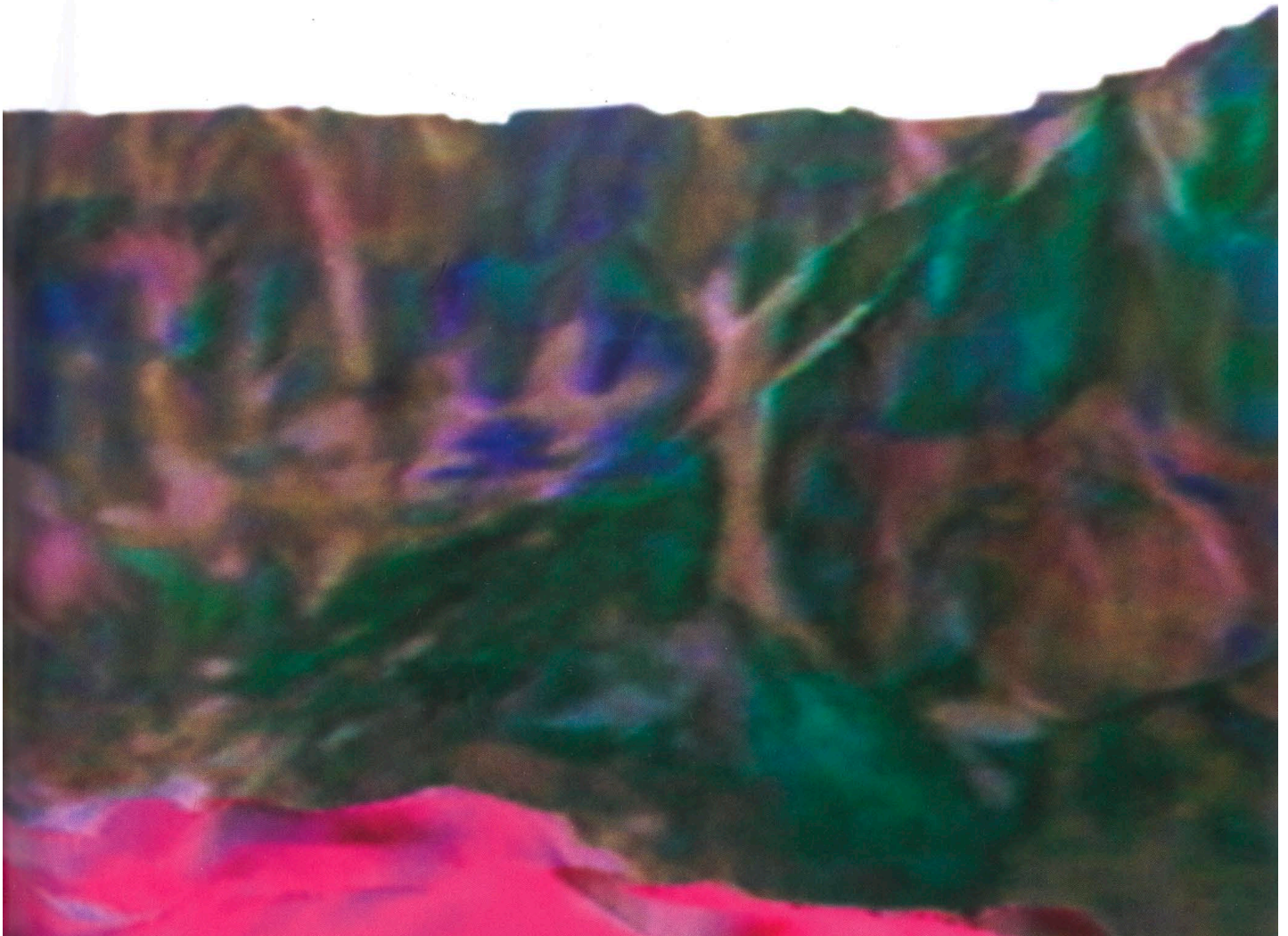


Lynne Marsh: *Crater*

SALLE NORMAN-MCLAREN, CINÉMATHEQUE QUÉBÉCOISE

Alice's adventures in the rabbit burrow or through the mantelpiece mirror encourage us to search for other gaps where we can penetrate the marvelous. There are a great many of them. In certain places, where the mystery is less carefully guarded, it seems accessible, either because nature lets us detect the elements' unrest there or because humankind has succeeded in taking control of the barrier: the inside of craters, volcanoes with flames shooting out of them; mist-covered countries where the horizon is lost as sky and water become one; deep tropical forests where life takes on a monstrous exuberance; modern laboratories in which machines, the products of dreams, transform a world of invisible forces into tangible forms.

Pierre Mabile¹



Mabille and his lover, seeking to escape the noise of Paris, stumble into the Palace of Illusions at the Musée Grévin. There, they stand in the centre of a mirrored polygon until the attendant starts the show, the images multiply, and the lovers cling to each other in “a space entirely inhabited by our presence and submitting absolutely to our pleasure.”²

Marvellous coincidence: as my fingers translate Mabille’s text into the codes of twenty-first-century communication, Lynne Marsh is preparing a work that can be sited virtually between volcanic crater and form machine – a work that reminds us of the pre-photographic theatres of magic lantern slide shows, dioramas, and panoramas. *Crater* captures the nineteenth-century spectacle’s ahistoric mixture of alchemy, humanism, enlightenment, imperialism, and progress, carrying it forward into a twenty-first-century technological sublime.

Crater is an installation work based on a 3D simulation of the crater of Mount St Helens, an active volcano near Seattle, Washington. Combining a panoramic environment and a soundscape, Marsh is creating an encompassing sensory experience that will place the viewer at the centre of the work, thrillingly close to the source of this earthly volatility. The work is intended to induce “a totality of engagement, aesthetically and conceptually.”³

The work is informed by, and appreciably extends, the spatial exploration of fantastic virtual terrains found in the gaming environments that Marsh, or her virtual double, has inhabited in the past. As Francine Dagenais’s essay in this collection explains, *Crater* marks a significant departure for this artist. First, she is working with footage of an actual earthly site, imagery she has harvested from the National Geographic Society. Second, her manner of integrating body and space has changed. While Marsh’s earlier off-planet excursions were led by a game avatar, or animated by a herd of yetis, her current landscape is unpopulated. Our bodies in the exhibition space are the only available scale. No surrogate shows us where to go or how to respond to the illusion. We are utterly reliant on ourselves as respondents to an electronic feed of light, imagery, sound effects, and tones: this visual-aural surround becomes our authentic experience. Marsh wants to invite the spectatorial body into a physical space that is also a virtual space, to make us the players. She writes:

Influenced by the aesthetics of simulated game spaces, the installation will feature the intensity and saturation of artificial colour: fuchsia pinks and vivid greens. I will be working from video images of low resolution, upping the resolution to create a recognizable yet slightly blurred scene where the viewer will feel inclined to squint to “see better,” forcing a suspension of disbelief. This mental leap and play with perspective mimics the way we deal with space that is virtual, what the viewer does to read the image – projecting themselves into the imaginary space and attempting to imagine the space as real. The new work will create an experience of space where the viewer becomes the character, as if on a set or in a game, exploring how we engage in fantasy, and the potential in inventing a fictional space.⁴

Crater is being projected as an experience of contemporary technology – a source of knowledge that also stimulates our desire for unexplained marvels.

Martha Langford

1 Pierre Mabille, *The Mirror of the Marvelous*, trans. Jody Gladding (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1998), 9.

2 *Ibid.*, 10–11.

3 Lynne Marsh, “Crater – new aspects and revision,” artist’s statement, curatorial files, Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal, 12 January 2005.

4 *Ibid.*