

# THE SCALABILITY PROJECT

EXHIBITION

#01

# FOR INFORMATION

06/28 — 07/28  
A.I.R. GALLERY



The Scalability Project is a year-long programming initiative that considers technologies and their implications for gendered, racialized, and class violence. The Project establishes feminism as a system of belief that has a wide spectrum of interpretations, exploring them through two exhibitions, eight public programs, and an online publication. The series also addresses the possibilities of scaling up feminisms, and the strategies needed in order to confront our socio-political landscape.

#### EXHIBITION 1: FOR INFORMATION

June 28 – July 28, 2019

Lex Brown, A.K. Burns, Daria Dorosh, Mary Beth Edelson, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Felipe Meres, Gabriella Torres-Ferrer, Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste, Aliza Shvarts, and Julia Weist

July 9, 7pm, The Unforgettables Reading/Working Group, session led by curator Christian Camacho-Light

July 24, 7pm, Lynn Hershman Leeson, !Women Art Revolution, 2010, Film Screening at A.I.R.

#### PUBLIC PROGRAMS: OPEN RESEARCH

September 2019 – July 2020

Open Research will consist of a series of public programs divided between field trips and reading sessions. On each trip, an artist and an expert in different technological and scientific fields will be in conversation. They will share their research with the public in an open exchange. These conversations will take place at the expert's workplace and will be recorded for the archives of The Scalability Project. The reading sessions are part of The Unforgettables Reading/Working Group and will be dedicated to thinkers in the humanities, who will facilitate discussions on relevant sources.

#### EXHIBITION 2: FOR DECISION

July 30 – August 23, 2020

Based on the findings achieved in For Information and Open Research, For Decision closes The Scalability Project and includes works that have stemmed from collaborations between participating artists and field experts.

# FOR INFORMATION

## EXHIBITION #01

Throughout history, narrative interventions have played a fundamental role in changing public perceptions. The exhibition *For Information* examines the power of such narratives as a socio-political tool from the vantage point of feminist practices. From Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, through Norma McCorvey in Roe

v. Wade and Zoë Quinn in #gamergate, stories of individual women's actions have long been employed to identify and mobilize collective forms of resistance. By recognizing how these stories have served as agents for galvanizing interventions in grand narratives, *For Information* seeks to explore how such a strategy might be updated and amended as a mode of opposition within our current global capitalist technological environment. It asks: How might we continue to develop stories that intervene in dominant logics? And how can we scale a feminist narrative intervention that takes the decolonial subject, the real bodies in real time, into account in order to begin to understand and rupture an economic model that treats all life forms as a surplus of exploitable resources?

Within our current technological environment, the transmission of narratives has become increasingly facile and uncritical. Contemporary interconnected devices track sites, movement, clicks, and swipes; facial recognition software studies our affectual responses; audio analysis algorithms listen and record our conversations. This raw material then becomes behavioral data that is bought and sold for the gains of corporations and government entities. The digital realm in which we reside has turned our private experiences into commodified objects used to predict, prescribe, and control. Our computerized socio-economic system, which is predicated on narratives of freedom and information sharing, is extracting more and more from each of us while simultaneously replicating offline models of violence and countering all forms of resistance.

Within this system, the individual that could, together with other individuals, form collective movements of opposition, is today sentenced to structures of atomization under the illusion of a constant competition for resources. As theorist Shoshana Zuboff describes, even though “we now have the tools to grasp the collision in all of its destructive complexity: what is unbearable is that economic and social inequalities have reverted to the preindustrial ‘feudal’ pattern but that we, the people, have not.”<sup>1</sup> The unrest directed towards this refeudalization of society is manipulated and controlled through its atomization, keeping subjects in check by creating the illusion that the pool of resources is limited, when in all reality there is an unfair division between classes and identitarian sectors.

One notable example of a conflict born from a perceived loss of resources or rights is #gamergate, a controversy that arose from a harassment campaign that targeted female game designers and critics under the pretext of allegedly unethical conduct in gamer journalism. Extensive research has demonstrated that the vitriol directed at female members of the community resulted from demographic changes in gamer circles, where female players now represent roughly fifty percent. The intimidation campaign used the tools of narrative intervention to violently harass female gamers, threatening their security by revealing personal information, including their phone numbers and addresses, while the authors of such actions remained in the obscurity of anonymity. #Gamergate is an important example because it behaved as a leaderless and blameless movement. By leveraging the internet's capacity for anonymity—a privilege extended only to the campaign's participants—the assault created a singular group identity for which no individual could be personally held responsible.

At the same time, the mob that emerged within #gamergate stands in stark contrast to other recent collective actions that identify themselves with personal stories and take responsibility for their messages. Feminist practices that have employed the narrative as a way to sensitize publics and change positions can now be amplified through digital networks in ways never before possible. Movements such as #MeToo (2017) and #SayHerName (2015) in the US, the #BlackProtest (2016) in Poland, and #NiUnaMenos (“not one woman less,” 2015) in Argentina brought awareness to the unifying factors that feminized bodies face and which can help unite these bodies as a common denominator. These movements function around the premise that the people taking part in them willingly reveal

<sup>1</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: Public Affair Books, 2019), 71.

their identities, and on many occasions relay personal experiences of gendered violence. The very fabric of these movements is woven by individuals, bound and supported by a group, who utilize technology to activate change. This visibility, however, has also wrought backlash, and marginalized bodies are once again under attack. Physical and verbal violence is on the rise and those most affected are always the most vulnerable: transwomen of color and poor women in certain parts of the Global South.

While the digital sphere offers new opportunities and challenges, the narrative has always been employed for different, contradicting ends. In his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard analyzes the role that narratives play in the production, acquisition, and dissemination of knowledge. In the text, Lyotard describes two types of knowledge: the scientific, which is dedicated to the discovery of truth, and the narrative, which is employed within the realms of the social. Writing in the late 1970s, he states that in an increasingly computerized society, the role of the narrative must be evaluated, because even in a world that would turn less and less to human wisdom and more to digital knowledge accumulation, the power of the narrative would not diminish. As he suggests, because the knowledge transmitted by narrations “is in no way limited to the functions of enunciation; it determines in a single stroke what one must say in order to be heard, what one must listen to in order to speak, and what role one must play (on the scene of diegetic reality) to be the object of a narrative.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, to participate in the narrative we need only to listen, share, replicate, or identify ourselves with a role within it.

**N**arrative knowledge can either go along with the dominant meta-narrative or against it, but both directions are disseminated in identical ways, and this dissemination exists only in the social. The collective nature of the narrative, moreover, adjudicates roles, determining who speaks and who listens, and thus defining

authority. According to Lyotard, the grand narrative serves to answer the following questions: “Who has the right to decide for society? Who is the subject whose prescriptions are norms for those they obligate?”<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Lyotard, 30.

problem is that by giving narrative power to a big “the people,” smaller narratives get dismissed or destroyed.

*For Information* attempts to shed light upon the narratives that might be overlooked in the midst of our changing landscape. As the first exhibition within *The Scalability Project*, the exhibition functions as a gathering of knowledge, actions, and research that aims to generate what author and artist James Bridle calls systemic literacy of our complex, computerized economic system. Literacy, according to Bridle, goes beyond computational thinking or even the understanding of a single, closed-loop network; rather, it is understood and practiced through fluency in the metalanguage of a system, “the language it uses to talk about itself and to interact with other systems—and is sensitive to the limitations and the potential uses and abuses of that metalanguage. It is, crucially, capable of both performing and responding to critique.”<sup>4</sup> *The Scalability Project* aims to generate some of this critical literacy by reflecting on feminisms at a local level, seeking ways we can scale our actions up towards networked resistance that moves beyond what we, as individuals, believe is possible.

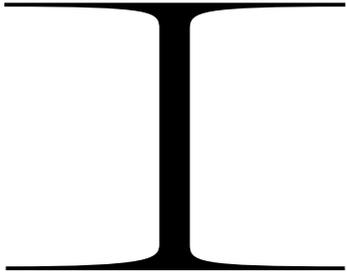
Because of the complexity of the reality we have constructed and live in, our total comprehension of it is beyond human capabilities. We look to familiar metaphors and symbols, such as clouds, homes, and pages, in order to elaborate what we can grasp. Nonetheless, never before have we had a system that goes so deeply into the private that it can determine our actions without us knowing, making us believe they are of our own will. Tracing different modes of resistance from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—from the rise of industrial capitalism through the feminist and civil rights movements in the US—will enable us to push against this opacity, and to question our own adherence and complacency. Acknowledging the privileges we wield, we move forward to comprehend this ecology of networks, where even the architects of its coded language have little grasp of the implications of their creations. The aim is to create new ways of understanding this techno-nightmare disguised as a dream.

Geared toward a process of informed decision making, this exhibition is a statement in which all participants take responsibility for their actions, successes, and mistakes—both individually and collectively. Drawing from feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty, we embark on this task through feminist action, which manifests on many levels: daily life,

<sup>4</sup> James Bridle, *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 5.

collective action, and knowledge production.<sup>5</sup> The collective working together against repressive systems of power is fundamental to a feminist praxis. This notion has taken multiple forms as the various waves of feminism have organized and reorganized around issues of gender and race. If not for the labor of those that fought before us, we would not have achieved the rights we have thus far. Since its inception, A.I.R. has provided a space where resource sharing and collective action meet the theoretical. Through its successes and failures, its shortcomings and pitfalls, A.I.R.'s greatest resource has always been its network and the dissemination of knowledge of the lived experience that this network has allowed.

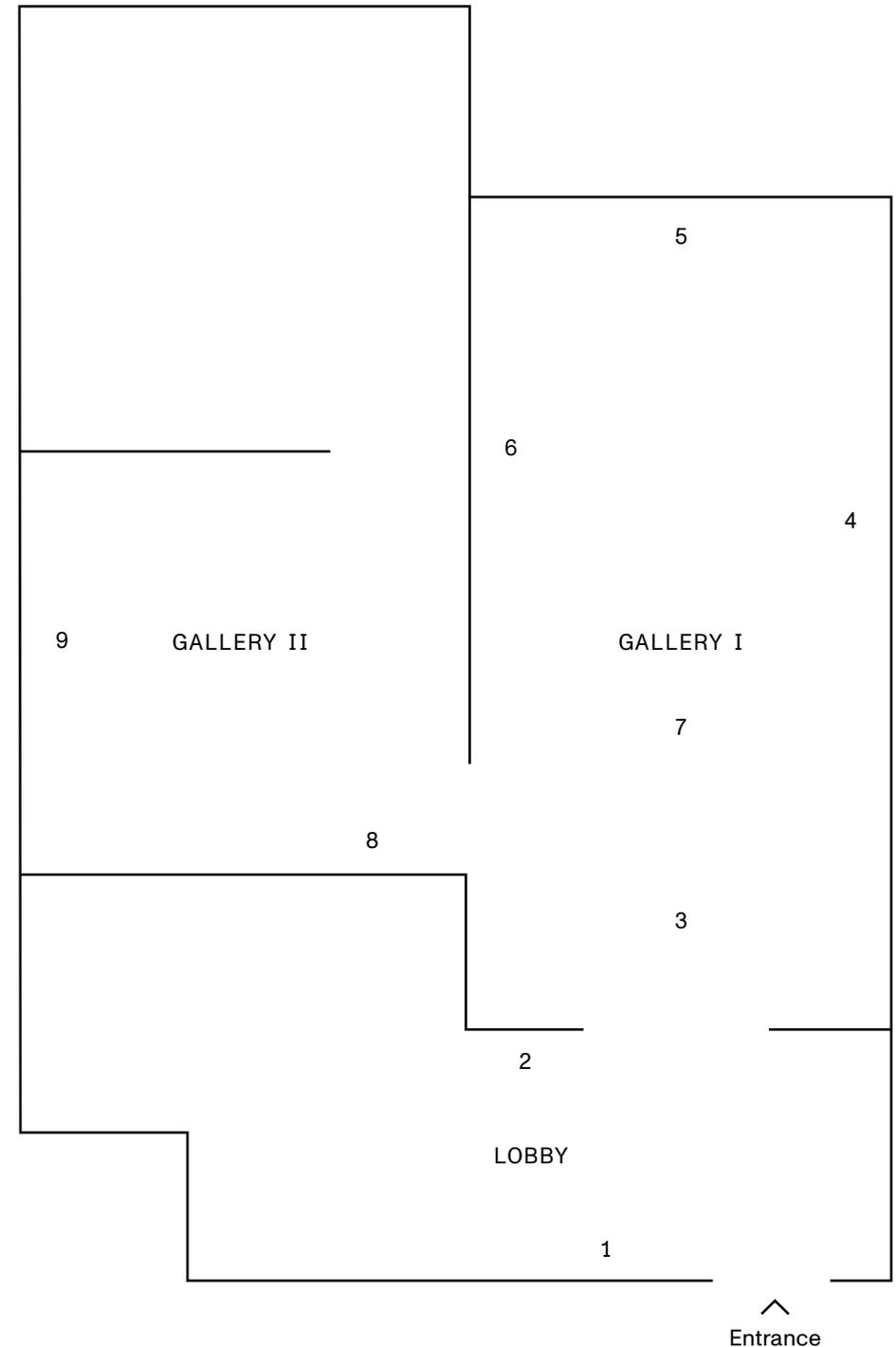


It is in this context of resource and knowledge sharing that The Scalability Project operates. Scalability, a term stolen from the world of business, is defined as the capability of a system to handle a growing amount of work. It is the inherently collective nature of the narrative that we identify as a tool for scalability. Recognizing

our responsibility and commitment to the audience both within A.I.R. and surrounding it, we understand our realities and struggles as entangled and inseparable,<sup>6</sup> necessitating that the values of reciprocity and solidarity as defined by feminist ideas be employed. The initiative aims to generate instances of exchange that permit us to hear divergent stories, and to allow alliances within difference, rather than those that suppress it. Leveraging the network is only an initial way to scale up, but rewriting the narrative in ways that allow us to change its code, its ontologies, and DNA, is what is required. The way we communicate and interact defines social relationships and vice versa. Let's scale up narratives that strike a balance between the individual and the collective while also enabling us to listen to each other, and to keep our identities and futures safe and possible.

Roxana Fabius and Patricia M. Hernández

<sup>6</sup> Here we refer to Karen Barad's concept of entanglement and Denise Ferreira da Silva's discussion of non-separability. For more on these concepts, see our earlier essay "Dialectics of Entanglement."



1. JULIA WEIST  
Parbunkells Image Archive (Composition for Inside and Outside) 06/12/2015 – 1/1/2016  
2015–16  
UV ink on adhesive vinyl  
Dimensions variable  
Edition of 3 + 1AP
2. MARY BETH EDELSON  
Death of Patriarchy / A.I.R. Anatomy Lesson  
1976  
Archival ink print on paper  
27.4 × 43 in  
Edition 9/20
3. JEREMY TOUSSAINT-BAPTISTE  
Get Low  
2019  
Raised steel deck, subwoofer, Duvetyne, mixer, digital audio player, digital audio file  
7.8 × 3 × 3 ft
4. DARIA DOROSH  
The Miroitier Series  
1985  
Acrylic paint on engraved prints, four of nine engraved plates from the 18th-century Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des métiers et des arts  
17 × 10.5 in  
Print, painting, mirror #5  
Print, painting, mirror #6  
Print, painting, mirror #7  
Print, painting, mirror #9

5. ALIZA SHVARTS  
Banners  
2018  
Continuous digital window printed on 13oz vinyl  
Various dimensions  
Banner (Yale Daily News)  
14.4 × 1226.5 in  
Banner (Adria Richards, Twitter)  
5.3 × 258 in  
Banner (Nariman Tamimi, Facebook Live)  
14.4 × 185 in  
Banner (Bahar Mustafa, YouTube)  
14.4 × 1325.5 in  
Banner (Mark Fisher, The North Star)  
8.5 × 367 in

6. LEX BROWN  
The Bank (excerpt from Animal Static)  
2019  
Digital video  
3:15 min  
Co2 Marketvalue 002  
2019  
Cigarette box, live Co2 market value display, 9 volt battery  
4.3 × 4.8 × 0.8 in  
PersonalDataMine 005  
2019  
Dollar bill, micro-controller display with market segmentation, 9 volt battery  
2.4 × 2.4 × 4 in  
PersonalDataMine 006  
2019  
Beer can, micro-controller display with Facebook targeted ad preferences, 9 volt battery  
4.8 × 3.2 × 3.2 in
7. GABRIELLA TORRES-FERRER  
Mine Your Own Business (Not Consent; Concealment)  
2019
8. A.K. BURNS  
Hand Out (She Was Warned)  
2017  
Cement hydrocal mix, rebar, steel wire, nitrile glove, gold plated brass  
4 × 10 in
9. FELIPE MERES  
Global Illumination  
2018  
HD video, sound  
8 min  
Edition of 5 + 2 APs

# ARTWORKS



JULIA WEIST Reach, 2015

image archive constructs a map of how information might accumulate on the internet. The images included range from products featuring the word to images in news articles, advertisements, and social media posts, all of which were produced by users other than the artist. As such, Weist reveals the ways in which one might insert or embed themselves within the internet, gesturing toward how individual action can reach multitudes of people through collective endeavors.

Julia Weist's Parbunkells Image Archive (Composition for Inside and Outside) 06/12/2015 – 1/1/2016 (2015–16) pokes at the holes on the internet, using search engines to produce an archive of a word that had previously never been searched for online. Stemming from a billboard in Forest Hills, Queens, NY, that the artist produced with the 17th-century word "parbunkells" printed on it, this user-generated



MARY BETH EDELSON Death of Patriarchy / A.I.R. Anatomy Lesson, 1976

Mary Beth Edelson's Death of Patriarchy/A.I.R. Anatomy Lesson (1976) overwrites Rembrandt's painting with twenty-six portraits of A.I.R.'s early members. In her reimagining of The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp (1632), the body of the man laying on the table is labeled as "The Patriarchy," while the women participating in the demonstration gleefully dig into the surgical exercise. By intervening directly on the image through collage, Edelson probes

the tools available to create visibility platforms for those who have been historically excluded from dominant narratives. In A.I.R.'s own history, this tactic was employed by feminist artists to contest and rewrite the art historical canon. Their efforts opened up conversations about representation in the arts and led to the development of a space for showing work by women artists.

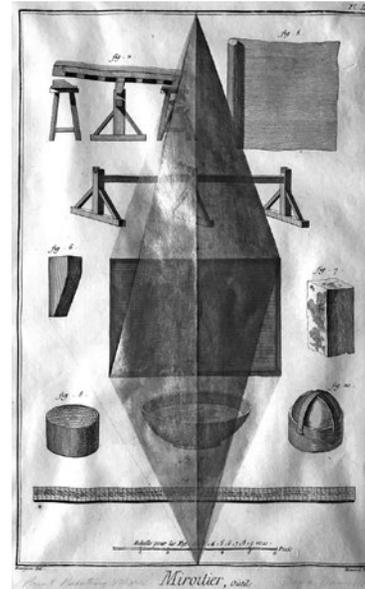
Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste's Get Low (2019) is a series of intimate structures imbued with vibrational potential by situating a subwoofer overhead in a space of total darkness. Get Low is an affective sonic environment that utilizes frequencies just at or below the threshold of human hearing to facilitate sites where encountering sound as inaudible allows people to experience it physically.



JEREMY TOUSSAINT-BAPTISTE Get Low, 2019

Toussaint-Baptiste calls these "hyperaudible" environments: lightless and intensely intimate sensoria where infrasonic tones are noticeably felt within the body, provoking an emotional response. These resonant architectural and environmental compositions are concerned with the dual capacity of bass to force bodies into submission or excite them into propulsion.

Get Low is a dark and dynamic exploration of the notion of "scalability," producing a site through which bass may be felt and understood as a tool for both liberation as well as subjugation.



DARIA DOROSH The Miroitier Series, 1985

Daria Dorosh's Miroitier Series (1985) includes four of nine engraved plates from the 18th-century Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des métiers et des arts. Each engraving is the background and inspiration for generating an abstract faceted form painted with Golden acrylic paints. The layers of transparent, iridescent, and transference colors respond to light and movement, both obstructing and revealing the engraving underneath to show the tools and manufacture of mirrors. Encyclopédie, co-edited by Denis Diderot

and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert and published between 1751 and 1772, was a landmark work of the Enlightenment that depicted the tools and methods of artisans and tradespeople. Comprising 17 volumes of text and 11 volumes of plates, it is highly valued as a record of the techniques and vocations of the pre-Industrial world. In her paintings imposed on diagrams of tools from before the Industrial Revolution, Dorosh inserts her hand into—and in some cases obscures—technological history.



ALIZA SHVARTS Banner (Nariman Tamimi, Facebook Live), 2018

Aliza Shvarts' Banners series (2018) mines the internet, compiling streams of comments left by users on various social media and publishing platforms, each culled from a different viral instance in which an individual was violently targeted online. Each banner displays multiple screenshots of a continuous digital window, such as the comments on a social media post, email thread, or online article. The vinyl scrolls capture viral public experiences in the lives of Adria Richards, Nariman Tamimi, Bahar Mustafa, Mark Fisher, and the artist. Shvarts' series exposes the more sinister side of the internet, which enables massive, anonymous, and impune online harassment of women, among other users. In physicalizing

and making tangible the breadth of this language, the artist points to how the internet compounds such power dynamics. These works provide an example of the dark side of scalability, exposing how it has been co-opted to serve more harmful ends.

Lex Brown employs humor, clowning, and improvisation as vehicles for critique. In her video The Bank (excerpt from Animal Static) (2019),

Brown reflects on the experience of accessing complex digital financial structures in their indecipherable language. The Bank utilizes the visual



LEX BROWN The Bank (excerpt from Animal Static), 2019

language and conventions of advertisement videos, however, each distinct part of the video refers to these conventions in a different manner. In the first section, two customers engage a bank teller in a conversation about exchanging a product, and the characters partake in the scene by showing partial awareness of their performance. Subsequently, the teller shows signs of deep self-reflexivity through a script that contests conflictive cultural narratives and dialogues directly with the viewer. Brown manipulates the narrative of advertising through cinematic tropes and the use of the absurd, making these her tools to ridicule its power.

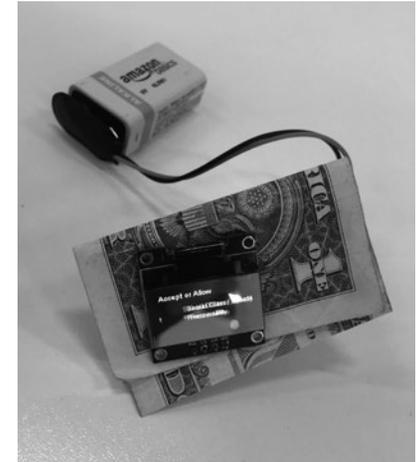
Gabriella Torres-Ferrer's series Mine Your Own Business (Not Consent; Concealment) (2019) presents a still life where a Budweiser beer can, an old Winston cigarette pack, and a dollar bill are each attached to micro-controllers showing financial data. Torres-Ferrer transforms these once functional objects into structures of display, building a parallel between the market value of carbon dioxide, user behaviour patterns, and the analytics of Facebook targeted ad preferences as exploitable commodities. People generate data constantly, and consequently, large portions of our lives are captured and transformed into marketable information. It is the appropriation of this information

that fuels digital capitalism, as corporations co-opt user-generated data while the users who produce the data receive no financial compensation. Torres-Ferrer's sculptures are commentary on corporate capitalization on individuals without clear consent, extracting from users the power and ownership over their digital body.



A.K. BURNS Hand Out (She Was Warned), 2017

In Greek mythology, Artemis was the goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, wild animals, the Moon, and chastity. She was also the patron of young girls and worshipped as the goddess of midwifery and childbirth. The version of Artemis created by A.K. Burns in the series She Was Warned presents a post-apocalyptic



GABRIELLA TORRES-FERRER  
PersonalDataMine 005, 2019

image of the dismembered body of Artemis, where parts of the goddess coexist separately and distantly. Included in For Information is Hand Out (She Was Warned) (2017), in which Artemis' latex-gloved concrete hand offers the viewer a gold plated IUD in lieu of her classical attribute, the golden bow. In this case, Artemis is neither giver nor taker of life, but rather enables us to prevent life altogether, commenting on the state of reproductive justice in the US and predicting an apocalyptic future.

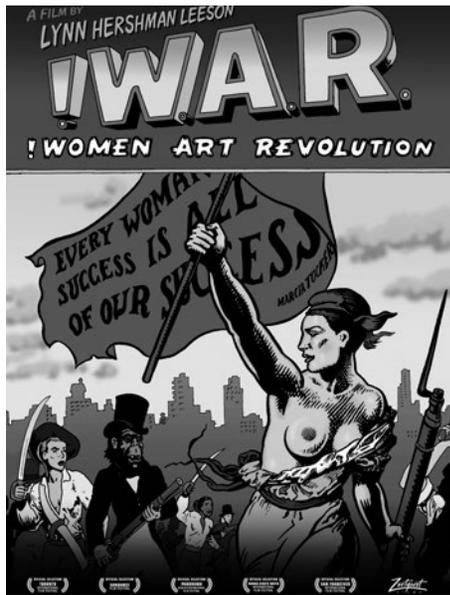


FELIPE MERES Global Illumination, 2018

Felipe Meres' Global Illumination (2018) applies 3D-rendering to Pre-Columbian objects from the Pumapungo Museum in Cuenca, Ecuador, to critique the ways in which ethnographic displays have traditionally framed archeological objects. These technologies are often used to produce images that are photorealistic, especially within museums aiming to digitize and preserve their collections.

As such, the images created by Meres blur the line between reality and fiction. The artist questions how seemingly objective technologies might reflect bias or transform the meaning of these objects by stripping them of their context. For example, the visual treatment of the objects speaks to the ways in which they have been conditioned to circulate within the art market. Meres presents a decolonial lens through which to view these objects, asking the audience to consider and question their materiality, dimensions, and function.

Lynn Hershman Leeson's !Women Art Revolution (2010) reflects on the history of the Women's Movement and documents the work of women artists in the narrative format of film. In revealing the gender politics of the art world and the work of activists and artists to alter these dynamics, Leeson demonstrates how seemingly



LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON !Women Art Revolution, 2010

small actions can build into a movement for change. The artist takes a revisionist approach to traditional narratives around art history, documenting the voices and stories of those who have not historically been included. These first person accounts develop an archive of the experiences of women artists on their own terms. In this way, Leeson provides an example as to how art might be activated to address and challenge inequalities.

A.I.R. will host a free public screening of !Women Art Revolution on Wednesday, July 24 at 7pm.

A.I.R. has been functioning as a space for women-identified artists since 1972 and operating under a unique cooperative model through which women's issues have been raised and scarce assets have been shared across multiple outlets. Our permanent exhibition space supports an open exchange of ideas and risk-taking by women-identified artists to provide support and visibility. As a self-directed governing body, the organization is an alternative to mainstream institutions and thrives on a network of artist participation.

We would like to thank all the artists, designers, and art handlers for their contributions, direction, and advice on this project: Lex Brown, A.K. Burns, Daria Dorosh, Mary Beth Edelson, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Felipe Meres, Gabriella Torres-Ferrer, Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste, Aliza Shvarts, Julia Weist, Wkshps, Pansum Cheng, Brittany Hayden, Gil Sperling, Alina Tenser, Xiaorong Liu, Cornelia Smith, and Yiwen Wang.

Notably, Lizzy Onck, Tang Ziqiao, and Chris Wu of Wkshps for the merit of their graphic identity. Also, the type designers Charlotte Rohde (SerifBabe) and Larissa Kasper and Rosario Florio (Monument Grotesk Semi-mono).

We would also like to express our gratitude to the galleries that enthusiastically supported this project: Bridget Donahue (Lynn Hershman Leeson), Callicoon Fine Arts (A.K. Burns), and Embajada (Gabriella Torres-Ferrer).

We would especially like to thank the New York A.I.R. Artist Members who supported this initiative and recognized its importance: Tomoko Abe, Susan Bee, Liz Biddle, Daria Dorosh, Yvette Drury Dubinsky, Maxine Henryson, Carrie Johnson, Cynthia Karasek, Carolyn Martin, Luca Molnar, Jayanthi Moorthy, Sylvia Netzer, Ann Pachner, Ada Potter, Ann Schaumburger, Negin Sharifzadeh, Susan Stainman, Joan Snitzer, Erica Stoller, Nancy Storrow, and Jane Swavely.

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Curators:  
Roxana Fabius  
and Patricia M. Hernández

Curatorial Assistant:  
Josephine Heston

Exhibition Assistants:  
Xiaorong Liu  
Cornelia Smith  
Yiwen Wang

Editors:  
Susan Bee  
Lucie Steinberg

Graphic Identity:  
Wkshps

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PUBLIC PROGRAMS: OPEN RESEARCH  
EXHIBITION 2: FOR DECISION