



External Space

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Despondence

Katie Kotler

Curated by Adrienne Crossman

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“The grid’s mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction).”

- Rosalind Krauss, *Grids*¹

Despondence by Katie Kotler is a silent 2D animation that plays with form and colour in non-narrative space. Digitally rendered shapes (some geometric, others organic), move about the screen, while lines and bright colours drift in and out of the visible frame. Aesthetically pleasing, calling to mind nostalgia and a camp sensibility, Kotler’s work exists as a marriage between functionality and pleasure. As a Virgo, Kotler enjoys rules, preferring to work within self-imposed boundaries and constraints, interested in the intersection where efficiency meets creativity. Much of Kotler’s work deals with dualities, forging connections between structure and fluidity, function and pleasure, physical and digital, reality and fantasy.

Despondence serves as a continuation of Kotler’s thesis work as a student in the Digital Futures graduate program at OCAD University. Up to this point, Kotler’s body of work has been comprised largely of grid animations, meant for the screen as well as being projected onto minimalist three-dimensional objects, such as plinths, lamps and glass spheres. Kotler is interested in the materiality of physical structures and the ways in which we perceive our bodies in space and time. In infusing the physical world with her

¹ Krauss, Rosalind. “Grids,” *October*, 1979

digital animations Kotler aims to create new landscapes, and inhabiting the spaces in between.

A prominent tool, integral to Kotler's practice, is the grid. A practical device with a rich history in art and the development of perspective drawing and painting, the grid is also a contemporary digital tool used by designers and artists alike in programs such as Photoshop and Illustrator and acts as the digital material that forms the 'mesh' (skeleton) of 3D modeled objects. These uses form an interesting parallel in relation to Kotler's work, that is both inspired by the early days of computer animated technology as well as contemporary digital art, such as a new form of net art called vaporwave that often features grids and neoclassical imagery. In this way Kotler takes inspiration from - and values both - 'high' and 'low' culture equally.

Born in the mid 80's, Kotler grew up watching an average of 5 hours of television a day. She speaks of being highly influenced by media and pop culture, both aesthetically and thematically. Influenced by late 70's and early 80's computer aesthetic, Kotler's work feels strongly sentimental. Upon discussing her work and influences, Kotler describes a scene from the 1990 film *Pretty Woman*:

"There is a scene where Edward is having trouble tying his tie, so Vivian takes it upon herself to do it. He is surprised that a prostitute can do this so well and asks her where she learned it. At first she says, 'I screwed the debate team in high school... I had a grandpa! He was nice to me. He liked ties on Sundays.'"

Kotler articulates that this portion of the film made her consider the role of semiotics in our understanding of not only popular culture texts, but even our own interactions in everyday life. In this particular film, there is something that is said, something that is implied and then, by the viewer, something that is imagined. Kotler replicates this process within her animations; the grid representing the structure of information given, the shapes our understanding of that message received, and finally, the use of colour representing our imagination and where that information will take us in our own thought processes.

The title, *Despondence*, refers to personal melancholy and feelings of despair, defined as “a state of low spirits caused by loss of hope or courage.”² Despite the weight of the title, the work feels light and whimsical, not weighed down within a heavy or limiting conceptual framework: a world created by Kotler to contrast the harsh realities of a personal struggle.

The 90's aesthetic and form of story telling found in movies like *Pretty Woman* obscured the harsh realities of the late 80's and early 90's; *Pretty Woman* explores a fantasy, while skirting real life issues. Kotler's work mimics this style of story telling, by hinting at desperation in her title, while completely obscuring these emotions in the video's subject matter. With no intention to mimic reality, the goal of Kotler's work is creation as a release in the hopes of producing visual pleasure, an aesthetically pleasing environment as a method of distraction providing both the creator and viewer a glimpse of fantasy.

-Adrienne Crossman

² Google definition