

Exhibition Review – “Post-Digital Materiality” Exhibition

Attending the opening of this physical exhibition (ironically in a former animal quarantine depot) was a rare and delightful event. Not only was it an enjoyable chink within Covid-19 regulatory isolationist armour, but it also provided essential relief from my increasingly screen based passive experience of art and the world. This condition, by the way, shared by us all, is one where boundaries between the physical and the digital world are fusing, and thereby defusing our first-hand experience and enjoyment of our haptic, tactilian environment.

Walking around the exhibition one can enjoy the duality of artworks digitally developed from the virtual and produced for a physical exhibition as a happy alternative to the current condition where physical art made to look its best online and within our screens tends to have the upper-hand.

The range, scope, intentions and context of the works on display at Post-Digital Materiality are described eloquently by Dr Song in her catalogue curatorial statement. She makes the case for the socio-cultural significance of this exhibition, by way of it presenting the “visualization of the unimaginable”, and the “re-interpretation of the relationship between human labour and technologies”, a concept explored and displayed in the robot printed shadows of Korean artist Do One Im.

Dr Song also says artists have always explored new tools for expression, and this exhibition also reveals how they can modify and use existing tools in different ways to achieve something new.

In a pre-pre-digital age the painter Jackson Pollock said that his brushes were “used as sticks rather than brushes”, to drip and steer the flow of the paint rather than to brush it onto the surface. This turnaround of an existing tool unleashed a new action and with it a completely new dimension in the field of painting.

The artists in this exhibition strive to find new and unique expressive dimensions from exploring and celebrating the creative possibilities that the technologies within this post-digital age can provide. Many “new tech” exhibitions focus on the technology and how it will enable, assist or guides us to do or to make, but here in this show the emphasis is on the artists and how they can enable, customize re-frame or subvert the technology itself to generate possibilities beyond standard use.

But what of the actual materials used within this exploration of post-digital materiality? Most of the resultant work is dependent upon synthetic resin or plastics of some kind, materials that are also part of a lively debate around our post-digital ecological environment.

O2 LAB's Yuka Otani, a Japanese Artist and Designer and Taiwanese engineer Hank Ou present a further perspective on this aspect of materiality through re-positioning new technology within traditional print processes and utilizing heritage laden 'sugar ink'.

This is perhaps a nod towards another phase that is arriving, where artists, designers and engineers are exploring the possibilities of objects printed with a plethora of alternative-to-plastic materials including metal powder, clay, and even a well-known brand of hazelnut and chocolate paste.

Post-Digital Materiality is a well-conceived, well presented, engaging and reflective exhibition on a number of levels and it showcases a range of versatile artists who, by different means, share a common goal in seeking alternative and additional creative potential. They are certainly artists with ideas and careers to follow, and as the Curator's statement asked me to, I travelled home reflecting upon, and days later I still am reflecting upon, and researching online again, these technologies and the impact they have and will have on our future society at various levels.

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