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NET NARRATIVE @ Carlos/Ishikawa

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Iain Ball, Ed Fornieles, Marlie Mul, Katja Novitskova, Ben Vickers, Holly White, Artie Vierkant. Curated by Harry Burke

It is hard to escape the legacy of Rem Koolhaas' 2001 essay *Junkspace* when it comes to the Post-Internet movement. After all, pertaining to the proliferating materialism of a post-industrial society, the essay pinpointed precisely what would come to define the post-internet climate. *Net Narratives*, curated by Harry Burke, obviously follows in this lineage, proposing an erratic display of formatted, rendered, and programmed sculpture works by seven prominent post-internet artists. Yet the show does more than explore the image fetishization of Internet culture, as it takes a critical stance on the new materialism surrounding the 2d image object. Perhaps as an attempt to reverse Koolhaas' observation that there is 'no form, only proliferation', *Net Narratives* displays works thatexplore form as fragments, isolated events of online narratives. As if salvaged from some Internet wreckage, the objects on display all share a common sense of existing as debris, as a 'weird thing', as Ian Bogost would put it, ' a computer left behind'.

Arguably, the influence of the recent turn towards the post-human in speculative philosophies seems to have played a role in the organization of the show, yet only insofar as it attempts to untie the image object from its relational ties online. The objects stand rather unexplained and inert as one tries to disambiguate the connective elements within the exhibition, allowing for their strange thingliness to protrude. Yet paradoxically, this materiality often appears as familiar and somewhat banal; the objects in themselves are comfortably recognizable as products of online culture, not far from the Internet subjectivity that came to delineate the New Aesthetic as a movement. If this post-internet banality is, in fact, what Burke is getting at, its affect on form is not as challenging as it promised. Holly White's *Never Forget Always Regret, phone photos from then til now, (Summer of my life 2012)*, for example, consists of hanging cardboard ovals strung across the gallery, pasted with low-res images taken on her mobile phone as the title suggests. The imagery is a mash-up of cultural scenes, Olympic branding and Native symbolism, an excess of narrative exemplary of the junkspace sensation of online browsing. The materials operate in a zone of pixelated, listless inkjet prints in a pale grey, literally discharged from the virtual and caught in a new form of obsolescence in the real. In the mode of a conspiracy theorist, perhaps implied in the crassly taped tinfoil on the moon-like shapes, the work attenuates disambiguation by blocking the viewer with excessive noise. In this sense, the speculative turn comes, in fact, from the blatant announcement of symbolic paranoia: the reduction of symbols to their surface qualities renders them a part of the real.

Ed Fornieles' piece, on the other hand, makes a very convincing nod towards a formalist aesthetic by maintaining material integrity and complete physical presence in the space. Consisting of a bloody shirt, a coffee cup and a piece of wood, the piece seemed to return to formal considerations of line, shape and texture, while maintaining a clear reference to a narrative through its representational elements. Though Fornieles' narrative is arguably the most widely known, the objects in themselves bear an air of mysticism, of resistance to interpretation. What comes to mind is a key point from Robert Morris's 'Notes on Sculpture 1-3': "The clearer the nature of the values of sculpture becomes the stronger the opposition appears". Morris' claim that the dialectical evolution of art has been structural, and that this structure in fact lies in the support (the objects, the elements of the work), emphasizes the idea that *Net Narratives* seems to target. The evolution of the image object online has perhaps been formal and by simulating its materiality in virtual space, artists are now able to approach objects away from what Morris voiced as illusionism—what could be

seen as correlationism in our current philosophical climate. Fornieles' work aptly expands the compressed image file, into a materiality affected by the unfolding of online narrative, but does not claim the necessity to extend outside of its virtual delineations.

 Other works, such as Iain Ball's *RARE EARTH SCULPTURES [Cerium]*, or Marlie Mul's *Second Hand Smoke,* seem to expand their narratives to a broader political context. While still operating under the slightly ludicrous surface qualities of net culture, both works attempt to create a new understanding of the relationship between new forms of cultural production and an expanding online economy. However, whilst Ball's piece seems to point out the production possibilities that come with a globalized network through the irony of the rather ludicrous object, Mul's smoking emoticons point to the direct and indirect social consequences of the amalgamation—or perhaps obscuring—between virtual and real spheres. Finally, Ben Vickers and Artie Vierkant's pieces remained somewhat generic, creating discrete objects presented under the context of image circulation, online aesthetics and social networks. The relationship between the digital and the real image remained at best a conceptual echo, one more look at the lack of fixity in the post-internet image-as-object, subject to continuous alterations over time.

Aiming to traverse the boundary of the virtual, the exhibition exists both in the gallery, as well as online, as a downloadable catalogue. Yet ironically it is the online content of *Net Narratives* that comes forth as inaccessible and difficult to navigate. The catalogue, a now 'traditional' display of Internet research materials —Tumblr images, lysergic gradients, amateur aesthetics inherent to the 90s—is virtually indistinguishable from the syncopated browsers of any web user. Though slightly redundant at times (in that internet excess we all partake in), the catalogue did however offer an interesting critical background into the contexts that the objects originated from. Avoiding any direct references to the materiality of the works, the catalogue alludes to the transformations undergone by the image object, allowing the gallery space to become the logical next step.

It is in the space of the gallery that the malleability of the post-internet object seduces, as simultaneously indifferent and aware to the vernacular context it has descended from. Yet removed from the context of the screen as a medium, the works obtain autonomy separate from the communal space of the web. Junkspace, as it were, is organized into a neat, if not somewhat undefined, proposal for the future of Post-Internet objecthood. It is the banality, the ubiquitous nature of this strategy that attracts, where objects move seamlessly from the virtual to the physical, permeating the curatorial contexts of screen to gallery space with very conscious irreverence to any absolute formal standards. Despite this, the show surprises in its formal quotations, forming a viable proposition for a more progressive approach towards the application of Post-Internet work in real life.

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• Next