Uncontainable: Broken Stillness
A change of speed, a change of style

BY

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The relationship between technology and speed has been closely associated with the development of progressive technology in the 20th century and now in this century, with the ubiquity of personal computers, mobile devices and networks, with rapidly increasing capability. It has been an expectation that machines will work faster and more seamlessly in the service of making society more flexible and agile. Unless procedures go wrong in the mainstream, data transfer, manipulation and creation is rarely questioned. Notably Paul Virilio commented on these developments observing that speed is so much a part of our engagement with society that we are dependent on it, while apprehensive or even fearful that the technology of speed may break, stop or cause accident and disaster. This subject has of course been the subject of much science fiction over the last 120 years from HG Wells to James Cameron. Current debate, such as that present in ISEA2011, focuses on our relationship with digital data and the complexities that have arisen in terms of creative practice, data storage, the environmental impact of working with digital data, and new forms of socio-economic grouping that are being created by social media and data mining.

The work in *Uncontainable: Broken Stillness* asks the viewer to address the issue of the relationship between new creative practices and older analogue pursuits, such as painting and pre-digital photography – the exhibition suggests that the temptation to discard art history in the digital era may be misguided.

Uncontainable: Broken Stillness is a shameless celebration of an artist's signature work and style in an age celebrating collective authoring, sharing and the 'hive mind'. The exhibition does not suggest an alternative for shared working but suggests that there is space for individual practice to make a contribution. The works have been selected for their use of digital techniques embedded in the development of a visual language begun in earlier forms of image-making. Much of the work is implicitly political and subverts the mainstream use of technology - particularly in relation to speed, mostly by slowing the process down at least for the viewer. The artists use the unique value of technology to increase the spectrum of mark-making, landscape, media and gesture.

Tim Head, a forerunner of the contemporary trend towards fusion of art and science and the producer of politically driven imagery and installation, strips data back to the material of the OS and the screen with a program written in C that randomly generates lines of colour on screen in conceptual works such as *Laughing Cavalier* - shown in the exhibition. (In some of his works randomly generated colours are produced pixel by pixel.)

Peter Hardie, a pioneer in computer animation, has dedicated years to studying the properties of water and the representation of its movement in animation. His *Ripple* series shown in the exhibition combines his interest in impressionist painting with animation. This work strives to find marks and techniques that can only be produced through computer programming. His study of water and light has combined mathematics, the study of molecular movement and light with the observational techniques of the impressionists. It is this combination that has enabled the artist to extend the range of techniques possible for describing movement of water and the reflection of light on it.

Susan Collins has worked since the 1980s in computer and electronic arts and is recognised as a leading UK artist in this area of practice. *Glenlandia*, a contemporary investigation into landscape art, is an archive of images gathered from pointing a webcam at Loch Faskally. The work shows images on screen generated by changing pixel by pixel over approximately 21 hours in a day. This piece provides a timeframe as well as an in-depth study of a single landscape. Presented on the screen in landscape format the artist introduces the representation of time, showing simultaneously day and night views of the same scene studied and recorded over two years. Collins has produced a series of archives in the UK and internationally that explore the subtleties of the landscape tradition.

boredomresearch continues the landscape theme using Processing to develop artificial life for their playful diptych *Lost Calls of Mountain Whirligigs*. The work generates fictional beings (Whirligigs) set in an environment combining landscape with mechanical technology. Each viewer experiences the piece differently as the Whirligigs exhibit individually

generated behaviors and lifespan. Through the use of genetic algorithms, boredomresearch rely on the generation of unique images and behaviors so that no two people will see exactly the same image. boredomresearch is interested in the way that viewers engage with landscape and the ability of digital media to develop fictional, fantastic, landscapes with which the viewer can engage. This multiple creation of images is reflected in Tim Head and Susan Collins' pieces, although all are dealing with very different approaches to image-making and concept.

Sigune Hamann, photographer and video-maker, uses analogue 35mm stills photography to add movement to the image by shooting a still film in one take. The resultant film-strip (*Whitehall* 9.12.10) made at the student protests in December 2010 stunningly combines moving image, panoramic photography and painterly gesture. This work develops her interest in the role of the camera and subject in standard narrative in film and photography and the application of digital techniques to old media to question and subvert these narratives. For example, the student protests were a mix of dreary, dynamic and subversive atmospheres and yet here the film-strip shows a beautiful painterly scene that seems removed from the reality of the subject.

David Cotterrell's work also subverts context by challenging our understanding of war through media images. His recent body of work assembled from footage taken during his residency in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, deliberately looks at the images of war that represent the waiting for action rather than the much publicized activity of war. *Green Room* is a video loop showing the anticipation of the arrival of casualties to the medical room in Helmand. Treated in post production and heavily mediated, *Green Room* creates a sumptuous image that enhances anticipation

of action – a very different tableau from media and cinematic representations of casualties of war.

Susan Sloan has researched extensively the use of motion capture in animation. This technique, most associated with gaming and cinema special effects, tends to focus on the production of stylized and standardized movements of characters. These are achieved through a post production 'cleaning' process erasing glitches in movement. Through the inclusion of individual signature gestures and character in her subjects, *Mary and Annie*, Susan Sloan is able to develop the language of portraiture and likeness through image and movement. Her short loop of each character provides an image that occupies a place somewhere between a painting and an animation.

Whilst all the images in U*ncontainable: Broken Stillness* suggest movement or are animated, these movements are subtle, falling in between the tradition of moving and still image. It is the power of the subtle suggestion of movement and the place the work occupies in art historical, cinematic or media representation, that is the focus of the exhibition. The pieces in this exhibition seek to develop significantly the role of image-making using these new techniques. ■

NOTES

1. Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1991).