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Art Daybook: Justin Berry creates his own reality from surreal video game landscapes

By **Molly Glentzer** Updated 4:54 pm CDT, Wednesday, April 18, 2018



Photo: Courtesy Of The Artist / Barbara Davis Gallery



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"Tabacal" is among works in Justin Berry's show "Road Trips" at Barbara Davis Gallery, on view through May 12.



The piece: "Tabacal"

The artist: Justin Berry

Where: Barbara Davis Gallery, through May 12

Why: Perhaps viewers who play video war games might recognize some of the elements Justin Berry recomposes from hundreds of screen shots into his own mystical landscapes. There also is a good chance they won't, because avatars tend to focus on whatever is coming through their scopes, too wrapped up in blasting away enemies to pay much attention to the

virtual scenery around them.

"Tabacal" might take its name from a real place in Bolivia or a location in Tom Clancy's "Ghost Recon" series — or both. Either way, Berry has constructed a landscape that only exists in his head, and now ours.

Crossing the center of his composition is a two-lane highway that curves and climbs at the edge of scrubby terrain into a heavenly territory of blue, purple, pink and white. Are those puffy clouds or ancient, craggy mountains? Small plants and rocks in the foreground, vividly highlighted, are so precisely rendered they project a different kind of mystery.

In an article for the Huffington Post last year, Berry wrote that while most video game players are abiding by rules and on a mission, he scans the virtual horizons for moments of beauty.

"Sometimes I have to dodge bullets while running through conflicted territory, just so that I can get to an area before it is bombed or so that I can arrive just after, when the dust has yet to settle and the air is thick and pearlescent," he wrote. "There is power in finding places of quiet reflection in a world where you are supposed to be running around and killing people."

You could look at "Tabacal" a long time and never figure it out. Other prints in Berry's show, "Road Trips," cast a similar spell. One is a photograph of an actual place; the rest are culled from video games. You'll probably have to see them in person to tell the difference.