



LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

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### Apocalypse already

"Welcome to [Douche](#) Bag City, a hopeless place where the greedy villains of society are imprisoned for their atrocities committed against the community." -- Introduction, Douche Bag City

Federico Solmi is no stranger to controversy. Take, for instance, his crucifix piece titled The Evil Empire, which was confiscated from the Arte Fiera international exhibition in Bologna in 2009. The cross, which bears an image of a smiling papal figure sporting an exposed erection, prompted an Italian judge to slap Solmi with obscenity and "religious offense" charges, which were eventually dropped.



For The Dissolve, Solmi -- an Italian-born artist and 2009 [John Simon](#) Guggenheim Memorial Fellow (for video and audio) -- presents an equally contentious work, albeit one that points its finger not at religion but at corporate greed and our complicity in its continued existence and growth.

Presented as a first-person-shooter video game on 15 custom-framed LCD screens, Douche Bag City introduces viewers to Dick Richman, "an insatiable and corrupt Wall Street employee," [according to](#) one of Solmi's 15 looped animations. "There is definitely a lot of rage in this work and a deep feeling of [social injustice](#) throughout all 15 episodes of the video installation," Solmi told Pasatiempo. "The Bernard Madoff case and the current economic crisis have definitely had a huge impact on me and the development of this project."

Dick Richman is the product of a vicious system; he is the inevitable consequence of a culture and a social construct in decay. "At its early stages," Solmi said, "Douche Bag City was conceived to be a satire of the world economic crises and a parody of Wall Street greed. But, unexpectedly, the irony and the sarcasm turned darker. I think that at one point during my research of the causes that triggered the financial crash, I felt totally helpless and I went into a mood of resignation. I began to think that it is impossible to fight against the obscure forces and powerful figures that are controlling our society. And so Douche Bag City evolved into a [dystopian](#) and frightening vision of how an ultramodern metropolis can transform once the economic system crashes, with no possibility of recovery. Life becomes total mayhem."



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Solmi's drawings were mounted and animated in 3-D environments by the artist's longtime collaborator, Russell Lowe, a New Zealand-born artist and professor of digital media at [New South Wales](#) University in Sydney, Australia. "When I began my career, I was exploring mainly traditional media, such as drawings and paintings," Solmi explained. "Soon I realized that I was searching for ... media that allowed me more freedom. I put together my first video animation with Lowe called Rocco Never Dies in 2004 after I came across an R-rated video game titled Grand Theft Auto. The game stunned me for its revolutionary content. Immediately I thought of building an animated video that incorporated drawings." (Rocco Never Dies is a satirical 2-D-drawing animation based on the 1998 XXX-rated film of the same name.)

It took approximately 12 months to complete the drawings and paintings and to prepare the 3-D environment for Douche Bag City, and two more months to complete editing, according to Solmi. But why frame Dick Richman in a video game? "I realized that using a modification of a video-game platform and combining it with the hand-drawn and hand-painted textures would bring an enormous amount of new narrative possibilities to the work," Solmi said.

Using the digital technology and interactive aspects of game design, Solmi was able to introduce a live-action element to the creative process. It allowed him to direct and film each scene using different computers linked together. Numerous individuals then operated the computers in real time, each controlling a character or element within each scene under Solmi's guidance -- like orchestrating an elaborate digital puppet show. Solmi was instantaneously able to manipulate the characters and their environments.

It seems fitting that audiences will see Douche Bag City in its entirety for the first time during SITE Santa Fe's Eighth International Biennial, just weeks after BP [CEO](#) Tony Hayward told reporters he just wanted his life back. Solmi explores communal hopelessness and toys with the idea of revenge fantasy within the framework of corporate-culture [enslavement](#) -- two themes that play heavy on the minds of many Americans these days.

In "Evil Always Prevails," the last episode of Douche Bag City, Dick Richman the corporate [sleazebag](#) is triumphant. "I have to admit," Solmi said, "that on some occasions I had some fun in beating, hurting, and killing Dick Richman. But toward the end I was taken again by a mood of resignation." Solmi felt a deep sense of failure because, even in his imaginary world, he wasn't able to twist the reality of corporate lies and cheating. The most noticeable difference between Solmi's latest projects and his previous work, he explained, is that the optimistic attitude and search for a blissful ending have completely disappeared. "The apocalyptic scenario of Douche Bag City is a metaphor of our unstable present," Solmi said. "The sense of tragedy that can be felt in my work comes from my inability to embrace a culture made of false myths and moral codes."

-- Rob DeWalt

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