

PLEASURE DOME

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LOST

IN

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AND

LATE

CAPITALISM

PLEASURE DOME
presents

**LOST AND FOUND IN LATE
CAPITALISM**

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*A Sponsored co-presentation with the Department of
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PLEASURE DOME is an artist-run presentation organization and publisher dedicated to experimental moving images in film, video, and media. It presents artists who expand, fracture and scrutinize the traditional cinematic spectacle, including those who use moving image technologies that are digital, interactive, or performative.



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FILM PROGRAM

Beyond Human Pete Burkeet (Ohio, USA), 2018.

Mad as Hell Emily Pelstring (Kingston, ON, CND) and Meg Remy (Toronto, ON, CND), 2017.

Gone Sale Matt Meindl (USA), 2018.

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Flat Pyramid Kevin Doherty (NY, USA), 2017.

FO

Well, truth is I made the work before drawing a link to Klein's series – the digital paint trails happened through an error when I was using the Unity game development software. After I screen captured the footage, Klein's series came to mind as a clear reference in history – from female flesh imprinting on canvas to digital representation of a male tracing shape with blue pixels on a digital canvas. Through motion capture techniques anyone can use their movement data to embody and animate a digital representation of any figure. For **Painting With The Man** I selected a 3D image of a man in a suit – which might signify a bureaucrat, a diplomat, an executive, a leader, or even the artist, Yves Klein. The avatar would elicit a closer connection to Klein if it was wearing a bow tie like the original formal suit Klein wore during the live painting. The avatar's suit however is close in color to Klein blue. Whereas Klein animated nude women as human paint brushes, I animated a 3D image of a man through motion capture which allowed me to embody a classic image of power – a man in a suit.

A nude body can be interpreted as without power or autonomy however this interpretation does not align with recall of an original female performer who indicated she felt empowered and respected as a collaborator in the work. My use of a dressed-up man in the suit disrupts the perception of power since I control, animate, and drive movement from within the hollow 3D mesh avatar. The suited figure performs two distinct dances I sourced from the internet – one from a young female and the other an older male. I recorded myself re-performing these dances and then applied that movement data to the male avatar. As well I added a control for the avatar to rotate their dance 360° on the spot, which reveals the backside of the figure as it turns and subverts front facing offensive / defensive or powerful body language. Rather than placing emphasis on 'Painting With THE Man' in the title I propose emphasis on WITH the man. Engagement through motion capture enabled me to explore or subvert cultural expectations of expression of gender through movement – both binary dances are embodied when I animate each from within the male avatar.



LOST AND FOUND IN LATE CAPITALISM

MASON WALES

Thirty years ago, Fredric Jameson (1991) characterized postmodernism—"the cultural logic of late capitalism"—as mired in a perpetual present and experienced as a loss of contiguity between past and future, resulting in a "waning of affect." In its isolation, the present engulfs and overwhelms the subject with a vividness and intensity that evacuates historicity. This "breakdown of temporality," Jameson argued, releases the present from all "intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis" (27).

But the economic rationality of late capitalism demands futures. As Jens Beckert (2016) demonstrates, although economists see the future as perfectly predictable through past data, the raw fact of uncertainty necessitates that "actors create imaginaries of economic futures, the achievement or avoidance of which motivates their decisions" (2). These 'fictional expectations' fuel capitalist dynamics. Financialization, distinct from other modes of market logic in that it has to do with individuals in their relation to time rather than things, disembeds these imagined futures, proliferating their influence and compounding their effect.

While Jameson posed postmodernism as part of a "feedback loop" between the cultural and economic, he describes a cultural field insulated, or detached, from the prevailing economic rationality (xv). The postmodern plays a sleight of hand, 'suitably distracting from the economic' while allowing new(er) modes and models of economic organization to be recategorized and depoliticized (xiv). Jameson's



postmodern subject was markedly middle class experiencing a totalizing exacerbation of modernity: "the symptoms and distorted expressions of the penetration even of middle-class lived experience by this strange new global relativity of the colonial network" (410; emphasis added).

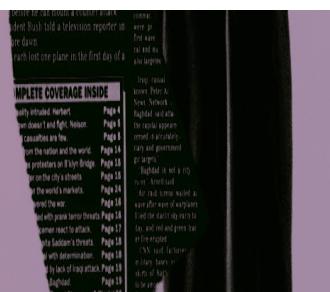
At least in North America, the post-war expansion of the middle class coincided with a transformation of its class character—from the relative independence of what C. Wright Mills (1951) called "a big stratum of small enterprisers" to the conformity of the white collar workforce. The post-Cold War thickening of late capitalism has been accompanied by its own transformation—the hollowing out of the middle class through increasing precarity. While, for many, residual generational wealth has mitigated its material effects, the folding of the former middle class into "the precariat" has produced a kind of moulting of bourgeois subjectivity through an alignment between the cultural logic and the economic rationality of capitalism wherein the future is experienced, as Beckert writes, "as an unending disruption of the present" (23).

Guy Standing defines the section of the precariat pushed out from the middle class as "the educated, who experience in their irregular labour and in the lack of opportunity to construct a narrative for their lives a sense of relative deprivation and status frustration" (2015: np). Jon-Arild Johannessen (2019) argues that "late capitalism" is actually the emergence of a new globalized form of feudal capitalism. This suggests that if, as Standing asserts, the precariat is a dangerous 'class-in-the-making', then knowledge workers/the creative class, to be in any way useful to the development of a class-for-itself, must work to tie their particular lack of a sense of 'future' to the experiences of uncertainty faced by the precariat as a whole. This requires, first, a

desertion of the ahistorical cultural milieu Jameson described through the treatment of historical content as such.

At the centre of this program lies an exploration of affect and representation which rebukes, as both theory and fact, Jameson's assertion that meaning filled affects have been replaced by empty intensities. **A Feverish Fascination** (CLENDINNING, 2018) attempts to overwhelm us with our own intensities, forcing us to examine them for meaning, leading us to question their moral grounding or, at least, correctness. **Music of Desire** (REEVES, 2016) provides a counter, deploying sound in search of a sense of comfort, with our own and others' sexuality, challenging the dominance of the image and its role in commodification. The vertiginous **Painting with the Man** (OLAFSON, 2017) and the layered framing that saturates **What is an Object?** (DEUMER, 2015) insist that recognition of representation's inevitable entanglement with the past is central to changing our relationship to both. Each confronts the political necessity, and potential subjective productivity, of dealing with the way history fills out the present.

This centre is surrounded by further entreaties to recognize how the imagined futures of the past come to shape the present. **Beyond Human** (BURKEET, 2018) and **Public Domain** (BRITSKI, 2018) replay the process of past projection. The first explores the possibility latent in (historical) dead ends — turning around. The second painstakingly reconstructs how they're made. While **Mad as Hell** (PELSTRING & REMY, 2017) charmingly illustrates the crisis in middle class subjectivity as drawn through its historical relationship to American empire, **Gone Sale** (MEINDL, 2018) creates a fruitful conflation of the decaying suburban domestic and consumer space. The last two pieces in the program, **Maelstroms** (CAPLAN, 2015) and **Flat Pyramid** (Doherty, 2017), are,



counterintuitively, the most promising. While they document and re-narrativize precisely the coercive and ideological force of late capitalism, in doing so, they work to develop an empathy and intimacy that might advance into solidarity.

These works do not portend a relapse into the frenetic pastiche of postmodernism. While they return to what Jameson called “the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality,” they do not fall back- or prey to—the nostalgic millenarianism that marks contemporary fascism and right-wing nationalism’s supposed rejection of the “postmodern.” Jameson saw experimental video, or video art, as characteristically post-modern. Its rapid total(izing) flow of images, he argued, abnegate memory and therefore historicity; “fold[ing] back immediately into the accumulating detritus of historical time” (77). But, perhaps typically, Jameson also suggests that video itself resists theorization. The works arranged here by Mr. Khayambashi seem to confirm the latter point by undermining the former. Each attempts to remake, or reattach, the corollary between past, present, and future.

But rather than recouping the ‘critical distance’ Jameson asserted had “very precisely been abolished in the new space of Postmodernism”, these re-appropriations exhibit an acceptance of proximity (48). As such, rather than as an agent of capitalism—as fascist ideology is often understood—these works might operate as technologies of critique that, in exhibiting “the critical acceptance of the categories which rule social life,” as Max Horkheimer wrote, “contain simultaneously their condemnation.” Rather than reading these pieces as part of “art’s” response to the “age of late capitalism” finally being reached (“that time that we have been warned about for decades”), we might consider them as evidence that it has finally been acknowledged.



In use, the term ‘late capitalism’ often appears less a stage than an orientation towards the future—an assessment of the capitalist system’s potential to maintain and propel itself. Whether this stage (or “age”) is truly capitalism’s “zenith” has yet to be seen, but these texts, in their historicized explorations of temporality, suggest that it is far from inevitable. We could take the ‘late’ in late capitalism as a kind of promise of, at least, an end. But importantly, none of these works offer themselves (or critique or art in general) as a substitute for politics itself. Rather, these adaptations, rearrangements, and reconfigurations submerge the past in the present and in doing so reorient it towards the future; a future, some future, that will someday be present whether bright, mundane, terrifying, or empty. They offer themselves as a space—a coherent space—in which to reconnect what appeared severed in the post-modern moment Jameson described. As such, they wade through it with us and help to clear the ground.

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Q & A

BEYOND HUMAN, Pete Burkeet (Ohio, USA), 2018. 9:51 min.

PD

Heaven's Gate has been a topic of renewed popular and academic interest in recent years. Certainly, the group's engagement with the internet and interest in fusing science fiction with theology lends itself to a post-internet aesthetic. It's easy to fetishize or reduce the iconography of a group like this, but your work manages to pick up on what's fascinating about Heaven's Gate while not falling into tropes. What does the experimental or non-narrative lend to telling stories about or representing cults or new religious movements (NRMs)?

PB

I have been fascinated by Heaven's Gate for a long time because of their aesthetics. They called their bodies vehicles, lived as genderless as they could, and some went so far as to become castrated. In their 'exit interviews' which anyone can watch on YouTube they delivered their message in robes and custom patches resembling ones worn by astronauts, and their leader delivered his remarks in a polypropylene lawn chair with his image digitally repeated behind him to infinity. I suppose one could get caught in the kitsch of it all but I was more into sampling the energy and excitement they beamed about what awaited them after they 'exited'. In **Beyond Human** I wanted to make something that could do justice to their ecstasy about leaving earth for a cosmic sci-fi journey.

MAD AS HELL, Emily Pelstring & Meg Remy (Kingston, ON, CND), 2017.
3:00 min.

PD

Your piece uses an upbeat song and the sometimes comical expression of lip-syncing or hyperbolic choreography to effectively express rage. Can you speak a little bit more to the ways that either comedy or exaggeration is mobilized politically in your work?

EP + MR

Since this is a pop music video, its main function is to promote the song. At the same time, we were interested in maximizing the opportunity to deliver a serious message. Humour was a necessary tool, used to distribute the weight between a complex, urgent topic and a promotional act. Also, if we didn't laugh, we would have only cried and gotten no work done.

Our critique is not limited to late capitalism, or to the military actions of the Obama administration, which the lyrics address. To talk about the recent and current costs of war, we mostly used footage from the 1940s-1970s. The age of the footage should tell us that what we are experiencing is not new. This ever-prevailing paradigm is already so extreme that nothing we could possibly do in a music video would be an exaggeration.

GONE SALE, Matt Meindl (USA), 2018. 5:00 min.

PD

The way that your work so effectively blends textured images of shopping and vintage signage with sinister music and voiceover reminded me a lot of Peter Strickland's recent experimental department store horror film In Fabric. Can you speak to the ways that GONE SALE evokes genre, despite its non-narrative format? What can horror uniquely evoke or express about late-stage capitalism?

MM

My film was influenced by the atmospheric elements of horror but rather than generating dread as a lead-up to a scare, I wanted **Gone Sale**

to just sort of draw out those eerie feelings and marinate in them. Every shot is smeared with shadows and accented by heavy-duty-moody music. There's humor mixed in too but the concept seemed compatible with horror because driving past a dead mall doesn't feel much different to me than driving past a haunted house. It's creepy. You have to look. You wonder what's inside. I always think of a line from Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* that's something like, "Nothing is so desolate as a place where life has been and gone."

I'm also influenced by the way that we experience horror when we're young, which I think is very impressionistic; it's less about what happens in a movie and more about how it all feels and how it heats up your imagination. I like non-narrative experimental horror because I think it gets close to replicating that kind of viewing experience. I'm thinking Mike Olenick's *Red Luck* here, or a lot of Guy Maddin's work.

It's interesting to me that the shopping mall board game featured in **Gone Sale** was marketed to a generation that grew up and entered the workforce during a financial crisis and recession. The object of the game (get money and buy all the things woo!) didn't seem all that weird for kids in the early 90's but now feels totally absurd. And maybe horror is in a unique position to underscore the mounting absurdities of our foundering economic system. Half the filmmaker's work is done—I'm already scared.



PUBLIC DOMAIN, Jason Britski (SK,CND), 2018. 4:33 min.

PD

Despite its archival footage, there's something very contemporary about PUBLIC DOMAIN. Can you speak to the ways that past and future converge in this work?

JB

With the film **Public Domain** I chose to use old archival footage that was all literally in the public domain. It is made with footage from approximately 1950-70, but it was always the goal to give it a more contemporary feel.

The old footage is very interesting in its own right, but I thought that with

with the counterpoint of the sound design that I could inject some of the tension that has crept into the political landscape in recent years. To make a subtle statement about what is happening in the turbulent times we seem to have found ourselves in presently. I thought that it fit the scenario unfolding in America right now to show images that harkens back to a time that is being held up by many as the "good old days", and to try and incorporate that sense of disruption, division, and anger through the relationship of the sound to the image.

The past and future do converge in many different ways in the juxtaposition of the audio and the imagery creating tension, humour, and hopefully introspection.



A FEVERISH FASCINATION, Imogen Wilson (Windsor, ON, CND), 2018.
20:00 min.



PD

Even from the title alone, we know that A FEVERISH FASCINATION is going to strongly evoke the body. Of course, the way you intercut found footage and layer sounds is incredibly visceral but I'm curious if you can comment more about the title of the work? Why are 'fever' and 'fascination' important descriptors of the spectator's reception of this piece?

IM

When I made 'Fascination' I was thinking about guilt and shame, the allure of watching acts of violence and consumer's capitalist preferences in crisp and life-like images. To make something grossly abstracted felt like a resistance to this better-than-real-life image perfection.

I chose the title because I wanted to reference the kinds of cliché 'baser instincts' that are often represented in popular media and entertainment. In my video, I'm interrogating the role of the observer, the watcher—I wanted to think critically about how violence and sexuality in media can

affect our perception of reality. This fascination with the moving image seems feverish; once you dive in things begin to repeat themselves and become more powerful.

Throughout the 20-minute film, patterns begin to emerge. I hope that the viewer is compelled to look for consistencies, and later, the eventual disintegration of any formula. These patterns and smaller narratives are at first a like cheeky and dated, but as the images become more foreboding or violent the image abstracts completely. To take a piece of film work, re-examine it and abstract it is to take control of that image and the power it imbues. I give the viewer a small glimpse into what they are seeing, but in **A Feverish Fascination** the appropriator is in the driver's seat.



MUSIC OF DESIRE, Kristin Reeves (KY, USA), 2016. 8:00 min.

PD

You suggest that you were excited and terrified of finding your own image in a medical archive during your research. Meanwhile, the images in your video are medical images of people in what could be called private moments. In your work and more broadly, what are the tensions between medical academia and privacy?

KR

I was photographed for pediatric research and unexpectedly found the images while alone in an examination room. It was me but also not. I was abstracted material and it was shocking. Medical images became personal because of this experience. Though I never discovered published images of myself specifically, I have found moments in medical/hygiene/educational media that felt like my own experience: intimate, real, and private turned institutional, voyeuristic, and performative. Media cadaver is how I describe the educational materials I've been using. I think of my process as reanimation. Sometimes media bodies need to be reworked to understand/examine their pre-mortem use and other times I am conducting my own aggressive experimentation on them, afterwards prescribing media therapy or education on the bodies within my films using pop songs and art tools. In **Music of Desire** video

synthesizers model brain signal overload, the source materials point to sexual dysfunction which is frequently a symptom of trauma. The clinic and the art world deal with intimate human experience. I'm interested in where these histories and objectives cross paths.

The pediatric research I was a subject of (stature/growth) was used to loosen the interpretation of bio-ethical laws created to protect vulnerable bodies from exploitation. Part of my intention in using archival images was to avoid creating research subjects for my own use while criticizing for-profit bio-medical industry that recruits subjects as bio-capital. But I realized that the ethical concerns that I had regarding the use of vulnerable bodies could apply to found media.



PAINTING WITH THE MAN, Freya Björg Olafson (Toronto, ON, CND), 2017. 3:37 min.



PD

You say that this work was inspired by Yves Klein's Anthropometrie series, which employed nude women as living paintbrushes, in a classic bit of mid-century misogyny. Meanwhile, your work, 'Painting with THE Man', interestingly employs a man in a suit. Can you speak more to this "the man" designation and the dressing up of your paintbrush?

FO

Well, truth is I made the work before drawing a link to Klein's series – the digital paint trails happened through an error when I was using the Unity game development software. After I screen captured the footage, Klein's series came to mind as a clear reference in history – from female flesh imprinting on canvas to digital representation of a male tracing shape with blue pixels on a digital canvas. Through motion capture techniques anyone can use their movement data to embody and animate a digital representation of any figure. For **Painting With The Man** I selected a 3D image of a man in a suit – which might signify a bureaucrat, a diplomat, an executive, a leader, or even the artist, Yves Klein. The avatar would elicit a closer connection to Klein if it was wearing a bow tie like the original formal suit Klein wore during the live painting. The avatar's suit however is close in color to Klein blue. Whereas Klein animated nude women as human paint brushes, I animated a 3D image of a man through motion capture which allowed me to embody a classic image of power – a man in a suit.

A nude body can be interpreted as without power or autonomy however this interpretation does not align with recall of an original female performer who indicated she felt empowered and respected as a collaborator in the work. My use of a dressed-up man in the suit disrupts the perception of power since I control, animate, and drive movement from within the hollow 3D mesh avatar. The suited figure performs two distinct dances I sourced from the internet – one from a young female and the other an older male. I recorded myself re-performing these dances and then applied that movement data to the male avatar. As well I added a control for the avatar to rotate their dance 360° on the spot, which reveals the backside of the figure as it turns and subverts front facing offensive / defensive or powerful body language. Rather than placing emphasis on 'Painting With THE Man' in the title I propose emphasis on WITH the man. Engagement through motion capture enabled me to explore or subvert cultural expectations of expression of gender through movement – both binary dances are embodied when I animate each from within the male avatar.

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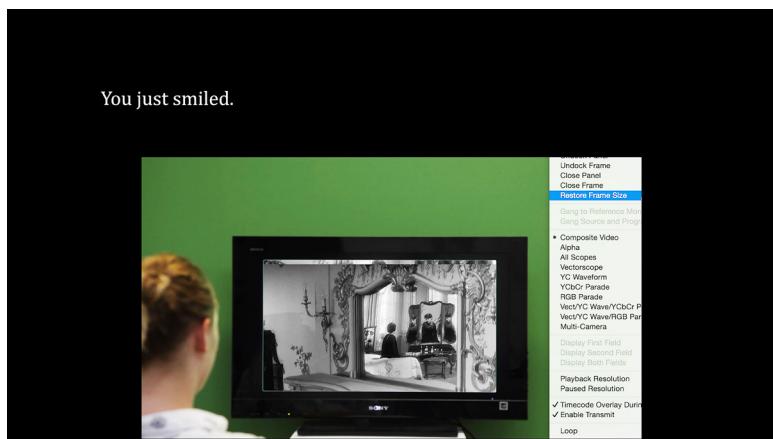
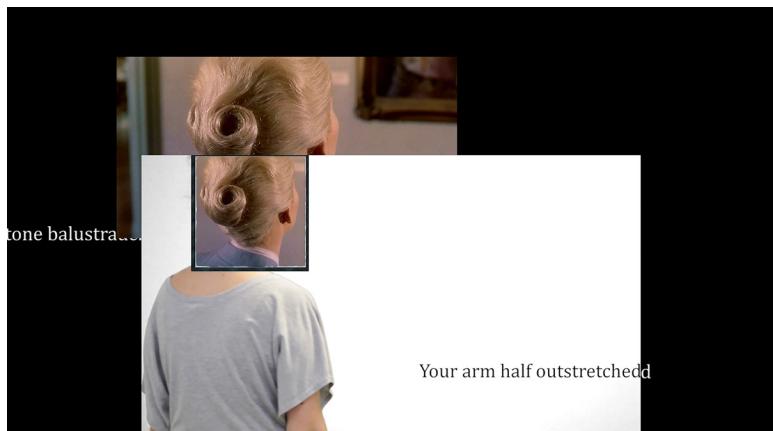
WHAT IS AN OBJECT, Stephanie Deumer (NY, USA) 2015. 7:06 min.

PD

I am almost tempted to ask you to verbalize the answer to your own question, what is an object? However, I would be more curious to know about this divide between analogue and digital media that seems to be present in your work. You take objectifying analogue media and use digital manipulations to subjectify them. Is there something about digital media that you find inherently liberating?

SD

I don't think digital media is inherently liberating, but I do think in the context of this video, digital media can be seen as more accessible than analogue. I have only ever viewed most of the found footage and reference imagery that is featured in the video through digital media, whether by way of digital photographs of paintings and sculptures, or digital reproductions of films. Because of the development and proliferation of digital media, I have been able to access and view works like Gerhard Richter's painting, *Betty* (1988), for example, or Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* (1958). However, with digital media allowing for these works to reach wider audiences and become more prolific, also comes the multiplication and reinforcement of their content: which is European, male-centric, heteronormative, and oftentimes discriminatory against women. In a world that is predominantly patriarchal, these works along with their views are perpetuated as the universal standard, in part because of digital media. On the other hand, digital media can allow for other views and lesser-known works to become seen more widely. It can also be easily manipulated to allow for critiques of its content and form. In my video, I am interested in directly engaging with and subverting not only the appropriated works themselves, which are analog media, but also the multiple material realities in which they exist and circulate. So while, to a certain extent, I am using digital manipulations to subjectify objectifying analogue media, I wouldn't say that I consider digital media to be a utopian ideal.



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MAELSTROMS, Lana Caplan (CA, USA), 2015. 7:30 min.

PD

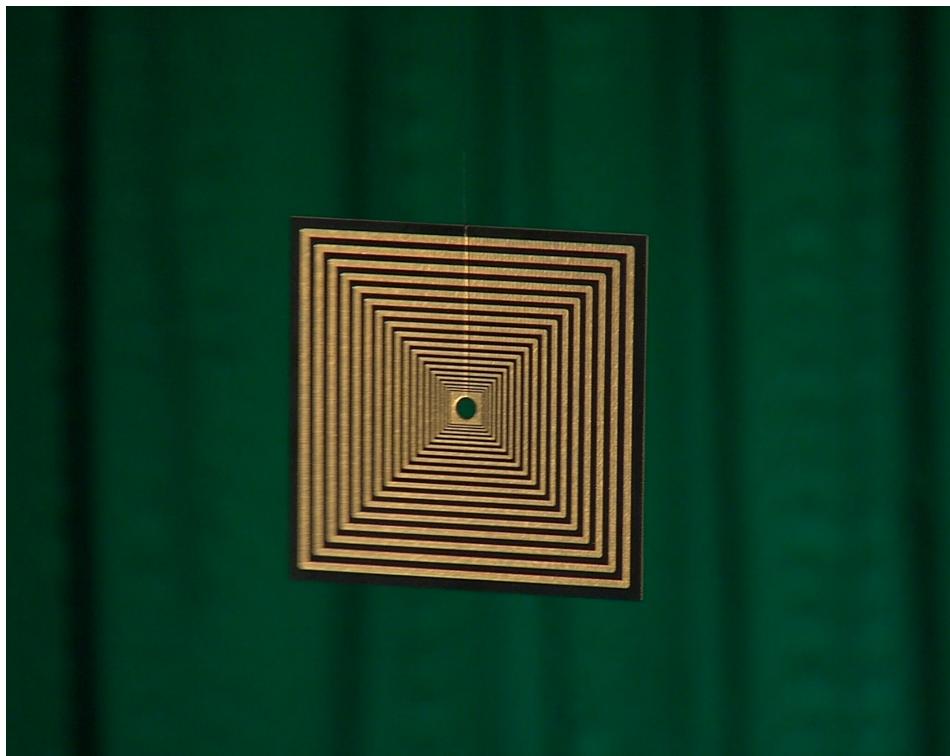
The footage in Maelstroms ultimately amounts to surveillance footage on an international level. The end goal of surveillance is to keep the undesirable out and away from the eyes of the established citizenry. What role do you believe the omnipresence of surveillance and dataveillance plays in our day to day lives?

LC

In this century, a twisted and broad societal implementation of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon has been realized. His 18th century design was a circular building, lined with backlit open door cells, under the threat of omnipresent surveillance from a central observation tower. The residents in the cells could always be seen and yet never see the inhabitant of the tower. Foucault called it "a design of subtle coercion for a society". Today, the optical surveillance this architecture afforded has been replaced by omnipresent electronic eyes and data. And like in the Panopticon, the expectation of this surveillance has become an intrinsic component of everyone's lives. We know that every keystroke we make on the Internet is recorded, all of our movements tracked by GPS in our phones, and cameras constantly watch us in public - retail stores, city intersections, public transit stations, and front doors. This scrutiny has become naturalized in our lives as surely as air or gravity. The ubiquity of surveillance allows people to assume the record of their activities are likely just lost blips in the torrent of noise of flowing streams of images and data - until your identity is stolen or you get arrested for belonging to a political group or your employer asks about your Facebook posts. And now the surveillance has doubled back, asking the watchers to watch themselves, reversing the point of view with body cams on police officers and whistleblowers releasing classified data. Bentham's simpler notion of social control has run amok, caught in a crossfire of ubiquitous information, images, and data.

■

FLAT PYRAMID, Kevin Doherty (NY, USA), 2017. 11:30 min.



PD

How did you find the art in predatory behaviour?

KD

What I was most interested in was the response to predatory behaviour — people who oppose or fail to adhere to it. The tactics of a pyramid scheme, which "Flat pyramid" centers around, are more brash than artful and the materials they use to train others in their methods border on camp. Instead, it is their system that serves the most predatory purpose by hijacking the trust of individuals and their immediate communities to steal from them. Some work well within this system by replicating scenarios and reciting set scripts to reel people in. Others do not or flat out refuse to. Despite often tragic results, the fact that many cannot replicate this behavior is the source of some hope, in that they might prove more resilient than the scheme itself.



PD
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