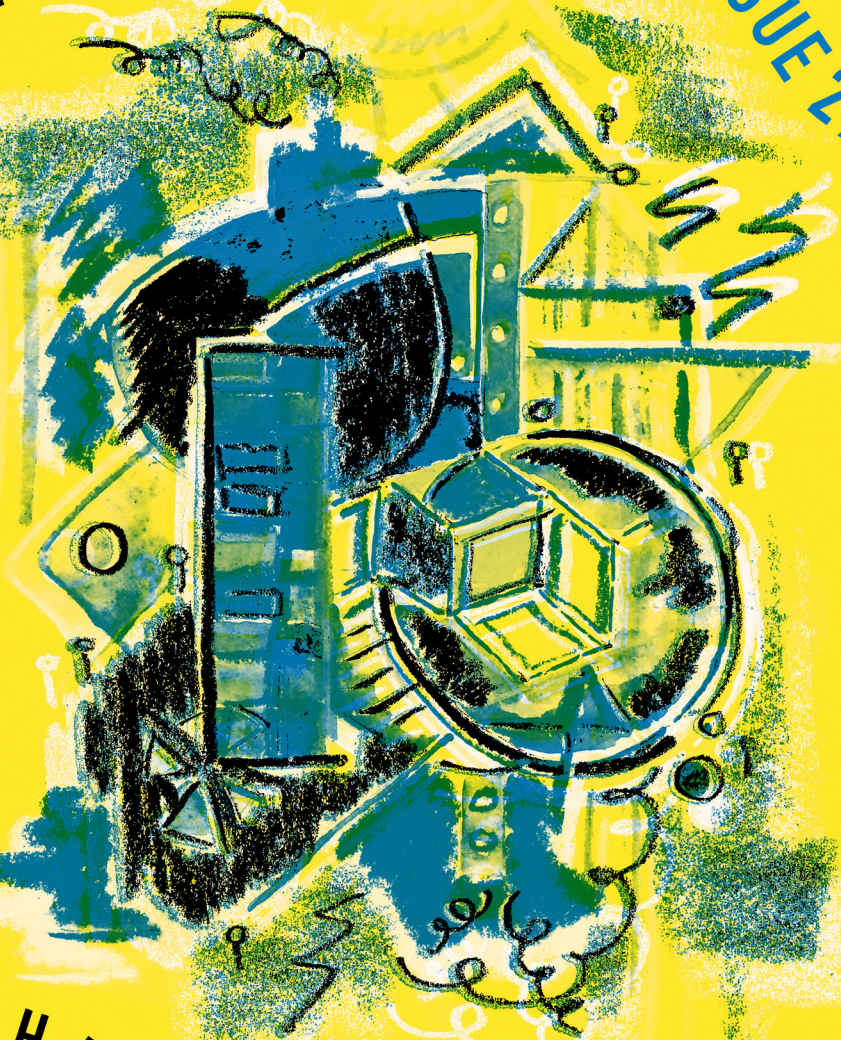


THE COURTAULDIAN ISSUE 27



THE MACHINE STOPS



**The Courtauldian  
Issue 27  
The Machine Stops**

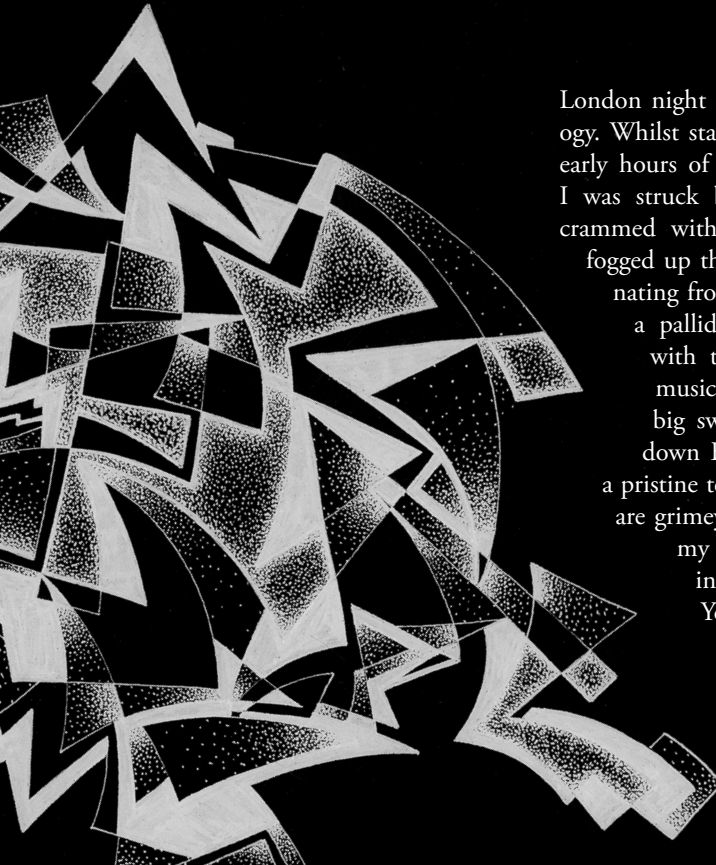
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Photograph by George Goodhand  
Front cover art by Sasha Dunn

# EDITOR'S NOTE

*'You talk as if god had made the Machine,' cried the other. 'I believe you pray to it when you are unhappy. Men made it, do not forget that.'*

E. M. Forster, *The Machine Stops*



London night buses are hives of technology. Whilst standing at a bus stop in the early hours of a cold February morning, I was struck by the sight of the N16 crammed with bodies. Hot breath had fogged up the windows, the light emanating from phones had filtered into a pallid glow. The bus hummed with the hiss of hydraulics and music blasting from AirPods – a big swollen cyborg cell hurtling down Edgware Road. This is not a pristine technological future. Things are grimey. There's gum stuck under my bus seat. There's gum stuck in the USB charge point. Your phone screen has your

greasy fingerprints smeared all over it. This is the age of the post-human. For many of us, the technology we use has become an extension of ourselves – our fleshy hands grip at our smartphones and spongy fingertips tap away at our laptops. We don't merely depend on technology for practical purposes, rather, it has become increasingly intertwined with our social and emotional lives – our knowledge of the world is informed by news apps, our self-perception is shaped by social media. I scroll through my feed on the night bus to avoid eye contact with my fellow passengers.

Novelist and cultural critic E. M. Forster predicted our current dependency on technology with unnerving accuracy in his 1909 short story, *The Machine Stops*. Although the work was written over 70 years before the Internet, Forster's characters, Vashti and Kuno, communicate with each other through handheld screens on which their faces appear. Vashti delivers lectures via videocall, and her daily routine is rife with other familiar technological conveniences designed to make daily life as comfortable as possible. However, the thought of face-to-face human interaction sparks anxiety in Vashti. Instead, she speaks to The Machine as if to a fellow human being, as we may speak to Amazon's Alexa. Beyond their individual living quarters, The Machine maintains an interconnected mechanised system that has stretched across the whole globe, infiltrating the earth's ecosystems and geology to an extent evocative of our current Anthropocene Epoch.

In *The Courtauldian's* 27th issue, our contributors explore how our dependency on technology is manifest in the artworld and wider culture. A number of articles touch upon the pressure art institutions face to 'stay relevant' in our increasingly technological age, by curating intentionally 'Instagrammable' exhibitions and employing the latest gimmicky software in attempts to attract more visitors. Contributors Maria Perry and Louisa Hunt investigate how emerging technologies can in fact aid and develop our understanding of art objects in their interview with Courtauld lecturers Guido Rebecchini and Barbara Furlotti, in which they discuss the use of 3D imaging to recreate lost works by Renaissance painter and inventor Giulio Romano. Madeleine Jordan's piece builds upon Forster's use of 'The Machine' as a literary metaphor for the status quo to address the oftentimes sinister power dynamic between art institutions and contemporary artists. Deputy Editor Kirk Patrick Testa explores artist Sondra Perry's use of digital technology to address the surveillance of Black bodies in a compelling interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Most notably, several contributors have chosen to approach the theme from a personal angle, which I believe is testament to how *The Machine Stops* has struck a chord with many at *The Courtauldian*. I hope this issue inspires both intrigue and reflection as we conclude our 2021/22 publishing year.

Maya Fletcher-Smith  
*Editor-in-Chief*

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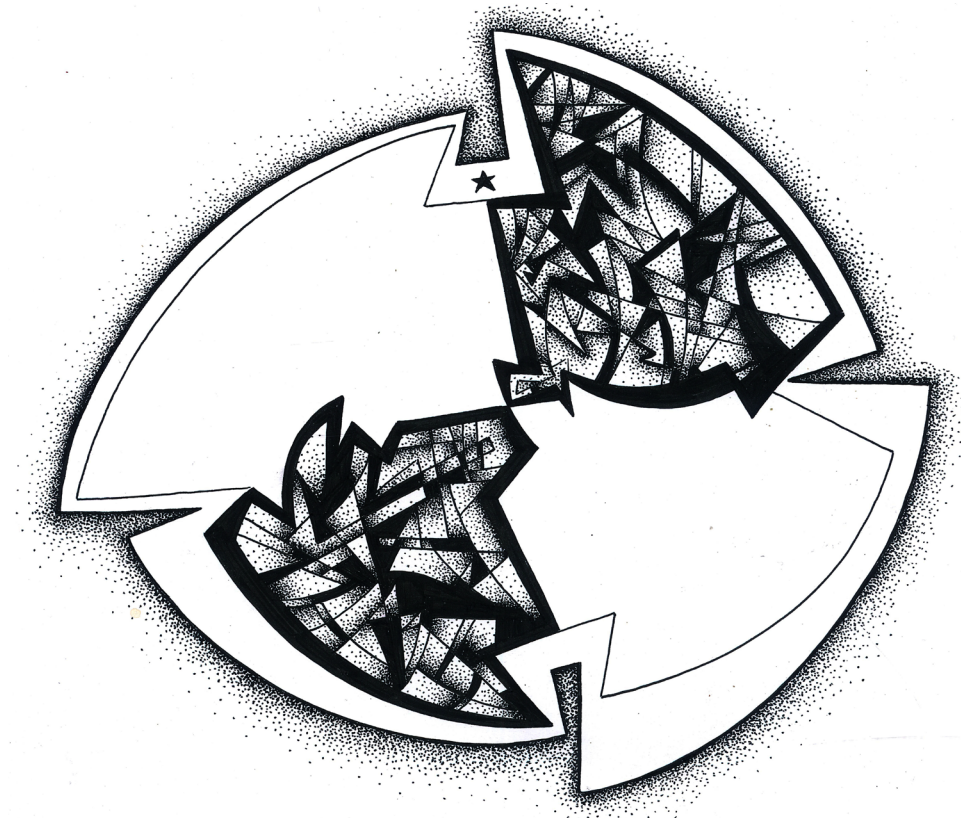
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## **Distribution**

*The Machine Stops* was produced by undergraduate and postgraduate students at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. If you are interested in supporting future issues or would like more information about the publication, contact: [the.courtauldian@courtauld.ac.uk](mailto:the.courtauldian@courtauld.ac.uk).

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Illustrations by Finlay Thompson

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# What Lies Beneath: Infrared Reflectography and Museum Curation

Sarah Mackay

*Opposite*  
Infrared Reflectogram of  
Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*,  
1503, oil on panel, Louvre, Paris

In the face of Covid-19, the art world has been forced to adapt quickly. The past two years have seen countless technological advancements aimed at overcoming our inability to gather in-person around works of art. Virtual viewing rooms and art fairs, augmented reality, and virtual reality exhibitions, QR code press releases, and now NFTs, have all become commonplace seemingly overnight. These changes have made it possible to experience high quality gallery shows from our living rooms, and, perhaps even more importantly, they have had a positive impact on climate change by eliminating the need for air travel and expensive, often wasteful, art shipping. Just imagine how carbon emissions have been offset by hosting even one year of Frieze New York online. And yet, with all

these commendable changes, there remains a general discontentedness amongst art world professionals—there is simply no comparison to seeing the works in the flesh. Despite valiant efforts, technology cannot replace the real thing.

In 2019, just before the onset of the pandemic, the Louvre was faced with a similar problem – how to represent works they could not secure by loan in their retrospective show *Leonardo da Vinci?* To honour the centennial of the death of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), the Louvre put on an unprecedented exhibition showcasing over 160 works (paintings, drawings, sculptures, and metals) by the artist. Negotiating international loans for such an extensive exhibition inevitably presents co-

lossal challenges, and the Louvre succeeded in obtaining six autographed paintings to display alongside four from their own collection. Gathering ten works by the Renaissance master for one exhibition is undoubtedly an incredible feat; however, it was the Louvre's courageous choice to include IRR (infrared radiation) images of some of the works they could not obtain that was even more remarkable.

IRR is a non-invasive investigatory technique used to see below the surface of a painting. Infrared light is projected onto the surface of a painting, which then passes through the paint layers until this light is either absorbed or reflected back towards a camera that captures an image of the layers underneath. Carbon black is especially absorbent of infrared, making IRR a useful tool for seeing underdrawing – the preliminary designs by an artist usually drawn in black on a white ground before proceeding with the actual painting. These images provide an intimate sense of the artist at work, and are insightful technical resources typically used only by specialists to study an artist's process, to help solidify attribution, and to uncover the history of an individual object, including whether it has been restored.

One painting not secured for the exhibition was the Uffizi's *Annunciation* (1472). In lieu of the work, IRR images were placed on a glass screen and lit from behind providing an enthralling, illuminated image of the preparatory stages of the artist's painting practice. Similarly, because

the *Mona Lisa* (1503) was left in its usual place in the *Salle des États* for crowd control purposes, IRR images of the work were presented alongside Leonardo da Vinci's damaged cartoon for his never-painted *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* (1499–1500). At roughly the same size, the pair presented an insightful comparison which showcased the artist refining his approach to the human form. The foreshortening of Isabella's right shoulder, for instance, was reworked and transformed into the more convincing shoulder placement of Lisa Gherardini, the sitter for the *Mona Lisa*. Differences in the *Mona Lisa*'s composition also evinced the artist adapting the figure to conform to Renaissance standards of beauty. These details are eye-opening revelations that help piece together how the artist conceived of the composition and provide insight into modes of self-presentation during the period.

Using IRR images in the exhibition, however, was bold, risky, and perhaps controversial. Their inclusion seems to remove the reverential barrier between artist and viewer perpetuated by the museum space; placed behind bulletproof glass cases and red ropes, Leonardo da Vinci's paintings are seen as sacrosanct objects. To unveil the machinations behind these miraculous works for the public seems almost sacrilegious. The images also provoke significant ethical dilemmas, such as whether showing these images respects the artist and his intention. With the technological ability to peer beneath the surface, the significant question in terms of museum display



Illustration by Sasha Dunn

becomes: should we, the collective public, even be looking at these images? The underlayers were never meant to be seen, let alone showcased to over one million people. This said, these paintings were also never intended for a museum audience to begin with, nor was the *Mona Lisa* meant to be commercialised through shows, or hackneyed, over-priced merchandise. The public display of IRR images seems the least mortifying of the many affronts enabled by technology against the artist's original intent. Moreover, IRR is an intensely fascinating educational device, and it seems an enlightened move on the museum's part to democratise information in this way. Including these images in the retrospective was incredibly beneficial to

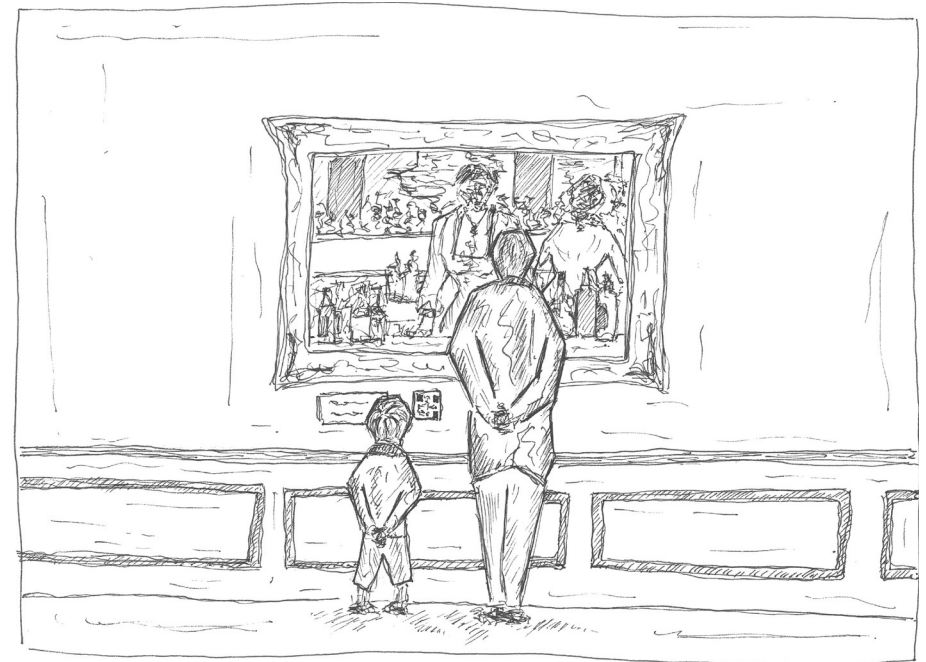
the viewer's understanding of the artist's life and work—for me, they truly made the show.

On the one hand, it seems unlikely that the inclusion of technical imaging will become a widespread curatorial practice. IRR images are complicated documents that often prove incredibly difficult to interpret even for the trained technical art historian. They also often show problematic details such as past interventions, particularities museums might prefer to leave confined to their dossiers or published in academic publications. IRR images also lack the 'Instagrammable' visual appeal of the completed painting, particularly because they are black and white. How many museum goers spend

long enough in front of an individual work to even begin contemplating the nuances of the superficial paint layers, let alone the intricacies of the painting process and the preparatory layers underneath? This is not a criticism, but a frank acknowledgement of the culture of viewership today. The critical engagement encouraged by IRR imaging seems at odds with the passive looking more typical of our time. These days, exhibitions are seen through phone screens more than they are through the viewer's own eyes.

And yet, IRR is one of few instances where technology acts as a humanizing force. These images reveal riveting stories of creation, making visible highly personal moments between artist and medium.

For those who are interested in intimately engaging with the works, IRR can provide thrilling revelations and delightful discoveries, such as where the artist changed his mind and adjusted during the planning process. Personally, I hope that curators opt to include technical analysis in exhibitions more often where it proves relevant—perhaps, in this instance, technology can be used to re-train our desensitised eyes and minds to look more carefully and more deeply. And so, as humanity hurls itself into the metaverse, it is imperative we bear moments such as the Louvre's *Leonardo da Vinci* in mind, as they remind us how technology can be used to enhance our own reality, to see the world around us with new eyes, and to become more in-touch with our fellow man, and our own history.





Siemon Scamell-Katz, *Painting 20:04*. Oil and enamel on aluminium.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

# Siemon Scamell-Katz: Painting the Post-Human Sublime

Maya Fletcher-Smith

*Courtauldian* Editor-in-Chief Maya Fletcher-Smith talks with artist Siemon Scamell-Katz at the opening of his exhibition *La fin de l'altérité* at 28 Rue Saint-Gilles, Paris, on the 6th of April, 2022. The works featured in the exhibition are accompanied by *Quarry*, a short story by novelist Rachel Cusk, as part of the acclaimed *Cahiers Series* by Sylph Editions.

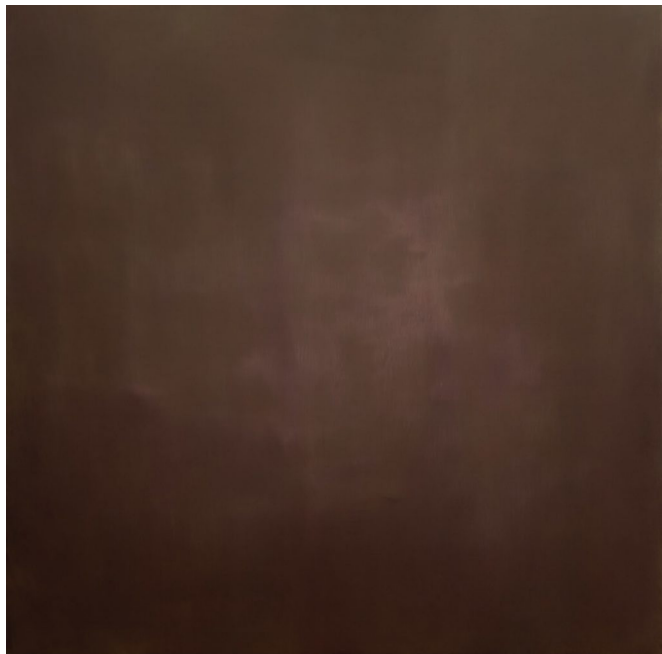
**This interview was originally published on *The Courtauldian's* website on the 13th of June 2022.**

Standing in front of a Siemon Scamell-Katz painting feels like standing on the cusp of something. Each work evokes a transitory experience – a waxing moon hidden behind fast-shifting clouds, rays of light gently illuminating the ocean floor. The paintings themselves are ephemeral objects, and appear strikingly different on

the afternoon I am sat with Scamell-Katz in Paris' Marais district than they did at his exhibition opening the previous evening. "I like that feeling of uncertainty," he grins, "I'm not offering a frame of reference you're familiar with." This is certainly true. For the majority of his artistic career Scamell-Katz has painted entirely abstract landscapes. Nothing in the eleven paintings exhibited as part of *La fin de l'altérité* (The end of otherness) is representational of the Greek landscapes that inspired their creation. Yet, an experience of standing on the scorching Greek seafront is palpable, a moment captured, entrapped in fine layers of oil and enamel paint.

Scamell-Katz has an unconventional career background for a painter, however, it is one that has greatly informed his practice and the considerations behind his work. "Well, I always wanted to be a painter when I was a kid... but for various reasons, to do with





Siemon Scamell-Katz,  
*Painting 21:03*. Oil and  
enamel on aluminium.  
Image courtesy of the  
artist.

*Opposite*  
Siemon Scamell-Katz,  
*Painting 21:08*. Oil and  
enamel on aluminium.  
Image courtesy of the  
artist.

my family, I worked in shops.” Working in shops led to an interest in consumer behaviour, specifically, to where a prospective customer’s gaze is drawn during their shop. Scamell-Katz then founded a business specialising in tracking people’s eye movements as they go about their shopping. This is about as dystopian as it sounds. I ask how his experience working with this technology translates to his painting approach. “What I learnt about visual marketing and perception is what has informed me in how I go about painting... the general population’s idea about how they see is completely wrong, our view is actually very narrow. We fixate for a very small amount of time, and that gives us our perception of what’s in front of us.” As Scammell-Katz can attest, given his work studying the neural responses of shoppers, we’re living

in the age of experience overload. At no time in human history have we ever been so bombarded with images, advertisements, music, sensory confusion. As such, our experience of the sublime is decidedly different from that of Shelley and Byron on a romp around the Swiss Alps two hundred years ago. Today, you can choose to have the most beautiful sunset you have ever seen in your life as your phone wallpaper, and be exposed to it dozens of times every day. “A memory of yours of a sunset may well be an advert for Thomas Cook holidays. So, the commercialisation of the image, as well, is something that led me towards wanting to go back... to look at the sublime and the presentation of beauty in the context of landscape.”

Through his artwork, Scamell-Katz con-



fronts the fact that our perception of the world has very little to do with what’s actually there, rather, it’s largely filtered through our personal experiences, our memories, including our exposure to masses of visual culture. “We have established ways of capturing landscape that are formulaic... as soon as you use composition in landscape, you are immediately referring to a whole body of landscape work that came before.” The result is that conventional landscapes can appear all too familiar, having been

effectively pre-digested by our visual memory. When looking at a landscape of the Romantic tradition, we expect to see a blurry cathedral, the gleaming, dewy hilltops, and as a result we fail to look properly. I agree with Scamell-Katz in that it’s difficult to eke out a feeling of the sublime from a John Constable painting when you are accustomed to seeing his work on biscuit tins. By avoiding composition and symbol, Scamell-Katz places emphasis on his personal experience of the landscape

and its awe-inducing sublimity, without the distractions that can accompany an established tradition of representational art.

It goes without saying that the work presented at *La fin de l'altérité* – and the nonrepresentational aesthetic ideals in which they are grounded – are evocative of abstract expressionist and colour field painting. I ask Scamell-Katz where he sees himself in relation to these movements. “I love that link to history, but I don't want to feel like I'm painting another Rothko... I'm aware of and acknowledge those traditions in my work.” Scamell-Katz's works diverge from abstract expressionism in their lack of emphasis on medium specificity, in fact, I would never have been able to tell the medium had it not been listed beside the works. To achieve this ambiguity, Scamell-Katz utilises an unusual painting technique that takes months of layering and buffing enamel and oil paints. At the gallery, the date of the application of each of these layers is displayed next to each work – a wonderful curatorial decision to indicate their temporality – every layer working to signify a certain point, an experience, in time. Scamell-Katz jumps up and strides across the room to gesture towards a lightened spot on *Painting 21:06*. “This painting, for example, changed a lot in its final days... I worked wet in wet and it took off a lot of glaze.” The work has a haunting glow. Each work is similarly tinged with a degree of melancholia. A mere two

years ago, Scamell-Katz was critically ill, something he admits has had an impact on his personal perception of landscape. “I thought ok, well, that's what dying might look like,” he says in a surprisingly matter-of-fact tone, a smile surfacing on his face in response to the concern surfacing on mine. Death, in the same way as mountains and seascapes, serves as a reminder of human frailty in the face of the sublime. I thank him for his time.

On my way back from meeting with Scamell-Katz I spotted a large poster pasted to the metro wall. A man with hair greying around his ears was taking a picture of it on his phone: *Des microplastiques retrouvés dans du sang humain pour la première fois* (microplastics found in human blood for the first time). It's rare for art within the tradition of landscape painting to address how the all-pervasive, omnipresence of human culture affects our mind – our very perception of the world, of artwork, of the amount of attention our image-weary brains will afford it. *La fin de l'altérité* actively seeks answers to such questions – what does it mean to paint the sublime in the age of the post-human?

*Many thanks to Siemon-Scamell Katz and his team for inviting myself and Literary Editor, Mary Phan, to the preview evening of La fin de l'altérité and for arranging this interview.*



Siemon Scamell-Katz, *Painting 21:06*. Oil and enamel on aluminium.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

# Sent from my iPhone

Mary Phan

Illustrations by George Goodhand



aria  
@ariasagirl

any female born after 1993 can't cook...  
all they know is mcdonald's , charge they  
phone, twerk, be bisexual , eat hot chip  
& lie

1:13 PM - 1 May 2019

What sort of patina will texts, emails, Instagram posts, TikToks, et cetera, et cetera, develop?

We read through the parchment paper scribbles, bread-and-butter notes, steamy love letters, and formal correspondences of our cultural vanguards. They are auctioned away in vintage trunks, scanned onto websites, compiled into books. They are romantic vestiges of the past and a voyeuristic pleasure for our modern eyes.

These literary artefacts offer us tangible examples of our subjects' mark-making and have become relics in and of themselves. I'm pretty sure I once saw a napkin Picasso had scribbled on going for hundreds of thousands at an art fair. The age of pen and paper is arguably over, but we have from it an attachment to these scraps of life — portals of humanity and history.

So how will (if our species survives climate catastrophe) the historians of tomorrow examine our seemingly infinite bits of communication immortalised in digital form? Is the dawn of the NFT the beginning of our digital world attempting to emulate the nostalgic ethos of antique paper — the 'ownership' of a meme akin to the purchasing of a Gutenberg Bible? Are Insta posts our generation's illuminated manuscripts? I have no answers, only more questions.

An unwavering constant in the history of mankind is the capacity for unfathomable change. Unfathomable because from generation to generation the common denominator is the capacity to forget. Perhaps it is only in forgetting that we are able to progress — our ancestors just two or three generations ago would likely think our world a pipe dream. Think of how outrageous they would find the literacy rate, women's



suffrage, birth control, modern medicine, Deliveroo, to name a few. It almost makes me feel ungrateful to want any better. Would the ancient Greeks find it hilarious that we examine their earthen Tupperware like it's gold, smuggle it away, and sell it for even more? To consider the portable computers in our hands as likely our most practised method of communication is all at once mesmerising, distressing, hopeful, and dystopian. While the anonymity of the Internet emboldens racist, sexist, (insert problematic '-ists' here) trolls, sometimes forming communities of unrestrained rage and hatred, the speed and accessibility of the medium also allow progressive community organising and the easy dissemination of documents and media.

This easy dissemination comes with a hefty *caveat emptor*, but one could argue that radical media and technology nearly always meet criticism. Machine-smashing Luddites reappear throughout history in one form or another. Now, you can pull a Jared Leto and pay a fortune to sit in the desert away from your phone and 'find yourself'. Moreover, millennials have certainly revived the market for artisan goods, no matter what contempt you may hold for the bearded craft brewery crowd, zeit-geists of a generation are forever ruled by a careful balance of nostalgia and rebellion, and sometimes I quite enjoy a beer brewed from hops passed over gemstones and civet coffee or whatever they are up to these days. Plus, it will probably be useful to have craft foragers and fermentation aficionados in

the coming times of climate collapse — I hope you like pickled dandelion greens.

So is there any 'correct' way to sail the sea of chaos that is the Internet or the (capital M) 'Media'? Here there be monsters.

It seems the Boomers have much to say on this, with observations like:

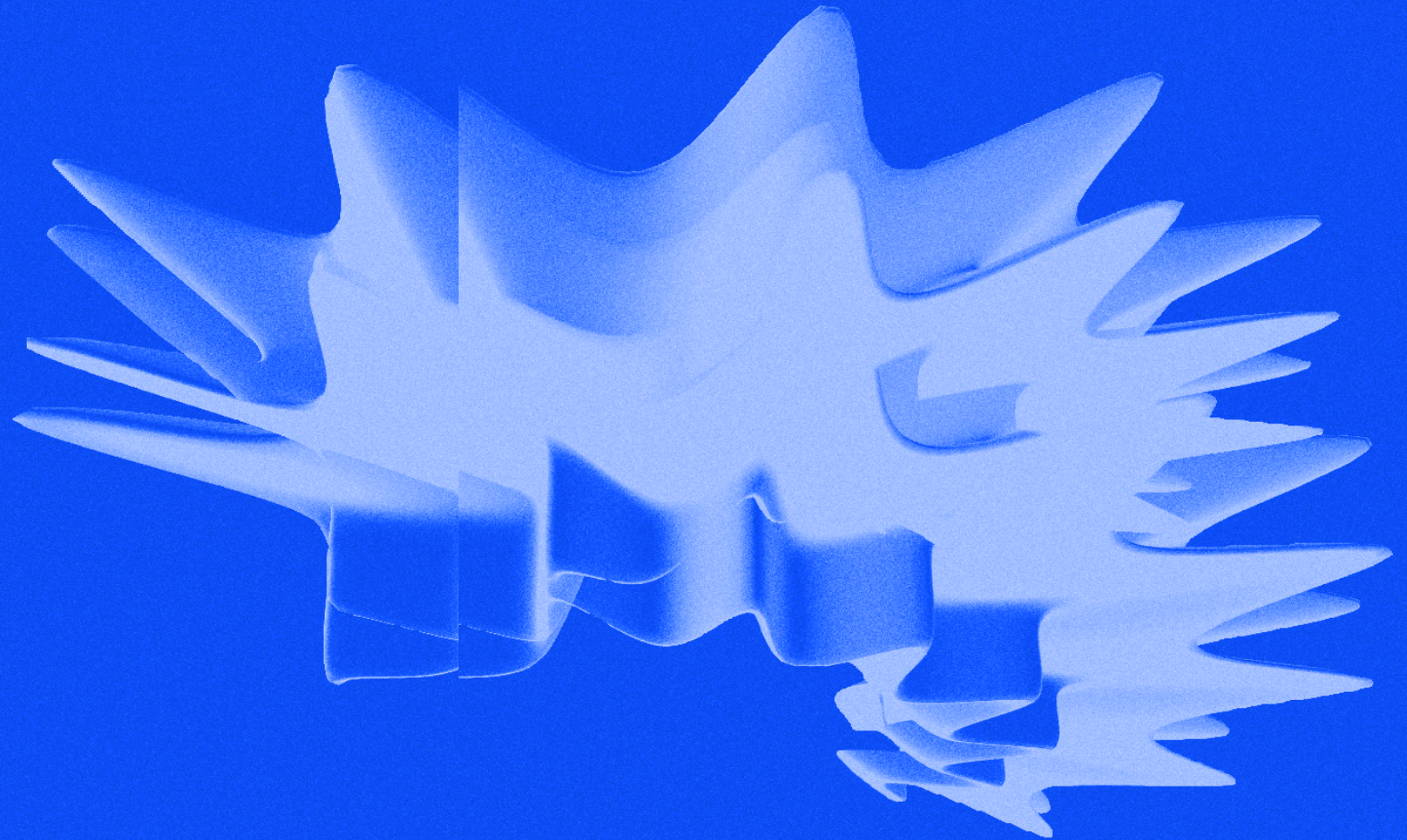
*'I heard they've stopped teaching the kids how to write cursive in school.'*

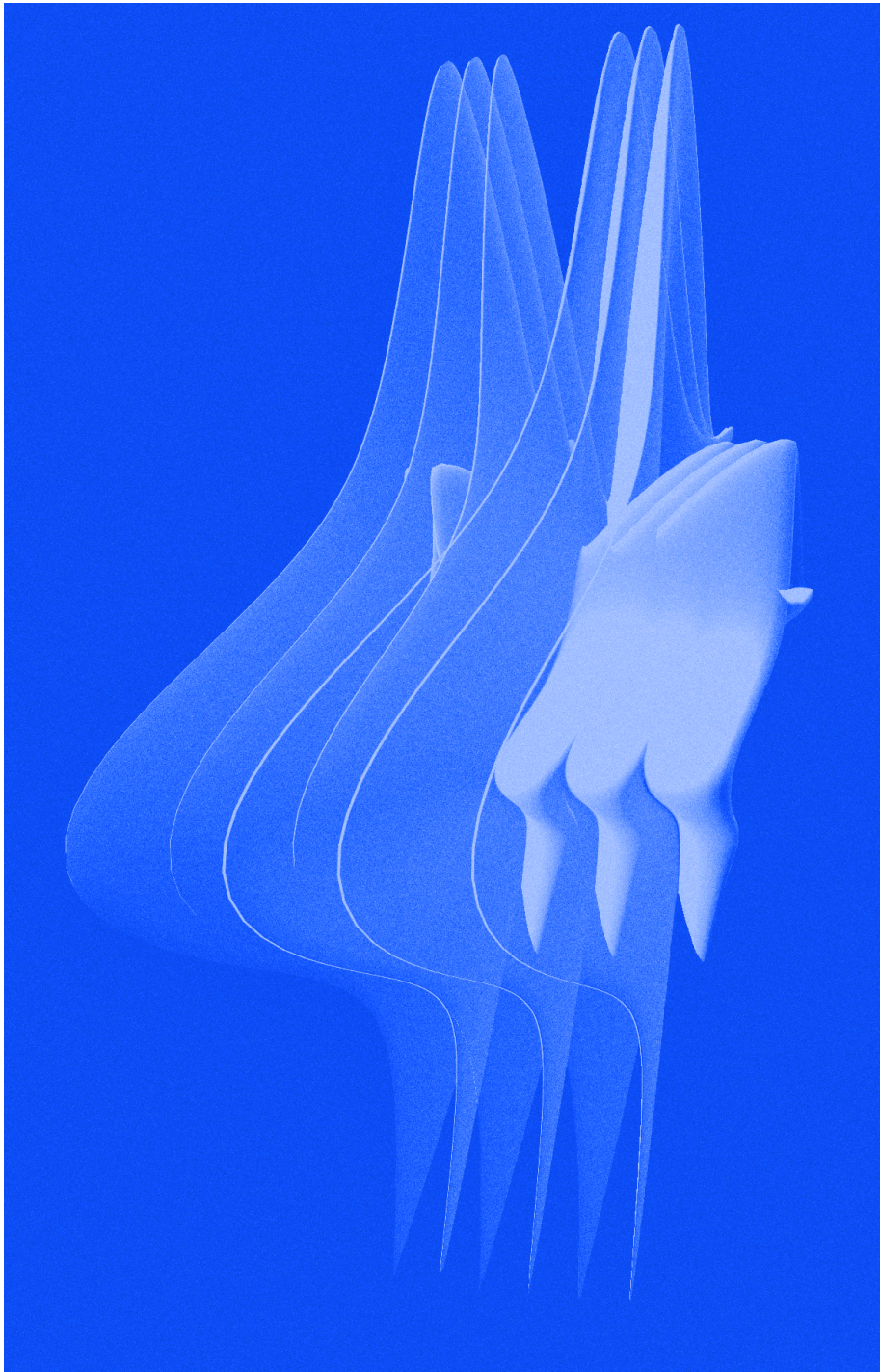
*'All the kids care about these days are those damn smartphones.'*

*'Back in my day I walked to school uphill both ways.'*

*'Remember the good old days when there were only two genders?'*

Okay, Boomer.





Obeying the elders seems a dire trajectory. But we can't help but feel there is something never before seen in humanity when we text or doom scroll through whatever social media is currently in vogue. It's easy to feel ambivalent about it, and even easier to poke fun at it. But perhaps it is in that humour that we are finding art and connection — faster than any of our forebears ever have. The cultural 'avant-garde' becomes gauche overnight in our lightning-fast Media cycles. Perhaps it is in this exhaustion of instantaneous, international, never-ending notifications that we seek refuge in handwritten letters and Polaroids, which have experienced a resurgence.

There is a power and ethos we have bestowed upon the analogue in our world of the intangible Cloud. But surely we have seen tweets and memes (ironically) create more cultural shifts and impact than today's 'Art World', so surely these modes of expression and communication belong in the art conversation. We live in tumultuous times. As Justin Vivian Bond put it, 'people in the '80s didn't make great art simply because Reagan was a dick. The great art came because it was a matter of life or death.' Our innumerable technologies provide new tools and mediums for the artists of today to tell their stories, ask us questions, and demand things of the world.

Commodifying culture is a slippery slope, and questioning the commodification of culture is a good place to start to consid-

er how we begin to place our modes of mark-making and communication into hierarchical strata.

'Hey u up?' is today's 'But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?' Despite prescribing certain modes of thought and creation as lower-brow, lower-effort, lower-culture, we cannot deny that many of these modes are the same songs to a different tune. Arguably, the popular and the kitsch can be emancipatory and community-building. There is a reason why the Rolling Stones were and are more popular than Wagner, and it's not because they staged three-hour-long nationalist operas. The twentieth century may have assigned a certain grandeur and nostalgia to the likes of the Gauloise-smoking artists and intellectuals, but who's to say Kanye won't be remembered like Hemingway. But likely it is not through any individual icon, but in the efforts and collaboration of the rest of us that we can break free from our prescriptivist history. With a greater understanding and access to social technologies than ever, there is hope for liberation from the confines of conservatism and archaic social structures.

But what do I know?

All I know is McDonald's, charge my phone, twerk, be bisexual, eat hot chip, and lie.

Iykyk.

# Nostalgic Arcadia: Cottagecore and its Origins

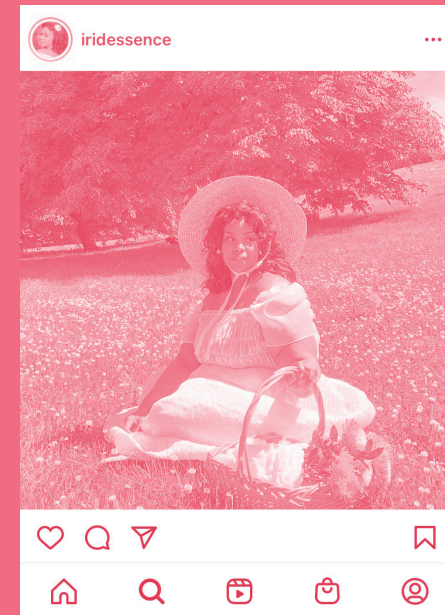
Madeline DeFilippis



Living outside of the industrial machine of society is a fantasy many people aspire to. Henry David Thoreau's novel *Walden* illustrates that ideology, espousing the ideal of a simpler lifestyle. However, despite *Walden's* success, Thoreau only spent two years and two months in the small town of Concord, Massachusetts, near a town with supplies and in a home built by his friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Thoreau's sojourn into the woods was short-lived and, although he had environmental ideals, his manifesto for dedicating oneself to 'the essential facts of life' was relatively unfulfilled.

The need for an escape from the everyday is ubiquitous after the last two years. We have been stuck inside, banned from seeing our closest friends and family, and had to put our lives on hold. Physical escapism was generally out of the question; emotional escapism, however, is another story. During the worldwide

lockdowns, people have learnt how to make bread, knit, cook, and sought out other creative outlets that they could do from home. This forms the basis for cottagecore, a developing movement: an autonomous approach to life through a nostalgic lens, a yearning for the past.



Herein lies the issue: when was the period during which cottagecore was meant to have happened? To what period are we casting our collective gazes when searching for 'the good ole days'? When were women allowed to live alone, dress in expensive strawberry dresses, grow plants and make TikToks about it without having to work to support themselves?

As for many other cultural phenomena on the Internet, cottagecore finds its origins in a *mélange* of desires. It is only natural to look back at simpler times as humans: Enlightenment thinkers were obsessed with the ancient Greeks, always turning to them for

Screenshot of @iridessence on Instagram, October 2020

examples of proper forms of education, behaviour, and civil society. The Pre-Raphaelites expressed their desire for a romantic vision of society, in spite of Victorian utilitarianism, through medieval and early Renaissance visual metaphors.

Nicolas Poussin's arcadian landscapes represent a similarly imagined past. Poussin used the visual metaphor of Arcadia to allude to a 'golden-age', one taking place before modern civilisation ended an idyllic way of life. The landscape is key — notably, Arcadia is embodied by the great outdoors. In the present day, people adopt a Narnia-like approach, seeking escape through their (wardrobe) door out into nature.

Escapism, however, is not new. The difference between good old-fashioned escapist tendencies and cottagecore, however, is that the latter has developed into a lifestyle that encompasses the existing

parts of our lives. Cottagecore enthusiasts wear makeup, they dress in flouncy dresses and live in English cottages. They also play Animal Crossing and listen to Taylor Swift's *Folklore* album. But these activities branded as 'cottagecore' take advantage

of contemporary conveniences. Their knitting needles are supplied by factories across the world and their baking ingredients are delivered by people who make minimum wage. It is sort of a non-stop exercise in slow-living and self-care, with a healthy dose of romanticism and dress-up. It is quite the absurdist notion that one can relinquish their capitalist conveniences — it does not eliminate

the fact that cottagecore is untenable without contemporary applications such as Instagram, and services such as same-day delivery.

Critical Theorists Adorno and Horkheimer, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,



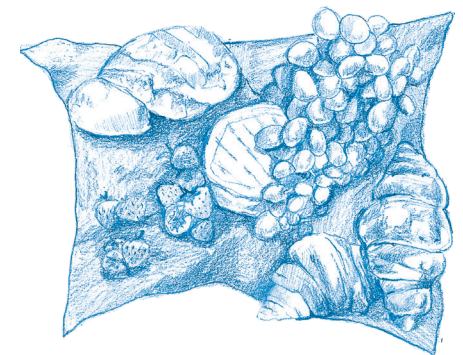
provided their theory of 'culture industry' as the contradictory consequence of the Enlightenment. A feature of late capitalism, popular culture works to seduce consumers and trap them into a cyclical industry of entertainment. The innate desires of society are commodified and, in the case of cottagecore, the marketability of escapism is enticing.

Cottagecore is nostalgic living for the contemporary person. It has grown in popularity in the lesbian community on TikTok and there is an account on Instagram called @cottagecoreblackfolks dedicated to envisaging people of colour in what would otherwise be a white dream of the past. For women and femme-presenting people, it is a chance to avoid the objectification and sexualisation of their bodies in favour of celebration. In the absence of the male gaze, people can dress comfortably and in clothes that make them genuinely happy. Cottagecore can also be — as a lifestyle — a sustainable initiative, addressing a significant issue in our everyday lives. It focuses on what the individual can do for the future. Is growing our own food such a bad idea?

This fairy tale dream is not without its faults. Critics have been quick to remind us that the dream of owning acres of land and farm animals in the past often came with BIPOC people handling the

manual labour. They certainly did not receive the benefits of this idyllic life, nor were they adequately compensated. Some think of it as the historical 'gentrification' of a lifestyle, like in major cities when minority populations are driven out of their neighbourhoods to make way for privileged residents who want to live on the other side of the tracks.

It is important to remember the reasons why we have left the past behind. Injustices, illness, and misunderstandings abound in our history books, and we would do well to learn from them before blindly associating romantic tropes. However, cottagecore is malleable. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach to life, as can be seen by the creators who advocate for it. The primary aim is one of happiness through simplicity of emotion, and with all that goes on in our world, I think we can all see the appeal.



Illustrations by Isabella Taleghani

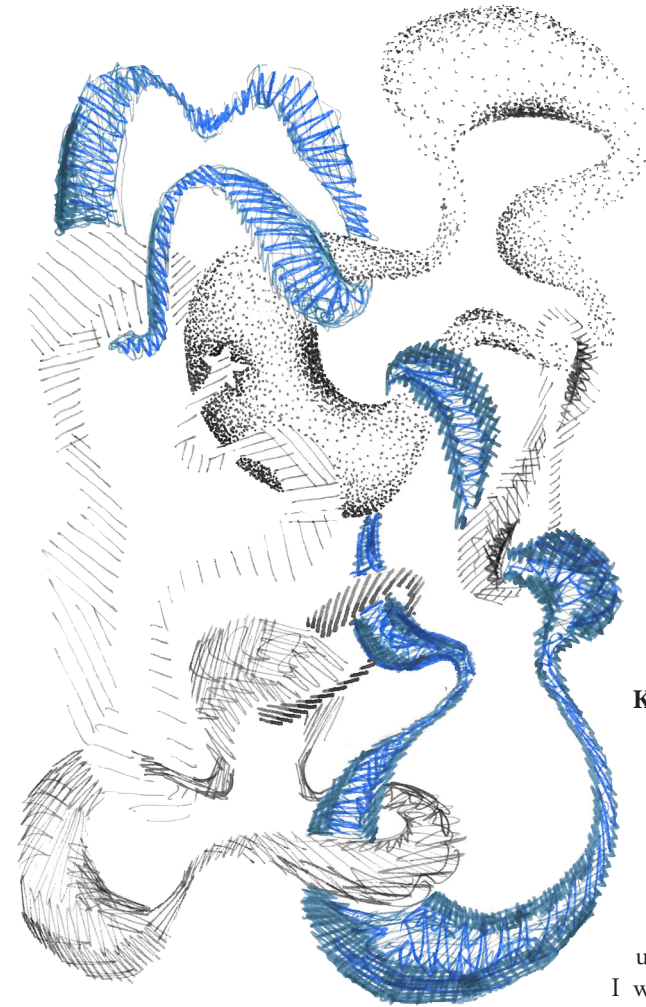
Opposite: Screenshot of @hillhousevintage through @cottagecoreblackfolks on Instagram, July 2021

# In Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist

Kirk Patrick Testa

Illustrations by Finlay Thompson

In the process of writing my second essay for my Global Conceptualism course with Sarah Wilson, I was granted the unforgettable opportunity to speak with renowned curator Hans Ulrich Obrist. In the conversation that follows, Obrist and I spoke about the very first Serpentine exhibition I saw: *Typhoon Coming On* from 2018. Featuring the uncanny sculptures and installations of multimedia Black American artist Sondra Perry, this exhibition mesmerised me so much that it became the topic of my undergraduate thesis at Vassar College, which I then followed up with an essay for my MA at The Courtauld. Though my interview with Obrist was just a fragment of the research I conducted for my essay, I decided that our conversation should have the chance to stand alone as a published piece. Of relevance to this issue of *The Courtauldian*, *The Machine Stops*, my interview with Obrist highlights the idea that our work never really stops. Instead, they evolve as ideas and projects flow into the next articulations. Perhaps more importantly, this interview, along with Perry's art itself, remind us of the urgent questions of how it is we are to live with technology, while remaining critically attuned to the past. Without further ado, here is the transcript of my phone call with the one and only Hans Ulrich Obrist.



*Telephone Interview with  
Hans Ulrich Obrist*

*by Kirk Patrick Testa*

*03 February 2022,  
8:08am*

**KPT:** Good morning, Mr Obrist. Thank you very much for calling me. To give you a little background, I am a former student of Molly Nesbit from Vassar College. In 2019, for my undergraduate dissertation, I wrote about Sondra Perry's 2016 installation *Resident Evil*, after experiencing her 2018 *Typhoon Coming On* exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery. I know that Sondra Perry's first foray into the world of the Serpentine was during the Park Nights event on 10 June 2016, during which she presented moving image works in dialogue with the poetry of Eileen Miles and Fred Moten. However, I would like to know, how did you first come across Sondra Perry?



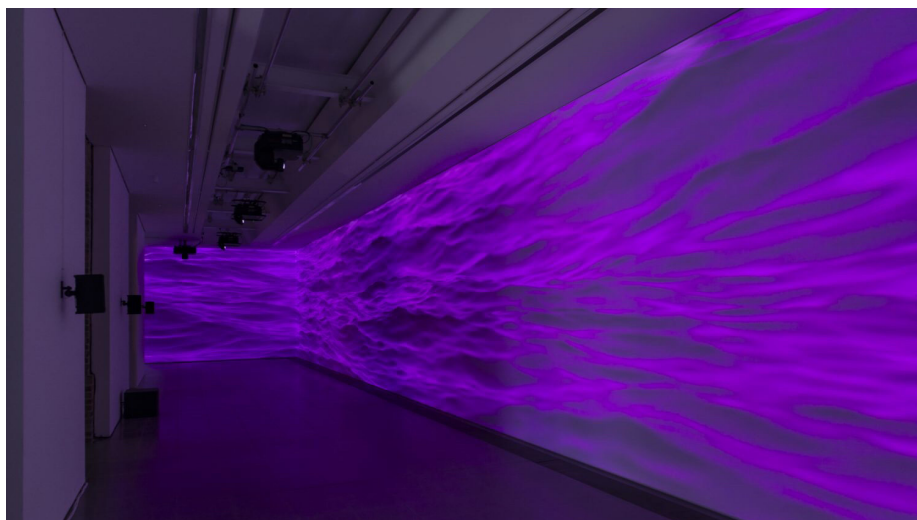


we certainly would not have asked to exclude those pieces. It must have been a decision that was in agreement with or driven by the artist. Our curator Amira Gad worked very closely with Sondra on this project, so she might know more, but I don't remember a conversation where we decided to deliberately exclude the pieces. The way I remember it is that there was this idea of the *Typhoon Coming On* piece based on the Turner *Slave Ship* painting. That was something Sondra really wanted. This piece is very much the centrepiece of the show. It really was a site-specific installation. Within that site-specific installation, we incorporated some existing work. But if you look at the space there is quite a limited number of works which can be included. The main thing is that big wrap around.

**KPT:** It's interesting that you describe *Typhoon Coming On* as a wrapping because in my writings on it, I describe it as a flooding of the Serpentine with those purple waves that vacillate with the distorted fragments of the Turner *Slave Ship* painting. I don't remember if there was one, but I wonder if you recall there being an image or an explanation of Turner's *Slave Ship* painting in the exhibition space?

**HUO:** Yes, it was explained, and we always have a wall text. The idea was explained that it's a digitally manipulated image of the *Slave Ship* painting.

**KPT:** I wanted to also ask you a more general question: why was it urgent to bring Perry's work to the Serpentine in the moment that it was brought there?



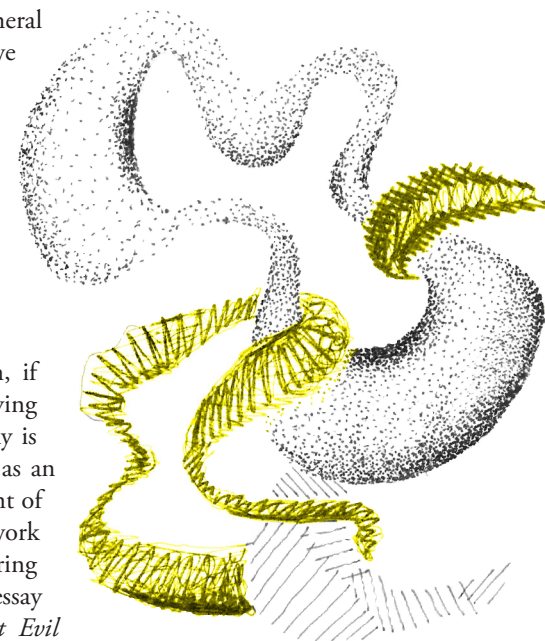
Sondra Perry, Installation view, *Typhoon Coming On*, Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London (6 March – 20 May 2018) © 2018 Mike Din

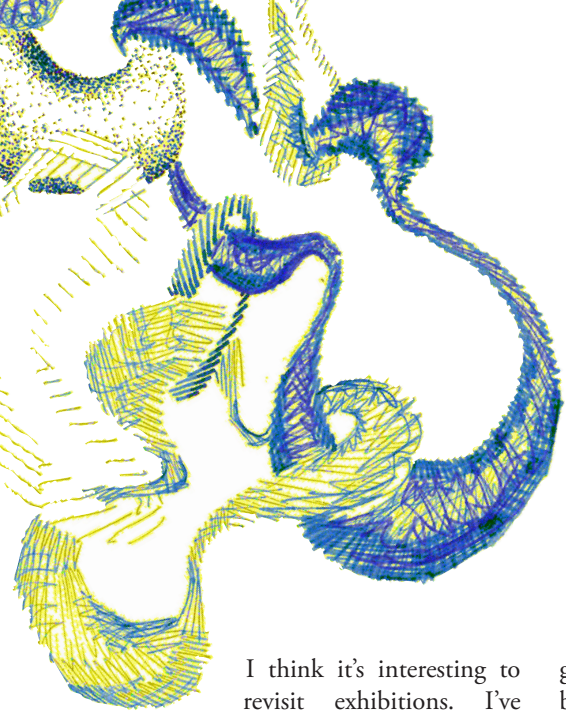
**HUO:** For us it was urgent in general to show the practice because we realised during the Park Nights Event that Sondra is an artist who was to have an exhibition in London. I think it was the night of the Park Night that we made the decision that we needed to show the work, because we were all so incredibly amazed.

**KPT:** I just have a last question, if you don't mind. What I am trying to accomplish in my current essay is to explore my own positionality as an author and my growth as a student of art history. I am revisiting an old work that I wrote for Molly Nesbit during my undergraduate years. This essay was about Perry's 2016 *Resident Evil* show. I wrote this essay because, to borrow your words, I was 'mesmerised' by Perry's work when I visited the Serpentine for the first time in 2018. It hasn't left my mind in all this time.

This notion of revisiting and rewriting has been on my mind, which leads me to a more personal question: though you may not have time to do so due to your busy itinerary and simultaneous projects, do you find it valuable to retrace your steps or revisit your past work?

**HUO:** Yes, of course. First of all, it is really great to speak with you, because it is fascinating that you've worked with two amazing art historians, Sarah Wilson and Molly Nesbit, with whom I did *Utopia Station*.





I think it's interesting to revisit exhibitions. I've been revisiting a show of mine called *do it* every single day since 1991. It's a way to evolve, change, morph, and learn. Our work, no matter what it is—books, texts, or exhibitions—evolve over time and incorporate feedback. It's a long duration programme. Those things run throughout our entire lives. They are never really finished. For example, with *Utopia Station*, with Molly and Rirkrit Tiravanija, we've been talking for 10 to 15 years on how to restage the exhibition, because it is such a different moment now. It would be very interesting to revisit *Utopia Station* in 2022, but we still haven't found the right angle to do it. For me, *Utopia Station* isn't finished. This is true for all my shows. Not only do I think it's valid, but for me, it's a daily practice.

Just to add to the previous question—why Sondra?—there are many reasons why. It

grew organically out of the Park Night, but it also has to do with our experiments with technology at the Serpentine and the way Sondra uses digital tools and materials. It can be bluescreens, avatars, or footage from the Internet that reflect on modes of representation, abstraction, and identity in art or the media. Sondra told me in our very first conversation that she is interested in thinking about how blackness shifts, morphs, and embodies technology to combat oppression and surveillance throughout the diaspora; Blackness is agile.

That sentence shows the urgency of the practice in this age of surveillance capitalism. Another reason why we felt this show was very urgent—and I could go on and on, because there are 50 reasons why Sondra Perry is urgent—is the commitment she has to net neutrality. I am friendly with Tim Berners Lee, who invented the world wide web in 1989. He has always said in my conversations with him that we need

to resist the loss of net neutrality, because the Internet has this idea of collective production and action. Now we have the Internet for the people who pay, so there's a danger that net neutrality is being lost. The way that Sondra uses open-source software to edit her work and leases it digitally for classrooms is very different from artists who do limited editions of five or seven, after which the work is inaccessible. Of course, she does editions for museums, but her work is also open source and accessible in classrooms. This open access seems urgent. These are just two more reasons why Sondra Perry is urgent, but like I said, it's a long list.

**KPT:** I completely agree with you. Thank you so much for your time and this unforgettable opportunity.

**HUO:** It was a pleasure.



# Connected + Disconnected

Isabella Taleghani

The way that we experience the everyday world is evolving and changing with technological advancements. The outdoors are a familiar and unfamiliar place, a hybrid world of virtual and real experience. With the developments of online platforms such as instant messaging and video conference we further move into our own bubbles as individuals and become part of this infinitely connected online web. Like in *The Machine Stops*, are we beginning to abandon this idea of tangible experiences and settling for a future of mechanised relationships? Through my photographs

I explore how people and technology have become intermeshed in their daily routines. They are an account of the anxieties of living in London, a progressive city, and the constant feelings of separation with existence. We live in this world that is constantly connected and disconnected to reality at the same time. Will there be an escape or are we destined to live through this cyber biosphere?



FATCAP  
SPRAYS



# Rage and The Machine

Madeleine Jordan

'You're a victim until you're able to articulate your victimhood – then you're a threat.'

James Baldwin

## THE MACHINE

Top 10 Summer shows read now Subpoenas granted all apparently consensual Outreach and resources for survivors Found not guilty Download App today for better fertility tracking #TheMuseum Watch new show out now Court overthrows misinformation case Follow the link in the description below

## THE MUSEUM

New Show Now On! An exciting examination of The Artist's expansive practice. Open 7 days a week and free to our members. More information on our website for family friendly interactive programming, café, and shop.

## THE ARTIST

On the 18th November 2013 I attended a talk held at The Museum where I first met The Money and they invited me to discuss my work in relation to an upcoming exhibition. I was in my late 20s and had just started my career. The Money is well known as a philanthropist, and I was initially excited to have the opportunity to meet. Throughout the evening they made inappropriate jokes and invitations which I politely declined. After that evening, they harassed and assaulted me on an exhausting basis for over 3 years. The Money has connections with many establishments, including The Museum,

who have made statements in support of survivors. The Money still sits on boards of trustees, donates large sums, and holds sway over many institutions.

I was not going to come forward about my experience with The Money publicly but my attempts to share my experience and inform The Museum about my harassment have been ignored. I feel I am being gaslit by the art establishment. I am asking to be acknowledged by The Museum after years of indifference. I am asking to be taken seriously by the public who support The Museum. I have very little professional security and am asking for the industry I work in to support me.

I support survivors and together our voices will not be silenced.#MeToo #TheMuseum

## THE MACHINE

Read our article on the allegations Tickets On Sale Now 50% Off I hope my daughter will never grow up in a world like this Discount on first order with code: ARTFIRST I'm so sorry to hear this happened to you we stand with you Order now for next day delivery So attention seeking this is honestly what they do to get press have you seen their old posts?

## THE MUSEUM

We are saddened to learn about the allegations made by The Artist today. We stand with and support survivors and will be taking this matter incredibly seriously.

## THE MACHINE

Public Museum makes statement in support of survivors Court ruling against Social Media legislation #MeToo IMG. FILE. I don't mean to be anti- The Artist but are we going to talk about their posts? Why would you even trust this person? I am never going to The Museum again This is everything wrong with the art world they all scurry Where is an apology from The Money? I think it's disgusting that people excuse assault 50% OFF FAMILY DAYS OUT

## THE MONEY

After thinking this through over the past few days I wanted to make a statement:

Yesterday morning, I was falsely accused of misconduct. I fully support survivors and would in no way want to get in the way of the great advocacy that the #MeToo movement has brought about. But I wanted to express my shock at how this amazing work is being undermined by the false accusations filed against me now. I have sisters and daughters who I feel would strongly agree with me when I say that there is no tolerance of this type of

behaviour. I am in talks with The Museum about the allegations made by The Artist and I want to say now – I apologise if my behaviour has been misread or hurtful, but I am NOT going to sit idly by and let my reputation be destroyed. I am growing and learning like all of us and I respect The Artist greatly. I hope this movement will allow for more opportunities for the truth to be heard.

## THE MACHINE

This is not an apology! This is what The Money thinks will take the heat off but you are wrong! The amount of people leaping on this half-baked statement is ridiculous The Money is human there is no way YOU would have a PR defence! #TheArtist Moves to prosecute doxers in data row #virtuesignalling Show set to open next week postponed in wake of allegations #witchhunt Trustees deny claims of misogyny Read The Artist's posts from May 2015 Delivery in your area Where are The Artist's posts from 2015? Has anyone seen this? I am dying – The Artist calls themselves an activist – what is this?! I am appalled and outraged by the way The Artist has acted– read this LINK Ex-partner of The Artist at the centre of The Museum scandal has said that 'toxic and manipulative behaviour was a daily concern' So is no one going to talk about how hypocritical it is to demand an investigation into The Money when The Artist's own behaviour is obviously abusive?

## THE ARTIST

I came forward because I wasn't being silent for me. I was being silent to protect The Money's reputation. I had to stop and think about how I was manipulated to keep this web of secrets.

About my past posts. I am sorry, I was in a bad place, and I said some dumb things and lashed out. I deleted them but obviously that doesn't excuse it and I'm sorry.

My ex and I had a turbulent relationship, it really has nothing to do with the current conversation about The Money. Who hasn't had bad break-ups?

## THE MACHINE

The Artist is a manipulator and deceiver just look at the evidence I'm not saying that The Money shouldn't be cancelled but no one is innocent here There is blame on both sides The Artist's work has benefitted from their relationship with The Money I just want to say that there is a place for vigilante justice in the outing of alleged abusers but The Artist should really use their power and privilege to have these conversations without potentially bringing someone public pain The Artist Show set to open next month is indefinitely cancelled amidst manipulation claims

## THE MUSEUM

A Long Way To Go will no longer take place at The Museum this year. We have cancelled this exhibition after concerns were raised about some participants' hostile behaviour. We will be updating our programme in the coming weeks.

## THE ARTIST

The Museum have cancelled the show I was set to participate in this year. Where is the punishment for The Money? So much for 'hurting their career' seems like mine is the one that is hurt!

## THE MACHINE

Sale now on Where are they now? Tell your story Stream it now New programme announced yesterday The Money reported to have 'quietly parted company' with long standing institution The Museum The Money buys mansion New work set to be shown next year

## THE ARTIST

I said my piece.



# Phone Sit / Phone Swap

Kitty Brandon-James & Rotem Porat

I used to have a boyfriend who wouldn't talk to me about serious business unless both of our phones were either in a different room or in the fridge. He was a professor of digital humanities, which I felt legitimised his position and the thrill he seemed to get from going out phoneless.

I worried about the phone-human ecosystem a bit, and engaged for a while, but it was pandemic season that brought home the machinations of my echo chamber. In March 2020, I lived equidistant from a field and a friend, and we would spend most of our outside time together with our phones, chatting

in front of them, and chewing the cud. We were of similar stock: sharing many interests, studying at the same university, living within the same postcode, but there were various topics we could just not discuss.

When one hot day the pubs reopened, we decided upon a small experiment: we would swap Facebooks and scroll through each other's feeds until the drinks arrived. It was shocking to note how different our algorithms were – my feed full of gubbins about Russia, and hers about Rowling. Partial to reading about our subjects, we had drifted to opposite echo chambers of

similar topics. Even though our human imprints were almost mirrors, our digital fingerprint was decidedly different.

As a march of docuseries about the data economy grew alongside a retinue of published copy, and think tanks like the Good Data Initiative recruited the bold and the brilliant, I felt infuriated with my algorithm, which I felt was feeding me scraps of a second-hand story, and sparingly at that. Why was it feeding me fluff, when I am a serious-sapient with a desire for substance?

At my new college, at my new university, I met new people who shared my frustration, and this is where our brainchild grew into a beta experiment. Presenting: Phone-Sit / Phone Swap.

One hour, four participants, three rounds of ten-minute phone swaps; three written prompts on what would form a

digital ID declaration badge; a discussion before the experiment outlying the rules; a reflection afterwards disclosing personal responses. We agreed to adhere to *The Harm Principle*, deciding not to post anything from the social media of our phone-in-custody, or to communicate with the phone owner's contacts.

This experiment was small-scale. We wanted to actively engage with other people's devices in order to influence the content they were fed but needed to keep trust in the room. Some invited participants were anxious about parting with their phones, and we had a handful of last-moment cancellations (as well as in-advance 'no ways'). We did not want to expose or destroy, but as one participant put it 'having only four known people, all phone swapping, assures mutual destruction, so we all behaved.'

The aesthetic was 'Serious Sci-fi': we swiped and scrolled in an oak panelled room in front of Her Majesty's portrait, wearing DIY pseudo-futuristic outfits: charm necklaces, lace gloves, and welder goggles. An acknowledgement that this wasn't in any way an official, data-based scientific experiment but more a reflection of our creative interest in our relationship with our phones and our personality-dominated algorithms. A nod to sci-fi's inflection on the present: that our 'New Normal' is a bit bleeping weird.

'What do your algorithms tend to feed you?'; 'What are your algorithm-independent interests?'; 'What would you like to be fed more of?' Our answers were different, (but not that different), as nametags portraying our digital ID illustrated: 'art, antique exhibitions and auctions'; 'dogs, dancers and punjabi political commentary'; 'wedding parties doing

the cha-cha-cha'; 'art and culture'. We wanted more 'politics, world affairs, research opportunities'; 'more humour'; 'more fashion'; 'more memes'; 'data-driven analysis' and 'cultural content'.

The experiment was flawed for its lack of variation in sample: all four participants work in the same field, are within the same age bracket, and have the same London postcode. But we are also different: we have different sexual, gender, racial and ethnic and linguistic identities; though we are all English speakers, we were each born in a different continent.

Despite our ostensible similarities, our algorithms were fortresslike and impenetrable. The Antiquarian's digital presence was so ironclad that it became a joke - no matter what we searched on their phone, the results returned something classics-related. A search for

*Meduza*, an independent Russian news organisation, unrelentingly resulted in Greek mythology. 'Wedding Parties doing the Cha-cha-cha', who had searched *Noli Me Tangere* the previous day, for the first time encountered the José Rizal novel about the colonisation of the Philippines as a top result once she looked it up on the phone with the digital ID 'dogs, dancers and Punjabi political commentary'.

Explicitly asking participants not to engage in extreme political content was an attempt to prevent

future harm. We didn't want someone turning up for a job interview with a digital trail of hate site engagement, (and we needed to create a safe and comfortable experience), but this sidestepped a major facet of social media. Think-pieces and data-fuelled articles about the impact of social media on political affiliations and major elections are undoubtedly important. Our focus, however, was on the sometimes niche and personal interests that dominate our ads and suggested media as a wider reflection of our interests. We are aware that

this eschews important questions about widely known harmful effects of social media and its addictive properties. But we were not trying to shake off or acknowledge technology's controlling force, merely trying to personalise it. And in any case, it is the banal that affects the cor-blimey!

A lack of quantifiable data at this stage makes it difficult to effectively measure the results of this so-called experiment. Everyone expressed an interest in information from the other side of the aisle, with an online meme library, (*The Potentially Inappropriate Memebrary for Historians and Literaries*), being the favoured find. While we agreed that the similarities in our interests make it difficult to affect any radical changes in each other's feeds, the particular

eccentricities of our respective interests added an intricate layer we hadn't previously considered.

And there was something fascinating about the space between, about the nominally quirky digital differences between four art and literature scholars.

Once we shared our reflections, we realised that we felt confronted with the act of calculated. We found ourselves forced to reflect on what it is we do when we scroll once we are deprived of the assortment of pages and profiles which guide us down our respective scrolling rabbit holes. It felt alien to actively seek out information that interested us, rather than being served what we thought we wanted to see by an unknown yet all-knowing technological presence.

This was an initial meeting, an expression of interest and an attempt to see if any broader thoughts and ideas could be gleaned from the session. It would be good to scale up, to provide a full-on diagnostic and phone-sitting service, where people can send their phone for ideological reconditioning. We are aware that for any noticeable change we would have to meet again, with a larger group from

varied backgrounds. Devices should be purposefully placed with users who have wildly different profiles. We want to feel the effects of each other's influence in tangible ways and ads.

Perhaps the most eloquent conclusion is the reflective summary written by one participant: 'Divan bed is nice; phone sharing is an intimate act; browsing while being browsed.'



Photograph by Isabella Taleghani

# Leisure Guilt in the Age of Technology

Louisa Hutchinson

Illustrations by Sasha Dunn

When was the last time you had a guilt-free day of doing nothing? In a capitalist society, true leisure and rest for the worker is incredibly difficult to achieve, as mandated time off is geared towards further productivity. Time off from work comes with a pressure to 'use it'; be it going out, socialising, gaining experience or knowledge, or resting ahead of the next working day. If we don't spend our free time bettering ourselves, we risk seeing our productivity decline. The Prime Minister of Finland suggested replacing the five-day nine-to-five with a six-hour workday and a four-day workweek, reasoning that allowing workers to have recreational time outside work would result in fulfilment both professionally and emotionally – which would in turn lead to higher productivity. Due

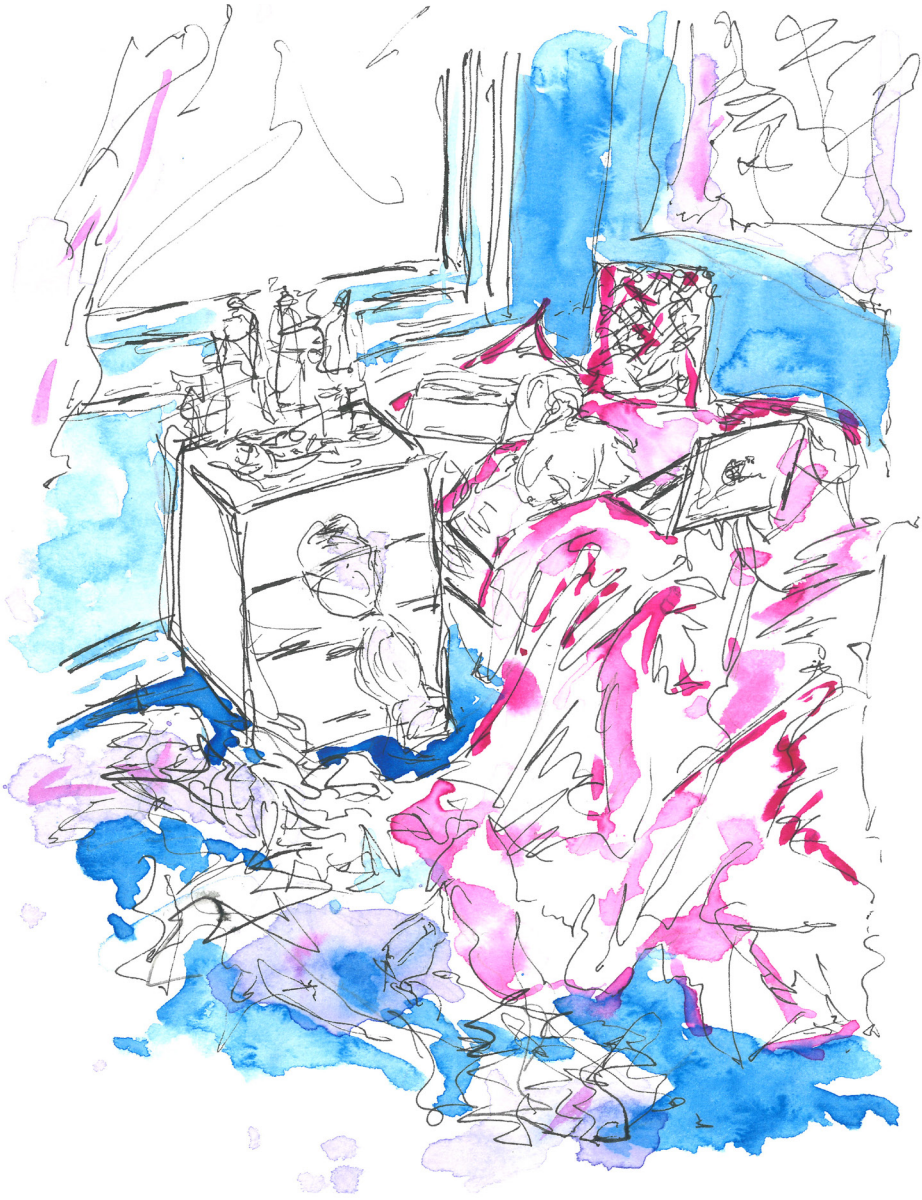
to this focus on capacity for productivity, truly unproductive time off comes with guilt and is incredibly difficult to achieve, as remorse takes over that we should be using our free time in a constructive manner which stops us from enjoying our time off. Unlike the characters of E. M. Forster's short story *The Machine Stops* we do not live in an egalitarian society, and views on leisure time differ based on the individual in question; the working-class individual who is resting is 'lazy' and demonised by 'hustle culture', whereas upper classes who often undertake a great deal more leisure time are seen to be successful in their rest.

Technology and technological change are endogenous to capitalism, with Marx positing that technological advancement is driven by the need

for society to develop productive forces. The application of innovation is an essential part of production, and technology carries these capitalist roots through into its mundane utilities.

***'You know that we have lost the sense of space. We say that "space is annihilated", but we have annihilated not space but the sense thereof. We have lost a part of ourselves.'***

E. M. Forster, *The Machine Stops*



Technology has indisputably changed recreational time and how we spend it. Through accessible communication, social media, and endless entertainment forms it is possible to maintain nearly constant stimulation by technology, both in work and in time off. Switching off for many still involves a phone, a television, a games console or the Internet in some capacity. This near constant exposure to technology and information can perpetuate capitalist leisure guilt in several ways. It is far too easy to spend precious free time watching other people live their lives and letting them tell you how you should be living yours – the above excerpt from *The Machine Stops* foreshadows this vicarious living, which takes place as we lose the world around us to focus on the world behind the screen. This ‘surveillance capitalism’ undermines autonomy and the private human experience, and it becomes increasingly difficult to participate effectively in society without using channels such as Google

and Facebook, which also supply capitalist data flows. The very platform which promised the democratisation of knowledge is now commanding our leisure time.

Social media, from TikTok to LinkedIn, creates an acute awareness of the actions and accomplishments of those around us, generating a perceived competition with the achievements of other people which otherwise would not have mattered to our own self-image and goals. ‘Influencers’ are a social media phenomenon which echo Guy Debord’s 1967 seminal work *The Society of the Spectacle*, which describes the ‘spectacle’ as a social relation between people which is mediated by images. Allowing us a near constant view into their fantastical lives and achievements, ‘influencers’ act as the middle point between the corporation and the consumer as living advertisements of an idealised life – earned usually through appearance and material possessions.

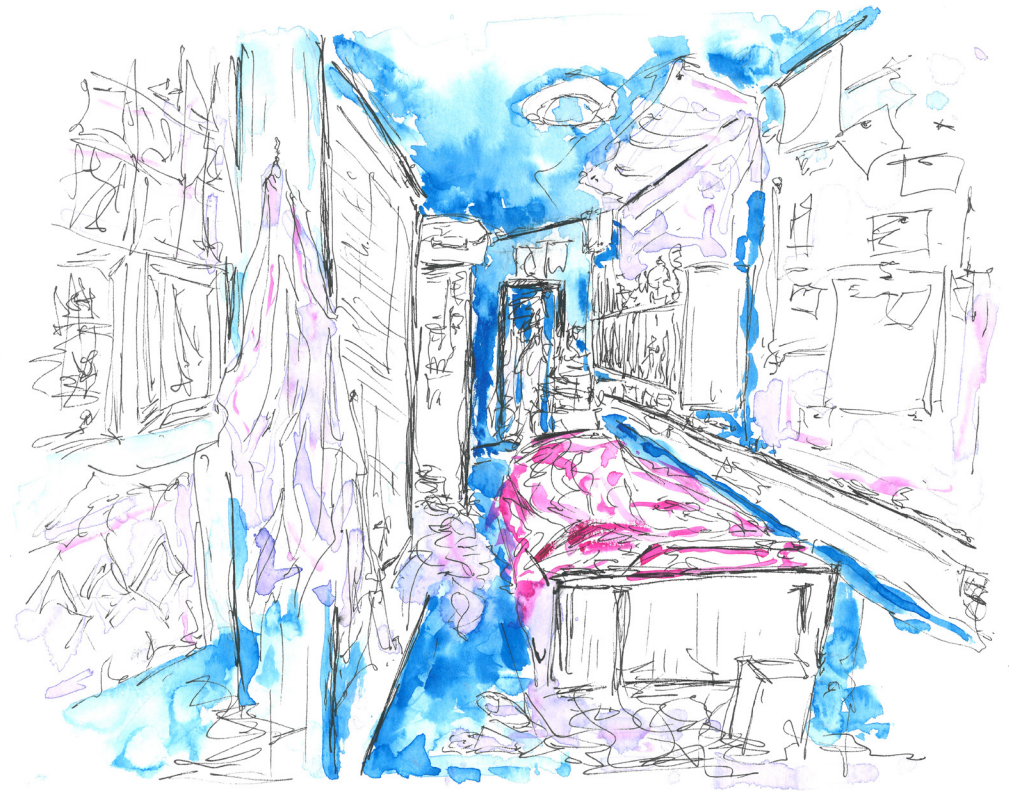
They are measured not in their talent or their contributions to society, but rather in net-worth or Instagram followers.

'Influencer' Molly-Mae Hague, unqualified creative director of fast fashion giant Pretty Little Thing, recently came under fire for her comments that everyone has the same twenty-four hours in a day. Her messaging echoed the age-old capitalist notion that if we are not successful, we simply haven't worked hard enough; an idea that is pushed online in the form of 'hustle culture'. This argument fails to account for the disparity in leisure time between the classes, and perpetuates leisure guilt through the implications that leisure time is the enemy of financial success. The social media phenomenon of 'hustle culture' has seen the commodification of hobbies and recreational activities, stripping them of their inherent pleasure by turning them into exchanges of labour for money, and creating guilt for the viewer who has not monetised their interests.

Showing off your work ethic on social media has now become acceptable and oftentimes praised, with the worker being proud of twelve-hour workdays and an unhealthy positive association with the very system causing the need for such excessive labour. Social media 'influencers' such as Molly-Mae, who directly profit from consumerism through brand deals and earn a superfluous amount of money, are on constant display for self-comparison and set unrealistic standards for how we should be spending our own 'twenty-four hours'.

*'Above her, beneath her, and around her, the Machine hummed eternally; she did not notice the noise, for she had been born with it in her ears.'*

E. M. Forster, *The Machine Stops*



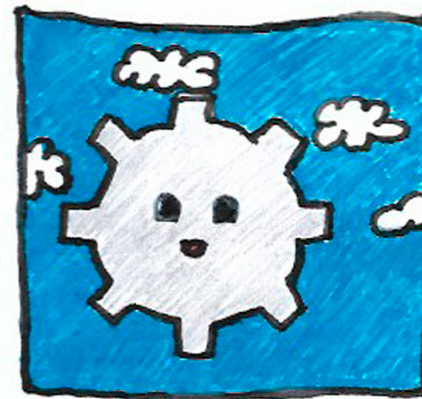
Social media and technology have become a near constant presence 'humming eternally' in the lives of most, to the point where we notice it more in its absence – if we go somewhere without our phones, or if our television is broken. In response to the 'influencer' and the

pressure of comparison felt on social media, we have begun to live our own leisure through technology too. Have you ever watched an artist at a concert through your camera lens, determined to capture the moment on video? We have begun, paradoxically, to spend our precious leisure

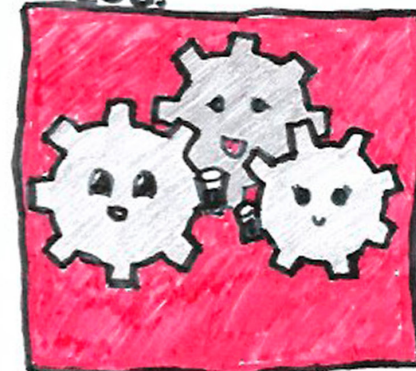
time letting other people know how we are spending it, forfeiting time truly for ourselves in the name of technological connection.



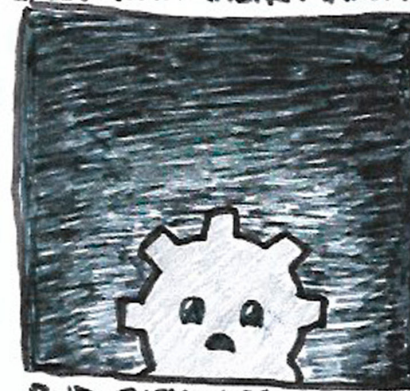
ONCE UPON A FUTURE TIME...



THERE WAS A LITTLE  
COG.



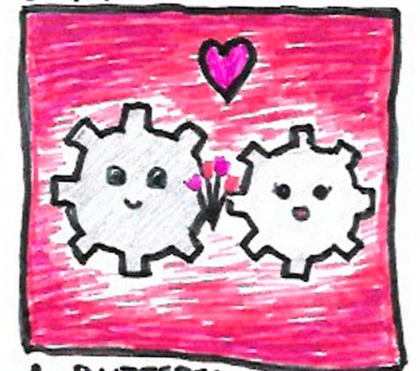
THEY ENJOYED GETTING  
CILED WITH THEIR MATES.



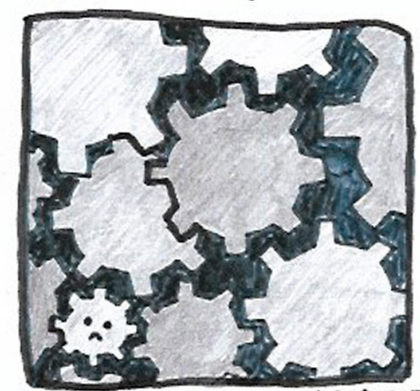
BUT THEY WERE IGNORED  
& NOT SEEN



WHO LOVED WHEN THE  
CITY FILLED WITH FOG,



& BUTTERFLIES ON A  
FIRST DATE,



FOR THEY WERE JUST A LITTLE  
LOG IN A BIG MACHINE.

# Mehr Licht: Projection Technologies in Art

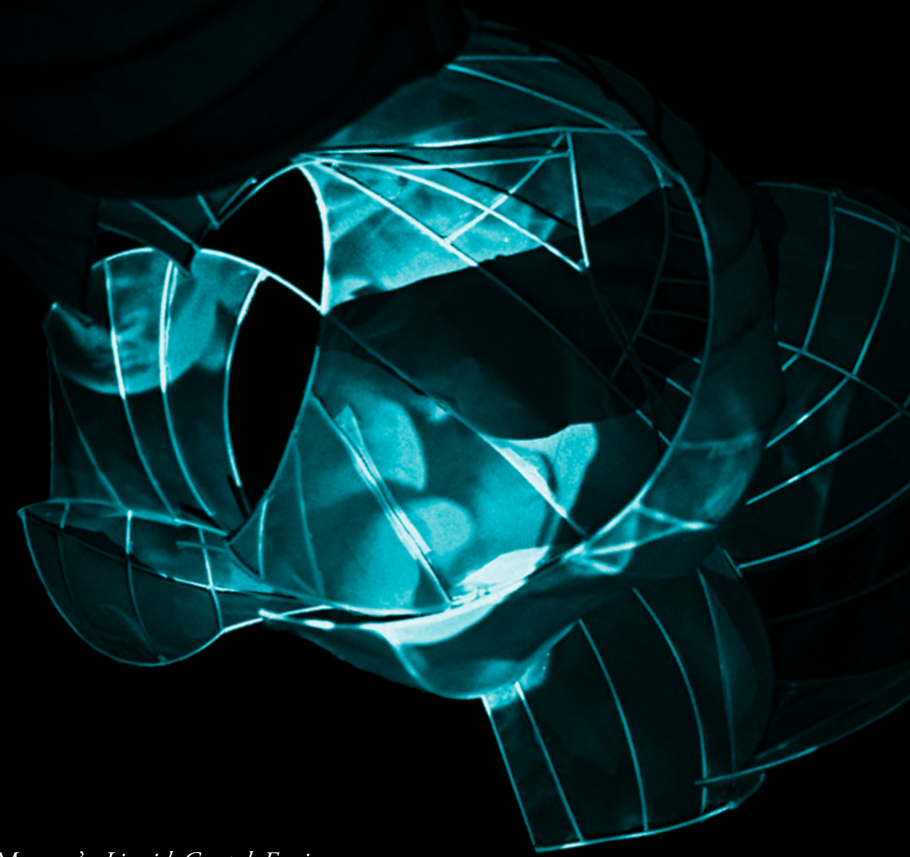
Sophie Buckman

Illustrations by Isabelle Carey

The gallery space, rigid and sacrosanct, positions itself as a strong-walled fortress of culture. The days of the bustling *kunst-kammer* are long gone, instead great hulking buildings are furnished with sterile, unfeeling rooms. Coughs echo, glares are thrown. What should be a shrine to the beautiful and affective instead feels like a long hospital corridor, housing rooms where the liveliest works are petrified and interned. This isn't helped by the formula of rectangular, monochromatic spaces, where art is pressed against the margins of great swathes of empty floor. The tried and tested 'canvases equally spaced on the wall' and 'solitary statues in the centre of the room' execution of exhibition seems a trudging inevitability of three-dimensional life, thanks Descartes. Corridors lead to rectangular rooms pasted with works of inimitable beauty lined up in a row like ducks at the fair. Light projection and projection mapping technologies do seem to offer an

alternative to this monotony. Video art has played with the human fascination with light for decades, longer if you consider the camera obscura in the same category. The emergence of video installations in the 1970s allowed for the gallery space to be reformulated and reinterpreted.

One example of this is Lis Rhodes's *Light Music* (1975), which refused to conceal the projector in an inaccessible cubby, as in the cinema, but moved it to the centre of the work. The beams of two projectors become the centrepiece of the work, rather than the projected image itself. A commentary on the woman's place in European composing, Rhodes transcribes an abstract 'score' onto film strip, using the projectors to play a visual music, emanating criss-crossing beams and hissing, otherworldly noises. The projectors take centre stage, emerging from their relegation to a tool, and becoming part of the means *and* the end. Similarly,



Gustav Metzger's *Liquid Crystal Environment* (1965, remade 2005) used heat sensitive crystals placed into the mechanism of the projector to project moving, mutable images, transforming colour and shape like hot magma. The effect is arresting and hypnotic. Whilst the images themselves are the pressing focus of the installation, Metzger's work forces us to consider the hot innards of the projector as an active agent in the artwork, as opposed to a solemn, lifeless tool.

There's an undeniable excitement to witnessing a projected image. Stood between the projector and matrix, the artwork runs around and through the viewer like a great stampeding river. In its constant travel,





thrown from the projector across the room, in a visceral sort of way the image is tangible. It hangs in the air; it feels more alive. Perhaps it's a sense of precariousness which imparts this humming excitement. With the flip of a switch in some dark bowel of the gallery, the art is gone. Seeing any work of art is a privilege, but when in the blink of an eye the image before you could evaporate, cease to exist in the corporeal world, there emerges a sense of urgency. Imagine

if through some fault, the *Arnolfini Portrait* could flicker and disappear before your very eyes. The flipside of this is that the projected image does not lay its claim to existence on the same plane as a Van Eyck does. It exists in a computer, sure, or in negatives in a studio somewhere, but the finished product exists only in light. Barthes expressed ambivalence towards the projected image, and outlined the troubling binary between the beams of light and the image itself,



which hold different but equally dangerous allures. Projected art is urgent, mobile, and inexpressibly visceral.

Projection mapping technologies facilitate not only an increasingly dynamic gallery space, but can effectively transport artworks into the public sphere. This is best epitomised by the eminently creative *Lyon Fêtes des Lumières*, an annual light festival with its origins in the nineteenth

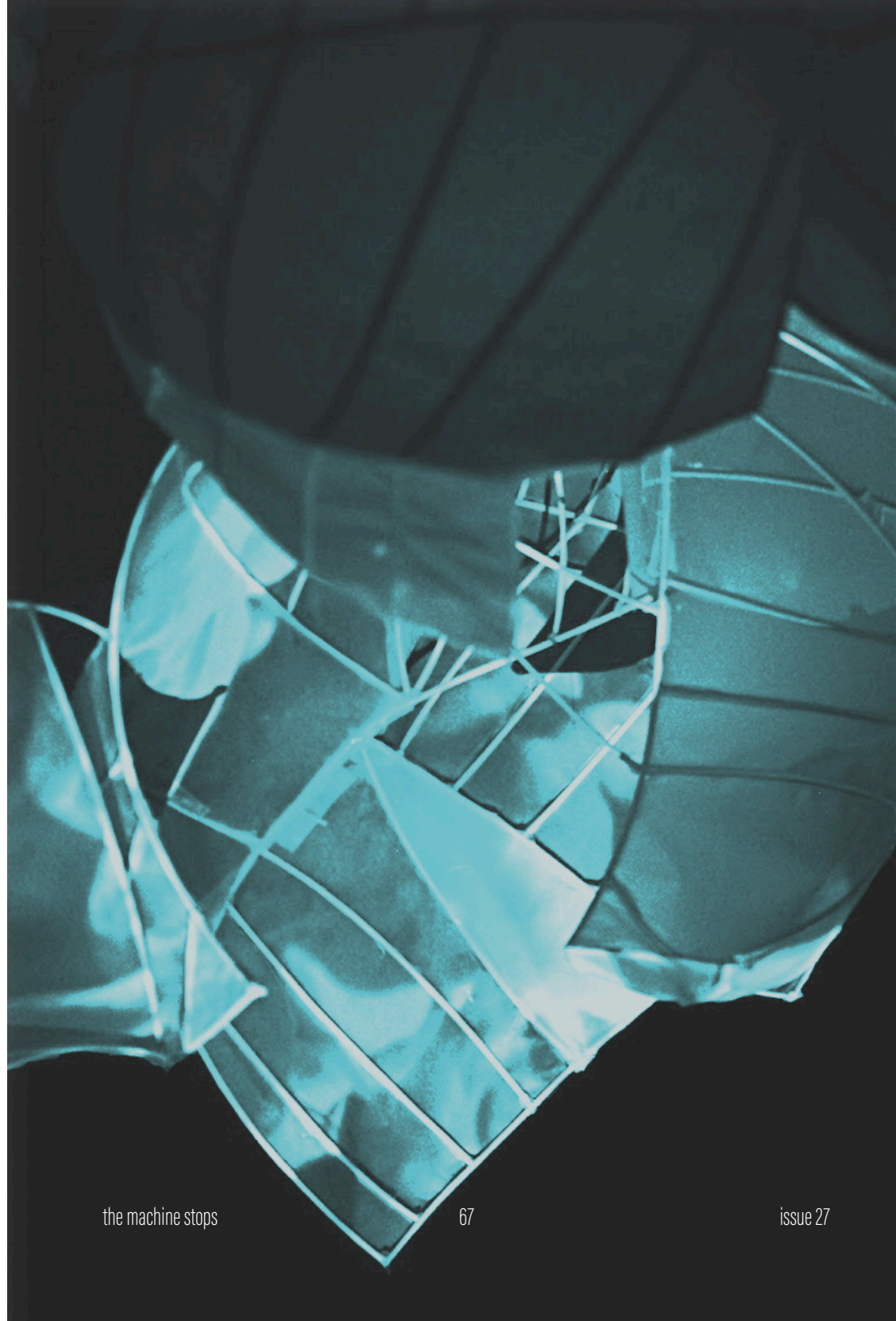
century. The citizens of Lyon have gone from festooning windowsills with candles in coloured glass, to coating their city in myriad installations of light and video art. Some are completely contemporary works, while some incorporate Old Master works in a newfound public setting. One example from 2015 was Daniel Knipper's installation *Regards*, which projected a moving collation of faces from Botticelli, Matisse, and Warhol among others over the monu-

ments on Fourvière Hill. The festival that year came mere weeks after the devastating terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, and Knipper integrated the names of the 130 victims into the installation. The meeting of these antique faces with the names of victims who represented a culture seemingly under threat, was deeply emotive. The public space, recently desecrated in an attack of unfathomable brutality, was triumphantly reclaimed through light and projection technologies.

While the mobile, mutable image can be thrilling and innovative, it does further open the art world to exploitative, gimmicky commercialisation. This is perhaps best exemplified by the current influx of immersive Van Gogh experiences, about which I have incredibly mixed feelings. On the one hand, the Instagrammification of art serves to expose it to a wider, younger audience. Periodic removal of certain works from the gallery or museum, spaces which to some can feel like impenetrable icy fortresses, is undoubtedly a good thing. However, moving them into a glorified marquee in Hyde Park, charging 20 pounds a head to see a projection of a Van Gogh when you can see the real deal for free less than two miles away at the Tate Britain?

Granted, at the Tate Britain you don't get to 'smell' the works, whatever that means, or hear some faint Saint-Saëns or whatever music they think matches the 'vibe' of the *Sunflowers*... I can only assume the swirling animations added to *Starry Night* hypnotises visitors into a catatonic stupor, providing soothing balm to the faint ache emanating from the hole in their wallets.

However, the numbers don't lie. There were, for a period in 2021, TWO immersive Van Gogh experiences operating in London. They both projected well known masterpieces up in busy halls. Some details were lost, some gained. Rich *impasto* is gone, sure, but a new perspective is offered on Van Gogh's broad brush strokes, suddenly enlarged to the size of a baby's arm. Some details invisible in a crowded gallery are illuminated. In promotional images, children perch on carpets made up of projections of Van Gogh's forest floor. The images wash over and around them, and it's difficult not to feel a touch sentimental. While the halls of plastic sunflowers epitomise some of the worst aspects of the commercialisation of art in the Anthropocene age, the Van Gogh experiences do manage to (mercenarily) invoke the immediacy, presence, and vivacity of projected art.



# Memeification: a Venture into the World of Memes

Olivia Keable



douchey.house



douchey.house  
Yung Hegel



All images courtesy of  
@douchey.house

Early in February I contacted the Instagram page @douchey.house and asked to conduct an interview, wanting to uncover the truth about this anonymous digital vigilante who has caused ripples at The Courtauld.

**Can you describe how you became involved in the meme dealing business?**

Like lots of us, getting kicked out of Duchy in March 2020 and having to move home really tipped me over the edge into the realm of the truly unhinged, and I needed

a creative outlet. I tried the focaccia thing, but I needed one that would allow me to maintain my 12 hours of screen time; the classic humour-in-a-time-of-crisis coping mechanism.

**Can you recount the first meme that you distributed?**

Some violently awful graphic design regarding tiny fringes at the nat gal? But I think the new generation of 'TikTok freshers' have killed off that classic art girl lewk :(



douchey.house



**How would you describe Douchey House in 3 words?**

Gallerina, Gaslight, Gatekeep.

**Is it just one person that runs this account?**

I invite you to believe what you want to believe. Memes are never made by one person - every meme is a digital paper

trail of 100 'onion' layers of reference and each meme-maker is just collaging those layers together, so really there's a thousand invisible faces behind each meme page. Reject individual authorship, embrace the collective collage!

**Do you think memes and Internet-based sources are where the art world is headed?**

I don't know, ask a blockchain bro.

In terms of memey-NFTs, I think memes lose their humour once they're commodified ...the irony of doge memes being sold for \$\$\$ wears off pretty quickly and you can only play the irony-pilled game for so long as an artist. Ultimately memes should belong to the masses and not to the auction house. That doesn't mean that there isn't a place for work that deals with our relationship to the Internet though, and the Internet's acceleration of postmodern referencing, self-referencing and memeification are here to stay.

**A lot of your memes are anti-institution, can you elaborate on your feelings towards that?**

Institutional critique will die when the institution dies.

Okay, but in all seriousness: memes cannot form real institutional critique and that's too big an expectation to place on some low-quality images and badly spelled text, but I think memes and humour can form a powerful outlet to vent frustration at the institution. I love when we all hate on the art historical establishment because it's a moment of togetherness.





**Can you speak more on the sense of togetherness?**

The Courtauld is notoriously poor for a sense of community - I know it's because we're a small uni, but they really did give us a vending machine, some sofas and call it a day. Going to uni during Corona really felt like being at uni with just you, your bed and your Zoom reflection, but Douchey sometimes kinda felt like an online common room without the snacks. Memes give

us small nuggets of common ground, even when the rest of the group is made up of floating digital entities.

**Is your aim with this account to bring down the patriarchy?**

No, in 2022 we're bringing back misogyny.

**How long will Douchey House prevail, do you have a line of succession in order?**

Douchey House lives by the samurai code of honour, Seppuku will be committed upon graduation.

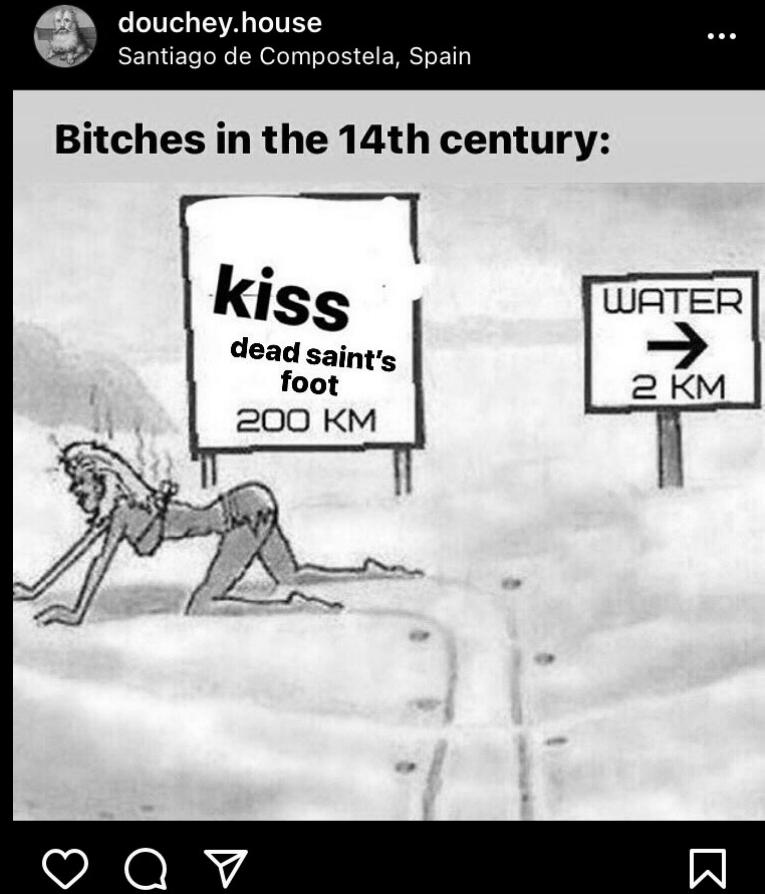
The line of succession isn't clear yet but may involve a fight to the death in the V Square smoking area, we shall see.

**Could you give a hint at who you might be?**

I can't be seen, I can't be felt, I can't be heard, and I can't be smelt. I lie behind stars and under hills, and empty holes I fill. I come first and follow after, I end life and kill laughter.

Does that clear everything up?

xoxo Gossip Girl



# NFT/NBT

## Cecily Hutchison

The Monster Punk Club, *Monster Punk Club #6098*, 2021.

Image taken from [Opensea.com](https://opensea.com)

Illustrations by Finlay Thompson



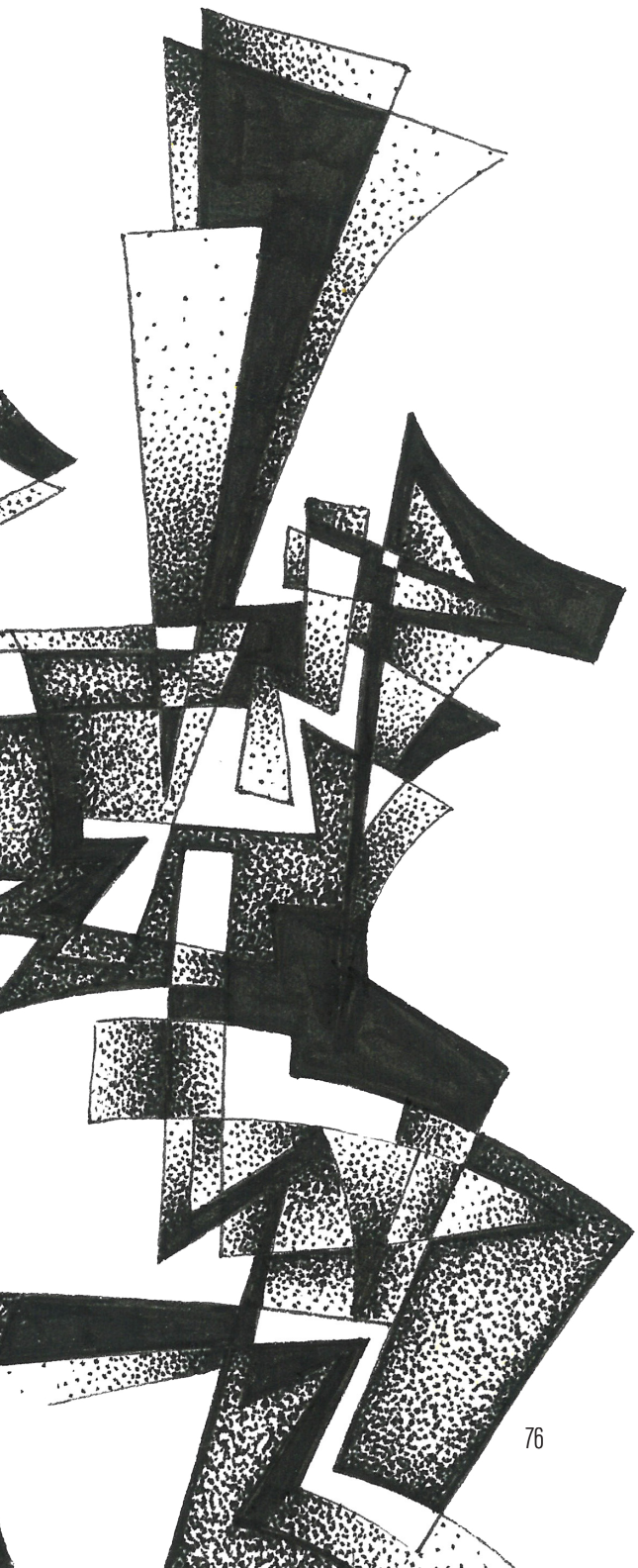
Pixelated smoke wafts out of Monster Punk Club #6098's virtual pipe as he stoically stands, arms at his side. The monster's pink sunglasses and straight mouth exude an aloof manner. He is not one to be messed with... unless you are interested in buying him. I currently own this monster in a halo of a mint green background. After purchasing this NFT last year, I honestly have had no clue what to do with it except to tell people that it's mine. I bought the monster for partly the same reason I downloaded TikTok: the attraction of the NBT. The 'Next Big Thing' is a holy grail in our capitalist economy and a key to 'success' in art since the avant-garde. When Jackson Pollock's drip paintings were splashed across *Life Magazine*, they were introduced as The Next Big Thing. Over five years ago, NFTs became the new NBT. But with every new development in the art world, speculation always follows.

NFT, standing for non-fungible token, is a unique asset on a cryptocurrency blockchain (often Ethereum) that can be likened to a collectible. The Bored Apes and CryptoPunk images we see online are not themselves on the blockchain, but are represented by a unique code, which in a way acts as the owner's certificate of authenticity. Considered by many as solely a new way for cryptocurrency investors to make more money in highly unregulated environments, the art component of NFTs continues to be undermined. However, in the last year with art critic Kenny Schachter at the helm, artists, galleries, and museums have contributed to developing the art historical importance of NFTs.

One major benefit of NFT art is the ability for artists to easily sell their own work. The clashing of heads between artists and galleries has long held

issues with creativity and artists' pay. These issues began to subside when Instagram became a digital marketplace for artists and collectors. Now NFT marketplaces like Opensea and Nifty Gateway, still acting as a middleman between artist and buyer that will take a percentage of sale, allow artists greater freedom when it comes to selling their work. These marketplaces included an incredibly important feature, resale rights, which allows the artist to continue earning a percentage on sales every time their work is sold. Resale rights is a feature the art world has been struggling to incorporate as a means to legitimise the 'artist' career as a financially sustainable life. It is unsurprising that it would take an entirely new system to gain more rights for artists.

On Opensea, there are various categories to browse NFTs including 'music', 'photography', 'collectibles', and the very



general 'art'. Many people would look at my Monster Punk Club #6098 and question whether it can be considered art. This is a fair suspicion and one I shared for a moment. It reminds me of the friend you go to a modern art museum with who looks up at a Cy Twombly painting, scoffs, and remarks 'my child could make that'. But did their child make it? No, Twombly did. We return to this notion that 'new' and, at this point, 'minimal' do not connote bad art. This is not to say that every NFT on the market should be considered fine art. However, that NFTs do not adhere to one's idea of beauty and that we might not yet understand what they contribute to our society, does not mean they will not be making it onto the pages of art history books years from now.

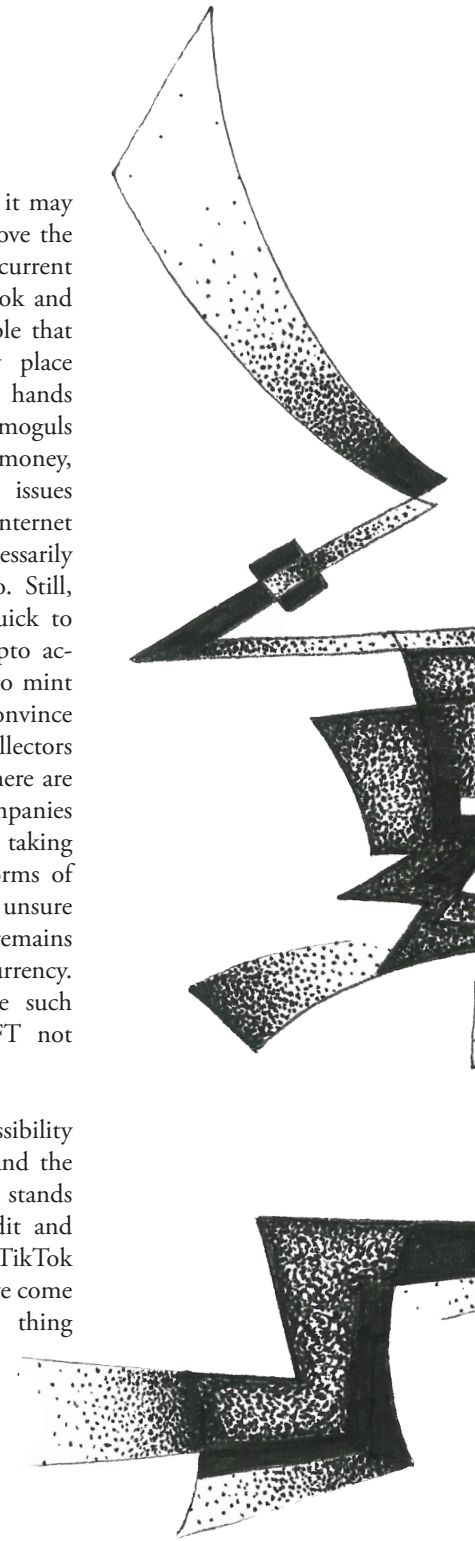
In the few years that NFTs have overtaken the art world, artists and organisations have been quick to address issues of

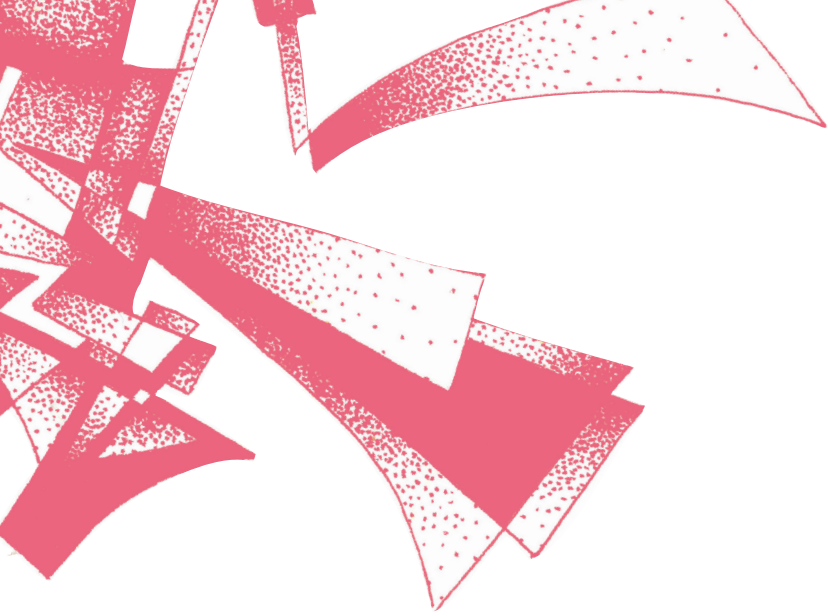
diversity, representation, and environmental effects. The NFT market boasts on average a much younger set of artists thanks in part to its digital nature. These younger artists are also representative of younger generations who care more about social causes and the environment. A key issue being addressed with NFTs is the large amounts of energy used to create them and uphold this data. But in the last year or so, many rising NFT companies like NFT Arts are putting the environment first by figuring out how to continue working with NFTs in a more sustainable method.

Next to address for the NFT world is their frightening reliance on cryptocurrency. We are unsure where cryptocurrency will lead us, and Bitcoin's volatility does not comfort anyone. The future of Web3, a decentralised, crypto-powered Internet owned by users, will not necessarily help with this untrustworthy

medium. Although it may seem better to remove the power from the current holders like Facebook and Google, it is possible that Web3 will simply place the Internet in the hands of different tech moguls looking to make money, meaning that any issues of distrust for the Internet today will not necessarily change with crypto. Still, artists today are quick to join in on the crypto action. They buy in to mint their NFTs and convince their friends and collectors to do so as well. There are some smaller companies that have started taking more traditional forms of payment, but it is unsure whether the NFT remains bound to cryptocurrency. Will there ever be such a thing as an NFT not linked to crypto?

The door of accessibility has been left ajar and the old-guard art world stands aghast at the Reddit and Discord users, and TikTok influencers who have come through. The one thing





that keeps the older galleries and auction houses from shutting this door is the enormous opportunities to make money through NFTs. While the money keeps the old-guard tight-lipped, the younger generation art world celebrates the huge increase in art appreciation and making. Instagram, TikTok, and your non-artsy friend are talking about art, a lot. Teenagers are creating it and businessmen are crazed for it. Does it feel a little wrong that it all comes down to the money? Yes, but also, when in the past century has it not? The art world simply must take advantage of this growth in interest, as it has started to

do, and emphasise the art aspect of NFTs.

In life there will always be a 'Next Big Thing', but that does not mean they will remain relevant and make history. NFTs, however, have spent the past few years proving they are here to stay in the commercial art world and in the history of art. Perhaps this current practice of selling NFTs will not stay, because, ideally, it will evolve into something greater and more inclusive. Just like everything in our world, new things become old, and they change or desist. I am certain that the market for digital art and centres for selling digital art and col-

lectibles is here to stay. In fact, there is a good chance that the metaverse means a lot more to our world just five years from now. Although I will probably still be questioning why fashion brands need virtual shopping centers. For now, we can revel in the great attention the art world is receiving thanks to Bored Apes, cryptocurrency, and tech-savvy teenagers.





# Modelling the Imaginary Water Garden

Mihaela Man

*System: imaginary water garden*

*Model 1: physical site of imaginary water garden*

*Model 2: scan of physical site of imaginary water garden*

*Model 3: waterscape based on scan and physical site of imaginary water garden*

‘My finest masterpiece is my garden’, said Claude Monet at the very end of his life. He was referring to his beloved flower garden in Giverny, which was the main subject of his artistic production during the last thirty years of his life. With its heterogenic fusion of flora and fauna, the garden was a product of his imagination, which he realised as a physical site and subsequently represented on canvas in his *Water Lilies* (1889–1920). Fast forward a hundred years later, French artist Pierre Huyghe exhibits *Nympheas Transplant* (2014), a set of diorama-like aquariums that use computational processes and organic materials to amplify the relationships between the virtual and physical renderings of Monet’s dreamworld. The garden in Giverny, the waterlily paintings, and the aquariums are models that survey and speculate on the

performance and behaviour of Monet’s idealised garden. These three models engage in a worldbuilding exercise to realise the environment he had in mind.

Claude Monet began building his water garden in Giverny after the horticulturalist Joseph Bory-Latour Marliac presented his hybrid waterlilies at the 1889 World’s Fair in Paris. In a world permeated by the promise of bioengineering, Monet redesigned much of his garden in Giverny to create an artificial pond carpeted with several species of waterlilies. He cut down pines, planted exotic flowers, weeping willows, bamboo trees, and diverted a river to recreate the image of the garden he had in mind. In geoengineering his painting subject, he laid the grounds for a reciprocal relationship between planting and painting, as well as for a new understanding of the role modern art could play in the representation of ideal worlds.

Once he finished constructing the garden, Monet created a series of approximately 250 oil paintings depicting the light and

the surrounding vegetation reflected in his waterlily pond. In revealing the totality of the garden’s biotope, the painted surface of the water becomes an extensive scan of the textures, depths, and volumes of the landscaped nature enveloping it. With their varied, expressive colour scheme, the paintings also amplify how the hues of the water garden change with the seasons. One can understand the minute brushstrokes that make up Monet’s grainy waterlily paintings as data points. Collections of vertices, edges, and faces formalise the surface of the lily pond and the volumetric features of its surrounding environment as they transform over time. In having its environmental data mapped onto the canvas, the garden becomes a site that cultivates a biocomputational understanding of painting as well as, more generally, of seeing. Huyghe’s *Nympheas Transplant* harnesses this idiosyncratic way of imaging living terrains to further explore the biotope of Monet’s water garden a hundred years later.

Both *The Waterlily Series* and *Nympheas Transplant* sought to map the visual effects



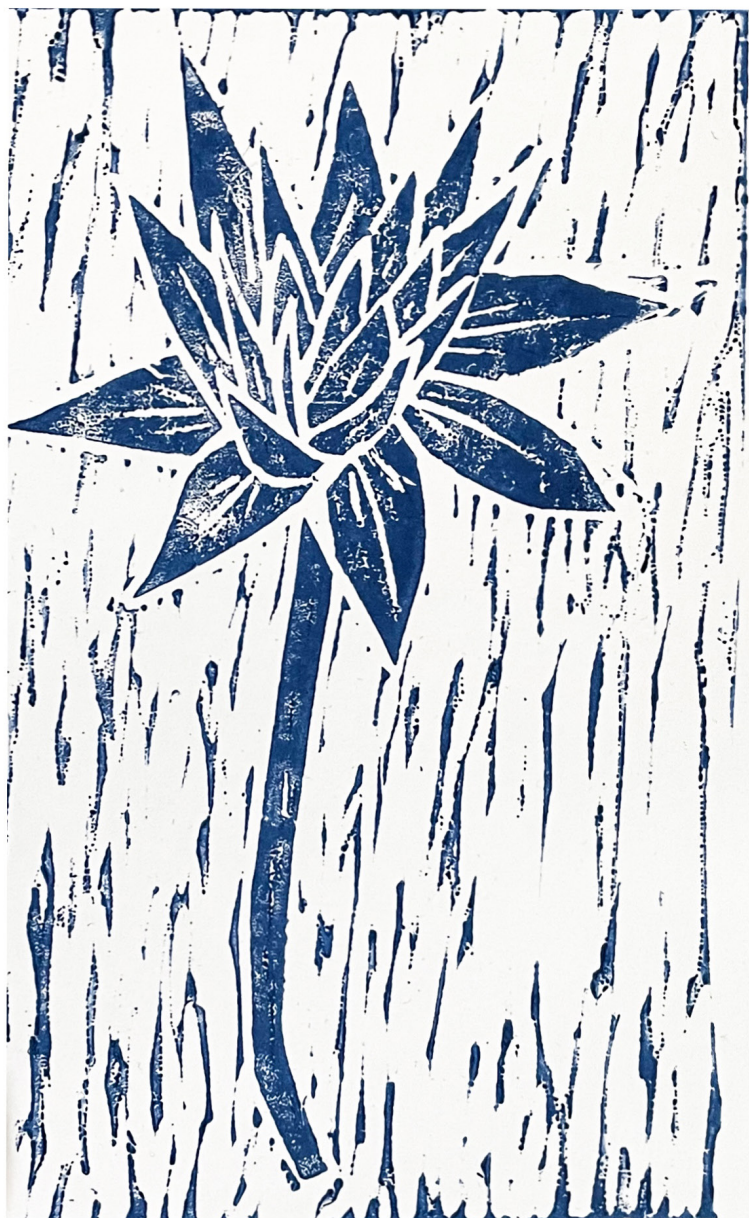
Illustrations by Olivia Keable

of the biotope in Giverny as it transformed from one season to another. Based on the existing pond and Monet's *Waterlilies*, Huyghe's water tanks are living ecosystems comprising a mixture of biological matter sourced from the pond in Giverny and of computer-generated weather factors. In understanding the way these water tanks operate, one might pick up on the notion of modular modeling, which is the act of building a series of models through interchangeable and fixed components. While the organic matter—soil, plants, and creatures—are almost identical in each water tank, the algorithms were programmed so that each of the four tanks approximated the corresponding light, temperature, and

water opacity of Monet's pond as they presumably looked like during each of the four seasons at the turn of the twentieth century. Therefore, Huyghe's tanks are iterations of the very same biotope. The distinctive light- and temperature conditions of each tank, in trying to mimic the murky waters Monet painted 'while Europe was butchering its sons by the millions in World War I', generated variations in the colour, the opacity, as well as the type of microscopic organisms of the water. Through modular modeling, Huyghe instils in his sequence of misty water tanks a sense of the motion of time, as well as, more metaphorically, a flash of the turbid historical moment in which Monet's idyllic garden emerged.



Pierre Huyghe, *Nymphaeas Transplant* (14-18), 2014. Live pond ecosystem, image courtesy of Esther Schipper, Berlin.



*Nymphaeas Transplant* is a work that underscores the condition of modern thought with its attendant extremes— as a simultaneous turn toward nature and one toward a future permeated by computer graphics and bioengineering. Could the humdrum of nature ever be ordered or captured through technology? This simple question forms the basis of Huyghe’s work, which brings a diverse array of biotic and abiotic elements together, including insects, algorithms, crustaceans, sand, sensors, plants, and gunk to create a heavily textural iteration of Monet’s waterlily pond. Situated between ornament and accident, *Nymphaeas Transplant* is more than a three-dimensional rendering of the pond’s water as envisioned and painted by Monet. The tanks are living models that suffer perpetual transmutations through the enmeshing of technological patterns and biological occurrences. From this point of view, Huyghe’s living model brings out the limits that lie beneath the endless

freedom of experimentation that both computation and geoeengineering promise. In the attempt to seize the very same image of nature that Monet sought to capture artificially, the matter in the water tank transforms perpetually— it leaks, oxidises, dies, and regenerates beyond control.

The success of *Nymphaeas Transplant* lies in the fact that it joins, and subsequently accentuates, the constellation of models that attempt to actualise Monet’s vision of the ideal garden. The joint workings of Pierre Huyghe and Claude Monet shape an imagined landscape by mirroring or incorporating a set of computational processes, including 3D scanning, texture mapping, and modeling. Spanning over a century, this constellation of works recomposes and interrogates the textures, structures, and colours of Monet’s imaginary water garden. In short, I would argue that their collective effort represents the most prolonged worldbuilding exercise so far.

# There's Not a Cloud in the Sky: Dismantling the Myth of the Idyllic Cloud Network

Rachel McHale

Cloud. *noun.* /klaud/ A visible mass of condensed water vapour floating in the atmosphere, typically high above the general level of the ground. A white fluffy-seeming substance inviting us to find objects and faces within its fleeting form. An ethereal phenomenon we watch drift over our heads whilst lying on the grass. Natural though clouds may be, something is mesmerising about looking up and watching the indeterminable shapes pass by. And clouds have proved fertile ground – or should we say sky – for artists. Sometimes cotton-candy, sometimes dark and ominous, they lend themselves perfectly to pathetic fallacy; a blue sky with a smattering of bright white clouds on a pleasant summer's day conjures contentment and peace, a brooding purple

sky whose clouds threaten to rain echoes feelings of fear and anger. From John Constable's nineteenth-century studies of skies which capture the delicate structure, volume, and movement of clouds, to Georgia O'Keeffe's modernist abstract aerial view paintings, clouds have enthralled artists for centuries.

But more recently, we've come to know the cloud as the global networked computer facilities offering remote storage and processing services via the Internet. Apple, Google, Amazon, and Microsoft, amongst others, all make use of the cloud. We are offered copious storage space for files, photos, and the like, the only requirement is to remember our password. It's simple, it

feels invisible. Behind the innocent cloud icons, however, lies a darker truth: whilst cloud networking and storage reduces the need for physical resources like paper, they require a large amount of technical infrastructure, servers, and data centres, which have a burdensome impact. These are not only responsible for a staggering amount of carbon emissions but also involve waste and toil. With cloud services increasingly favoured by individuals and companies alike, their effects are only set to rise.

These more recent metaphorical and technological associations have also permeated the art scene, as artists address the underbelly of the cloud. Indeed, why only gaze at clouds when you can purchase them?

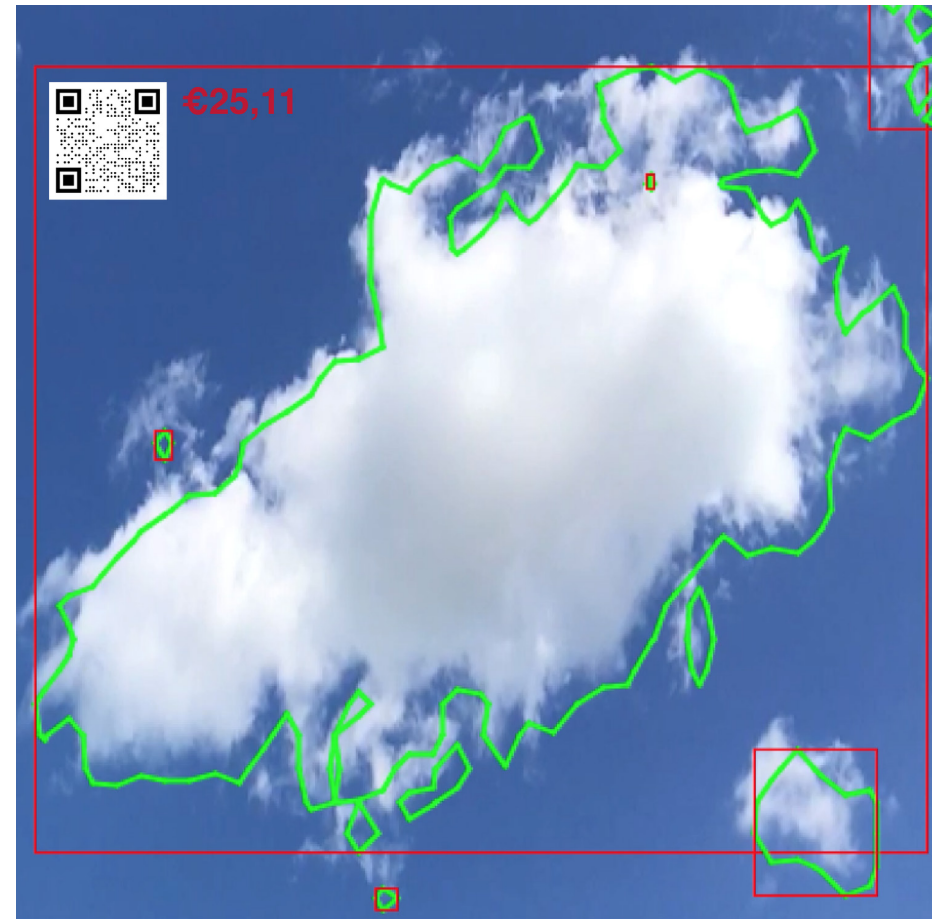
Noa Jansma's video installation *Buycloud* invites you to do exactly that: buy a cloud. The ambiguous white forms whose characteristics are their blurred edges, seeming softness, and indefinability suddenly find themselves defined. Neatly demarcated by a green border and placed in a red box, these clouds become products. Each cloud is accompanied by its price and a QR code, which the viewer can scan to view the virtual speculation market, enter their details, and officially buy a cloud. After doing so, they receive a certificate of ownership. Turning clouds into commodities, Jansma questions the transformation of natural phenomena into exploitable resources, reflecting on a wider history of colonial conquering of lands. Jansma applies the

Western construction of property and exploitation onto a natural substance that has thus far avoided capitalist logic. *Buycloud* consequently reflects on the intersections between nature, exploitation, and capitalism, interrogating the appropriation of natural phenomena.

Another artist dispelling the myth of the innocent cloud is Louis Henderson. His video *All That is Solid* explores the tangible global consequences of such cloud services. Filmed in the Agbogbloshie electronic waste ground in Accra and illegal gold mines of Ghana, the video shows young workers, often children, mining the heaps of electronic waste amidst trails of black smoke to extract precious metals which can then be sold to make new products. As Henderson puts it, this also reveals 'a kind of reverse neo-colonial mining', as the workers search for mineral resources in the waste materials from Europe. The video includes found and re-edited footage, as Henderson overlaps computer browser, audio, image, and text across the screen. Taking its title from a quotation in Karl

Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*, the video invokes the viewer to recognise the material ramifications of a supposedly immaterial construct, dismantling the idea that the cloud is merely 'a hard disc in the sky', as a voiceover states in the video. Henderson makes visible the gruelling realities of the mythical cyberspace by tracing the connections between the online database and a mining site on the west coast of Africa. The cloud is not pure and undemanding, it is dirty and laborious.

Shattering the façade that the innocent, idyllic cloud icons and images would have us believe, these artworks call into question the progress associated with technological advancements. Although the cloud certainly has its benefits, both Jansma and Henderson show that it is also entangled with exploitation and environmental harm. It has become incredibly easy to send, store, and share data without a second thought. But the weight of the cloud becomes clear: it is no longer as light and fluffy as it seems.



Noa Jansma, *Buycloud*, 2020.  
Interactive video installation.  
Image courtesy of Noa Jansma.

# Millthorpe: Edward Carpenter's Utopia Against the Machine Age

Alice Dodds

*'Man is the measure. That was my first lesson. Man's feet are the measure for distance, his hands are the measure for ownership, his body is the measure for all that is lovable and desirable and strong.'*

E. M. Forster, *The Machine Stops*

E. M. Forster first visited Edward Carpenter at his home in the Peak District hamlet of Millthorpe in 1912, describing the experience 'as one approaches a saviour'. Millthorpe had become a part-commune, part-pilgrimage site for those chasing the utopian project: the collective living and gardening, craft economy, promotion of nudism, hearty vegetarian diet, and radical openness to queer relationships were an irresistible pull for many. The fluctuating cast of visitors and residents that rolled through its carefully crafted and locally-sourced stone walls unsurprisingly included the anarcho-communist designer William Morris, and architectural reformer

Raymond Unwin, alongside socialist clairvoyant Annie Beasant, and future Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald.

Having lived in this rural commune with his partner George Merrill since the late nineteenth century, by the time Forster visited in 1912, Carpenter was an established yet controversial figure on the British Left. Born in 1844 to an upper-middle class family in Brighton, Carpenter had originally followed the expected path and become a curate at Cambridge University. He left the Church, and then academia as a whole after visiting (and allegedly sleeping with) Walt Whitman in the late 1870s,

using his inheritance to build his home at Millthorpe as the new centre of a radical utopian experiment in simple and communal environmental anarchist living.

At Millthorpe, he lived with a slew of working-class lovers, writing poetic, philosophical and political texts that espoused a socialism imbued with spirit and mysticism and founded on the principles of a homoerotic fellow-feeling. An early activist for gay rights and environmentalism, Carpenter's anarchist politics dissented from mainstream socialism's obsessive focus on material inequality and economics. Instead he opted for a more wholistic approach, advocating for a fundamentally new way of life that reassessed how we relate to each other and the earth. Alongside William Morris, he was amongst those who had left Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation after disputes over its increasing materialist authoritarianism. Putting these politics into practice at Millthorpe, he was mocked by George Bernard Shaw as 'The Noble Savage' and later dismissed by George Orwell as 'the sort of eunuch type with a vegetarian smell, who go about spreading sweetness and light' who attracted 'every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, pacifist and feminist in England.'

Yet, Carpenter's much maligned sandals were a key part of his utopian political practice at Millthorpe. In resistance against the highly-polluting, capitalist, and alienating effects of industrial machine making — and the very early beginnings of fast fashion — the economy at Millthorpe was focussed around the craftsmanship of

making leather sandals. Influenced by the ideas of William Morris, the sandals' value came not from their monetary recompense but the value and joy found in slow hand-craftsmanship. Collectively made, they also considered how reassessing people's relationships to each other could refigure the means of production in a utopian socialist/anarchist society. Thus, they were readily given as gifts to visitors to welcome them into Millthorpe's liberating lifestyle. Rather than arguing about the ins and outs of revolutionary theory in London, Millthorpe was the site of a very practically-focussed utopian experiment.

In this sense, the Machine dystopia of Forster's *The Machine Stops* seems the exact inverse of Carpenter's Millthorpe. Where people are weighted down—'strangled'—by their clothing in *The Machine*, Carpenter promotes a freedom in nudity at Millthorpe. Where people live isolated and underground in Forster's dystopia, at Millthorpe Carpenter lives in the open countryside amongst a constantly fluctuating community of others. Where *The Machine* suppresses the 'imponderable bloom' of nature as it turns towards manufactured artificiality, Millthorpe blooms with its gardens full of fresh fruit and vegetables. As a long-time admirer of Carpenter, and greatly inspired by his late-nineteenth century utopian essays, it is unsurprising that we find these parallels in Forster's work even before he visited Millthorpe.

*The Machine Stops* chimes with many of Carpenter's own criticisms of modern 'Civilisation', science, and technology. In his 1891 essay collection, *Modern Science*, Car-



penter offers his apprehensive prediction for the future. He warns against a future of the constant student, chained to their desk in a poorly ventilated, mechanised laboratory as they pursue the progress of science isolated and alone. It's an image that perhaps feels particularly recognisable both in Forster's *The Machine Stops* and in today's technological information age of online conferencing. 'Is he not really ignorant of the facts?' Carpenter asks. He concludes that 'Certainly, since he has not felt them, he is.' As an alternative, he poses a future of immersion in nature, a resistance to reliance on technology, and an embrace of an emotional approach towards life and learning. 'Facts', he argues 'are at least half feelings' — and that a shared sentiment with nature is vital to life, but the so-called 'objectivity' of machines alienate us from nature and this sentiment.

Written and published whilst living at Millthorpe, unlike his influences of Morris and Ruskin, Carpenter wrote his manifestos of utopian alternatives to the machine age from an active utopian practice. Utopia, for Carpenter, was not a post-revolution future but a practicable present. Although criticised as an escape from the 'real politics' of the urban, Millthorpe was instead an important socialist experiment that provided a glimpse at what a potential socialist future could look like — and how it might be run. Its constant cast of influential political figures shows that it was never a reclusive rural commune, but one that hoped to share the joy that a libertarian left could bring.

This is perhaps the reason why E. M. Forster's protagonist in *The Machine Stops* can physically escape the machine dystopia into the ecological Utopia, rather than experience it in a dream or vision as in other utopian literature around the turn of the century. *The Machine Stops* is perhaps a manifestation of Forster's own longing to escape the machine life of modernity and experience Carpenter's utopian Millthorpe. Although we might find that Forster's dystopia chimes scarily with our experience of technology today, this reading that longs for an escape into a practicable Utopia is perhaps a glimmer of hope.

The utopian project of Millthorpe is perhaps best summed up not by Forster's frequent longing allusions in his novels, or Carpenter's own philosophical texts, but rather Carpenter's partner George Merrill. On being challenged about their lifestyles at Millthorpe, he responded 'Can't you see we're in heaven here — We don't want any better than this!'. Indeed, in resistance to the machine age, life at Millthorpe was hard work. It was long days of physical labour in the garden, it was manual craftsmanship of sandals, it perhaps lacked some of the creature comforts to which we have become accustomed in the metropole. But, if these things are heaven — is that not the heart of Utopia? In an age where technology increasingly imposes on our lives, is there something we, like Forster, can ultimately take from Millthorpe to make it our saviour too?

Illustration by Jago Henderson

# The Italian Renaissance in Virtual Reality: Reviving the Long Lost Works of Italian Masters

Louisa Hunt & Maria Perry

What happens to art objects that have been lost, and how do we deal with them as art historians today? In the case of silverware from the Italian Renaissance, most of the beautiful objects designed and made in the sixteenth century were melted down and sold in later centuries to restore the wealth of failing noble families. The only trace of survival of these objects are intricate and detailed designs, by artists such as Michelangelo, Francesco Salviati, and Giulio Romano.

It is these designs that will take centre stage at an exhibition curated by Courtauld lecturers, Barbara Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini, in October this year. *Giulio Romano: The Power of Things* (8 October 2022 – 8 January 2023) will take place at Palazzo Te in Mantua, Italy. This exhibition not only aims to showcase these important, yet sometimes overlooked, sixteenth century drawings and designs in the magnificent setting of the Palazzo Te, but will do so using innovative technology to bring these lost objects from 500 years ago back to life.

Furlotti and Rebecchini have worked with Factum Arte, the leading company in art technology, to use 3D imaging to recreate Renaissance objects digitally, using existing designs. Factum Arte's mission is to bridge the gap between the physical and the digital by merging technology and craft skills, rethinking the way in which we experience art and objects.

Giulio Romano was an inventor and innovator of his time. Known as a pupil of Raphael, and for contributing to the design of the frescoes in the Villa Farnesina in Rome, Romano became an artist and architect in his own right. He moved to Mantua in 1524 to work for Federico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua. There, Romano designed the magnificent Palazzo Te, where the exhibition is held, along with many beautiful objects that live on through his drawings and designs, such as those of salt cellars and a set of prongs in the form of a duck.

It is certain that these objects held much power. In this exhibition, the power of these objects transcends time, brought to life using 3D imaging that leads as an example for how to marry sixteenth century objects with today's technology.

Interview with Barbara Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini (BF & GR) conducted by Louisa Hunt and Maria Perry (LH & MP)

LH & MP: Tell us about the exhibition *Giulio Romano: The Power of Things* at Palazzo Te.

BF & GR: Our exhibition *Giulio Romano: The Power of Things* focuses on sixteenth century design and includes drawings by artists such as Giulio Romano, Francesco Salviati, and Michelangelo, as well as objects seldom seen in conjunction with designs for comparable secular works. Beyond displaying designs and splendid luxury objects which once ennobled Italian courts, the exhibition highlights how artists strove to bring the objects to life through sophisticated, often humorous animal and human figures cleverly embedded in the objects they imagined. Ultimately, we would like to show how the design of objects for Italian courts was not a minor occupation for the most acclaimed artists of the day, but one in which they expressed their power of imagination and their fantasies with the greatest degree of freedom. The exhibition will take place in the rooms of Palazzo Te, Giulio Romano's architectural masterpiece, allowing a comparison of his design inventions with his celebrated frescoes and stuccoes.



**LH & MP: Why is it important to use technology in your exhibition and what are the benefits of using technology to view objects that have been destroyed or lost?**

BF & GR: Many sixteenth century design drawings for metalwork still exist, but very few of the objects crafted from them in precious metal in Italy survive, as the metal has been melted and reused over the centuries. Sophisticated digital technologies enable us to reconstruct these design drawings in 3D and to bring back to life the full extent of the artists' imagination.

**LH & MP: How do the technologies used in this exhibition provide a unique experience and insight into the objects that could not be achieved otherwise?**

BF & GR: The objects that we are going to reconstruct will be in silver with gilding, so they will have a strong impact on the viewer. We hope that the experience of seeing them in relation to their drawings will deeply transform the viewer's understanding of these inventions.

**LH & MP: Tell us about your experience working with Factum Arte and why you have chosen to work with them for this exhibition.**

BF & GR: Our decision to collaborate with Factum Arte stems from the fact that they possess extraordinary technical skills

and, in their many projects, have always entertained fruitful collaborations with art historians and researchers.

**LH & MP: Have you as curators ever used technology before to bring Renaissance objects back to life? If not, is there another example of technology being used in a Renaissance exhibition that has inspired you?**

BF & GR: This is our first experience in this area, but we were struck by both the reproductions of objects in the Piranesi exhibition in Venice in 2010, and by one of Raphael's cartoons at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

**LH & MP: What do you see for the future of using imaging in Renaissance scholarship and exhibitions?**

BF & GR: Technology is having a huge impact on every area of our lives. Inevitably, in the future, it will feature more and more prominently in exhibitions and in scholarship too. However, technology is a useful tool, but not an end in itself.

**LH & MP: Finally, what do you think Giulio Romano would say to his works being brought back to life 500 years later?**

BF & GR: He would definitely say: 'Things are transient, my ideas last forever.'



Illustration by Sasha Dunn

*'Above her, beneath her, and  
around her, The Machine  
hummed eternally; she did not  
notice the noise, for she had  
been born with it in her ears.'*

E. M. Forster, *The Machine Stops*

Photograph by George Goodhand  
Back cover art by Finlay Thompson

