IN CONVERSATION: CORINNA BERNDT – DIGITAL HOARDING

TM: Hi Corinna, thanks so much for taking the time to answer these questions about your practice and exhibition at Verge for our audiences. Firstly, can you tell a little bit about your background in art making and perhaps what led you to a career in the arts?

CB: I spent most of my undergraduate years working in sculpture and installation, often focusing on spatial concerns and how we might understand the materiality of a particular object or work. I would often use short animations as a means to further activate different relationships between sculptural components. A lot of the artworks I made during that time were sculptural assemblages, referencing the human body, whilst also opening up a space for the imagination. I have always been interested in allowing for a more speculative understanding of materiality to emerge.

The question of what led me to pursuing a career in the arts is quite tricky to answer, especially when the idea of what such a career might look like is not that straight forward and might differ for everyone. I think ultimately, what has driven my practice so far is the dialogue with other artists' work, being able explore a particular idea through a visual medium, and being part of a particular community.

TM: Can you take us through the broad themes behind digitisation and digital hoarding? How did your investigation of these processes come about?

CB: Looking at digitisation and digital hoarding, I am interested in the ways in which one might have been led to imagine that the world has become somehow less tangible through our daily engagement with digital technologies. For example, how one might conceptualise the internet as a single virtual object—as 'the cloud'—could be considered as means to conceive of digitalisation as a phenomenon that separates data from its physical origin. In particular, certain terminologies seem to suggest that once digitalised, information might somehow disappear into thin digital ether. Yet there is a danger of forgetting all the relationships that continue to unfold in the material realm, such as the human labour, the natural resources needed to sustain the digital technologies, as well as the physical implication of dense amounts of user data now circulating online.

Coming back to your question about what caught my interest in digital hoarding, I came across the concept when listening to a radio show. The program discussed that apparently amongst my generation and younger generations, material possession was in decline, which was put into contrast with the apparent tendency of owning excessive amounts of digitally stored documents. The radio show referred to this phenomenon as digital hoarding, which according to the discussion, indicated a moving away from a material focused concept of 'belongings'. I

got particularly interested in the idea of digitalised memories which appeared to make up most of the discussed digital hoarding.

TM: The seemingly random collection of objects in the exhibition, from seed pods to celestial rocks, bring to mind questions about origin and selection. What was the rationale in choosing these particular objects for the show and digital archive?

CB: The 3D scans in the work are of objects that are mostly personal mementos or that remind me of a particular moment in time. A lot of these items I came across sometimes by accident, sometimes through another person, sometimes they were just things I picked up on the street. A fair amount of the things in the database were of ephemeral nature and no longer exist in their original physical form. In a way they are very mundane objects but if you start contemplating them more closely, all kinds of histories might unfold through their existence.

TM: Psychologically, collectors obtain objects that hold monetary or sentimental value. Do you think our and/or society's relationship with an object can be retained once it does not exist in physical form? Are you trying to challenge the notion of an object's sentimental and monetary value through this digital archive?

CB: I think rather than challenging the notion of sentimental value, I am looking at the idea of information loss and mistranslation from the physical into the digital realm and the sense of nostalgia that might arise when particular objects no longer exist in their physical form. My personal archive of these kind of memory objects could be considered as a means to explore the process of holding onto information. Yet there also is the continuous destruction of the original object that might occur through its mediation. This project actually started with the memory of a lost recording of my heartbeat, which I was trying to find in my digital files. So maybe the work examines the value we place on intimate or personal memories which have increasingly become intertwined with digital technologies.

TM: You describe the digital screen as a space to be considered as "a paradoxical space, simultaneously flat and deep, and capable of holding on its surface a multi-layered world, expressive of both physical appearances and the abstract poetic depths of the imagination."

CB: The objects in the archive are familiar yet the quotes/words attributed to them confuse this familiarity and therefore our understanding of the object's meaning. How do you see this disruption in translation factoring into narratives around these archived objects meaning pre and post-digitization?

The way information can be categorized and reordered on the screen creates an internal logic and draws on the poetics that might exist in the digital realm. US-based media theorist Lev Manovich considers the content of any database as having the potential to be indefinitely re-ordered and re-categorised. As such, the ability to index information becomes an important spatial tool for navigating its structure. Within this architecture, the potential to infinitely add to and reorder information then suggests relational narratives with a capacity to render presented information as fluid in value and interchangeable in relation to its context. In short, our capacity to move information online by recreating an archive of collected information and accompanying projections of the digital database as infinite and intangible, implicates a place where meanings might be transformed once absorbed into virtual processes. And furthermore, the digital archive becomes a fictionalised and indeterminate space within which collected information can shapeshift established meanings.

TM: You describe your works as "experiments on the digital screen" and historically, human form and movement feature heavily in your work but are omitted from this show. Has the omittance of the body in 'Not Born Digital signalling a direction into a new experiment or is this work simply an investigation tracing the connection between humans and the pre/post-digistied object?

CB: You rightly pointed out that a lot of my previous work featured a body, mostly myself performing in front of the camera, often in front of a green screen. In a lot of these earlier works I was working out the relationship between my own body and the digital screen or the image space, whilst also contemplating how the screen might pin down and frame particular kinds of bodies.

In those earlier works I was trying to produce the sense of a haptic or tactile viewing experience, as a means to experiment with different ideas concerning the gaze and the female body. Thus, video performance seemed to be the appropriate medium.

The idea of being able to somehow produce a tactile viewing experience led me to move away from performing in my videos, as I became more focused on exploring the embodied relationships we might have with all the non-human elements that make up everyday existence, and which arguably also influence our sense of self. The work 'All my Chameleon Signals' shows a network of relations between language and images, technologies and memories that all make up a particular experience of physical existence. Even when these objects are viewed as 3D-scanned items on the screen. You are still physically engaging with them through your particular understanding of having a body, and of being embedded within particular networks of material relations.

TM: You've mentioned that the work comments on the direct and indirect impacts of the production of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the environment. What are you asking people to consider about ICT's impact on the environment as they look at this body of work?

CB: Having become seemingly ubiquitous, it is easy to forget that behind their often slick and seductive exterior, our digital devices tend hide their connection to environmental destruction and oppressive power structures. While my work in the exhibition speaks more to the poetics of meaning-making that might occur through digitalisation and within the database, I think it is very important to acknowledge and be aware of the very complex impact these technologies can have on the environment and on our lives.