

RHEA MYERS

The Fractionalized Phallus

Opening: Friday, March 7, 2025

Exhibition: March 7 – April 17, 2025

PRESS RELEASE

Rhea Myers' exhibition features new works that repurpose blockchain technologies and cryptographic concepts to explore themes of identity, ownership, and self-determination. From NFTs that challenge traditional notions of gender and personhood to generative art inspired by cypherpunk ideals, the exhibition interrogates societal power structures and the anxieties they produce.

Following *The Ego, And It's Owned*, *The Fractionalized Phallus* deepens the transfeminine perspective in Rhea Myers' work and transforms the artist's own body into a fragmented relic of a past self. 3D scans, no longer tied to the body they once represented, collapse the patriarchal master signifier into the marketplace, where it is redistributed, deconstructed, and rendered mutable. This dissolution of fixed identity finds a parallel in *Self-Identifying*, where generative PostScript programs create unique images embedded with their own cryptographic identity. Here, the artwork does not just depict identity but enacts it, asserting autonomy in both form and function and interrogating authorship. The critique of systemic control takes another form in *Non*, where the legal frameworks that govern corporate power become the subject of the work itself. Through an NFT embedded with Non-Disclosure and Non-Disparagement clauses, the piece reflects on the entanglement of labor, ownership, and compliance, exposing the anxieties and mispriced fears of late startup culture. In doing so, *Non* reads like marriage vows: love, honor, and obey.

Rhea Myers is an artist, hacker, and writer based in British Columbia, Canada, originally from the UK. Since 2014, she has used the blockchain as a medium for embodying, critiquing, and moving beyond the anxieties of post-financial-crisis society. Her work places technology and culture in mutual interrogation to produce new ways of seeing the world as it unfolds around us.

Myer's art has gained international recognition with exhibition at AKG Buffalo Museum, New York (USA), HeK, Basel (CH), Art Science Museum, Singapore (SGP), Kunsthalle Zürich (CH), Francisco Carolinum, Linz (CH), Musée d'Art de Nantes (FR) and Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (GER). *The Fractionalized Phallus* is her second solo exhibition with Galerie Nagel Draxler.

The anthology *Proof Of Work. Blockchain Provocations 2011–2021* reflects on her pioneering projects and understanding of conceptual art and decentralized technology.

Galerie Nagel Draxler
Weydingerstr 2/4
10178 Berlin

berlin@nagel-draxler.de
www.nagel-draxler.de

AGAINST DISRUPTION: TRANS HACKERS IN THE AGE OF BLOCKCHAIN

by Maria Babusch

„She manipulates the epics, rearranges the poems of the powerful, snips away at their documents until something new emerges.“ This was how I attempted to characterize the figure of the hacker in my piece *Hackers on Estradiol*, which adopts a historical perspective. My depiction was inspired by the *Hacker Manifesto* of theorist McKenzie Wark. More than twenty years after the publication of this classic of media philosophy, twenty-five years after the release of the first *Matrix* film, and over a decade after the so-called *Transgender Tipping Point*, it is fair to say that the figure of the trans hacker has gained a certain degree of establishment. Yet, even as she still carries an aura of subversion, she is simultaneously threatened by assimilation into a tech industry that is increasingly turning hacking into a fundamental method of power and capital accumulation. The hacker originates from a different era of the internet. Her forms of resistance are becoming ever more difficult to practice.

Californian Thinking

For the artist Rhea Myers, the essay *The Californian Ideology* (1995) also held a kind of manifesto-like significance. Indeed, its authors, Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, were among the first to confront the information technology industry of the infamous Silicon Valley using the tools of Critical Theory. Building on their work, we are now able to historically trace our present information age. One possible starting point for this history could be a courthouse in Philadelphia, where, in 1983, the company Apple first succeeded in extending intellectual copyright to binary code. As a result, this „information“ was no longer free, allowing its value to be extracted. The initial public offering of *Apple Computer, Inc.* had taken place less than three years before this court ruling.

Asymmetric Data

It always comes down to datasets. Datasets are read. They are produced and manipulated. Processed and transmitted. Around this domain, an entire political economy has formed, placing new technologies at its service. The blockchain is just one of many innovations burdened with the grand promise of changing the world and liberating humanity. Boundless techno-optimism was already identified by Barbrook and Cameron as a defining feature of the *Californian Ideology*. But if one takes a step back from this belief in progress, numerous questions arise. What exactly is the world-changing potential of blockchain, for example? What kind of information is at stake here, and what do these pieces of information actually tell us?

The mechanics of cryptography are easy to look up—after all, we live in an age of informational abundance. And yet, this does not mean we truly understand what is at play. A certain need for explanation is, in fact, an inherent feature of new technologies. When they are presented in terms of their potential for the future, it often remains unclear what this potential actually consists of. Instead, it functions primarily as a kind of historical-philosophical affect: the sense that we lack the relevant information, that we do not know what is at stake—that is what it is about. Rhea Myers' work embraces precisely this ambiguity.

The Ideology of Disruption

The trans hacker is one who operates in secrecy, discovering loopholes within the order of power while simultaneously manifesting this ethos through her bodily subjectivity. Both her actions and her gender are shrouded in a nylon veil of danger and illegality. This only makes her more alluring; the hacker's program is disruption—she opens doors to new worlds.

One might therefore assume that, within information capitalism, the trans hacker would enjoy a certain popularity—after all, "disruption," the production of difference, is precisely the method by which value is generated in this system. Silicon Valley successfully appropriates this disruption as a narrative, positioning itself in the tradition of counterculture—rebellious, nonconformist, and anti-authoritarian—while fusing this story with boundless techno-optimism. This makes it attractive to financial markets. More than anything else, new technologies are highly desirable investment objects. Of course, the trans hacker herself remains excluded from such possibilities of accumulation. And yet, the aura of disruption still clings to her, as it does to trans women more broadly. Only now, disruption has turned into a stigma. In times of *trans panic*, she no longer opens up unforeseen possibilities; instead, she is cast as a threat to the social order, a sexual aggressor. The tech industry—and its stock prices—can comfortably coexist with this narrative. As long as sexual minorities are framed as the cause of social tensions, suspicion does not fall on them.

The Hacking of Gender Identities

Nowhere is the formation of a transmisogynistic society through new technologies more visible today than in the United States, where the state itself becomes a hacker of gender identities. Tools of targeted exclusion from public life include government techniques such as advanced facial recognition software, which, when combined with the laws of the new administration, promise maximum efficiency. If, for instance, entry into the U.S. were to be criminalized for trans people, this would serve a dual purpose: First, it would provoke legal transgression, since everyone understands that one can still enter the country—provided one is able to pass. This, in turn, legitimizes further state persecution. At the same time, it mobilizes both law enforcement and civil society to refine their cultural techniques of *transvestigation*—methods of scrutinizing and identifying trans people—thus accumulating more information, and with it, power, over transfeminine individuals in particular.

Digital Aesthetics of Production

The situation is precarious—we see this in the fact that we do not know what is at stake. But if what is at stake is precisely that we do not know what is at stake, then what, in turn, does this mean for art? The work of Rhea Myers can help us think through these questions. Of one of her pieces, she once said: “It tells you everything except for the one thing that you want to know, which is what the content actually is. That was 2018. And then in 2021, I suddenly realized that this might be about me, about there being something that was hidden very effectively in my lifetime of experience.” The years here mark the time before and after the beginning of her transition. This reveals something crucial: by forming artistic connections with technology, its supposed infinite potentiality can, in fact, be realized subjectively. In art, information always refers to something *other*—and sometimes, that *other* is transness itself.

At the same time, Myers distances herself from the dominant narrative of disruption and boundless potential when, in an interview, she soberly describes blockchain as “a chance for social reform.” In the end, perhaps it is not so much about what kind of aesthetics the information age produces, nor about how fundamentally different these might be from anything that came before. Perhaps the question of new technologies today is, above all, a question of the conditions under which art is produced. Myers calls herself the first *Bitcoin artist*—by which she means the first artist to be paid in Bitcoin. Whether art is ultimately subjugated by technology, or whether it manages, with the help of blockchain, for instance, to carve out a degree of autonomy—enabling at least a few artists to make a living—is both a political and legal question. Myers addresses this by adopting a queer political slogan: “Trans Rights Are Human Rights.” It is about *human rights*, not *property rights*.