

Vision has always been unreliable. True or false, could a photograph or a painting ever show us more than the outward appearance of things? But today visual form seems particularly vexed.

Under the aegis of digitization, we are bombarded with images, and yet so much of labor, leisure and communication happens invisibly, across fiber optic channels, server farms, and encrypted Wi-Fi signals, unseen except for some complex computer algorithm silently collecting data, and then whatever glowing array might appear within the confines of a rectangular screen. And any distance between visual art and the various myths of our time that it might represent is so uncertain: does art “reflect on” the current ideology of information and dematerialization, or is it an instrument of this ideology itself, furnishing images for a new order of things?

Each of the works in this exhibition has something to say about life today. Above all else, it seems to me that in each of them a certain deliquescence of things — a utopia of dematerialization and digitization — appears inseparable from a disordering, a systemic breakdown. But if the question is still how art might reflect on the changing conditions of living by finding out what it takes to make a representation of them, the answers are more difficult. Who or what is represented on the surface of Carissa Rodriguez’s pathologically flattened tongues, by the babbling chatbots in Ian Cheng’s digital simulation, in the pixels of Melanie Gilligan’s digital filters, or within the congealed interior of Anicka Yi’s objects?

Things and pictures never add up, and maybe these works frame, and savor, certain discrepancies. An insensible traffic between surface and depth: between internal organs and skin, artificial intelligence and human cognition, fossilized memories and spectral projection, the flatness of things and a sense of distance and history.

— Jacob King

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