

Lamps Weird: An Exploration in Making Digital Images

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**Lamps Weird:
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fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

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ABSTRACT

The following paper is a supporting document for the Lamps Weird exhibition on display at Angell Gallery from March 31 to April 28, 2012. These two components are the final thesis for my Masters of Fine Art degree completed at the Graduate Program of Visual Arts, York University between September 2010 and May 2012. With this project I explore and develop my own unique method of creating digital images. I investigate how meaning can be displaced from the manifest image through excessive collaging of historical references.

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Introduction

My artistic practice is an exploration of the aesthetic effects of colour, composition, and space in conjunction with enigmatic subject matter. My thesis, titled Lamps Weird, marks a new direction in my artistic practice. It comes out of a recent shift in my creative thought and production. During my undergraduate years, majoring in photography at OCADU (2004 - 2009), I constantly tried to develop a discourse to produce my work. There were many discourses to choose from: identity politics, the relationship between analogue and digital photography, issues relating to public versus private space, etc., and instructors would often encourage me to position my practice within one of these discourses. I increasingly felt a gap between the theory and practice, where the creative process was atrophying and the theory wasn't necessarily originating from the artwork.

Now mid-way through my York MFA program, I have decided to focus on a more personal relationship to art. My enthusiasm and inspiration that comes from my appreciation of art is now channeled directly through my studio production. This dramatic shift in spirit alleviates my anxieties about being a relevant artist and aids me in overcoming barriers to my creativity. I have been surprised by the ensuing work and creative methods that have resulted from this new personal approach.

In Lamps Weird,¹ I construct enigmatic photographic images of objects and spaces using 3D software and output them as digital inkjet prints. This new body of work will be presented at Angell Gallery from March 31st to April 28th, 2012. It is comprised of five framed prints and a ten-minute video revealing the process of working with 3D software. The frames I have chosen for my images vary throughout the series. Some frames have deep beveled edges while others have discreet rectangular profiles. Each frame varies in colour, ranging from vibrant orange-red, silver-white, charcoal, black and distressed wood. The works are displayed along four grey-coloured walls. The video component plays on a 32" LCD screen sharing a wall with one of the framed prints.² The overall installation refers to traditional

¹ The title of the series was inspired by the last-name of one of my favorite fashion photographers, Inez van Lamsweerde. I vocalized the name until I arrived at the words, "Lamps Weird".

² The video component, titled Processing, reveals the creation process for two images from the series: Archer and Hoefler. One half of the video is dedicated to each of the two pieces. For each piece, I show a time-lapse video of my computer screen, depicting the creation process from the vantage of the 3D software's interface. The video also includes a slideshow of rendered stills, illustrating the journey an image takes before it is considered complete. This video is not considered artwork, rather an informative component that exhibits and explains my process.

museum presentation, allowing the framed prints to be read as curiosity objects³ intended to attract the viewer.

Each image in Lamps Weird is a tableau in the still life genre. Throughout the series, arrangements of strange objects populate an interior space. The objects seem to have been placed by an anonymous person for unknown reasons. This absence of evident purpose that we find in each work is the main characteristic of the series.

³ The “cabinet of curiosities” was an encyclopedic collection of rare, new and remarkable things during the European Renaissance. Some collections were dedicated to the pursuit of scientific and historical knowledge while others for public entertainment (Costa, 147).

In Hoefler (see Fig. 1), a thin metallic gold device suspends sausage-like forms in front of a maquette of a medieval European village. The device sits atop a table covered in tweed fabric. The cloud-like forms have a biscuit-like texture and billow upward into the maquette's ceiling.



Fig. 1. Hoefler, from the series Lamps Weird, 2012, Inkjet Print, 19.5" x 22"

In Gewebe (see Fig. 2), a scientific object is comprised of glass, marble and plastic. The object's forms allude to body parts: two large glass spheres resemble breasts while a red protuberance resembles a deflated stomach. The tile work possesses a different linear perspective than that of the main objects, creating a visual tension.



Fig. 2. Gewebe, from the series Lamps Weird, 2012, Inkjet Print, 16" x 18"

In Archer (see Fig. 3) a white porcelain object appears to be in the state of construction in a craftsman's workshop. The delicate form is propped and probed by various contraptions. A window suggests an expanded space beyond the cramped work area but our perception shifts as we realize that it's just a painted backdrop.



Fig. 3. Archer, from the series Lamps Weird, 2012, Inkjet Print, 19" x 22"

In Didot (see Fig. 4), objects litter a stage-like scene reminiscent of a Renaissance play suggested by the curtain and floor motif. The strategically arranged objects form a reclined figure. It is unclear as to whether we should address the figure as a key performer or as an insignificant prop backstage.



Fig. 4. Didot, from the series Lamps Weird, 2012, Inkjet Print, 19" x 22"

In Rococo (see Fig. 5), pastel coloured fabrics become part of a barren landscape as they cling to the rough sand and stone surfaces. A circular hole frames the scene, giving the viewer the effect of looking out from an interior space. The view expands far into the horizon, giving no clues as to where this place is.



Fig. 5. Rococo, from the series Lamps Weird, 2012, Inkjet Print, 19" x 24"

Each image is designed to hold the viewer's attention by the use of visual effects and techniques. In Hoefler, a variety of contrasting textures and forms are deployed throughout the image. The bold curved sausages guide the viewer's eyes in a gentle sweeping motion. A scientific device made of black glass and creamy off-white plastic sits at the right edge of the image, suggesting an entire world outside the frame. The sausages have a bumpy speckled casing that is contrasted by the European village's matte crystalline texture. Tucked away at the bottom right corner of the image, a gold platform embossed with an intricate design adds a subtle theatrical element.

The picture frame is an important element of the work as Hoefler's deep beveled edge creates the perspectival illusion of looking into a cavernous room. The frame's 3-dimensionality protrudes 2-inches from the print, enhancing the piece's presence as an object.

Hoefler successfully addresses concerns in my practice more pointedly than the other works. The specificity of references—the paper village, the patterns, and sausages—elicits possible questions from the viewer. They may wonder what specific village is being portrayed, what purpose the construction and display serves, who arranged and documented the scene, and so on. When I look at art, I do not necessarily have all the information needed to fully understand the work.⁴ I value

⁴ Art critic Jan Verwoert states that contemporary art is concerned with “the idea that the primary task of art, as a strategical operation, [is] to provide conceptual

this state of unknowing as it leaves more room for sensory experience of the work. It is my intention to offer this experience to the viewer through formal references that allow the viewer to produce the meaning of the work.

German painter, printmaker and sculptor Max Ernst was known for his artistic contributions to the Dada and Surrealist movements of the early twentieth-century. His practice was dedicated to making strange and enigmatic images through various Surrealist techniques. He often reworked existing material such as printed advertisements and scientific diagrams into artworks by either collaging them or simply painting over select parts. In Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Icelandic Moss 2 Kinds of Lungwort 2 Kinds of Ruptures of the Perinaeum Growths of the Heart b) the Same Thing in a Well-Polished Little Box Somewhat More Expensive. (1920), Ernst turns a diagram of equine anatomy upside-down and paints over certain parts to create a new strange and fantastic image (see Fig. 6).

legitimations (to satisfy or lay down the law, among other things) by constructing references that situate the work within an established economy of meaning” (Verwoert). This contemporary art model operates on making references to ideas outside the work. The proliferation of references within an artwork today can make it difficult for the viewer to appreciate or decipher a work's meaning or intent. I have chosen to continue this difficulty in my work but without historically verifiable references.

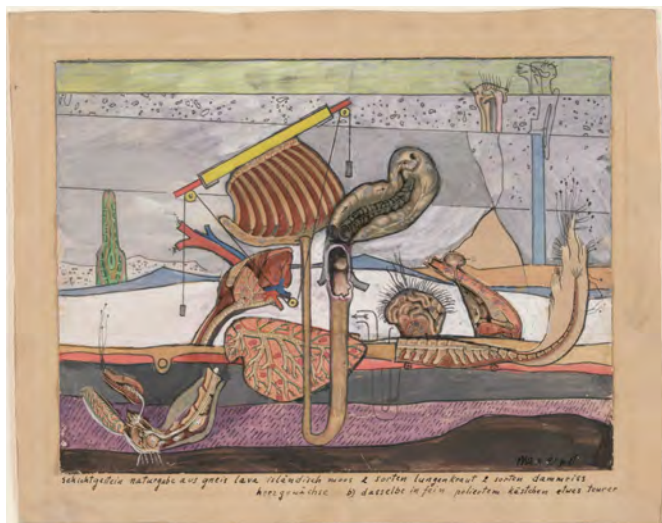


Fig. 6. Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Icelandic Moss 2 Kinds of Lungwort 2 Kinds of Ruptures of the Perinaeum Growths of the Heart b) the Same Thing in a Well-Polished Little Box Somewhat More Expensive. Max Ernst, 1920 (Ernst).

In this piece Ernst transforms the familiar scientific diagram into an image that defies scientific reason. The fictional mechanical devices and organic forms are expressed in an objective scientific manner. The piece's title mixes poetic and scientific language and thereby enhancing the image's strangeness.⁵ Ernst makes it

⁵ Much like Ernst's title here, the titles of my images are intended to impel the viewer to read into the image even further. Their meaning isn't fixed or necessarily chosen for an informative purpose; rather they suggest that the objects and spaces are extracted from actual history as they allude to particular ethnic and cultural

difficult for the viewer to construct meaning by abstracting familiar elements from their original contexts to make new and bizarre images (Gee).



Fig. 7. Didot (left) resembles the lowercase “i” from the typeface of the same name (right).

backgrounds. Hoefler, Didot and Archer are font names by the type foundry Hoefler & Frere-Jones. They are chosen for various aesthetic reasons. For example the name Didot was chosen because the floating wheel at the top left part of the image and columnar forms resembled Didot’s lowercase “i” (see Fig. 7). I also like how it is clearly a French name, implying that these are French motifs.

The Aesthetics of “Difficulty”

The aesthetics of “difficulty” is an aspect of art that can be traced to early modernism. It is an artistic strategy used to impede the viewer’s understanding of an artwork. Literary scholars Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, known for their contributions to Reader-Response theory in the 60’s, believed that the indeterminacy of meaning (*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*) is an important aspect of modern art. Jauss and Iser noted that easily interpreted works are doomed to the language of clichés while more difficult ones endure through time. By extending the encounter beyond the initial session of consumption, difficult art produces a lasting effect on the viewer. In addition to their theories, they discovered that viewers found the struggle to find an artwork’s meaning an appealing and potentially rewarding intellectual activity (van Zuylen).

In my work I use difficulty in a slightly different manner to what Jauss and Iser suggested. My intention is to aestheticize difficulty, not to prolong the viewer’s interpretation. I give the sense that my images and the motifs that constituted them are sampled from history, inciting the viewer to find meaning. But meaning is displaced in my work, as the references forming the image are sourced from unknown contexts, obscuring any potential meaning. For the viewer, the constant

interweaving of signs⁶ becomes an end in itself. I want the viewer to experience my work as I experience life.

Contemporary artist Olaf Breuning appreciates the aesthetics of difficulty in a similar way. His tableau photographs are a mash-up of contemporary American pop-culture, packaged in the aesthetic conventions of conceptual photography. We Only Move Wehen Something Changes (2002) is a large format photograph depicting a gang of protestors occupying a demolition site (see Fig. 8). No clues are given as to who these people are and what they are protesting. They sit in static poses staring from a distance into the camera's lens. The image is comprised of a constellation of signs including a flag, clown noses, a Range Rover vehicle, 90's grunge fashion and a peace sign. Even with a bounty of signs, it would be difficult to arrive at a verifiable meaning.

⁶ I use the term "sign" in Jean Baudrillard's sense; that modern cultural artifacts and practices, such as art and consumer culture, are comprised of a network of signs that reference other objects, ideas and concepts. For example, the artist's signature is not just ink on the surface of a print but also a sign that distinguishes the otherwise mere object as artwork (Kellner). My work presents familiar signs that lead to no particular clear meaning: the gold material in Hoefler does not represent ideas of wealth, or indicate scientific purpose, but simply is used to create an aesthetic of historical specificity.



Fig. 8. We Only Move Wehen Something Changes, Olaf Breuning, 2002 (Breuning).

Breuning's We Only Move Wehen Something Changes bares a stylistic resemblance to photographs by artists like Thomas Struth (see Fig. 9) and Jeff Wall. Such conceptual photographs are informed by contemporary theoretical discourses and require the viewer to be aware of them to properly decode the work. Because conceptual photography is about ideas, symbols are arranged in a direct manner, avoiding expressive or visually distracting elements that would detract from the artist's idea. Breuning appropriates and uses this aesthetic convention to set up a situation for the viewer to search for an idea or meaning. But because the subject of Breuning's photograph is far more abstracted from a plausible event (versus Struth's

more likely-to-happen family photograph), meaning is displaced further beyond the manifest image.



Fig. 9. The Smith Family, Fife, Scotland 1989. Thomas Struth, 1989
(<http://greatbritishartdebate.tate.org.uk/>).

For art critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss, the caption or title that accompanies a photograph adds an instructional dimension to the inadequate nature of the photograph. This is made clear in Struth's photograph that although its status as an

evidentiary document⁷ of an event that took place, the evidentiary nature of the photograph is not enough to impart a full understanding of its purpose. Therefore the caption he includes helps specify a time, place and purpose and in this case an identity of the subject.

But Breuning plays with captioning to deaden this function. Using ambiguous terms within his title like 'we', 'something', and 'change', he both indicates a general political sentiment while withholding its connection to a context. Much like the signs within the photograph, Breuning's title deceives the viewer by anchoring interpretive devices. This is a play on what the theorist Roland Barthes explained as the inherent nature of photographs, that they are visual *messages without a code*⁸, because they are simply chemical records of a physical and temporal reality (Krauss, 59). In this sense Breuning pushes the function of the photograph to harbor a cluster of ambiguous messages designed to lead the viewer to continually form meaning.

⁷ Rosalind Krauss describes the photographic "index" as a "type of sign which arises as the physical manifestation of a cause, of which traces, imprints, and clues are examples" (Krauss 59). For much of the 20th century, the photograph was understood as an index or trace of physical reality (Wells 311).

⁸ *Code* is used in the semiotic sense to refer to the way signs are systematically organized to create meaning. For example, photographic codes that give a wedding photograph its sense of dignity (Wells 338).

This use of a medium to produce a confusion of subject is expressed in similar ways in Breuning's film Home 2 (2007). The film's protagonist Brian Kerstetter recounts his travels to Japan, Papua New Guinea and the Swiss Alps. In every situation, Brian attempts to familiarize himself with the people of foreign cultures. But when faced with the opportunity to learn about them, Brian responds with a self-indulgent gag. This is evident at the beginning of the film when Brian childishly whispers to the camera that the women of Papua New Guinea look like men. The film teases the viewer with its frequent jump cuts to different countries and events—scrambling our linear sense of time and space. All the while the protagonist performs his dull one-liner tricks to the camera. In this film, Breuning makes the protagonist's wandering a metaphor for how Breuning understands and articulates his experience in contemporary culture.

In my work, I deliberately make allusions to eras, places, designs and cultures without fully divulging their specific origin.⁹ One can assume that it is a medieval European village in Hoefler but cannot name specifically what village it is.

⁹ Critic Gianni Jetzer explains that the reception of Breuning's work is characterized by a fractured mode of interpretation, where individual citations play a subordinate role and are not of real importance (Jetzer 51). Jetzer uses Susan Sontag's notion of "camp" from Notes On Camp (1966) to explain Breuning's work as an assemblage of quotations of the actual things named.

Like Breuning's work these specific references to time and place incite the viewer to try to form a meaning that is not necessarily present in the manifest image. We treat difficulty as an aesthetic end by presenting complex puzzles—conundrums that motivate the viewer to navigate the signs and try to make sense of their relationships to the components within the work. When experiencing my work, the viewer travels across a multitude of historical times and places, unable to identify specifically where I take them. This notion of transcending borders of time and place has come to broadly characterize contemporary artistic practices.

In Nicolas Bourriaud's essay Altermodern (2009) he describes the current nature of art practice as engaging in an intellectual journey between multiple contextual points:

It is neither a petrified kind of time advancing in loops (postmodernism) nor a linear vision of history (modernism), but a positive experience of disorientation through an art form exploring all dimensions of the present, tracing lines in all directions of time and space. The artist turns cultural nomad: what remains of the Baudelairian model of modernism is no doubt this *flânerie*¹⁰, transformed into a technique for generating creativeness and deriving knowledge" (Bourriaud).

¹⁰ Charles Baudelaire's poem Windows (1863) describes the modern artist as flâneur; a voyeuristic man who gains artistic inspiration from wandering the streets of Paris and peering into the privacy of homes (Godfrey). For Baudelaire, this nomadic

Bourriaud's wanderer of global and temporal contexts defines both my experience of the world and my art practice. Using the Internet as my primary artistic research tool, I have become a nomad of the visual information world, designing my practice to be extremely elastic. Like Breuning, the things that constitute my images can come from any point in history. What matters to me is the new context in which I insert them.

Process

When I make art, I immerse myself in the world of gallery websites, art blogs and YouTube art channels finding this virtual space to be empowering. One can get far without having to deal with the social and physical hurdles of real life gallery visits. The Internet allows access to the most informed opinions by artists, theorists, critics and historians from around the world. On YouTube, an informed speaker at

ritual serves as the research stage in the modern artistic process. The notion of the flâneur can explain two aspects of my work; characterizing the research stage of pulling from contexts outside my own time and place, and from the viewer's perspective, as they look into a metaphorical window that reveals partial stories to be mentally completed. The pleasures of flânerie expressed by Baudelaire can be seen to parallel the appeal of modern difficulty aesthetics. For example, in my work the viewer's mind is intended to wander across ambiguous signs in a state of rêverie.

an art conference can provide an in-depth discussion on art, while on an art blog I can see what is happening in vanguard scenes around the world. I find this to be far more enriching than attending local openings. Granted, the direct experience of art in a gallery is still invaluable as we can then experience an object's materiality—its texture, scale, and true colour. However, I believe the Internet enriches our experience of art by allowing us to explore information in a different manner.¹¹

Besides using the Internet as an informative tool, I also use it as a creative one. The art database ARTstor.org, helps me imagine potential objects for my work. First, I look for objects whose bizarre appearances are attributed to their incidental historical purpose and context (see Fig. 10).

¹¹ The term “post-Internet” was coined by artist Marisa Olson and later developed by Gene McHugh in 2009. McHugh defines it as art responding to a condition when the Internet is less a novelty and more a banality (McHugh). Art critic Karen Archey extends this notion by stating that post-Internet art simply reflects the idea that the Internet is part of daily life (Archey). According to artist Artie Vierkant, in the post-Internet climate, the work of art lies equally in the version of the object in the gallery, and in the representations disseminated through the Internet and print publications (Vierkant 3). Although my artistic research happens predominantly online, I do not adhere to Vierkant's notion of equating the photo-documentation of the artwork with the actual artwork. My thesis work requires the viewer to enter the space and walk up to each work to discover their intricate details.

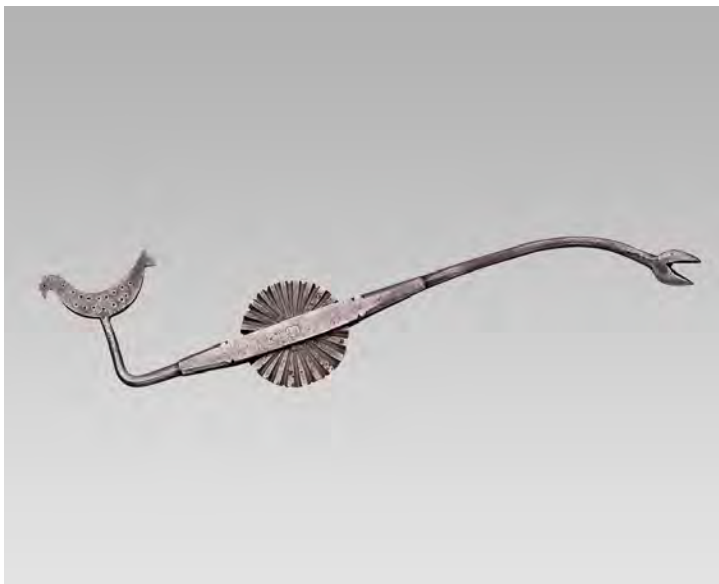


Fig. 10. Pie Crimper. Unknown Artist, 1790-1820, American Folk Art Museum (<http://artstor.org/>).

For example, I found this antique pie crimper to be such a peculiar object, that I saved it for inspiration. Sometimes I purposefully avoid looking at the historical information that accompanies every image on ARTstor. This decontextualization allows me to bring out its inherent mysterious, alien qualities. The objects I find on websites are never manifested as themselves in the work; rather, through synthesis with other components, new fusions are created. I use them as inspiration to invent new ones. My goal is to create images that propose an assemblage of different realities.

Like John Cage, William Burroughs and various surrealists, I have developed a method that favors chance over prescription. In my practice the errors and

inaccuracies of my perception serve as a resource for new ideas for images. This gives me room to imagine artifacts and spaces that have never existed. The imagination part of my process is the most exciting moment of my practice. There is no concrete structure to my process as I often jump between the sketchbook, the screen and my mind.

Some activities help stimulate mental images. Pacing around the room gives me mental distance from the work, while sitting meditatively can engender ideas and mental images. I have also trained myself to catch mental images as they come to me throughout the day. These mental activities have proven to be the most effective in creating this kind of work.

On-line video can also be a valuable source for the components of my work. As images emerge on video, the initial appearance of an artwork, object or scene can capture my attention. At this point, I pause the video, take a screen-grab of the area of interest and save the digital image on my computer's desktop. These screen-grabs are collected as formal inspirations for new pieces, but rarely become blueprints for works. I often use them as fragments, in order to construct spaces, compositions, forms or colour schemes. I use this method consistently with all my Internet source materials.

Once I find an image, I often ask: What historical periods come to mind? How do I articulate the feeling of a period and place using pattern, texture, space, colour and form in my work?

However, the articulation of emotional sensations through the formal elements overrides the allusion to history. Although the tile work in Gewebe may locate the image within European history, what's more important is how the colour and form impact the viewer in the here and now. The object's contours, protruding forms, bold colours, textures and the ensuing emotional response take precedence over what history is being referenced.

A few months after completing Gewebe I found a video on Youtube documenting the installation of a Manon exhibit at the Aargauer Kunsthaus. The video shows gallery assistants arranging Manon's large photographs in the gallery space. I was intrigued by Manon's appearance: her face, clothing and hair looked as if composed of a single material and coloured with a powdery pigment. After saving the video to my YouTube favorites, I realized that her image embodied what I tried to do in Gewebe: to compose an image using a few bold colours and simple elegant contours (see Fig. 11). Gewebe has become a piece that shows how I work with basic formal elements. This instance of Manon and Gewebe illustrates the degree of intuition in my process as I save images without immediately knowing why.



Fig. 11. Gewebe (left), Manon (right)

(<http://www.youtube.com/user/AargauerKunsthaus>).

My early art practice involved an interest in portraiture. The sitters in my photographs were just models with vacant stares. The work was never about expressing the identity of the sitters, but rather how I work with formal elements within the photographs such as colour, texture, and composition. Naturally, my current work continues elements from my past by anthropomorphizing computer-generated forms to create formal studies. This is most evident in Hoefler, Gewebe and Didot, where inanimate objects resemble human forms such as penises (Hoefler), breasts (Gewebe), and a reclined figure (Didot). This continues a technique called double imaging, most notably practiced by the 16th century Italian

painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo and continued by Salvador Dalí and other Surrealists in the early 20th century (Bradley). In Arcimboldo's seminal series The Four Seasons (1563), he developed a technique where he painted an arrangement of objects that collectively resemble a portrait of a human bust (see Fig. 12) (Kaufmann).



Fig. 12. Summer (Eté), Giuseppe Arcimboldo, 1573. (Arcimboldo).

The process for Archer was long and tedious, with many unexpected turns. It started with a random Google search that somehow led to a thumbnail sized image of a *Monstera Deliciosa* plant (see Fig. 13). I downloaded the image at a very low resolution so that I could assume what the plant would look like. Next, in the 3D program, I modeled the forms. From that point, I kept rearranging the objects, keeping an eye on potential avenues to take. This part of the process was filled with uncertainty and doubt as the constant rearranging often lead to disappointment.

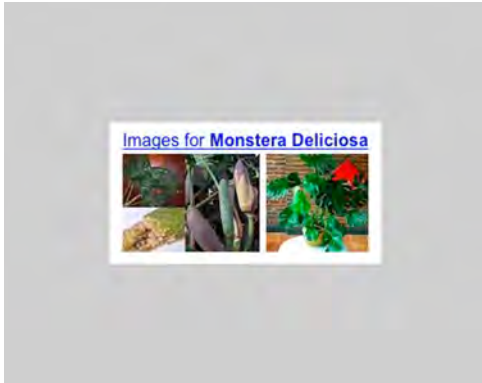


Fig. 13. Monstera Deliciosa (<http://www.google.com/imghp>).

The leaf form in the early stage is removed and then brought back into the scene in a later stage. Using a deformation effect, I distorted the shape of the leaf by plugging in an arbitrary number value. This produced a surprising result. The leaf became a cylindrical form as the deformation effect curled it, making the top and bottom ends touch. This new form reminded me of a crawfish segment, so I repeated it along a curve creating a continuous array. Every tweak to an object can affect another object's placement or appearance. For example, the position and shape of the lights affects how I see the forms in the scene. How I see the forms determines what I make them into; in this case my mind thought it saw a crawfish segment, so I decided to complete the form into a crawfish-like object (see Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. Archer, from the series Lamps Weird, 2012, Inkjet Print, 19" x 22"

The surface texture and colour gives a sense of off-white glazed porcelain, making the fish-like object a decorative one—perhaps an object that a connoisseur of historical artifacts would have collected. But the craftsman's tool positioned at the bottom-right of the scene and the curly off-white shavings littered throughout tell a different story. We begin to imagine that this image documents the intermediate

stage of an object being hand-crafted by an artisan. But this narrative also makes no sense, as porcelain is never whittled after it has been glazed.

The formal elements coevolved with the ideas in the making of Archer. When I started the piece, I did not have a final image in mind. Rather it was a long process consisting of small discoveries along the way, each nudging me forward to the final image. I do not subscribe to any particular logic as long as the objects and motifs that constituted my final images seem historically derived, maintain a strong suggestive potential and are visually striking. This process and criteria marks a key turning point in my artistic career as it radically rejects all the notions I had learned about art and making art in the past.

In my practice, I am now wholly engaged with two subjects, an examination of aesthetic experience and an analysis of digital art methodologies. This examination and these methods have become extremely generative for my practice. Whatever medium or approach I choose in the future, I'm confident that the imaginal¹² and

¹² Henri Corbin, a French philosopher and researcher of Sufism coined the term "imaginal". He discovered that the Sufis believed in a separate world called *alam al-mithal*, with its own identifiable cities and geography. This separate world was accessed through imagination (Lambert 440). The imaginal in my practice pertains to the ability to mentally generate hypothetical images of space, form, colour, texture and composition; essentially what the Sufis were doing.

perceptual skills I've started to develop during my thesis will be relevant to the visual arts.

Digital Art and Mental Imagery

Computer graphics allow me to create worlds that are completely imaginative simulations. The illusion of surface texture, light and perspectival space is mathematically determined—algorithms written by scientists, mathematicians and programmers. Much like a camera, there are automated aspects to image making with 3D software; the computer calculates the properties of perspective and light based on real-world physics. On the other hand, there are aspects that are shared with drawing, painting and sculpture.

I use 3D software for its hyperreal¹³ aesthetic. Because the images simultaneously look photorealistic and computer simulated, this software lends itself to the imagined worlds I'm proposing. This notion parallels the Byzantine notion that mathematic theory provided a way of realizing pure ideas in material reality. The Byzantines believed that numbers and pure geometry belonged to the world of

¹³ I use hyperreal in Jean Baudrillard's sense where contemporary modern culture is dominated by the commercial media's simulations of reality (Kellner). In my work, the surfaces and spaces are mathematically calculated by the computer and claim no fidelity to the real world.

noetos—the world of the mind (Lambert 440). Consider the glass-like objects in Archer. The image is not a document testifying the physical existence of glass objects at a point in time. Rather it is the result of a mathematic formula written to emulate the look of glass.

In 1993, the media critic Lev Manovich claimed that computer graphics were the vision of a cyborg and this for him was the future of sight itself. He was amazed by its ability to exceed our vision with its perfect, infinitely detailed images (Manovich). Manovich noted Hollywood's integration of computer graphics into analogue film. In such movies as Jurassic Park and Terminator 2, skilled technicians would try to seamlessly blend the computer image into the film footage, denying the computer graphic image its inherent aesthetic.

My work on the other hand uses the unaltered computer-generated image (CGI) for its otherworldly look. I find it appealing how its appearance vacillates between artificial and realistic effects. In a similar manner, Tim Berresheim's images exemplify Manovich's unaltered cyborg vision. His large photographic prints are windows into the computer's eerie perception of our physical reality (see Fig. 15). In Berresheim's work and my work, the objects and spaces seem to occupy two realities: one being our own and the other a purely mathematical one.¹⁴

¹⁴ Berresheim's work and my work cross at another path: we both take familiar object and spaces and de-familiarize them creating bizarre and otherworldly realities. This



Fig. 15. Violett (Haar). Tim Berresheim, 2007

(<http://http://www.timberresheim.com/Violett-Haar>)

Media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define “digital art” as “static graphic images made with pixels rather than oils or watercolours” (Bolter 133). In their book Remediation, Bolter and Grusin claim that 3D computer graphics is the first artist’s tool to completely rely on the conventions of older mediums. For

can be seen as continuing Max Ernst’s making the familiar scientific diagram, strange.

example, 3D software automatically calculates linear perspective and light to produce photographic images. In contrast, the process of building an image can feel more like painting, sculpting or drawing. This is reflected in the fact that most digital art produced using a 3D program resembles the imaginative language of painting and sculpture rather than realist attitudes of photography. I can attest to this notion, as I do not capture a particular moment such as a snapshot in my work, but rather build an assemblage of different moments and ideas from scratch.

Bolter and Grusin state that most digital art repeats art history because it is a medium reliant on the language of older mediums (Bolter 134). Berresheim's work supports this claim because, similar to mine, it repeats past art conventions. But what I have learned about working with 3D software is that it has its own set of technical concerns that take years to master much like traditional mediums. Along with these concerns, it has its own aesthetic language that is a rich and untapped territory. I believe my thesis work has uncovered new visual languages and techniques within this medium.

Conclusion

My thesis practice has invested in exploring the possibilities of CGI aesthetics within traditional visual languages. As mentioned earlier, the professional entertainment industry's use of CGI is to give fantasy the illusion of photographic indexicality with its ability to create realistic images of objects and spaces. My work intentionally subverts this proper use of CGI by breaking from the immersive illusionistic space of deep linear perspective. Most evident in Gewebe and Didot, the perspective is flattened to resemble the spatial depth of bas-relief or collaged elements arranged on a flat surface.

Contemporary CGI stages materiality, unlike analogue photography where materials are inscribed on light sensitive emulsion. To translate CGI's staging of materiality to the obviously physical world of the print, frame and museum space, reverses its immersive goals. This effect is compounded by the choice of matte finish paper and the grey walls: the viewer's perception of depth is brought to a halt as they witness the ink sitting on the surface of the paper and the artworks sitting on the surface of the walls. This emphasis on collaged surfaces, both within the image and the display environment, differs from the illuminated, metaphorical window of the Hollywood motion picture. This reversal of Hollywood's more immersive representation of space, combined with the amateur aesthetics of a collage artist, comes to form my visual language.

All the inadequacies in my practice—my technical abilities, the overtly staged effect of flattened space and my inaccurate knowledge of the inspiration content—are factors I exploit to create work.

There is something about CGI, as Manovich explains, that brings a distinctly new synthesis that is apart from historical surrealism. It must be understood as a medium with its own technical limits, visual aesthetic and cultural significance.

As I have stated, CGI is determined from mathematical algorithms that are designed to mimic—to varying degrees—the appearance of the indexical photograph. Because there is no physical referent in CGI, we are dealing with a fundamental difference to photography. The messages depicted in my CGIs are not produced from a pre-existent nature; this eliminates any speculation regarding photographic truth. This, coupled with fictitious content and the intentional confusion of subject (following Breuning's approach), produces artwork that attempts to realize Barthes' aforementioned notion *messages without a code*, but takes it beyond his explanation by using an entirely digital means to create photographic images.

These concerns emerged from an intuitive approach to creating images using 3D software. In the past year I have made an arduous journey from the terrain of analogue photography to explore my fascination with the landscape of computer-generated imagery.

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