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Tiger
Strikes
Asteroid
Greenville

REDIRECT

Conrad Bakker
Victoria Bradbury
Ben DuVall
Janna Dyk
Benjamin Grosser
Joyce Yu-Jean Lee
Jorge Lucero

Curated by Suzanne Dittenber

January 24 - February 24, 2020

RAMP Gallery
Asheville, NC



My deepest gratitude to Carol Cole Levin for her extraordinary generosity towards this publication. I cannot overstate my appreciation of her support, without which this catalogue would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank Paddy Johnson for writing on our behalf, Ben Duvall for his design consultation, and TXTbooks for their participation in the printing of this catalogue.

My special thanks to the artists of this exhibition for sharing their thoughts, their works, and their time in shaping the conversation, as well as to Lei Han for moderating the artist panel discussion.

REDIRECT was exhibited through the generosity of Colby Caldwell and Revolve, its host gallery, the technical support of University of North Carolina Asheville, the installation efforts of Mark Hursty, Jackson Martin, and Tom Schram, as well as Jordan Whitten's documentation.

My many thanks to all who helped to make REDIRECT a success.

Suzanne Dittenber
Tiger Strikes Asteroid Greenville

2020 can feel like living inside the early aught thriller *Memento*. Like the film's protagonist, Guy Pearce, our culture remembers nothing for longer than a few minutes, no matter how shocking the event. Conspiracy theories, like Pearce's, flourish, and nobody feels safe. Even the cause of our protagonist's predicament feels familiar; a mix of disease, compromised archiving techniques, and willed ignorance.

One of the challenges of the 21st century is navigating systems that cause cultural amnesia without falling prey to the *Memento*-like paranoia it can cause. It's hard work, a reality revealed by the artists in Suzanne Dittenber's exhibition *ReDirect*. Buzzing with anxious energy, the art in this show offers visibility to hidden problems and relationships specific to our times.

One method many artists in *ReDirect* use to draw attention to unchallenged assumptions is to change the way we're accustomed to interacting with a digital medium. Entering the show, a computer workstation by Ben DuVall showcases *Anti-Archive*, a piece that transforms the artist's website into a series of 12 links titled only by their date. The linked days lead to artworks he made at that time three years ago (DuVall created and deleted an artwork per day in the original iteration); every 24 hours, he manually deletes the uploaded files from the previous day and replaces them with new work. Unlike the average artist website that serves up art by the year, DuVall offers something akin to Snapchat. Visitors have one chance to view the work for the day, and short of sending an email request for more, that's all the chances they get.

As a larger body of art, probably the most surprising aspect of *Anti-Archive* is just how much of it succeeds. A video of stacked subtitles reads like uncanny horoscopes or fortune cookies. A bizarre Instagram populated with pictures of red and green sandwich boards and posters labeled, "Thank You for Shopping Here. Your Business is Appreciated" cleverly mirrors the platform's purpose. Many of the works reference contemporary and art historical sources, a color photograph of a firehose recalling Theaster Gates sculptures in the medium, a still life vanitas overlaid on a poem made of repeating text, and a surrealist illustration depicting a man with an eye-shaped head. DuVall never lets you forget his anti-archive draws on an actual archive—the images of art history.

Almost all the work in the show engages online culture. Of these works, *FIREWALL*, a collaborative artwork executed in 2016 by Joyce Yu-Jean Lee (with development by Dan Phiffer and other collaborators), remains the best known. The piece consists of two identical monitors and a single keyboard; viewers type keywords into Google, and *FIREWALL*'s custom plugin brings back Google searches on one monitor and Baidu (China's leading search engine) on the other. What does online censorship look like in China and the US? This piece shows us.

Not everyone welcomed this learning opportunity. *FIREWALL* made headlines in 2016 after reports surfaced that the Chinese government exercised intimidation tactics on Chinese citizens who had planned on participating in *FIREWALL*'s auxiliary events. (The exact nature of those threats has never been revealed.)

Lee places suggested search terms like "Tiananmen Square" and "Ai Weiwei Imprisonment" on the wall for users who might have trouble coming up with them on their own. Every query brings back different results, but the more politically charged words above reveal the kind of contrasting results you'd expect. Google shows repeating shots of "Tank Man," an iconic photograph picturing an unidentified man staring down an army of tanks on July 5th, 1989, one day after the government's massacre of pro-democracy student protestors. Baidu shows nothing but a bunch of tourists enjoying the public space.

Nearby, Victoria Bradbury's *Electronic Ginseng* touches on political issues related to China as well. Taking the form of a "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure," Bradbury presents a computer screen, motorized ginseng sculpture, and beanbag seat for viewers that sets the stage. "You are in the Western North Carolina Nantahala National Forest" begins a text that casts you as a poacher of wild American Ginseng potentially worth hundreds of dollars to Chinese buyers seeking the plant. Click next, and you discover the ginseng, but set off the sculpture, which mimicking Appalachian folklore, screams when a viewer gets too close.

Often described as a "canary in the coal mine," American Ginseng possesses immunal qualities that boost a forest's resistance to disease. Its absence can quickly devastate a forest. Bradbury's work recalls much of this history through the tale—a tradition of storytelling that has a corollary roll in net art. (In curator Michael Connor's essay for Rhizome's Net Art Anthology, he describes the online preservation as similar to the sharing of oral histories, dance traditions, or recipes—fragile and recorded through everyday experience.)

Nowhere is this more evident than on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, where cult-like communities fed on a constantly evolving news cycle emerge. Ben Grosser's *Twitter Demetricator* responds to this and the addictive qualities of these mediums by removing Twitter's comment counts, retweets, and likes. Without a data-obsessed social media environment, how would our exchanges take place? Would we be more kind to one another? Could the Russians sow so much discord? No definitive answers exist.

My own experience with Grosser's *Demetricator* proved illuminating regardless. I found that while my daily activity remained the same (I still got notifications about my tweet likes and DMs even if I didn't see them elsewhere), my awareness of what I saw in my Twitter feed increased. I regularly questioned why the tweets I saw appeared in my feed.

Five years ago, I never needed to ask these questions. In 2016, Twitter switched from a transparent system that sorted chronologically, to algorithmic-based sorting. *Demetricator* alludes to that loss of transparency. Unlike a library, which uses the Dewey Decimal System—a non-proprietary sorting method—Twitter and other social media platforms use algorithms unavailable to the public. In an online environment where it is already difficult to know the source of most information, algorithms that only further obfuscate why we see the information fuel distrust in the media. *Demetricator* gets to the heart of this issue by removing the false

decoys—the so-called navigational cues that give users a false sense of control.

Like much of the art in this show, Grosser's piece meets the Net Art Anthology's definition for net art—"art that acts on the network, or is acted on by it." In other words, net art is an act of public performance by either the artist or the spectator. Conrad Bakker's *Twitter Marginalia* paintings begin as performance—he tweets excerpts from Marcel Proust and Adrienne Rich's *In Search of Lost Time* to Twitter, and then paints the text, likes and all.

The tweets allude to a larger story, eerily well-suited to critique social media. In Swann's Way, one of seven books within the series, Proust's narrator describes human nature in much the same terms as we understand it today—incomplete even in its nuanced form, and never enough to safeguard us from foolishness. Fittingly, even the most popular tweet from this book doesn't break 30 likes—a metric and message Bakker preserves with paint. It's not just that we haven't learned, but that we never will.

Artists use the strategy of transforming dynamic content into static works repeatedly in *ReDirect*, usually as a means of evoking anxiety. Arguably the most viscerally affecting work in the show, Jorge Lucero's *Slow Instagram*, consists of a phone slideshow presenting blurry half loaded Instagram shots. When struggling to get a connection in the gallery, I passed the piece multiple times before realizing it was art. In each instance, the phone's images reinforced my anxieties about getting online. Later, when I saw the work reproduced in a review online, I thought the post wasn't loading correctly—even though I was familiar with the work. I had to fight the urge to close the article. No other work makes the viewer more aware of their dependence on software than *Slow Instagram*.

In some ways, Janna Dyk's *21 Days* serves as a natural companion. Originally executed in 2009, Dyk invited 35 friends to take pictures of themselves daily for three weeks, and send the snapshots to her along with texts about why that image represents them. (32 friends accepted.) The photos presented more than ten years later in *ReDirect* take the form of a giant grid, with each participant's photos lining the walls in columns.

21 Days might be the exhibition's most analog work; it duplicates the functionality of Instagram, but without any of the software. Still, the piece fits the definition of net art and the perimeters of the show—it is presented with an awareness of the network, and requires participation. The result, 672 photos, some staged, others candid, others still silly, mundane, and forlorn produce a cumulative portrait of the network.

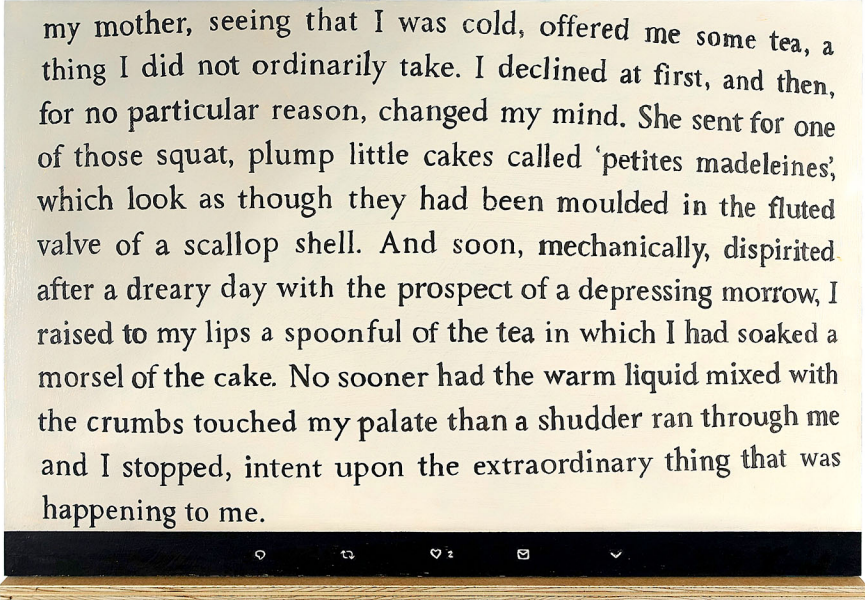
Perhaps most significantly, though, the physicality of these works offers an alternative to our Memento-like digital world. Instagram isn't an archive, but this piece legitimately works like one. It provides a look at the lives of 32 individuals, free of algorithms and vested interests. As a result, it's the only work in this show completely liberated from the nervous anxiety that defines the online world. I know what I'm looking at and why, and in this world, that's a blessing.

Paddy Johnson
February, 2020

Conrad Bakker

conradbakker.tumblr.com

Untitled Project: Twitter Marginalia is a series of paintings of twitter images shared by readers of specific texts, in this case the texts include a poem by Adrienne Rich and Marcel Proust's epic novel *In Search of Lost Time*. This project is part of an ongoing reflection on reading and materiality in that it focuses on the independent act of reading literature and the public performance of that act via shared images on social media, and then using painting, as a process and a thing, to slow down and complicate the repetition.

The image shows a painting on a wooden panel with a shelf. The painting is a reproduction of a text from Marcel Proust's 'In Search of Lost Time'. The text is written in a black, serif font on a light yellow background. The text reads: 'my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent for one of those squat, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines', which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, dispirited after a dreary day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me.' The painting is mounted on a wooden panel with a shelf at the bottom. The shelf is a dark, horizontal strip with several small, white icons (a heart, a speech bubble, a mail icon, and a checkmark) on it, suggesting a social media interface.

my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent for one of those squat, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines', which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, dispirited after a dreary day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me.

*Untitled Project: Marcel Proust / In Search of Lost Time [Twitter Marginalia]
[No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me]
Oil paint on wood panel w/ shelf
2018*

Victoria Bradbury

blurringartandlife.com

Electronic Ginseng 2.0 is a sculptural ginseng with digitally fabricated leaves, stems, and roots. Wild ginseng challenges an east toward west production and trade model. In Chinese medicine, American Ginseng has a calming effect to balance its Yang cousin, Asian ginseng. American ginseng is sought after in China and a complex cultivation and trade industry has grown around the demand. The ginseng plant grows wild in Appalachia and has served as income for generations of Appalachian families. The wild plant can be elusive and is thought to evade discovery and harvest. This project concerns ginseng's tricky biological, mythological, and economic lore. Arduino and custom electronics mediate the interaction.

http://blurringartandlife.com/vb/electronic_ginseng2_0.html

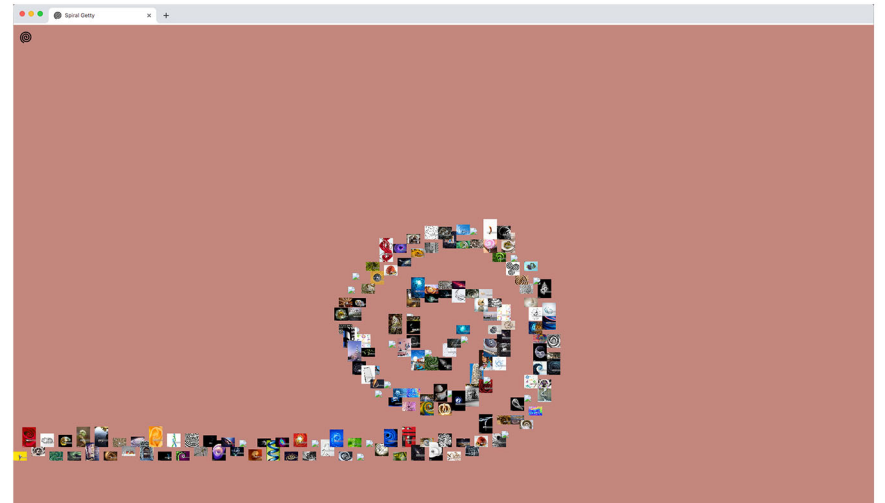


Electronic Ginseng 2.0
Laser cut wood. Arduino. Servo Motors. Proximity sensor.
2018

Ben DuVall

bduvall.com

From January 1 through December 31, 2017 my personal website functioned as an “anti-archive”, all content was deleted every day and new content was uploaded, with previous content available by email request only. Operating on a set of rules I wrote for myself, the Anti-Archive became a year-long web performance, resulting in a series of texts, images and other web-based experiments which changed daily at www.bduvall.com. Projects that took me months or years to complete were presented with the same privilege as something that took five minutes—all to be erased within a 24 hour cycle. I became the active “custodian” of the site, uploading, maintaining, dusting, deleting, fielding requests and organizing the output generated by and for the project. The site became a means of rapidly generating ideas, some of which I am still working through currently, but it also raised many other questions for me regarding distribution of artwork, sustained commitment to projects and ways of presenting oneself online.



Spiral Getty
website, found jpegs
2017

Janna Dyk

jannadyk.bertha.me

21 Days highlights changes in our digital social habits from the last decade. In 2009, Dyk asked 36 people from 6 countries to send her both an image and a text for 21 days, resulting in 756 "spaces," each representing someone's life and perspective. This contemporary installation of 21 Days marks the 10th anniversary of the project.

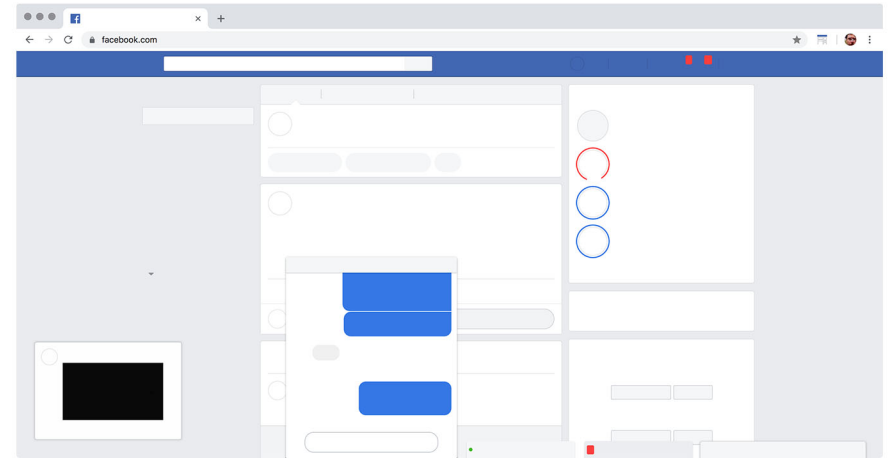


21 Days
2009/2019

Ben Grosser

bengrosser.com

Given the harms that Facebook has wrought on mental health, privacy, and democracy, what would it take to make Facebook “safe?” Is it possible to defuse Facebook’s amplification of anxiety, division, and disinformation while still allowing users to post a status, leave a comment, or confirm a friend? With Safebook, the answer is yes! Safebook is Facebook without the content, a browser extension that hides all images, text, video, and audio on the site. Left behind are the empty containers that frame our everyday experience of social media, the boxes, columns, pop-ups and drop-downs that enable “likes,” comments, and shares. Yet despite this removal, Facebook remains usable: you can still post a status, scroll the news feed, “watch” a video, Wow a photo, or unfriend a colleague. With the content hidden, can you still find your way around Facebook? If so, what does this reveal about just how ingrained the site’s interface has become? And finally, is complete removal of all content the only way a social media network can be “safe?”



Facebook News Feed Modified by *Safebook*
Browser Extension

Joyce Yu-Jean Lee

joyceyujeanlee.com

FIREWALL is a not-for-profit, interactive art project designed to foster public dialogue about Internet freedom. The goal of this project is to investigate online censorship through a participatory process by comparing the disparities of Google searches in western nations versus those on Baidu, the primary search engine in China. As a Chinese American artist, Joyce's socially engaged art practice reframes western art and culture into transnational and "glocal" (global + local) pluralistic contexts.

The project asks: How does visual culture reflect and/or script dominant ideologies about the "other"? Does the representation of truth differ visually by culture or location? Participants are welcome to type in any search into the FIREWALL "Search Station," a geo-specific cache of the worldwide web. They can then examine their image results simultaneously in both the U.S. and China, and vote on whether the images are affected by censorship in the FIREWALL Search Archive.



FIREWALL
2 channel Search Station with social software
dimensions variable
2016-present

Jorge Lucero

jorgelucero.com

In the summer of 2016 my family and I moved from one house to another. The new house on Maple was a ninety second drive from the old house on Larch. On the day we moved, we rented a ten-foot U-Haul™ and after a 24-hour period of driving back and forth between the houses we had only put seven miles on the truck. All the annoying duties associated with moving were done, including changing all of our utilities to the new address. At the old house we had AT&T™ U-Verse™ as the provider of our Internet service. It was good. We could send out emails and watch Netflix™ without any issues. We could be watching TV, working on the computer and using our iPhones™ all at the same time without seeing any significant connection issues. Six people live in our home.

The AT&T™ guy came to the new house and set everything up so that we could continue to live our connected lives the way we like to. When we plugged in our devices at the new house we immediately started to notice the difference. The kids couldn't watch Hulu™ and I couldn't download stuff from my Box™ or Outlook™ accounts. We called AT&T™ and they upgraded us—at an additional cost—to their highest internet speed. Things were a little better but not much. Whenever I opened Instagram™ or Facebook™, everything loaded at a 5% slower rate. An image on Instagram™ would take about 3 seconds to go from blurry to HD™. It bothered me. I began to take screenshots of these Instagram™ Gerhard Richter's™. I then reposted the blurred pictures—which I then called Slow Instagram™—to my Facebook™ account. We later switched to Xfinity™. In 2018 I got completely off of Instagram™ and Facebook. I downloaded all the content from my Facebook™ and turned it into a five hundred-page Adobe™ PDF. I print hardcopies of that PDF for sale through Lulu.com™. I deleted my Instagram™ account permanently and I didn't make any efforts to archive any of its content. In 2019 I found out that WhatsApp™ —which I use—is now owned by Facebook™. In 2020 I walked in to the living room at our house while my teens and wife were watching Aaron Sorkin and David Fincher's The Social Network™. Later on Wikipedia™ I read that they're thinking about making a sequel.



Slow Instagram
2017-present

TSA Greenville Members:

Mark Brosseau
Kara Blanken Soper
April Dauscha
Suzanne Dittenber
Susan Klein
Hirona Matsuda
Kelsey Sheaffer

greenville@tigerstrikesasteroid.com
tigerstrikesasteroid.com
ig: tsa_gvl
tw: @tsa_gvl
fb: @tsagvl

Published by TXTbooks
txtbooks.us

