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ACV 207: Materialising the Image

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CURATORIAL BRIEF: ctrl+S

ctrl+S explores the endless and ever-expanding stream of data which has been created since the dawn of the internet age. These artists dissect and interrogate the implications of the digital image, produced both by human and by machine.

RATIONALE

Ctrl-S interrogates the implications of the internet age, particularly in the repercussions of digital image production. The exhibition focuses on the notion of the digital world as archive; the idea that our communication, actions, and relationships are constantly archived through the internet, often in an incomprehensible mass. The artists featured pull from these archives, appropriating images constantly produced online. Ctrl-S aims to create a state of overwhelm for the visitor, uncovering the massive digital wasteland which surrounds us.

Digital screens have become an extension of the human experience, bombarding everyday life with a slew of colour and information. In such an era it becomes paramount to investigate how this affects the visual world and human life. How do we make sense of this unprecedented exposure to stimuli?

This theme of information overload and the takeover of the digital image relates to my interests because the rapid digitization of our lives is parallel to my generation's upbringing. My aim with curating this exhibition is to gain some understanding of how my own perception has been affected by being submerged in internet worlds for so long, as well as how it affects society at large.

ACADEMIC BACKING

The idea of the internet at archive is intrinsic to contemporary archival theory. Jacques Derrida describes the notion of 'archive fever', citing the West's 'repetitive and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return of the most archaic place of absolute beginning.' (Derrida 1996)

Sue Breakell utilizes Derrida's ideas in interrogating the dichotomy between society's obsession with the archive, and 'a widespread sense that within Western capitalist societies we are surrounded by stuff but uncertain about what is significant'; (Breakell 2015). Breakell questions what the volume of material produced by the internet means for researchers, rejecting notions of the digital as the ultimate archival solution. This is in line with Ben Highmore, who writes 'by letting everyone speak about everything, the vast archive of documents became literally unmanageable' (2007, p. 16). In his discussion of artists who utilize archival ideas, Hal Foster presents a moreso utopian vision. Fosters archive moves away from the 'excavation site' and towards a 'construction site', where artists can transform 'belatedness into becoming' (2004, p.2).

CHOICE OF ARTISTS

The artists included in ctrl+S are **Jon Rafman, Camille Henrot, Toby Ziegler, and Penelope Umbrico.**

They are linked through their appropriation of images and structures which have been found on the internet. These four artists pull from the same source material, and through their own curatorial, archival, and artistic processes create glimpses into the incomprehensible digital world we reside in.

JON RAFMAN

Fig. 1: Jon Rafman*, Rv888, Finnmark, Norway - Google View,* 2010, Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper, 146 x 233.7 cm

Fig. 2: Jon Rafman, Fuji-Q Highland, 5-6-1 ShinNishihara, Fujiyoshida, Yamanashi, Japan - Google View, 2009, Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper, 146 x 233.7 cm

Fig 3: Jon Rafman, *Manuel Ávila Camacho, Veracruz, Veracruz- Llave, México - Google View,* 2009, Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper*,* 101 x 162 cm

Fig 4: Jon Rafman, *Oudezijds Voorburgwal, Amsterdam, Nederland - Google View,* 2009, Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper, 101 x 162 cm

Jon Rafman is a Canadian artist who has been described as 'an archivist and ethnographer of the virtual world', working with appropriated images found on the internet. (Rafman 2012, p. 2)

Nine Eyes is an ongoing series started in 2008, and is featured in this exhibition as a set of four large-scale prints (Fig. 1-4). Rafman surveys Google Street View and captures screenshots of worthy scenes, resulting in an ever-expanding set of sublime, and sometimes unsettling images taken by the mindless drone of Google's camera. Here, Rafman interrogates the ease of which surveilling cameras have been accepted into our world, and asks what effect such image-making has.
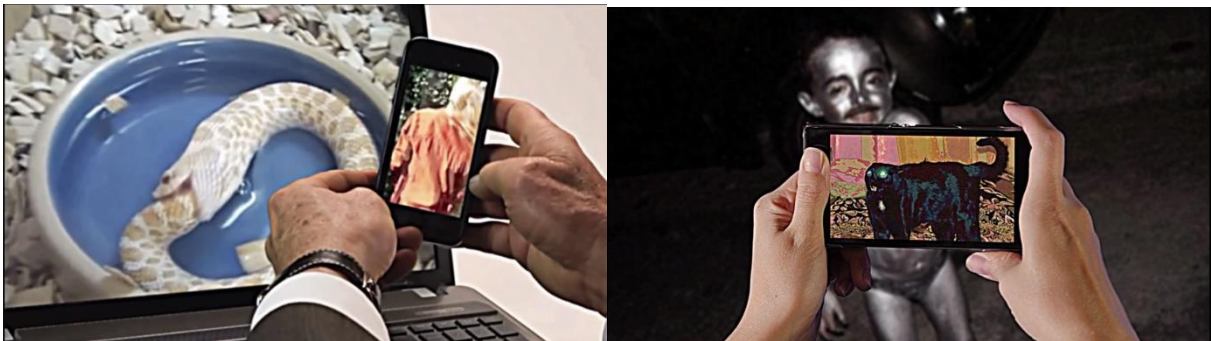

Fig 5:
Jon Rafman
Erysichthon
2015
Video: colour and audio, 8:04 duration
(stills captured from https://vimeo.com/184674362)

Erysichthon (2015) is a video piece which is available for viewing at https://vimeo.com/184674362. This piece differs from the previous in that it is fabricated by Rafman, rather than exhibiting found images by themselves. Consisting of found videos, Rafman unsettles the viewer by presenting scenes of gross over-consumption

through the lens of the internet. This work will be projected onto a darkened wall in a sectioned off room in the gallery, constructing a space where the viewer is interrogated for their own consumption of the images in this gallery space.

CAMILLE HENROT

Fig 6:
Camille Henrot
Grosse Fatigue
2013
Video: colour and sound, 13m duration
(stills: moma.org)

Camille Henrot is a French multimedia artist working with themes of anthropology, mythology, and systems of knowledge at large. Her film *Gross Fatigue* is considered a seminal work which examines creation myths from a span of human culture, combines them into a spoken word poem, and illustrates these ideas using a series of seemingly banal images and videos placed side-by-side on a replication of an iOS desktop computer. Henrot departs from the other artists in Ctrl+S as her work is less appropriative, with most of the video sequences directed by the artist. Instead, she uses the rapid-fire form of online information consumption to present a largely non-sensical conglomeration of creation myths. As Rafman, Ziegler, and Umbrico pull on the archive of the internet, Henrot sources her material from museum collections and historical archives, offering a

comparison in how information is found and consumed in contemporary times. *Gross Fatigue* speaks to the overwhelming aspect of the exhibition, as viewers are asked to absorb so many elements at once. This piece will be shown in parallel to Rafman's *Erysichthon,* in its own isolated and darkened room.

TOBY ZIEGLER

Fig 7:
Toby Ziegler
It'll soon be over (exquisite corpse)
2018
Two-channel video installation, colour, with sound; duration 00:04:55 looped

Toby Ziegler is a British artist interested in the visual qualities of digitizing images, as well as incorporating algorithm into his work.

His 2018 video installation *It'll Soon Be Over* is projected across the west wall of the gallery space. The two channels play side by side, looping between a rapid-paced slideshow of algorithmically selected images based on their visual similarities. This pace is met by the sound of a beating drum, heard across the gallery space. This rhythm is short lived, as the video loops back to stillness and silence. The disarming effect this piece has on the viewer creates a tone of overwhelm which permeates the exhibition. This installation plays off of Rafman's *Nine Eyes* in its machine-like interpretation of the internet image, creating associations perhaps only a machine would make.
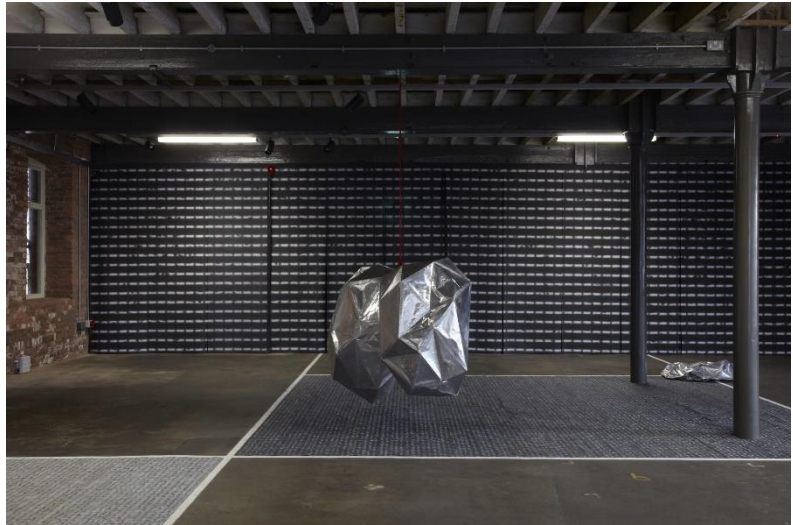

Fig 7 + 8:
Toby Ziegler
Expanded Narcissistic Envelope
2014
Aluminium, rope

Ziegler's sculptural works included in *Ctrl S* are both untitled, exhibited in the past as the installation *Expanded Narcissistic Envelope* (2014). Illustrated in figures 7 and 8, these sculptural works were modelled off of digital images of body parts, reduced to such

a low resolution that they are depicted as abstracted geographic sculptural forms by Ziegler. By digitizing the body, and then reconstructing some part of it through this warped manner, Ziegler interrogates the relationship between humans and the online realm. Central to the exhibition space and large in size, the aluminum sculptures loom over the viewer as they explore the space.

PENELOPE UMBRICO

Fig 9:
Penelope Umbrico
monument (the news)
2018
42 broken LCD TVs and computer monitors, live cable stream

Penelope Umbrico is an American artist who is perhaps the most focused on digital waste, decay, and surplus out of the artists exhibited. The broken monitors of *monument (the news)* speak to the tangible materiality that often goes ignored when we use our

devices everyday, drawing attention to the actual medium through which the other works in the space were created.

Fig 10:
Penelope Umbrico
Bad display (e-waste)
2017-2018
Broken and disassembled LCD TVs, monitors, and laptops; found plexiglass; TV boxes; white house paint

These notions of materiality and waste are underlined by Umbrico's *Bad Display (e-waste)* (2017-2018), where the components that make up such screens are separated and leaned against various walls in the gallery. In line with the overconsumption on display in Rafman's *Erysichthon*, Umbrico presents the obsession with ever-advancing technology which has captivated the internet era.

Umbrico's ongoing *Suns From Sunsets From Flickr* compiles thousands of

sunsets documented by Flickr users. Although reminiscent of the mindless consumption

featured in some of the works exhibited, the Flickr suns contribute a sense of human

warmth, each representing a moment somebody wanted to commemorate. Although

spanning an entire wall in the space and continuing to overwhelm the viewer, they may

provide a sense of comfort in a space dominated by machine-generated imagery.

Fig 11:
Penelope Umbrico
Suns From Sunsets From Flickr
2006-ongoing
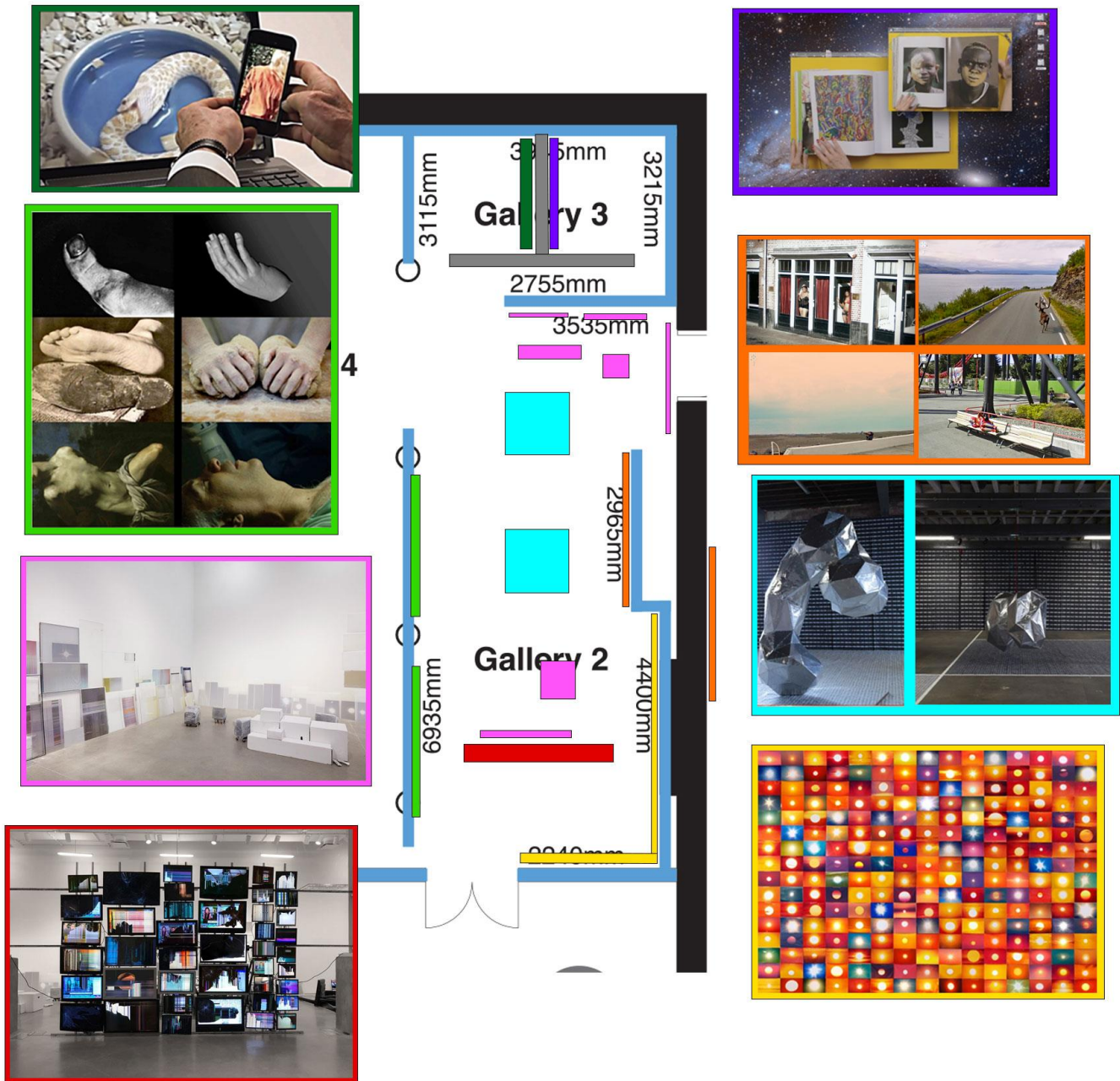2000 machine c-prints, each 4 x 6 in

Gallery 3

3115mm

3315mm

3215mm

2755mm

3535mm

4

2965mm

Gallery 2

6935mm

4400mm

2240mm

VENUE

Ctrl+S will be held in the c3 gallery in the Abbotsford Covent, specifically in Gallery 2 and 3, as illustrated in figure 12.

The exhibition requires a traditional white wall gallery setting because it aims to surround the viewer in image, creating a sense of over-stimulation. Another consideration is the amount of AV equipment required for the three videos, necessitating an indoor space with electric capabilities.

The c3 gallery is open to 'new and innovative approaches towards the production of art and ideas', which allows for the potentially unsettling nature of the work in the exhibition, particularly the video pieces.

As illustrated in figure 12, the 'gallery 3' space will need to be partitioned with moving walls, creating two darkened 'theatres' for the projection of Rafman and Henrot's video works. The exhibition requires four projectors in total; two gallery 3 and two for Ziegler's dual channel work. All of these video works require high quality speakers which should be mounted just under the ceiling for each work. Umbrico's *monument* requires power cords to be extended into the center of the space, however these can be left un-discrete as exposing power sources is in line with the exhibition's overall aesthetics. The main gallery space should be fully lit, and all other pieces are installed through quite traditional means, with photo prints simply adhered to the walls and Ziegler's sculptures resting on the floor. (1751).

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