

**“UNCHARTED”**

game franchise is now a movie with Tom Holland, right, and Mark Wahlberg.

just be a kid who was graduating into the SAS and goes on a mission, which is obviously exciting and adventurous. At the end of the film, he would be recruited into MI:6 and given the status of double-O and the title of James Bond. I thought it was really cool, but no one else, I guess, thought it was cool.”

Asked specifically what drew him to Drake, Holland isn't afraid to say there was a hint of selfishness motivating his push to get this film made.

“What intrigued me most about the character was his sense of adventure and where that would take me,” Holland says. “We're talking about a character that explores the world and I love traveling, so I'm hoping that with this film series of ‘Uncharted’ we can go to places I would never have normally gone. So far that has been the case.”

If only everything could be so simple. Although “Uncharted” follows in a lineage of classic adventure films, from the “Indiana Jones” flicks of Holland's youth to last summer's “Jungle Cruise,” “Uncharted” the game was never a sure sell.

**T**O UNDERSTAND the effect of the “Uncharted” games, one must capture the video game scene in 2007. With the risk of oversimplification, games that featured male protagonists — that is, most of them — tended to be of the brooding, tough-guy type. And if they didn't, they were still often set in sci-fi-inspired locales.

An old-fashioned adventure of the Indiana Jones sort hadn't really been seen since the “Pitfall” games of yore or the point-and-click of “Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis” in the early 1990s. Although plenty of video game liberties are taken with “Uncharted,” there simply weren't many big-budget action games starring mostly normal people and set in what could be the present-day real world.

It was such a rarity that people quit. “We actually had people leave the studio,” says Bruce Straley, who co-directed “Uncharted 4” with Druckmann and, with “Uncharted” architect Amy Hennig, had a role in the early development of the franchise.

Straley, who left Naughty Dog, partly due to burnout, shortly after the release of “Uncharted 4,” explains that some Naughty Dog staff “were so adamant about losing the characterization and fun in video games that we had in ‘Jak and Daxter’ that they were appalled we would use motion capture. It would ‘restrict them as animators and creators.’ OK. It was *that* grounded of a game, but it's not grounded at all, compared to ‘The Last of Us’ or more games that have come out.”

Holland's desire for the project to get made is credited as the reason Drake is younger in the film than in the games, where the character is in his 30s and 40s. But Holland's Drake is still a man who seems to revel in the ridiculous situations he gets himself into, even as there's a part of him that longs for deeper connection.

In “Uncharted 4,” recently reissued for the PlayStation 5, the game plays with Drake's struggle to settle down and be an honest partner to his wife. In the film, which largely side-steps romance, Holland's Drake is missing the father figure of his older brother and finds a thief-going partner, eventually, in Mark Wahlberg's Victor “Sully” Sullivan.

But he's still ultimately a criminal. Holland says a lot of care was taken to make sure audiences connect with Drake in the film, especially since one of the first major set pieces is Holland, as a bartender, robbing a female customer.

“We needed Nathan to be very likable in this film, which is why we introduced the idea that finding the gold would mean finding his brother,” Holland says.

“We wanted it to be the story of a young boy searching for his family and, in turn, finding a family in Sully. But, yeah, it was definitely something we spoke about. The scene where he steals that bracelet from the girl in the bar, we set up that she's not the most likable person. She's slightly rude to him. I think I even have a line — I say, ‘Would you like to keep a tab open?’ Of course you do. It's daddy's money.’ So stealing her bracelet doesn't seem that bad. Not that anyone should steal anything from anyone.”

Besides, America has a thing for troublemakers. Indiana Jones was one, as was the original inspiration for Drake.

“There was something about Johnny Knoxville,” Straley says. “He was probably in his early to mid-30s at that point. He had a little bit of a nasolabial fold, that thing that represents age, but he still had a real light-heartedness in the way he laughed at himself. The fact that he could get hit by a car and roll with it and stand up and keep going was something we felt was interesting as a character. It's the don't-take-yourself-too-seriously nature.”

“We knew there was something in there that was creating a veneer, like, ‘I'm willing to risk my life and do

these adventures.’ So it was interesting to examine Johnny Knoxville as a sketch of a character.”

**T**HE ORIGINAL “Uncharted” is a game meant to be a movie you can play. Is something lost if a game becomes a movie you can ... watch?

After all, one of the film's primary action scenes comes straight from “Uncharted 3,” a midair jump-and-fight segment amid cargo trailing an airplane. It's unlikely any human would survive such a moment. In the game it works, as we're in control of the character and see only the exaggerated action for the absurdly embellished set piece that it is.

“The joke in the industry was that nobody would survive a Nathan Drake jump,” Straley says. “You would literally drop down from any ledge and break a hip and that would be the end of your adventure.”

“Uncharted” director Ruben Fleischer says he had to be cognizant of how far he could push his characters. What feels real in a game can look downright goofy when actual humans are doing the stunts.

“The scope and scale of the action is beyond anything on the big screen, and to try and make a passive viewing experience that can compete with that feeling of playing the character and being the character and being in the game is a fool's errand,” Fleischer says. “You have to make a movie that works as a movie, that pays tribute to the source material but exists as a conventional feature film. But it isn't trying to bring the video game from the PlayStation to the big screen.”

Ultimately, “Uncharted” serves as a prequel to the games, dialing back Drake's age, keeping him single and not putting a gun in his hands until late in the film. That's a different track than Naughty Dog is taking with “The Last of Us,” a series in development for HBO that is believed to more closely hew to the source material.

Druckmann and Straley have long talked up the cinematic influences on the interactive text for “The Last of Us,” including “No Country for Old Men” and the film adaption of Cormac McCarthy's “The Road.” But while dealing with a flesh-destroying infection that turns humans into zombie-like creatures, “The Last of Us” takes pains to be rooted in reality, focusing on the trauma of such a situation rather than simply emphasizing the “fun” of shooting a monster. Its core is the story of a would-be father-daughter relationship, and where personal and societal sacrifices meet and conflict.

“I've been thinking about this a lot because there are two different approaches you can take,” Druckmann says. “The games, both ‘Uncharted’ and ‘Last of Us,’ are so cinematic. They're scored. They're acted. It's unclear how one should adapt them — what to keep and not keep. With ‘Uncharted’ and ‘Last of Us,’ we're taking very different approaches. With ‘Uncharted,’ it's telling a whole other story that's picking and choosing moments from the franchise and giving you an ‘Uncharted’ flavor.”

“With ‘The Last of Us,’ we're trying to tell the same story that's in the game, deviating in minor ways,” Druckmann continues. “I don't know if either is wrong or right, but you have to play to the strengths of the medium. Here's an experience that worked well, and you're taking something out that is fundamental to its story, which is the interactive part. So you better complement it in other ways. For example, you can jump around between character perspectives in a way you wouldn't in a game, because we're trying to immerse you as the character you're playing as.”

Druckmann says the influence of film and television on games will only continue and vice versa. That's expected, especially as society leans more toward participatory types of entertainment, be it games, TikTok or the way gaming community Discord has continued to infiltrate mainstream communication. Druckmann says his approach to game directing will be informed by his time on the set of “The Last of Us.”

“I had the privilege of directing an episode for the HBO show, and it's just learning how they handle cinematography or plan shots. Each shot has to have a single purpose. You're not trying to get muddy with too many ideas in one shot. It reflects a lot of our thinking in how we're approaching games. But it's just reinforcing the notion of clarity.”

Holland is just happy games are being taken seriously as IP. While making the media rounds for “Uncharted,” Holland has even expressed a desire to some interviewers to make a live-action “Jak and Daxter” film. Turns out that time in front of a screen as a kid is paying off.

“I recently just bought the Oculus Rift,” Holland says of the Meta-owned virtual reality headset. “I love how when we were kids our parents used to tell us, ‘Don't sit too close to the TV or your eyes will go square.’ And now kids are like, ‘Show these screens in your eyes!’ It's really cool.”

It's also evidence that the video game generation has arrived.



GLEN WILSON Various Small Fires

# GET YOUR FRIEZE FIX EARLY AT L.A. SHOWS

BY DEBORAH VANKIN

**F**RIEZE LOS ANGELES is rolling into town Thursday through Feb. 20, with the contemporary art fair showcasing more than 100 international exhibitors in a tented enclosure next to the Beverly Hilton. The crowd promises to be nearly as colorful as the works for sale, studded with artists, collectors, celebrities, fashionistas and, perhaps, the occasional attendee in a cowboy hat with antlers and a fuzzy tail dangling from his bottom. (Hello, Frieze 2020.) † All of which may sound exciting for thrill-seekers or, for the COVID-cautious, terrifying. ‡ The art fair will enforce COVID-safety protocols; but for anyone looking to get their Frieze fix on early, either to avoid the crowds or to get familiar with the artists before viewing or buying, here's where you can see some of the artists in exhibitions currently up around Los Angeles.

**L.A. LOUVER: LEON KOSSOFF**

The late British artist's work will be on view at L.A. Louver's Frieze booth, a presentation of paintings and drawings called “Masterworks From Los Angeles Collections.” But why wait? The Venice gallery is currently showing a retrospective of the artist's work, “Leon Kossoff: A Life in Painting,” through late March. In Kossoff's Expressionist reworkings, Times critic Christopher Knight points out that “it's often hard to tell whether we are witnessing a joyful bacchanal or a deadly massacre, a revelry or a riot.” The exhibition, part of a three-city tour, includes more than 20 works — the largest gallery presentation of the artist's work in more than 20 years — and features figurative work, landscapes and two “transcriptions,” or interpretations, of 17th century works by Nicolas Poussin, an artist whose work Kossoff studied at London's National Gallery. The show is a good primer to the upcoming J. Paul Getty exhibition “Poussin and the Dance,” opening Tuesday. 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, lalouer.com

**LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES: RODRIGO VALENZUELA**

Industry, automation and displacement, along with workers' struggles for unionization, are longtime interests of Valenzuela, whose photography and cast concrete sculptures will be on view at Luis De Jesus Los Angeles' booth. Get familiar with the L.A.-based Chilean artist's photography first, however, in “New Works for a Post-Worker's World,” the downtown L.A. gallery's first solo presentation of his work. Valenzuela is an assistant professor at UCLA, and his black-and-white images in the current show, the gallery writes, “suggest the roaring steel mills of the past, quickly abandoned once outdated, while also offering a retro

**WORK** by Glen Wilson, left, at NeueHouse Bradbury, and Leon Kossoff at L.A. Louver, below.

ings about living cross-culturally. Two of those artists, Hoy and Wilson, are both L.A.-based and have separate work on view right now in a group exhibition at NeueHouse Bradbury called “Mystic Truths.” That group exhibition, consisting of 14 artists from around the U.S., features paintings, sculpture, photography and video work exploring surrealism, contrast and opposing truths. NeueHouse is a private membership club and working space but visitors to the exhibition can make a reservation at the bar, which is accessible to the public. And the iconic building where NeueHouse is located, the Bradbury, is an architectural landmark of L.A. that's worth the visit. 304 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, neuehouse.com

**LACMA: KEHINDE WILEY, CALIDA RAWLES, CATHERINE OPIE**

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art's substantial and stunning “Black American Portraits” exhibition, up through April 17, features 140 works by 110 artists. Several of the artists in this exhibition will be showing work at Frieze, through different galleries. Wiley — whose 2018 portrait of former President Obama was on view at LACMA in a separate exhibition that included Amy Sherald's portrait of former First Lady Michelle Obama — will be part of Roberts Projects' group exhibition at Frieze. The gallery will present a new portrait by Wiley. The L.A.-based Rawles will be on view at Various Small Fires' booth, and Opie will be part of Regen Projects' Frieze presentation. But see them all first at LACMA — the exhibition is



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KEHINDE WILEY Mark Gulezian

**KEHINDE WILEY'S** 2018 portrait of former President Obama. His other work is on view at LACMA.

**NEUEHOUSE BRADBURY: ANNA SEWHOY AND GLEN WILSON** Various Small Fires' booth at Frieze will include a group exhibition of artists who are working globally and making sculpture, photography and paint-

one of the museum's finest in a long while. 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, lacma.org

**THE BROAD: ELLIOTT HUNDLEY, LARI PITTMAN, OPIE**

The important L.A. artists are part of the Broad museum's “Since Unveiling: Selected Acquisitions of a Decade.” The exhibition features 53 works by 27 artists — including Mark Bradford, Cindy Sherman, Kara Walker and Kerry James Marshall — and highlights how the museum's collection of postwar and contemporary art has grown over the last 10 years. 221 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles, thebroad.org

**CHÂTEAU SHATTO: ZEINAB SALEH**

The London-based Kenyan artist's charcoal drawings over acrylic paint — works on paper — will be part of a group exhibition at Château Shatto's Frieze booth, which will also include paintings by the Melbourne-based Helen Johnson and the Marfa, Texas-based Van Hanas as well as a large-scale, silicon sculpture by the New York-based Aria Dean. But the downtown L.A. gallery is currently exhibiting Saleh's first solo show in the U.S., “Softest place (on earth) [Extended mix].” It features 18 works, both paintings and charcoal drawings, all observational abstracts. 1206 Maple Ave., No. 1030, Los Angeles, chateaushatto.com