

Machines Will Watch Us Die at The Holden Gallery

9 April – 11 May at The Holden Gallery, Artist talk and screening – 8 May, Machines Will Watch Us Die The Symposium – 11 May



Emma Charles, Production still *Fragments on Machines* (2013).

Attempting to link the monumental time scales of minerals and ores to the instantaneous transfer of digital information is quite an undertaking, yet *Machines Will Watch Us Die* at The Holden Gallery does just that. Curated by Patrizia Costantin (PhD student in curatorial studies) the exhibition explores how the development of seemingly immaterial digital technology is grounded in our material surroundings, addressing themes of digital decay and obsolescence without falling into a typically narrow-minded, negative view of technology. As such, visitors are encouraged to consider the earth-bound roots, and social and historical context, of the machines that surround us.

Among the six artists included in the show, Martin Howse uses raw earth materials to manipulate and explore digital technology, acknowledging the common roots of the geological and the technological. His approach blurs

artistic practice and scientific enquiry resulting in a unique viewpoint of our digital surroundings, in this instance leading to the intriguing installation *Test Execution Host* (2016-18).

Meanwhile, Emma Charles combines the ephemeral and the material to expose the often-hidden physical reality behind our experience of the digital. The film *Fragments on Machines* (2013), for example, uncovers the imposing and tactile roots of digital systems that go unnoticed within urban architecture. Whilst Charles' films clearly documents the physical processes that bring about ephemeral digital realms, an air of mystery and the unknown also remains. How soon will Charles's documentations become dated and nostalgic as a result of the relentless development of technology? Do they therefore represent a sort of future archaeological artefact?

Rosemary Lee also creates future archaeologies that fuse the environmental and the digital. Broken and twisted gadgets are encrusted with semi-precious stones and ores and set in a modelled landscape more akin to a natural history museum display than an art gallery. Presented in glass cabinets as if they were artefacts from an ancient civilisation, these examples of 80's and 90's technology become a vessel to explore the blurred timescales and contrasting viewpoints that run throughout the show.

In *Vail/Lakes* (2014) and *Jeans/Lakes* (2016), Cory Arcangel shows us how quickly digital culture develops, swiftly rendering technological objects obsolete and intrinsically linked to a place in history. He uses the iconic character of Mario, his own digital realm dematerialising around him, to illustrate the decomposition of technology in *Super Mario Movie* (with Paper Rad, 2005). Concurrently, Shinji Toya's *3 years and 6 months of digital decay* (7 April 2016 – 7 October 2019, in association with Arebyte, London.), and Rosa Menkmans *To Smell and Taste Black Matter* (2009) exhibit digital decay as pure data loss. They provide a contrast to the material nature of other works in the exhibition and show us the results of digital decay as we experience it at the interface of digital realms.

Machines Will Watch Us Die is a thought-provoking project that expands horizons and brings together artists that compliment, but also challenge, each other. The exhibition is accompanied by a talk and screening with Emma Charles on 8 May, and a symposium taking place on 11 May to contextualise the exhibition and stage further discussion around digital decay, the role of online media, and its role in shaping history.

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