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Nora Raggio on Jan 1 2000

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In this interview Nora Raggio talks with Bill Viola on his perspective on Digital St John and why he chose this venue in particular to work with Ground Zero.

SWITCH: Hi Bill, do you mind?

BV: That's quite all right...are you shooting this for yourself?

SW: I'm shooting for SWITCH

BV: I don't know that...

SW: SWITCH is CADRE Institute's e-zine, edited by Joel Slayton at San Jose State University...We wanted to have a perspective on your DIGITAL ST JOHN, why you chose this venue in particular to work with Ground Zero...

BV: Well, it actually came out my experience-- as all my work does-- recently my experience has been taken up with this large travelling exhibition that I had at SFMOMA up here...

SW: Yes, I saw that exhibit...

BV: Yeah, and so...I worked with individual room space, which was a big step for me, making small monitor things and then realizing I could create the whole room as an artwork...and that exhibition gave me the opportunity to put sixteen to eighteen rooms together, to link them, and make a total experience. I never conceived of anything like that before...and so it wasn't too much of a stretch to think that, if I had done that with real space and had this great and rare opportunity to be able to command the resources to form 15,000 sq feet of space to my image that I had in my mind ... an experience or a journey somewhere... if I went into cyberspace I could do it virtually... and have someone be able to move through this complex, architectural world...

SW: So you would like to translate your work at the SFMOMA into cyberspace?

BV: Well, I don't want to say I'm taking what I did and translating it directly into cyberspace...

It's a new thing...

It's a sculpture, it's a multilayered world, it's interactive, the way my show was interactive ...it's all of those kind of things...

SW: I had a sneak preview into your DIGITAL ST JOHN through the GroundZero brochure...it mentioned it had seven levels...

BV: Yes, based on the idea of a cosmology, harking back to antiquity, the idea of seven level worlds...you know, the expression seventh heaven comes from that. The Aristotelian model of the universe was a seven-tiered world, a seven-layer world of

concentric spheres, basically, of which the earth and material world was the center and the absolute farthest out layer was the divine, immaterial world...and the whole idea of our existence is based on a journey from the material existence which occupies our life here on earth to this kind of absolute state...and, of course, as we know from the history of mysticism, there are people in this world who have figured out how to do that in their lifetime...and so instead of waiting, after death, like the rest of us (laughs)...that's sort of the model of the piece...is based on that idea of making that journey...

SW: In what way has Ground Zero helped you conceive and move forward with this concept, in terms of finance, resources...

BV: That's coming into play right now...they approached me a while back...they were aware of this project that I had developed with a small grant from Intel and received some help to try to get it off the ground a year and a half ago, two years ago...and we got just so far in the project...it got bigger and it was not manageable with the resources we had, so...it was continuing to develop on my own, sort of, with some of the people I had met... and then Ground Zero stepped in just recently and expressed interest and said they wanted to do it, so...that's how it developed...

SW: So you're in the negotiation stage...

BV: We're putting together in practical terms how it's going to happen...we're actually figuring out...you know, it's all those practical things that the panelists have been talking about in here (.artfrontiers) ...you have a vision but it has to live on earth so, like, how much does it cost and what does it really mean to do it...so I'm facing that, you know, interesting but painful level... which I didn't think would be as painful in cyberspace as compared to the kind of pain I've suffered trying to actually get a physical room built, or eighteen of them, that people can explore...

Which is, I always thought, hey, do it in cyberspace, man, you know, it's a lot easier...Well what I want to do turns out to be pretty ambitious, so we're trying to figure that out right now...

SW: So do you think you will reach seventh heaven with Ground Zero?

BV: (Laughs) As long as I don't go into seventh hell...we'll see what happens, yeah, I hope I will, they're great people...

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Nora Raggio is currently a graduate student at the CADRE Laboratory.



::CrossReference

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