

Trust Is The Ultimate Currency

Opening February 22nd, 2019 from 6 - 9pm

23rd February – 24th March 2019

Harlesden High Street in collaboration with *isthisit?* is pleased to present *Trust Is The Ultimate Currency*, a group exhibition featuring new and previous work from 11 national and international artists, including Bob Bicknell-Knight, Ami Clarke in collaboration with Richard Cochrane, Débora Delmar, Ollie Dook, Tom Galle, Eloise Hawser, Botond Keresztesi, Erin Mitchell, Charlie Godet Thomas, Frank Wasser and Thomas Yeomans.

Curated by Bob Bicknell-Knight

Trust Is The Ultimate Currency seeks to consider the importance of the news, questioning why fake news and alternative facts have become throwaway catchphrases, overwhelming and frightening to the mainstream media whilst enabling small groups and organisations to spark outrage and anger by manipulating imagery and falsifying realities. The exhibition brings together works critiquing, commenting and reflecting upon the rise of the media circus, documenting the decline in the relevance and reliability of the news and wondering whether citizen journalism is a worthy replacement.

Trust Is The Ultimate Currency is an accompaniment to the sixth issue of the *isthisit?* book, which launched at SPACE's Art+Technology programme on the 31st January, looking at fake news, alternative facts and the rise of clickbait.

isthisit? is a platform for contemporary art, exhibiting over 700 artists since its creation in May 2016, founded by its current director, artist and curator Bob Bicknell-Knight. Online, it operates as a gallery producing monthly exhibitions showcasing emerging to mid-career artists, hosting a roster of guest curators experimenting with the medium of the internet to interrogate a variety of concepts. The website also hosts monthly residencies, where artists are given a web page to create new work that exists on the internet as a piece of net art. Offline, it has held exhibitions nationally and internationally and is the publisher of *isthisit?*, a book series released on a triannual basis.

Bob Bicknell-Knight's sculptural work *Unattended Bag* (2018) takes the form of a custom made handbag featuring slogans from a recent Facebook advertising campaign launched in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, whereby it was revealed that illegal data harvesting on the platform had occurred on a world-wide scale during the 2015/2016 United States presidential election campaign and the 2016 Brexit vote. The unattended bag, referencing the continued threat represented by unattended luggage in public and private spaces, contains a number of shredded newspapers accompanied by a 3D print of Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg's head. The attached USB contains all of Bicknell-Knight's Facebook data since joining the social media platform over 10 years ago. Also included in the show is *Dinner with Mark* (2019), a recent painting that depicts Zuckerberg holding a severed goats head on a wooden spike whilst giving a speech at a conference. In a recent interview with Rolling Stone, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey stated that there was a year when Zuckerberg was only eating what he was killing, and had six goats on his property at any one time. Supposedly he would stun goats with a taser, cut their throat with a knife and have their bodies sent to a butcher to prepare. Being served goat for dinner whilst attending a dinner party at Zuckerberg's house was Dorsey's most memorable encounter with Zuckerberg.

Ami Clarke's *Low Animal Spirits* (2014) is a piece of software made in collaboration with Richard Cochrane, ex-vice president of Goldman Sachs, and takes its cue from the oft-mentioned loss of the referent in both language and the economy speculated about wildly after the economic collapse of 2008. It deploys an HFT algorithm that 'deals' in words sourced from global news feeds for virtual 'profit', whilst speculating on their usage. The analysis produces new phenomena in the form of speculative headlines tweeted from the twitterbot: @LowAnimalSpirit. The work considers what happens when news is produced and distributed through highly volatile environments driven by statistical analysis. Also included in the show is *Breaking News Flash Crash* (2014), a steel sculpture that depicts the drop in the market after the Associated Press twitter hack of 2013, pointing to how inter-dependent social media and the calculus of the financial markets had become, through a process of analysis and prediction of past and future behaviours.

Débora Delmar's *Canto I (Mayfair Businessman)* (2018) is part of a series of works whereby the artist has taken offcuts from bespoke business suits to create abstract corporate compositions, relics from a past that saw businessmen donning three piece suits for work, rather than the same grey t-shirt worn by social media companies' CEOs. **Ollie Dook's** *Animal Stories* (2018) takes multiple strands of reoccurring and memetic ideas of the animal image that are primarily accessed and shared via the means of YouTube, and re-told in an episodic tale harking back to the traditions of Disney's 'Silly Symphony' series, that would re-tell traditional fairy tales for a new generation. Via the surreal and plasmatic visions of his animators, the vivid shine of Technicolor and the freshness of multi-plane technology, these stories could be told as never before. **Tom Galle's** sculpture *Revoltig MacBook Air* (2018) is a MacBook Air covered in graffiti in different styles copied from different corporate and monetary websites, depicting various slogans and aphorisms associated with data misuse, from "make data people again" to "my phone, my nudes!". As with most forms of graffiti, the piece can be seen as a form of

protest, against companies and large conglomerates that utilise and misuse their user's data, a protest being made directly onto a device that's been used to feed the internet with Galle's data.

Eloise Hawser's *Sedentex CT IQ Phantom/Virtual Human Male Pelvis Phantom* (2018) is a collage of source imagery from the CIRS Tissue Simulation & Phantom Technology. Phantoms are specially designed objects used to test medical imaging equipment such as X-Rays, MRI and CT scanners in place of a human. The purpose these machines is to better understand physical and natural phenomena. These devices, as well as showing how quickly technology is progressing, in turn expose how little is known about the human body. Medical phantom producers have created innovative physical objects to assess how accurately MRI and ultrasound are comprehending flow systems within human bodies. However, what these objects show is that, whilst we are inching toward more accurate readings, the technology still has considerable blind spots that reveal just how mysterious the human body's patterns and movements remain, continuing to elude the grasp of machine technology, an antidote to the much-discussed idea of overwhelming machine intelligence and control.

Botond Keresztesi's *The Satan's Dog* (2019) is a new drawing by the artist, depicting a Boston Dynamics robot dog body, with the head of an Anubis accompanied by raptor legs and bat wings, searching for the bones from a Fra Angelico mid age painting. The autonomous robot dog, Spot, is still in development by the company, creating media buzz around the dangers of AI whenever new footage surfaces. Keresztesi uses found material to create surreal compositions, dreamlike and sometimes eerie, his work connects digital images, internet surfaces, cybernated realities, infomercials and avant-garde culture in a stream of consciousness, floating across the paper's surface.

Erin Mitchell's video performance *Erin Mitchell: The Future of Virtual Nature* (2018) is a talk presented by the artist at a virtual location specified only by its geographic coordinates, loosely associated and hosted in conjunction with TEDx and the TED organization. Reflecting on the privileged origins of the TED organization and the compellingly presented, feel-good pop-science that has become a hallmark of the widely-recognized TED Talk, Mitchell turns the tables on TED by hosting her own satirical talk on the commodified natural virtual environments she examines in her work. Co-opting the presumed authority of a TED speaker, she uses confident assertions and persuasive language to inspire viewers to leave behind the limitations of the natural environments around them for a more enticing future product experience that will be "as easy as updating your current operating system and as affordable as the latest iPhone X." Portraying an alternative version of herself, Mitchell makes intentionally bold claims and sweeping generalizations with conviction and gusto while providing little or no evidence to support her statements.

Charlie Godet Thomas's wall based sculpture *Go Configure* (2019) is a continuation of the artists interest in fusing the stylistic qualities of both newspaper cartoon strips and the archaic form of the illuminated manuscript, old and new formal amalgamations of combining writing and imagery. The text embedded within the work feels like a warning against being too enmeshed within a network of information, a network that will keep asking more of its user until it's eventually too late, akin to our relationship with social media applications or our overdependence on our technological devices. **Frank Wasser's** *Detritus I* (2019) is a sculpture comprised of newspapers fabricated by the artist and discarded on the top of bus stops in South London, alongside living Moss grown in South London that feeds on newspapers, string and water. Also included in the exhibition is *Detritus and Errors* (2019), a 32 page newspaper containing a selection of failed works, annotated research including errors on Wikipedia and a selection of images including the work *2.11.2020* (2018) previously exhibited at Jerwood Arts. *2.11.2020* (2018) is a fragment of a fictional future edition of the Metro newspaper, confronting the viewer with a series of questions and possible outcomes in response to the political instability of the current climate, which leads with the story of Donald Trump's assassination in November 2020, accompanied by subtly edited photographs and adjusted advertisements. News tells of PM Jeremy Corbyn, the White Pube winning the Turner Prize and calls for a referendum on a United Ireland as a result of fallout from a NO DEAL Brexit.

Thomas Yeomans' Flat Earth (2018) and *Crisis Actor* (2018) are digital images fabricated as light boxes, adding a commercial language to the propagandist aesthetics of fictionalised flags. Both *Flat Earth* and *Crisis Actor* utilise contemporary issues surrounding misinformation and alternative facts to imagine a world where those that hold these ideologies have formed their own country or institution.

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