RHONDA HOLBERTON | SELECTED PRESS

ARTICLES/REVIEWS in, MAGAZINES, JOURNALS, and NEWSPAPERS WRITTEN BY OTHERS ON THE WORK OF RHONDA HOLBERTON

2023 Pritikin, Renny, *Renny Pritikin on Rhonda Holberton*, Square Cylinder. March 9, 2023.
Staff, *Photo Journal Monday: Rhonda Holberton*, Musée Magazine. Feb 6, 2023.

2022 Jacob Kupperman, *MYR takes a Human Eye to Deep Time*, Long Now Foundation. July 13, 2022.
Renny Pritikin, *The Million-Year View @ McEvoy*, Square Cylinder. June 4, 2022.

2019 Desmarais, Charles, *'Show Me as I Want to be Seen' examines artistic and gender identity*, SF Chronicle. Feb 10, 2019.
Tafoya, Harry, *A Probing Look at How We Perform and Present the Self*, Hyperallergic. Mar 15, 2019.
Latimer, Tirza True , *Show Me as I Want to be Seen @ CJM*, Square Cylinder. May 7, 2019.
Hotchkiss, Sarah, *'Beneath This Mask, Another Mask': Identity is Unfixed in CJM's 'Show Me'*, KQED Arts. Feb 12,2019.
Schiffman, Jean. *Artists Explore Self with Nuance and Complexity*, SF/Arts. April 1, 2019.
Wood, Sura. *Gender Fluidity & Mutable Identity*, Bay Area Reporter. Feb 12, 2019.

2018 Storey, Grace. *Rhonda Holberton: Still Life.* This Is Tomorrow Magazine. May 2018.
Hotchkiss, Sarah. *Expansive, Exciting 'Bay Area Now 8' Lives Up to Its Name at YBCA*. KQED Arts. Sep 7, 2018.

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Westin, Monica. *Post Photography and the Contemporary Economy: Ten Images.* SFAQ.
Gayer, Tanya & Shultz, Oliver. *Still Life.* San Francisco: Aimee Friberg Exhibitions, 2014. Exhibition catalogue.

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Persson, Henrik . *The Smell of Security*. Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies: Global Scanning Review. Issue 3/2005 pg 5.
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Lutz, Leora. *Disparate Measures.* SFAQ.

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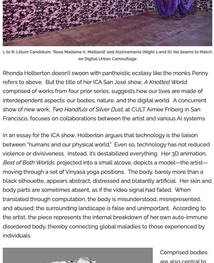
Lutz, Leora. *YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW.* Exhibition Catalogue.
Simons, Amanda N. *Rhonda Holberton: YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW.* Art Practical.

Renny Pritikin on Rhonda Holberton

MAY 9, 2023

by Renny Pritikin

"...the Gregorian chants entered people's bodies and rearranged their DNA, so that they were part of everything around them...Everything was splendid and everything was equal." –Louise Penny *The Beautiful Mystery*



L to R: Lilium Candidum, 'Rosa Madame A. Meilland' and Alstroemeria (Right 1 and III). No Seams to Match on Digital Urban Camouflage

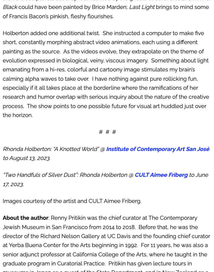
Rhonda Holberton doesn't swoon with pantheistic ecstasy like the monks Penny refers to above. But the title of her ICA San José show, *A Knotted World*, comprised of works from four prior series, suggests how our lives are made of interdependent aspects: our bodies, nature, and the digital world. A concurrent show of new work, *Two Handfuls of Silver Dust*, at CULT Aimee Friberg in San Francisco, focuses on collaborations between the artist and various AI systems.

In an essay for the ICA show, Holberton argues that technology is the liaison between "humans and our physical world." Even so, technology has not reduced violence or divisiveness. Instead, it's destabilized everything. Her 3D animation, *Best of Both Worlds*, projected into a small alcove, depicts a model—the artist—moving through a set of Vinyasa yoga positions. The body, barely more than a black silhouette, appears abstract, distressed and blatantly artificial. Her skin and body parts are sometimes absent, as if the video signal had failed. When translated through computation, the body is misunderstood, misrepresented, and abused; the surrounding landscape is false and unimportant. According to the artist, the piece represents the internal breakdown of her own auto-immune disordered body, thereby connecting global maladies to those experienced by individuals.

All The Actors Have Withdrawn, 2024, video projected on acrylic, 14 x 20"

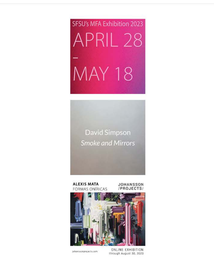
Comprised bodies are also central to two digital prints, *All the Actors Have Withdrawn* and *Still Life Vanitas*. The first depicts two female bodies (the artist's) dramatically enmeshed and simultaneously exploding. Projected on a small acrylic rectangle, they evoke mortality and decay, like figures from Pompeii captured in death. The second, executed in the manner of Dutch still life paintings, portrays two contemporary women having tea, their bodies reduced to white shells. Protestant-influenced 17th-century vanitas paintings, which held that life was merely a prelude to death and worldly success is merely transitory, are, in Holberton's view, unconsciously echoed in today's self-aggrandizing social media posts. More corruptions of the still-life tradition appear in a pair of fractured, almost cubist photographs of flowers. *Lilium Candidum, 'Rosa Madame A. Meilland' and Alstroemeria (Right 1 and III).*

Digital Urban Camouflage, a design Holberton created, covers the gallery walls in a pattern suggesting sedge, transformed to invoke the diminution of nature into decorative wallpaper one of many references Holberton makes to military origins of the technology that now dominates life. Like *The Best of Both Worlds*, this also embodies an unmentioned autobiographical reference: Holberton's father worked in military intelligence. A silk sculpture, *No Seams to Match*, hangs from the ceiling, a "soft" re-creation (a la Oldenberg) of a bunker, another military reference that, again, demonstrates how technology links humanity to nature: silk exists at the capitalist nexus of human ingenuity, animal biology and early biotech.



Best of Both Worlds (still) 2016, digital animation, 12:11

Two Handfuls of Silver Dust, the title of Holberton's exhibition at CULT Aimee Friberg, was the only salvageable line in a poem written by an AI program (ChatGPT) from her prompts. The poem is a rhyming bit of doggerel, so bad it underscores any fears of AI displacing writers and artists. In fact, the whole exhibition is, in part, a tongue-in-cheek mockery of technoparanoia. Such disdain merely demonstrates how artists have always glommed onto innovations they think they can use. I remember how video was kidnapped from television's clutches in the 1970s and how exhibitions of work made on fax machines were held in the 1980s. (I own a fax made by Robert Gober.) The difference with AI-generated art is that it ostensibly negates authorship, though I am skeptical about that. Does giving a machine access to every scanned image actually upend the traditional artist-implement relationship? Well, to some see. Given the way that Holberton cajoles the AI systems she works with to produce anything interesting casts doubts on such fears. It feels akin to the mental process I employ to write this sentence.



Thigh Trail, 2023, single-channel digital video, 2:49 (looping)

Consider the additive process by which she creates the works in this show. The artist begins by feeding her short text to the DALL-E AI system – including phrases like "what it means to create life" and "humanity's relationship to the future of life." She then asks the system to design sculptures "inspired" by that text. The results, based on a database of twelve million sculptures, are familiar, dull amalgamations based mostly on the human body. Holberton shows two such works fabricated in bronze and glass: small abstract forms made of handsome materials that, in the end, are unremarkable. A computer also wrote sci-fi-like prose pieces following the same prompts. For these, Holberton instructed the AI system to make a painting from lines of the AI-generated text, e.g., "a gold spine floating in the sky growing roots, hovering above a silk sheet." She then reworked the painting, showing five 60 x 48-inch examples printed with UV-cured acrylic pigments augmented with her own hand-painted gestures in gesso on wood panel. They're more interesting than the sculptures, but they feel haunted by the ghosts of other artists: *Shimmer Black* could have been painted by Brice Marden; *Last Light* brings to mind some of Francis Bacon's pinkish, fleshy flourishes.

Holberton added one additional twist. She instructed a computer to make five short, constantly morphing abstract video animations, each using a different painting as the source. As the videos evolve, they extrapolate on the theme of evolution expressed in biological, veiny viscous imagery. Something about light emanating from a hi-res, colorful and cartoony image stimulates my brain's calming alpha waves to take over. I have nothing against pure rollicking fun, especially if it all takes place at the borderline where the ramifications of her research and humor overlap with serious inquiry about the nature of the creative process. The show points to one possible future for visual art huddled just over the horizon.

# # #

Rhonda Holberton: "A Knotted World" at ***Institute of Contemporary Art San José*** *to August 13, 2023*

"Two Handfuls of Silver Dust": Rhonda Holberton @ ***CULT Aimee Friberg*** *to June 17, 2023*

Images courtesy of the artist and CULT Aimee Friberg.

About the author: Renny Pritikin was the chief curator at The Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco from 2014 to 2018. Before that, he was the director of the Richard Nelson Gallery at UC Davis and the founding chief curator at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts beginning in 1992. For 12 years, he was also a senior adjunct professor at California College of the Arts, where he taught in the graduate program in Curatorial Practice. Pritikin has given lecture tours in museums in Japan as a guest of the State Department, and in New Zealand as a Fulbright Scholar, and visited Israel as a Koret Israel Prize winner. The Preisinger Library published his most recent book of poems, Westerns and Dramas, in 2020. He is the United States correspondent for *Umbigo* magazine in Lisbon, Portugal.

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Jennifer says
MAY 10, 2023 AT 2:05 PM

Great article!

FEB 6 PHOTO JOURNAL MONDAY: RHONDA HOLBERTON

PHOTO JOURNAL MONDAY

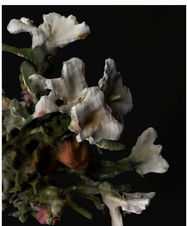
Still Life Lost This One Thing: Series Lonely
Instagram account
2015 - present
© Rhonda Holberton

Writing and Photos by Rhonda Holberton

Holberton's ongoing interest in so-called "Instagram aesthetics" inhabits that very same digital realm in *Just This One Thing*. This series consists of 3D-scanned personal belongings, staged in virtual space to mimic the sterile aesthetics of popular lifestyle magazines like *Kinfolk* and *Cereal*. To display these stills, Holberton populates her Instagram feed with the uncanny images, exploring the way the self is constructed on social media not only via selfies, but also through the curation of aestheticized commodities extracted from their native contexts.

Still Life Lost This One Thing: Vanities
Instagram account
2015 - present
© Rhonda Holberton

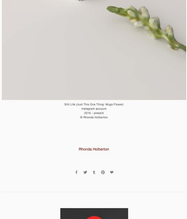
As the title *Still Life* suggests, this exhibition considers the relationship between stillness and life, inanimate and animate, in today's image-inundated world. While the commissioned edit the painting was once a verified symbol of status, this slow tradition now continues in shades of multiplicity. Holberton reflects upon the smartphoned classes compulsively and carefully arranging, digitally displaying, and sharing their personal schemers at incredible speed with both still images (*Just This One Thing*) and animations (*The Dance Is and The Distracted Is 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 "stupid" that is nearly physical yet entirely artificial.



Still Life Lost This One Thing: Prince Rentals Petrified Wood)
Instagram account
2015 - present
© Rhonda Holberton

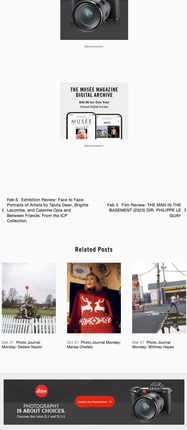
This series consists of 3D-scans of personal belongings, staged in virtual space to mimic the sterile aesthetics of popular lifestyle magazines like *Kinfolk* and *Cereal*. To display these stills, I populate my Instagram feed with the uncanny images, exploring the way the self is constructed on social media not only via selfies, but also through the curation of aestheticized commodities extracted from their native contexts.

The sterile images tend to reduce/recapitulate the object they represent. The allure of these heavily mediated images is not surprising; the meaty things themselves are divorced from material consequence but have an immaterial valence that signify self and identity online. I was thinking a lot about the currency of digital aesthetics how platforms that circulate images of images seem to be accumulating wealth at massive rates. Where is the value in these 'free' models of aesthetic exchange and who is producing it?



Still Life Lost This One Thing: Apple
Instagram account
2015 - present
© Rhonda Holberton

When we talk about brands as individuals or influencers as brands, what does that mean? That business is little bit slippery and I don't think we've really reconciled how to address that. Advertising uses fear of inadequacy to sell products to us. If we're re-performing popular advertising tropes on social media to increase the visibility, likability, or shareability of our content, that construction of identity stems from a misalignment of anxiety between object and desire, or at the very least identity as a product for other people.



Still Life Lost This One Thing: Fitness Kit
Instagram account
2015 - present
© Rhonda Holberton

My image of what people are doing, my imagination about what people are doing, how they're spending their time, and what they look like is very different than my experience out in the real world. These worlds don't align, but I am constantly overlaying a mental projection of the world—much of which is informed by human interactions on social media—on top of my lived experience.

Still Life Lost This One Thing: Mega Flowers)
Instagram account
2015 - present
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Feb 6 Exhibition Review: Face to Face: Portraits of Artists by Tacita Dean, Brigitte Lacombe, and Catherine Opie and Between Friends: From the ICP Collection.

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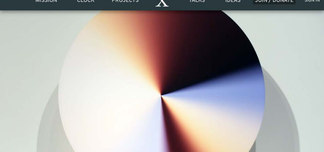


ART

MYR takes a Human Eye to Deep Time

MYR is not just a collection of art but a place for contemplation, a way to internalize those worlds of deep time that can otherwise be so hard to grasp.

By Jacob Kupperman @jacobkupp

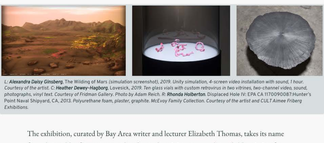
Jul 13, 02022

A simulation of Mars millennia from now, verdant but utterly devoid of human inhabitants.

A set of ten glass vials, each filled with a custom retrovirus that spurs the production of oxytocin in the human body.

A pair of sticks of incense — one imbued with the scent of Earth's first forest, and one with the scent of what may be its last.

At *MYR*, a new art exhibition currently on view at the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts in San Francisco from May 27–Aug 27, 02022, these works of art — and more — are on display. On their own, each piece is an intriguing and often visually striking conceptual work. Taken as a whole, the exhibition ushers as a thought-provoking exploration of the human experience in the face of the vastness of deep time.



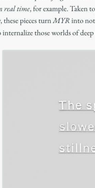
L: Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, The Wilding of Mars (simulation screenshot), 2019. Unity simulation, 4 screen video installation with sound, 1 hour. Courtesy of the artist. C: Heather Dewey-Hagborg, Lovesick, 2019. Ten glass vials with custom retrovirus in two vitrines, two channel video, sound, photographs, vinyl text. Courtesy of Fridman Gallery. Photo by Adam Reich. R: Rhonda Holberton, Displaced Hole IV, EPA CA 117009058 Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard, CA, 2013. Polyurethane foam, plaster, graphite. McEvoy Family Collection. Courtesy of the artist and CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions.

The exhibition, curated by Bay Area writer and lecturer Elizabeth Thomas, takes its name from the worlds of astronomy and geology, where it is a commonly used abbreviation for a span of one million years. Yet it also subtly evokes the idea of the *myriad* — a word that originally came from the ancient Greek term for ten-thousand, but has since come to mean an uncountably large and diverse set of things. The ideas and artforms on display at *MYR* capture this feeling of overwhelming diversity; rather than take a certain position on what the far future may hold, the exhibition seems to occupy a sort quantum superposition, showcasing a kaleidoscopic view of deep time that most of all emphasizes its unknowability.

In her curator's statement, Thomas notes that the artwork in the exhibition can "help us to decenter the human and imagine ourselves as a part of the world around us rather than apart from it." The most affecting works in *MYR*, though, are artforms on display at *MYR* capture this feeling of overwhelming diversity; rather than take a certain position on what the far future may hold, the exhibition seems to occupy a sort quantum superposition, showcasing a kaleidoscopic view of deep time that most of all emphasizes its unknowability.

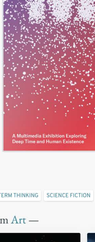
Consider Rhonda Holberton's *Displaced Hole* series, impressions of blast marks from nuclear testing and manufacturing sites cast in plaster and Polyurethane foam. Holberton's work considers both the extremely long lives of some radioactive isotopes — uranium's 700 myr half-life makes it uncertain if humanity will survive for the span of its more stable cousins — and the impact that human industries of energy and war have on the landscape in the nearer term. The sites she collected her casts from had in many cases been reclaimed by nature since their use as centers of manufacturing in the 01940s and 01950s, a testament to both the depth of our impact on the landscape and how even shorter lengths of time can wash that impact away.

The exhibition's set of physical works is accompanied by a series of short films screening on loop, each one further toying with the human experience of time. Multimedia artist Jenna Sutela's *Holobiont* explores the worlds of extremophilic bacteria and space travel, using visceral imagery of natto, a Japanese fermented soybean delicacy, juxtaposed with the clean rooms and purification facilities used by the European Space Agency's Planetary Protection quarantine systems. It's an almost overwhelming film, going from the cosmic to the gastric in just ten minutes. Other films in the exhibition explore cephalopods as a possible direction in human evolution and the ways in which plastics have pervaded the "interconnected network of fluids flowing through all land-based organisms."



Miriam Simun, YOUR URGE TO BREATHE IS A LIE, 2019. HD video, color, sound. 25 min. Courtesy of the artist.

Yet despite all of the sweeping, high-concept pieces in the exhibition, some of the most inspired works in the gallery may be the simplest. *MYR* includes a number of pieces by Scottish artist Katie Patterson, who previously has cataloged dead stars, captured the sound of melting glaciers, and begun a library project where the books will not be readable for a hundred years after they are written. Patterson's pieces in *MYR*, though, are more direct: a series of metal plates scattered throughout the gallery, subtle enough that you might miss them at first glance. Each piece in the *Ideas* series consists of a single, thought-provoking statement — *The speed of light slowed to absolute stillness* or *The universe rewound and played back in real time*, for example. Taken together with the more visually arresting works in the gallery, these pieces turn *MYR* into not just a collection of art but a place for contemplation, a way to internalize those worlds of deep time that can otherwise be so hard to grasp.



Katie Paterson, Ideas (The speed of light slowed to absolute stillness), 2016. Micro waterjet-cut sterling silver. McEvoy Family Collection. © Katie Paterson 2022. Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York. Photo by Ollie Harrop

MYR *is showing at the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts in San Francisco from May 27–Aug 27, 2022. Admission is free. For more information, see their website.*

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More from Art —

POETRY

Three Poems

Poems about the magical place and person Jung constructed for himself outside of time; the impending death of all artists and their art; and a throughline between a math/entropy scholar, Oblivion, and the speaker.

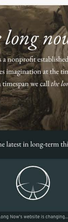
By Brianna Barnes

ART

This Present Moment in Motion

Two original videos from Long Now's video team capture the journey taken by Alicia Eggert's neon sculpture.

By The Long Now Foundation



POETRY

Five Poems

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ART

Alicia Eggert's This Present Moment

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Long Now's website is changing...

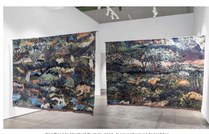
The Million-Year View @ McEvoy

JUNE 4, 2022
by Renny Pritikin

Katie Paterson, The Cosmic Spectrum, 2019spinning disk, printed vinyl, motor

When gray wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone Park at the turn of the century, rapid changes ensued. Elk herds had to move more quickly to evade the wolves. This resulted in greater health for willows and other plants which the elk could no longer devour at their leisure. In turn, the increased availability of willow trees enabled the beaver population to grow from one to eight colonies. Bird populations soared, as did those of smaller predators such as lynx.

The hidden and complex nature of ecosystems and the human impact on them is one of the subjects guest curator Elizabeth Thomas addresses in *MYR*, a group exhibition at McEvoy Foundation for the Arts. Candice Lin's *Verdant Curtain* (2020), a long, wide tapestry that stretches from one gallery wall to the other with a passage in the middle through which visitors can pass, opens the exhibition. Its imagery appears to parody the 19th-century nature painting of Henri Rousseau or Edward Hicks' *Peaceable Kingdom* (1830-32). What it depicts, however, is the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, which, in the absence of humanity for some six decades, now teems with life, as does the area in Ukraine around Chernobyl.



Candice Lin, Verdant Curtain, 2020, Jacquard woven tapestries

Thomas' title, MYR, refers to time measured in million-year increments. This big-picture approach acknowledges the relatively recent arrival of humans on the planet and our likely short-term presence. Accordingly, the exhibition features artists who think about life and the universe in those terms. For example, a small, suspended cable-and-wire orb by Tomás Saraceno, *Zonal Harmonic 1N 500-9*, (2017), elegantly depicts the interactions of invisible natural forces that encircle and shape our environment, modelling an idea he once proposed for large-scale colonies that float in the atmosphere.

Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg's *The Wilding of Mars*, 2019, a four-channel video, simulates the terraforming of Mars to make it Earth-like. The idea is to distribute seeds and allow flora to adapt and thrive, eventually producing enormous changes in soil and atmosphere that might accommodate human habitation. These changes would occur over many millennia rather than play out across years, as Elon Musk might have it. Heather Dewey-Hagborg presents a mixed-media set of objects titled *Lovesick* (2019)

Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, The Wilding of Mars, 2019, unity simulation, four-channel video, sound, 60 min.

that purports to document the lab-based development of a retrovirus that acts on humans to increase the bodily production of oxytocin, a hormone that, according to Wikipedia, promotes "pro-social behaviors, including trust, empathy, gazing, positive memories, processing of bonding cues, and positive communication." Chilling though the idea of human-designed evolution may be, it suggests that only technological interventions of this magnitude can counterbalance our unstoppable despoliation of the planet.

Amy Balkin's *A People's Archive of Sinking and Melting (State After COP 26, Glasgow, October–November 2021)*, (2021–present) invites residents of regions threatened by rising seas to contribute quotidian objects to an open-ended archive as a kind of anticipatory memorial, documented in a slide show. It aligns with efforts of other contemporary artists who prioritize activism, research and community participation.

Rhonda Holberton, Displaced Hole I: Sandia National Laboratories Livermore, CA, 2022, polyurethane foam, plaster, graphite

Rhonda Holberton explores human-caused environmental damage by digging bomb-crater-shaped holes in the soil at three California sites connected to atomic weapons development. From them, she made casts resulting in tapered fungus-like objects about a yard wide inscribed on their flats tops with graphite lines that lend them a loamy aura. Because radiation produced by nuclear weapons lasts hundreds of millions of years, these objects serve as totems of danger for future generations.

Katie Paterson's clearheaded, poetic installations of wall texts – half a dozen in all — dominate the exhibition and place her in league with a renowned group of artists, including Lawrence Weiner, Kay Rosen, Barbara Kruger, and Jenny Holzer. Each consists of sterling silver cut by waterjet. Her phrases, titled *Ideas*, are simultaneously silly, moving and clever. Example: *The universe rewound and played back in real time*. The largest piece in *MYR*, *The Cosmic Spectrum* (2019), a spinning vinyl disk about six feet in diameter, displays the average color of the universe throughout its history, a hue scientists have described as "cosmic latte." Paterson also offers a boxed display of two pieces of incense, which, if burned, will ostensibly recreate the odor of Earth's oldest forests.

Katie Paterson, IDEAS – (THE UNIVERSE REWOUND AND PLAYED BACK IN REAL TIME), 2017, micro-waterjet-cut sterling silver 4 1/4 x 11 1/8 x 1 1/8 inches

Miriam Simun's mural (accompanied by an online video and a poster), *Training Transhumanism (I WANT TO BECOME A CEPHALOPOD)* (2022) also appears in the exhibition, as do six short videos on related themes by Cauleen Smith, Jenna Sutela, Sissel Marie Tonn, Sophia Al Maria and Cannupa Hanska Luger.

In taking on the formidable task of curating an exhibition intended to be critical (but also imaginative and fun), Thomas has identified artists who have engaged with the distant past and the unfathomable future.

# # #

'MYR' @ McEvoy Foundation for the Arts through August 27, 2022.

About the author: Renny Pritikin was the chief curator at The Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco from 2014 to 2018. Before that, he was the director of the Richard Nelson Gallery at UC Davis and the founding chief curator at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts beginning in 1992. For 11 years, he was also a senior adjunct professor at California College of the Arts, where he taught in the graduate program in Curatorial Practice. Pritikin has given lecture tours in museums in Japan as a guest of the State Department, and in New Zealand as a Fulbright Scholar, and visited Israel as a Koret Israel Prize winner. The Prelinger Library published his most recent book of poems, Westerns and Dramas, in 2020. He is the United States correspondent for Umbigo magazine in Lisbon, Portugal.

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Comments

Laura Stokes says
JUNE 4, 2022 AT 12:12 PM

This article is worth the read because of the topic and because it brings attention to the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts in San Francisco.

For me, the topic is this. For any artists concerned about the state of the environment, this exhibition reminds us that we all have something called "agency."

We all have the ability to contribute to changing the world within our area of influence. Never disrespect your agency.

I was not aware of the existence of the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts until I read this article. I'm happy to hear about it.

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Group Exhibition: Show Me as I Want to Be Seen Contemporary Jewish Museum

Feb 7, 2019–Jul 7, 2019

Water Striders, 2015 (installation view, foreground). Platinum cure silicone, nylon power mesh, and polyurethane foam. The Italian Navigator Has Landed in the New World, 2014 (installation view, background). Single-channel HD color digital animation. Photo by Johnna Arnold.

Assistant Curator Natasha Matteson of the Contemporary Jewish Museum included 9 pieces of my work in a group exhibition of 10 contemporary examining presentation of self and fluidity of identity in conversation with artist and writer Claude Cahun (1894–1954) that ran from Feb 7, 2019–Jul 7, 2019. The exhibition is accompanied by a 112-page, fully illustrated hardcover catalog published by The CJM.

In addition to the installation and catalog, the museum also produced a video interview with me, asked me to give a presentation of my work to the museum's directors and staff, and published a conversation I had with the director of marketing on the museums' website.

Curatorial Statement for the Exhibition
How do we depict "the self" if it is unknowable, inherently constructed, and ever-changing? How does the concept of portraiture shift when categories are in crisis and visibility itself is problematic? Jewish thought on performed and fluid identity can be interpreted in the Book of Esther in the Hebrew Bible, an archetypal story of an empowered declaration of Jewish identity. Likewise, the Talmudic notion of svara is a potent entry-point to Jewish practices of self-determination, themes that animate Show Me as I Want to Be Seen.

Taking the work of French Jewish artist and writer Claude Cahun (1894–1954) and her lifelong lover and collaborator Marcel Moore (1892–1972) as its starting point, Show Me as I Want to Be Seen examines the empowered representation of fluid and complex identity. Cahun (born Lucy Schwob) and Moore (born Suzanne Malherbe) were pioneers in their bold representations of an unfixed self. This exhibition positions their work in dialogue with ten contemporary artists working in painting, sculpture, photography, video, and 3-D animation. The contemporary artists in the exhibition—Nicole Eisenman, Rhonda Holberton, Hiwa K, Young Joon Kwak, Zanele Muholi, Toyin Ojih Odutola, Gabby Rosenberg, Tschabalala Self, Davina Semo, and Isabel Yellin—also address notions of the opaque, constructed, and shifting self.

Press Extracts

A Probing Look at How We Perform and Present the Self, Harry Tafoya, Hyperallergic
"Rhonda Holberton is uniquely attuned to the weirdness and multiplicity of performed selves online and offers some of the show's best work with her uncanny, half-scanned animated pieces."

Show Me as I Want to be Seen @ CJM, Square Cylinder
Tirza True Latimer, Associate Professor and Chair of the Visual and Critical Studies Graduate Program at California College of the Arts
"FOIL, one of my favorite pieces (again by Holberton), takes aim at state sponsored systems of surveillance and control. Research conducted by the CIA in the early 1990s acknowledges human scent as a highly accurate biometric, more failsafe than fingerprinting, facial recognition or retinal scanning. Holberton created FOIL, a fragrance line distilled from smelly T-shirts donated by friends. She bottled the fragrances in atomizers, which can serve to mask a person's signature scent and foil this form of olfactory surveillance."

Artists Explore Self with Nuance and Complexity, SF/Arts
Jean Schiffman, Arts Journalist
"Rhonda Holberton's large digital animations are particularly unsettling: In one, a headless, fragmented and disintegrating body is doing yoga asanas; Holberton scanned her own body to create a model, then animated it. "She's posing questions about whether and how we might be able to represent ourselves in virtual space with avatars," points out Matteson."

Gender fluidity & mutable identity, Bay Area Reporter
Sura Wood, Arts & Culture Critic
“Oakland artist Rhonda Holberton is represented by nine installations, each more fascinating and mind-boggling than the next. Too bad there weren't more. Among other things, she envisions a world where the human body is obsolete, a relief or a disaster, depending on one's point of view, but at least there'd be no hay fever. For the digital animation "The Ground Was Never Stable in the First Place" (2015), she tried on football padding and riot gear, 3-D scanned her body, then animated the scan walking forward, combining movement of soldiers marching and fashion models strolling down the runway. The result: a plaster-white, robotic space soldier of indeterminate gender, wearing breastplate armor and arm and shin guards, its face half-blown off a la "The Terminator" on a bad day. Soulless and unstoppable, it strides relentlessly toward the viewer. Even spookier is "The Italian Navigator Has Landed in the New World" (2014), for which Holberton also used keyframe animation techniques similar to puppetry or stop-motion. Headless, missing part of an arm, and the flesh-tone of raw chicken, a limber figure resembling a ripped egg carton goes through the paces of a virtual yoga routine, a spectacle disturbing in a way that's difficult to overstate.”

‘Beneath This Mask, Another Mask’: Identity is Unfixed in CJM’s ‘Show Me’, KQED Arts
Sarah Hotchkiss, Visual Arts Editor, KQED Arts
“Rhonda Holberton’s Just This One Thing—part of the show but only visible to those who have the wherewithal to scroll through the Oakland-based artist’s Instagram feed—skewers the spare, ecru-hued “Instagram aesthetics” of influencers’ lifestyle posts.

A croissant, a stack of baskets, handmade ceramics—Holberton creates the images by 3D-scanning actual objects and staging them in virtual space. In a quick scroll-by, the digital fabrications appear innocuous, ordinary. Only close inspection reveals them to be oddly pixelated approximations. Tagging each image #stilllife, along with hashtags like #rainydays or #sundaymorning, Holberton launches these interruptions into the stream of “real” Instagram posts, themselves approximations of actual lives.”

‘Show Me as I Want to be Seen’ examines artistic and gender identity, SF Chronicle
Charles Desmarais, Art Critic for the San Francisco Chronicle
“Rhonda Holberton, who lives and works in Oakland, makes a particularly strong showing with works that make coldly poetic use of video and digital media.”

LINK TO FULL ARTICLES (PDF)

As Rhonda Holberton talks about her process depicting still her hands the arrangement and heft of the objects that appear in her images–it's hard not to think of those things and that space as real. But everything, from the objects themselves to the famously 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, breaks together the real and virtual worlds so tightly that it becomes nearly impossible to separate one from the other.

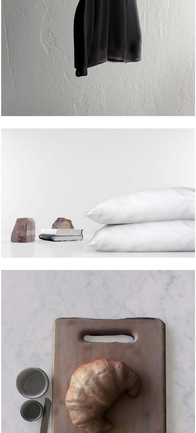
In the twenty-first century, most people navigate between real and virtual worlds almost, if not hundreds, of times daily. We project ourselves into the digital realm through photographs and videos, and we bring the digital into our physical spaces through open source software. We don't often mistake 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 as those limits in representation, challenging us to recognize digital noise, to see pixelation and lag. Her 3D scans of objects, like the Instagram photographs we take of them, are imperfect renderings of their surrounding space in utterly convincing. the image of the original object remains clear. The artifacting in her images makes formal the ruggedness of the movement between the real and the virtual; it is this haphazard, improvisatory character that tips her images into the uncanny. They are too close to real.

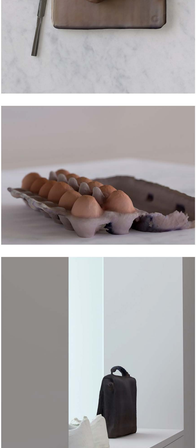
THE QUESTION RAISED BY HOLBERTON'S WORK IS NOT JUST LOOK HOW MUCH THESE PICTURES LOOK LIKE EACH OTHER, BUT LOOK HOW MUCH THE REAL WORLD JUST LOOKS LIKE THE REAL WORLD THESE ARE THERE ARE THESE.

The genre of still life painting, to which the title of Holberton's series alludes, has historically disseminated a teasing awareness of the differences between things themselves and their images. The Romans seem motif symbolized a town's generosity through a bountiful display of fruits and vegetables, and the Dutch Golden Age still life paintings, with their meticulous attention to detail about reason, were an excess was made present through the pictures. William Harnett and John Frederick Peto's popular trainwork, 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 those images represent. The images Holberton creates are not immediately recognizable as digital renderings, but they are not quite real either. Her images seem to exist merely to be beautiful photographs of covetable objects. Yet, unlike Harnett or Peto subtonics, viewers of Holberton's images on Instagram are often stumped by her "Still Life" pictures. Some commentors read the pixelation or artifacting as a unique cosmetic effect, while others assumed that the images were simply poorly rendered. Holberton's work, in other words, has achieved that occasional an social media's delight of hand, where many, unfiltered life is falsified into enviable images. what Holberton's work brings most startlingly to light is the very constructedness of contemporary life itself. Beautified would agree that the images we take of ourselves, our food, our drinks, our homes, and restaurants around the world seems more and more like Instagram come to life. They have become living images of themselves.

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 looks like the real world these and there. Doesn't that make my little denim or period succulents or kicks carpets in reach a reproduction as any photograph? The most layers of mediation that Holberton inserts between the putative real object and the image of that object, the more real those objects seem. Is this a function of the ubiquity of digital images in our lives? Or is it a lesion of our found realism? And, most importantly, where isn't the is? Holberton's dissembling images. their pictorial grace that seems a cross between Heath ceramics and sci-fi horror, reveal the yawning emptiness that mind thumpy struggles to fill.





www.rhondaholberton.com

Written by Kim Bell

Kim Bell is the Associate Director for ITALIC, an interdisciplinary arts program at Stanford University, where she also teaches courses in literature and 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, in a no. contemporary art quarterly, Visual Resources, and Afterimage.

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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 Ateneo Friberg Exhibitions

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Rhonda Holberton: Still Life
Transfer Gallery
7 April – 10 May, 2018
Review by Grace Storey

'Still Life' in the second iteration of San Francisco-based artist Rhonda Holberton's exhibition - first presented at CULT Ateneo Friberg 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 destabilise the notion of these binaries, and explore the possibility of a third space.

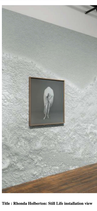
'Still Life (Vanitas)' (2017), is an archival pigment print of a digital simulation which draws a parallel between capitalist systems of exchange, the currency of digital aesthetics and 17th Century Dutch still life painting commissioned by the mercantile class, which can be regarded as some of the earliest social imagery. Holberton's still life depicts a fragmented bust modelled 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 'Neocon', have a rough, uneven texture, as a result of the inaccuracy of the 3D scan. Holberton's quivering objects do not fall into the trap of nostalgia for the analogue objects which carry a coded memory of their personal, material and cultural histories.

In two performative works titled 'Dust to Dust' (2017), Holberton uses her body to 'engage corporeally with a global materialism 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 tattoo technology to live-stream a syringe of mosquitoes bred from her own blood. This action alludes to the artist's relationship to the body, and to the ecological impact of humans in the Anthropocene / Climatic Change, challenging the conception of an interdependent Mother Earth. By inserting herself into a local system indicative of a much larger system, Holberton's digital 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 3 grams of gold displayed within a vitrine, panned by Holberton from the California landscape. Referring to the frequent association of 20th Century gold with 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 Hiroky Kita's idea of 'Virtual Memory', whereby he contends that virtuality is not a contrarian, 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.

Transfer Gallery, 1030 Metropolitan Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11211

Rhonda Holberton: Still Life



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Credit : Photo by Dan Bradica, courtesy of the artist and CULT Ateneo Friberg Exhibitions

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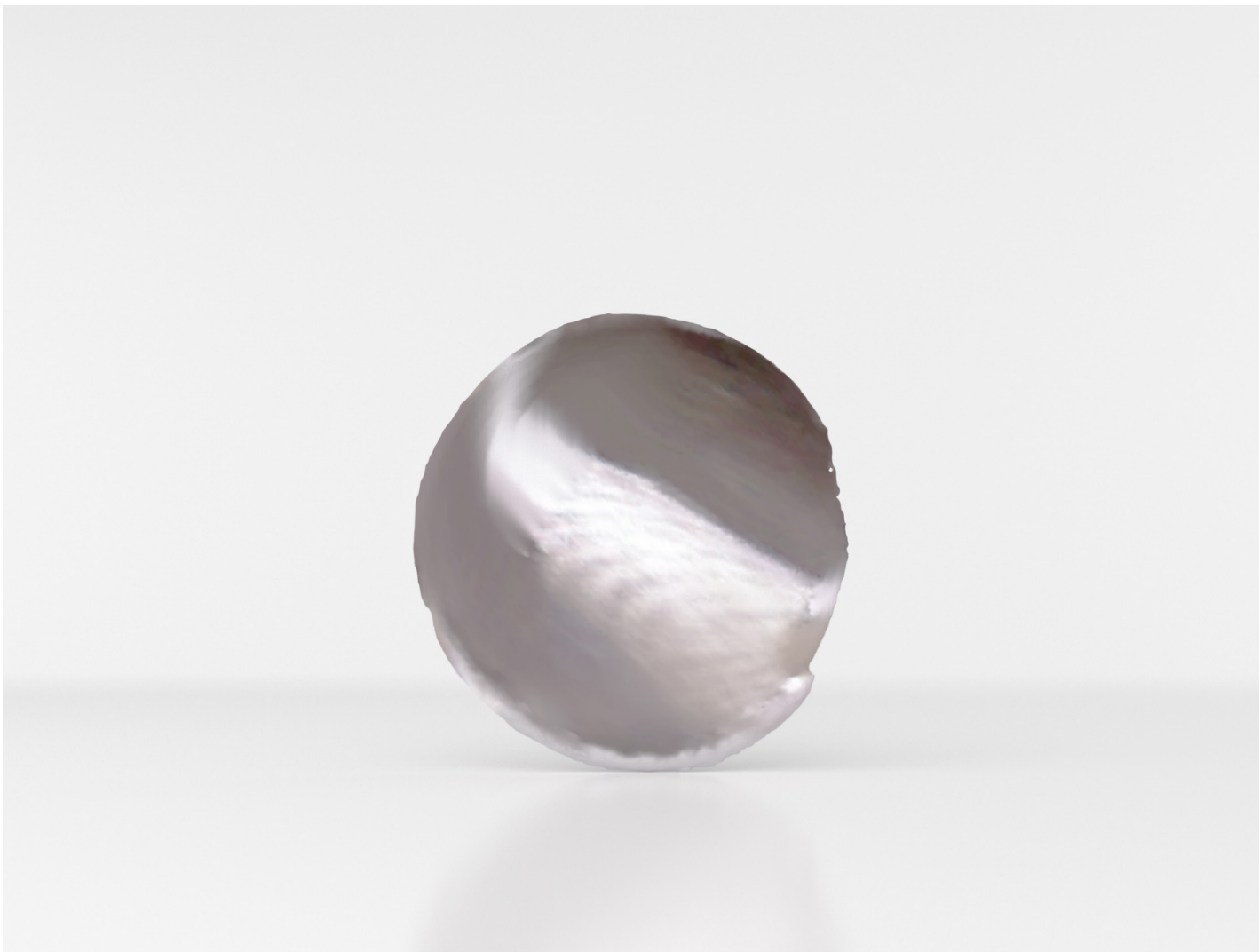
STILL LIFE

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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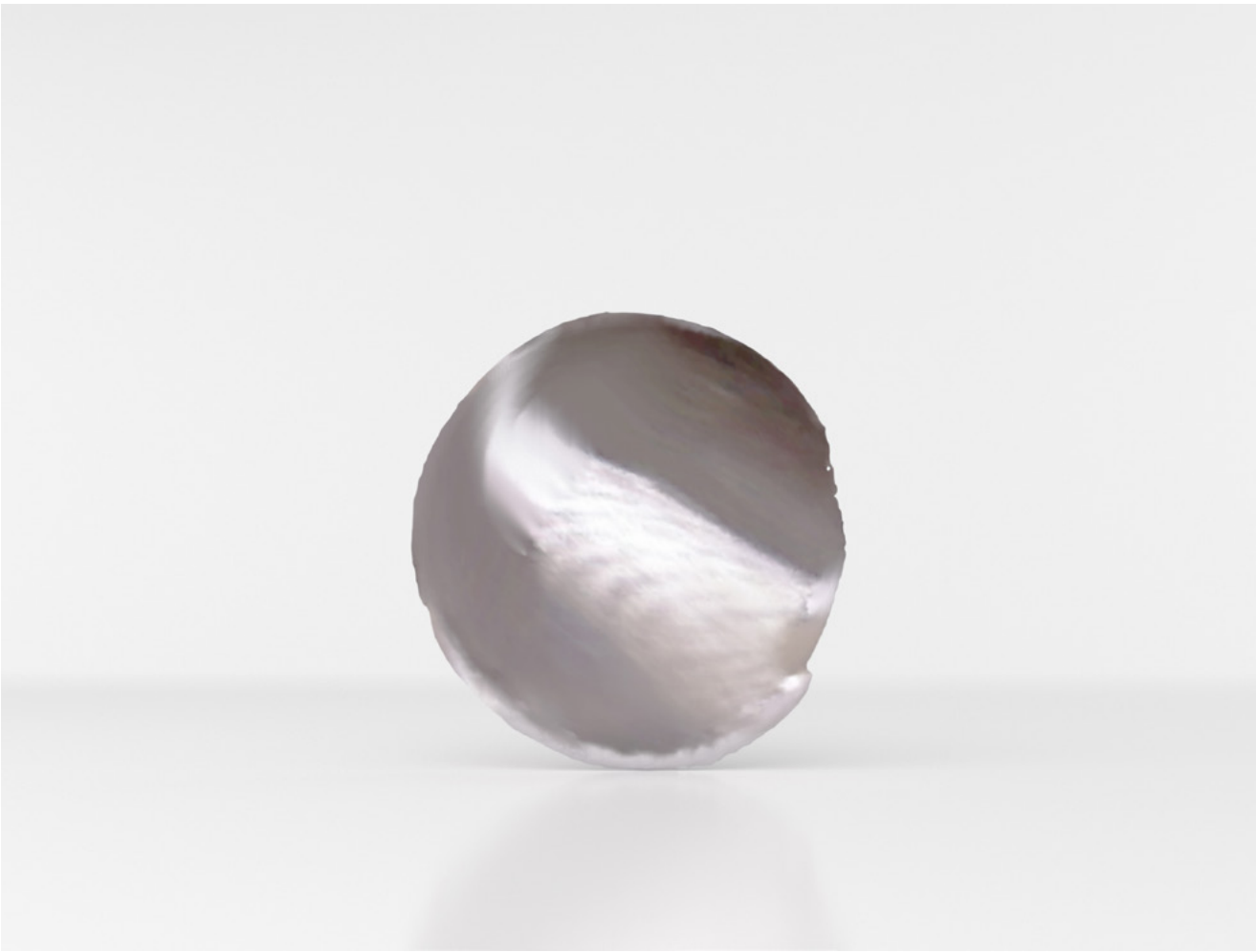


Cyclic Compression

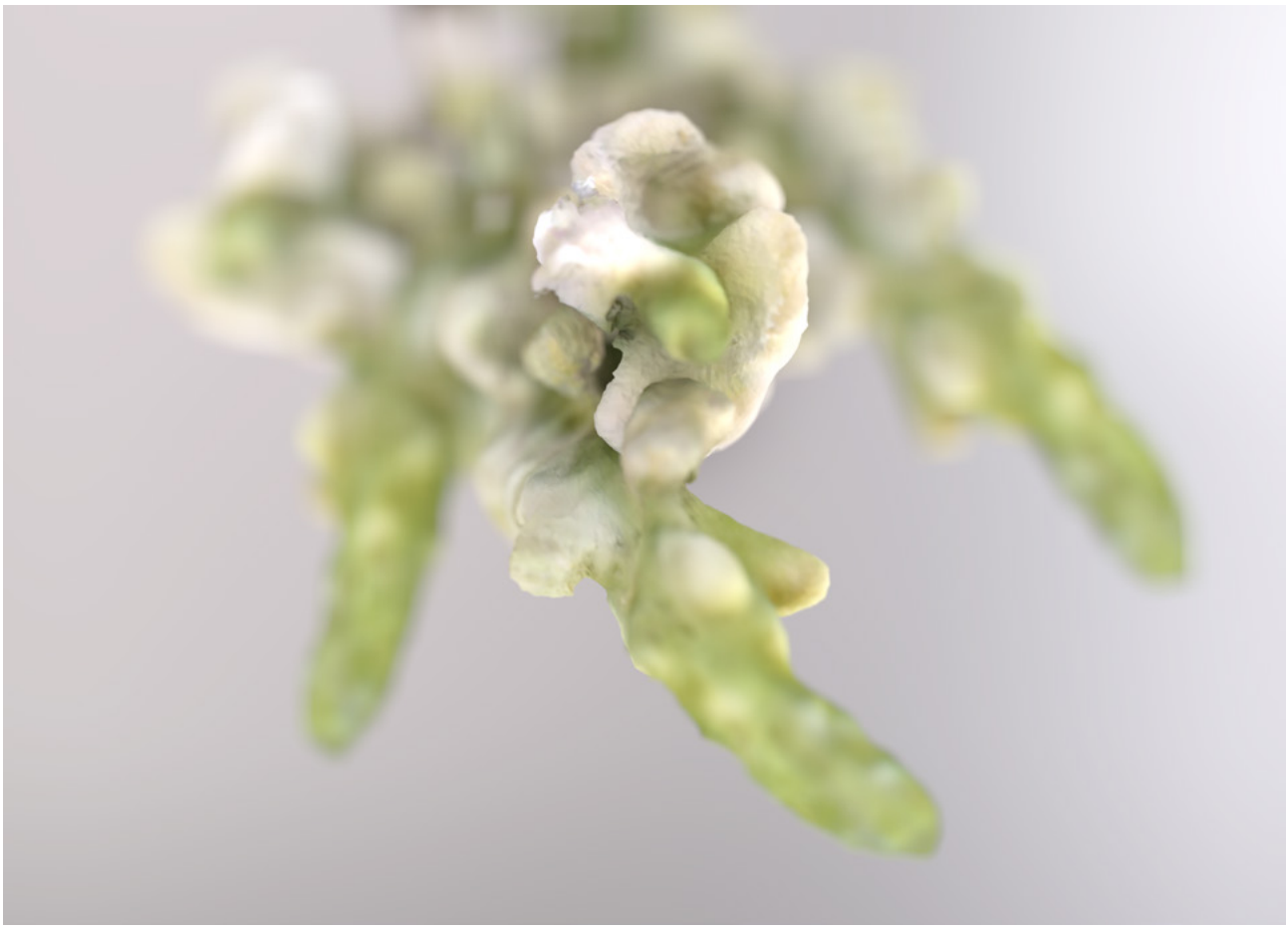
ENERGETIC CONTACT AND THE ARTIST AS MEDIUM

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.

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.

Art in America

FIRST LOOK

Rhonda Holberton. *>QR CODE< (FOIL)*, 2014, fragrance in glass atomizers, 6 by 1½ by 1½ inches each.

Rhonda Holberton

by Ceci Moss

RHONDA HOLBERTON examines military practice in order to consider how technology is used to view, read and track humans. In her earlier works, Holberton, who lives in Oakland, Calif., attempted to collapse the distance between herself and obscure sites of nuclear testing and research. For *As Close As I Can Get* (2012), part of the body of work she produced while pursuing an MFA at Stanford, she rolled soft resin beneath the gates of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). The pliant material cured into long rods imprinted by the pavement and the gates. To make *Displaced Holes* (2012), the artist dug large holes in the earth at LLNL and similar locations and cast them in foam and plaster. This process allowed her to map largely cordoned-off places through their physical impressions, an investigation that led the artist to elaborate other means of accessing the sites and the surveillance tools of the military-industrial complex.

For her 2014 solo exhibition "YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW" at Pro Arts in Oakland, Holberton rerouted technologies developed for military purposes into everyday items. Her perfume *>QR CODE<* (*FOIL*), 2014, for example, uses CIA-developed methods of detecting genetically unique human scents to distill a fragrance from T-shirts worn by anonymous volunteers, that would cloak the scent of the wearers, making them undetectable to olfactory surveillance. Across a large wall of the gallery, Holberton affixed repetitive black-and-white wallpaper with a pattern that, when printed on streetwear, would help people hide in an urban landscape. In front of this wall stood two identical mannequins wearing unisex clothing made from a fabric complementary to this visually dazzling display, their silhouettes suggesting bodies beneath the camouflage. By integrating dubious techniques of tracking or disguise into mundane items such as clothing and perfume, Holberton signals the subtle ways in which military research filters into civilian life, posing a threat of pervasive military control through biopower. ○

CURRENTLY ON VIEW
"You Are Something That the Whole World Is Doing," at the Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley, Calif., through May 3.

CECI MOSS is assistant curator of visual arts at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. See Contributors page.

SFAQ / NYAQ / AQ
INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE

James Cordas and Rhonda Holberton, Cold Storage, 2015. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artists and City Limits. Photo: Kristine Eudy

DISPARATE MEASURES FOR TWO SOLO SHOWS

LEORA LUTZ — DECEMBER 19, 2015

City Limits is presenting Rhonda Holberton and James Cordas, featuring their new work as a two-person show; the pairing juxtaposes both quiet and loud visual and sensory experiences—singularly titled *Cold Storage*. The room is a bit crowded, so seeing the two for their individual merits is difficult. Not that there needs to be the same number of pieces by each artist, but leaving space to breathe between the two would have been beneficial for visitors to be able to experience the work more fully. The work of each artist is in conversation with the other, but more evident at first are their differences.

Holberton's work is more subtle, visually speaking, in her predominantly white color palette and several understated sculptures, whereas Cordas's works incorporate a rainbow of colors, spatially dominating sculpture, as well as an audio piece that overshadows the entire space and therefore the whole show. Both artists also include film in their work: Holberton's monochromatic white film of one subject occupies one wall, whereas Cordas offers two films of multiple images on two monitors. Additionally, the gallery chose to, with the approval of the artists, scatter the floor with fluorescent light tubes in order to illuminate

the space from below, rather than from above, so that the space was dimmer than usual and more conducive to viewing the films in conjunction with providing ambient lighting for the sculpture. These can be somewhat easily mistaken as art objects, creating some confusion amongst the work.

Rhonda Holberton, A Fallen Pixel: #3, 2015. Polyurethane foam, plaster, acrylic paint (Printed from stock 3d model), 18 x 10 x 10 in. Image courtesy of the artist and City Limits. Photo: Kristine Eudy

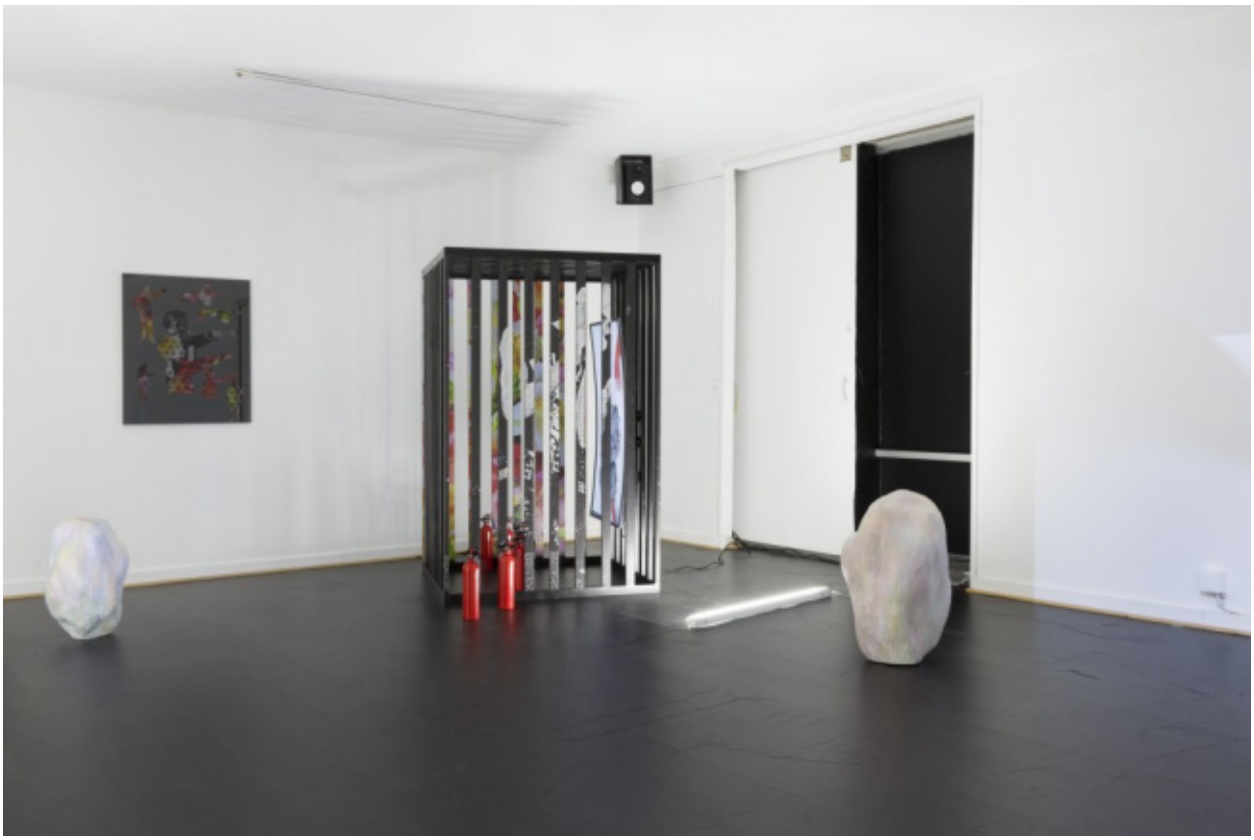
There is potent work here that utilizes digital source materials and tangible objects. Holberton's series *A Fallen Pixel*consists of three sculptures, each created using the same downloaded object from a publically sourced website (which Holberton prefers to leave anonymous) and made on a 3D printing device. This unobtrusive shape is iterated in graduating sizes from 28" to 22" to 18," echoing notions of public accessibility, fair use, and commodification. Upon some Internet sleuthing, I learned that there are at least four dozen sites that offer files (basically templates) for making objects on 3D printers. There are also over 35 sites where people can share, buy or sell file creations, and display the things they make and accumulate friends and followers who also enjoy or make 3D files and objects. Holberton has chosen a rock for her object—which is humorous to say the least, and at once too strange to laugh at. The title implies that the works could have fallen from the sky, as if during a meteor shower or alien invasion. They

are coated with plaster and painted with white iridescent pastel sheen, accented by shades of mint green and pale lavender, reiterating a science fiction quality as if they are relics from another planet's landscape brought back from space exploration. These qualities are in keeping with her history of engaging with the intersection of nature and military operations, particularly the sites of nuclear testing. In doing so, she explores human destruction of Earth, and the pervious dealings of volatile measures that are taken to protect the populace.

Rhonda Holberton, N-O U-N-R-E-A-L T-H-I-N-G E-X-I-S-T-S, 2015. Powder coated steel, polyester resin cast, acrylic mirror, media player, 66 x 12 x 12 in. Image courtesy of the artist and City Limits. Photo: Kristine Eudy

Projected on the largest wall of the gallery is her film *Knights of the Sky*, which includes footage of sand dunes from the POV of the camera operator walking over and down the crests of sand. The title references WWI combat aerial fighter aces (though a reference to the simulator game of the same name created in 1990 is also an interesting interpretation). Holberton's film is projected on an entire wall, creating an immersive effect as the camera jostles slightly, bobbing so that the viewer can share in the journey. For Holberton, sand dunes are desolate and contemplative but are also politically charged sites

for testing weapons and surveillance. Nearby, her sculpture *N-O U-N-R-E-A-L T-H-I-N-G-E-X-I-S-T-S* features a clenched fist in polyester resin, as if in defiance against government or military violence. Holberton's poetic works are simple yet powerful statements about government control that require one to read between the lines—like haiku for insurgent radicals.



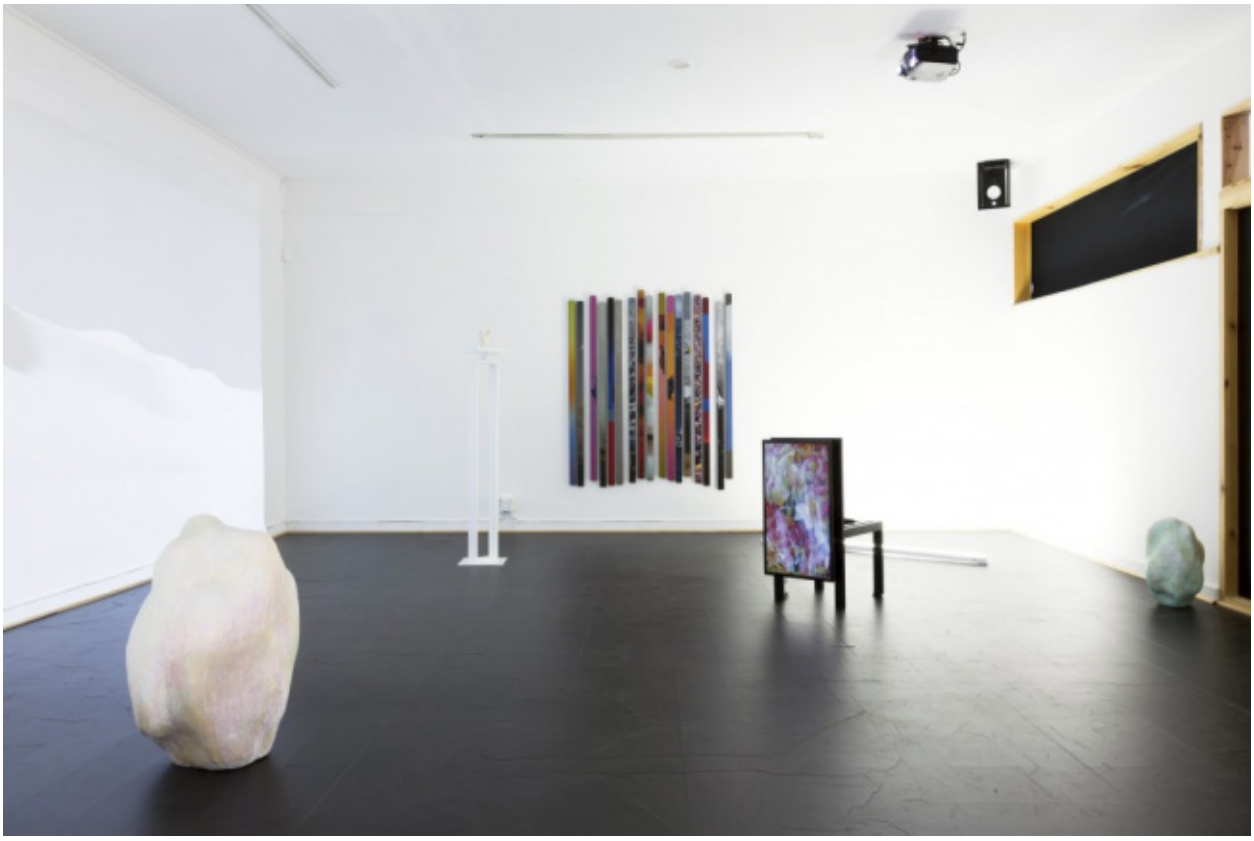
James Cordas and Rhonda Holberton, Cold Storage, 2015. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artists and City Limits. Photo: Kristine Eudy

Meanwhile, Cordas's elephant in the room is the cage-come-jail-cell sculpture that includes panel strips printed with imagery, a monitor inside showing a 23-minute looped video, and a row of small red fire extinguishers that lead from the inside out. Titled *A mason jar full of wasps*, the video inside features arms painted bright red reaching into a jar with a drowned wasp, including cuts to a mangled wasp nest being handled without gloves—a dangerous innuendo. The sound is foreboding and urgent, with loud shrieks and white noise hushes. Another sound work, WW *Alien 3* (1992) and includes a monologue performed by Charles Dutton during a eulogy scene. The audio has been completely altered using a granular sampler that alters the sound to create a loop. In an email exchange with him, Cordas shared that the first music CD he purchased as a youth was the *Alien 3* soundtrack, bypassing the popular skater punk, grunge, and Brit-Pop of the '90s for something that scared him—prompting him to seek answers as to why he was, and clearly still is enamored by the orchestration of Goldenthal's music.

James Cordas, Chair, 2015. Brushed steel, LED monitor, book, James Gendron, perforated vinyl, chair, 36 x 23 x 17 in.; human, 5 ft. 11 in. Image courtesy of the artists and City Limits. Photo: Kristine Eudy

The act of sampling music is a regular practice for Cordas, whether with music, images, or language—and he more frequently has been working on collaborations, including writing and reading poetry. For this show Cordas invited writerKevin Killian to rewrite poet James Gendron's *Sexual Boat (Sex Boats)* (2013), into a limited edition hard-bound book, which includes several solid single-color pages that act as an artist interlude by Cordas. During the opening reception, Gendron himself sat in a piece titled *Chair,* which includes an embedded video monitor that screens over 100 original photos of lily imagery, also reiterated on the jail cell bars. Gendron stared at the monochromatic pages during the exhibition in order to alter his vision perception of light after staring at color. Throughout Cordas's work, there are multiple layers of repetition, be it bars, flashing imagery, or painted, perforated surfaces. Thematically, Cordas grapples with many emotions of love, of color perception, feelings of containment and ritual, as well as issues of altered states of awareness.

Together, Cordas and Holberton reconsider the roles people play in relation to each other, be it through government control or with language and imagery, each using their own very personal interests to channel these ideas. Conceptually, they both tap into the frightening world of information sharing that blurs public and private space. Aesthetically, the work is disparate on the outside, but in the end it is the human condition that they both seek. Their work is loaded with complex backstories that are not easily accessed without inquiry (or further research)—not unlike the privacy many people seek in their own lives.



James Cordas and Rhonda Holberton, Cold Storage, 2015. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artists and City Limits. Photo: Kristine Eudy

TEMPORARY

Temporary Art Review
Rhonda Holberton at Royal NoneSuch Gallery
E. MAUDE HAAK-FRENDSCHO
December 15, 2014

Rhonda Holberton, in her exhibition *The Italian Navigator has Landed in the New World* at Royal NoneSuch Gallery, "imagines the body as seen by the machine on the other side of the screen." Utilizing the hollowed out forms of casts, imagery of the silicon molding of the CPR dummy Resusci Anne, and body scans of herself animated into yoga practice, Holberton addresses mediations between body and mind, through technology and across time. Through material and technological reproductions of bodily forms, she problematizes how bodies are sensed—and known.

From the gallery window pristine white casts of limbs and other body sections are arranged like a collection displayed for emerging doctors, a display I imagine might be called "Best Practices in Osteopathic Medicine" in that context. Holberton titles the work *Something of the Same Feeling to Everyone*. The cast-encrusted body is echoed in a projection on the rear wall of the gallery, a single-channel video created using Microsoft's Kinect technology, which uses infrared dots for position tracking and facial recognition. For *The Italian Navigator has Landed in the New World*, Holberton scanned her body to create a 3D model, later animated to recreate her yoga practice. It's jarring to watch; no smooth Vinyasa, just halting and modulation on a loop. The incompletely rendered Holberton is headless, handless, and dons a cast that breaks open, revealing no body inside, when moved in positions that exceed the boundaries of the cast—a trick reserved solely for the realm of the virtual.

Adjacent in the gallery is a large photographic reproduction of a partial face, a stack of silicon molds, in fact, of a CPR dummy. Holberton tells us in the exhibition statement that Resusci Anne, the name of the training mannequin, has been in production and use since 1958. The face belongs, ironically, to L'Inconnue de la Seine, an unidentified woman who drowned in the River Seine near the end of the last century. In circulation and reproduction so long, she has the most kissed face of all time; she is known, and now belongs to all of us. Through the distance of reproduction and the intimacy of mouth-to-mouth, she has found a name but not an identity.

These medical technologies are not neutral in their masking of the unknown and broken aspects of our fragile bodies. Always striving for an ideal state of health—a set-up that denies a range of bodies, and death—the biomedical model in general, and it's support technologies specifically, continue to study and train for medical health interventions through body reproductions and artifacts. The technologies to facilitate a functioning body as breathing, whole, unbroken also impart distance from actual bodies, from actual breath, skin, and bone. The armature can be described and articulated, but can it really be known?

Holberton cuts to the quick; the technology she uses is tellingly called PrimeSense, for Microsoft Kinect. "Sense" has taken on new connotations in new technology. It's no longer the sole purview of people to perceive their worlds; the television show *Shark Tank* tells me that sensor technology is the future, and a good one to invest in. What does that mean for the primacy of our embodied sense experience? Or closer: who knows it better, your body or the machine? Historically, philosophical debates have privileged one or the other, sense knowing versus abstract or theoretical knowing. There is a gap between the two, one beautifully addressed by poet and software engineer Maged Zaher from his book *If Reality Doesn't Work Out*: "In my fantasy, you are / In the distance between the mathematical model and the physical object / This accurate inadequacy this inadequate accuracy." The reproductions made by a computer may be credible, but they can't universally capture embodied experiences for the infinitely diverse set of humanity. There is a space between embodied sense knowledge and the sensor knowledge of medical technologies.

Flopped on the middle of the gallery floor is a normative white person BandAid flesh colored yoga mat. It is laid out with a twist in the middle of its flesh, and is the thickness, density, and texture of human skin. It is somehow quite disturbing to imagine touching it, in a way that actual skin-to-skin contact is not. It's an alienated production of a part dissociated from the rest of its non-being. The visceral reaction to this oversized skin flap perfectly captures the tensions that Holberton explores: alienation from our bodies and loss of identity to reproductions of our physical selves.

Rhonda Holberton: The Italian Navigator has Landed in the New World *is on view at Royal NoneSuch Gallery in Oakland, CA through December 14th, 2014.*
Images courtesy of Royal NoneSuch Gallery. Photos: Rhonda Holberton

DAILYSERVING
AN INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Rhonda Holberton: YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW at Pro Arts Gallery

Amanda N. Simons

September 14, 2014

Pro Arts Gallery in downtown Oakland is currently host to *YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW*, a 2 x 2 Solos exhibition of work by Rhonda Holberton, curated by FICTILIS.[1] Mere footsteps from the former epicenter of Occupy Oakland's nightly clashes with police, Holberton's work serves as a critical commentary and an eerie reminder of the (sometimes camouflaged) structures of authority that govern civilian life. The exhibition is a series of visual iterations on military technology, consumer culture, and concealment, in the form of textiles, video and sound installations, computer-aided sculpture, and product design.

Rhonda Holberton. *YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW*, 2014; installation view; Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland, California.

All the Actors Have Withdrawn (2014) is a digital video projected onto a frosted acrylic panel placed upright on a pedestal. The video depicts a gray-toned, three-dimensional rendering of what appears to be three nude female figures melding into a single conjoined form. Arms, elbows, and fists protrude outward at various angles in combat-like stances. The image rotates upon a central point to reveal a 360-

degree view of this grainy, broken, and disintegrating form frozen in space. While the pedestal, figurative form, and rotation at first call reference to classical bronze sculpture, the momentum of the rotation suggests a deeper intent that challenges classical conventions. With less emphasis placed upon the aesthetics of the object, *All the Actors Have Withdrawn* depicts, rather, a violent conflict carefully paused at an opportune moment.

But the piece itself is only half the experience. The projector from which the video emanates is mounted above the piece and is directed at the viewer. Its lens is carefully taped to reveal just a slit of light that shines and flickers uncomfortably downward. As I stood there, I found myself conflicted. Instinct and experience said to move away from the voyeuristic projector lens, at the risk of being unable to experience the work, but the video's movement called me to stay put. Such a conflict raises the question, at what point do we sacrifice our personal privacy for the sake of participating in or even simply experiencing contemporary culture? Or, in light of contemporary government surveillance, are we even afforded such a choice today?

Like the content it addresses, Holberton's work is surprisingly subtle and strategic in its execution. The exhibition's carefully curated objects —flowing ponchos, perfume bottles, and digitally rendered wallpaper—reference our everyday lives with a comfortable familiarity. With time, the initial ease one might feel dissipates as the camouflaged works reveal themselves: video masked as reality, war marketed as fashion, and an installation that brands gallery-goers not as passive recipients of the works' messages, but rather as active participants, implicated by their very presence in the space.

YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW *is on view at Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland, California, through September 19, 2014.*

Amanda N. Simons is an artist, writer, and educator who lives in Oakland. She received an MFA in Studio Art and an MA in Visual and Critical Studies from California College of the Arts, and is the Exhibition Coordinator for San Francisco's Queer Cultural Center.

[1] FICTILIS is the collaborative practice of Andrea Steves and Timothy Furstnau.

Copenhagen Institute for **Futures** Studies
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Issue 3/2015

GLOBAL SCANNING REVIEW

INCLUDED INSIDE

This issue looks at augmenting creativity, collectingalgorithms,regressiveinnovation, biological concrete, knowledge multipliers, crayon therapy, unfinishedness, digital hygiene, micro-moments, earthscrapers and the underground, the smell of security, sentient workspaces and much more.

FUTURE OF
SOCIETY & GOVERNANCE

DESIGNING BY DATA

Taking mass-customisation to a new level with data and the power of the crowd

Swedish architecture firm Tham & Videgård have been commissioned by property agency Hemnet to design the most sought-after home in the country using data. The 'Hemnet Home' project is an experiment in the use of consumer data to lead architectural design. Drawing on statistics and analytics collected by Hemnet, the designers were able to find the most desirable size, price and layout of homes in Sweden. 86,000 online property advertisements were measured in terms of popularity, with 200 million user clicks analysed. The result is a new home archetype 'for everyone by everyone'. The use of individual data to lead design is being taken to new heights. Projects such as this look at the power and wisdom of the crowd to determine designs that will be well received. Tracking online behaviour and observing desire lines allows organisations and governments alike to analyse and gain insights into consumer-citizen preference and potentially improve the user experience or citizen journey. *Source Link*

DIGITAL HOSPITALS

Full digitsation enables the optimisation of resource and increase user satisfaction

Toronto will soon open the first fully digital hospital in North America. It was designed with the efficiency of an airport in mind and will enable a smooth flow of data, people, and materials. The construction has been based on five principles – lean, green, digital, patient care, and community. Digital capabilities bring interoperability to improve efficiency, accuracy, reliability and safety, while the unrestricted flow of information provides access to care providers, patients, and community partners. Some of the features include voice recognition for immediate bedside charting, robotic blood testing completed within minutes instead of hours, immediate charting of diagnostic images, allowing real-time remote consulting with experts 24/7, robotic delivery of non-narcotics and suppliers, and patient ability to order food, control lights, use the phone and access materials online through a centralised panel by the bedside. *Source Link*

THE SMELL OF SECURITY

New security considerations with the proliferation of bio-information

Rhonda Holberton is an American artist who, as a part of her creative production, developed a perfume called FOIL. The scent is derived from t-shirts worn by three complete strangers. Rhonda has done this by using techniques, deployed by the CIA and the FBI that can detect human beings by their scent. The idea of the perfume is symbolic. Rhonda wants to put attention on the fact that anyone can spray on the perfume and adopt someone else's scent to mask their own. There are parts of a scent that remain completely unique and unchanged for each individual throughout life. Now researchers are trying to find out what part of the human odour can be broken down into a specific DNA, using biometrics. If this method can be standardised, odour can be used as a part of a personal ID. *Source Link*

BIOLOGICAL CONCRETE

Improving the sustainability of urban centres with new materials

Henk Jonkers is a microbiologist at Delft University of Technology, who is working on a concrete with built-in bacteria that can fill in cracks as they form. The bacteria are packaged in minuscule pellets, which together look like a fine, white powder. These pellets contain dormant Bacillus and/or Sporosarcina bacteria, as well as their food source, calcium lactate. The powdery substances are then mixed into wet concrete before it gets poured into place. When a crack forms and water seeps in, the bacteria "wake up," and start eating the food. As a result, the bacteria excrete hard limestone filler, which fills in the crack and prevents the water from doing more damage (such as rusting the steel bars that are present in a lot of concrete structures). While many forms of concrete start breaking down after 20 to 30 years, these bacteria can stay dormant for 200 years without food, thus extending the life of a concrete structure for decades past its expiration date and saving money. *Source Link*

YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW
By Leora Lutz

Rhonda Holberton's exhibition *YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW* politicizes identity and desire. The title takes its cue from a list of the five most influential marketing words in the English language.[1] The scene presented in the gallery is reminiscent of a retail store, and as with advertising, there is something of a dream being offered here: an augmented reality that is newer and more necessary than the present. In this case, militant police states and one's personal identity and privacy collide with basic instincts to survive—and to be loved.

In general, Holberton's investigative art practice remediates technology and human interaction, situating historical events, procedures or techniques as groundwork to create narratives that shift perception. To compare, some artists and projects that come to mind are Trevor Paglan's *Invisible: Covert Operations and Classified Landscapes*, which documents clandestine military operations and Michelle Jaffe's *Neural: Soul Junks,* which takes a poetic audio stance on corporate political influence. Additionally, Holberton acknowledges Sanaz Mazinani's work as a counterpart to her own work, where the body acts a means of activism and Mai Thu Perret's psychological ensemble installations.

Holberton's work falls into the category of conceptual work that implements actual findings as a means for discovering plausible hidden agendas, activating speculation and intervening on known truths. Her sculpture, film and installations have centered on conceptual networks within environmental concerns, particularly military encroachment in everyday lives, the mystery of the cosmos and the space between materiality and the cerebral.

Throughout her varied approaches one element is constant: location. How one locates themselves in the scenarios that Holberton creates is the crux of her diligent outcome. *YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW* is no exception with its selection of considerations that questions the very nature of politics and the body as a subject of consumption.

The retail setting of Holberton's 2 x 2 Solos exhibition at Pro Arts prompts the viewer to metaphorically buy into what it is being "sold." The commodification of art is nothing new, as the philosopher Herbert Marcuse pointed out in his essay, "Art as Form of Reality" (1969). But rather, "From the position of today's rebellion and refusal,"—which still rings true today—"art itself appears as part and force of the tradition which perpetuates that which is, and prevents the realization of that which can and ought to be." In essence, art is a camouflage of reality. As Marcuse continues: "in this universe, the work of art, as well as of anti-art, becomes exchange value, commodity: and it is precisely the Commodity Form, as the form of reality, which is the target of today's rebellion."[2] By presenting the double entendre of object commodification available for purchase within the context of a fictitious society, Holberton invites the viewer to exchange the here and now with the notion of a not so distant future.

For this particular exhibition, Holberton draws from military combat ideology and objects, such as operational manuals and camouflage. She offers up these solutions as survival alternatives in the utopic/dystopic scenario she has constructed. The multi-media assortment of works including sculpture, film and audio, contain elements of the figure, alluding to people navigating the politically charged social landscape. In preparation for such dark habitation, helpful audio files guide the listener to think about how to approach an issue, be it love or other covert operations. Garments are presented to blend into the hostile metropolitan surroundings while custom fragrance is offered to ensure one's existence. Moody silhouettes of tree shadows cast on the sidewalk are projected through the window, shifting viewers' perception of the locale. A large dream catcher fashioned in the manner of a parachute remains a hopeful symbol for the delicacy of aspirations. Together these works weave a complex and overlapping conceptual quandary of the relationship humans have with the environment and with one another.

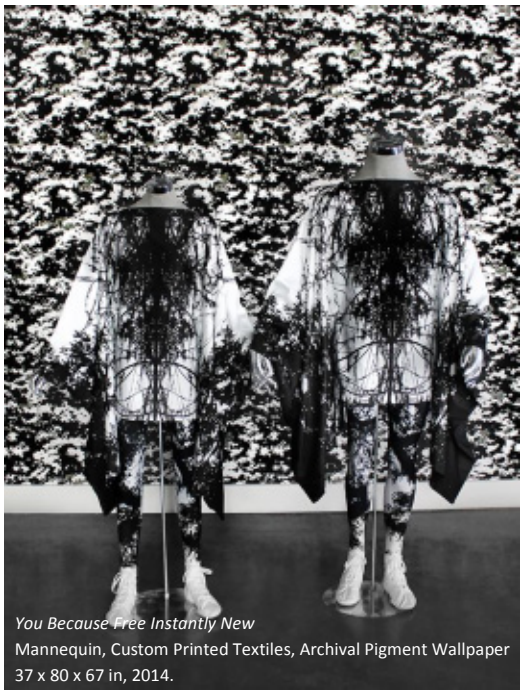
Now We Have Division
Sound-Focusing Speaker, MP3 Player
00:44:21, 2014.

By coupling military components with human conflicts of self-worth and desire, Holberton integrates real and actual things and spins them toward science fiction story-telling. To use the adage: *Reality is stranger than fiction.* Holberton has situated the viewer within a story where they themselves are the protagonists who find themselves struggling with belonging in a place where the choice to conform or become radically invisible seems inevitable. The science fiction theme is pronounced in the audio work *Now We Have Division*, installed above a cushioned bench. The concept is similar to the hypnodædia in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* which involved the conversion of text into soothing voices that subliminally influenced the listener. Using similar technology available in text to speech applications, Holberton transliterated hundreds of phrases from self-help books and military operation manuals into a convincing woman's voice. The phrases are carefully chosen yet delivered at random to coincide with what the viewer sees in the gallery while sitting on a bench listening:

Power-struggle, like any addiction, intensifies over time. A single interaction between two people might now affect an entire department. Balance security and synchronization. Insufficient security may compromise a mission. Excessive security will almost always cause the mission to fail because of inadequate coordination. There are three categories of products associated with PSYOP and/or propaganda: white, gray, and black.[3]

Against one wall of the exhibition is the signature piece of the show, *You Because Free Instantly New (An Army of Lovers).* The subtitle, *Army of Lovers* references a speculative resistance movement. In this scene, as Holberton notes, "civilians are agents of capital and soldiers of resistance."[4] Two mannequins, one male and one female, are set in front of a wall covered in black and grey-tone Digital Camouflage wallpaper. Digital Camouflage is designed so that the people wearing it will blend into the silvery angles

and asphalt laden metropolitan landscape. The mannequins wear identical, unisex garments similar to the purposeful homogeneity and efficiency necessary for soldiers to wear. The garments' fabric pattern is generated from photographs that Holberton took at Point Reyes. The contrast between the natural patterns against the digital wallpaper implies the poetic juxtaposition of humans' imposition and destruction of nature. Traditionally used for hunting or for combat, the purpose of camouflage takes a socio-sexual turn when perceived in conjunction with other works.



You Because Free Instantly New
Mannequin, Custom Printed Textiles, Archival Pigment Wallpaper
37 x 80 x 67 in, 2014.

All of the Actors Have Withdrawn is a grey scale video of three bodies engaged in a variety of street combat poses,

All The Actors Have Withdrawn
Rear Projection Video on Acrylic
14" x 20", 2014.

locked in a shattering embrace. Layered across each other, the poses could be any movement—combat, dance or copulation. The bodies are collapsing and disintegrating like crumbling marble, suggesting the falling of tradition and normativity. The provocative and sexually charged scenario romanticizes both sex and combat-violence—both are overtly physical acts that require bodies to touch each other.

In contrast, the sculpture titled *toward_a_more_pure_profile* suggests an idealized human exchange, albeit tinged with loss. The structure is comprised of two three-dimensional scanned, CDC routered foam models of Holberton's vertically bisected torso that have been adhered together. Here, the coupling melded into one body signals the idealized notion of romance—each one sacrificing their individual identity to be conjoined as a single pair.

toward_a_more_pure_profile, Polyurethane Foam
37" x 37" x 24", 2014.

Conversely, *FOIL* is the name of a professionally packaged "perfume" that Holberton created using an alcohol distillation process that gleans individualized scents comprised of a person's DNA. Modeled after military scent detection technology, *FOIL* replicates a product that is meant to safe-guard one's identity. Political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri posit, "The question is really how the body of the multitude [the public] can configure itself as a telos."[5] Telos, as in teleology, is the study of an object's intention or purpose. Just as with any strategic operation, foiling one's opponent through appropriation gives "power adequate to the destruction of the enemy and the

construction of a new society."[6] On the coinciding title sheet for the exhibition, Holberton replaced text information for *FOIL* with a QR code.

FOIL, original scents derived from distilling garments worn by anonymous individuals, 1.5" x 1.5" x 6", 2014.

Visitors can scan the code, which leads to the title of the actual piece: *AN ARMY OF LOVERS*, which is taken from a book co-authored by David Buuck and Juliana Spahr of the same title. The characters of their story attempt to reconcile capitalism through corporeal experimentations and performative activities.[7] Attune to the strangeness of their book, the society that Holberton proposes has converted identity into a product, reiterating the notion that one could be instant, though never free, and never new.

YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW draws attention to the conflicts of personhood, place and ardor. The history surrounding the venue of Pro Arts happens to be completely aligned with Holberton's continued investigation with government activity as a means to address the unpredictable and immobilizing aspects of everyday life. Pro Arts is located in Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, directly opposite City Hall, in Oakland, California; the same plaza where citizens gathered for the Occupy Movement. The Occupy website states: "The purpose of our gathering is to plan actions, mobilize real resistance, and defend ourselves from the economic and physical war that is being waged against our communities."[8] Somewhere in this science fiction that Holberton has presented lies the proposition that reality is nearer than comfort zones may allow, and acceptance of all that is possible is inevitable.

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[1] Gregory Ciotti, "The Five Most Persuasive Words in the English Language," *Huffington Post* (December 12, 2012).
[2] Herbert Marcuse, "Art as Form of Reality" in *Art and Liberation,* ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 1969), 148.
[3] The bibliographic list for the appropriated text includes:
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Army Doctrines published by the Federation of American Scientists, including "ATTP 3-34.39 (FM 20-3)/MCRP 3-17.6A: Camouflage, Concealment, and Decoys" and "FM 3-05.301(FM 33-1-1)/MCRP 3-40.6A: Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures;"
Buddha's Brain: The New Neuroscience and the Path of Awakening Inquiring Mind by Rick Hanson, PhD; and *Hope and Healing: Peaceful Parenting in an Uncertain World* by Naomi Drew & Arthur Caliandro.
[4] Notes from the artist.
[5] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (London: Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 404.
[6] Ibid.
[7] David Buuck and Juliana Spahr, *An Army of Lovers* (San Francisco: City Lights Books), 2013.
[8] *Occupy Oakland,* occupyoakland.org/about/

All images courtesy of the artist, http://www.rhondaholberton.com/
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