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*Volume* is Xpace Cultural Centre's annual anthology of exhibitions and essays. These essays demonstrate the breadth of exhibitions, artists, designers, curators and writers that contribute to Xpace's place as a vibrant part of Toronto and OCAD University's arts community. This publication includes programming across all four of our exhibition spaces in the 2015-16 year.

Xpace Cultural Centre is a membership driven artist-run centre dedicated to providing emerging and student artists and designers with the opportunity to showcase their work in a professional setting. We program contemporary practices that respond to the interests and needs of our membership. As we program with shorter timelines this allows for us to respond to contemporary issues in theory and aesthetics, keeping an up to the minute response to what is going on directly in our community.





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## LIL PINK PHOTO OP

KATIE MORTON

SEPTEMBER 11 — OCTOBER 30, 2015

" I DON'T KNOW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I STOPPED  
POSTING ART AND STARTED POSTING PICTURES OF MY FOOD. "

I don't know what would happen  
if I stopped posting art and started  
posting pictures of my food.

Katie Morton has recently graduated  
from OCAD University with a BFA  
in Painting and Drawing. Inspired by  
her friends and personal experienc-  
es Morton's body of work portrays  
young women in quirky situations.  
Her personas are colourful, daring  
and most importantly, assertive of  
their own power and presence. Lil  
Pink, a life-size cardboard teen diva, is  
part of this lineage of fictional char-  
acters. Using the window space, Morton  
explores the power of the gaze in a  
society of spectacle. More specifically,  
it is through an investigation of social  
media interactions and the notion  
of self-branding that she unveils new  
methods of feminine empowerment.

For the purpose of the exhibition, the  
addition of a fictional interview (which  
is a co-production between Katie  
and I) with Lil Pink further develops  
the character as the archetype of the  
youth obsessed, self-absorbed, cis-gen-  
der, and privileged- the true post-fem-  
inist popular icon.

The creation of Lil Pink, a spoiled  
brat who is famous for being famous,  
is in direct conversation with today's  
market of desirability. Entertainment  
hot topics like the Kardashian-Jenner  
saga are by-products of an economy  
of visibility that has introduced a new  
genre of acceptable voyeurism and  
commodification of the self. Seated on  
a throne and taking a selfie, surround-  
ed with articles from her new clothing  
line and her recent endorsement for  
Coca Cola, Lil Pink actively participates



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in shaping her image as an appealing and entertaining consumable good. Actually, the selection of the medium could also be interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek comment on the disposable and fleeting nature of reality TV stardom. Extending their social influence from the small screen to the realm of the Web 2.0, young socialites such as Kylie Jenner work every day to perfect their images on Instagram. This popular application has become one of the most effective social media platforms on which self-fashioning has evolved as the proper way for individual emancipation and self-preservation. Academic and author Sarah Banet-Weiser explains in her book *Authentic; the Politic of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* that when we think about the self-as-commodity we have to consider the social relationship within which we position one's self. There is an entertained ideal of the self as one of innovation, production and consumption that stands as a unique 'authentic self'.<sup>1</sup> This shared obsession we have with the performance of the self in our daily interactions underscores a widespread need for recognition that expands beyond our close circles- it is now between the individual and a culture at large. Through self-conscious mise en scène, we capture what we believe represents an appealing facet of our

'authentic' self. Thus, via Instagramming our dinners, travels, clothes, readings, home décor, our social gatherings are reduced to backdrops of a relentless self-promotional campaign.

The relationship between Lil Pink and the social implications of self-branding has led me to think about the ways in which this conversation could be linked to the use of social media by emerging artists. My reflections were mainly centered on the non-quantifiable and invisible labour that is at play when orchestrating the self as an "art brand." "What does it take to be a desirable "brand" when promoting one's practice online? What are the advantages that spaces like Instagram offer to young artists? I had the pleasure of discussing with Katie the aforementioned topics; here are some of her thoughts:<sup>2</sup>

On Instagram as a Tool for Networking and Exposure for Young Artists

KM: I love Instagram as a tool especially because I am an artist and I like to share images. It's instant, fast paced and the quickest way possible to get my imagery out to people. Now it has a much larger audience than something like Facebook. It's the quickest way to connect with an audience. That's important to me, because I am making

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lots of stuff and I don't intend to hide it. I want to share it with the world, also as a means of marketing myself, as something that can be attainable. I want people to be able to approach me and you know, purchase my work or work with me if there are other artists who would like to do that. (...) I don't know what I would do without it coming out of school. I might have felt a bit more lost cause I would be looking for other ways to put forth my work. I know that from [Instagram], I received most of my leads. I feel like a lot of people are not really good at one-on-one social networking, knowing the right people and having those connections. So people really feel trapped (...) but I mean, it can also be hard to curate yourself on social media.



GW: I was reading an article about the nature of the invisible labour in the commercialization of the self online. How do you feel about that? Do you feel like it is also part of your job when you are managing your Instagram account?

KM: Yeah, it definitely is. And sometimes it can feel shallow or silly when you're spending so much time figuring out the best way a tiny square image can be presented. It does take a bit of behind the scenes effort sometimes

to get a picture you're happy with sharing. I suppose that is the case with a lot of artistic process but there you have it.

GW: But it takes time and there is no monetary value to it. As an artist you are not paid for that. Internet 'Likes' do not mean that you can pay your rent. There is still a lot of financial scarcity, even though you are visible.

KM: That's the tricky bit I'm trying to figure out. As an artist, how can I use these tools of visibility to assist in financial stability? Just because people "Like" your artwork does not mean they are willing to purchase it or go beyond the convenience of social media interaction.

GW: So do you think that your Instagram account is tied to your survival?

KM: I don't think my survival is tied to Instagram, but I think the potential for wider reach is certainly helpful. It's basically a virtual gallery with a set amount of guaranteed viewers to attend the "show."

On the difficulties of curating one's self on social media and Our Dependence on the "Like" Factor

KM: It is so funny how the "Like" has



turned in to a quasi currency which gets divvyed out and measured by the creator as the images worth. On the one hand it's great to share the love and be able to quickly and easily voice your opinion but on the other hand we can get caught up in the politics of how those numbers look. For example, maybe one day you post a silly photo you could care less about and it receives a large amount of likes and then the next day you share a photo of a work of art you worked hard at and it receives far less acclaim. You know the whole matter is trivial but part of you is probably thinking 'what the gosh darn hecky'.

GW: Yeah, it's weird because some of my flower pictures get thirty Likes but then when I post art, the response is lower, and I am like why?! It's Art!

KM: Yeah, it's weird and annoying, it's hard to tell. I don't know what would happen if I stopped posting art and started posting pictures of my food. I guess people would be mad?

KM: It definitely makes you think about what your audience would like best but then, I don't care if a picture gets way less Likes. I decided that if I like something, I'm going to leave it up. I used to delete things if they didn't reach a certain point. It still has to be

mine. I still want to remain myself and not get all weird about it.

GW: Yeah, I mean if you don't have any Likes on a picture, you don't feel good. It is stupid but it is how it works, and you know it's ridiculous and rationally you don't want to give into that. At the end of the day, it still takes so much space. So how do you think this interaction influences the value of your work?

KM: It's frustrating. Especially, like you don't want to show too much for free. You are just getting to a point where, is this enough for people to want to go beyond just seeing your Instagram and purchase something or see this work in real life? (...) Even if you do have a good following, it is hard to know the formula. It's like whatever hits, hits.

Based on the discussions I have had with Katie, I realized that nowadays the commercialization of one's artistic practice is closely linked with the ability one has to market his/her/their self/selves as a subject worthy of the public eye. Although, if we look back at previous generations of artists, one can argue that it always has been the case; however, there is something different happening on social media. Perhaps it is this new positionality generated by the accessibility to someone's daily

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life- the performative aspect of the artist- as a mythical character is not just a rumor- it becomes something you can actually observe on a regular basis. Consequently, one has to capitalize on the capacity to sustain their followers' interests in order to sell their art. Through platforms like Instagram, what we are now consuming is no longer art for what it represents as an object, and idea, but an access to the maker's 'authentic self'. Under this angle, Morton's satire transcends recent shifts in art's marketability.

- Geneviève Wallen



### Exclusive Interview with Lil Pink

Most of us have followed, or at least heard about, the White family drama through their reality TV show *Red White and Juice*. The daughter of Rose and Redmond White, Lil Pink did not want to only be known as "the daughter of..." and sought to become her own brand at a young age. The eigh-

teen-year-old socialite is already at the head of an empire consisting of a clothing line named *Lil* and a forthcoming makeup collection. Nominated as the most influential teen of 2015, she is one of the voices of her generation. Today, I had the privilege to meet and conduct a short interview with this inspiring young woman, as she is in the city for a short trip.

GW: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet me today. It is so great to finally be able to chat with you a little. Wow, what a year it has been for you, eh?

LP: Oh, thanks for inviting me. I am very happy to be here. Toronto is such a fun city! And the fans and all! Yeah... super busy year but like really exciting you, know?

GW: Let's dive in shall we? So, who are your role models?

LP: I would have to say my Mom, Rose. She has like literally always been there for me and has been a great example of how hard work really pays off.

GW: Do you define yourself as a Feminist?

LP: Um, like I think so. I think that maybe people think that being a feminist



means hating men and stuff, but like after hearing Beyoncé's new album, I think I understood the definition a little better. Plus Beyoncé is so beautiful so ya.

GW: Haha yeah, Beyoncé is amazing! Can't wait to see what she will produce next! Ok, let's talk about your relationship with Kylie Jenner. She stated in a recent interview for *Teen Vogue* that if it wasn't for the success of her family's show, *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, you wouldn't enjoy the social status that you have today. What are your thoughts on this comment?

LP: First of all, I love and like totally respect Kylie and her family. However, I don't think the success of myself or my family is a result of being featured on *KUWTK*. I have worked so hard to build my clothing line and give my fans something they can enjoy and be proud of and I think that has little to do with them and everything to do with my own motivation.

GW: How do you feel about your nomination for the most influential teen of 2015?

LP: Honestly, I like literally feel so blessed to have such amazing fans and such support from everyone. I am excited to be announcing my new makeup line

this fall, so I hope I can repay everyone with something new and exciting.

GW: Where do you see yourself in five years?

LP Well, if my math is correct I will finally be able to sing that Taylor Swift song about being 22. Haha um... but for reals though, life is a journey and I hope by then I will be living in my new dream home and bringing it with my Lil clothing line. Just gotta believe it to achieve it, I always say.

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<sup>1</sup>Sarah, Banet-Weiser: "Branding the Postfeminist Self" in *Authentic: the Politic of Ambivalence* in a *Brand Culture*, (London and New York: New York University Press, 2012), 73

<sup>2</sup>Katie Morton (artist) in discussion with the author, August 6th, 2015. All citations were taken from recorded sessions with the artist during the Xspace residency at Artscape Gibraltar Point. These excerpts have been revised and approved by the artist.

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## PRIVATE ISLAND

MT JR.

(MOHAMMAD REZAEI  
AND JOLEEN TONER)

NOVEMBER 6 — DECEMBER 12, 2015

PRIVATE ISLAND GUIDED MEDITATION

*\*Before you begin the meditation, please find a quiet place. This meditation, amongst many others, can be purchased in the App store or downloaded from iTunes for your ultimate tranquility\**

*\*If you are reading the meditation aloud it should take approximately 5 minutes to read. Please base voice speed on this time recommendation\**

*\*It is also recommended that when spoken aloud, the meditation should be read in a calm voice. Calm may be defined as quiet, still, unflustered and tranquil\**

As you breathe in and out, allow your mind to fly far away.

Visualize yourself on a private island in the middle of the Ocean.

Everything looks like something from a postcard (or actually it looks more like that island they went to on *Keeping up with the Kardashians*. You know the episode? The one where Kim loses her diamond earrings in the

ocean and FREAKS out? They were in like Bora Bora or something. Yeah, that's what it looks like.

You can hear the sound of the gentle waves and see the ocean bright blue with emerald green (hmm, actually the ocean should be whichever colour looks best with your complexion. You should really be the best dressed in your meditation. Also you're wearing all white but don't worry, it doesn't make you look fat. You look super cute).

Wanting to explore the island, you begin to walk along the beach.

And as you look back you see your footprints in the white sand (going barefoot is best because flip-flops are never a good look).

Imprints from your past are embedded in those footprints (you could never embed the past in flip-flop

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prints for sure).

You watch the waves of the ocean take you to paradise.

You watch the waves wash away your footprints.

Free from the past, you move forward (you should not have any messy footprints in your paradise. Minimalism is key to any good meditation).

You feel as though the trees and flowers move aside, welcoming you to the island.

You begin to notice how everything around you sways with harmony, to the rhythm of your inner tranquility (you could also choose pretty much any Drake song. They're all pretty good to sway to).

Feel the gentle waves lapping at your feet, warm and refreshing.

In your mind, allow the water to wash over your feet.

Your inner tranquility attracts more beauty towards you, like colourful fish (or maybe that cute person you were checking out earlier at the all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet).

All that is good circles around you. You feel nothing but deep peace.

This is the perfect place.

Your very own private island.

(You are at peace just in time to meet up with your friends at the swim-up bar.

You will party all night but will wake up without any hang over: the ulti-

mate inner peace.)

\*These materials may be used only for Meditation Purposes. You may not copy or distribute any part of this material to any other person. Where the material is provided to you in electronic format you may download or print from it for your own use. You may not download or make a further copy for any other purpose. Failure to comply with the terms of this warning may expose you to legal action for copyright infringement\*

\*We do not take responsibility for any lack of extreme calmness or tranquility that follows this meditation\*<sup>1</sup>

MT JR's installation, *Private Island*, investigates and breaks down the tropical island fantasy many have come to imagine as the ultimate escape from a mundane reality. Utilizing various elements including text, images and objects, the installation picks apart the idea of a utopic paradise, revealing just how much of this idea is constructed and how little of it is actually accessible.

Five plinths sit in the window; each is printed with text reading the name of an island and its price. You may wonder, "Who can afford paradise?" while reading the price tags attached to these private islands. At that cost, the truth is not many. Utopia is apparently only available to the extremely rich.

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Instead, you will have to do like the rest of us: Google image search "paradise". Stare longingly at your search results. Place yourself there in your mind.

The construction of fantasy and ideal beauty is further exposed by a list of popular plastic surgeries printed on the back wall of the space. Without being literal, this list allows you to consider just how much the ideals of beauty are constructions, whether of a person's physical beauty, or the beauty of a utopic paradise. Both can be created and both can be purchased. In either of these fantasies, the boundary between what you want and what you have been told to want is uncertain, and eventually it becomes almost impossible to distinguish a difference. Do I really want an all-you-can-eat lunch buffet at my tropical island getaway or has Sunwing Vacations just convinced me of its luxuriousness? To be honest, I'm not really sure anymore, but I do know that I can't stop thinking about it.

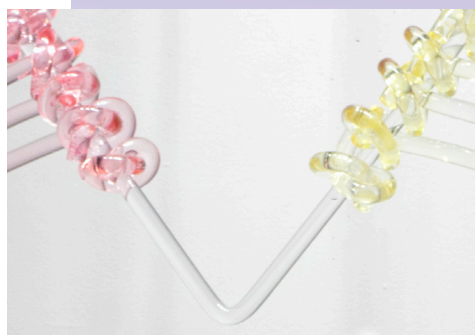
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Finally, MT JR. has included a grayscale image of water as the installation's backdrop, which prompts me to consider just how often fantasy does not match reality. When you finally visit paradise, will it be exactly how you imagined, or will it fall short? Will its construction be revealed? Will reality peek through the fantasy, creating a not-so-seamless paradise like MT JR's private island?

— Samirra Sada

<sup>1</sup>Excerpts of this meditation are sourced from Inner Space Meditation. "Paradise Island- Guided Meditation to Relax" Online video clip. Youtube. YouTube, 22 Sep. 2010. Web. 22 Oct 2015.





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## LOVE IS...PLASTIC

COREY MORANIS

JANUARY 15 — MARCH 4, 2016

PLASTIC BE PROUD

DON'T IMITATE ANYTHING

YOU'RE PURE, PURE, PURE

—THE SUGARCUBES,

"DEAR PLASTIC"<sup>1</sup>

Corey Moranis loves plastic. As a child, her parents suggested getting her a bicycle as a Christmas present; she preferred a small pink plastic chair instead (she got it, and still has it). She's a lifelong collector of plastic items like toys, which often serve as inspiration for her work and sometimes feature in it themselves. Moranis is fascinated by plastic's inherent qualities of colour, texture and materiality, by its very unnatural-ness. Plastic is suggestive of nostalgia and kitsch, particularly for children of the 1980s, though Moranis feels this nostalgia without irony; for her, plastic is magic.<sup>2</sup> *Love is... Plastic* is formed from manufactured clear acrylic rods, which Moranis has bent, twisted, knotted and dyed to form the shape of a heart. Suspended in the Window Space by brightly-hued pink and yellow cords, the installation

takes its name from the 1960s comic strip created by cartoonist Kim Grove. Each of Grove's comics consist of a single-frame featuring a nude, big-eyed and child-like couple accompanied by a phrase beginning with 'love is...' ('love is... what can melt the coldest heart,' 'love is... when your knees turn to jelly').<sup>3</sup> The installation's knotted acrylic rods and colourful cords recall 1970s macramé wall hangings (which were often hand-crafted with synthetic cord). These references point to Moranis' sincere appreciation for oft-maligned kitsch objects. Plastics were initially developed as sustainable alternatives to natural materials like ivory, wood, turtle shell and glass, often imitating their predecessors in colour and texture; plastic continues to substitute for pricier materials to this day, disguising itself in the image

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of more elegant components.<sup>4</sup> Rather than a transformation of plastic into something else, or a so-called 'elevation' of kitsch to fine art, Moranis is interested in the value of the material in its 'natural' state as an un-natural and sentimental material.

In addition to her practice as an artist and jewellery designer, Moranis is also a baker. Though these mediums at first seem disparate, they are highly interconnected within her work. Moranis bakes elaborate, multi-layered and multi-coloured cakes, often several feet tall. Their outsides are coated with icing in patterns inspired by psychedelic textiles, and decorated with candy and plastic toys; their insides are made of kaleidoscopically marbled cake batter and edible glitter. They're joyful, nostalgic, and unlike anything you've seen before, again demonstrating Moranis' earnest affinity with kitsch. In Moranis' jewellery line, Coco's Frosting Shack, she dyes and hand mixes a rainbow of solid, liquid and powdered acrylics, along with edible sprinkles and glitter, and molds them into simple Lucite<sup>5</sup> shapes. Each wearable piece resembles a slice of Moranis' marbled cakes, and the designer refers to them as 'frosting.'

With *Love is...* Moranis expands on her jewellery design practice and dives

further into experimentation with the medium of acrylic plastic. She has shaped each acrylic rod by hand to form the installation. To begin, the rod is inserted into an 'oven', which heats it up enough to be malleable; once the temperature is reached, Moranis has about 10 seconds to bend, mold or knot the piece into the desired shape by hand while wearing protective gloves. Each plastic rod in *Love is...* starts out clear, then selected pieces are then dyed shades of yellow and pink. It's challenging to find information on how to dye industrial plastic online, so Moranis has experimented with several methods with varying degrees of success. Currently, she employs a process similar to that which is used to dye synthetic fabric. After mixing the dye with boiling water, the rod is added to the pot; once the colour has set into the plastic, the piece is dried, cooled, then buffed. Through the process of buffing, some of the dye is removed, producing a visible ombré effect.<sup>6</sup> Moranis' material explorations in plastic, though more sleek, recall her experiments in wearables and edible confections.

Moranis is a collector, and her strength lies in her ability to collect nostalgic materials, techniques, colours and symbols, and reinterpret them in a way that fully appreciates and values

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their sentimentality. *Love is... Plastic* reminds us not to dismiss hearts and flowers, but to embrace wistful reminiscence.

-Emily Gove

<sup>1</sup> The Sugarcubes, "Dear Plastic," *Here Today, Tomorrow Next Week!*, Elektra Records, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Conversation with the artist, January 6, 2016.

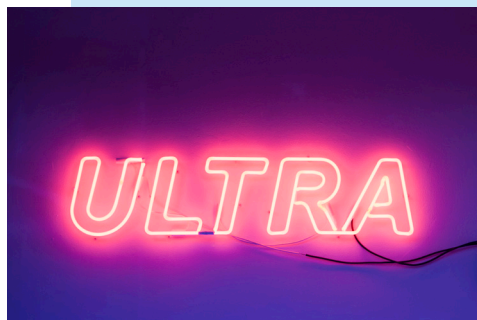
<sup>3</sup> *Love is...* comic strip collection, [loveiscomix.com](http://loveiscomix.com), January 6, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Freinkel, "A Brief History of Plastic's Conquest of the World," *Scientific American* online, May 29, 2011: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-brief-history-of-plastic-world-conquest/>

<sup>5</sup> Another name for poly(methyl methacrylate), a.k.a. acrylic

<sup>6</sup> Conversation with the artist.





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## ULTRA FINE II

NADIA KUZMICZ

MARCH 18TH — MAY 6TH, 2016

CURATED BY TOBIAS WILLIAMS  
AS PART OF *VULGAR ERA*

## ULTRA

: going beyond what is usual or ordinary; excessive;  
exceptional; extreme  
: surpassing customary norms  
: located past, on the far side of  
: carrying to the fullest degree possible  
: over, mega, real  
: very

A pseudo utopia, Ultra Fine II is for self indulgence.  
Ego grants Entry; its all about Ego. A simultaneous high  
and low, you're in Limbo. There exists no consequence  
until its time to leave. Exit is followed by reproach. This  
is the worst part but you need it to feel ultra.

*Ultra Fine II is open 24 hours a day.  
Presented in partnership with the Images Festival*

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## STATES OF BEING

ADRIA MIRABELLI  
AND YANA VERBA

JUNE 24 — AUGUST 12, 2016

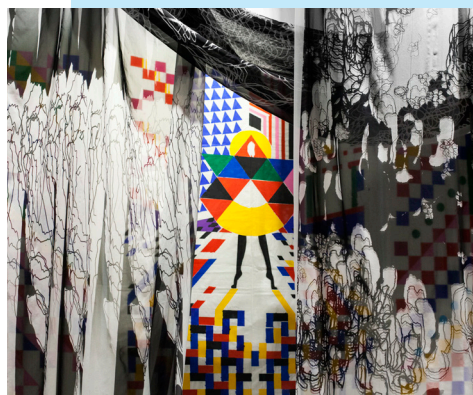
STATES OF BEING; AN  
ACT OF WAYFINDING

In *States of Being*, contemporary artists Adria Mirabelli and Yana Verba look to the colours and patterns of the past to situate themselves in an ever shifting present. Working with themes of memory and nostalgia each of these artists locates personal history through various means, manipulating culturally encoded patterns as an act of wayfinding, an open call between the present and the past. The title of the exhibition, *States of Being*, gives us some clues as to how we might decode Verba and Mirabelli's collaboration. States are simultaneously fixed and fluid, always moments away from their next incarnation.

The act of looking backwards varies for both artists, but for both Mirabelli and Verba it is idiosyncratic, ideological, and deeply personal.

Originally inspired by the shop windows of 1980s and 1990s Russia, the forlorn visual displays of a collapsing Soviet Union, Verba and Mirabelli's site-specific window installation is designed to be viewed through glass. Bridging the gap between contemporary installation and commercial display, both artists acknowledge that what separates the present from the past is the act of looking.

Mirabelli's large-scale, translucent, draped and suspended textiles alter the tone and shape of all that lies beyond them, providing us with intricate monochromatic lenses through which to view Verba's work, and *States of Being* as a whole. In her practice, Mirabelli actively assembles an inexhaustible archive of patterns and photographs. Most of her visu-



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al archive is taken from the textures and shapes of her proverbial ancestral home, a small Italian enclave in North York, a bastion of all that is quintessentially Italian-Canadian.

Alternatively, Verba roots her work in the geometric abstractions of modernist painter and designer Sonia Delaunay. Separated by a century and an ocean, Verba and Delaunay are joined by an obsession with design, pattern and colour.

Both Verba and Delaunay were born in the Ukraine. Like Delaunay, Verba has been displaced many times throughout her life. According to Verba, these movements across time and space produced a feeling of isolation, which pressed her to seek out a visual home in Delaunay's designs and paintings, to anchor herself in the language of both abstraction and Ukrainian folk culture. In her bright, spacious home studio in Los Angeles, Verba is alone. In a new country, in a new city, she paints vibrant colours onto large muslin panels. Tapes out geometric patterns. Revels in the audacity of pigment.

For both Verba and Mirabelli, their work is an act of wayfinding, of tracing backwards.

While Verba seizes colour, the con-

sciousness of brush strokes, and the deliberateness of pigment, Mirabelli zeroes in on shape, line, and repetition.

Mirabelli leans into her work. In a shared industrial space in Toronto, during one of our studio visits, I watch her perched on a small chair, surrounded by pieces of paper. Tacked to every surface are scans of manipulated textiles. Swirling crochet tablecloths. Rippling floral curtains. I can almost smell the rooms packed with Tiffany lamps, plastic sofa covers, floral mattresses, and religious memorabilia that have become a treasure trove for Mirabelli. Her grandparents' home, the birthplace of her Canadian-Italian roots. To understand her place as a contemporary artist she paces these rooms. Snaps photos. Collects fabrics.

Mirabelli works organically. After scanning physical materials and manipulating them with her hands, her work transitions into the realm of the digital and she begins to draw. She zeroes in on a single corner of a single pattern. The lilt of a leaf, or the curve of a line. From these details she expands and repeats, building an intricate hand drawn digital world, which she later rematerializes onto silk. For Mirabelli, the transition from the material to the digital is seamless, an essential element in the layering of her work. She is a product of her generation: embracing

technology for its generative properties, not guarding against it.

In her studio, Verba works steadily. Imperfection is an important part of her work. She does not seek to replicate Delaunay, and to prove this she allows for leaks and digressions. In the smudges and specks of paint at the edges of Verba's geometric parcels of colour, she reveals herself. She is not in turn of the century Paris pioneering the colourful modernist movement of *simultanéisme*. She paints in a trepidatious present. One that is notoriously messy. It leaks. It bleeds and smudges. Modernism is no longer a promise for the future; it's a poem of the past. In the process of painting Verba uses only one piece of tape to keep her colours in line, to build her rhythmic patterns. Through the leaks she winks at us. She knows the rebellious pigments will give her away. The totality of modernism is dead. And this contemporary world in which we find ourselves is overwhelmingly messy.

Fiber cutouts also fill the installation. Delicate and complex, marked with the intricate hybridity of collaboration.

Wayfinding relies on others.

Embedded in the installation is a small muslin painting by Verba reminiscent of one of Delaunay's 1920 designs

for Metz and Co. (originally a source pattern for men's ties). Into this muslin Mirabelli has cut out hand drawn patterns from her visual archive. The hybrid work renders the muslin delicate, spacious. For both artists the gaps in their work are essential. It is in the gaps wherein lies the whole, a space for encounter; a bridge between the present and the past. Together both Mirabelli and Verba develop a new language of space – of what it truly means to collaborate.

Verba's painted muslin panels and Mirabelli's hand-drawn digital patterns on silk exist in such close proximity they cannot be witnessed without the visual influence of each other. This is significant because Verba and Mirabelli are working 4,000 kilometers apart. Verba is now based in Los Angeles, and will never see the work installed in person.

In various ways both artists collapse time and space in an attempt to reimagine, re-encode and re-pattern the past through the lens of an unpredictable present. In life, states of being are understood by their fixity, but they are always a moment away from the next gesture, the next instance of looking backward, or forward, or toward one another. Together Verba and Mirabelli expose the fragility of collaboration and the intimacy of





shared space. Cumulatively, *States of Being* transforms into a hybrid present that bears witness to both artists and the act of looking simultaneously.

--Victoria Mohr-Blakeney

EXHIBITION

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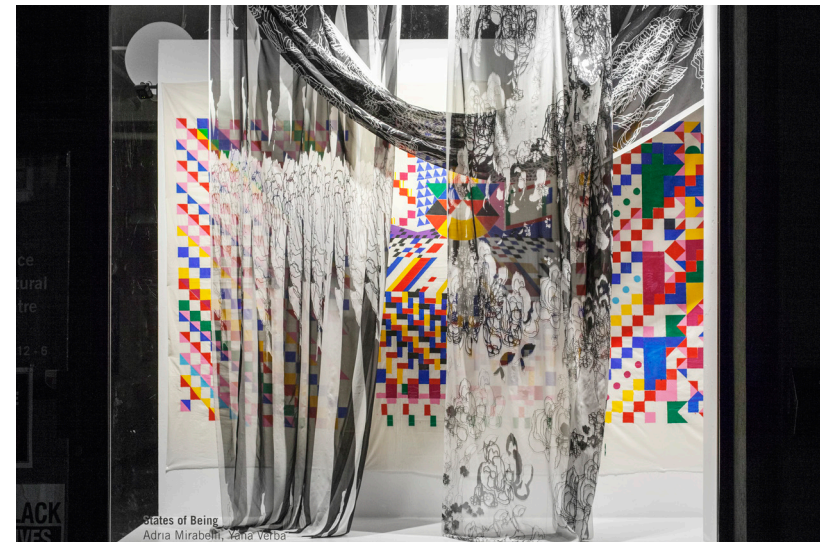


WINDOW



EXHIBITION

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WINDOW



02

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## SWALLOWED

ALEXANDRA MACKENZIE

SEPTEMBER 11 — OCTOBER 17, 2015

Don't underestimate the power of celebration and joy. Pleasure is an almost radical idea, especially when confronted with the ongoing effects of colonialism, capitalism and environmental destruction on the land and people of Canada and the world.

Alexandra Mackenzie's wall-to-wall screen-printed wallpaper, in a variety of complementary and opposing patterns, and animated gifs projected onto the walls work to create an environment for her music performance project Petra Glynt. An infinity symbol repeats indefinitely throughout the work, particularly notable in her text piece (also the title track of her forthcoming album) "Fell into a hōle". The patterns of the wallpaper are mesmerizing, overwhelming in their maximalism and most importantly, cel-

ebratory. The sense of joy is palpable and incredibly refreshing. But make no mistake, as the energy harnessed from Mackenzie's art and music practice is not singularly rooted in joy alone, but also in a passionate dedication to social change. Mackenzie often addresses issues of environmental and social justice in her music in order to communicate more succinctly certain topics that she finds more challenging to convey with her visual practice. In her words, "by combining my practices, I hope they can resonate more effectively."<sup>1</sup>

Living in Canada under a Conservative government that refuses to acknowledge some of the most pressing issues this country has ever faced is frustrating and downright depressing. Imagine being told, if you are a First



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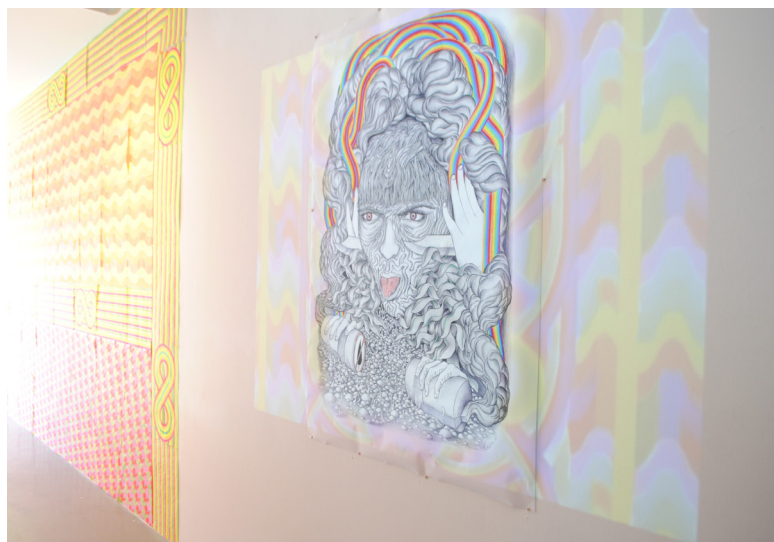
EXHIBITION

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Nations woman, that the overwhelming amount of violence: community violence, societal violence, and systemic violence you face is, in the very words of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, "... isn't really high on our radar, to be honest."<sup>2</sup> Then take into consideration the ongoing theft of land and identity, and cultural and literal genocide that First Nations peoples in Canada have faced since European colonists first arrived here.

As a white woman living on the colonized land of Toronto (of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation) I am deeply grateful to First Nations peoples fighting on the front lines of climate change protest. As I write this, a standoff is taking place between the Crown/RCMP and the Unist'ot'en clan in BC holding off Chevron (and many other oil companies) who are fighting to set up pipelines through their territory without their consent, despite the fact that these projects explicitly violate Wet'suwet'en Law.<sup>3</sup>

In Mackenzie's music project Petra Glynt, she writes intricately layered, looped and passionate songs questioning our roles and place within a capitalist and colonialist county. In "Fell into a Hole" she writes,

"Surf the dwarfed landscape,  
they're in the know, they're in the

know.

Many secrets to behold- sold our souls  
for phony gold

...

Haven't we had our time to shine?

Haven't we plucked what's left of the  
vine?"

Mackenzie has been a vocal opponent to many pipeline projects that have been approved to begin or expand in Canada as of late, despite the criticism, doubt and fear from many Canadians that these projects have a very high potential to devastate the communities they run through. In a recent track she released titled 'Murder' (which was openly addressed to Prime Minister Harper) she sings,

"Call it what it is: murder.

Call it what it is: murder.

Choosing the economy over a real  
future

Call it what it is: murder.

All I see is dirty hands and dirty money  
I got a fire in my heart and a fire in  
the belly

Don't try and sell me a green car  
All the green is the colour of tar.'

Classically trained in opera as a teenager, Mackenzie's voice is strong and commanding, and often gives me shivers. Her art practice, in some of its nods to psychedelia, DIY culture and



PHOTO BY JOSH CHONG



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craft based making, look to the past for its embodiment of holistic, green living, while she simultaneously and stubbornly pushes forward, imagining a future that cares for the earth and its people. Her drawings often depict a female form as a revolutionary figure standing against violence enacted on the environment. In her hand screen-printed wallpapers lining Xpace's walls, the colourful infinity loop reminds us that what happens in our lives and in history is often a pattern. We should pay attention to the patterns and listen to what the past

has told us, otherwise we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

The in-your-face pulsating colours and patterns of the immersive environment she has created provide a pleasure and a joy to be found when hopelessness can be crushing. Her songs are crafted as a call to action, for us to realize our own agency in an unjust structure, and to protect and take joy in the beautiful, strange, and incredibly diverse planet we have, for the time being.

- Alicia Nauta

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EXHIBITION

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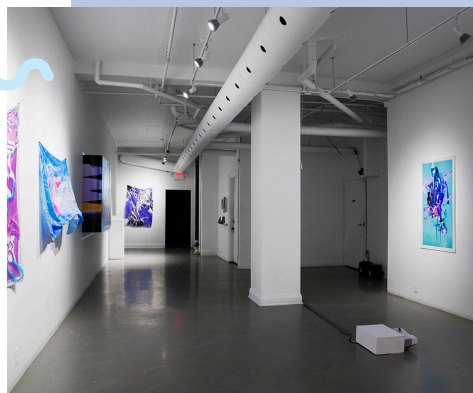
<sup>1</sup> Conversation with the artist, (August 31, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> CBC News, Full text of Peter Mansbridge's interview with Stephen Harper, December 17, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Unist'ot'en Declaration, <http://unistotencamp.com/?cat=7>

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NIKI SEHMBI

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## 100PERCENTREAL

CAT BLUEMKE, COLIN ROSATI,  
JAZMINE V.K. CARR, NIKI SEHMBI

CURATED BY ADRIENNE CROSSMAN

NOVEMBER 6 — DECEMBER 12, 2015

IRL: IN REAL LIFE

URL: ONLINE. UNIFORM RESOURCE LOCATOR AKA THE UNIQUE  
WEB ADDRESS OF A WEB PAGE ON THE INTERNET.

What is the divide between the virtual and the 'real' and how does it define how we perceive reality? Social media theorist Nathan Jurgensen describes this "mythical divide" as "digital dualism," and argues that we now live in an augmented reality vs. one that exists as separate binaries.<sup>1</sup>

Whether it's a painter compiling their mockups on Photoshop, or an artist who makes their work specifically for the web, to the use of digital tools to map out how physical work will be displayed in a white cube space, to the ever-growing community of creatives sharing their work and visual brand over social media and online platforms, the move towards digital practices among artists is increasingly pervasive. The ubiquity of the digital is undeniable, but this shift is still very

much a part of recent history, and one to which the contemporary art world, in large part, has not caught up. With such a shift come questions: what is digital art? How does digital art fit into a contemporary art context? Should net art be shown in galleries, and what does it mean when it is? How do we define value when art may evade traditional forms of capitalism and commodification? Why may artwork seen as more legitimate when contextualized within the institution (i.e. the white cube)? Does art have less value when lost in an infinite Tumblr scroll?

The plight of the digital artist often includes a negotiation of where and how their work is to be exhibited, if the work will have commodity value, and how one rationalizes these decisions in relation to the artwork's intent. This

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CAT BLUEMKE WITH TOUGH GUY MOUNTAIN



CAT BLUEMKE

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within a physical setting, blurring the boundaries between one's physical and digital self.

For the online component of the exhibition, Rosati has created *After Image*, a widely scrollable webpage made up of animated GIFs, JPEGs, video and interactive user functions. "As the sun sets all I see is compression,"<sup>4</sup> says Rosati in describing the work, specifically *Sunset Reel*, a video that is found through clicking on an embossed image of a sunset located towards the center of the vast webpage.

*Sunset Reel* is an assemblage of found moving images, footage of sunsets compressed into low res pixelated imagery, a poetic metaphor highlighting the translation from the physical sublime to compressed digital immateriality. *After Image* looks to how digital media functions, re-contextualizing the ways in which we use these media day-to-day, and bringing attention to the proliferation of degraded images within our daily visual lexicon.

In describing her work, Jazmine V. K. Carr says, "Impermanence and documentation are essential qualities in preserving the work. The treatment of objects is intimate, personal, process based and repetitive,"<sup>5</sup> words that speak to both her IRL and URL

projects in *100percentreal*. Carr's online project, *Epilogue (1&2)*, consists of a 26-minute video documenting a durational performance in which the artist repeats the process of 'deleting' physical photographs by treating them with bleach. Carr, clad in a facemask and protective gloves, inhabits the video frame, seated around a large bucket of bleach. She immerses individual photographs in the substance one by one, taking a moment to watch the physical image brighten then literally drip off the paper, leaving behind only the materiality of the now blank photograph. The photos were sourced from Carr's personal and family archives, ranging from those given to her by her mother and grandmother, as well those shot by Carr herself. She describes the process as an "intimate way of releasing myself from certain memories and certain pasts."<sup>6</sup> Instead of simply throwing them out, Carr goes through this process of 'deleting,' enacting a physical reversal of the photographic process, resulting in a type of cathartic healing. This temporal performance lives on only as digital documentation on the internet, highlighting the precarity and uniqueness of the physical archive in contrast to the pervasiveness of digital data's infinite reproducibility, and the lack of the owner's control over the content once released online.

Carr's sculptural work, *slide to unlock*

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exhibition aims not to answer these questions, but to meditate on them, even evading/bypassing the questions by proving them irrelevant, and putting the focus on the work itself.

*100percentreal* features the work of Cat Bluemke, Colin Rosati, Jazmine V.K. Carr, and Niki Sehmbi, four emerging internet-aware artists working within the realms of digital and physical space. The exhibition is made up of two components: the IRL Embassy at Xpace Cultural Centre and the (URL) digital exhibition hosted online at onehundredpercentreal.net as part of The Wrong New Digital Art Biennale, the world's largest biennale and only digital art biennale<sup>2</sup>. The artists in *100percentreal* are renegotiating the relationships between the digital and the physical, the synthetic and the 'real' through explorations of:

- Commodification, brand identity and virtual tourism (Cat Bluemke)
- Image value and the physical tangibility of digital space (Colin Rosati)
- The digital sublime, and digital aura (Niki Sehmbi)
- The precarity of the physical archive vs. the inability to fully delete one's digital remnants online (Jazmine V. K. Carr)

For *100percentreal* Cat Bluemke is exhibiting three separate works.

The first, *Luxury International F/W Catalogue 2014*, hosted online, consists of a series of images, mimicking its original form as a scrollable PDF. The piece is a collection of Bluemke's work published digitally as a catalogue, and is meant to be viewed outside the physical gallery constraints. Created during time spent in Florence, Italy in 2014, *Luxury International* explores contemporary issues of archiving and authorship, the shifting values of information as commodity, the digital in relation to traditional art objects, the hyperreal, and the evolving construct of value in internet-aware 'Postinternet' society.

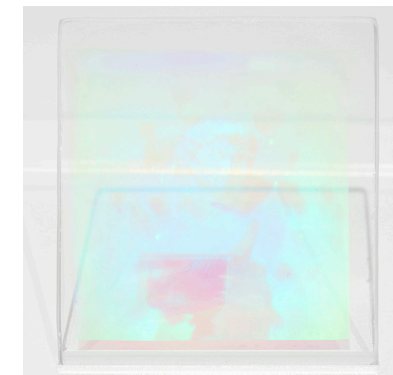
A unifying theme throughout Bluemke's work is virtual tourism: "a simulation of an existing location, usually composed of a sequence of videos or still images."<sup>3</sup> *International Brand Expansion (IBE)* is a collaborative project between Bluemke and her collective Tough Guy Mountain. The work consists of both digital as well as IRL components. Hosted online, a series of GIFs and JPEG images represent a virtual gallery space or showroom, the work takes the form of 3D rendered textiles featuring imagery of famous international tourist destinations. The designs were inspired by search engine results yielded when inputting the destinations, often producing idyllic hyperreal renderings of the real loca-

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tions. These textile works have also been rendered physically via digital printing, and hang on the gallery walls of Xpace throughout the duration of the IRL exhibit, extending the digital showroom to a real life gallery setting. Also located in the gallery are Bluemke's *David Renditions II*, dichromated gelatin holograms depicting Michelangelo's *David* created at Holocreator's lab in Hamburg, Germany. Neoclassical imagery, such as that of *David*, has been so heavily re-produced within our contemporary digital climate that the effect of its symbolism has become far more pervasive than the physical work itself, often taking the form of kitsch iconography. *Renditions* explores the idea of the art historical object and its value as an experience within this contemporary context. This work requires the physical presence of a viewer in order to be properly experienced, as the nature of the hologram medium is essentially un-documentable.

Colin Rosati's *Autocidal After Image* is an installation that explores video and video infrastructures in the context of online networks, systems and databases. The installation consists of a single channel video projected onto a sculptural object that mimics the materiality of video in digital space. Found footage sourced from online archives is placed within a 3D space created by

Rosati—rendering each image as virtual objects to be examined. Taking on the role of the artist as a filter, Rosati aims to reveal and question online video-based infrastructure, including that of the users, the cameras, video aggregation, compression, network commodification, databases, and content consumption. *Autocidal* delves into issues of ownership and authenticity in relation to online representation, incorporating aesthetic tropes that specifically reference online environments, emulating web-based navigation



CAT BLUEMKE

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COLIN ROSATI



JAZMINE V.K. CARR



(*oscillate*) is an interactive installation that combines traditional art objects with digital technology. *unlock* consists of a sculptural assemblage featuring a large, grid-patterned painting coated in a heat sensitive pigment that alters in colour based on temperature, allowing the audience to alter the work's physicality and appearance. The work is positioned in front of a computer-controlled oscillating heater, activated via a motion sensor triggered by movement in the gallery. Once triggered, the heat changes the colour of the artwork, shifting from blue to a bleached off-white. The transformation of the work's surface recalls that of the unlocking of a touch screen phone, a device that requires human contact (body heat) to be activated. Carr refers to the work as a "performative assemblage,"<sup>7</sup> requiring a subtle interaction by the audience (physical proximity). This participation by default completes the work, triggering the mechanics to allow the objects to 'perform.'

Niki Sehmbi's work explores issues of authenticity, challenging notions of 'realness' versus 'falseness' in relation to physical versus digital space. "Traditional artwork, such as painting and sculpture, is often championed over digital work, as it is seen as holding an aura that is inaccessible in the virtual realm."<sup>8</sup> Sehmbi's artistic practice

often employs a blurring of boundaries between physical and digital, 'real' and virtual space. For the online exhibition, Sehmbi has created a series of three animated videos: *Entrance Drive*, *Planet Ball Game*, and *CloudTV*. The expansive colourful animations cascade down the browser window, appearing one after the other, forcing the user to scroll through. The work is visually stunning, entering the realm of the sublime, and giving the viewer a sense that they are catching a glimpse of an environment not of this world.

For the IRL exhibition Sehmbi has produced two large-scale digital prints, created through the process of 3D scanning objects from the 'real' (read: physical) world and placing them within virtual settings. The images are recognizably digital but echo traditional painting and sculpture practices. In making *Bloomville* and *Lighthouse*, Sehmbi used open source software<sup>9</sup> to scan her own body and face. Taking the improper renders, Sehmbi applied heavy digital manipulation, resulting in abstract digital assemblages and the creation of completely new synthetic objects and landscapes: shifting, self-sustaining realms.

Through these processes, new auras that inhabit the virtual rather than that of one unique (original) physical object, are generated by Sehmbi's





digital works. The same can be said for all of the artists in 100percentreal, each creating new contexts for existing material. To quote artist and writer Hito Steyerl:

“[The] aura is no longer based on the permanence of the ‘original,’ but on the transience of the copy [...] The poor image is no longer about the real thing – the original thing. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractures and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation. In short: It is about reality.”<sup>10</sup>

- Adrienne Crossman

*Autocidal After-Image* recently won the inaugural Emerging Digital Artists Award, presented by Equitable Bank. The work is now held in the Equitable Bank art collection.

Xpace Cultural Centre acknowledges the generous support of the Toronto Arts Council and the City of Toronto for this exhibition.

<sup>1</sup> Nathan Jurgensen, “The IRL Fetish,” *The New Inquiry*. Web. November, 2015.

<<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/the-irl-fetish/>>

<sup>2</sup> Alyssa Buffenstein, “The World’s Largest Art Biennial is Now Online,” *artnet news*. Web. November, 2015 <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/worlds-largest-biennial-art-352847>>

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia. Web. November, 2015. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual\\_tour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_tour)>

<sup>4</sup> In conversation with the artist, 2015

<sup>5</sup> In conversation with the artist, 2015

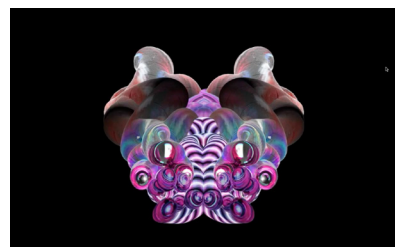
<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> In conversation with the artist, 2015

<sup>9</sup> A BETA version of ReconstructMe

<sup>10</sup> Hito Steyerl, “In Defence of the Poor Image,” *e-flux*. Web. November 2015. <In Defence of the Poor Image>



NIKI SEHMBE

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CAT BLUEMKE

ABOUT THE WRONG NEW DIGITAL ART BIENNALE – [thewrong.org](http://thewrong.org) Established in 2013, The Wrong is the first online-only art biennial, and the largest digital art biennale in the world. Based in São Paulo, Brazil, the first edition of the festival ran from November, 2013 - January 2014, hosting 30 online pavilions and 10 IRL Embassies (physical exhibitions) in ten cities around the world - including Brooklyn, Los Angeles, Barcelona, Melbourne and Istanbul - exhibiting

over 300 artists. The Wrong’s mission is “to create, promote and push positive forward-thinking contemporary digital art to a wider audience worldwide through a biennial online event that gathers the best of the best, while embraces the young talents of today’s emerging digital art scene” ([thewrong.org](http://thewrong.org)). Previous participants of The Wrong include internationally renowned digital artists such as Lorna Mills, Jennifer Chan, and Jon Rafman.

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## DESIGN + COMMUNITY

ATANAS BOZDAROV, DANICA  
DRAGO, LIDO PIMIENTA, PATTERNS  
MAGAZINE, TEAM SAGITTARIUS

JANUARY 15 — FEBRUARY 27, 2016

*Design + Community* explores the complex relationship of human interaction in design processes and methodologies. The five projects included in this exhibition by emerging designers, artists and collectives highlight not only how communities interact with objects, but show the nature of this symbiotic relationship. These works emphasize how the designed object shapes its community as the community shapes not only the end result of design but also the process itself. Within the field of community-centered design, three priorities are set in place in order to realize social change: equity, empowerment and participation.<sup>1</sup> The works in this exhibition put these priorities to practice by using design and its process as tools for education, creative expression, and liberation, as well as creating spaces

for intimacy and community-building.

Danica Drago's *Pedal Potter* is a mechanical system that invites participants to share in the experience of making wheel-thrown clay objects with a potter. Drago combines a clay-throwing wheel and a bicycle to create a participatory machine. People are invited to power the machine: a participant mounts the bicycle and pedals to give direct power to the belt drive, which turns the throwing wheel. Although the form of the clay object is still largely decided by the potter's hand, the speed of the wheel is determined by the cyclist, thus creating a process that demands collaboration from both the potter and the cyclist in order to create a clay object. This performance generates a situation in which the power of creation gets



PATTERNS MAGAZINE

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EXHIBITION

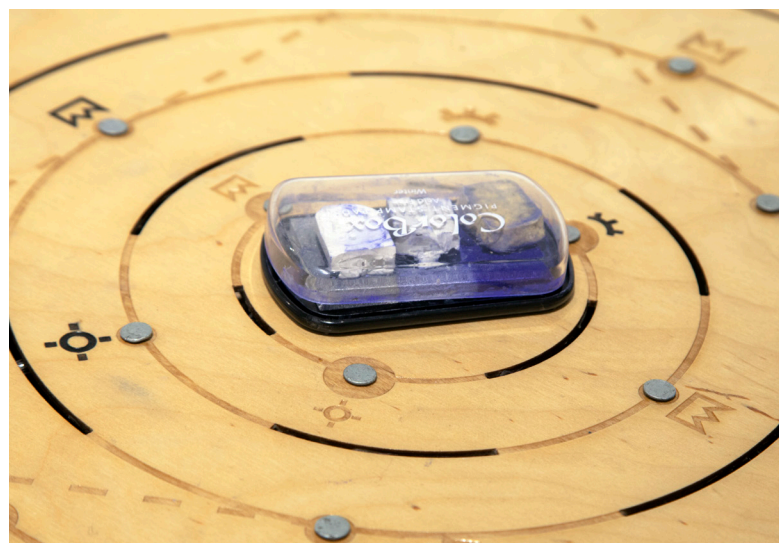
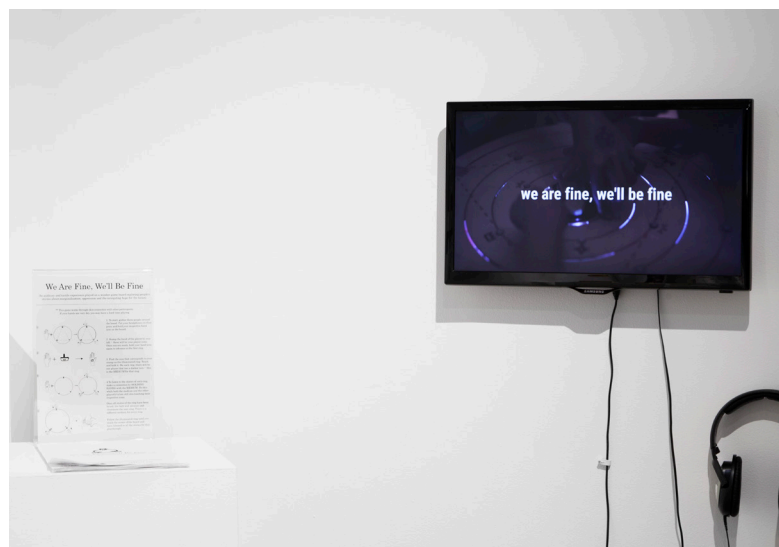
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TEAM SAGITTARIUS

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distributed from the artist's hand to include potential participants. Drago's artistic practice centers on "the methods, failures and risks involved in the making of objects, rather than the final products themselves."<sup>2</sup> Their machine fuels a critical discussion on the creation of objects and its broader relation to social and spatial contexts. Drago's machine is built to take the production process out of the studio and into a setting where it becomes accessible to the public through direct interaction. When not in use, the machine and the clay objects it creates act as artifacts of a complex process of production that highlights community-based design as a process rather than a means to an end.

Lido Pimienta's installation *Adult Toys* is made up of a collection of two series of objects meant to bring out the inner child in us while inciting connection, intimacy and learning. Pimienta describes her artistic practice as one "charged with the narratives of oppression and survival" through "the healing powers of art and design."<sup>3</sup> Her work in this exhibition demonstrates how interaction with her designed objects can tackle trauma, pain and loneliness. The first series within Pimienta's work is a set of hand-made pillows embroidered with slumberous faces. Pimienta cites the inspiration for this work in a break-up and the need

for company after losing someone.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of her anthropomorphized pillows is to ease loneliness and keep company while still being functional objects.

The second series is comprised of a number of wooden dollhouses inspired by the history surrounding Canada's residential schools. The surfaces of the dollhouses are adorned with imagery of human figures, buildings and foliage meant to represent Indigenous peoples and Christian churches. Their child-like aesthetic invites people of all ages to engage with these objects and the history they share. Pimienta's dollhouses function as educational tools that facilitate the learning about a difficult history within Canada in order to remind settler populations of the past as well as the on-going injustice to Indigenous peoples. The houses also provide an opportunity to discuss what can be a traumatic experience for many individuals in the hope that these interactions promote personal and communal healing.

Team Sagittarius is a design collective made up of Nicole Pacampara, Raoul Olou and Hope Erin Phillips. Their project *We Are Fine, We'll Be Fine* is a game-based experience where participants can explore multiple anecdotes told by individuals facing marginalization and oppression. Played on a

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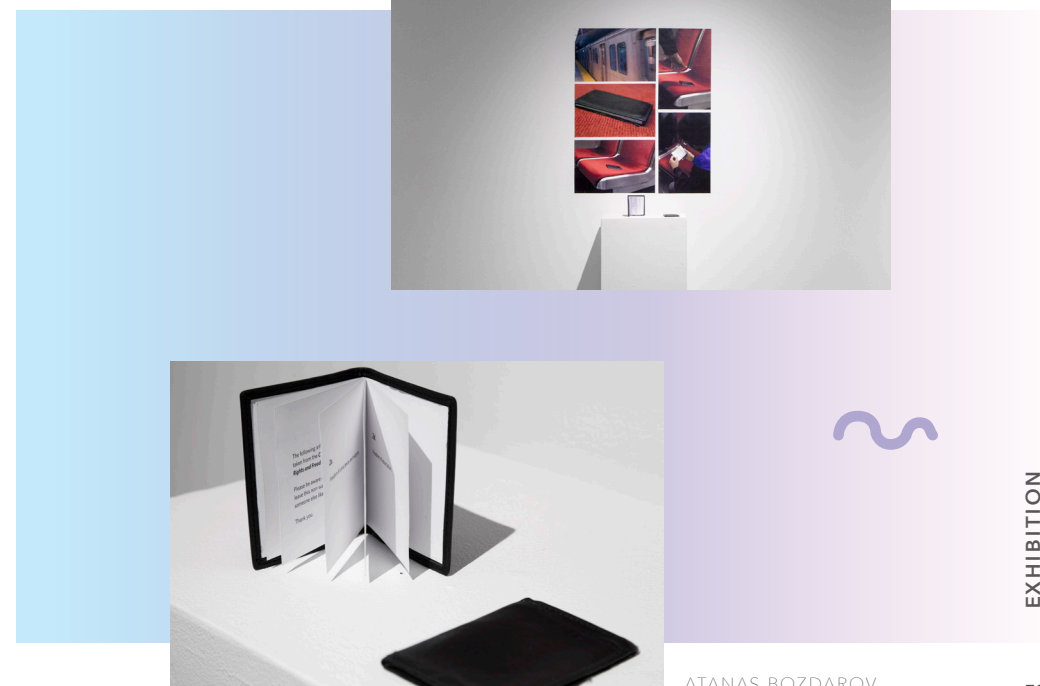
wooden board by three people, the main interface of the game becomes activated by the act of touching the board and holding hands with the other players. Team Sagittarius' design was made to create a temporary intimate space. The interface of the game promotes the closeness and physical interaction one might have while confiding to close friends.

Another important aspect in the design process of the game and its progression is a conscious effort for a decentering of power, where the active gaze is taken away from the status quo and given to those who are often marginalized. This shifts the objective of *We Are Fine, We'll Be Fine* from an explanation or learning experience to an act of intimate sharing, witnessing, active listening and support. Team Sagittarius describes the experience as a cathartic process that builds solidarity among those who are labeled as "Others."<sup>5</sup> The narrative structure of the game contains the recorded stories of over twenty individuals. Through the sharing of these narratives, participants connect not only with the other players but also with those whose stories unravel by playing the game. The communal sharing of feelings of marginalization, oppression and exclusion take individuals through a process of healing by means of self-help and helping others that ends the

game with a vision of hope.

Atanas Bozdarov's *To Be* presents a series of public installations and interventions that examine section 2(b) in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.<sup>6</sup> Section 2 discusses fundamental freedoms including religion, peaceful assembly and association with part "b" stating "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication."<sup>7</sup> The objects in this series consist of multiple posters, screen-printed on newspaper, which quote the freedoms presented in section 2(b). The posters are then distributed to newsstands throughout Toronto, reminding consumers of print media of the rights given to the press. The second set of objects consists of simple wallets, which Bozdarov has altered to function as small booklets containing the information found in the Canadian Charter. These wallets were dispersed throughout Toronto's public transit to be picked up by curious commuters. *To Be* creates surprising representations of Canadian law that use design intervention as a method of generating dialogue regarding the rights Canadians have been granted. Bozdarov's work empowers individuals through a building of awareness that causes its viewer to acknowledge their rights and critically contemplate on the political and legal systems that surrounds them.

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ATANAS BOZDAROV

Another work presented as part of *Design + Community* is *Patterns Magazine's Apathy Issue*. Founded by Nyssa Komorowski and Megan Yetman, *Patterns Magazine* is a conglomeration of social, political, creative and critical discourse causing disruptions within hegemonic narratives. Its first issue aims to pervade public spaces with art, writing and critical thought to promote social and political change. *The Apathy Issue* contains forty-four posters to be disseminated throughout the city by wheat-pasting the content onto surfaces easily seen by

the public. Its topic was taken from a Town Hall meeting with OCADU students regarding the perceived apathy regarding post-secondary education from university staff, students, and the public at large. *The Apathy Issue* came together after Canadian and International artists, writers and designers submitted to the project, amounting to a collection of poetry, photography, critical writing, drawing and illustration discussing topics like love, democracy, narcissism, alienation, philosophy, mental illness, youth, humour and much more.

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LIDO PIMIENTA

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In addition to taking art away from the white cube, *The Apathy Issue* promotes accessible creative expression and invites its viewers to interact with the work through simple viewing, to sharing it online, to street artists physically adding to the work. It also contemplates the nature of public space, hijacking it back from its private or corporate uses to forcefully create a space for art and design. Its design as a collection of mini billboards rather than a print magazine takes action overtly by physically demanding attention and taking charge of large amounts of space. The *Apathy Issue* acts as a reminder of the socio-political nature of public spaces that empower its viewers through art and design.

Community-centered design not only shifts the focus from the maker to the user, but also works towards blurring this division altogether.<sup>8</sup> As the projects in this exhibition demonstrate, the objective of design does not have to be the creation of an object, but rather it can be about the building of an environment where individuals are able to influence the design process. Contemporary design holds the potential to empower people and create intimacy while still being able to teach something new or communicate a different perspective. It is this respect for current community-based needs while still introducing new ideas that

makes design a method of generating social change and human connection.

— Maya Wilson-Sanchez

<sup>1</sup> Katherine Melcher: "Equity, Empowerment, or Participation: Prioritizing Goals in Community Design." *Landscape Journal: design, planning, and management of the land* 32, no. 2 (2013): 167-182.

<sup>2</sup> Danica Drago artist statement, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Lido Pimienta artist statement, 2015.

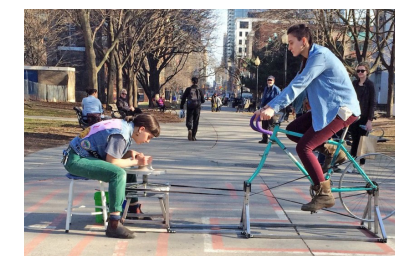
<sup>4</sup> Author in correspondence with Lido Pimienta, January 2016.

<sup>5</sup> The author in conversation with Nicole Pacampara and Hope Erin Phillips, Skype, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Atanas Bozdarov's artist statement, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s 2, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11.

<sup>8</sup> Winschiers-Theophilus, Heike, Nicola J. Bidwell, and Edwin Blake. 2012. Community consensus: Design beyond participation. *Design Issues* 28 (3): 89-100.



DANICA DRAGO

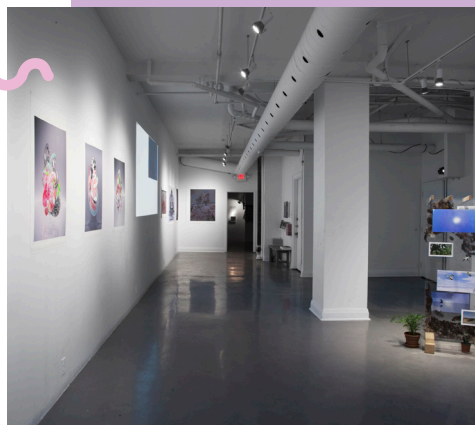


LIDO PIMIENTA

MAIN







DAHAE SONG

MAIN

## VULGAR ERA

ALESSIA DOWHANIUK , TRUDY ERIN  
ELMORE, ALANNA GILCHRIST, DAHAE  
SONG, ERIN WHITTIER

CURATED BY TOBIAS WILLIAMS

PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH IMAGES FESTIVAL

MARCH 18 — APRIL 30, 2016

"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.

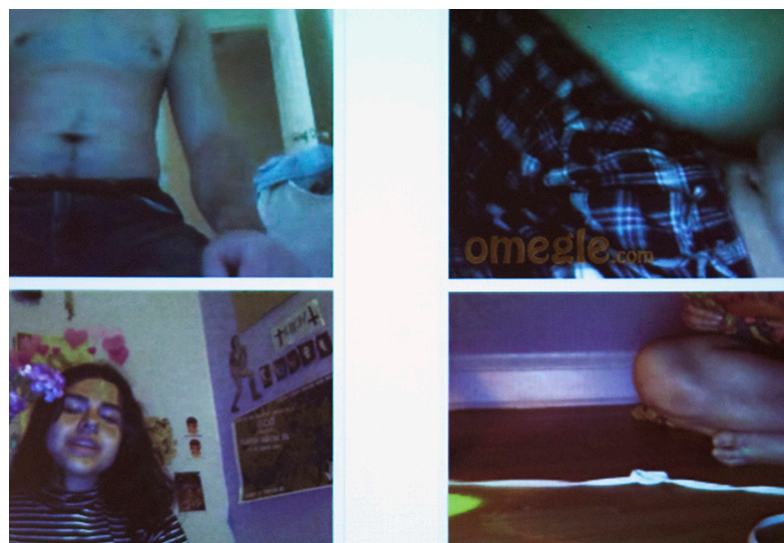
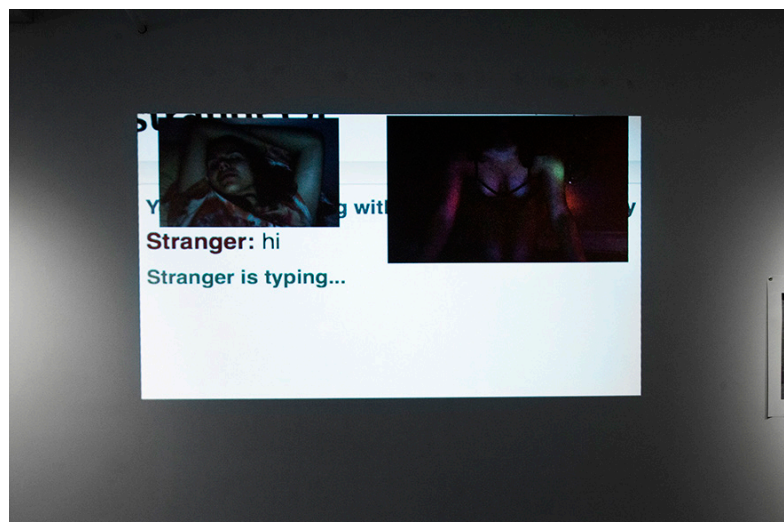
The effects of this techno-cultural shift are often difficult to isolate and analyze, partially because they are so widespread but also because they happen at such a rapid pace that technologies which were disruptive only a short time ago rapidly become commonplace. The result is a world in a constant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

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ALESSIA DOWHANIUK

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selves 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.

Alanna 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

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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 in-

stallation 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', tilts into the graphic online world of "Vore" content. Vore, short for vorarephilia, is a 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.



ERIN WHITTIER







EXHIBITION



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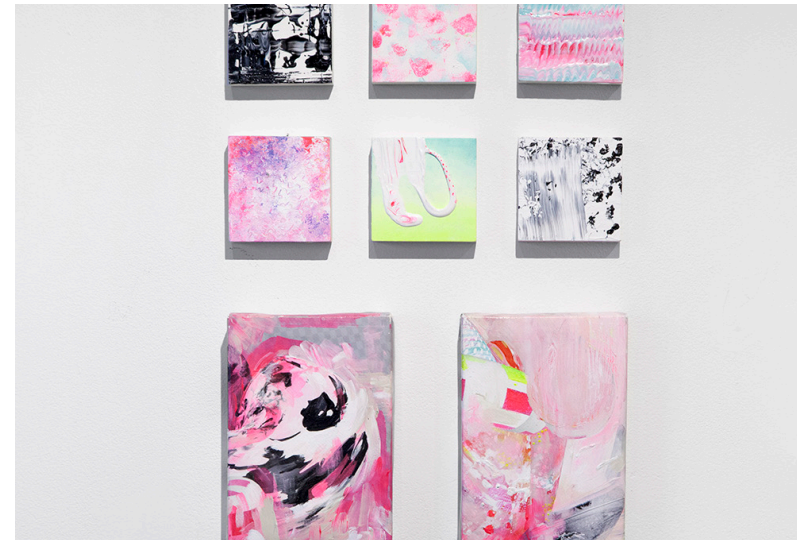
TRUDY ERIN ELMORE

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EXHIBITION

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DAHAE SONG

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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

<sup>1</sup> Xspace'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.xspace.info/exhibition-event/weve-met-before/>

EXHIBITION

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This exhibition acknowledges the generous support of the Ontario Arts Council

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EXHIBITION

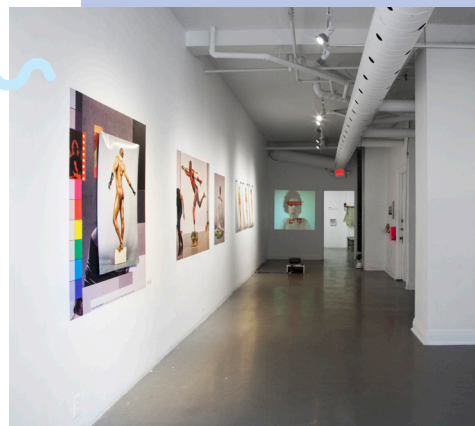
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ALANNA GILCHRIST

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## BLINDSPOTS

DARRYL TERRELL, DERRICK  
WOODS-MORROW, TEEJAY HAYCHE,  
MARIEL ZINMAN, SHELLIE ZHANG

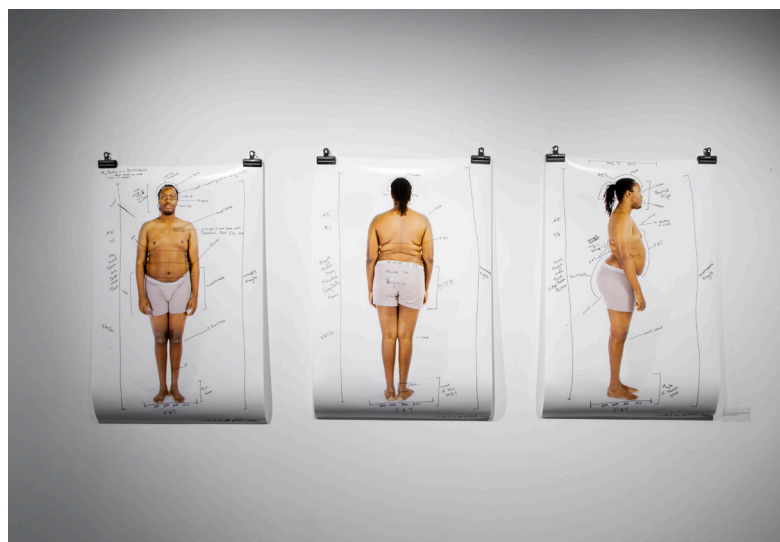
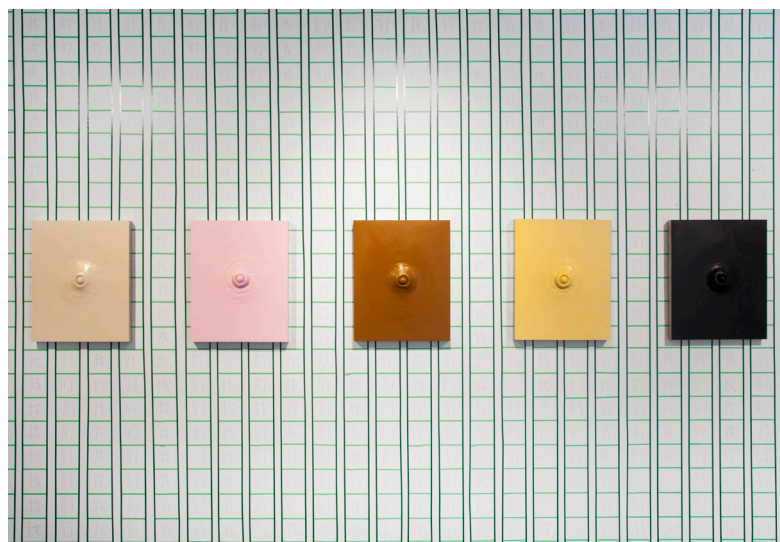
CURATED BY: DAINESHA NUGENT-PALACHE

JUNE 24TH — AUGUST 6TH, 2016

E. Patrick Johnson is a performance artist, ethnographer, and scholar, who explains that “because much of queer critical theory interrogates notions of selfhood, agency, and experience, it is often unable to accommodate the issues faced by [queer people] of colour who come from [racialized] communities.”<sup>1</sup> The label of LGBTQ is often synonymous with gay-white-cis-able-bodied-male; *Blindspots* puts the focus on those who exist under the queer umbrella, but don’t quite fit under this category. This exhibition seeks to expand upon existing queer discourses through intersectionality, taking into account the experiences of five queer diasporic artists. The works of Teejay Hayche, Darryl Terrell, Derrick Woods-Morrow, Shellie Zhang, and Mariel Zinman, come together to illustrate how queerness manifests

itself once intersected by race, gender, class and nationality.

Although the umbrella of ‘queerness’ may create solidarity amongst those in the LGBTQ community, it may also homogenize their experience, thus running the risk of erasing difference. Differences in experience, actualized by way of race and nationality are important; race cannot be denied (when it is visible), and the impact of traditions and societal expectations passed down through one’s cultural history or nationality are hard to erase (even when they are denied). Scholars often discredit the validity of empirical knowledge—knowledge based on observation—viewing it as essentialist or devoid of intellectual merit<sup>2</sup>; however, the presence of empirical evidence is significant when dealing with the iden-



tity politics of those who fall outside of dominant systems and prevailing cultures. The personal narratives of racialized queers, though they might be individualized, will always speak to certain truths of others who fall within the same intersections, and are affected by the similar histories--while also revealing the shortcomings of the prevalent culture, and understanding of queerness.

bell hooks writes of Homeplace, the geographical place where we are raised and socialized. When one's Homeplace exists as a safe space to critique and discuss oppressive powers, it then becomes a site of resistance. In a similar manner, when one's intersectional queer position is taken into account, and the oppressive forces which police these bodies are challenged, it becomes an act of resistance.<sup>3</sup> Blindspots exists as a site of resistance against white supremacy in the LGBTQ community and in regards to queer discourse.

Given the current state of the world, the need to radicalize queerness and continue to fight for the equality of LGBTQ people is absolutely momentous when it comes to the welfare of queer people worldwide. Hate crimes committed against the LGBTQ community continue to be a tremendous problem, despite the perceived mile-

stones which have occurred in terms of people's attitudes around queerness and the civil liberties granted to queer-identifying people in North America. In 2015, Statistics Canada released a report on police-reported hate crimes which indicates that hate crimes committed due to a person's sexuality or gender expression accounted for 16% of reported cases in 2013, however 66% of these crimes were violent in nature. It is also important to note that since 44% of police-reported hate crimes were committed due to a person's race<sup>4</sup>; when a racialized person is also queer, the likelihood of them being assaulted increases.

On June 12th 2016, what has been deemed the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history occurred in Orlando, Florida at Pulse, a queer nightclub. In terms of the existing societal attitudes surrounding queerness, there is gravity in the fact that the most horrific mass shooting in U.S. history was a direct assault on the LGBTQ community. June 12th happened to be Latin night at Pulse, which unfortunately supports the statistics stated above that show that the potential of violent assault based upon sexual orientation and gender expression is increased when a person is also a visible minority. I cannot help but think that what happened in Orlando could have occurred at Yes





Yes Y'all, a monthly queer dance party in Toronto, which celebrates queer POCs.<sup>5</sup> Although progress has been made for both POCs and queer identified individuals, discrimination is still prevalent, and the affects of history still mark their experience--history has the power to shape the future, for better or worse.

Derrick Woods-Morrow's series of photographs, *A Tale of Three Women* (2015), demonstrates how history shapes the contemporary experience. Woods-Morrow's images are saturated in pastiche, as the artist embodies three women situated within different places in history, while at the same time speaking to his current experience as a queer black man. In the series, images of Saartjie Baartman, Grace Jones, and Kim Kardashian are reimagined through the use of the artist's own body. Colonial histories have rendered the black female body as hypersexual, though simultaneously undesirable, and the bodies of black males as violently hypermasculine and oversexualized. In both cases, these readings have moved black bodies into the realm of taboo and fetishism, often disallowing black people from being seen as more than sex objects. These ideas are perpetuated in popular media, and particularly in pornographic representations. The idea of black queer love is not often illus-

trated, rather, sexualized black bodies are seen to represent otherness and the forbidden. In the artist's words, "black males are often seen as nothing more than twelve-inch dicks who rape and pillage."<sup>6</sup> *A Tale of Three Women* attempts to flip this reading, while simultaneously illustrating how certain ideas that surround the black queer identity have been constructed and continue to be maintained.

Saartjie Baartman, Grace Jones, and Kim Kardashian have each been hypersexualized, exotified and framed as objects of desire to be consumed, at varying levels of agency. Saartjie Baartman was removed from South Africa by white European colonizers in the early 19th century, and exhibited across Europe as a freak show attraction, due to the large size of her bottom.<sup>7</sup> Grace Jones is a model and musician who was often photographed by her partner, Jean-Paul Goude, during the 1980s. However, Goude primarily photographed Jones nude, always accentuating her features (for example, her dark skin tone, androgynous features, and prominent bottom) which rendered her as different. Then there is Kim Kardashian, who is famous for not much other than her curves and love of selfies. In 2015, Jean-Paul Goude photographed Kim Kardashian for Paper Magazine in the same style as he had with many of

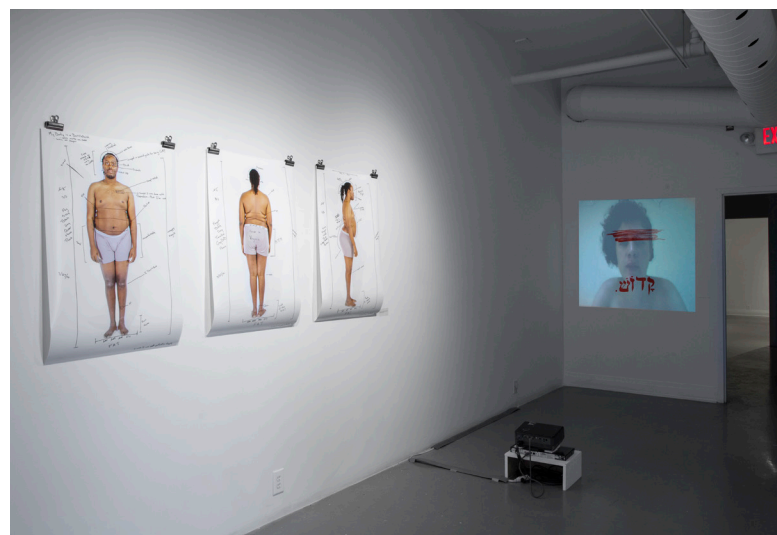
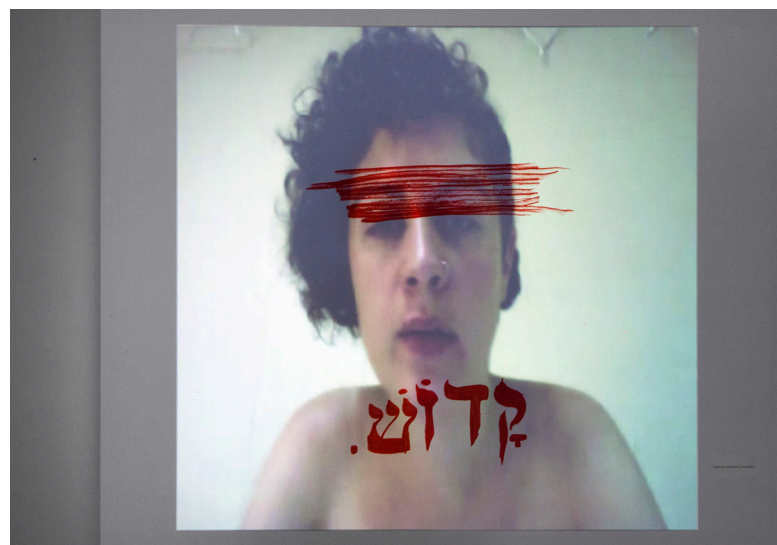
MAIN

his black female subjects in the past. Although Kim Kardashian can pass for Caucasian, Goude deliberately highlights her posterior as abnormal nudging her into the realm of otherness, inviting the viewer to further fetishize her. These are just a few examples pulled from a long history of black bodies being viewed as sexual objects for the consumption of the white gaze, perpetuating the wide-reaching legacy of colonialism. *A Tale of Three Women* allows the artist to stand in solidarity with these women who have had their identities shaped for them, quite literally presenting how an image or an understanding of a person's identity is constructed through photography and popular media. By reinstating his own agency and presenting himself as he would like to be read, Woods-Morrow rejects a projected macho and aggressive masculinity, allowing him to be read as feminine. Whereas Woods-Morrow's work explores expectations and fetishism imposed upon the black queer male body, the work of Darryl Terrell illustrates the dissonance that inherently marks the black queer male experience.

Rejecting or deviating from predetermined societal expectations around queerness-- and more specifically the queer black male body--increases the potential for stigmatization. As Terrell

explains; the conversation around body image is one that is mainly fixated upon women, and "not until recently were women of color added to the conversation. There is another demographic that is still left out of the conversation, that being men. Queer, fem, black men, and I felt the need to speak on behalf of that demographic."<sup>8</sup> As do many racialized artists, Darryl Terrell finds that his work is a platform for exploring issues he faces in his everyday life. *I Wish I was Perfectly Happy* (2015), came into existence quite intuitively, during a transitional time; Terrell was leaving undergrad, coming to fully grasp his sexuality, and realizing that everyone around him seemed much happier than himself. "Everyone around me was in a committed relationship, finding jobs or beginning their Masters [degrees], and I found myself asking what's wrong with me?"<sup>9</sup> *I Wish I was Perfectly Happy* is a triptych composed of three self-portraits, seeking an answer to the question, "what's wrong with me?" Terrell's images make the viewer aware of subjective norms monitoring his physical appearance, while calling to attention less visible aspects, regarding history, culture, environment and personal traumas. The self-portraits employ a clinical study aesthetic; each presents a different angle of Terrell's body, and is marked with labels pointing to different areas. Labels such as, "cute enough

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to be fucked, not to be loved" speak to the experiences of many black queer men during sexual or intimate encounters. Labels like "negroid type" and "Baartman" point to bodily features indicative of blackness, serving as a reminder of the histories which have deemed these features unattractive by societal standards. Homophobic slurs which have been directed at Terrell and violent events that he has had to endure because of his queerness are also noted onto his body. The artist makes mention of his body as a battlefield, where "some marks are made, some marks are deeper."<sup>10</sup> The work serves to illuminate the events and histories that make up a person's experience which are not always visible, but have infinite relevance when discussing identity.

Mariel Zinman's work continues this exploration of diasporic queer realities by illustrating how lived experiences leave invisible marks upon our bodies and shape our identities. The artist explains, "when people see me, they don't see the songs, words, and teachings that have made me who I am today, that have been woven into who I am, how I see myself."<sup>11</sup> In the performative video-work *Kedusha* (2016), Zinman attempts to reconcile the shame she feels around her sexuality, and the silence she has used in order to cope with these feelings. Zinman

was raised in the Jewish Orthodox faith, and the piece explores the religious teachings that have contributed to those feelings. In the video, Zinman inscribes the sacred Hebrew word "Kedushah" קדושה (meaning feminine holiness), onto her body. Through this action she questions what it means to embody holiness and purity, while existing between two worlds: one of "modesty and traditional restrictions, and the other of open expression."<sup>12</sup> Zinman's experience is an embodiment of the cognitive dissonance that exists where culture and tradition intersect queerness, a common struggle for many diasporic queer people that often furthers feelings of displacement.

Artist Shellie Zhang also employs the use of traditional text to illustrate the potential for queer displacement when meaning is lost in translation. Shellie's work consists of two elements, 我们 (2014), and *Neapolitan Dreams* (2015). *Neapolitan Dreams* is a series of 5 panel paintings, each containing an egg in the center; the work utilizes the colour swatches Zhang used for skin tones in her earlier paintings. In short, the paintings together act as a symbol for the unity of all women. The second element in Zhang's installation is a wall drawing which includes a grid, into which the artist has repeatedly written the Mandarin characters for 'us' (我们), Zhang





explains that this text comes from a fictional love letter a woman in Canada sends to a woman in China, where she writes the Mandarin characters for 'us' --我们--again and again. "Lost in translation, the phonetic pronunciation of 我们 reads as wǒ-men, when spoken in Mandarin. The emphasis on a homosexual relationship fails to be communicated although the message of unity is conveyed"<sup>13</sup>, says the artist. This "lost in translation" can be likened to Chinese government's censorship of queer media throughout the country. Depictions of homosexuality exists amongst the long list of imagery but was deemed inappropriate following Xi Jinping coming into power in November of 2012.<sup>14</sup> Although queerness is not outrightly condemned in China, the government puts a great deal of effort into erasing it. In early 2016 a popular Chinese drama called Addicted Heroin was removed from the air, and made inaccessible online because of its queer content.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, South Korea is one of many places throughout the world where a person can be punished for their queerness, running the risk of facing time in either prison or a mental institution. These violent oppressive measures inform Teejay Hayche's practice. In South Korea, military service is expected of males between 18 and 35 years old who hold citizen-

ship. Hayche must abide by this law, and because of the strict regulations around homosexuality in the army, he must be extra careful about exposing his identity as a queer person. Article 92 of the Military Penal Code defines same sex relations<sup>16</sup> as harassment, disregarding the potential of consensual same sex relations. In *Angry Hotel* (2014), two young Koreans dressed in army attire drink Soju (a popular Korean alcoholic beverage), while speaking aggressively to the camera. The pair spews homophobic slurs as well as racial epithets directed at Anglo-Saxon westerners, with the intent of redirecting their anger derived from systematic oppression. The Asian male body has been erased and effeminized, partly by way of early colonial writings on the "orient" and sexuality<sup>17</sup>. These texts center European men as the masculine standard and characterize Asian males as androgynous and feminine; contemporary Western culture perpetuates this argument, and the lack of visible Asian males in popular media contributes to their erasure. The University of Southern California conducted a survey of the 600 most popular films between 2007 and 2013, and their findings concluded that only 4.4% of the characters with speaking roles were Asian<sup>18</sup> --this figure accounts for both men and women, so the figure for men alone is presumably much smaller.

The subjects in *Angry Hotel* reject a passive reading of Asian maleness and femininity, through assertiveness and aggressivity. Each segment featuring the interlocutors is interrupted with highly stylized dance animations (featuring dancers Hayche refers to as the "gay army"<sup>19</sup>), and scenes reappropriated from Korean pop videos, illustrating the existing homoerotic undertones in mainstream South Korean culture. One of the protagonists in *Angry Hotel* questions the necessity of studying the works of Western theorists as there are many South Korean scholars whose writing speaks more clearly to his own personal experience and understanding of queerness. Though Western queer studies occupy a preeminent position in the academia, these ideas do not encompass the multiplicity of existing queer voices.

The stories of all people matter; but when the perception of prevailing groups is accepted as universal truth, voices are silenced, difference is erased, and people become oppressed. In the same way, when empirical evidence presented by minorities is deemed invalid, this is the same as denying the legitimacy of their experiences, it is the same thing as asking them to either remain hidden and out of sight--to remain in your blind spot.

<sup>1</sup> Johnson, E. Patrick, and Mae Henderson. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, Donald E. *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2013. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Hooks, Bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston, MA: South End, 1990. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Canada. Statistics Canada. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 June 2016.

<sup>5</sup> a term used primarily in the United States to describe any person who is not white. The term encompasses all non-white groups, emphasizing common experiences of racism. The term's use is reminiscent of "colored", which was previously used in the US as a term for African Americans only.

<sup>6</sup> Woods-Morrow, Derrick. Personal communication, June 2, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Crais, Clifton C., and Pamela Scully. *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Terrell, Darryl. Artist Statment, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Terrell, Darryl. Personal Communication, June 2, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Terrell, Darryl. Quote from *I Wish I Were Perfectly Happy*, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Zinman, Mariel. Artist Statment 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Zhang, Shellie. Artist Statment, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Lu, Shen, and Katie Hunt. "China Bans Same-sex Romance from TV Screens." CNN. Cable News Network, 3 Mar. 2016. Web. 24 June 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Working Group. "Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and the Refugee Determination Process in Canada." Academia.edu. Http://ihp.lawutoronto.ca/, Jan. 2015. Web. 16 June 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Han, C. Winter. "Constructing the Asian Male Body." *Body Aesthetics*. Ed. Sheri Irvin. Corby: Oxford UP, 2016. N. pag. Print.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, Stacy L, Dr.; and Katherine Pieper, Dr. "Race/Ethnicity in 600 Popular Films: Examining On Screen Portrayals and Behind the Camera Diversity." Annenberg.usc.edu. University of Southern California, 2013. Web. 23 June 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Hayche, Teejay. Personal Communication, June 16th, 2016.



03

# PROJECT





-NUHSAWAHTAT-  
TO ADD ON A ROOM, TO EXTEND A HOUSE

NYSSA SKY

SEPTEMBER 11 — OCTOBER 17, 2015

Nyssa Sky's multi-media installation *-nuhsawhtat- to add on a room, to extend a house* addresses a number of socio-political matters, binding together personal and societal struggles. To accompany this essay, I have stitched together a mind map of the themes that are explored within the works presented. Even if this initiative brought to light the ways in which, for instance, rape culture, cultural dispossession, mental illness, environmental racism, and Aboriginal issues are all connected, the complexity of each theme makes it difficult to formulate a cohesive and comprehensive synthesis that will encompass all. With the realization that this essay might fall short in discussing the many facets of the artist's body of work, my aim is to create a literary map that will illustrate the different threads that tie the instal-

lation together, and hopefully add to a conversation that will branch out of the gallery space.

**Preconditions of Belonging**  
**#IDLENOMORE**

**Nyssa, August 11th, 8:30 pm**

"One of the first spaces where I felt a sense of belonging and felt like it was ok for me to be in that space, first to relate to, then to claim my own Aboriginal identity, is activism."

Nyssa Sky was born to a mother who is part Oneida and Canadian (and then adopted by a Catholic family) and to a Father who is an English immigrant of Polish descent. Like many of us, her origins and cultural positioning reveal a broad and tightly knit history of violence. Her positionality results



PROJECT

PROJECT

EXHIBITION

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EXHIBITION

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in many ways from Canada's patriarchal system of governance and its treatment of First Nations people. For instance, the Indian Act and Bill C-31<sup>2</sup>, Residential schools, as well as the institutionalization of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families between the 1960's and 1980's (notably referred as the Sixties Scoop)<sup>3</sup> severely affected cultural transmission systems on her maternal side. Writer Christine Smith (McFarlane) recounts her experience as a First Nations child into the Canadian child care system for Briarpath Magazine. In her poignant testimony she claims that in addition to daily physical and emotional abuse, she as many children, grew up without a sense of her culture, language or traditions.<sup>4</sup> Smith also mentions how "children had to fight to learn the ways of their people, often from outside their adoptive families and communities."<sup>5</sup> Nyssa doesn't know the history of her mother's adoption or childhood, but this intergenerational interruption of cultural transmission translated into a visceral need to reconnect and readdress what has been held away from her mother and by extent, herself. The Indian Act has been at work for generations to undo cultural and family ties, and being defined legally as non-status is the loss of Aboriginal rights and interests as well as community membership. During our time as residents at Artscape

Gibraltar Point we spent quite some time talking about issues surrounding Indigeneity - what does it mean to be recognized as Aboriginal and what are the impacts of being unrecognized by the state through official Indian status? How are cultural dislocation and a rooted sense of belonging constructed and how do those factors contribute to communal well-being? During recorded sessions, Sky talked openly about past disruption with her indigenous cultural ties, the affects of passing for white, its privileges and disadvantages, the uneasy path of self recovery from her traumas, and her journey for self- and cultural reclamation.

**Nyssa, August 11th, 7:30 pm**  
My mom was adopted as an infant. Her biological father was status Indian, and a member of the Oneida Nation of the Thames and her mom was white Canadian. (...) So at the time that my mom was born, she was not eligible for status because her biological parents weren't married. She was adopted into a Catholic family, I think of German background but you know, Canadian. My mom is Catholic, that is her belief but I've seen her connect with Aboriginal culture in many ways, like my aunt gave her an eagle feather when she graduated. I relate to my mom's adoption as a kind of immediate assimilation, and that was partly because of the laws at that time--she

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wasn't given Indian status. And today's laws that deny me my rights and interests like Bill C-31. (...) I remember we went to socials when I was a kid and I learned how to dance and I made things like drums and heard sweetgrass teachings. The feeling I have looking back is maybe that my mom was figuring it out for the first time too. I just talked to my mom about a cultural camp I went to as a kid, a kind of immersive experience.

**Nyssa, August 5th, 3:45 pm**

When I was younger we celebrated Aboriginal culture. I was told all my life that I am part Native, one-quarter Oneida. I knew that and practiced that, and then, there were severe interruptions to my life and my family life; my dad's illness, my homelessness as a youth, sexual assault, and mental health issues. So my family life was interrupted and of course it interrupted being in touch with the culture.

**Nyssa, August 5th, 3:55 pm**

Interrupted culture combined with not being recognized by the State that I live in create a lot of anxiety and a feeling of belonging in a certain place, belonging with Aboriginal identity but at the same time, I feel like I don't belong there. I feel Aboriginal but like an illegitimate Aboriginal person.

Nyssa, August 11th, 7:40 pm

There was an effort to bring Aboriginal culture and teachings into my life for a time, and coming from my parents that doesn't exist anymore-that effort. I recently realized I had to start making the effort to stay connected with the culture. And so, thinking about my history of personal dislocation, of moving across the country and also family violence, mental health problems, these things have contributed to the loss of the culture, again, in a more personal way.

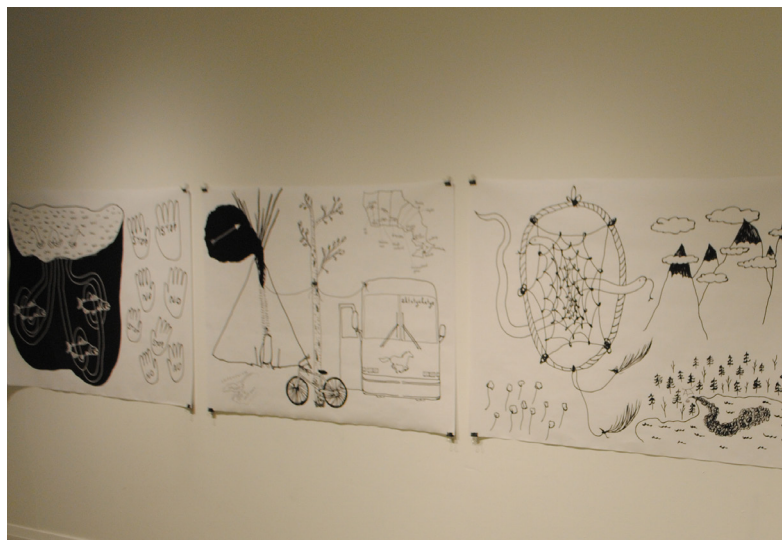
**Nyssa, August 11th, 8:15 pm**

When you read Thomas King, who is a great writer and storyteller, his stand point about this feeling of authenticity is something that is sort of put on Aboriginal people on purpose by the states of Canada and USA in the effort to assimilate us. So if you feel uncomfortable to perform your culture and you don't, then you don't transmit your culture to your children and the culture dies.

Sky describes the use of the term -nuhsawhtat- as "not just 'to add on a room', to extend a house' [in a literal sense] but [it] also describes the growth of the whole community".<sup>6</sup> With this concept in mind, one can read that not only this installation taps into making space for her own subjectivity within a larger narrative about Aboriginal identities, but it also opens

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the conversation to think about allyship in the fight against systems of oppression and violence.

### Wichita Do Ya

The video performances from *Path of Resistance* (which includes *Water Song* and *Appreciation of All Things*) invite the audience to pay attention to water's abstract form: as a conductor of knowledge and a spiritual healer. *The Water Song* (also called the river song or the Cherokee water song), performed by Sky, is an anthem used as a water blessing chant or cleansing song. Moreover, to sing *Appreciation of All Things* on Gibraltar Point's shore is very symbolic, since it brings forward a deeply felt satisfaction with having the opportunity to enact and transmit newly acquired knowledge. Through these videos viewers happen to witness a transcendental moment where the artist connects with her environment in a way that is profoundly personal but also communal. It appears as though she is singing as a mean to create a healing space for herself, for her mother and all others whom like her have been disconnected in a way or another with their culture and community.

Protecting water, as the artist mentioned in one of our recorded sessions, is to protect life, and protecting Aboriginal land rights is also protect-

ing life. As caretakers and stewards of the land we occupy, individuals of Aboriginal descent's well-being (including physical, spiritual, and cultural) is in sync with its environment. Past and current struggles to preserve ancestral lands from destructive economic developments also include a constant fight for cultural sustainability. Issues related to Aboriginal title and land rights are complex but have several common denominators weaving together the fate of our natural resources and environmental racism. Stitched on an ornamented blanket, the words Protect Water echoes past as well as present imperialist projects affecting Aboriginal communities. Interestingly enough, the choice of material and format evoke ambivalent positions existing within Indigenous communities towards this familiar object- the comforting yet deadly blanket. Through the artist's water-themed works, water is portrayed as powerful leverage in political, social, cultural, and economic affairs that are tied to Canada's history of colonial brutality, systems of exclusion and dislocation.

#Consent #NoSilenceAgainstViolence





## Sounds

Oneida does not have a long history of being written. The writing system used in this work is an adaptation of one introduced in the 1930's. It has been used increasingly since the 1970's for teaching purposes. The sound values of the letters are as follows:

### Vowels

a	as in <u>a</u> ha or fa <u>th</u> er
e	as in the <u>y</u>
i	as in ski <u>i</u>
o	as in n <u>o</u>
ʌ	as in <u>f</u> un or <u>u</u> h <u>h</u> u <u>h</u> (this vowel is always nasalized)
u	as in <u>t</u> une (this vowel is always nasalized)

### Resonants

l	as in <u>l</u> ow
n	as in <u>n</u> o
w	as in <u>w</u> e
y	as in <u>y</u> es

### Other consonants

t	as in <u>s</u> tove or wa <u>t</u> er - closer to a <b>d</b> when followed by a vowel or resonant as in <u>t</u> op elsewhere
k	as in <u>s</u> k <u>i</u> ll - closer to a <b>g</b> when followed by a vowel or resonant as in <u>k</u> ee <u>p</u> elsewhere
s	as in wa <u>s</u> - closer to a <b>z</b> when between vowels as in <u>g</u> ay elsewhere - there is some variation among speakers and an <b>s</b> often sounds partway between a buzz and a hiss
h	as in <u>h</u> elp - h is aspiration and frequently occurs before consonants producing sound combinations not found in English
ʔ	as in the catch between the syllables in uh-oh - ʔ is a glottal stop and occurs only after vowels in Oneida

### Special clusters

tsi (before consonants)	as in <u>j</u> udge
tsy (before vowels)	as in <u>j</u> udge
tshi (before consonants)	as in <u>ch</u> urch
tshy (before vowels)	as in <u>ch</u> urch
sy	as in <u>sh</u> oe

### Intonation marks

A raised dot right after a vowel represents a lengthened vowel.  
An accent mark over a vowel represents a stressed syllable.  
The combination of both a dot and an accent on the same vowel represents a long falling tone on that vowel.  
Final syllables in parentheses represent whispered sounds.

CLIFFORD ABBOTT, "SOUNDS" FROM ONEIDA LANGUAGE TOOLS, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - GREEN BAY, 2006: [HTTPS://WWW.UWGB.EDU/ONEIDA/](https://www.uwgb.edu/oneida/) REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.

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## Nyssa, August 20th, 14:43 pm, Instagram Post:

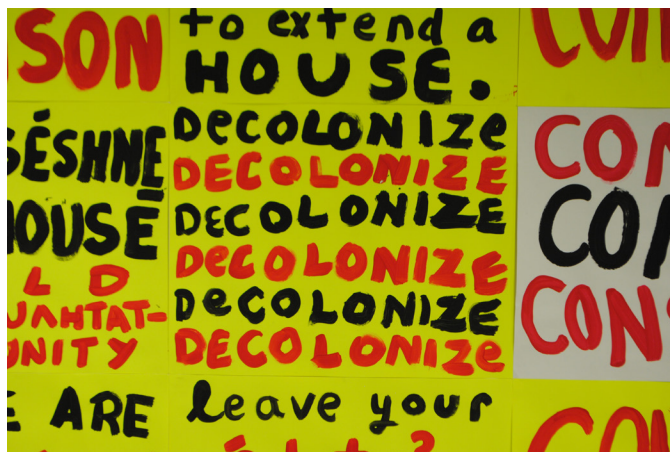
"...investigating connections between sexual violence and Aboriginal land rights issues"

Spelled in capital letters, black on white, Sky's *CONSENT* banner (made for the occasion of a protest against rape culture and the presence of Roosh V<sup>8</sup> in Toronto on August 15th, 2015) pin points multiple facets of power relations. Laid in the middle of the room and taking up most of the floor space, the connections between sexual violence and Aboriginal land rights issues become clearer - consent takes on another dimension in addition to its relation to the right for healthy and respectful sexual experiences. The chain of events linking governmental land abuses and interpersonal violence in indigenous communities sheds light on a long history of oppressive politics instituted since the first European settlements in Canada. When speaking about consent the issues of rape culture, cultural dispossession, and land occupation come together as the roots of discriminatory infrastructures insuring the cultural and economic supremacy of a minority. Rendered as a fundamental decree that should dictate current politics, consent is a non-negotiable term of agreement that is far from being honored when it comes to resource extraction on

First Nations territories. The land as a material and mythological entity is allegorically comparable to the human body. If one thinks about the process of colonization and forceful occupations, bodies and land are violated in similar ways. Thus, by intentionally obstructing the visitors' spatial navigation; the artist forces them to confront their definition and daily performance of the term. What does it mean if someone carelessly steps on the banner, leaving traces behind? Is it indicative of one's personal stance towards it? Caring and respecting someone on their own terms is not a negotiable grey area but a necessity.

- Geneviève Wallen

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<sup>1</sup> Nyssa (artist) in discussion with the author; August 11th, 2015. All citations were taken from recorded session with the artist during the Xpace at Artscape Residency Gibraltar Point. All excerpts were revised and approved by the artist.

<sup>2</sup> Bill C-31, or a Bill to Amend the Indian Act, passed into law in April 1985 to bring the Indian Act into line with gender equality under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It proposed modifications to various sections of the Indian Act, including significant changes to Indian status and band membership, with three major goals: to address gender discrimination of the Indian Act, to restore Indian status to those who had been forcibly enfranchised due to previous discriminatory provisions, and to allow bands to control their own band membership as a step towards self-government. However it did not redress all repercussions of cultural assimilation caused by the Indian Act. For more information please see: <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-indian-act/bill-c-31.html>

<sup>3</sup> Christine, Smith (McFarlane). "A legacy of Canadian Child Care" *Surviving the Sixties Scoop*. Last modified September 1st, 2013. <http://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/a-legacy-of-canadian-child-care>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Nyssa Sky, Facebook message to author; September 1st, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Nyssa Sky comment on Instagram, August 20th, 2015. <https://instagram.com/nyssoul/>

<sup>8</sup> The infamous American author, blogger, and self-proclaimed pick-up artist Daryush Valizadeh (also known as Roosh V) has produced a number of statements promoting violence against women. The nature of his writing describing techniques of sexual coercion and his stand towards rape has alerted many feminist groups in North America. When learning about his intentions to lead a series of conference in Canada, a petition to stop his entry has been circulating and mobilizations have been organized in Montreal and Toronto. To learn more about the demonstration against rape culture and his visit in Toronto please read: "No Silence Against Violence" by Iris Robin for Toronto Coop Media. <http://toronto.mediacoop.ca/story/no-silence-against-violence/33836>

## PROJECT



## A CHEMICAL LOVE STORY

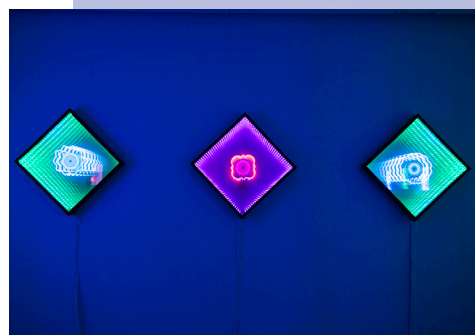
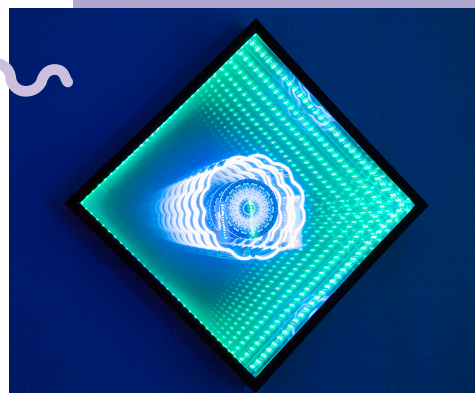
ARMA YARI

NOVEMBER 6 — DECEMBER 12 2015

ArmaYari's exhibition *A Chemical Love Story* interrogates a dual fascination: our longstanding relationship with the alchemy of mind-altering compounds, and the way in which desire is encoded within our very being. The discourse around both subjects can often tend toward the tyranny of absolutes — cynicism and dependency on the one hand, utopic idealization and autonomy on the other. However, not unlike the experience of zoning in and out of lucid perception there is always a blind spot within that oscillation. From fantasies of oblivion to transcendence, there more often stirs the truth of living in between, contradictions in tow, which is precisely where Yari stakes the practice of her optic sculptures.

While its theoretical, counter-cultural, and neuro-scientific implications are

vast, one need not be a psychonaut to navigate the works in *A Chemical Love Story*. Her wavey corpus of neon-emblazoned retinas collide and kaleidoscope across an infinity arcade, but they beckon with an almost eerie familiarity. Works such as *Delyside* or *Absorbance* are almost a composite of the pulsing fluorescent signs that amass in the marketplace, offering a dutiful understanding of how trippy imagery invades all corners of our cultural psyche. We live in an age where, more than ever, psychedelic cues have been normalized and maintain a certain ubiquity. When we curtain our screens with swirling screensavers, tune into Adult Swim programming to find quantum imagery, when rhythm and drugs overtakes traditional R&B on radio airwaves, and as we extend ourselves into virtual worlds such as



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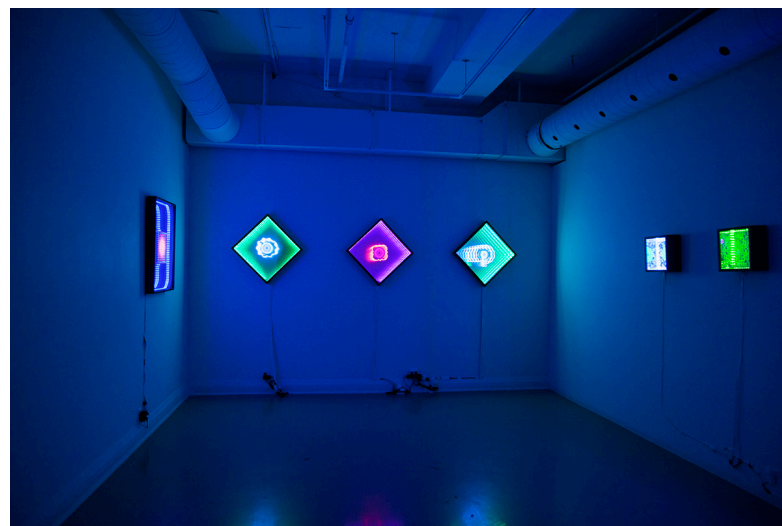
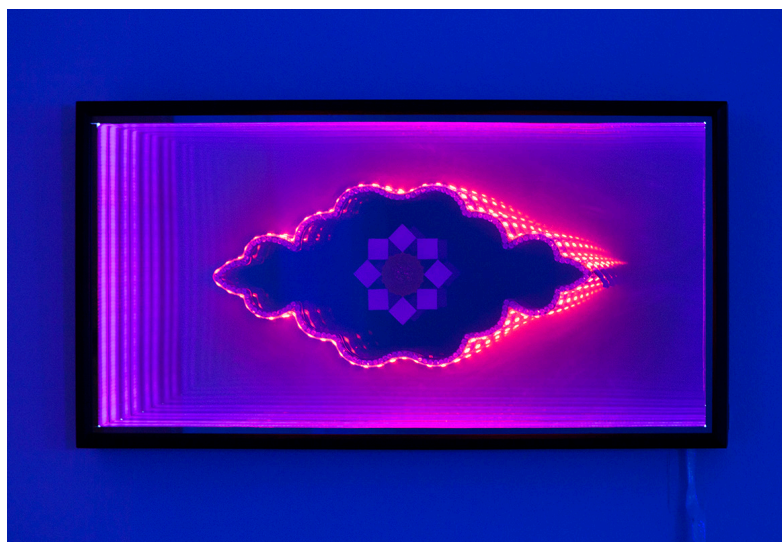
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the Oculus Rift, electric dreams are no longer reserved for the dusky reverie of the cult underground. Instead, extending the limits of neurotechnology becomes a lived reality, and an ostensible event horizon for the future.

Even more compelling are the intertexts of the esoteric, iconic, or niche variety. For example, the title of the exhibit itself is cribbed from Alexander Shulgin's cookbook for psychoactive substances of the same name. Elsewhere, the mystical icons featured in works such as *Synaesthesia* and *Cross-talk* recall the cryptic geometric shapes in the loopy, dream-based comix of American cartoonist Jim Woodring; in film, the hard opacity of HAL's dim cybernetic eyeball in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the neu romancing of the *Blade Runner* neon cityscape, or Gaspar Noé's attempt to escape corporeal subjectivity in *Enter the Void*; in the art world, the immersive light installations of James Turrell, the infinity mirror rooms of Yayoi Kusama, or Damien Hirst's *Pharmaceutical Paintings* series; in architecture, the vibrant stained glass and hyper-detailed, geometric tiles of the Nasir ol Molk Mosque in Shiraz, Iran; in philosophy, Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, and Swiss chemist and inventor of LSD, Albert Hofmann's writings about the consciousness-expanding possibility of "entheogens."

From these pattern recognitions and art-induced surreal hallucinations, a confluence emerges. However unexpectedly, a psychedelic encounter can launch a whole mesh of associations old and new.

This odd mix of nostalgia and futurity stages a repetition with a difference, in this case, the way an organism retains sameness while essentially changing. Yari's series of sculptures, composed of mirror, glass, LED strips and neon lights, literalize this conceptual process by narrating the biological processes at work during an LSD trip down the rabbit hole. A window onto an incremental phase from ingestion to activation is affixed to the centre of each piece. Encrusted in neon, these snapshots magnify the chemical reaction in an inner frame, while the enclosing mirror stretches the static images into seeming infinity. Starting with a sculpture that represents LSD being absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract, the sequence proceeds to cerebral stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system, responsible for pupillary dilation, heightened body temperature, and a rise in blood sugar. Based on MRI scans and images of neurotransmitters, other works such as *Absorbance*, *Serotonin*, and *5-HT2A* follow the propagation of nerve impulses toward sensorial flux that can lead to strange, synaesthetic visions.





Yari's fixation on mystic imaginings is greatly indebted to Swiss scientist Albert Hofmann, notably his ideology about the catalyst function of LSD. Hofmann casts the drug's accidental synthesis in transcendental terms: "I did not look for it, it came to me. This means to me that a higher authority thought it was necessary now to provide mankind with an additional pharmacological aid for spiritual growth."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a source of inspiration is Francis Crick, the father of modern genetics, who discovered DNA while under the influence of acid.<sup>2</sup> Although the nexus of drugs and sensation can indeed be a creative stimulant and empower social or political change, Yari remains cautious in her rationale and practice. Too often, proponents of a narco-aesthetic champion the artistic gains of drug culture without being sensitive to the dangers of intoxication and unproductive repetition. Especially in our context when idle distraction runs rampant, as Steve Goodman, another thinker about sensorial manipulation notes, if mood swings were induced to synchronize an entire populace, or conversely form a chaotic note of paranoid discord, affective modulation could also be a tool of mass control.<sup>3</sup>

If Yari is cognizant of the utopic-dystopic coin flip of psychedelic drug culture, she nonetheless embraces

the opportunity to drive dialogue about its complicated history without resorting to an inflexible cure/poison dualism. The work is more than just cosmic reflections and perceptual distortions; operating within the troubled constraints of psychedelia is a way to negotiate boundaries and taboos, not just of its own complex history, but in the way one more deeply considers the relationship between self and surroundings. As a sequence, then, *A Chemical Love Story* is a dazzling dance, a transformation of forms about the dissolution of form. When the sublime and the uncanny enfold, infinity meets repetition to the effect that the ego can no longer compute.

How desirable is this outcome? We usually think of our identities as separate from the machinery, substances, elements, and processes that allow us to motor forth. We also often delude ourselves about the control we exert over the predictable serendipity of what sparks intrigue, arousal, even love. It can take a powerful stimulant — drugs, art, romance — to access any kind of mystic, oceanic feeling, and to dislodge our position as a stationary observer. If Yari's work were merely homage or fetish, it would be a closed loop. Rather than pave over paradox, however, and by isolating each psychedelic part from the whole, we must confront whether we choose our

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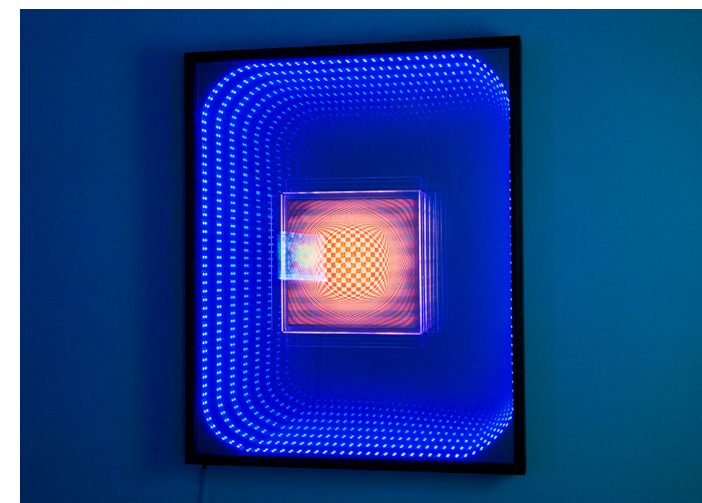
own magic eye portals or vice versa. To escape is to enter; to enter is to escape — and in this vertigo, chances are enlightenment or objectivity may be a fantasy, but nonetheless we cannot seem to look away.

-Joshua Chong

<sup>1</sup> Hofmann, Albert, "LSD as a Spiritual Aid," *Spiritual Growth with Entheogens: Psychoactive Sacramentals and Human Transformation*. South Paris: Park Street Press, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, Richard M. *Darwin's Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noosphere*. Washington: U of Washington Press, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Goodman, Steve. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and The Ecology of Fear*. London: MIT Press, 2010.



## PROJECT





## 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"<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

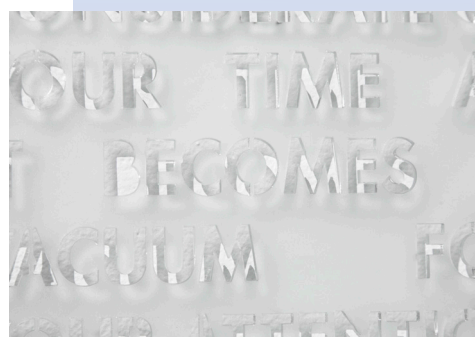
In the exhibition, *Being Digital*, Katherine Ross creates visceral romantic poetry from the emptiness found within the disembodied digital realm. Through the use of form, function, and materiality, her work seduces the viewer to reflect upon their own investment in digital existence.

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.<sup>3</sup>

The text found within the various works utilizes multiple voices, yet



THOUGHTS ARE  
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AND OUR FINGERS  
ARE PADDLES THAT  
PUSH AGAINST THE  
TURBULANCE OF THE  
DIGITAL WORLD



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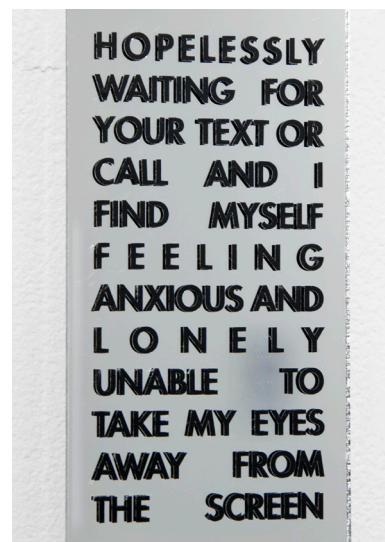
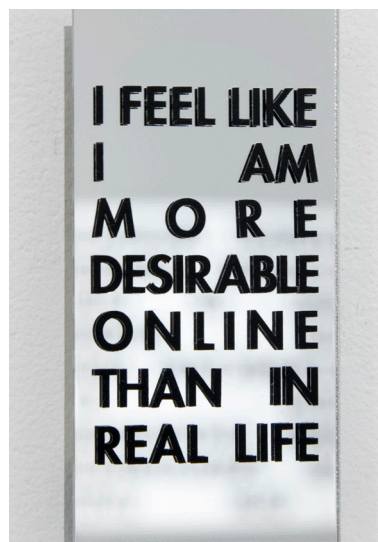
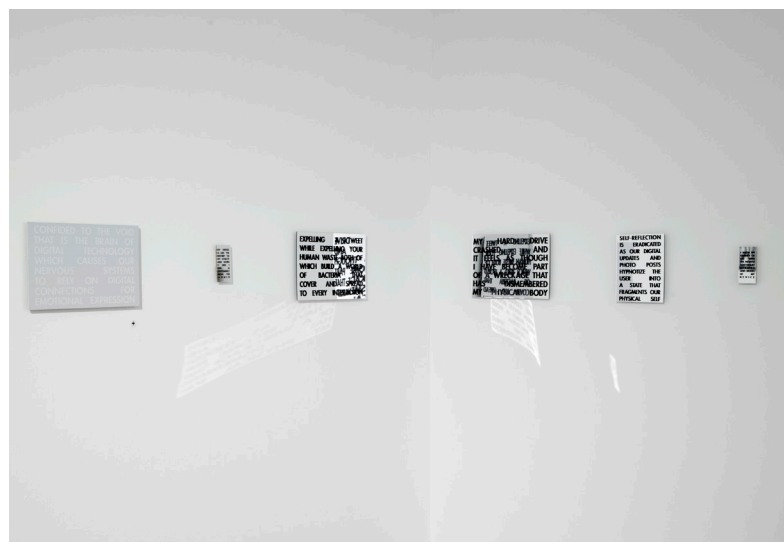
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maintains a similar tone and message throughout. The text remains relatable by traversing contemporary vernacular that we have all assumed and share via digital communication on a daily basis. Each piece is scaled to the dimensions of various Apple 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"<sup>4</sup>

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 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."<sup>5</sup>

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





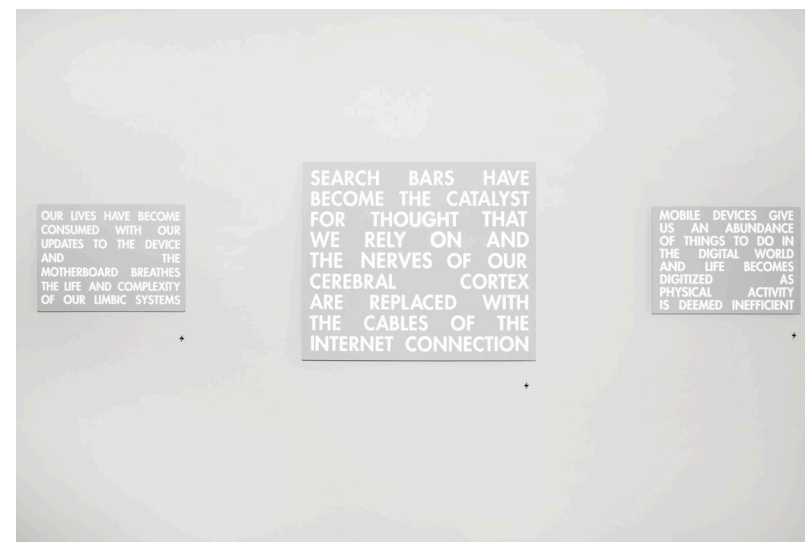
fact that companies now thrive on a phygital<sup>6</sup> business model, how does one trust content ingested online, and how can a true sense of security exist in a digital space?

*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. 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"<sup>7</sup>

— Maddie Alexander



<sup>1</sup> Katherine Ross, *Being Digital*, 2015, mixed media.

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

<sup>3</sup> "In Real Life."

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Ross, *Being Digital*, mixed media, 2015.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Ross, *Being Digital*, mixed media, 2015.



## CLOTH DRIPPING

MARY GRISEY

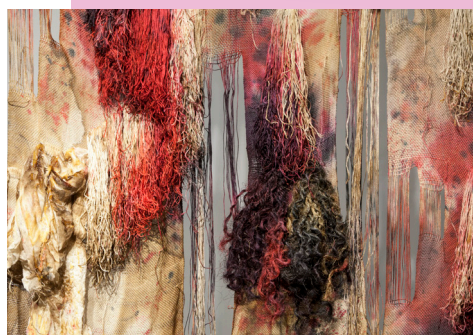
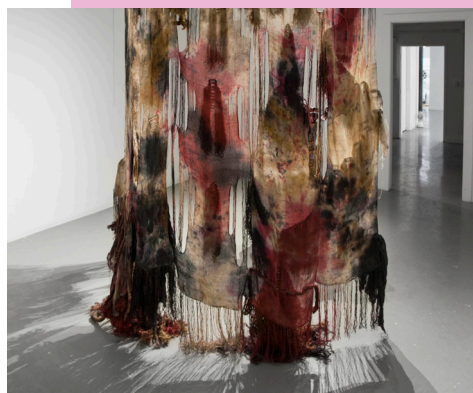
MARCH 18 — APRIL 30, 2016

"...cloth dripping..." (Fragment 147)<sup>1</sup>

In the exhibition *Cloth Dripping*, artist Mary Grisey creates an installation of cloth weavings, sculpture, and sound. These weavings are suspended from the ceiling and surround a terracotta structure glazed in a mixture of black with subtle colours visible from underneath. Bearing the texture of seashells and fingerprints, the terracotta form holds up a vessel of water. The soft, haunting sound of a woman's voice singing emanates from within it, and quietly permeates its surroundings. The weaving is earth-coloured and dyed with natural materials. It is fragmented and frayed because of its contact with rust, and woven into it are remnants of latex, and found, uncoiled rope. The weavings, each approximately eight feet long, are sewn together one after

another and hung into an immersive wall-like form that surrounds both the vessel and the viewer. In its ruinous state *Cloth Dripping* recalls a sense of awe, like the discovery of something ancient and wonderful.

Mary Grisey's process of weaving includes the act of undoing her weavings. They become changed through the application of rust and natural dyes. They are inspired by, and draw from, the fragments of Sappho, an ancient Greek poet from c. 610 to c. 570 BCE, whose works are primarily lost but whose surviving fragments have been documented and translated.<sup>2</sup> For Grisey, Sappho is the central figure from which the installation's themes of loss, love, and the metaphorical emerge. The myth of Sappho, an epic tale from Ovid's *Heroides*, re-



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lays the story in which the poet, full of grief over the loss of her love Phaon, plummets off a Leucadian Cliff into the sea in an attempt to rid herself of her pain. The artist is interested in "the ruin and beauty of both the body and the psyche,"<sup>3</sup> seeking to convey the profound power of this emotion, and invites viewers in a space to consider what is possibly beyond the body, and beyond the self.

with what eyes?<sup>4</sup>

The most famous translated anthology of Sappho's work, and the one that Grisey references, is titled *If not winter*, by Anne Carson. Some of Sappho's works, like "...cloth dripping..." exist only in such fragments- bits of lost text, two words placed side-by-side, or separated by blank expanses where holes or tears appeared in the papyrus. They are phrases that skip a word, leave you with emptiness instead of meaning, or do not begin or end but surface in the middle. In reading the fragments, Carson seems both to have translated the words themselves, as much as considered the lost meaning in the spaces that surround them. There is a sense of strange reverence evoked by encountering something lost to decay, one which the artist's weavings present in their processes of undoing. The cloth becomes a metaphor which recalls the cycle of for-

mation and dissolution, which follows the notion that "[b]reaks are always, and fatally, reinscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone."<sup>5</sup>

The weavings in Grisey's installation are made with strands of linen that meticulously accumulate in the repetition of thread woven over her loom. Each weave dictates what will come after and tells the artist what the final work will become.<sup>6</sup> After the woven piece is formed, it is then unmade by placing rusted metal or acid on its surface. These substances make the material undergo a type of alchemy. The weavings begin to carry the transformative, degenerative processes of rusting metal, and they uncoil and transform with them. These substances break down the fibres until there are tears, rips and discontinuities. For the artist, the significance of cloth is that it holds this memory; it is embedded within it. The weavings become a relic of the materializing act itself, when something tangible is thrown down into the world, giving form to that which would otherwise have been sensed, buried within, and perhaps lost.

you burn me?<sup>7</sup>

How can one come to the intangible through the material?<sup>8</sup> How is such a space constructed? In his book





*The Sacred and the Profane*, French historian Mircea Eliade describes the apparition of the sacred through something that is otherwise ordinary: "In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act- the manifestation of something of a wholly different order; a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world."<sup>9</sup> In *Cloth Dripping*, we enter into a realm whose intentions become comprehensible if we begin to suspend our belief in the structures of logic and language. What is understood lies within the body, in intuition, and within sense experiences. I want the viewer to learn their own truth.<sup>10</sup>

The installation's singing voice (made from a recording from the artist's own voice) is full of longing. It sings the words "I wait for you now" over and over. It is soft and haunting like the voice of a memory or ghost calling from the depth of a well. Sound gets inside of you.<sup>11</sup> Like her hung cloths, the installation's sonic element is woven; through editing, the line repeats itself, cycling and layering and extending. It echoes and intersperses through the space and resonates through the body, and feels as if it is coming from an interior source. In Ovid's myth, Sappho knew of a superstition that said it was possible to rid herself from her love unharmed, if she jumped into

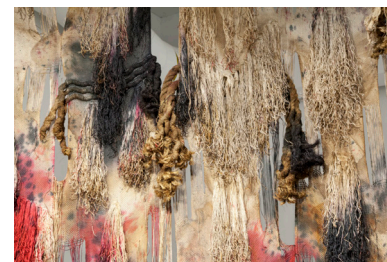
the sea; in her grief, she does so and dies.

Narrative and myth can extend and express essential parts of human experience. Grisey speaks of storytellers who reference the warp and weft<sup>12</sup> of looms as a metaphor for the coming together of two things, fusing into something greater. Within the enormity of an emotion that is bigger than one person, Grisey points to the power of this sense experience and offers a tangible point of reference. The installation also asks, "what does it mean for the body to be gone?"<sup>13</sup> What is beyond the body when Sappho dies? *Cloth Dripping* is a relic of this story, an interwoven cloth of myth, fiction, transformation and history, echoing through the past to the haunting recesses of the present moment, holding on to the possibility for something to cycle back from loss and decay, into something emerging, forming anew.

someone will remember us

I say  
even in another time<sup>14</sup>

— Mary Ma



<sup>1</sup> Carson, Anne. *If Not Winter: Fragments of Sappho*.

Canada: Vintage Canada Edition, 2002. Pg. 147

<sup>2</sup> "Sappho Biography" 15 Mar 2016 <<http://biography.com/people/sappho-947166>>.

<sup>3</sup> Grisey, Mary. "CV/Statement." Web. 15 Jan. 2016 <[www.marygrisey.com/news](http://www.marygrisey.com/news)>.

<sup>4</sup> Carson, Anne. *Fragment* 163, pg. 327

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*. Chicago, 1981

<sup>6</sup> Grisey, Mary. Statement from artist in personal interview. 11 December 2015

<sup>7</sup> Carson, Anne. *Fragment* 38, pg. 77

<sup>8</sup> Grisey, Mary. Statement from artist in personal interview. 11 December 2015

<sup>9</sup> Eliade, Mircea. Trans. Willard R. Trask. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harcourt Brace Inc., 1987. Pg. 1

<sup>10</sup> Grisey, Mary. Statement from artist in personal interview. 11 December 2015

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Warp and weft refers to the vertical and horizontal orientation of thread in fabric made over the loom, where weft (horizontal) is woven through the warp (vertical).

<sup>13</sup> Grisey, Mary. Statement by artist in personal interview. 11 December 2015

<sup>14</sup> Carson, Anne. *Fragment* 147, pg. 297





## PROJECT

## LOITER

SEBASTIÁN BENÍTEZ

JUNE 24 — AUGUST 6, 2016

In *Loiter*, Sebastián Benítez engages photography and sculpture to address conflicting values of exchange, decay, rebirth, and political and cultural currency in a post-colonial moment in his home country of Venezuela. The work implicates histories of modernist art into the uneven politics of contemporary Caracas. In *Loiter*, Benítez seeks to understand what relationship the vestiges of Modernism now have with their contemporary environments.

Venezuelan Modern artist Jesús Rafael Soto described his manifesto for art making as such: 'Artistic creation is a force which should preferably be directed towards the exploration of space, of the universe, of the infinite realities which surround us, but of which we are hardly conscious.'<sup>1</sup> Soto's series of public sculptures,

*Penetrables* (1967-90), individually form large square grids from which hundreds of plastic tubes hang vertically like vines from a jungle canopy. The artist intended for these tubes to be interacted with both optically and physically by the viewer, who can wade through the artwork, feeling the pieces moving against their body. Breaking with the perception that art objects are precious and should not be touched, the Venezuelan artist of the Op and Kinetic Art movement sensed a need for playful reshaping of the way in which the artist, the institution, the art object and the viewer interact. The viewer is engulfed by the object, becoming one with it and is dematerialized within it. It is likely that Soto did not expect new interactions beyond those limitations put in place. In *Penetrable*, as we consume the art,

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the art consumes us.

Consumption and perception play a concerted role in the ways in which the arts and the economy of a Modernized country progress. Art markets play into the desires of the consumer, into a culture of ownership and collection, where objects are idolised, worshipped and consumed in the public and private arenas. We store them in acid-free environs or in climate-controlled vaults, so that they might exist, we hope, forever. Their precarity precedes their preciousness. However, in an age of digital reproducibility, with accessible online catalogues of images, videos and online journals of art criticism, the art object can never truly die – its existence is assumed to be eternal. Who owns an art object more often than not has more relevance to the market value of that object than the artists themselves. But when art is in the public, its value is worthless and priceless – valuable in its existence as an art object, but one that is at risk of environmental decay.

For those yet to make an encounter with visual art, the presence of public art in occupied urban spaces is essential but problematic. Public art subverts the context of wealthy ownership and private consumption of cultured bourgeoisie and class division.

But what value was there in Modern art aesthetics to a Venezuelan public in the 1960s and 70s? The delights of the ethereal and the profundity of existentialism provide little in the way of real nourishment for those living in extreme poverty. While the modernist approach can be said to be universal and humanist, the degree to which the wealthy class helped shape the Venezuelan art world to this narrative for social capital was to the detriment of a society of people whose desperate reality was being publically ignored.

Under a booming oil economy of the 1950s, Venezuela made its accelerated progression towards Modernization. The kinetic art movement captured the exhilarating climate of this time, but over the next decade grew to “assume a hegemonic position in the cultural world, dominating the major institutions and public spaces of Caracas and leaving little room for new and different art forms.”<sup>2</sup> The suffering that existed under dictatorship and elitism did not disappear as the times gave way to a period of political stability and economic growth. As the country began to undergo Modernization in its urban planning, architecture, industries and economy, its government looked to show that progressive face to the world in its cultural output. So when Venezuela chose to commission Ki-

netic and Op Art in public spaces in the 60s and 70s, the apolitical nature of this work would have been specifically appealing to a government that wanted to appear forward-thinking and Modern without actually addressing any of its country's social inequality.

The artist known as Gego began to produce her *Reticuláreas* (Nets) towards the end of the 1960s. These environmental sculptures, the size of rooms, were built up of finely modelled triangular steel components hooked together, forming “a discontinuous equilibrium... in a dynamic rhythm of tensions, forces and transparencies.”<sup>3</sup> They were sensorial – a work in flux – that embodied the desires of that generation: to build great and modern structures that visualise the degree to which technological complexity was the driving force behind the nation's coming success.

An encounter with public sculpture and Modern art during Benítez' childhood in Caracas in the 1990s made a lasting impression on the young artist. Public works such as Soto's *La Esfera de Caracas* (The Sphere of Caracas) – a vast suspended orb made up of different shaped metal tubes – were experienced while moving around the city but in a radically different context than at the time of their commission. In 1983, Venezuela

saw its currency hugely devalued and in 1989 it had a close-call with bankruptcy.<sup>4</sup> Since then, little or no upkeep has been performed on the outdoor sculptures. As Benítez saw during his childhood and during trips home from Toronto, the monuments have begun to exhibit signs of decay – both environmental and through vandalism<sup>5</sup>. There are rumours that segments of Soto's *La Esfera* have been removed and sold for scrap metal by persons whose material needs supersede their cultural exigencies. The harsh irony is that these public sculptures are slowly being decayed by the social ills their existence purposefully ignores.

In Loiter, Benítez considers a new use for these Modern icons of Caracas. In a metamodernist reflection on abstraction, he is liberating the work from its original “modernist ideological naivety.”<sup>6</sup> By imagining a repurposing of the work of Soto and Gego for contemporary times, through uses that are practical and frivolous, ironic and sincere, the artist is creating an artwork that speaks to the real circumstances of its arrival and art that is truly public. In *Loiter*, Gego's *Reticulárea* is repurposed – no longer just an object of rarefied introspection but also as an object of considered practical worth for a Venezuelan public. What remains instead is a utilitarian network of hanging frames that

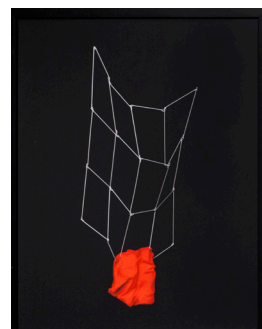


connect with other objects. Rather than remaining functionally separate from its environment, the piece has acquired new uses as a hanging rack. Photographs by Benítez show the Modern art of Caracas dematerialized and playfully re-appropriated while also considering the newfound value of the aesthetics of decay.

In contemporary times, as global oil-prices have dropped, Venezuela's economy has gone into tailspin, and with it, its social democracy crumbles.<sup>7</sup> 2016 has seen inflation reach record levels and the imposition of a 60-day state of emergency due to the widespread looting and violence resulting from food shortages.<sup>8</sup> When Soto tells us we should be 'hardly conscious' of art, he was unwittingly pre-empting the need for art that is exactly the opposite – boldly conscious and decisively political. In the late 20th century, the commissioning of public works seems now in contemporary times, to be an outlandish expenditure by a government that sought aesthetization of its poverty and social inequality instead of resolution. Rather than urban renewal and gentrification, Benítez' artwork imagines the reclaiming of salvage and through it rebirth. Taking back and rebuilding from the works of Soto and Gego is in itself an act of artist's rebellion.

— Benjamin Hunter

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<sup>1</sup>Jesús Rafael Soto

<sup>2</sup>Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century, Ed. by Edward J. Sullivan, Phaidon. pp. 146

<sup>3</sup>Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century, Ed. by Edward J. Sullivan, Phaidon. pp. 148

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. pp. 153

<sup>5</sup>Conversation with the artist

<sup>6</sup>Luke Turner, *The Metamodernist Manifesto*. Web. Accessed 14 June 2016

<sup>7</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/20/venezuela-breaking-point-food-shortages-protests-maduro> Web. Accessed 14 June 2016

<sup>8</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/24/venezuela-crisis-basic-food-shortages> Web. Accessed 14 June 2016



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## CATCHING A GHOST

CHRISTOPHER GARLAND

SEPTEMBER 15 — NOVEMBER 30, 2015

Christopher Garland's *Catching a Ghost* uses humour and the aesthetics of ghost hunting reality television to reimagine the private expulsion of negative or destructive feelings and behaviors in domestic space. Themes of privacy, ideas of home, and shifts between public and private identities are explored in *Ghost* as well as recurrently throughout Garland's broader artistic practice.

Though Garland works primarily in photography, *Catching A Ghost* is thematically in tune with his body of work; as early as 2009 (*Back Home: Diary I*, 2009-2011) Garland has used his body to explore identity within domestic and public spheres. *Back Home* is a series of photographs that chronicle Garland's presence in his hometown of Belleville, the photographs

range from an intimate bathtub shot to a glimpse down a sterile Wal-Mart aisle.

*Catching A Ghost* is formatted like security footage; two rows of three split screens, without audio, surveil the rooms and hallways of the artist's domestic space. Garland performs as the ghost, wearing nothing but a white sheet, white sneakers and a nondescript white mask over his face. His nudity rejects the clothed formality of the public sphere and marks a shift into intimate, private space.

In the first seconds of the video, centered in the bottom middle frame (perhaps providing a moment of symmetry before the chaos), Garland stares directly into the camera and performs a quick, disarming shrug. Cap-



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turing a ghost so wholly unobscured would certainly provide the money shot for any of the ghost shows Garland drew inspiration from, but rather than lionizing the poltergeist, this moment is used to deflate the unknown, familiarizing the unfamiliar — the ghost is caught and doesn't seem to mind. As Garland says, "When alone in one's own space, there is no hiding"<sup>1</sup>.

The tone-setting shrug gives way to a nine-minute-long tantrum. The ghost floats from room to room, violently rummaging through and displacing the artist's property; he is haunting himself. The performance mimics classic tropes of supernatural mayhem: lights are flicked on and off, kitchen cupboard doors are flung open and closed again, items are pushed off walls and thrown to the ground. Nothing is left undisturbed in the ghost's wake.

Garland's movement between screens provides the piece with a dance-like quality, an almost rhythmic ebb and flow of chaos and rest. The uninhabited frames (though eventually in shambles) surround the mayhem in a tranquil glow. Each movement and motion of the ghost is as unrestricted and expressive as a private emotional outburst.

Despite the comedic qualities of Garland's simple childlike costume and

occasionally gleeful performance, the rampage generates a sinister atmosphere. To witness this pristine domestic space ransacked by a masked figure elicits an uncomfortable, negative visceral reaction. It is precisely that negativity, expressed in the safety of private space, that Garland is drawn to. He says in the write-up of his *Swallowing The Key* (2015) series:

"In a public sphere we censor our negative feelings, behaviors and impulses in order to improve society and avoid creating chaos within it. These consequences are not as great in a private sphere, and so here these feelings can be explored and played with."

And Garland is certainly playing. Though he performs without shame or hesitation in his expression of negative, destructive inclinations, this is clearly a controlled exercise; no permanent damage is done to any of the spaces.

*Catching a Ghost* ends as Garland walks, in the same brisk and unflagging pace he has maintained for the entire performance, past the kitchen and beyond the scope of the camera lenses. For the first time we are left with six still frames. The ghost's presence has been memorialized by little more than an open fridge and assorted debris strewn about the floors and surfaces of Garland's home. Perhaps the ghost's

confident exit stride suggests he has seamlessly transitioned back into the public sphere, without any indication of the goings on of the last nine minutes.

*Ghost* appears to argue that our private spaces are the perfect venue for catharsis, a controlled zone in which we may pour our innermost frustrations, allowing us to re-enter public life calmed, refreshed, and ready to behave politely. Perhaps, in a perfect world, it would be simply therapeutic enough to chuckle at an artist in a white sheet throwing a tantrum. Laughter is a physiological reaction signaling joy, relief or safety in moments of potential danger or unease<sup>2</sup>, it is even correlated with a higher pain threshold<sup>3</sup> — like a ghost haunting himself, exploring discomfort in comfortable space.

- Halloway Jones



<sup>1</sup>Christopher Garland, Artist's website (*Swallowing the Key*, 2015), Web. Sep 8, 2015. <<http://www.christopher-garland.com>>

<sup>2</sup>Gervais, Matthew. Sloan Wilson, David. "The Evolution and Functions of Laughter and Humour: A Synthetic Approach". *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, December 2005, Vol. 80, No. 4

<sup>3</sup>Dunbar, Robin. "Social laughter is correlated with an elevated pain threshold." British Academy Centenary Research Project, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK. Sep 12, 2011.



## FLASH SPLASH

ELI SCHWANZ

DECEMBER 1ST 2015 — FEBRUARY 15TH 2016

### ORIGINS

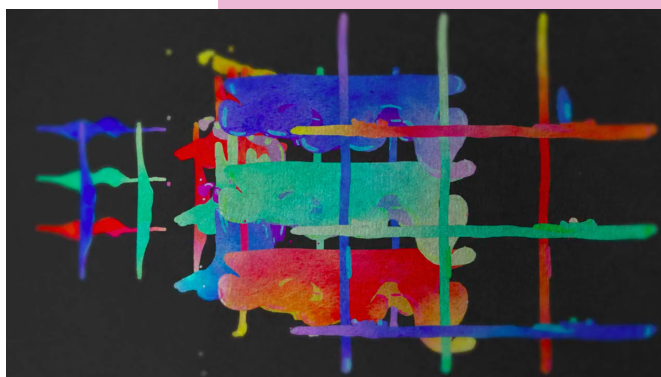
Three fluid horizontal lines appear on a gray-black backdrop: one of reds, one of greens, one of blues. These RGB lines reform themselves, in sync with each other, into abstract shapes before returning to their initial position. (The approximate shapes of each transformation: puddle—wave—geyser—eruption). Then the whole sequence repeats itself, and in so doing, defines itself as a loop.

The viscous mobility of these lines is rendered not only by their mutations, but also by the flicker effect overlaying the video; by the gradient of hue in each line that stretches from orange to pink, from lime to forest green, from purple to royal blue; and by the restless shuddering of these abstract forms. The three horizontal gels that break

the blackness behind them seem to take on a certain primordial sentience, or at least a minimum of dynamic life, like the first Protista emerging after the Big Bang. Against the backdrop of a void infused by static, the three lines enact a struggle or a dance between the orderly stillness of form at rest and the chaotic growth of form in upward motion, breaking from itself.

### PROLIFERATIONS

In one segment of the lines' looped lifespan, a drop of colour falls from one line to the next. In this gesture, the lines are shown to ultimately not be separate; they are joined by mixture, by an RGB harmony of substances in which the three become one. The cyclical nature of the piece is expressed not only in the parallel balletic motions of the three lines, but in their mutual



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union, their essential interconnectedness. As in any loop, the three lines display both changeability and stasis: the viewer comes to understand that transformation and rest will each follow the other.

Then, at [0:20], the first triad shifts to the right of the screen—to make room for more of itself. *Flash Splash* adds iterations of the first loop onto the screen until slowly half the screen is filled with the three lines looping. Each copied loop of the original is located at a different position on the screen, in a distinct size, and occasionally turned to the side by 90 degrees. No copy is synchronized with the original; they follow the same sequence as the first loop but the video screen unfurls into chaos through the dissymmetry of the temporality and size of their identical loops. One loop, which appears to the left of the screen at half the original loop's size, gives the screen an odd optical illusion of depth; a 3D tunnel is forged in the black grid between the loops. Halfway through the video, this stilted mosaic comes to a climax and the scene decrescendos: one by one, each looped unit disappears back into the blown-out blackness from which it sprung.

#### HERMENEUTICS

For any attentive audience, Eli Schwanz's *Flash Splash* brings up the wide-open question of hermeneutics

(which is the art & science of interpretation). The first phase of this question: should such a work be interpreted? If your answer to this is a staunch no, then you will take your experience of this video—with the moods it evoked, the calm or mess it instilled, the beauty it brought—and go home with it, leaving it untouched by the faculties of comprehension that would threaten to make it something it is not.

But if the answer is yes, then the corollary question of how do we interpret abstract colour & shape comes into view. Below I offer two interpretations pulled from a possible infinity of them: just as the lines mark the empty space behind them, so do our ideas and perceptions mark the work itself.

Play. As the piece unfolds into a quilt made of its repetition, the viewer gets the sense of an exploration of contingency. It is not that you feel the artist's hand has moved randomly; the piece is not reminiscent of Dada or fluxus art, which hands the reins of control over to the object almost entirely. Here, the artist chooses the placements, enlargements and rotations of a set object—he is limited by the thing itself, but can modify its scope and geography. Schwanz's choice of the kindergarten onomatopoeia word splash in the title and the bright pastel colours of the lines reinforce this sense of

play, akin to a child moulding from his repertoire of clay, where the thrill of imagination in the artist is bounded by the limitations of form and materiality. Freedom of the artist—and the freedom of the forms themselves, straining to become other than what they are—is shown to be freedom only within certain constraints.

Genesis/Endings The language that arises from *Flash Splash* is one of generation and dissolution. Nothing about this piece is dramatic; the pulse of the loop unfolds after its own logic, at its own set pace. *Flash Splash* strikes you intuitively as having cosmological resonance; it is, in its own minor way, a retelling of Beginning and End, with its middle narrative a complex interplay between repetition and difference, between evolution into disorder and cooldown into simplicity, between the rigour of the loop and the spontaneity of the loops' overlap. But because the video is itself played on loop, neither its end nor its beginning are proper to itself; the viewer's experience of *Flash Splash* begins when they enter the room, and ends when they exit it. Each Beginning and each End is made by the viewer themselves; in this artwork which is a maze of loops, this experience is what cannot be repeated.

The loop, lasting three minutes and forty-one seconds, finally closes where

it began: in a state of shaky quiescence, the three lines nearly still but still trembling. *Flash Splash* functions both as a singular and infinite object which can only be encountered for what it is, and as an invitation for a meditation upon the object which spins away on the experience of the work, particular to each viewer; and the squiggling thought-lines of its audience.

— Fan Wu



## WE'VE MET BEFORE

MAYA BEN DAVID

FEBRUARY 16TH — MAY 9TH, 2016

My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean, a Scottish folk song with fuzzy origins, twists and distorts, confusing and attracting the viewer as they try to make sense of the gestaltian bricolage of Maya Ben David's *We've Met Before*. This grating nostalgic tune is incongruously matched with an dancing, pink-haired hentai-appropriated girl<sup>1</sup>, but both evoke a shared craving... a pining to reach across distances—whether physical, digital or between species. Written more than 200 years ago, some believe My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean was penned for the defeated—and later exiled—Jacobite leader Charles Edward Stuart, but more popularly the song is sung by those pining for one's 'bonnie', a term not attributed to any particular gender, but a stand-in for the object of one's lonely longing desire.

Vorarephillia comes from the Latin vorare meaning to swallow and philia from Ancient Greek, meaning love, and as vorarephilia within the contemporary medical context is categorized as a paraphilia, a sexual fetish/disorder that exists mostly in the realm of shared fantasies.<sup>2</sup> Vore is characterized by a desire to engage in the imagined act of being swallowed or swallowing whole another in the pursuit of erotic pleasure, which is, like other more impractical sexual acts, usually imaged or played out in fantasy. This phantasmagorical community thrives within the disembodied, yet curiously embodied plane of VR, and anime culture.

Online vore forums like Eka's Portal is a space for vore enthusiasts to congregate, theorize, and solicit partners,



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either as prey or predator—a process often accompanied by debates addressing the contentiousness of gender divisions and identifications of such roles. Anime, and hentai in particular, more than live action films, is a malleable conduit for the expression of vore fantasies. The visible two dimensionality of the animated hentai figures (usually well-endowed female figures) precipitate the gap of recognition between the two dimensional character and the viewer's physical body. This gap in recognition, scholar M. Ortega-Brena argues is distinguishable between viewer and the stylized representations — the hentai girl's animated breasts trigger a series of “barely conscious analogies” and invite a “heightened sense of sensorial input.” The viewer is on some level is aware of the un-reality of the animated characters, but is presented with enough signifiers to activate the mind in search of sensorial input from the real. M. Ortega-Brena suggests it's through this tension between the real and unreal that the viewer is able to fill in these scenarios with their own “corporeal awareness” or the “imaginative projection of one's corporeality.”<sup>13</sup> This slippage between the real and unreal, are an ample playground for enacting impossible fantasies restricted by the limitations of the human body like vore.

Vore itself is the umbrella term under which sub genres exist: soft vore, which finds an allegiance with BDSM, and is complexly intertwined with murky gender politics that are constantly in a precarious dialogue attempting to negotiate the tricky territory of domination and submission. Undeniably, highly eroticized female figures are often the focal point of these soft vore fantasies, which Ben David exposes for their unequal power dynamics with numerous eroticized female figures being both the object of consumption and the penetrated, from hentai girls to cheerleaders.<sup>4</sup> However, unlike hard vore, soft vore refuses to transgress the boundary that permits the mastication of flesh (furry, anime or human). Cannibalism is not the objective, which would render the participant inactive, although absorption of the victim by the predator occasionally does occur through the natural processes of digestion.

In female genital vore, also referred to as vaginal vore a sub-genre that is rife with Oedipus complexes and maternal fetishisms, the individual enters through the vaginal canal to nestle into the womb initiating a regression, or an un-birthing.<sup>5</sup> Ben David's *We've Met Before* is an act of ingestion, consensual or otherwise. Through the work, the viewer is slurped, gulped and taken in via various canals and deposited in the

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insides of their 'pred.' Simultaneously a meta-consumption occurs between the viewer and the screen as each of the layers of the video, overlap, fade, and fold into one another -- our pink-haired guide is particularly vulnerable to the dissolution and reconfiguration of the digital code

Aspects of vore can be traced back into various cultural expressions—illustrations from Hokusai Katsushika 1814 novel *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, the quintessential example of Japanese erotic art called shunga<sup>6</sup> depicts the sexual engulfing and domination of woman by octopus. Although the devouring of the whole body is absent in shunga, there is an emphasis, both in style and in objective, on the sexual consuming of one's prey/lover (often female), suggesting a possible genealogical connection to contemporary hentai vore. But vore-like tendencies are also found within a number of folklore, fairytales, and biblical tales that tell of human victims engulfed by wolves, whales, cats, while the human remains intact and sentient throughout the inner space voyage.

Jonah is one such biblical character and makes an appearance in *We've Met Before*. In the work, he appears as a low-budget, shabbily drawn cartoon reminiscent of those popular in Christian Sunday schools shown in musty

church basements. In this biblical tale from the Hebrew bible, Jonah is cast overboard, given over to the mercy of ocean and finds salvation during his three-day respite in the belly of a whale. By weaving together hentai, furry fandom, biblical stories, and the proverbial cheerleader eating mascot trope<sup>7</sup>, Ben David transverses linear time and provokes connections between historical contexts to create “one long vore video.”<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, it is a video that belies some sort of collective preoccupation and infatuation with the act of sensual consumption.

Vore may have more recently found a kindred spirit in the plasticity of the digital realm, but an animus desire to consume or be consumed predates the emergence of the computer age. Returning to the opening song of the video, *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean*, there is a deep rooted and insatiable loneliness that presumes it can only be satisfied by the physical presence of another being. Vore is a nuanced and fluid space that is both straightforward and complicated in its handling of gender—the predilection in vore imagery to either hunt or penetrate the female figure is undeniably problematic. But at the same time there is also internal and inescapable loneliness inherent in the idea of consuming or being consumed. This insatiable desire to intimately bond with



another being—whether by searching endlessly for one's bonnie, or swallowing them whole—belies a very basic human yearning across an almost impossible expanse between two beings.

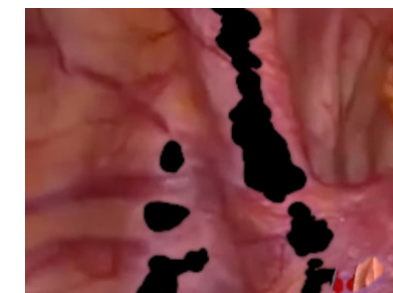
- Amber Christensen

This exhibition acknowledges the generous support of the Ontario Arts Council

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"Watching Japanese Hard-core Animation." *Sexuality and Culture*. 13.1. (2009): 18. Web.

<sup>4</sup>Female predators being more widely accepted than male, as a female predator is sometimes described as being penetrated, and doubly the female characters are often sought out prey. From forum discussions on Eka's portal. <http://aryion.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=45233>. Web. Accessed 3 Feb 2015.-

<sup>5</sup>Unbirthing as described on Eka's Portal involves some sort of digestion, and "consists of an umbilical cord and/or age regression, absorbing both physical and spiritual energy until the victim is either at a younger point, or absorbed completely, going back into other lives and absorbing the soul entirely." <http://aryion.com/content/unbirth>. Web. Accessed 28 Jan. 2016.

<sup>6</sup>Shunga is a terms for Japanese erotic art that is usually made using woodblocks that reached its height of popularity during the Edo period from 1603 to 1867 in in Ortega-Brena, Marion. "Peek-a-boo, I See You: Watching Japanese Hard-core Animation." *Sexuality and Culture*. 13.1. (2009): 21. Web.

<sup>7</sup>Even in 2010 a YouTube clip of the Toronto Raptors mascot devouring a cheerleader went 'viral' with close 3 million views. Engelhart, Katie. Raptor devours cheerleader: Hey haven't we seen this before? *Macleans*. 2 March 2010. Web.

<sup>8</sup>An observation made by Maya Ben David in conversation with author.

<sup>1</sup> Hentai in Japanese according to M. Ortega-Brena means "changed or strange figure" that can be used to denote metamorphosis aberration, and sexual perversion or abnormality. In modern Japan hentai magna refers to a specific genre of magna or anime that features extreme or perverse content. In English, hentai has become a catch-all phrase for anime or magna depicting explicit forms of sexual activity and animated sexual experiences in in Ortega-Brena, Marion. "Peek-a-boo, I See You: Watching Japanese Hard-core Animation." *Sexuality and Culture*. 13.1. (2009): 18. Web

<sup>2</sup>Vorarephilia. Wikipedia. Web. Accessed 5 Feb. 2016

<sup>3</sup> in Ortega-Brena, Marion. "Peek-a-boo, I See You:

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## DOORCUTS

ZAK TATHAM

MAY 17TH 2016 — AUGUST 1ST 2016

Following an anonymous character (played by artist Jesi the Younger) as she passes through a series of real and digital doors, Zak Tatham's short film *Doorcuts* invites the viewer to consider the ways in which online platforms mediate identity.

In the 1990s—the early days of the public Internet—‘doorways’ were ‘built’ to allow users access to the Web. These doors were called “web portals.”<sup>1</sup> Public portals included Yahoo!, MSN, iGoogle, and many other chat rooms, message boards, and search engines; these online spaces were gateways to a new world of connections and data. As the Internet became more easily accessible and the creation of online communities began, entering an online portal could mean taking on a new identity. Logging onto the Web meant passing through a

door to a separate plane of existence, where no one knew who you were or what you looked like. Chat rooms and message boards allowed users to stay as anonymous as they wanted; with the ability to identify yourself only by a chosen username, you could easily present yourself to strangers from around the world as whomever you wanted to be. And when you were tired of being online, you logged off, hit the computer's power button, and went out into the real world again.

As the Internet becomes more and more an ever-present part of our daily lives, not only is it much more challenging to disconnect from the Net, the old possibility of total online anonymity is rapidly disappearing. It's becoming more common for users to link different parts of their Internet identities together, pushing Twitter and



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Instagram posts through to Facebook, and registering dozens of different accounts onto one email. The Internet is less and less a space for subversive exploration and expression and more simply another part of daily life. This means that the same day-to-day care is now required to maintain an online presence as you put into your personal appearance. Self-curating begins to feel like a constant necessity, as nonstop connection to social networks is now available via the ubiquity of smartphones<sup>2</sup> and the access they grant to websites and apps like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. With the possibility to be online at all times comes the desire to be constantly updating and reaffirming one's online presence. This practice, at first novel, can become a burden, as the pressure to respond to online comments and provide new content for friends and/or followers never lets up.<sup>3</sup>

The film's eponymous doors evoke the anxiety induced by both the possibilities and demands of continual online connection. While the portals featured in Tatham's work grant access to new horizons, they are also portrayed as dangerous: at one point chasing the protagonist down a corridor; at other moments falling and crushing her. Every time she passes through a door, she changes not only her surroundings but also her outfit: moving through a doorway allows

her to alter her identity as well as her location. However, as the narrative progresses, it ends up going too far; ultimately, the protagonist loses the power to determine the location to which she'll be transported. Her real self and the digital afterimage she leaves behind as she passes through each doorway become mixed up, until the viewer is no longer certain who is real and who is a digital reflection. At one moment, two versions of the protagonist's self meet: with a look of fear, one self pulls shut the door that had just opened between them. This scene is one example of the way in which *Doorcuts* depicts the digital fragmentation of identity as anxiety inducing. Think about the sense of alienation you sometimes feel when glancing at your Facebook profile or reading over sent emails: did I really write those words, or was that some different, digital version of me? It can be difficult to feel that the online self is congruent to the self away from the keyboard.

There are several moments in *Doorcuts* when digitally rendered space (computerised stars, black-and-green grids, pixelated galaxies) can be seen peeking out from behind doorways. It is as if the doors are guarding against a fall into some kind of deep-space netherworld; maybe there is a reason that they chase Tatham's protagonist away. These brief glimpses of the world behind the doors seem like glitches. They

invoke an anxiety similar to the feeling of discovering a "404 Page Not Found" error when navigating through a website—or of realising that the persona you present online may not be exactly who you are. Abruptly, the artifice of the Internet drops away, the flashy graphics are gone, and behind there is nothing but a blank space. Is this what the protagonist of *Doorcuts* is running from? She is running, after all: at first navigating through the doors seems fun and exciting, but quickly it appears to grow stressful, even frightening, as "she goes too deep" in exploring where the doors can take her.<sup>4</sup>

The redemptive possibilities of the *Doorcuts* narrative may seem slim at first, but Tatham wants to leave the story open to interpretation.<sup>5</sup> To view the film as a cautionary tale against the dangers of getting lost in online experiences would be to disregard the extent to which *Doorcuts* is a playful example of the real and digital blurring together. The animation, mostly reminiscent of early 2000s video games, is sometimes eerily real, in the sense that it can be difficult at times to know which doors are artificially rendered and which are photographed. The nostalgic feeling of the whole film only adds to this sense of reality flattening out, with references to fantasy-based literature furthering *Doorcuts'* surreal atmosphere. For example, the frequent mirrored doors bring to

mind Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, while the passage from a bedroom closet filled with leaves into a forest recalls plot points in childhood classics like Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* and C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. Tatham cites Narnia as an influence, along with the science fiction franchise *Star Trek*, the 1988 film *Beetlejuice*, and Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series.<sup>6</sup> These narratives all have in common with *Doorcuts* a focus on border crossing and a tension between real and imagined worlds.

Ultimately, not only does reality flatten out in *Doorcuts*, but the protagonist does as well, folding up into a 2D cube like the victim of some kind of horrifying glitch in *The Sims* video game. This cube-self pushes through one final door and out into an unexpected landscape<sup>7</sup> of vast, beautiful mountains covered in lush verdant forests, mist hanging overhead. The cube falls down a cliff in silence and then, catching on a tree branch, disintegrates, clothes coming undone, flattening out into nothingness, returning to nature at last. Now that the Internet seems to be all around us at all times, the idea of accessing online information by passing through a web portal is quaint, strange, and as magical as opening up a door in the air and stepping into another place. How should we respond to the possibility—made very real by the





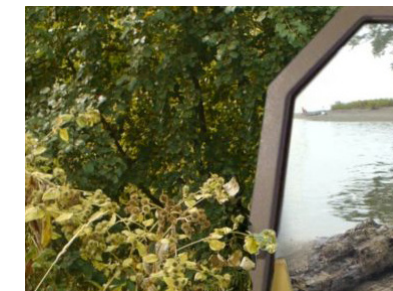
ubiquity of smartphone technology and social media—that the border between offline and online life might eventually disappear? That instead of choosing to log on by opening a door online, we will always be connected, constantly passing through one realm of online space after another as we navigate lives which have become just as real online as they are offline? In *Doorcuts*, Tatham visualises the anxiety this question creates and the impact it has on our identities, blurring the distinction between real and digital passageways until it is as murky and uncertain as mist moving over a mountain.

— Jill Blackmore Evans

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Zhou, "A History of Web Portals and Their Development in Libraries," *Information Technology and Libraries* 22, no. 3 (2003): 119.

<sup>2</sup> As of 2015, two-thirds of the population in both the USA and Canada have been identified as smartphone users, and high percentages of households pay for Internet access. Aaron Smith, "U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015," Pew Research Center: 1 April 2016. Web. CRTC, "Smartphone and tablet use on the rise," news release, 27 Oct 2016, <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1018749>

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Richardson, "Twenty-four hour social media 'link to teenage anxiety,'" BBC News. 11 September 2015. Web.

<sup>4</sup> In conversation with the artist, 14 April 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Tatham explains that while the rest of the film was shot in Toronto over a period of three years, these final scenes were shot in Thailand. In conversation with the artist, 14 April 2016.

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