Hybrids
Curated by Brit Bunkley and Ian Gwilt

Featuring: ajaykumar & 8-technology (UK), Keith Brown (UK), Brit Bunkley (NZ), Annie Cattrell (UK), James Charlton (NZ), F4 (Marcus Williams & Sue Jowsey) (NZ), Ian Gwilt (Aus) and Sarah Munro (NZ).

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Hybrids

We are in the era of the Post-Medium Condition; a phrase coined by art theorist Rosalind Krauss as a logical step beyond her notion of the ‘Expanded Field' of sculpture - where in both instances, the power of the discrete object has been replaced by the hybrid object and environment. As Joanna Slockin of the University of Chicago explains, "Krauss expands Clement Greenberg’s description of the modernist desire for 'pure' art forms in order to encompass the forms and issues of art today, the art of the 'post-medium' age"; where Joseph Kosuth’s idea that as painting and sculpture start to come together, i.e. as different media become indistinct, the project of art will become more general, and modernist art must locate the 'essence of Art itself'. Digital technologies have expanded the field further than Rosalind Krauss initially could have imagined. For example, in an update of Kosuth’s play on the ontological properties of an object in One and Three Chairs, a digital 3D model can be output as a 2D photorealistic image, a 3D object created by CNC (computer-directed machining) or rapid prototype (layered 3D print) technology, and also simultaneously as a seemingly real component of a moving image.

Keith Brown Cyber-Mine (CAD render of installation), 2010

Christiane Paul, a curator of New Media Arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art makes a distinction between digital media as a tool for art and digital art as a medium in itself - in which "the work exclusively uses the digital platform from production to presentation, and that it explores that platform's inherent possibilities". For her digital art has unique features which encompass "interactive, participatory, dynamic, and customize able" elements. The medium is not simply an adjunct to 'traditional' media but a harbinger of a new entity. In this exhibition all varieties of digital, hybrid art are explored without suggesting a hierarchy between 3D digital software as a tool for 'traditional' art forms, and participatory 'pure' digital art that uses a digital platform from the creation of the artwork to the final digital output.

Hybrids brings together nine local and international artists who have produced work using 3D media and digital media as hybrid with other related art media. The artworks are grounded in both digital and material culture - a fusion of creative acts which combine computer based modeling with material fabrication and terrestrial objects. These hybrids are realised in a number of forms including installation with 3D integral projections, video and computer control syntax and a CNC 3D print, cell phone locations that are represented as 3D prints, and digital projections of bubbles onto deintegrating biodegradable sheets. The content ranges from social-political to relational, blurring the interface between manufactured truth and objective reality.

The notion of inherent mutability or hybridism within digital technologies is often revealed through the capacity in the digital computer to migrate content across media types and representational modalities, and to create dynamic systems that evolve through time or interaction. This mutability is part of a new arts practice, which is often used to explore issues of space, reality and representation. Furthermore, we are increasingly seeing an artistic desire to combine these digital traits with physical elements, in the formation of creative hybrid spaces. These hybrid experiences are becoming recognised as belonging to an associated group of works, which sit loosely under the term of ‘mixed-reality' art and include works which address how we can perceptually move between digital/physical constructs and create, define and re-design complex spaces in technologically aware environs. This extended definition of a set of contemporary arts practices allows for the inclusion of conceptual works, which use the intersection between the digital-virtual and the physical-real to explore associated languages and produce social commentary.

Pierre Lévy calls the interaction between the physical-real and digital-virtual the Mobius effect (1998: 33). In the Mobius effect, evolving transitions from one state to another - interior to exterior; public to private; local to remote; author to reader and so on - prefigure the dialectic interplay between notions of the physical-real and the digitally virtual. The Mobius effect is facilitated through our increasing engagement with ubiquitous and distributed technologies, and suggests that we need to be continually rethinking the exchange between the physical and the digital and the way we perceive and differentiate between these states. In this context social structures based on the notion of spatial connectivity and fixed distances become increasingly destabilised through our engagement with digital technologies and the increasingly pervasive nature of digital networks. However, this shift from a belief in binary oppositions to the notion of referential feedback loop is far from clear-cut. Established positions around the physical-real and the digitally virtual are well founded, the mixing of these elements is at best loosely intertwined. Hence we have a condition where there is continual referencing and looping between states - a depositing and removal of traits from and between each space takes place in the forming and mixing of cultural realities.

The controversial argument that the potential powers of the virtual might begin to supersede the qualities of the physical is raised by Umberto Eco in his collection of essays, Faith In Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality, where Eco ponders, with some irony, whether or not technology can provide more reality than nature. In this essay he critiques the notion of digital fabrication and the ability of the digital to successfully transmit the aura that we associated with the 'original' physical artifact. Furthermore, perhaps the concerns raised by Mark Slouka regarding the virtual as a means of evading the inherent possibilities of the current backlash against immersive Virtual Reality (VR), and the growing interest in digital-virtual/real mediated spaces fashioned through hybrid mixed-reality practices. In respect to the mixed-reality VR environment it is claimed that there was something nightmarish about this hunger for transcendence, this lust for dissolution, this utter lack of loyalty to the earth, the body, the human community" (1995: 33). Moreover, it appears that this desire to create a digital utopia or a clear understanding of the two environments. In these mixed-reality spaces the virtual becomes a determining factor when exporting computer-generated forms through to a physical fabrication process. This is an interesting paradox of the virtual becoming a physical artifact. Furthermore, perhaps the concerns raised by Mark Slouka’s negativity towards technologically facilitated VR, mediated in, which we can hold onto the physicality of our corporeal bodies and associated sense of time, space and consciousness, without the prescriptive outer-body sensations often implicit in immersive VR experiences especially as they were designed during the 1990s. Yet at the same time, we can experience the layered potentials of digital media- warping scale, narrative and other metaphysical experiences difficult to experience through traditional media or our mortal bodies (Morse 1998: 141-2). The notion of mixed-reality allows us to incorporate both the mediated and empirical experience in a hybrid combination, moving between and synthesising the two to facilitate an augmented experience that is not offered by the digital-virtual or material-reality alone. In a creative context Grau (2003: 17) states that "in addition to copying it [reality], the transformation of reality is the central domain and essence of art: the creation of reality, individual reality, collective reality".

References:


