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An Illuminated iDentity

Presented in Partnership with the Images Festival

Connor Crawford, Matthew Jarvis Wall, Mary Kidd, Sarah Butterill, Jennifer Chan, Jenna Crook, Sarah Wong, Emilie Gervais and Olivia Erlanger

Curated by David Hanes

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The nine artists featured in *An Illuminated iDentity* — Connor Crawford, Matthew Jarvis Wall, Mary Kidd, Sarah Butterill, Jennifer Chan, Jenna Crook, Sarah Wong, Emilie Gervais, and Olivia Erlanger — are particularly fond of their status as users. They play on the net, play on their computers, hold deep relationships with people they've never met, order things unseen off of the web, and live in integration with technology. *An Illuminated iDentity* questions what it means to be an individual and how our cultural identities are formed when narratives merge exponentially with digital technologies.

The nature of contemporary culture and its integration with communication technologies is immensely inescapable. How we buy things, keep in touch with each other, meet new people, and follow art and visual culture is tied up with our use of this technology, infinitely customizable and shapeable to suit our every whim. For the artists included in *iDentity*, their role as users becomes an active part of their identity in how they both see and present themselves to others.

Three of the artists in *iDentity* specifically ask the viewer to peer out beyond their screens and treat them as windows to lands both desired and imagined. Olivia Erlanger's *Heaven* or *Diana Domino Donut* is a dual channel video that uses 3D renderings to portray a projected gallery in a virtual fantasy realm. This simulation immediately brings to mind MMORPG's (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game's) as well as puzzle scenario games such as *Portals* (1) or *Minecraft* (2). Sarah Wong's 全球技術公司促 [PROMO] could also be looked at in this light of constructed scenario and gaming. The liquid like universe of her world oozes with pastels and techno luminance. Connor Crawford's *An Outside Dream* takes the term digital windows literally. Here we are given a controlled view of a never changing beach paradise, shown in the kind of picturesque perfection that only stock footage can really obtain. The work's resemblance to the prescribed desktop images of an iMac (3) takes on a new meaning as we are given three virtual windows entering into our physical space complete with Venetian blinds to block out our virtually blinding sun. Seen as both paradise and purgatory, Erlanger, Wong, and Crawford's work teeter on the edge of an aspired for escape.

Jennifer Chan's newest piece *Grey Matter* continues her exploration of online identity politics and aesthetics through a combination of kitschy Youtube (4) jumbles and Karaoke colours. Mixing earnest diaristic confessions with references to games like Pokemon Yellow (5) and Crystal (6) and a dash of subtext about critical theory disguised by bright colours and tacky Internet aesthetics. The casual display of the work mirrors the constant shifting of Chan's virtual identity, where nothing remains stable or permanent for long.

Emilie Gervais and Jenna Crook's newest works are static yet have a materiality that bonds and blurs the lines between the on-screen and the off-screen. Gervais' *Myogenic Muscular Organ* is a freestanding banner that offers a visual mess of the character "fei-yen" (7) from the '96 Dreamcast game "Virtual On" (8). Accompanying the image is also an online portion of the piece that takes one of fei-yen's attacks and turns it into an online representation of the character's beating heart. Gervais' piece acts as a welcoming banner to the show. The banner recalls fan fiction conventions, jamming the typical display of characters through distortion and embracing glitches to show vulnerability. In Jenna Crook's *img_velaz*, Crook uses Diego Velázquez' baroque portraiture as source material for a colour-bold blur that makes use of the tropes of Photoshop editing, presenting the results as an abstract painting. Using the digital medium as a way of just splashing, smudging and blending what already exists in the sourced work and highlights it with a virtual brush-stroke and impossibly accurate decay. Printed on sheer nylon, the piece moves one step closer to classic pictorial representation but, unlike its predecessor, has no textural depth, no plane beyond the flat.

Matthew Jarvis Wall's *Assemblage* makes reference to the archaeological term meaning "a group of different artifacts found in association with one another"(9). Jarvis Wall's assemblage takes digitally altered versions of the Virtual Hampden Museum (10), and treats them with a metallic tone and decay like melting aluminum or deteriorating foam. Accompanying Jarvis Wall's archaeological remixes are bits of information that reveal fabricated histories of each of his alien like artifacts. The objects move by passively and exist in a subtle motion reminiscent of H.U.D. displays from games like Metroid (11).

Finally Mary Kidd and Sarah Butterill's *Never Change*, presents a water cooler elixir open to sampling and enjoying. The artists will be texting the phone with positive messages over the course of the exhibition, imbuing the water with the semblance of positivity and life, a virtual fountain of youth. By drinking the water the message of the work is that the texts sent to the phone will become a part of your body, a tongue and cheek reference to the place that cell phones have taken in our daily lives, we are what we eat, and we become what we use.

Discussions and representations of technology as integrated into our understanding of our own identities can be a bit of a cliché. The playfulness of an exhibition like *An Illuminated identity* pokes fun at the seriousness of this exploration. By placing works together in the vein of an open screen with multiple tabs, the show's theme is more of an accumulated collage than a direct relationship. The inclusion of these particular works acts as a kind of compiled identity that blogging and online social sharing provides. Like those platforms, this show is selected on my own assumptions about what online identity

is these days; a little chaotic but also beautiful and breathtaking in its organization and structure.

-- David Hanes

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