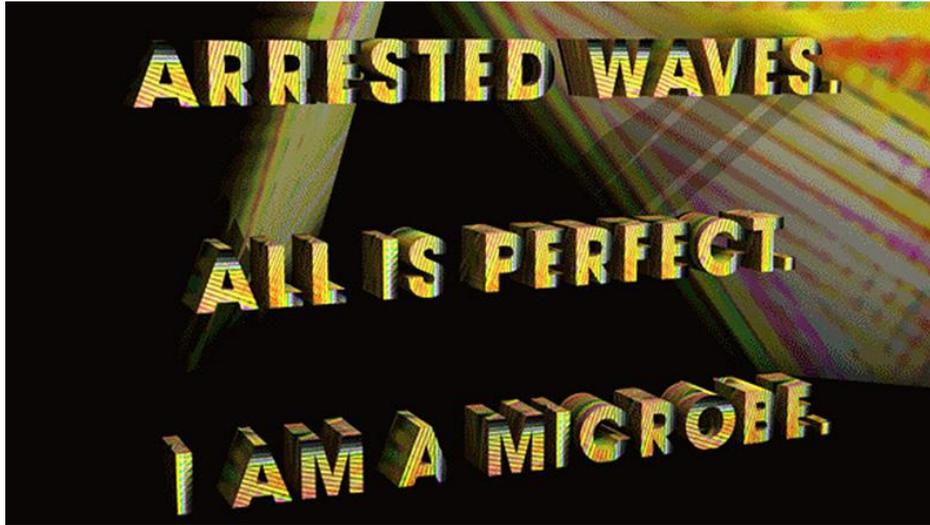


MONTE VISTA

1206 Maple Ave Los Angeles, CA 90015 5th floor #523



Bryne Rasmussen, *ALL IS PERFECT*, animated GIFs, duration variable 2016/2021

Artifacts of Sentience

September 10th - October 2nd, 2022

Artists' Reception: Saturday, September 17th, 7-10pm

Closing Performance: Sunday, October 2nd, 2pm

MONTE VISTA PROJECTS is pleased to present *Artifacts of Sentience*, a multimedia group exhibition curated by Molly Schulman and Bridget Batch. Join us for the artists' reception on September 17, 7-10pm and a live projected performance for the closing on October 2, 2pm.

In its second iteration, *Artifacts of Sentience* showcases a snapshot of art created at the cusp of this tsunami of technology transforming our humanity. Humans seem compelled to leave a mark, scratching graffiti since at least the cave paintings preserved at Lascaux 19,000 years ago. The internet is the largest and most inviting blank wall of all. As two artists and mothers in conversation, we realized that we are the last generation to have experienced a childhood *sans* internet and thereby the last to have that experience inform our parenting. Through distance learning and remote-working parents, this global pandemic overwhelmingly forced tablets into kids' ever-demanding (and human-defining) opposable thumbs. As we each post our own mediated content, who will corral our history?

Artifacts of Sentience places works together that contemplate, shift, bend and play with technology's effect on our daily interactions, systems of communication, our physical beings and psyches. The exhibition's

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artists delve into lesser known histories within Big Tech and the internet. The ubiquity and advancement of the internet and its better half, the smartphone, redefine our language, habits and personæ. As our virtual and corporeal identities merge, our systems of communication shift. Zoom meeting after Google Hangout after Facetime after Instagram Live after Postmates delivery after Netflix, we plug in our phones to recharge next to our beds as we slumber, burnt out from an exhausting day of being online. We awaken the next day to the ding of our alerts, pondering how long we can sustain this online lifestyle.

With its predictive, autocorrected text and Emoji features, smart technology can be a valuable and often necessary part of our daily visual culture. The universality of Emojis, set by the international organization *Unicode*, reflects pop culture while referencing an ancient hieroglyphic language and the uncertain future of a communication system that is constantly evolving. Emojis enhance the emotional weight of a text or email, while the smartness of our phones often fills in the blanks in our minds, by anticipating our next thought, leaving open the question of just who, or what, is doing the feeling or thinking. We develop technology—but it trains us.

Sarana Mehra's painted resin sculpture *Canula* references and materializes the connection of human responses to illness & medicine and its continued conflation with belief, even in our scientifically advanced era, to ancient artifacts extracted from an archeological dig. Mehra's painting, *Follow the Flag Til Your Grave*, collages symbols that reference and draw parallels between the Unicode library of Emojis and ancient milagros, small religious folk charms that are used for healing purposes. Mehra relates these symbols back to the human body, in all its vulnerability and resilience, as we ail and heal. Soon these symbols, along with our online identities, will be an artifact of a foregone virtual language and culture, mere snapshots of the early 21st Century.

In direct reference to the foundation of these now integral components of our lives, Soyoung Shin's iconic tapestry *24,000 BCE - 1992 CE* commemorates early female computer programmers, including two of the six who wrote the language for ENIAC, the first general purpose computer whose binary code was based on the jacquard weaving Shin employs. The women who worked on ENIAC, and other early programmers, were omitted from official computer science histories - these women are absent from press photographs of ENIAC's team. Shin collapses time, depicting the Victorian Countess and inventor of the first computer algorithm, Ada Lovelace, as a contemporary of ENIAC's programmers, along with Grace Hopper, one of the inventors of the COBOL programming language and Annie Albers, pioneering Modernist whose focus on textiles reflects the origin of computing itself.

For *ALL IS PERFECT*, Bryne Rasmussen has created a series of Animated Graphic Interchange Formats—otherwise known as GIFs—a media format definitive, endemic, and memetic to the internet. Each GIF features a different piece of aspirational wisdom, culled from various dark corners of the

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internet—enigmatic cult-leader-wannabes who broadcast via Youtube, a Sufi mystic, a media theorist, Russian literature, a corporate motto, to name a few. Extracted from their original platform, Rasmussen transforms them into thoughtful, mantric aphorisms (well, mostly).

The collaborative duo TOWERS, culls imagery from subjects they revere - video games, internet memes and the like, and use machine-learning to turn them into images reminiscent of ancient reliquaries. These images are then fed through a fractal compositing program, but the process doesn't end there. Returning to reverence, they offer their work to the sun gods, exposing the images on photo-sensitive paper to sunlight producing brilliant blue, mystical cyanotype prints, as in *Time Generated Daily*.

Utilizing 3D scanning technology, Elizabeth Leister attempts the difficult task of capturing her own body, becoming both performance artist and muse. The act of self-scanning becomes a *pas de deux*, as she both maneuvers her body to capture the contours of her form, while remaining motionless so the scan produces a readable image. Leister embraces the digital fallout and glitches in *Mirror #5* and *Mirror #7*, so while we can discern recognizable body parts, the final product appears abstract and surreal. Despite the austerity of the scan, through this intimate and delicate manipulation, Leister creates an image wrought with emotion.

Salomeh Grace's intimate drawings are sourced from social media, namely Instagram. Certain images capture her attention as she scrolls through the feed, turning what is often, for many of us, a mindless involuntary habit (compulsion) into a contemplative exploration. In her drawing for this show *In the Studio*, we see the back of a man slumped in a chair, motionless, floating against the green construction paper background. Is he in the midst of a daydream, having an existential meditation, or perhaps consuming his individualized algorithmic feast on his personal device? This projection, perhaps best left to the viewer, echoes the very limited context we have for each image in our curated social media feeds. Somehow, Grace manages to quash the chaos of social media and provide a quiet moment suspended in an unknown time.

Gottfried Haider's practice joins theoretical computer science into the exquisite details that make up an existence. To create *Californian Rock*, he cast two rocks embedded with tracking devices, from real ones found in the California desert. He then introduced the faux rocks into an environment where some of the youngest stones in the world lay scattered across the landscape - Iceland. As it happens, someone picked up one of the rocks and made it their own, unwittingly offering up a surveilled, anonymous journey. Haider too ends up on this unexpected sojourn, chasing the tracking device, always one step behind, as revealed in the book accompanying the rock's templates.

Multimedia artist Selwa Sweidan draws upon a tragic familial and colonial event to inscribe a work of poetry and haunting beauty onto a piece of cast bio-plastic in *Ancestral Touch (or) my alphabet body, my meshy mess*. The fleshy, molded piece conveys the fragility of the body and our lives, even as we continuously

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attempt to alter and transcend this mortality through our digital renderings. This organic piece pulsates to life with vibrating jolts from ERM motors which are used in consumer electronics to produce haptic (touch) feedback. Sweidan invites viewers to touch her piece.

Cindy Jeffers offers three sculptures *Marsupial*, *Monotreme* and *Ungulate*, all of which she has programmed to react to external stimuli. She turns cast replicas of the uterus of these types of animals into responsive sculptures. Originally inspired by medical illustrations that depicted disembodied wombs as wearing skirts, Jeffers comments on the long history of tainted gender projection into the supposedly neutral scientific perspective. Are the womb-machines capable of creating life? Of course not, but the boundary of life's beginning and preciousness is a nether region where perhaps no one but artists need tread.

For the final closing night, performance artist C. Tai Tai will bring a work that continues the theme of contemplating where the body ends and the network begins, as her remote live performance will appear projected in the gallery space. Donned in body armor formed by her own body parts, *A hard baby searches and tries strolling in the garden* is a performance piece that plays with the fragility of our own flesh and our very human tendency to mistreat ourselves as we plod through life's travails. As C. Tai Tai moves her weighted down body, the cumbersome gear deteriorates and fractures. Theoretically meant to protect, the inverse effect happens, deeming her armor dysfunctional, uncomfortable and even painful. As an artifact of this performance, a ceramic armor piece she constructed will be on display throughout the exhibition.

The corporeality of human existence continues, even as we seem determined to fling ourselves headlong into the Cloud. The physical can bring difficulty and pain, but it also serves as a profound source of pleasure and connection. The coldness of computation often seems almost antithetical to humanity. Perhaps the tension between the body and the cool, calm clicking of network processes will be infinite, or one day we will transcend it. Of course we don't know but this exhibition brings all of that tension into contemplation while placing the screen just a bit out of arm's reach for a moment

Ultimately, to not embrace the digital world and consign oneself as an outlier is impractical and near impossible. But those of us who remain within the greater stranglehold of industrialized culture get to make choices. We ask ourselves important questions—who are we offline, online and what is the distinction? The artists selected for *Artifacts of Sentience* come from varying backgrounds and practices, but they each incorporate their relationship with modern technology using a sense of delicacy while flirting with destruction. They choose to apply digital technology and its particularities as opposition or as tools, but always as something to be profoundly considered.

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Artists: Bryne Rasmussen, Cindy Jeffers, Elizabeth Leister, Gottfried Haider, Salomeh Grace, Sarana Mehra, Selwa Sweidan, Soyoung Shin, C. Tai Tai, TOWERS

Curators: Bridget Batch and Molly Schulman

Performance Date: October 2nd, 2pm, by C. Tai Tai

Gallery Hours: Saturday and Sunday 1-5

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