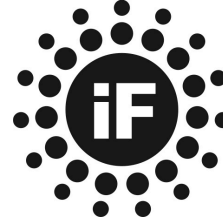


**Main  
Space**

Xpace Cultural Centre  
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Toronto ON M6K 2W5  
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Tuesday-Saturday 12-6  
[www.xpace.info](http://www.xpace.info)



**IMAGES  
FESTIVAL**

***Vulgar Era***

**Alessia Dowhaniuk , Trudy Erin Elmore, Alanna Gilchrist, Dahae Song, Erin Whittier**

**Curated by Tobias Williams**

**March 18 – April 30, 2016**

**Presented in partnership with Images Festival**

***“Now in the dark world where I dwell, ugly things, and surprising things, and sometimes little wondrous things, spill out in me constantly, and I can count on nothing.”***

**-Philip K Dick, A Scanner Darkly**

Over the last 30 years, digital and internet technologies have irrevocably changed our society. The way that we create, communicate and conduct business is now almost always mediated through digital devices. This digital revolution has disrupted many aspects of contemporary life on a scale not seen since the industrial revolution.

The effects of this techno-cultural shift are often difficult to isolate and analyze, partially because they are so widespread but also because they happen at such a rapid pace that technologies which were disruptive only a short time ago rapidly become commonplace. The result is a world in a constant state of flux where the present and the future both seem ill defined.

Perhaps the largest technological/cultural shift in recent history occurred in the year 2004, which saw the rise of the walled gardens of social media and the spread of Web 2.0, a movement in web design focused on formats that capitalised on user-created content. This is the moment in history where using the web as the primary tool of communication between peer groups shifted from a niche phenomenon used by various

subcultures to an every day activity of the general public. Sites associated with web 2.0 include Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, Twitter as well as more recent additions such as Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest.

The artists in *Vulgar Era* are from a generation that matured in a context where it was natural or expected of them to represent and express themselves in a digital form. They have diverse perspectives on identity, nature, history, landscape and emotion informed by technology. The work that they created for this show is sometimes ugly, sometimes wondrous, but most importantly often surprising.

Alessia Dowhaniuk's video piece, *What Do You Want To See*, takes a journey through the messy bedrooms, grainy webcams, and ribald chat messages that form the digital landscape for sex and romance on the Internet. The video makes use of captured footage from the online cam service Omegle, a platform that matches up two random users and puts them in a private conversation with a live web cam feed from both parties. Omegle differs from similar random cam websites such as Chat Roulette in that it has become popular as an online space for people seeking anonymous online sexual encounters. Throughout the video the artist acts as a performer for the unblinking eye of her webcam, showing scenes of idleness, stripping for a faceless chat partner and reciting a short love ballad. The piece is presented with a multi window desktop aesthetic intercut with glowing ombré text as well as saccharine gifs of sparkling hearts. *What Do You Want To See* touches on the complex nature of self-representation, the male gaze, sexuality and romance within the context of a vast world of bored strangers connected through screens and devices.

Trudy Elmore's large-scale digital prints portray scenes of skeletons acting out wild scenes of sexual excess, ascension and aggression. The works in this series deploy a unique aesthetic, using compositions reminiscent of renaissance depictions of the dance of the death, blended with a visual style somewhere between the glossy slickness of 3D graphics and some broken form of computer vision. The visual style in these images is

achieved through 3D rendering and compositing techniques, which make use of the early, unfinished images produced by 3D rendering software as it calculates lighting. This work presents a singular aesthetic exploration of historical and contemporary imagery, presenting a flattened out view of time and space.

Alana Gilchrist's video piece, *Suburban Scum*, is a reflexive examination of the cultural identity of sprawl. The video cycles through different vignettes featuring a performer dressed in variations of the same crop top tracksuit idly loitering in vacant suburban / light industrial spaces. The video itself is displayed as a picture within a picture, being played on a discarded CRT monitor sitting in what appears to be a gravel pit, a visual device that frames the work and reinforces the disposability of these mass manufactured environments. The focus of the piece is on the relationship between this character and banal ugliness of the landscape. The environments presented in *Suburban Scum* call to mind Howard James Kunstler's novel, *The Geography of Nowhere*, which investigates the relationship between automobiles, urban planning and its effect on the social realm. Kunstler proposes that suburban cities have sacrificed communal spaces for the supposed convenience of an automobile based life style. The result of this trade off is a series of landscapes and places which exist outside of human scale. These spaces are meant to be driven through with automobiles rather than walked through and experienced by inhabitants. *Suburban Scum* activates these non-spaces with a quiet almost still looping visual style, reminiscent of an animated gif.

Erin Whittier's photo installation, *Mediated Environments*, is comprised of photographs of landscapes appropriated from Google Street View, scavenged plant matter and structural elements of acrylic and wood. The clean commercial aesthetic of the images from Google are presented with the overlaid street view interface, suggesting an interactivity, which has been purposely severed by this mode of display. The Google Street View landscapes contrast the banal natural materials presented in the installation, bringing to light the disparity between the sublime simulacra of the natural world portrayed in digital media against the realities of living in urban centers, isolated from a

real connection to the landscape and nature. *Mediated Environments* contemplates the paradoxical separation from natural spaces caused by living with technology as well as the impulse to reach out and experience natural spaces through that same technology.

Dahae Song's large-scale digital prints display a dynamic synthesis between traditional hand-made mark-making methods and 3D digital rendering software. *Synthetic Love*, presents a sequence of images that depict glossy three-dimensional forms resembling a heart and its surrounding arterial architecture. Also included in the exhibition is a grouping of small paintings that were scanned by the artist to create the textures in the digital composition. There's a visual tension in the work, between the slick sterile pulmonary forms and the messy warmth of the textures contained and channelled within them. *Synthetic Love* is a visual study of the emotional ecosystem of the digital era.

Nadia Kuzmicz's neon and cement installation in the Window Space, *Ultra Fine II*, creates an open-ended textual proposition for the viewer. The word, "Ultra," is spelled out and underlined in glowing characters presenting the world with a shrine for a non-denominational superlative. *Ultra Fine II* explores the deep-set impulses that drive the North American zeitgeist; the constant desire for more, to have better things and to lead a better life, to continuously push forward toward an ever shifting and unattainable goal. Kuzmicz' art practice is profoundly influenced by her time spent studying in Florence, and her work calls to mind themes from Counter Reformation catholic art, ecstasy, agony, and the sublime tragedy of saints. Nadia reimagines these historical motifs applying them to contemporary notions of self-identity, spirituality and health. *Ultra Fine II*, develops on these themes distilling our societal drive and celebration of excess into a bold singular statement.

Maya Ben David's video piece, *We've met before*, screening in Xpace's External space,<sup>1</sup> tilts into the graphic online world of "Vore" content. Vore, short for vorarephilia, is a

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<sup>1</sup> Xpace's External Space is located in the [OCAD University Learning Zone](#) on level one of 113 McCaul Street. The video can also be viewed online at: <http://www.xpace.info/exhibition-event/weve-met-before/>

genre of erotica usually associated either with anime, cartoon or furry subcultures in which a fictional character swallows another character whole. The video is comprised of amateur-made content produced by vore fans and distributed through the internet for other fans to enjoy. Despite the intense nature of the content, there is an enduring quality to the outsider craftsmanship of this explicit material. Ben David splices and overlays these clips, weaving an immersive video-scape which aestheticizes this claustrophobic and abject subject matter. The majority of the clips in *We've met before* feature a female character as the predator, which presents an interesting element of power dynamics and role reversal in a genre, which often presents women as passive or submissive participants.

The artists in *Vulgar Era* developed their art practices in a world that was already in the midst of the digital revolution. They are the first generation to have formed their identities within the paradoxically isolating and unifying effects of social media and other user content driven web platforms. They come from a diverse range of backgrounds and have complex and nuanced relationships with and against digital media. *Vulgar Era* presents new and divergent perspectives from a world in a constant state of technological disruption.

**-Tobias Williams**

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