

**COLA Grant Proposal (2008)**

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**Project Title: *Landless in Second Life***

Presidential candidates, Ivy League universities, corporations, and non-profits are among those who have their own islands here, hoping to reach the denizens of a virtual 3D online world known as Second Life. Created by Linden Lab of San Francisco, Second Life has over a quarter of a million members worldwide who create many more *avatars*, their “digital representation”. Visual and media artists have also engaged Second Life as an exhibition venue, subject matter, and software tool. A notable example is the artist Cao Fei, whose videos about Second Life became the Chinese entry to the 2007 Venice Biennale. Using the same software engines that generate images in computer and online games, many artists have produced media art, called Machinima (a composite of machine and cinema), which pushes the parameters and concepts of games themselves as well as digital media.

I’m seeking support to spend a year exploring the Second Life community and environment to examine how the residents of this online virtual world view immigrants and immigration. At the end of my yearlong residency I will use the Second Life software engine to create a Machinima work about my findings and experience. Some of the questions I am eager to research are: In a fantasy world, are there immigrants? If so, where are they from? Do they yearn to return to whence they came? Are they able to impact events in the homeland? Is there nostalgia, and what are the memories of that other place, time? How do Avatars remember? What do they remember? Are they able to recreate a replica of that land in the new one? And more broadly, in Second Life as in real life, owning land is a common ambition in order to have a stake in this world, plant roots, and to move upward. What does it mean to be landless? What does it mean to be tied to the land, in a virtual environment?

Presently I have created my avatar: SugarPath Dalglish. She has nearly completed the orientation in Second Life and will be ready to enter the main world soon. For years I’ve been intrigued with Machinima as a new form of creating digital media. This project marks a significant formal move in that direction. It also furthers my exploration of immigrants and immigration, which I’ve addressed in *Epilogue: The Palpable Invisibility of Life* (sample work) and in my current creative work, a screenplay based on the life of my mother titled *Call Me Sugar*.

During the award period of July 2009 – June 2010, I will spend a year in residence in Second Life attempting to answer some of the questions above and others that will arise, as well as collect footage. This research and material will be used to create an original experimental documentary about my experience in Machinima, which I will also learn how to use within the year. I anticipate a completed media artwork at the end of this period.