

ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE 6

2014-2015

Ryan **Aasen**

Molly **Balcom Raleigh**

Claire **Barber**

Daniel **Dean**

Meredith **Lynn**

In his fascinating essay “Something about the Digital,” theorist Alexander Galloway writes:

Digital doesn’t mean machine. It doesn’t mean virtual reality. It doesn’t even mean the computer—there are analog computers after all, like grandfather clocks or slide rules. Digital means the digits: the fingers and toes. And since most of us have a discrete number of fingers and toes, the digital has come to mean, by extension, any mode of representation rooted in individually separate and distinct units. So the natural numbers (1, 2, 3, . . .) are aptly labeled “digital” because they are separate and distinct, but the arc of a bird in flight is not because it is smooth and continuous.¹

Introduction

He goes on to suggest that “the switch from analog computing to digital computing in the middle twentieth century is but a single battle in the multi-millennial skirmish within western culture between the unary and the binary.”

In *Art(ists) On the Verge* we tend to focus on the future, especially the future of emerging artists, but it is useful to remember Galloway’s historical context to imagine the future of an emerging medium. Not only do we know that in the future—now—the “digital” infects every human endeavor, but the digital in the sense of abstracting the world by counting it, dividing it between you and me and us and them, has always been a cultural force.

This is the rich territory that this year’s *Art(ists) On the Verge* explore: the intersection between the tools that allow us to discretely abstract the world (computers, networks, cybernetic feedback loops, interactivity) and that smooth and continuous curve that we call life.

Molly Balcom Raleigh starts with “big data” to identify the gap between knowing something about you and being genuinely known. Ryan Aasen and Meredith Lynn both “trick” our GPS-located selves into exploring the consequences of our seeming inability to disconnect from a twenty-first-century world of drone strikes and fracking. Claire Barber Delphicly channels Roy Ascott’s infamous question “Is there love in the telematic embrace?” and overloads herself with information to wonder about where and what is wisdom. Daniel Dean immerses us in the continuous pool of infinite self-regard to unshackle our synaptic minds from our digit bodies.

As always, codirector Piotr Szyhalski and I thank the five AOV fellows for giving so much. Their mentors, Morgan Adamson, Valentine Cadieux, Peter Happel Christian, Jan Estep, and Natasha Pestich, unstintingly offer critical insight and support. Sarah Peters is an invaluable literary doulah, providing trained and experienced professional writing guidance. The Soap Factory, especially Ben Heywood and Kate Arford, are year-long partners in this amazing program, which is generously and fully supported by the Jerome Foundation.

Steve Dietz, Codirector, *Art(ists) On the Verge*
President and Artistic Director, Northern Lights.mn

1. Alexander R. Galloway, “Something about the Digital,” *boundary 2* (March 18, 2015). <http://boundary2.org/2015/03/18/something-about-the-digital/>.

Guildenstern: We're just not getting anywhere! Not even England! And I don't believe in it anyway.
Rosencrantz: In what?
Guildenstern: England.
Rosencrantz: England? Just a conspiracy of cartographers, you mean?

In the final scene of Tom Stoppard's play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern consider the existence of England. It might be just virtual, like the Internet, but even if the destination is fictitious, or otherwise fraught with the risky possibilities of mistaken identity, not getting there is still compulsively anxiety-producing. Coming of age in the age of hypermechanical reproduction, the artists in this show all grapple with the anxieties of a digitally mediated social milieu, where the solutions offered by the ubiquity of media are themselves part of the dilemma they investigate.

Watching these five artists craft this show over the past year, I have often been reminded of the narrative trajectory of John Baldessari's 1967 painting Solving Each Problem As It Arises: "Whatever the subject, the professional artist makes exhaustive studies of it. When he feels that he has interpreted the subject to the extent of his capabilities he may have a one-man exhibition whose theme is the solution of the problem." The structure of Art(ists) On the Verge obviously enhances this systematic trajectory, but the artists' foregrounding of their methodology is particularly stark this year given the virtual nature of what each has been exhaustively studying.

"Virtual" does not do justice to the exploratory domain charted by these five projects, so I will step through the mechanics of each installation in turn to reflect a glimpse of the rich mappings these artists have made of the relational spaces they each investigate. I invoke Guildenstern's suspension of the future in part because the five artists found five wildly differing methods to explore unrelated topics—yet they have managed a common gesture, sending the gallery visitor into the compelling methodological space of probable connection, the variable-reward promise of the online environment, the tantalizing if dangerous possibility of big data, social media, and the potential hackability of constant surveillance.

Launching exhibition visitors into the space behind our obvious relationships with devices, **Claire Barber** sits down on the toilet on one of the three screens uneasily bounding her installation. There she consumes an entire pop culture magazine, archetypally digesting, transforming, and

presenting the excreta of the compulsion to turn toward available cultural repositories for advice about what to feel and believe. Barber probes our desire for culture to tell us things about ourselves, capturing the crippling uncertainty, violently confused desire, and stolid persistence of Internet advice-seeking (the successor to pop culture magazine advice-seeking) with similarly persistent multi-channel video documentation. Through this digestive process, she develops methods to productively engage with the horror unleashed in that search: the compulsive grasping at wisdom while recognizing the random, algorithmic, or predatory nature of the sibyls untethered in the act of looking into the bowels of the World Wide Web.

Presenting the detritus of spastic searching and discarded layers of meaning-making within the disorienting field of a triad of documented investigations, when you know you know lures viewers into acknowledging our own weaknesses for authority-checking and for giving in to persuasions to wonder whether someone else's advice might upstage our own. Methodical indefatigability in all the components that make up this installation underlines the irresistible hegemony of authority vested in the culture industries of media—and the embodied way this authority is experienced. Relentlessly requesting your attention to the steady turning of magazine pages, rifling through clothing piles, and conducting search after Internet search, this assemblage evokes the vicious cycle by which anxiety is both manufactured and reproduced with promises that it can be allayed.

As you move into the second gallery, snow blows across West Fargo, MN on the far wall, and you face another aspect of the Internet's capriciousness. After discovering the mislocation glitch that created the (accidentally fictitious) Facebook location of West Fargo, MN, **Meredith Lynn** has populated the fortuitous placelessness with a deliberate, playful, and participatory placemaking process. Providing smartphones to volunteers interested in constructing an identity for the (already existing North Dakota) neighborhoods now remapped (for an unknown duration) as the nonexistent town of West Fargo, Lynn methodically built up a process for demarcating, claiming, and inhabiting this virtual community.

Connecting a geographically widespread network to reflect back into place ideas about the virtual topography of a new layer of the Bakken-era boomtown, Lynn's project mines the familiar mechanics of social media geolocating and place boosterism to develop a critical process for "owning" the troubled dynamics of extractive

SOLVING EACH PROBLEM AS IT ARISES

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WHOSE THEME IS THE SOLUTION OF
THE PROBLEM. IT IS SURPRISING HOW
FEW PEOPLE WHO VIEW THE PAINTINGS
REALIZE THIS.

John Baldessari, Solving Each Problem As It Arises, 1967. Acrylic on canvas. Janet and Simeon Buguin Fund, Yale University Art Gallery. © John Baldessari/Marian Goodman Gallery.

economies. The beauty and solidity of the actual place are represented by a three-legged table built of wood from a reclaimed North Dakota building, on which participants can play the interactive game that stakes their claim and structures their involvement in actively imagining West Fargo, MN into being. Placement of geodetic survey marks establishes the act of bounding and calls out that act as a noticeable practice, one that might be changeable, hackable, or reimaginable in ways less than obvious in the straightline grid of a place where geologists are so powerful. Enrolled in fantastical geomancy through the literal concrete marks and the erroneous place, we must navigate our place biases as well as our distanced relationships with the stuff places are made from—and the places stuff comes from.

Daniel Dean's adjacent Center for Advanced Applications carries on the temporal hybrid: if Lynn's West Fargo deed game evokes nineteenth-century boomtowns represented through twenty-first-century Facebook activity and online games, Dean's hyperconsumer e-surface store rests on the social fabric of a nineteenth-century salon and scientific community. Assembling a cohort of extra-verted social critics willing to confer on questions of commodity consumerism and motivated by media capitalism, the Center presents a meditation on the existential responses possible under the pressure of commodification. Starting with the existential dread of commodified information, Dean and his collaborators summoned a wide pantheon of material and immaterial laborers. Arriving at a series of slick advertisements and surfaces that repel our clutching habit to attempt to connect through them, the Center for Advanced Applications appropriates our habitual desire for connection to turn commodity fetishism back on itself.

Smoothly welcoming you into the ether of commercialized wellness language via an audio guide to productive stress management, the Center's voice foregrounds the performative authority of late capitalism. Leaving you as if in the midst of a hypnotism experiment, the Center asks you to experience, over and over, the mechanics of connectedness, demechanizing it, declawing both the anxiety and reward mechanisms of connection technology and requiring us to confront our aspirations for social association and meaning. Deviling the mechanics of authority in the surfaces that command our attention, this installation calls for methods to find in the object of suspended connection, if not solace, an extended view into the detailed abscesses of consumer desire making.

Across the second gallery, Molly Balcom Raleigh's Personal Appeal invites you into conversation. Take a seat at the table amidst mailbags worth of letters sent between Balcom Raleigh and thousands of households in a painstakingly choreographed direct mail campaign. Tapping into sophisticated mechanisms of consumer surveillance to grasp the exquisite nugget of being known, this piece asks you, personally, to extend yourself into the sea of big data to reflect on what it feels like to be known—or to feel known. You are asked to share details about yourself, and your replies are subject to the kind of linguistic analysis that drives millisecond trades to invest in whatever is trending on the Internet now. But your data provide the waymarkers that lead to the possibility of your being known. Drawing you along an algorithmic path on which your guiding stars have been identified by others, the dialogue you supplied the data to shape creates a scaffold that lets you relax into the strangeness of recognizing how much is constantly known about you and how much the choices you think you are making are already shaped by your credit history, your tracked phone, the words in your emails.

Using the raw materials of direct marketing, Personal Appeal has built a curious network of people willing to write back to automated junk mail. Laboriously reproducing the folds, typography, tone, and timing of personal appeals, Balcom Raleigh dares us to face the magic in the feeling of being known, even in such a mechanized way. Hybridizing the arts of playwrights and marketers, a core method of this epistolary project was the discovery and systematization of a vocabulary meaningful to the participants as they write letters and converse through Personal Appeal's tablets and their automated dialogue script generator. Signposting the way from marketing mail to human contact, Balcom Raleigh traces a thread of voice that suggests we might flex our capacity to feel known in ways that push us to risk personal exposure. Step onto the dais. Read the mail. You might experience a conversation that tells you something about yourself.

Ryan Aasen holds down the end of the show with his double play on "NSA" in the third gallery. Combining a fascination with complicating identities via the cultural and data practices of the National Security Agency and No Strings Attached hookups, Aasen's exhibition NSA lays out most exaggeratedly the methodical triangulation used by this cohort of artists to explore their subjects and arrive at their exhibited work. Mapping a counter-topography of human contact in a data-driven

domain marked by secretive politics, Aasen's process entwines the brazen and clandestine in a bid to find the space for the personal and the political in worlds largely identified with violent disjuncture. Organized around a simple but profound hack of locational data in the geospatial positioning of hookup software, the building blocks of this installation are wrapped in unsolicited photographs sent by those who responded to his hacked profile as it appeared near recent U.S. drone strikes.

Providing subtle roadmap clues in the repeated motif of the grid of electromagnetic field shielding fabric (constructing the tent shielding the wirelessly broadcast server of supportive documentation, in the interstices of the hookup dialogues, and in the reflective patterning of the gay bar dance floor), this piece, too, shows methodical response to the compulsion of connection and disconnection. An early experimental stage of this project demonstrated its exquisite balance between unintegrated emotion (disappointment with having missed iconic political eras, unease with cyberwarfare, fascination with the intensity of contact in surveilled and violated places) and the steadiness of practice and familiar ease with the underlying technologies. Lusting after the opportunity to have been part of something big, politically, Aasen used the image-wrapped bricks—with images blown up so large as to be unrecognizable, bits of data materialized around the building blocks of the Soap Factory—to throw through windows. But these windows were set up in his studio, a measured method for testing the intensity of experience, a constrained violence used to assimilate the discomfort of hacking hookups and geopolitics.

Much discussion of social practice art has revolved around the challenges involved in not making things. This show makes good use of its social location in the Twin Cities and at the Soap Factory by channeling many of the skills of social practice. Allowing what they made to serve the engine of their ideas throughout the process, what this year's Art(ists) On the Verge have made, and what this social space provides, is largely methods: figuring out how to figure out, making things to find ideas, and finding ways to invite others into making experience.

Over the course of the year, I have come to think of these artists more and more as methodologists, like alchemists of process, withholding the thing except as an engine of process, as long as possible, providing props to show the method behind the process, but only enough so that the viewer must become involved to make sense. To become enrolled in the method is one of the requirements of the sense-making of this show.

This seems an eminently suitable practice in the era of the turn toward practice, where practice is the talisman that grants entry into the exploratory realms on offer. Given the rise of popular interest in curation, and the concurrent existential examination of what curation is and does (and how and by whom), these artists have used well their mentored time as Art(ists) On the Verge to construct lexicons you must page through, explore, and practice with to make their meaning emerge with adequate fidelity.

It would be possible to say that the five artists on this year's verge are investigating digital connection and the anxieties of surveillance, disconnection, annihilation, and the possibility of reorientation—and it would be right to see them as part of an extended generation's attempt to grapple with the coming of age of the age of mechanical reproduction. But although I end with an evocation of the voice I have heard emerging from the co-genesis of these explorations, you should not leave the show having heard only their voices. Instead, we hope you accept the invitation of their compulsions to launch into the heady yet careful exhilaration beyond what we know, on the way to constructing syntax in the device-mediated meaning we make.

Methodologists on the Verge

We are about questions.

We are compelled to answer in as many ways possible,
because we know our starting place is not quite right
and we have not assembled the authority to make what we feel we need.

We are pushing beyond the end of history.

Another world may be possible,
but we have to find where it is already made and figure out how to fit our hands and voices in
because if we are successful, we risk being louder than the silence we heard when we knew
no one was listening.

We know we must practice, and we make our ideas
for others, so they can know the world they make too.

We place people:
in our violence,
in our neuroses
and our lusts,
in wanting to be known,
and to have the authority to place ourselves on the maps of what we see matters.

We hope methodology may bring us new access
to experiences and elders,
as we plumb beyond narcissism how broken things are, and hack the systems we live within
using the healing alchemy of process to find delight sharing methods.

We are our own critics,
not because we have authority
but because the whole point of methodology is that we put the practice into the circle of those we want to care,
and see what we can do with it.

Kirsten Valentine Cadieux explores social and spatial relationships in the governance of land use and food and the politics of sustainability. Using art and social science approaches to society–environment relations (specifically, the political ecology and moral economy of agrifood systems), she builds publicly engaged participatory research processes to support differing ways of understanding environments and performing and justifying environmental and food system interventions. Her writing focuses on the influence of social and environmental identities, performances, and anxieties on group negotiations and aspirations for equitable and healthy food systems and residential landscapes.

Ryan Aasen

NSA

Ryan Aasen

b. 1989, Minnesota

Lives and works in Minneapolis

I am interested in the intersections of physical and digital spaces and the subtle implications that follow even the simplest interactions with digital technology. Although largely based on documentation, my work extends into interaction through readily available, over-the-counter technologies. Cheap phones, free software, and pirated files all serve as material to question positions of power and accentuate subversion and transgression within social and political systems.

NSA

NSA is the [National Security Agency](#), a United States governmental agency.

NSA may also refer to “[no strings attached](#),” an expression for casual sex often used in personal ads.

Two years ago, when news organizations began disclosing unchecked and pervasive surveillance programs operated by the National Security Agency, the implications of our digital infrastructure were laid bare. Largely through documents provided by [Edward Snowden](#), these disclosures detail the interception of Internet traffic, direct access to the servers of major tech companies, and the collection of [metadata](#) from millions of cellphones.

<http://northern.ights.mn/projects/artists-on-the-verge/artists-on-the-verge-6-fellows/ryan-aasen/>

For this project, I am using [burners](#) to override the GPS location in [Grindr](#) to interact with men living close to the areas of the world where the United States is enacting unofficial and indirect war tactics such as [cyberwarfare](#) and [predator drone](#) strikes. Burners are often scrutinized because they can anonymously subvert surveillance, but for people living in these areas they are often the only means of accessing the Internet. By manipulating my GPS location I increase my chances of entanglement in domestic surveillance, because case law and surveillance defenders have repeatedly suggested that [Fourth Amendment](#) protections apply only when all involved parties are American citizens. Any implications, even incidental ones, are stored indefinitely in government data centers for possible future uses.

By creating and mining my own archive of communications, I have made a series of revolving works that map the intersecting politics of networking, surveillance, human rights, and global identity. Cues of surveillance culture infiltrate seemingly innocuous cues of local culture: black tinted glass and [RF shielding](#) mesh, used at the National Security Agency’s headquarters to protect its surveillance tactics, here shield mundane but intimate moments, and a landmark speech by the [U.S. Secretary of State](#) on human rights becomes the vocals of a local gay bar soundtrack.

Local and international, personal and political, private and professional worlds converge most blatantly online. As we move into an increasingly networked world, digital technology gives us unprecedented opportunities for connection, but also unprecedented opportunities to be surveyed. Our rights are still dependent on the physical boundaries that are constantly blurred by new technology, and, as billions are coming online for the first time, it will become harder to ignore such scrutiny of our digital activities and social circles. In the current digital landscape, where everything is considered fair game for exploitation, there are always strings attached.





Molly Balcom Raleigh

Personal Appeal

Molly Balcom Raleigh
b. 1976, Carlisle, Pennsylvania
Lives and works in St. Paul

My work is rooted in a desire to expand people's perceptions of themselves as powerful agents within the systems that shape their lives. I do this through a hybrid of performance and installation, informed by my background as a theater director and playwright. I make situations that play out like performances, with participants as both viewers and actors. Through choirs, shared meals, card games, and conversations, my projects bring people into one another's physical and emotional space by creating the opportunity to be daring with each other.

Personal Appeal

Personal Appeal delves into the world of intimacy and big data. The largest consumer data collector in the United States, Acxiom, holds an average of 1,500 data points on more than 700 million people. This company alone has more personal data collected on each American than the National Security Agency, and Americans born in the mid-1980s and after have had consumer data collected about them from the moment they were born.

<http://northern.lights.mn/projects/artists-on-the-verge/artists-on-the-verge-6-fellows/molly-balcom-raleigh/>

Sophisticated Big Data gathering and analysis techniques are working to take the mystery out of who we are so that we can be known, understood, catered to, and relied on as consumers. But there's a difference between an accumulation of personal data points and our truly feeling that we are being known.

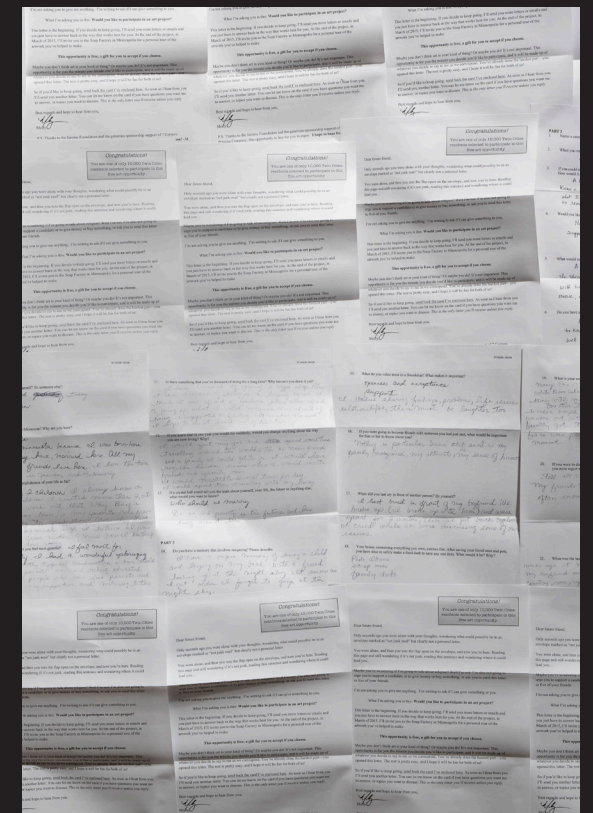
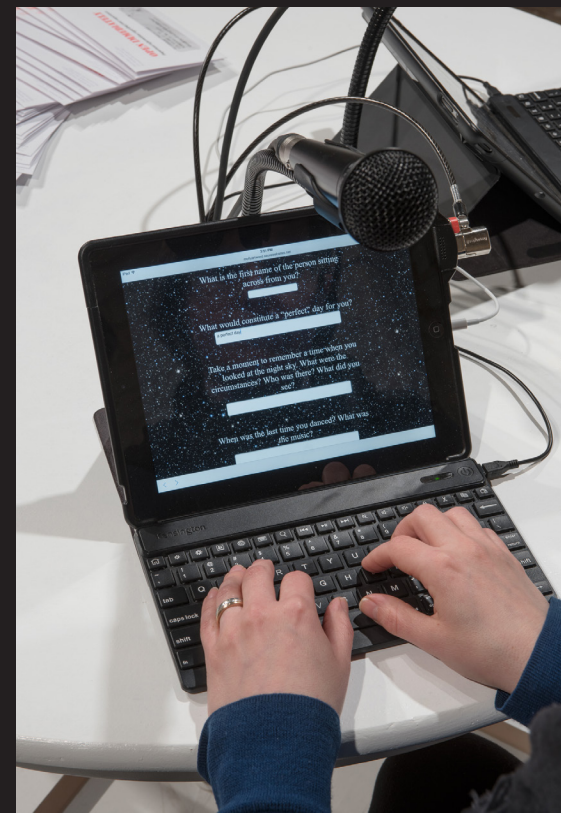
In December 2014 I rented an Acxiom list of ten thousand names and addresses, to which I sent a generic mailing requesting participation in a free art project. Seventy people responded to my invitation. For three months I corresponded with them, leading up to an in-depth questionnaire that asked participants to share their thoughts about death, regret, love, and friendship. Their answers revealed other demographic information, including age, gender, marital status, home ownership, occupation, leisure interests, and a host of other nuances.

Privacy and security are immediate concerns that come up in any conversation about Big Data, but my interest here is the influences these practices have on our relationships to each other and their impact on our fundamental needs for intimacy, understanding, and belonging.

Rather than presenting these seventy participants as subjects through the profiles they disclosed to me, I worked with a web developer to apply online data mining tools to create an interaction that would reveal these participants through their connections to gallery visitors. In the world of this project, you have to give a little data to get a little data.

Gallery participants complete a version of the original questionnaire, then the answers are run through a research tool that analyzes such things as emotional tone and keywords. Based on a score, text is retrieved from the database of earlier responses and populates a unique script. Finally, participants read these scripts together over microphones, hearing each other's and their own emotional tone and attitude through someone else's words. The effect is a reassertion of ourselves as unknown and unknowable, decollapsing us as unique, complex, and contradictory, and recasting our psychological ambiguities, personal narratives of loss and joy, and constantly shifting, growing, changing selves as critical to being and feeling known.

Special thanks to 7 Corners Printing for generous sponsorship support.





Claire Barber

when you know you know

Claire Barber

b. 1989, Bennington, Vermont

Lives and works in St. Paul

Metaphor often locates the origin of intuition within the body. You can know something “like the back of your hand” or reach for a half-formed thought on “the tip of your tongue.” My artistic work deals with profoundly physical experiences that defy attempts at literal description.

I dress inner tubes in women’s clothing, cut mouths in bowling balls, and transform black trash bags into molten skin stretched over chicken wire. Materials and objects are taken from their original contexts and pushed beyond their limits—constricted, stretched, cut, melted, and ultimately transformed. There is a subtle violence present in my work, confused with feelings of wanting.

My previous work focused on visceral sensations, but when you know you know looks outward to capture the physical overwhelm of being alive in a world dominated by media that are both seductive and alienating.

<http://northern.lights.mn/projects/artists-on-the-verge/artists-on-the-verge-6-fellows/claire-barber/>

when you know you know

As our physical lives become more and more commingled with the virtual, search engines like Google have become our go-to doctor, best friend, and expert in times of need, as we perhaps forget that other people, just like ourselves, are behind the information we find. While the Internet supplies a wealth of information, it can’t answer our biggest questions. In fact, with so many answers at my fingertips, I often feel paralyzed.

“When you know you know” is a phrase often intended to reassure those struggling with large, existential questions, yet it belies how difficult it is to feel certainty. As a way of dealing with my own crippling uncertainty, I began googling this phrase in the hope that I might find something more concrete in an image than in those slippery words. What I found was a mess: an algorithm’s stream-of-consciousness fueled by abhorrent, bizarre, stock, and inspiring images uploaded by the Internet community.

This installation is meant to capture the physicality of a Google search—the cold sweat, aching eyeballs, and cluttered, anxious mind that follows an information binge. Video footage documents my painfully catalogued searches and disoriented rummaging through piles of physical stuff. I record myself performing the arduous and absurd task of reading every single word in an Us Weekly magazine while on the toilet. I film the inside of my mouth with my phone and my finger in front of the camera lens.

Both digital and physical “stuff” overtake the space. Shredded magazines and packing foam—products that move from shelf life to waste life very quickly—are piled high inside a “do-it-yourself” dumpster. Like a Google search, these are quick materials, offering immediate gratification or solutions to a problem. They are emblems of our consumption and often vilified as such. But they are also records of our existence, proof of what we wanted, thought about, and used at a certain time. These things make up a material portrait of our lives and have the potential to be instructive, if not strangely beautiful.

Unexamined, this stuff accumulates, obscuring our deepest, most vulnerable thoughts. But if we look at it closely, in its most granular form, we are led back, as though by bread crumbs, to where we have been and toward knowing again.





Daniel Dean

The Center for Advanced Applications

Daniel Dean

b. 1976, Warrenton, Virginia

Lives and works in Minneapolis

As a conceptually driven artist, I initiate critical dialogue about the role of culturally constructed values and identities by recontextualizing familiar objects, images, language, and processes from social, economic, and political infrastructures. More specifically, an interest in power structures, media, and the ubiquity of network technologies is at the heart of my practice. Media production plays an integral role in how we view the world and ourselves and how we interact with each other. The pervasiveness of global capitalism drives these developments and so provides a key context for my work. I frequently collaborate with others from diverse fields in an effort to better understand my own work. This interdisciplinary approach mirrors the realities of production in today's globalized world. I see my process as a form of translation, of making transparent subliminal mechanisms of control. In this ongoing project, my primary collaborator is artist John Sebastian Vitale.

<http://northern.lights.mn/projects/artists-on-the-verge/artists-on-the-verge-6-fellows/daniel-dean/>

The Center for Advanced Applications

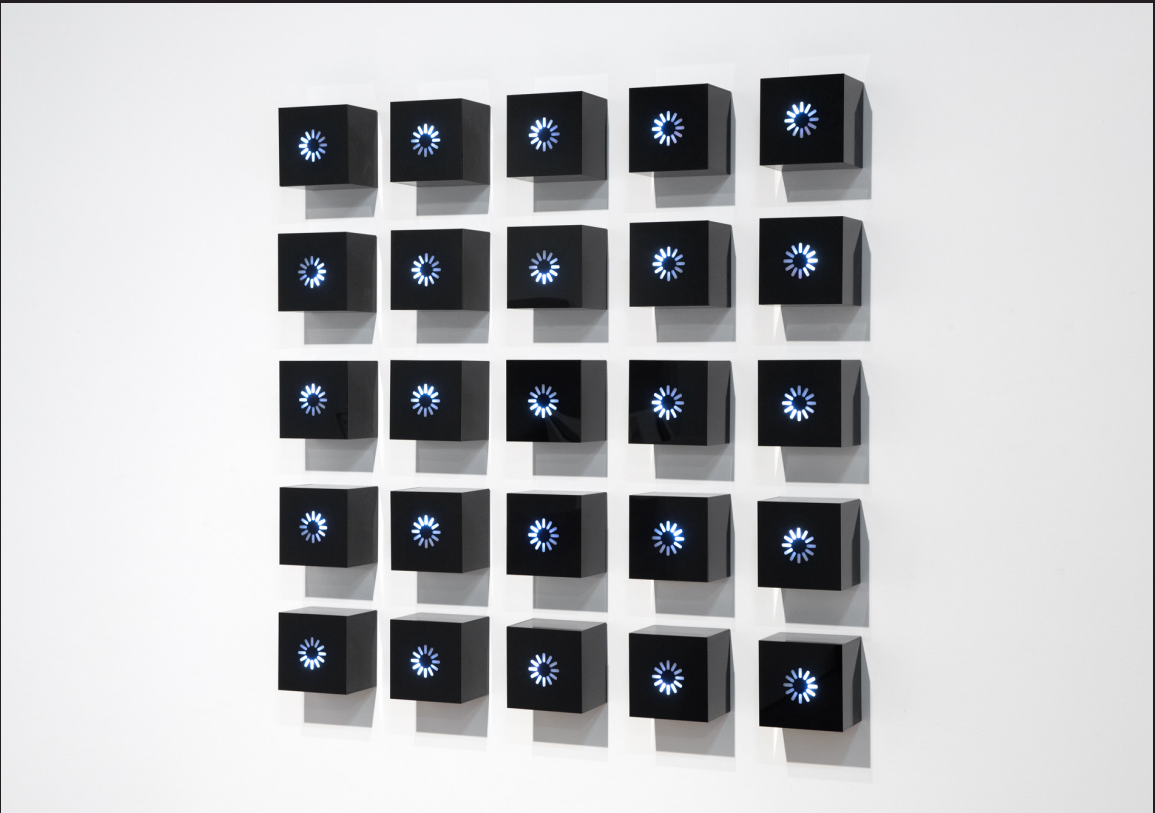
The Center for Advanced Applications (CAA) is a long-term, strategic research project focused on understanding the complex problems of a globally connected world. CAA consists of creative thinkers and makers from fields such as art, design, education, and communications. The Center leverages this breadth of experience to critically engage with rising trends in global mass culture. The group researches the impact of emerging technologies on mass culture in arenas such as the ownership of information, erosion of privacy, and dependence on technological prostheses. To extend the research initiatives, the CAA offers consulting services, presents concepts, and develops innovative products.

In 2014, CAA addressed existential quandaries of increasingly networked lives and cultures and pressures exerted on our time via the simultaneity of work, play, and socialization. Because consumption is the driving force for economic exchange, CAA developed three products that are introduced in this exhibition. Introductory commercials accompany the launch of each product.

The CAA's new products appropriate and decontextualize familiar images, objects, and gestures. Smartphones, computer screens, indeterminate software progress indicators, and advertising media become vehicles for reimagining our relationship to the world around us. Metaphysical stone smartphones bridge the gap between a techno-utopian promise and the innate human desire for meaning, knowledge, and spirituality. Black mirrors that mimic the size and shape of common computer and mobile device screens reflect only the user's image; they challenge the user's desire to seek meaning beyond the self. A computer software activity indicator becomes real, a portable 3D object that hints at the constant whirring of a global network beyond our control.

In launching these products, The Center for Advanced Applications actualizes its research to reimagine our relationship to each other and to reevaluate the forces of technological change that mediate our understanding of the world. The CAA acknowledges the inherent contradiction that its existence springboards from current power structures like global capitalism yet it adopts these modes to critique these structures.





Meredith Lynn

West Fargo, MN

Meredith Lynn

b. 1984, Boston, Massachusetts

Lives and works in Moorhead, Minnesota

I am a collector and archiver of anecdotes. Culling through historical research, meteorological and geological information, oral histories, myths, legends, and my own personal experience, I search for small stories with broader emotional content. I am interested in the obvious narratives that arise when words are paired with visual material but also in the more subtly implied emotion that the relationship between the two forms of communication can illicit.

Through a wide variety of text, image, and media I highlight and share these collected and curated stories. My work most frequently sorts itself into distinct projects, and I use drawing, painting, book arts, and digital media as each idea dictates. Although the projects vary in form and material, a common theme in my work is the ways in which the landscape and history of a place affect us. I have explored such topics as the emotional power of bad jokes, the physical manifestations of spiritual knowledge, and the contemporary frontier. These themes are present in West Fargo, MN.

<http://northern.lights.mn/projects/artists-on-the-verge/artists-on-the-verge-6-fellows/meredith-lynn/>

West Fargo, MN

When you post to Facebook from certain areas of Fargo, North Dakota, your post will be place-stamped with the name of a town called “West Fargo, MN.” This place does not exist in the physical world; it is an accident that occurs somewhere between your phone’s GPS and Facebook’s location software. According to Facebook, 1,818 people are from West Fargo, MN, and a McDonald’s, a Starbucks, two Subways, and the Fargo, North Dakota, courthouse are all within the city limits. This digital mishap creates an opportunity for the kind of reflection that can be difficult in the physical world. The project West Fargo, MN encourages us to examine our own roles in an economic and social system that we may prefer to distance ourselves from.

The real towns of Fargo, North Dakota, and Moorhead, Minnesota, are experiencing a period of rapid transformation fueled by the Bakken oil boom two hundred miles to our west. Intense population growth and newfound economic prosperity have led to a rate of social change last seen during the original frontier days.

West Fargo, MN allows us to explore these issues from scratch. Participants in this project can become residents, landowners, oil developers, and pipeline constructors in West Fargo through a website. These roles force the users to confront their own real-life involvement in the oil industry. As users develop their land and utilize their mineral rights, they encounter the ways in which they act in and benefit from the oil-based economy, blurring the lines between our digital involvement and our real-life participation in an exploitative and unsustainable system. It can be easy to distance ourselves from global economic forces, especially when the environmental and social ramifications occur in a remote region of a sparsely populated state. West Fargo, MN recreates those circumstances closer to home.







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Steve Dietz, artistic director, Northern Lights.mn
James Garrett Junior, AIA, managing partner,
4RM+ULA Architecture
Ben Heywood, executive director, The Soap Factory
Piotr Szyhalski, professor, Media Arts, MCAD

AOV6 Mentors

Morgan Adamson
Valentine Cadieux
Peter Happel Christian
Jan Estep
Natasha Pestich
Sarah Peters

The Soap Factory

Ben Heywood
Tana Hargest
Mitch Redepenning
Kate Arford

Catalog

Matthew Rezac, designer
Laura Westlund, editor
Rik Sferra, photography
Modern Press, printing

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