

LAURA BARTLETT GALLERY  
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# frieze

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The History of Technology

Written by Jonathan Griffin October 2014



JESSICA SILVERMAN GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO—When Aristotle imagined a technological future in which ‘every instrument could accomplish its own work’, it was to the weaver’s shuttle and the lyre- player’s plectrum that he turned for examples. It is probably just coincidence but, in ‘The History of Technology’, woven fabrics and the sonorous tones of a stringed instrument featured prominently. The exhibition assembled five artists whose work, in different ways, arises from reflections on the technological present and imminent future, which often manifests itself in decidedly olde-worlde formats. Margo Wolowiec’s hand-woven fabric panels, such as *Somewhere Shortly After* (2014), are made by printing images from online sources such as Instagram onto polyester

thread. Wolowiec then re-weaves the thread – a process that makes the images crackle with static, emulating the effect of a corrupt jpeg or a VHS tape being fast-forwarded out of legibility. Philipp Timischl's sculptures – in which he fixes a canvas directly above a freestanding flat-screen television – sound funnier, and glibber, than they are. At Jessica Silverman Gallery, the monitor played the looped title for the HBO series *In Treatment* (2008–10), along with a haunting phrase from its theme music. (Hence the sound of strings, probably generated by a synthesizer.) Up top, the canvases were stained with a puddle of epoxy resin – rhyming with a CGI water effect sloshing across the screen below – over which Timischl had printed dull photographs of cityscapes, tilted on their sides. It is confounding that these hybrids of opposites – plasma and fabric, wet and dry, word and image, motion and stasis – cohere as naturally as they do. As confounding, perhaps, as the simultaneously antiquated and hi-tech moment that we currently inhabit. (As a friend once remarked to me: 'Everybody may have iPhones, but policemen still ride horses.')

To make his wall-mounted panels, Samuel Levi Jones rips the covers off multi-volume encyclopaedias and stitches them together in grids. These emptied containers for knowledge ironically allude to the totalizing system of the internet, which, beneath its shiny surface, is actually shallow, unforthcoming and dilapidated. These works may well have suggested themselves to the artist at garage sales where bulky encyclopaedias, once symbols of high-minded middle-class investment, are usually now offered for peanuts.

The middle of the gallery was occupied by Dashiell Manley's 'Walk Cycle' (2014), a series of eight double-sided panels that sat on shelves and leant against steel frames. Halfway through the show, the panels were flipped, although it's unlikely anyone noticed. On one side of each, eight pieces of paper with sequential images of a cartoon man walking were fixed to clear acrylic; on the other, the man's silhouette was cut out of a watery pink wash. Compositionally, the surfaces were hastily arranged, as if the idea wasn't to make a picture at all but just to carry data, in transit to becoming a time-based representation. The eight panels seemed like diffident material remnants of the drawing board, the cutting room or the projection booth.

The exhibition's outlier was Simon Denny, whose work did not involve fusty old materials unless you counted the canvases onto which his punchy digital images were inkjet printed. He contributed six of the 89 panels from his 2013 exhibition at Kunstverein Munich, each documenting events from the 2012 Digital Life Design technology conference. Denny's organization of this information (photos of speakers, soundbites such as 'We are hard-wired to share' and 'We've made the choice that everyone is and can be a creator') conformed to the digital design principles of skeuomorphism: chirpy cursive fonts, paperclips, pinned-up

Polaroids and drop-shadows. Most people first learnt the meaning of the term in 2013, when Apple renounced skeuomorphism with the release of its new iOS7 operating system.

Denny shows us how visions of the future get old as rapidly as they are glimpsed. Does it follow that the faster they are dreamt up, the faster they die? His work certainly suggests it. Perhaps that accounts for the background hum of pathos elsewhere in this exhibition. The history of Silicon Valley may be only decades old but the history of technology is ancient.

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