

Anonymous Materials at Fridericianum

November 14th, 2013

The city of Kassel has played host to quintennial mammoth show, Documenta, for the past 6 decades. For the next two months, however, Kassel's Fridericianum Museum is playing host to a more modest showcase of artists whose practice focuses on technology and its impact on the world, but with a vigor and immediacy that makes you wonder – what exactly is going on here?

“Speculations on Anonymous Materials” combines the voices of artists who touch on the consequences of living in our post-information age: an age where you, me and everyone else is using the Internet and computer technology on an unprecedented scale. Inclusive technological change has seduced grandmas into paying bills, Mexican drug-lords into sharing photos and (almost) everyone else into using its services for all manners of complex and mundane tasks. In such a disparate world of voices, all shouting for our online and offline attention, it can be difficult to draw the line between virtual and real spaces.



Antoine Catala, (L) Image Families, 2013. (Not Cat/Pizza/Ass/Car). (R) (Cat/Not Pizza/Ass/Car). Both works: Latex print, aluminum frame, vacuum pump, hoses, arduino chip, lolenoid switch, 12 C power supplier, misc. power connectors. 190 x 124 x 124 cm. Installation view Fridericianum © Photo: Achim Hatzius Courtesy Antoine Catala, 47 Canal, New York and Galerie Christine Mayer, Munich

Trisha Baga and Jessie Stead explore this tension in their immersive landscape filled with performative detritus and punctuated by roaming soundscapes. Multiple visual realities are superimposed on top of one another, forcing you into a subjective and selective editing process. Information must be compulsively screened and rejected based on its personal relevance and applicability or you are doomed to mental exhaustion. Josh Kline's cocktails of energy drinks infused with DayQuil and caffeine gives a boost to improve our lifestyles, simultaneously improving and degrading our bodies — bodies that have long ago been commoditized into legitimate territories for lifestyle brands. Antoine Catala combines everyone's love of pizza, cats and butts, using language from the mechanised industry of advertising to playfully invert cultural memes onto themselves. Yngve Holen presents a slightly cynical approach to flying, where the meat of economy class clientele is rendered into marble. Holen's work is a celebration of and commiseration to the invention of Extended-range Twin-engine Operation Performance Standards (ETOPS), standards that have given rise to Trans-atlantic air travel and the tourist industry; now, we are all just one airport away from paradise. All the while, Timur Si-Qin's "Axe-Effect" sculptures pierce through consumer grade plastic, leaving behind a coloured pool of fluorescent synthetic goop, a delightful symbol of aesthetic death.



Josh Kline, Creative Hands, 2013. (detail) © Photo Achim Hatzius

But not all the voices in this exhibition are so intense. Aleksandra Domanovics video piece “From Yu to me” documents the rise and fall of early Internet technologies in the former Yugoslav. Domanovics quiet and reflective documentary touches on the oft-overlooked position of women in technology. Jan Rafman combines archival computer game footage and digital animation in a nostalgic work about the escapist potential of games, while Ken Okiishi mixes painterly gestures reminiscent of Abstract Expressionists with the blue screen of death, subtly disrupting the fetishistic materiality of technology. The multiplicity of positions explored in “Speculations on Anonymous Materials” touch on issues of identity, authorship, originality and the increasing immaterial qualities of objects, real and virtual. It seems that the Post-Modern baggage of forever looking to the past for inspiration is slowly being shed, and just in time. The new baggage is already on next-day delivery, self-designed and customized with the aid of a smartphone App and Amazon’s growing business services. But is technology being embraced, or perhaps it has just become so pervasive that it is difficult to ignore? Either way, the pleasure could be in figuring it out for ourselves.

By Tomasz Kobialka
Speculations on Anonymous Materials
Fridericianum, Kassel
Until 26th January 2014