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Being Digital
Katherine Ross
January 15 – February 27, 2016

*"MY HARD DRIVE
CRASHED AND
IT FEELS AS THOUGH
I HAVE BECOME PART
OF A WRECKAGE THAT
HAS DISMEMBERED
MY PHYSICAL BODY"*¹

It is undeniable that our contemporary interactions, language, and sense of identity are heavily influenced by the digital world. We have curated every part of our existence in digital spaces. However, a lack of physical interaction has greatly affected our ability to empathize, communicate, and create. It seems as though rates of anxiety and depression are soaring as our ability to distinguish between the real and the hyperreal continues to dissolve.²

In the exhibition, *Being Digital*, Katherine Ross creates visceral romantic poetry from the emptiness found within the disembodied digital realm. Through the use of form, function, and materiality, her work seduces the viewer to reflect upon their own investment in digital existence.

¹ Katherine Ross, *Being Digital*, 2015, mixed media.

² Ahmet Akin and Murat Iskender. "Internet Addiction and Depression, Anxiety and Stress," *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences* 3.1: 138-48. Web.

Ross' work examines our internal psychology and external presence. Our interaction with art and life has been permanently transformed. In a digital world, how do we interact with media? Does our appreciation for art change considering our access to an endless stream of beautifully 'curated' Tumblr and Instagram accounts where we consume the contemporary digital image? Ross takes a deep look into the vast web of our hyperreal obsession to reveal evidence that this digital world alters our appreciation for art and reality. The work uses the basis of our 'digital life' to incite and inspire a new desire to reconnect with physical forms IRL.³

The text found within the various works utilizes multiple voices, yet maintains a similar tone and message throughout. The text remains relatable by traversing contemporary vernacular that we have all assumed and share via digital communication on a daily basis. Each piece is scaled to the dimensions of various Apple products, providing a familiar format for the viewer to experience. The reflective and translucent substrates subtly allude to our identity manifestations in the social media realm.

*"INTERACTIONS ARE NOT
FELT PHYSICALLY AND
INTIMATELY WHILE THE
NET OF THE INTERNET
FILTERS OUT EMOTIONS
TO DISTILL CONVERSATION
INTO MERE WORDS"*⁴

Accompanying these pieces is Ross' publication *Being Digital, Being Altered: Immersion in the Digital Sea*. The text is broken down into six chapters: Mobility + Immobility, Identity + Obsession, Escaping + Existence, Transparency + Bond, Cyber-attacks + Vulnerability, and Networking + Hyperreality. It combines Ross' text pieces with screenshots, sub-cultures of the deep web, as well as explorations of significant theories and essays regarding art, representation, and the human psyche. It examines with poetic insight our relationship with the digital realm and raw data. The reader is provided the

³ "In Real Life."

⁴ Katherine Ross, *Being Digital*, mixed media, 2015.

opportunity to reflect on and evaluate their own connection to the digital world, or to scroll through the manifesto like a carefully curated Tumblr account. The publication demonstrates Ross's critical eye for design and provides a platform for her evocative writing.

In *Being Digital*, Ross states that “technology, especially cell phone and computer formats, have developed mobile capabilities in order to keep up with the pace of our rapidly developing society. However, these devices are not mobile without our companionship. They are needy and require our attention. We are attracted to the wealth of information they make available, often resulting in our faces becoming glued to the screen, obstructing our potential for face-to-face interaction. While these devices are advancing in their capabilities, they have disabled our capacity to absorb and recall information. Instead, we are absorbed by the device and it paralyzes us in our place as movement is transferred to a digital format.”⁵

This statement alludes to a new philosophy of life, which presents itself through our interaction with the digital world. How do we thrive without the mediation of digital technology playing an important role in many aspects of our lives? Being conscious of the fact that companies now thrive on a *phygital*⁶ business model, how does one trust content ingested online, and how can a true sense of security exist in a digital space?

Being Digital analyzes the intense connection between our happiness and our recognition in digital spaces. A page found within the publication displays a collection of selfies bearing the caption stating, “I know I posted a selfie yesterday but I’m feeling really bad about myself right now and this is how I cope.” What may resemble a shallow statement, in reflection, is abrasively honest. Ross confronts the reader with unedited data and evidence of our relationship with the digital world. She does not provide us with an opinion, instead she allows us to reflect and absorb an array of familiar and, perhaps common realities.

⁵ Katherine Ross, *Being Digital; Being Altered, Deep Immersion in the Digital Sea*. Toronto: Self-published, 2015.

⁶ *Phygital* refers to a business module of creating a hybrid between branding and the consumer across physical and digital spaces.

Katherine Ross creates work that questions what it means to be lonely in today's digitized world, when unlimited access to voices and opinions are available with the click of a button. Her work creates authenticity in a sometimes overwhelmingly inauthentic world. It is liberating. Ross amplifies the voice found in the back of our heads as we struggle to compose the perfect selfie, or write the wittiest comment. This work is an attempt at breaking down the digital world into its most physical representation. In doing so, it creates a dialogue and challenges the viewer to truly evaluate and reflect upon how we choose to exist.

*"THE DEVICE
ALLOWS YOU
TO FRAME
YOUR REALITY
AND CAST
FORWARD AN
EXISTENCE
THAT CAN
ONLY BE
APPRECIATED
THROUGH
THE SCREEN"*⁷

– **Maddie Alexander**

⁷ Katherine Ross, *Being Digital*, mixed media, 2015.