

virtual *CRUSH*

Melissa Broder / Arvida Byström / Claudia Hart / Kira Kutcher /
Kim Laughton / Eva Papamargariti / Signe Pierce

Curated by LaTurbo Avedon

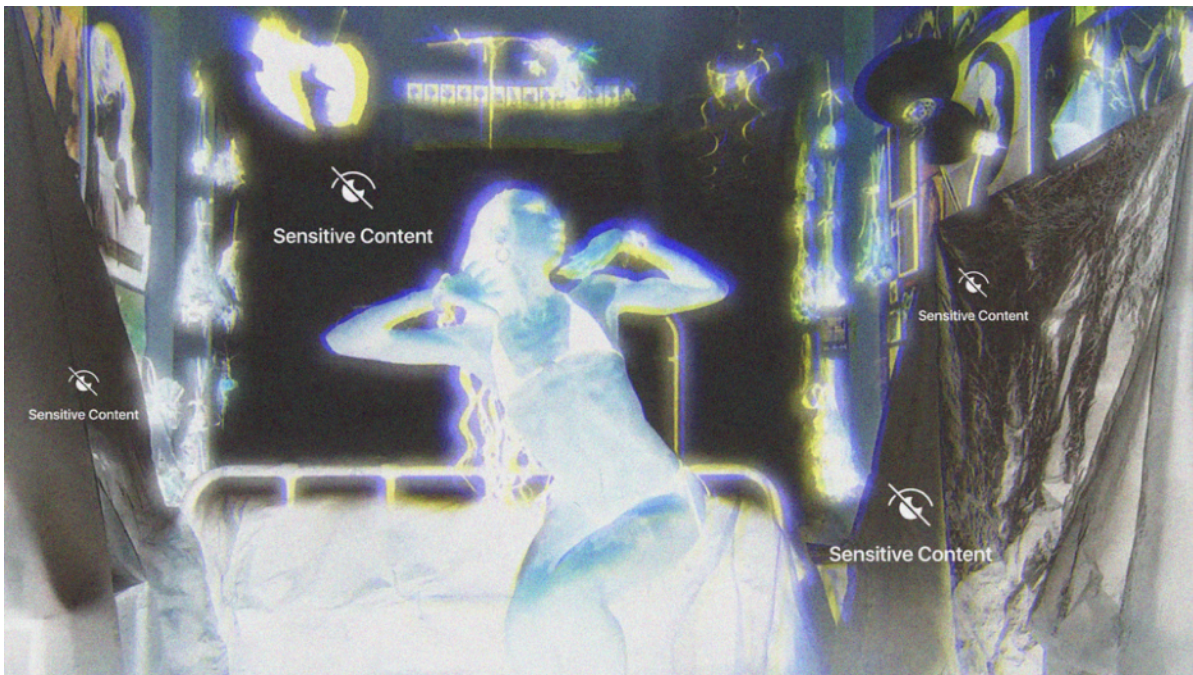
May 2 - September 19, 2026

Opening Reception: Saturday, May 2 | 5 to 8pm

Curator remarks at 4:30pm

Slash 1150 25th St, Building B, San Francisco

Open Thursday-Saturday, 11am-6pm



Kira Kutcher, *unconditional.obfuscation.mov* (still), 2026, video, 04:58

Avatar-artist and curator LaTurbo Avedon introduces *Virtual Crush*, a multi-disciplinary group exhibition featuring seven international artists: Melissa Broder, Arvida Byström, Claudia Hart, Kira Kutcher, Kim Laughton, Eva Papamargariti, and Signe Pierce. The selected works, spanning 2009 to present, focus largely on representations of the simulated body, identity, and intimacy across this period.

Virtual Crush: how do you read it? Does virtual modify crush, or crush modify virtual, or are they operating in both directions at once? The exhibition refuses to resolve that ambiguity. Virtual arrives here in its fullest sense: not the diminished copy, not the screen-mediated substitute for something more real elsewhere, but the field of difference and potential

that precedes actualization. Crush names the intensity of that threshold: is it still cute and flirty? Or is it the pressure of becoming on the verge of form? Together they name a mode of time in which the event is always simultaneously not yet and already.

The earliest work in the show, *Dream* (2009) by **Claudia Hart**, arrived when the Internet was still a place you went. There was a threshold. You sat down, you opened a browser, you logged in, you entered. And then you logged out and returned to what was presumed to be the real version of your life. Digital dualism felt true because there was still a gesture of crossing over. The virtual had not yet diffused into the ambient. Hart's piece emerged post-Internet, before the simulation age: a virtual identity assembling itself at the threshold, in the time when that threshold still existed at all. The dreamer, dreaming from inside a prospective simulation.

Eva Papamargariti's *Soft Touch* (2015) addresses the moment when the Internet was no longer somewhere you went; it was something you carried against your body at all times. The virtual self (the profile, the curated feed, the interface persona) had become continuous with the physical self rather than separate from it. Seeking desire and intimacy through the App Store. The love letter now an interface event. Papamargariti bends the body past its structural limits because that is what was happening: the virtual body in acceleration. In *Soft Touch's* simulated water and pixelated diamonds, a crumpled, dithered note reads: *I love you more than I love my phone*.

Kim Laughton's *parking* (2018) is constructed as a realtime CGI simulation, a parallel to the perpetual uplink most users had adopted by that point. Chronically online as the new state of nature. The avatar in *parking*, armored in stickered blue plastic sports padding, moves through a hyperreal tableau built from 3D models of shipping and receiving infrastructure: a world of floating signifiers, media extracted and repurposed, cleaved from their original references. The avatar moves through this world as observer, but is also being watched from inside it. Surveillance runs in both directions.

By 2025 the virtual had undergone its most fundamental transformation. It was no longer about digital representations of real things. Generative AI had arrived at scale. The image no longer required an original. The virtual body could now be generated from within: a distributed aggregate of all the bodies the machine had ever been shown, producing something that had never existed but looked as though it had. This is the moment the word virtual finally shed its apologetic meaning entirely.

Arvida Byström's *Crushing* (2025) presents the viewer with a contemporary form of the mutoscope, the early motion picture device historically used to privately screen erotic images. Through its small aperture, Byström reveals a contortion of AI-generated flesh: synthetic, deformed, hallucinating in the place where the old world monetized its own taboos. The intimate image delivered to one pair of eyes through a mechanism you operate alone. The coin is now a data point. The crank is now a thumb. The scroll, the feed, the private browser window: all versions of the same aperture. Pornography is not merely subject matter; it is the appetite that has underwritten successive technologies. The camcorder, 3G, the Internet itself: each arrived on the currents of technological desire.

We tend to think of virtual space as image-space: the rendered body, the avatar, the generated face. But language has always been virtual in exactly

the sense this exhibition means. It constructs worlds that require no physical coordinates. The earliest virtual spaces were text: the chat room, the forum, the screen name. **Melissa Broder** is a direct descendant of that lineage. Her work in the exhibition, *@melissabroder* (2026), presents her continuous networked self at new scale: Substack posts extracted from their platform and displayed at scale in the place of paintings.

Signe Pierce's *Simulatrix Affirmations* (2026) is a video manifesto in which an AI rendered in Pierce's likeness delivers original techno poetry drawn from her Neolexicon, a personal vernacular addressing metamodernity, consciousness, and the deep fake. Datamoshed footage fuses with AI renderings of her face into liquid, psychedelic paintings. Pierce wrote every word that the AI in her likeness delivers, insisting on the distinction between the self and its simulation at the precise moment the image makes them indistinguishable.

Kira Kutcher's *unconditional.obfuscation.mov* (2026) approaches the uncanny valley from the other side: an intimate body performance rendered through image processes that diffuse the figurative into hyperreality. The work explores agency through controlled surveillance, evasion, and unintelligibility, with Kutcher challenging the viewer to discern these boundaries within their performance.

Virtual Crush, reaching from the explosion of commercial social media to the present, reveals the simulated body in constant redefinition. No matter the order of sorcery, there will always be forking paths.

- LaTurbo Avedon

Virtual Crush, curated by LaTurbo Avedon, is the 20th in a series of exhibitions at Slash, each curated by an independent curator. The exhibition is generously supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Special thanks to Clark Buckner, Andy Rappaport, and The Center for New Music and Audio Technologies (CNMAT).

Melissa Broder is the author of the novels *Death Valley*, *Milk Fed*, and *The Pisces*, and the forthcoming *Empty* and *Marvelous* (Scribner; 2027), the essay collection *So Sad Today*, and five poetry collections, including *Superdoom*. Her books are translated in over twelve languages.

Arvida Byström (b. 1991 Sweden, Stockholm) is a digital native with an intrinsic relationship to pink. Her work is rooted in ideas that deal with the internet and its social, aesthetic and commercial implications. She is known for employing a hyper-feminine aesthetic to explore themes concerning femininity, body image, social dynamics, emerging technologies and economic principles through primarily a lens based practice including, performance and sculpture work.

Claudia Hart uses simulations-technologies to create installations using 3D animation, VR, AR and objects produced by computer-driven production machines. As a Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she developed *Experimental 3D*, the first curriculum dedicated solely to teaching simulations in an art-school context. She has shown and is collected widely, by museums and private galleries. She lives in NYC.

Kira Kutcher (they/she) is a freakfemme trans dyke, erotic entertainer, and performance artist. Kira's body and their art are rituals of subversive feminine expression. Their performance and video artistry is an erotic dreamworld of resistance for all who dare to explore with her.

Kim Laughton is a British multidisciplinary artist based in Tokyo.

Eva Papamargariti's practice spans moving image, printed matter, and sculptural installation. Her work explores the cognitive and affective relations between coexisting realities, where the grotesque, fictional, and real converge. Using video, CG animation, AR, 3D scanning, and textiles, she investigates metamorphosis, liminality, and symbiotic relationships between human and non-human agents, as well as identity construction shaped by online presence. She has exhibited work internationally, including at the New Museum (New York), Whitney Museum (New York), Tate Britain (London), and Transmediale Festival (Berlin).

Signe Pierce is an American multimedia reality artist whose practice spans photography, performance, video, manifestos, electronic music and sculptural installation. Operating between the material, the spiritual, and the virtual, Pierce uses her body, camera, and constructed environments to produce works that interrogate the nature of reality in an increasingly mediated world. From transformative artist talks to immersive installations incorporating projection, screens, and light, Pierce's work collapses boundaries between the physical and the simulated, provoking reflections on identity, embodiment, and autonomy in the digital age.

LaTurbo Avedon (they/them) is a pioneering artist and curator, celebrated for their work in the digital and virtual art realms. Their character creation and body of work are developed through video game worlds and emergent simulation technologies. Their curatorial approach highlights the democratic accessibility offered to artists and audiences within hybrid virtual frameworks. LaTurbo's work has appeared internationally, including at MAK - Museum of Applied Arts (Vienna), Transmediale (Berlin), Haus der elektronischen Künste (Basel), and The Whitney Museum (NYC).

Slash is a nonprofit exhibition space founded in 2018 to advance and promote the expanding field of contemporary art in San Francisco through exhibitions, publications, and public programming.