

Curated by **Max Henry**
Nov 30 - Jan 7, 2006

Kota Ezawa
Malachi Farrell
Wayne Gonzales
Emilie Halpern
Jan Mancuska
Laurent Montaron
Scott Myles
Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven

Public Programs:

Wed Nov 30, 6:30 pm: Curator talk

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cover image: Kota Ezawa, *Who's Afraid of Black, White and Grey*, 2003, two channel video, endless loop

The Last Generation

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Culturally altered for better or worse, every day we are steps closer to the cyber-fictional world of man/machine. From 20th century analog bulk-mass and "slowness" to early 21st century speed and compactness, this transition hurtles us forward. At some point in the near future the analog world of the 20th century will be a distant memory....

Many of you remember:

There was a day when the phone rang, and was left unanswered if nobody was home. Then came answering machines, which brought the first wave of automation into the home. The LP record and 8-track tape were gradually replaced by smaller cassettes. One day after MTV hit, I walked into a major record store, and seemingly overnight everything in the racks was a sleek (wow!) compact disc, with the old technology overstock in leftover bins...

As the years flew by we witnessed a technological boom...ATM machines cropping up everywhere, satellite television installations in almost every home, and the pc revolution...

A phrase that most often refers to recently outmoded technology, a quick internet search on "The Last Generation" reveals thousands of references to video gaming, holocaust and A-bomb survivors, tomes written on the political history of the last generation of the Roman Republic, and end-time Christian ideology on "the rapture." Such a term then indicates an irrepressible change from past knowledge towards an encounter or collision with new ideas and altered forms.

In contemporary art, the juxtaposition of the analog and digital has led to an ambiguous back and forth between the two. The virtual has seeped into our consciousness like a stimulant drug, and we find ourselves in an ambiguous artistic terrain that is grounded in the intangibility of matter. As physical objects become more condensed we find their origins in virtual forms, as seen in the unusual shapes of the architecture and design of Gehry and Hadid.

The group of artists hereby assembled represents a generation that experienced the last decades of an analog dominated world. While fully immersed in the digital ether of now, they maintain a strong link to analog processes and esthetics--in music often described as warm, as opposed to the coldness of digital.¹

Emerging from this hyperspace of 21st century altermodernity and its numbing visual and informational matrix, many artists have found ways to process and edit the flux of our post-industrial information age.² Such is the case in this show where the appropriation strategies of the 1980's are utilized in addition to some of the post-production techniques of post-90's art. Late postmodern irony has led us into the first decade of a new century full of paradox, marked by an exchange between naturally occurring phenomena (as in the physical world I associate with analog and the body) and the simulated supra-plasticity of the digital with its implied modifications of the real.

Immanuel Kant set up a distinction between phenomena and noumena—"phenomena" being that which can be experienced, and "noumena" being things that are beyond the possibility of experience and transcend the vehicles of representation. In the phenomenal world we experience something that reaches the senses and clues us in to an added

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dimension that leads to heightened perception. Videos, sculptures, and television monitors initially offer the viewer an analog (phenomenal) experience by virtue of their physical presence. Then digital compression takes over the information and a moment of conflation occurs, a seamless balance in the space/time continuum.

Situated on the axis of the phenomena/noumena, these works occupy the space where the raw materials of the analog world and the subtleties of the virtual interact, expand, and contract. The body is represented as a robotic tool that receives commands from an unknown source, coldly executing movements that (strangely) emote human neuroses (Farrell) / Text references hypertext, physical aberrations of mass produced signage, and the structure of words as thought in constructed form and connotation (Mancuska, Myles) / The propagandistic visual sound-bytes of the media are enlarged to a colossal scale, compounding their power to induce fear and awe (Gonzales) / The retrieval of dreams from the database of the unconscious underscores the encoded narrative of sleep cycles and the search for their meanings (Montaron) / Simply animated characters move with analog-like slowness like our lowest common denominator, the consuming television viewer (Ezawa) / A vortex of complexly layered pop imagery references western philosophers, numerology, cognitive association, and spatial perception, mirroring the brain's synaptic response to a flood information and our ability to process it (Kerckhoven) / Eastern mysticism and metaphysical transcendence are evident in the landscape where a person dematerializes. Is this a romantic gesture or a hallucinatory moment in the virtual? (Halpern)

In the above-mentioned works there is a moment of cognition that takes the viewer from the alien to the familiar, a cause and effect within their mecha-

nistic analog/digital sleight of hand. As such, "The Last Generation" is for me the equivalent of a transformer of the perceptual. The rich tonality associated with the analog is present, as are the cold, unquantifiable depths of the virtual. A visual blueprint for the exhibition might look like an analog/digital converter where one form transmutes into another and a double take reveals more.

Distancing itself from nostalgia and aware of Modernity's failed utopia, "The Last Generation" contains nonetheless a sense of the sublime. Not in the 19th-century Romantic sense, but by virtue of an intangible network of associations that push art further into the terrain of physics. As though gazing at a scaffold surrounding an invisible edifice, we experience the duality of nothing and something at the same time.

Max Henry
2005

1. In layman's terms: analog is defined as a signal that has a continuously and smoothly varying amplitude or frequency. Digital is signal composed of electrical pulses representing either zero or one. Because digital signals are made up only of binary streams, less information is needed to transmit a message.

2. Nicolas Bourriaud has coined the term "altermodernity" which I interpret as a characterization of 21st century modernity: a modernity which is no longer a linear march forward but rather a revolving door that allows movement in either direction.

Max Henry is an independent curator and critic based in New York.

Scott Myles, *Untitled*, 2004, acrylic, wood, and Perspex, 61 x 15 x 15 in, and *Double Exit*, 2004, silkscreen on paper, 28 x 40 in



Jan Mancuska, *9 I was falling...*, 2005, beamer projection, aluminum text, dimensions variable



Wayne Gonzales, *Untitled*, 2005, acrylic on craft paper, 120 x 65 in



Kota Ezawa, *Who's Afraid of Black, White and Grey*, 2003, two channel video, endless loop

Malachi Farrell, *These boots are made for walkin'*, 2005, 6 boots, motors, electronics, military hats, cables, variable dimensions



Laurent Montaron, *Somniloquie*, 2002, digital c-print, 48 x 60 in.



Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, *Cumulator*, 2004, computer animation



Emilie Halpern, *Disappearing Act*, 2004, DVD, 1 min 47 sec