Still Life
Installation View
Transfer Gallery, Brooklyn NY
2018

Featuring work across varied media, this show explores the way technology reshapes the relationship between humans and the physical world. As the title suggests, the exhibition utilizes material and process to transgress the boundary between stillness and life; not as a final objective subject, but rather to reveal unexpected sympathies that emerge as a result of examining virtual corporeality such as value and waste, self and other, cognition and physiology, real and representational. Utilizing materials that run the gamut from gold dust and mosquitoes, to digitally designed tapestries and mannequins salvaged from the American Apparel bankruptcy liquidation; these objects are not simply the things in themselves, but carry a coded memory of their personal, material, and cultural relations. The works weave together to form a surreal narrative documenting my attempts to make sense of the self within massive systems that can only be partially accessed through a technological lens.

PRESS

Storey, Grace. Rhonda Holberton: Still Life. This Is Tomorrow Magazine.

Biel, Kim. Rhonda Holberton - Still Life. Paper Journal.

Still Life
18 x 22 in
Archival Pigment Print
2017

A still life made from a collection of 3D scans. It is inspired by the Vanitas paintings of the of the 16th and 17th centuries in Flanders and the Netherlands. The vanitas painting style coincided with the height of Dutch Colonial Empire; a period of accumulated capital largely based on trade in slave labor. The paintings were popular with mercantile class and are some of the first examples of images circulating outside of the church and noble classes so in many ways were examples of the first 'social images.' They were meant "illustrate the inevitability of death and the transience and vanity of earthly achievements."

A / fisherman / hunts / a / shark / with / a / gun
Archival Pigment Print
28 x 35
2017

A 3D scan of a mannequin acquired during the American Apparel Bankruptcy asset liquidation. The virtual sculpture was made in collaboration with the physics algorithm of the modeling program which calculates the folds and interacts with the model. The results of the sculpture are different every time the program recalculates the drape.

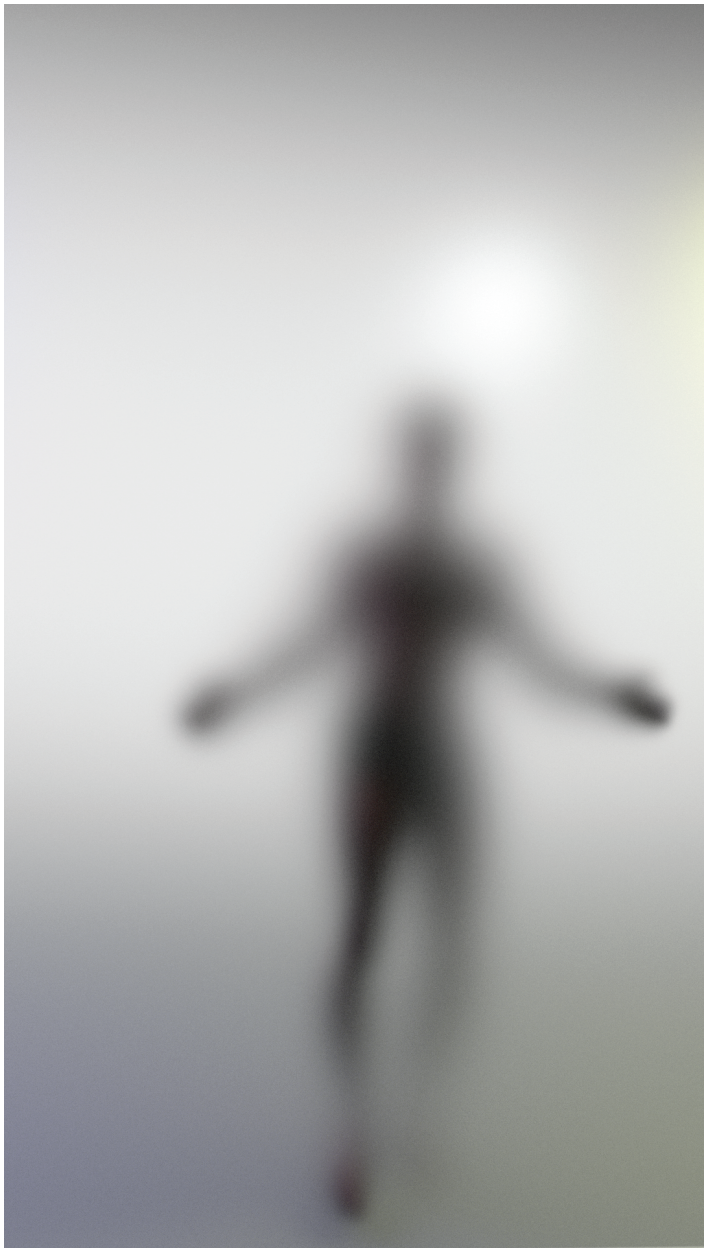
The drone is not distracted by the perfume of flowers
4k Digital Animation
00:02:36 (looping)
2016

Link to clip: https://vimeo.com/188581469
password: glassbees

The animation is inspired by the failure of the swarm model's promise to form new radical behaviors that arise from networked interactions between individual agents (Hardt & Negri). Rather than manifesting emergent behaviors, the dismembered hive is broken into creative units rendering a linear production of commodity.

Dust to Dust
Dimensions Variable
Gold Dust, Mosquitoes, Acrylic, Nylon, Aluminum

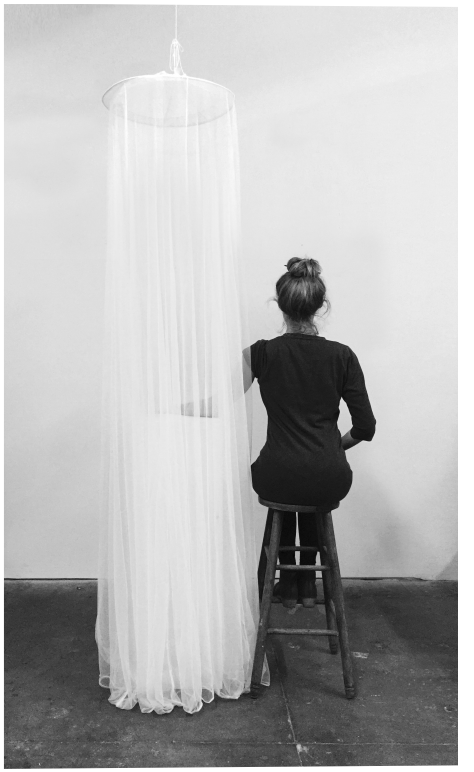
Artist Statement: I will attempt to extract One Ounce of gold from the Earth. This will be an intentional art action. The gold will be exhibited in a commercial gallery located within the geopolitical boundaries of the gold's country of extraction. My portion of the sale price will fluctuate to reflect the spot price of gold on the date of the transaction. In 2016 I attempted to extract One Ounce of gold from the Earth and raised a generation of mosquitos. I titled both works 'Dust to Dust' but I'm not sure if they are one or two pieces. Both of these very material things are embedded in stories of digital technologies in ways that connect back to corporeality. On the one hand, I'm interested in extraction as method for value creation vis–à–vis material transformation through labor (me with the gold, the mosquitos through blood meal). On the other hand I'm interested in the pairing of the metaphors and [hi]stories. Silicon Valley is referred to as the contemporary gold rush, both activities of value creation associated with a masculine entrepreneurial ideology. Alternatively, it's hard not to think about the mosquito without thinking of the virus, currently associated with darkness circumscribed by femininity and fertility, or of the mosquitos migration to new territories as an index of Climate Change- something that's shifting the narrative of a benevolent 'mother earth.'



/no stats the same
Recreation of a room that no longer exits,
Rear Projection Video on Acrylic Sheet
120 x 89 x 120 in
2017

Link to video:
https://vimeo.com/274984841/5dc861aa25

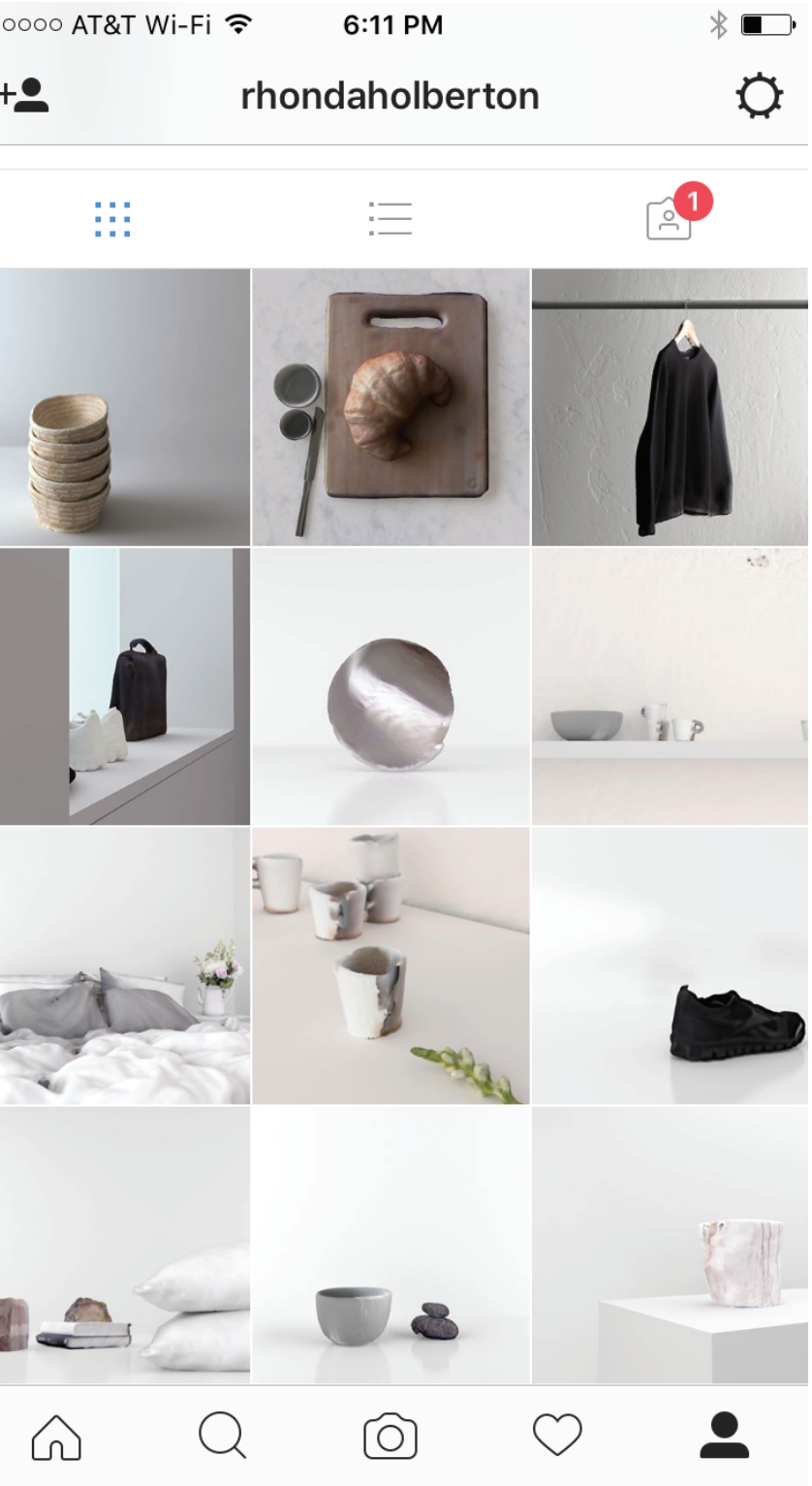
The video installation, /no stats on the same, utilizes motion capture data recorded from my body transplanted onto a scan of a male model. I rendered the animation through a virtual pane of frosted glass placed in front of the camera in the rendering program. In the physical gallery space, the video is rear-projected onto a frosted acrylic sheet covering the entrance to a small room. I taped out the dimensions of this room in the gallery in my studio, and then performed within the perimeter I mapped out. Also, the room was recreated to scale in the 3D modeling program. So, the physics, movement, and models are all sampled from elements of the real world, but interpreted algorithmically within the render.



Dust to Dust
Dimensions Variable
Mosquitoes, Glass, Sugar Solution, Netting
2018

Two two monitors are illuminated by a full-spectrum hydroponic grow-lamp. One monitors displays a feed of mosquito larvae descended from adult mosquitos I raised in my studio, the other displays a 10% sugar solution that the hatched insects feed on. Mosquito larvae are born sterile (no viruses), it is only when they feed on blood that the animals carry the virus. Female Mosquitoes need the protein from blood meals to develop eggs, male mosquitoes live on sugar. Hence, only female mosquitos carry the viruses the insect is commonly associated with. If no blood is taken, the mosquitoes will simply live out their life without reproduction.

STILL LIFE
STILL LIFE



Just This One Thing
Instagram Photos, Tapestry, & Printed Magazine
2017

I've been interested in what I will call instgram aesthetics & the curation of objects as expressions of the self. I used a Kinect Sensor to scan objects from my domestic space and then compose them using cues from contemporary branding aesthetics (see Cereal Magazine). The scans are rendered in a virtual environment will manifest as rendered images and objects. The stills will be posted to my instagram account and few of the stills will be re-manifest in corporeal space as woven tapestries.

Just This One Thing
Instagram Photos, Tapestry, & Printed Magazine
2017

In 2015 I met with an astrologer and psychic after meditating on the anxiety I felt about environmental degradation and the collapse of globalized capitalism. I was hoping the psychic could help reconcile the anxiety I felt about the future using the stars to connect me to the expanse of the universe as a palliative measure. Instead, she pinpointed somatic manifestations of my worries, much of the conversation centered on ridding my body of the internalized symptoms from a global dis-ease.

The discussion focused on a broken body and a broken heart. She told me my brain had hijacked the system (true) and much of our conversation focused on ways my body and heart could reclaim their place. I was told my body wasn't happy because my heart and house were out of order. This was very true; after trying to buy a house shortly after grad school I gave up and have prioritized studio space over domestic space.

CULT | Aimee Friberg Exhibitions (San Francisco, CA) is pleased to present ***Still Life****, the second iteration of an exhibition by San Francisco Bay Area based artist* ***Rhonda Holberton***, from April 7 – May 26, 2018 at Transfer Gallery (Brooklyn, NY).

As virtual environments and autonomous bots infiltrate our homes, and the omnipresent computer in our hands change the role of the body— in all areas of life and commerce, *Still Life* is Holberton's attempt to rediscover the value of the biological body through labor and material transformation.

The exhibition features a networked video installation, prints rendered from augmented reality, a room wallpapered in embossed textures derived from CGI techniques, gold dust that Holberton panned from the California landscape, mosquitoes cultivated from the artist's blood, and mannequins salvaged from the American Apparel liquidation. In total, these works and objects weave together a narrative document of the artist making sense of her life and ours within an increasingly dematerialized landscape.

As the title *Still Life* suggests, this exhibition considers the relationship between stillness and life, inanimate and animate, in today's image inundated world. While the commissioned still life painting was once a rarified symbol of status, this slow tradition now continues in streams of multiplicity. Holberton reflects upon the smart-phoned classes compulsively and carefully arranging, digitally displaying, and sharing their personal ephemera at incredible speed with both still images (*Just This One Thing*) and animations (*The Drone is not Distracted by the Perfume of Flowers*). Yet instead of photographs of her own mundane belongings, Holberton presents 3D scans carefully knitted together within a CGI programming environment. This

belabored manufacture produces a new form of '*objet*' that is nearly physical yet entirely artificial.

Further skewing the real and unreal, the video installation, (*/no stats the same*), the artist utilizes motion capture data of her own body, and then transplants this onto a 3D scan of a male model. The performance locates a queer space within the digital quantification of algorithmic skin and the computerized human choreography— an avatar's gendered exchange of labor.

Still, the importance of reality and place are evident. Holberton's *Dust to Dust* are two works of the same name that explore the Californian ideology of masculine entrepreneurialism and oft predatory behaviors, which began with the Gold Rush, carry on in the Silicon Valley tech boom, and are now seen in the burgeoning cannabis industry.

In the front gallery, a vitrine holds 5 grams of recently extracted Californian gold. In the rear gallery, a full-spectrum hydroponic grow-lamp illuminates two screens that display a live-stream of mosquitos the artist has bred in her studio. In a videotaped performance, the mosquitoes bite from Holberton's arm, completing a necessary step for the female mosquito's reproductive success. Additionally, the mosquito evokes the emergence of the Zika [and the newer Chikungunya] virus associated with infertility, poverty, and climate change. The *Dust to Dust* works offer a reminder that while the bio-technical divide grows ever more transparent, we are still very much dependent on the "six-inch layer of topsoil, and the fact that it rains."

Altogether, *Still Life* presents metaphors and histories of material objects and the human body to crystalize the disparate yet wholly connected narratives of our times: digital technology, global warming, religion, and social/identity politics especially. Holberton explains, "I wanted to insert myself into a local system that indexes a much larger system, what ecophilosophist Timothy Morton calls a hyperobject; something too large and complicated to be understood by a single human processor."

The exhibition opens to the public with an artist reception on Saturday, April 7 at Transfer Gallery, 5-8 PM in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn, at 1030 Metropolitan Avenue. An exhibition catalog will be released, which includes essays by Aimee Friberg, Tanya Gayer, and Oliver Shultz. A series of talks will also accompany the exhibition. *Still Life* is curated by Aimee Friberg, it was first presented at CULT | Aimee Friberg Exhibitions in January of 2017. For more information contact info@cultexhibitions.com

RHONDA HOLBERTON (b. 1981, Fall Church, Virginia USA)

Working in sculpture, installation and photography, Rhonda Holberton employs a hybrid of scientific and metaphysical practices to reveal a symbolic reading of empirical canons of belief.

Rhonda has recently had exhibitions at CULT | Aimee Friberg Exhibitions (San Francisco, CA), City Limits Gallery and Royal Nonesuch (Oakland, CA), and the Berkeley Art Center (Berkeley, CA). Holberton's 3D Animation Best of Both Worlds was recently acquired by SFMOMA and is many notable private collections. Her work was part of a three person exhibition for the National Museum of Women in the Arts in San Francisco, curated by SFMOMA's Curator Jenny Gheith. Holberton has been included in exhibitions at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art and the San Francisco Arts Commission and as a solo presentation in ZONA MACO SUR 2016 in Mexico City. In 2012 she received a Project Grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission. Holberton received her B.F.A. from the California College of Arts and Crafts, and her MFA from Stanford University. She currently teaches at San Jose State University and Stanford. Her work has been featured in Paper Journal, Terremoto Magazine, PLASMA, SFAQ, Art in America, Art Practical and Daily Serving, among others. Holberton is represented by CULT | Aimee Friberg Exhibitions.

CULT | Aimee Friberg Exhibitions is an international gallery showcasing cutting-edge work by emerging and established artists who bridge formal, conceptual and process-based investigations exploring the human condition. Founded by Aimee Friberg in 2013, CULT engages viewers inside and out of the formal white space, with experiential programming including: talks, dinners, art tours and nomadic exhibitions. CULT is housed in a shared design and art space in the NOPA neighborhood of San Francisco, at 1217 B Fell Street. Public hours are Friday and Saturday 12 - 6 PM and by appointment.

Image credits (from left): *The drone is not distracted by the perfume of flowers*, 2017 Digital animation, no sound, 00:02:36; *Still Life (vanitas)*, 2017, 19 x 23 inches (framed), Archival pigment print

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April 7th
through May 26th, 2018

CULT | AIMEE FRIBERG EXHIBITIONS (SAN FRANCISCO, CA) IS PLEASED TO PRESENT STILL LIFE, the second iteration of an exhibition by San Francisco Bay Area based artist Rhonda Holberton, from April 7 – May 26, 2018 at TRANSFER (Brooklyn, NY).

As virtual environments and autonomous bots infiltrate our homes, and the omnipresent computer in our hands change the role of the body— in all areas of life and commerce, *Still Life* is Holberton's attempt to rediscover the value of the biological body through labor and material transformation.

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In the front gallery, a vitrine holds 5 grams of recently extracted Californian gold. In the rear gallery, a full-spectrum hydroponic grow-lamp illuminates two screens that display a live-stream of mosquitos the artist has bred in her studio. In a videotaped performance, the mosquitoes bite from Holberton's arm, completing a necessary step for the female mosquito's reproductive success. Additionally, the mosquito evokes the emergence of the Zika [and the newer Chikungunya] virus associated with infertility, poverty, and climate change. The Dust to Dust works offer a reminder that while the bio-technical divide grows ever more transparent, we are still very much dependent on the "six-inch layer of topsoil, and the fact that it rains."

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SPECIAL EVENT

Saturday, May 6th from 1-4PM
1030 Metropolitan Avenue in Brooklyn

OPENING RECEPTION

Saturday, April 7th from 6-9PM
1030 Metropolitan Avenue in Brooklyn

GALLERY HOURS

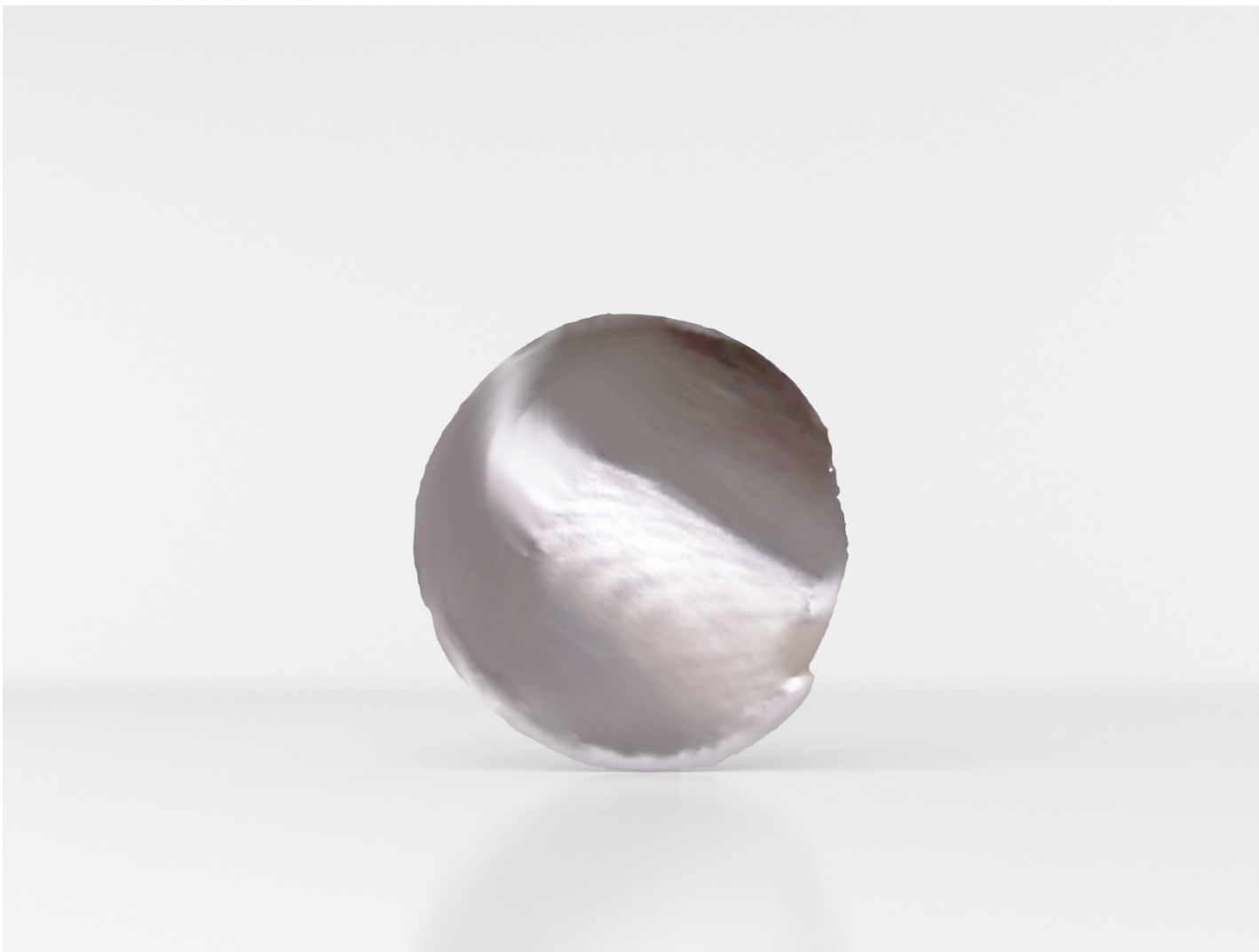
Open to the Public on Saturdays from 12-6PM

By appointment anytime with info@cultexhibitions.com

Download the Press Release

STILL LIFE

RHONDA HOLBERTON



SOFT DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN STILLNESS AND LIFE

Aimee Friberg

Featuring work across varied media, Rhonda Holberton's installation, *Still Life*, explores the way technology reshapes the relationship between humans and our physical world. As the title suggests, this exhibition utilizes material and process to transgress the boundary between stillness and life. Unexpected parallels emerge between the organic and constructed as a result of examining virtual corporeality such as value and waste, self and other, cognition and physiology, and real and representational. The cool façade provides a smokescreen for strange pairings and the subversive use of manufacturing as medium. Utilizing materials that run the gamut from gold dust and mosquitoes, to psychic readings and mannequins salvaged from the American Apparel bankruptcy liquidation, these objects are not simply things in themselves. Rather, they carry a coded memory of their personal, material, and cultural relations. The works weave together to form a surreal narrative documenting the artist's attempts to make sense of our humanity within massive systems that can only be accessed through a technological lens.

The works on view provide visual antiphon to the investigation within three groupings in the gallery. At the entry of the gallery is a headless male mannequin casually presiding over the goings on in the gallery. On the walls in the front room, 3D modeled images are woven into tapestries (*Just This One Thing* series) and animated into a digital video (*The Drone is not Distracted by the Perfume of Flowers*). These representations soften distinctions between illustration and allegory through the restaging of real objects that have been scanned and re-presented in virtual space. Taking cues from Instagram aesthetics & the curation of posts as expressions of self, these 3D renderings engage the historical context of computation and automation.

The video installation, /no stats on the same, utilizes motion capture data from the artist's own body movements transplanted onto a scan of a male model as an exercise in becoming other or mapping one's avatar onto another biology. The performance of the artist and the virtual environment are both plotted onto the dimensions of the existing architecture of the gallery; uniting the space of two physical locations through the projection of virtual space.

In the rear gallery, a netted veil is suspended from the ceiling illuminated by a full-spectrum hydroponic grow-lamp. Inside the net housing, mosquitoes feed on sugar water near recently harvested California gold measured by the gram. On the one hand, the works model extraction as method for value creation vis–à–vis material transformation through labor; the artist with the gold, the mosquitoes through blood meal. On the other hand, the metaphors and histories of these very material things are embedded in stories of digital technologies, climate change, religion, and politics in ways that connect back to corporeality. Today, the technologists of Silicon Valley are compared to the 49ers of last century's gold rush; both activities of value creation belong to a similar narrative embracing masculine entrepreneurial ideology. Similarly it's hard not to think about the mosquito without thinking of the virus; particularly, one that is currently closely associated with fertility, globalization, and climate change. These works offer a reminder that while the bio-technical divide grows ever more transparent, we are still very much dependent on the 'six-inch layer of topsoil, and the fact that it rains.'

STILL LIFE

RHONDA HOLBERTON'S LIQUID ELEGIES

Oliver Shultz

A recumbent figure of a male mannequin lies at the center of a gallery floor. Its legs are crossed in a leisurely gesture; its elbows prop up a headless torso. This mannequin is an artifact of the upscale clothing retailer American Apparel's bankruptcy. Rhonda Holberton acquired it when the embattled company, facing widespread backlash over the overt misogyny of its founder and former CEO, began liquidating its assets in the late months of 2015. Transplanted into the gallery space—from one kind of commercial context into another—the mannequin becomes a readymade. Torn from its original function by an act of "liquidation," it nevertheless remains a stubbornly solid thing.

What, after all, does it mean to liquidate an anonymous plastic effigy, reducing it not just to currency, but de-valuing it entirely? (Holberton received the mannequin from the secondary seller for free because the supplier coudn't get rid of them.) Post-liquidation, the mannequin's appearance is essentially unchanged, but it is in fact only a relic of its former self. Naked and disused, it can no longer perform its function as a commodity for propelling the flow of other commodities. Rescued and deployed as a work of art, its ability to generate a certain kind of desire has been interrupted. And yet its commodity provenance still haunts it, clings to it. Is this simply because the mannequin is reborn in the guise of another sort of commodity—an artwork—even as it bears scant trace of artistic intervention? Or is it that the mannequin is not the work at all, but rather a cipher or parergon, something that goes before it, a placeholder for something more difficult to articulate: that mysterious process Marx saw as the liquefaction of "all that is solid."

The mannequin suggests, in its very presence, that the way commodities matter most is by no longer existing as matter, but instead by being dematerialized, transformed from things into values. Deployed in the gallery, the equation is reversed. The mannequin becomes a dissembled thing, an object whose former capacity for generating value is drained—its liquidity squeezed out of it—only to have a new kind of value resurrected secretly within itself, obscured as if by a husk or shell. In effect designating the object a readymade, Holberton's gesture reveals the liquidated manne-

quin's conceit: that it is nothing, after all, but surface. She reveals it as thing de-valued precisely for the fiction of its hollowness.

This artifact of American Apparel's bankruptcy—a totem for the misogyny of its founder—functions as a lodestone. It captures and radiates the very essence of what animates Holberton's practice: the urgency surrounding a state of affairs in which all things have been coaxed by capital's mechanisms into vesselhood; the sense in which any solid body now remains a body only insofar as it is opens itself as a container for capital's flows. Infinitely transmutable, capable of being inhabited by an endless procession of other things, it anchors what Deleuze and Guattari saw as the schizoid "desiring-machine" binding and shaping what the psyche is under capitalism.

The question of inhabitation is often at stake in Holberton's work. In *_no-stats-the-same* (2016), another sort of mannequin takes center stage: a dancing body projected onto a sheet of frosted glass at roughly the scale of an actual human form. Installed across the threshold of a small room, the figure appears to occupy real space. This is because the rear projection screens-off access to the darkened area behind. The effect is that this spectral figure appears like the shadow of a real body.

The movements registered in the figure are in fact Holberton's own: she used a motion sensor to capture herself as she danced. She then digitally transposed the resulting data onto the form of an anonymous 28-year-old male model. In "possessing" this other body, Holberton enacts a radically new idiom of enfleshment. Her gesture begs the question, in her words: "What does it mean to have access to this other skin?" What does it mean to be able to animate the shadow of this appropriated body with the trace of one's own displacements? Her very question suggests the strangeness the work seeks to make explicit: that a cold, bloodless, algorithmic corpus should somehow correspond to the notion of a "skin." What has "skin" become if we refer to this light-image as a "skin" to which one can gain "access"? What is it to be enfleshed when one can have "skin" in this way, if one can "skin" an app or an avatar as readily as one inhabits one's own corporeality?

In truth, "skinned" personae—computer-generated images of people, animals, or sentient beings of all kinds—have already become banal aspects of our everyday world. They proliferate to such a degree that it is often difficult to discern a "traditional" image of a body—whatever that might now mean—from one that has been processed through computerized manipulation. Meanwhile, the act of algorithmically mapping the movements of an actual body in actual space onto a digital one in virtual space suggests the persistence of indexicality. The index lingers on, almost superstitiously, in the form of a history: a rigorous recounting of a certain series of moments in the earthly body's unfolding.

The ambiguous status of this lingering indexicality is all to the point, for if the rear-projection onto the frosted glass panel suspends the illusion of an actual space and an actual

body dwelling behind it (is it merely a screen or is it a window?), this is just how Holberton problematizes the everyday condition of image-saturation. The integrity of the screen as screen is called into question. By unfixing the certainty of what a screen is, Holberton also disrupts its ability to "screen off" the space of the Imaginary. The screen-as-barrier no longer guarantees the safety of the viewer. The result is a palpable threat, exposing the body's vulnerability to a regime in which material enfleshment is increasingly dissolved into digital skin.

Can we locate Holberton herself in the displaced movements of this digitized male body? Does there persist the trace of her own personhood, an index of her transubstantiated presence, inhabiting and animating the incorporate vessel of another, differently enfleshed body? What are the risks of such inhabitation? What threats does it pose? How does it bear upon selfhood, upon how we construct it, how we coax it into being in the context of ubiquitous hypermediation.?

In *Just This One Thing* (2016), Holberton dwells specifically on the precarious state of contemporary selfhood. The work comprises a series of woven tapestries generated from digital images of still lives, which are themselves composed of 3D scans of belongings from Holberton's home: stone and earthenware vessels, smooth riverbed stones, a vase with flowers, a lone shoe. She transforms these mundane items into digital information through the use of a Microsoft Kinect scanner, finally returning them to analog form—an anciently and unremittingly handmade one—as woven tapestries. (Though hers are produced entirely by machines, tapestry in general arguably serves to signify the handmade in its art-historical status as a "craft" genre.) Here, the machine-made quality of Holberton's tapestries underscores their digital genealogy. Their status as vessels or things plucked from the current of a river, meanwhile, suggest their momentary arrest from the flow of commodities that churns around them. A selection of these images also appear on Holberton's Instagram feed, a space in which selfhood is increasingly performed and negotiated.

If the gridded surface of the tapestries woven from these images, composed as they are of an enjoined landscape of warp and weft, might be seen to evoke the pixels of their digital counterparts, such isomorphism is all to the point. For the loom is the oldest computer, the punch cards used in Jacquard looms provided the prototype for modern computational devices. The image, like the self, is a woven thing—deliberately threaded together, interlocked, bound into a tight and seemingly continuous surface that is nevertheless composed of independent strands with disparate origins. Despite apparent coherence, the yarn that composes the self is always threatening to fray and unravel; it is technology's prosthetics that secure it, like the brute metal bars that affix Holberton's tapestries to the gallery wall.

In probing the nature of subjectivity in the digital age, Holberton often evokes a quiet intimacy, a whisper of eroticism. In Dust to Dust (2016), mosquitoes are the agents of this intimacy. The work consists of two

vitrines. The first contains a small amount of gold that Holberton extracted by panning in California riverbeds. The other contains a brood of second-generation mosquitoes, the offspring of a colony of insects whose eggs were fertilized by Holberton's own blood. Like the discarded and rescued mannequin, the juxtaposition of gold and blood suggests two homologies notions of value. Gold's value is both intrinsic—in its rarity, beauty, and uniqueness among other metals—as well as extrinsic, subject as it is to external market forces and collective psychological pressures like "consumer confidence." Similarly, blood belongs to the body's productive capacities; it is spilled and it boils, flowing like capital. It is the engine of the body as a productive organism, but it is also the oil for a machine made to liquefy the body altogether.

Both the physical substrate of currency and as a signifier for the process of exchange itself, Holberton here uses gold to encode the material body's capacity and readiness for dissipation into the flows of capital. Yet the fact that Holberton herself extracted this gold from the land, making it the product of her own embodied labor, short-circuits rather than reifies its capacity to lubricate such flows. Here, gold is not just encased in the vitrine but neutralized by its inability to circulate. The same is true of the mosquitoes, whose threat is mitigated by their enclosure; all they can do is wait to die, unable to access the blood necessary to reproduce. They too are artifacts of Holberton's own body, offspring of a generation of insects that she had allowed to feed on her. Shown thus, they can no longer be re-inscribed back into the circulation of insect and animal bodies. By framing them in the vitrine and designating them as works of art, Holberton denatures their performative force while imbuing them with a new kind of aesthetic capital.

As vectors of proximity between disparate bodies and as biopolitical actors in their own right, mosquitoes have a charged presence in the Imaginary. This is especially true at a time when epidemics like the Zika virus preoccupy public discourse. In Holberton's refiguration, this proximity relies on a kind of defleshment, one born of the same operation that divorces labor from value, echoing the commodity's fetishistic structure. Skin emerges not from the body's inhabitation of flesh qua flesh, but loosens itself from actual bodies, from their abject liquidities, leaking out into circuits and reconstituting the body in the animacy of the algorithm.

If the material body is constantly under threat, ceaselessly de-materialized by technology, this hardly means it has disappeared; it stubbornly remains a thing in the world, even as the world remains an earth, the sun a star. Hanging above the liquidated mannequin, Holberton's *Developer* (2016) reminds us of this persistence: an image developed over decades by UV radiation from the sun itself—indexes the persistence of earth and cosmos in the face of digitality's disembodied atmospheres. If the earthly body is ceaselessly liquefied and reconstituted as if it were a conjured thing, this star-forged photograph performs a mute work of mourning for its now artifactual corpus. The cerulean landscape crystallizes an underlying presence that animates much of Holberton's work: the desire to articulate a silent elegy for the body's disappearance, whispered in the liquid language of its own erasure.

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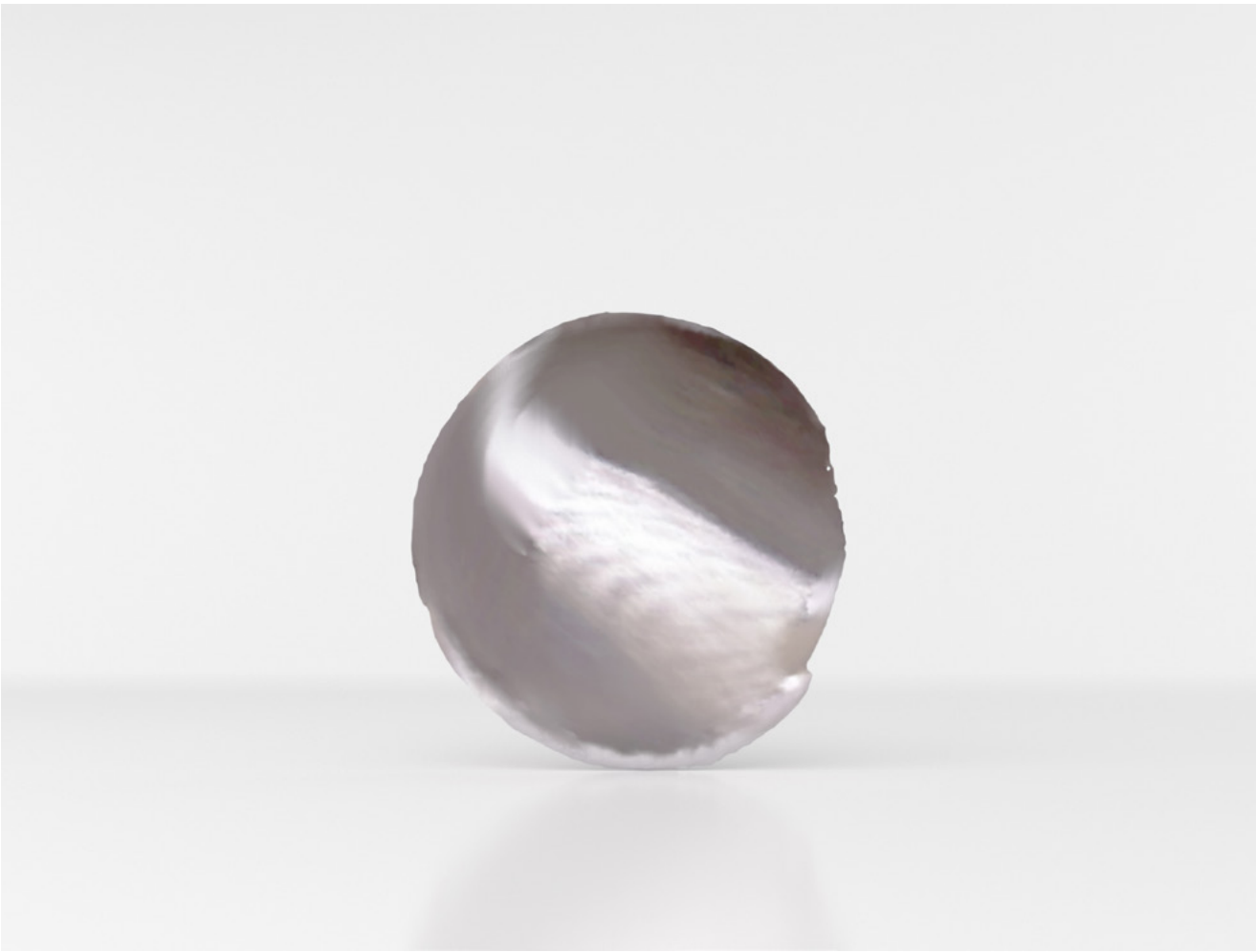


Cyclic Compression

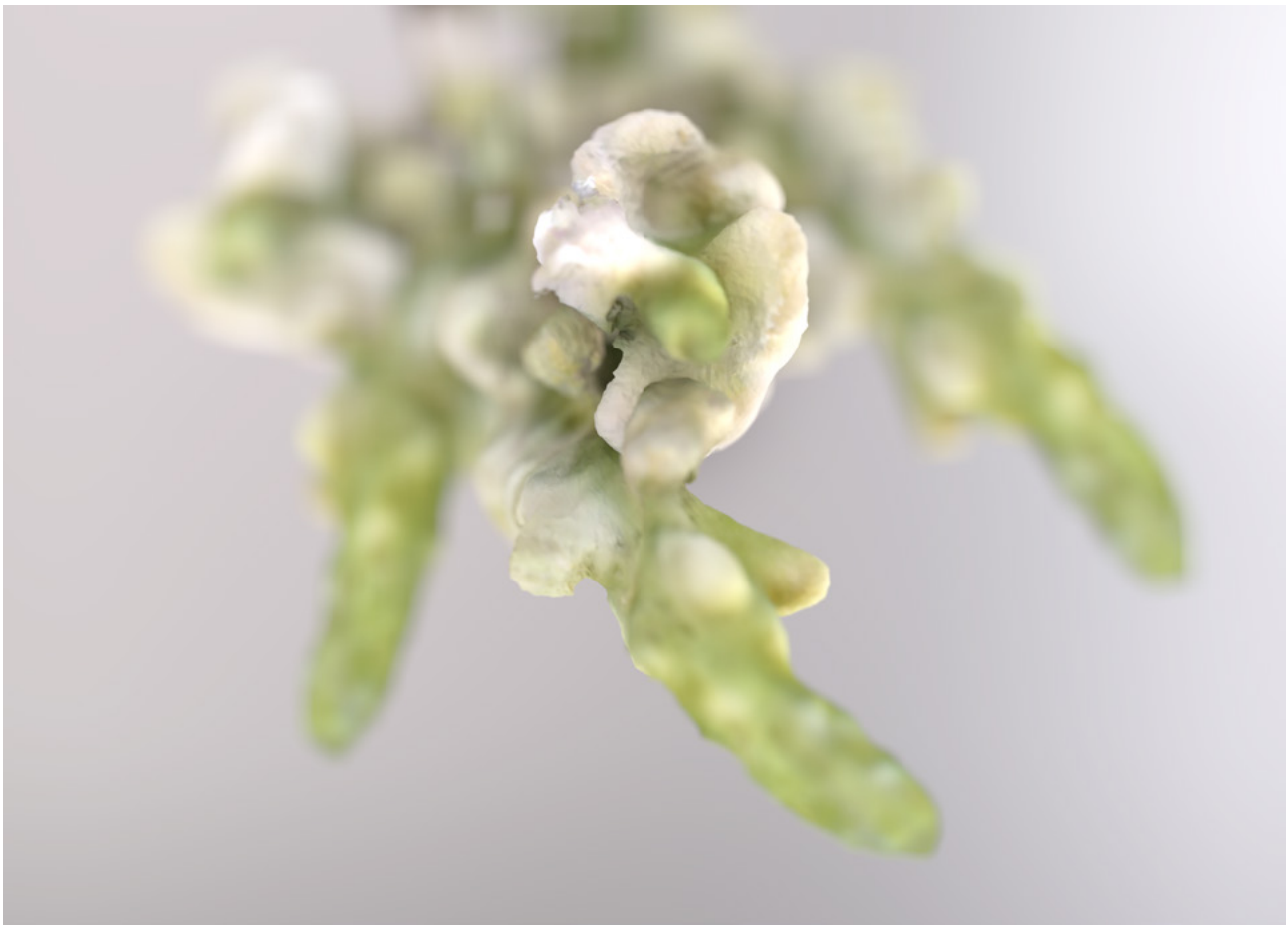
ENERGETIC CONTACT AND THE ARTIST AS MEDIUM

Tanya Gayer

I stand in the dark interior of a metallic structure. As my eyes adjust to the surroundings I begin to see ghostly ballerinas who are twirling around one another. Their tutus softly bounce with each step they take and their hands gracefully trace their bodies. As legs lift into pirouettes I become distinctly aware that I am surrounded by strangers and wonder if they can make out this faint scene as well. I blink and the dancers disappear. My eyes now begin to trace a long and thin horizontal line of light. Does it flicker? Or hum? I find I cannot trust my senses as I continue to adjust to the darkness; unsure if I see a soft glow of delicate bodies, or if I hear sound, or if I can give into the simplicity of a band of light.

The portal of time and vision I experienced in the installation, *The Invention of the Ship Was Also the Invention of the Shipwreck*, replicates many of the inquiries and experiences with which artist Rhonda Holberton imbues her oeuvre. I conjured what Holberton describes as a "human vernacular within digital semantics." There were in fact no ballerinas whatsoever in her work, but instead an amalgamation of movie trailers spliced together and projected on a CRT monitor orientated downwards towards the floor. The result of the converted projection was a narrow horizontal line reflected from the ground. And most surprisingly, the movie trailers were chosen by the artist based on their representation of the apocalypse. Rather than a soft and romantic vision of tulle-clad dancers as I envisioned, Holberton's compressed images within the horizontal line were actually of death and destruction.

What is evident in *The Invention of the Ship*, considering my experience and Holberton's intentions for the work, is the notion of disassembly and reinstatement. My senses were stripped away in the installation, which led to the fabrication of my surroundings, and resulted in my doubling back to reconstruct the images and environment altogether. For the artist, the act of disassembly and reinstatement is identified in her compilation of similar conceptual movie trailers, the distillment of images by angling the projection downwards, and the result



of flashes of light that travel across an imitation of the earth's atmosphere. By reducing the images in the films into fundamental forms of an apocalypse—explosions, darkness, and atmospheric penetration—Holberton pivots to offer an altered emotional state. She dampens the senses so that one might experience their corporeality over planetary destruction.

The process of de/reconstruction I describe here contributes to an additional and crucial component of Holberton's artistic measures: her persona as a medium. The artist navigates a boundary between human experience and the handling of technology and/or politically charged environments associated with surveillance and nuclear testing. By negotiating scientific knowledge she reconfigures its purpose, often reinstating an objective of self discovery. In the works *The Italian Navigator has Landed in the New World* and *FOIL* the artist manipulates 3D animation and scent detection technologies used by the military, seen respectively in *The Italian Navigator* and *FOIL*, to envision the human condition on a more intimate scale. In these works a body contains phantom limbs we can project ourselves upon in moments of meditation and/or we grapple with the minutia at which we can be detected as criminal or layperson simply by odor.

In *A Fallen Pixel* Holberton utilizes a commonly sourced computer-generated rock in video graphics and carved the object with a computer-controlled router, giving it palpable form. In *No Seams to Match* the artist reconfigures military bases out of photographs printed on silk, and the result is a transparent floating spirit. For both works, the artist interjects to slow down perception. The act of producing a physical form in *A Fallen Pixel* asks viewers to consider the invisible labor that produced the digital rock. We must ask what the implications are for an object infinitely produced in virtual space, even if it is just a rock. In *No Seams to Match*, once a bunker is reconstructed into a form that filters light and is soft to the touch, the surveillance and destruction closely associated with the architecture are mitigated because neither are viable in this new form.

Holberton's conceptual endeavors in her older works (2011-2013) are more firmly situated in time and place. In *Hole Series, Displaced Hole Series, As Close As I Can Get, Two Otherwise Distant Points,* and *Mutually Assured* the artist investigates an experience or experiment in the desert to uncover covert military operations. Holberton physically digs into the earth, searches for sites of nuclear destruction, and enmeshes herself within the horizon of the desert in these series.

Her actions focus more upon moments of effacement and loss within a site. These conceptual components are incorporated into her later works, but rarely do these early works act as totems for reformation.

In *Mutually Assured* Holberton compiles the coordinates of sites used for nuclear bomb testing in the United States and composes a tour of them via two videos made from Google Earth technology. One video displays the imagery itself, and the other a mirrored and color inverted display of the same sites. In the installation of this work the artist projects the videos at each other with a screen in between, which results in a white rectangle and cancels out any recognizable imagery. In *Displaced Hole Series*, Holberton digs holes near historic sites of nuclear weaponry research and subsequently casts the holes. She then takes the composite and exhibits it as a sculptural form. The actions taken in both of these series ruminate on forfeiture. The tour in Mutually Assured totals over two hours and confronts the viewer with the sheer number of sites used for detonation. And the physical weight and presence given to an act of displacement and removal in *Displaced Hole Series* emblematizes Holberton's interest to bring nuclear testing sites into the public lexicon. The viewer is reminded of governmental prowess in ensconcing nuclear testing. By visually reformatting our contact with such sites, Holberton questions the amount of research and operations that remain sealed by Google Earth and the military. As an excellent paradox, the public relies on these entities to reveal destructive intentions.

Still Life, Holberton's most recent body of work, displays a deliberate feminist investigation in combination with her familiar themes of digital translation, de/re construction, and the production of individuality in the digital age. Feminine craft and female domesticity are explored in *Just This One Thing* due to the relationship the work has to the Jacquard loom and the manipulation of Holberton's household items; the artist's blood and undertones of the Zika virus in *Dust to Dust* point toward reproduction; and the female body is translated through the male gaze and sexist values in /no stats on the same and her display of American Apparel mannequins (along with the historic baggage of the corporation). Holberton's feminist lens is incredibly timely, as her show featuring these new works opens merely days before the Trump inauguration. The artist's voice contributes to the bravura many women must realize as misogyny appears to reign supreme. It is my personal hope that Holberton's work constructs visions on par with the one I experienced: of ballerinas dancing despite the apocalypse.

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The Drone is not Distracted by the Perfume of Flowers (still)
2017
4K Digital Animation
00:02:36 (looping)

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2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

4

Still Life: Petrified Wood (Gorman)
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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Still Life: Reebok
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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A / fisherman / hunts / a / shark / with / a / gun
2017
Archival Pigment Print
28 x 35 in

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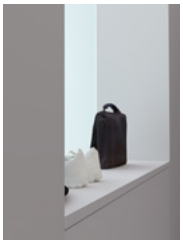
Still Life: Basket
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable



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Still Life: Window
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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Still Life: Sweater
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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Still Life: Brunch
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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Still Life: Kitchen Study
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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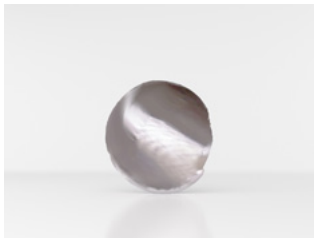
Still Life: Bowl & River Rock
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable



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Still Life: Plate
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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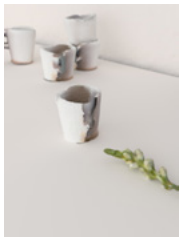
Still Life: Bowl, Mug
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable



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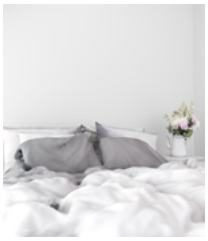
Still Life: Mug, Ornithogalum Thyrsoides
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable



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Still Life: Bed
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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Archival Pigment Print
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Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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Lilium Candidum, Rosa ‘Madame A. Meilland’, Alstroemeria (Night I & II)
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable

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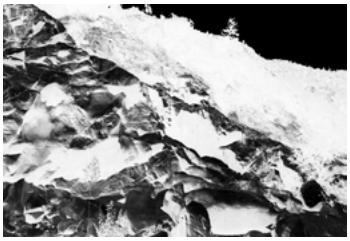
Still Life: Ornithogalum Thyrsoides (White Star)
2017
Archival Pigment Print
Dimensions Variable



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Developer
2017
Inkjet on Vellum
96 x 120 in

BIOGRAPHY

Rhonda Holberton is an artist based in Oakland, California. Her multimedia installations make use of digital and interactive technologies integrated into traditional methods of art production. Rhonda Holberton received her MFA from Stanford University and her BFA from the California College of the Arts. She is currently a lecturer in experimental media at Stanford University. Holberton was a CAMAC Artist in Residence at Marnay-sur-Seine, France and awarded a Fondation Ténot Fellowship, Paris, France. Holberton has recently exhibited at San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, the San Francisco Arts Commission, and The Berkeley Art Center.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My practice illuminates the boundaries of our observable universe; I am interested in what is at stake there- and how at the far reaches of our perception the belief in science and magic do not seem that different.

The work hijacks existing technologies to reveal invisible histories and make space in the ordinary for the creation of fantastic narratives. The installations, videos, and sculptures I create are often the residue of performative actions adapted from scientific methodologies that return metaphysical hypotheses rather than empirical data. The conspicuous occupation of my body within technological ecologies employs haptic perception to make sense of intellectual property, algorithmic creation, and labor relations vis a vis corporeal engagement within these systems. These methods have included everything from stardust harvesting to digging holes on the remediated landscapes of decommissioned military bases.

While science is dependent on observable and repeatable phenomena, truth and meaning are liberated from such methodologies and seem to arise from the realms of subjective experience. The work I make recovers the parts of human experience that are lost when absolute truth is thought to be found solely in scientific methodologies and conveyed in digital technologies. Rather, my practice utilizes the complexities of these systems to point toward a reality that is immaterial and unpredictable in nature.

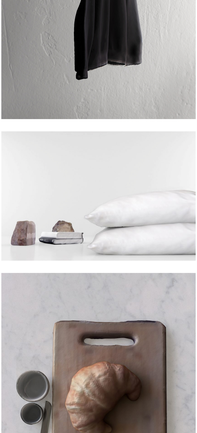
As Rhonda Holberton talks about her process dissolving with her hands the arrangement and heft of the objects that appear in her images it's hard not to think of those things and their space as real. But everything, from the objects themselves to the flawlessly diffuse lighting and cool white marble ground, is digitally produced. Holberton makes 3D scans of real objects, then places them in virtual spaces of her own creation using Blender, an open source software suite. Her recent series, Still Life, blends together the real and virtual worlds so tightly that it becomes nearly impossible to separate one from the other.

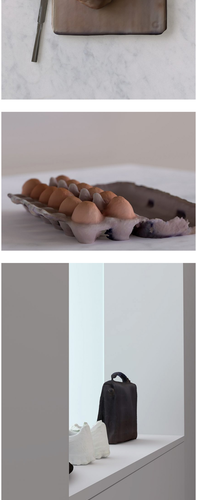
In the twenty-first century, most people navigate between real and virtual worlds almost, if not hundreds, of times daily. We project ourselves into the digital realm through photographs and videos, and we bring the digital realm into our physical space through spaces within. We don't often mistake the stuttering of a Skype call or the low-resolution of a picture on Instagram with failures of perception in the real world. But Holberton's process on those limits in representation, challenging us to recognize digital noise, to understand that the "real" is always mediated. The "real" is always a construction, whether it's a photograph or a painting. The surrounding space is utterly convincing, the image of the original object almost tactile. The artificiality in her images makes literal the ruggedness of the movement between the real and the virtual; it is this haphazard, improvisatory character that lips her images into the uncanny. They are too close to real.

THE QUESTION RAISED BY HOLBERTON'S WORK IS NOT JUST LOOK HOW MUCH THESE PICTURES LOOK LIKE EACH OTHER, BUT LOOK HOW MUCH THE REAL WORLD JUST LOOKS LIKE THE REAL WORLD THESE ARE THERE AND THERE.

The genre of still life painting, to which the title of Holberton's series alludes, has historically disseminated a cunning awareness of the differences between things themselves and their images. The Roman term *morti vivi*(vivified) a host's generosity through a display of delicacies, but also reminded the viewer of the fragility of life and the inevitability of death. Holberton's images are about morals, even as excess was made present through the pictures. William Harmel and John Frederick Peto's popular nineteenth-century trompe l'oeil paintings were sought out precisely because viewers delighted in deconstructing their experiences of deception by picking apart the difference between the real world and its copies.

It is harder to identify the gap between still life in the contemporary vernacular and the things these images represent. The images themselves are ostensibly constructions, but they're also constructions of a world that we already live in. Holberton's images don't seem merely to be beautiful photographs of covetable objects. Yet, unlike Harmel or Peto admirers, viewers of Holberton's images on Instagram are often stamped by her "Still Life" pictures. Some commenters read the pixelation or artifacting as a unique cosmetic effect, while others are more confused, asking whether the images are real or digitally manipulated. The ambiguity is efficient but frustrated as social media's delight of hard, where many, unfiltered life is distilled into enviable images. What Holberton's work brings most startlingly to light is the very constructedness of contemporary life itself. Beautifried would agree that the images of food, fashion, and lifestyle that populate Instagram, Facebook, and restaurants around the world seems mad more like Instagram come to life. They have become living images of themselves.





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Written by Kim Bell

Kim Bell is the Associate Director for ITALIC, an interdisciplinary arts program at Stanford University, where she also teaches Literature and Creative Writing. She received her PhD and MA in Visual Studies from the University of California, Irvine and her BA in Comparative Literature from Brown University. Her writing appears regularly on Artforum.com, is a 4-in contemporary art quarterly, Visual Resources, and Afterimage.

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Contemporary Art Magazine

Transfer Gallery, 1030 Metropolitan Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11211

Rhonda Holberton: Still Life

Title : Rhonda Holberton: Still Life installation view
Credit : Photo by Dan Bradica, courtesy of the artist and CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions

Rhonda Holberton: Still Life
Transfer Gallery
7 April - 26 May, 2018
Review by Grace Storey

'Still Life' is the second iteration of San Francisco-based artist Rhonda Holberton's exhibition - first presented at CULT | Aimee Freiberg Exhibitions in 2017 - featuring a networked video installation, prints captured from augmented reality simulations, wallpaper embossed with textures derived from CGI techniques, gold dust mined by hand, and video tracking a swarm of mosquitoes housed in the artist's studio. Contrary to the exhibition's title, which suggests a state of stasis, Holberton's work

oscillates between analogue and digital, animate and inanimate, in order to destabilize the notion of these binaries, and explore the possibility of a third space.

‘Still Life (Vanitas)’ (2017), is an archival pigment print of a digital simulation which draws a parallel between capitalist systems of exchange, the currency of digital aesthetics and 17th Century Dutch still life painting commissioned by the mercantile class, which can be regarded as some of the earliest social imagery. Holberton’s still life depicts a fragmented bust modeled on a mannequin salvaged during the liquidation of clothing manufacturer American Apparel, who gazes at her reflection through the screen of an iPad. The protagonist is positioned against a backdrop which mirrors the wallpaper covering the gallery walls, and is surrounded by a vase of flowers, a lone croissant, and a weighty 3D printed mug, copies of which are displayed on shelves opposite. Unlike the hand thrown original by ceramicist Eric Bonnan, part of a set purchased for the artist’s partner, the copies, entitled ‘Vessels’, have a rough, uneven texture, as a result of the inaccuracy of the 3D

scan. Holberton's quivering objects do not carry a single meaning, but rather, exist as allegories which carry a coded memory of their personal, material and cultural history.

In two performative works titled 'Dust to Dust' (2017), Holberton uses her body to 'engage corporeally with a global metabolism represented in the concept of the Anthropocene / Capitalocene.' She asserts that 'the metaphors and histories of material things cannot be divorced from globalised networks of digital technologies, the environment, religion and politics.' In the first work, Holberton utilises technology to live-stream a scourge of mosquitoes bred from her own blood. This action alludes to the threat to fertility posed by the Zika virus, and the migration of mosquitos as an indicator of Climate Change, challenging the conception of an omnibenevolent Mother Earth. By inserting herself into a local system indexical of a much larger system, Holberton's diptych alludes to Timothy Morton's concept of the Hyperobject; something too large and complex to be understood by a single human processor. This micro / macro relationship is also at play in the second work, which comprises 5 grams of gold displayed within a vitrine, panned by Holberton from the Californian landscape. Referring to the frequent association of 20th Century gold rush pioneers and Silicon Valley as the epicentre of the 21st Century US tech economy, the work draws attention to a male-centric entrepreneurial ideology, and questions the role of physical labour in an increasingly dematerialised society.

While Holberton's practice frequently incorporates performance, seen by way of objects and simulations which evidence a discontinuity between the visual sign and its meaning. This constant fluctuation between physical and digital generates a hybrid space, which permits a consideration of the abject, the gendered body, and the conception of labour within contemporary society, invoking Homay King's idea of 'Virtual Memory', whereby he contends that virtuality is not a contranym, but rather, can be regarded as a metaphor to navigate lived experience. Likewise, the traces of past and future images which reverberate throughout Holberton's body of work coalesce at the site of presentation to propose a new reality inhabited by the viewer.

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