Locust Projects provided studio space for several months. Metcalf Creek Holler (MCH), Emerson Dorsch Gallery’s residency in Mars Hill, NC, hosted Clay and her collaborators over the summer. Elisa Anderson provided soundscape support and Tayina Deravile provided dialogue and mental health consultation. Clay extends special thanks to Samuel Lopez de Victoria for his coding mentorship and to Dennis Scholl, president and CEO of Oolite Arts, for his guidance and friendship.



ABOUT JEN CLAY

Jen Clay works in a wide range of media, from quilted wall hangings to interactive and multimedia performances. The artist uses forms, materials and techniques familiar to her from personal experiences with mental illness, particularly hallucinations. Clay’s projects become meditations on the uncertainties we all face at a time when disaster is a constant threat. Her practice interrogates how fears’ effects are impacting our ability to perceive the world as it is, sometimes forcing suspension of truth to preserve sanity. Moreover, the ubiquity of archetypal fears begs the terrifying question: are the phenomena provoking the fears individual at all or, rather, do they exist at population level?

Jen Clay was born in 1985 in Mountain View, North Carolina. She received her BFA in Sculpture from University of North Carolina Charlotte and her MFA from the University of Florida. Her screenings and performances have been presented at Girls Club Collection, Fort Lauderdale, FL; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; The Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL; NSU Art Museum, Ft Lauderdale FL; and Miami Light Box, Miami, FL. Girls Club Collection, Young

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at Art Museum, South Dade Arts Center, and Norton Museum of Art in Palm Beach commissioned more complex and immersive multimedia performances. She was a South Florida Cultural Consortium Fellow in 2019. Residencies include Locust Projects, Miami, FL (2023), Metcalf Creek Holler, Mars Hill, NC (2023), Oolite Arts, Miami Beach, FL(2020-2022), and Atlantic Center for the Arts (2020), New Smyrna, FL. A short segment on her practice, “Jen Clay: The Texture of Anxiety,” won a 2020 regional Emmy through South Florida PBS. She is represented by Emerson Dorsch Gallery.

Photo above: Jen Clay, courtesy of the artist.

ABOUT LOCUST PROJECTS

Founded by artists for artists in 1998, Locust Projects is Miami’s longest running nonprofit alternative art space. We produce, present, and nurture ambitious and experimental new art and the exchange of ideas through commissioned exhibitions and projects, artist residencies, summer art intensives for teens, and public programs on contemporary art and curatorial practice. As a leading incubator of new art and ideas, Locust Projects emphasizes boundary-pushing creative endeavors, risk-taking and experimentation by local, national, and international artists. We invest in South Florida’s arts community by providing artists with project grants and empower creative careers by supporting the administrative work of being an artist through an onsite artist resource hub and access to pro bono legal services.

Locust Projects 2023-2024 exhibitions and programming are made possible with support from: The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Diane and Robert Moss; The Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners, The Children’s Trust; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Ruth Foundation for the Arts; State of Florida through the Division of Arts and Culture; The Miami Foundation; Diane and Werner Grob; Susan and Richard Arregui; The Albert and Jane Nahmad Family Foundation; The National Endowment for the Arts Art Works Grant; Funding Arts Network; Hillsdale Fund; Kirk Foundation; and the Incubator Fund Supporting Sponsors and Friends.

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