

RENDERING TIME

CLAUDIA HART & ALEX M. LEE

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Claudia Hart & Alex M. Lee
2013. 5. 15. Wed - 5. 21. Tue

cover image ▷ Claudia Hart *Motification 01* 2007-08
 ◁ Alex M Lee *untitled (Rugen)* 2013

GALLERY **DOS**

115-52, Palpandong, Jongrogu, Seoul, Korea / Tel. 82 2 737 4678 / www.gallerydos.com

Nicholas O'Brien

Within the work of Claudia Hart and Alex Lee, a strand of romantic sensitivity and powerful quietude weaves its way through a visually distinct digital fabric. The computer-rendered garment of their work contains both a serene stillness and the lush vibrancy of a delicate, warm, embracing cloth. Hart and Lee don this airy robe not to signify some position of authority, but instead to be enveloped by the deliberate and humble intention of renewing the visual and metaphorical underpinnings of Romanticism. For these two artists, this reinvestigation stems from the myriad of political, spatial, and aesthetic concerns that new technologies pose to traditional notions of the sublime, the body and the virtual, found within Romantic thinking.

The particular technologies that are most wrought with these questions are those that both artists employ: 3D animation, rapid-prototype printing, mobile application, digital photography, and networked technology. In doing so, Hart and Lee expose the ways in which Romantic thought and vision have influenced new media production by striking new territory into a profoundly self-reflexive terrain. By establishing equivalences between Romanticism and digital technology, Hart and Lee position their work at a metaphorical precipice all too familiar to their art historical predecessors.

At the root of the similarities between Romanticism and digital art lies the creation of a space of repose. In art history, as in the contemporary practices of these artists, this self-reflexive state often seeks to inhabit the natural world. Both artists create contemplative spaces to reflect on the ways in which computer-rendered imagery has altered and reshaped our expectations of what might be the virtual qualities of the "natural." Certainly many discussions concerning the virtual qualities of the digital have been articulated many times over within the work of a plethora of artists working online. However, what makes the work of these two artists particularly poignant is how they address the virtual through the lens of a Romantic spatial metaphor.

For Romantic painters and poets the use of metaphor, allegory, and visual symbolism was a consistent mainstay in discussing the rapidly shifting virtual qualities of space and landscape at the dawn of the industrial revolution. Questions of the *aura* (à la Benjamin) of a work of art are equally pivotal for all artists working in a digital context. As industrial and representational tools generally developed over the course of history, abstraction and metaphor also did as the means of describing the symbolic or what one might also think of as the "virtual" qualities of a landscape: that which was indescribable; that which was totally exterior to the urban and the industrial. At first this abstraction took the form of a divergent color pallet, then an adoption of negative space within the canvas, then eventually manifesting through an abandonment of representation altogether to an abstract symbolism that continued into Modernism and Minimalism.



Alex M Lee
Room with a View
 2008

Within the work of Lee and Hart, we see that romantic abstraction remains integral to continuing the discussion of the virtual as it has been reborn in the terms of the digital. The romantic abstraction within the work of these artists is evidenced by their shared contemplative slowness. We are asked to take time, to reflect *with* the artists and their work, and not merely as witnesses to the unfolding of their oeuvre. We are asked to be patient, but are rewarded with a serenity that verges on meditation.

As a result of this willingness to wait, audiences begin to observe moments of immense scrutiny and care. Unlike decisive points that typically flash momentarily, the serene respite of Hart and Lee's work unfolds and decentralizes the phenomenological experience of the virtual as it relates to the physical. Where Henri-Cartier Bresson would argue that in street photography ? a discipline rife with decisive moments - "life is once, forever," Hart and Lee extend the forever into a series of repeatable gestures and moments. As a result, the rendering technologies that these artists use are not merely employed for the sake of emulating other media -- like photography does -- but are instead adopted for their specific material and metaphorical reasons.

One such material is the ways in which space and location can be rendered and examined. Space and the virtual "cameras" within 3D modeling software, become a mutable form. The fluidity of architecture and geometry within 3D software renders these environments as visual encapsulations of the virtual qualities of the physical world. This is in part why a common linguistic synonym of the digital is *virtuality*. But it is important to distinguish this confluence for both Hart and Lee, since it is through specific qualities of the digital that these artists approach Romantic concerns about the virtual.

One such concern found within the reflective state of these works is how they converse with Romantic ruminations on the Sublime. When looking at the work of Hart and Lee, one can witness how both of these artists are influenced and in dialog with Edmund Burke's poetic definition of the Sublime. Burke's definition situates the sublime as a state of overwhelming terror; a kind of indescribable rapture that can only be acknowledged upon a return from the void. In nature, the sublime occurs in a state of astonishment and "with some degree of horror."

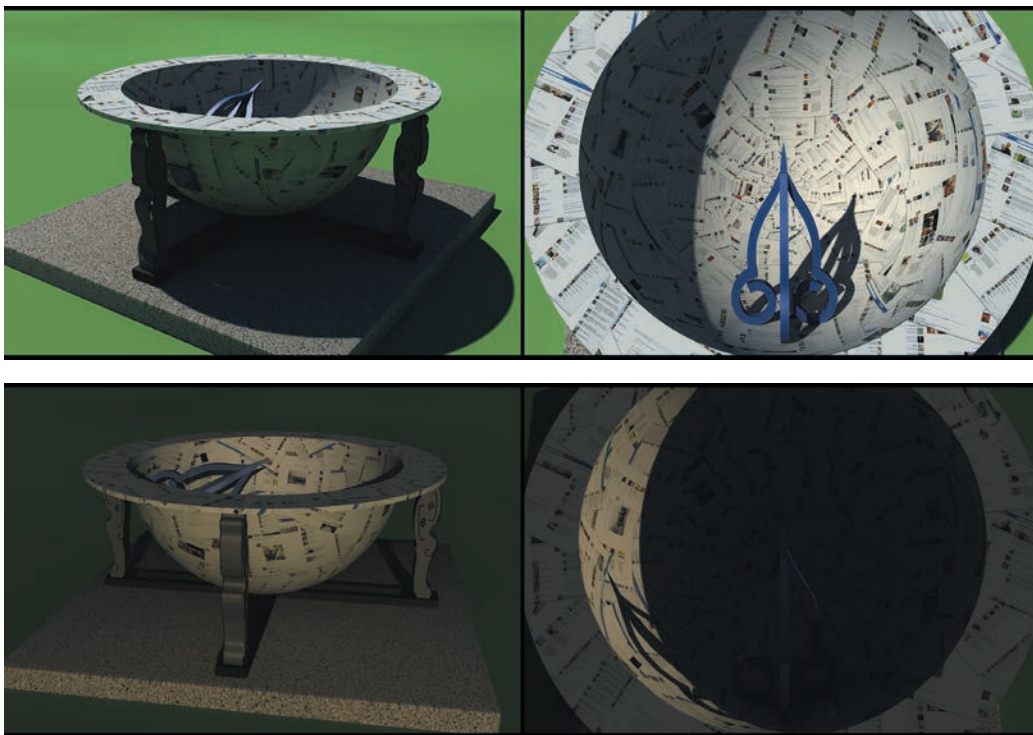
There is a "terrible"-ness in Burke's Sublime that requires "obscurity" in order to be representable as something that is actually "away" from nature. This obfuscation of "nature" to create it as a metaphor for the sublime resonates deeply within the work of Hart and Lee. The necessity for a large degree of abstraction, and the pursuit of the "obscure and imperfect idea" of a location or space permeates many pieces within Hart and Lee's repertoire. Although the high intensity of Burke's Sublime is important for these artists, it is a meditative repose proposed upon a return from it, that appears of significance to both.

Two examples from this exhibition can be found in Hart's *Food for Children* and Lee's *Room with a View*. In Hart's piece, the saturation of neon-colored snacks, overly sugary soft drinks, and deceptively neat arrangements of unhealthy products are balanced with computer rendered fruits and healthier alternatives. The "imperfect idea" of Hart's compositions then speaks to a desire of dissecting the apparatus of advertising food products to children (and that aggressive noise that surrounds those messages). Similarly, Lee's piece *Room with a View* digests the obfuscation of the natural and meditative space that occurs in an austere, corporate architecture. Through a subtle and witty gesture, Lee creates a serene sublime of a heavily sheltered, truncated, and compartmentalized room that is both soothing and ominous.

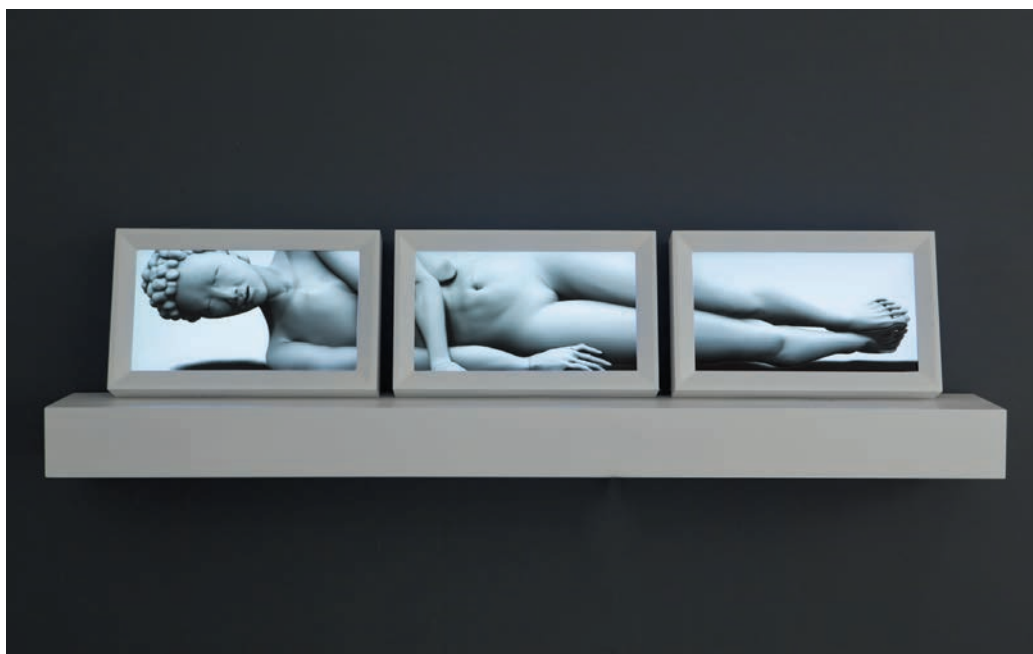


Claudia Hart
Food for Children
2011

The return from the fearful place of the natural sublime (fearful in that it instills a sense of uncanny astonishment) drives Hart and Lee to explore and metaphorically inhabit a specific type of place. The location that emerges from this exploration is one that doesn't simply aim to re-represent the initial site of awe. Instead, the sublime within Hart and Lee's work not only acts as a site for inward inquiry, but also as a location for outward criticism against digital incessantness. For this duo, the terror that Burke describes could be found within the unrelenting quality of the digital, and these works are the artifacts of the return from information and representational overload. Their criticism is positioned in such a way as to transport the viewer away from a digital monotony, away from a hyperactive consumerism, and into an island of lush respite. Hart's *Digital Death* is a quintessential example of this creation of space in that we witness a full cycle of a blossoming tree whose roots eventually dissolve. Likewise, in *Haeshigae (For Proust)*, Lee similarly creates a critical distance away from social-media saturation. In this work, he textures a multiple screenshot of Facebook onto an ancient Korean sundial to address the radical shifting of the speed and scale in our daily social habits.



Alex M Lee
Haeshigae - for Proust
 2012



Claudia Hart
Caress
 2011

In looking at these two examples, we begin to see a marked difference of subject matter between Hart and Lee and the scope at which their sublime lens is focused. The majority of Hart's work examines the digital body, although this body is viewed through a humanist perspective of "the natural." Whereas with Lee's work, we tend to speculate how history, science, and time have developed tropes and traditions to understand the sublime. For Hart, we look at the body, and the intimate interior of the flesh; for Lee, we look to the cosmos and towards a deep time. Although one could view these locations as disparate locations, one should instead consider how these spaces could collapse into one another; acting as mirrors to one another, or equal sides of the same metaphysical coin.

When looking at Hart's *Caress*, a paradigm of her work, we observe a female body shifting between different archetypal poses of a woman Odalisque painting. She is ambiguously rendered in an emotive state between discomfort, confinement, rapture, ease, and momentary self-awareness. As a result, our relationship with the figure, to a body as a vessel for self-reflexivity, is complex and difficult to determine. The model within this work is certainly recognized as female, however the details of her figure are abstracted and exaggerated in such a way that one feels compelled to think of this subject being under duress. The obscuring of the female form, combined with her subjugation, suggests that Burke's Sublime is certainly at play. Burke outright pairs the sublime with power and strength in that "wheresoever we find strength, and in what light soever we look upon power, we shall all long observe the sublime the concomitant of terror."

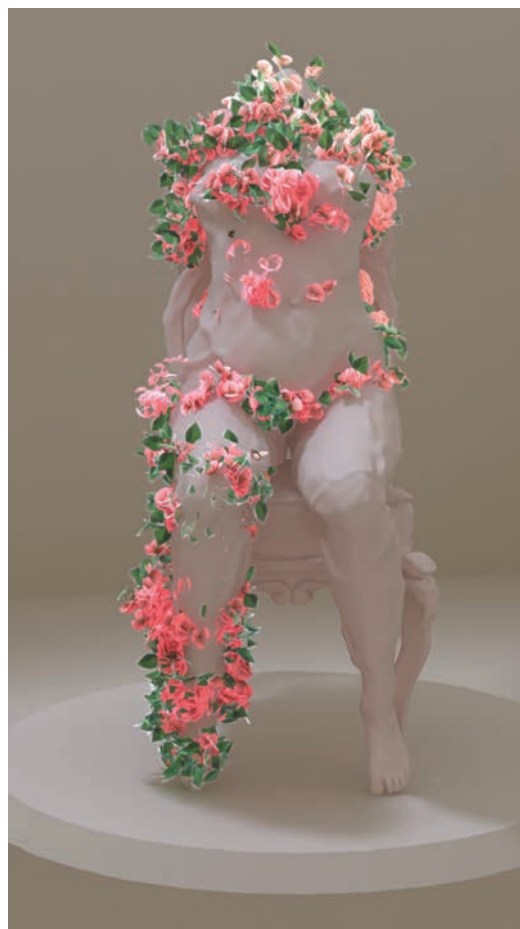


Claudia Hart
Empire
2010

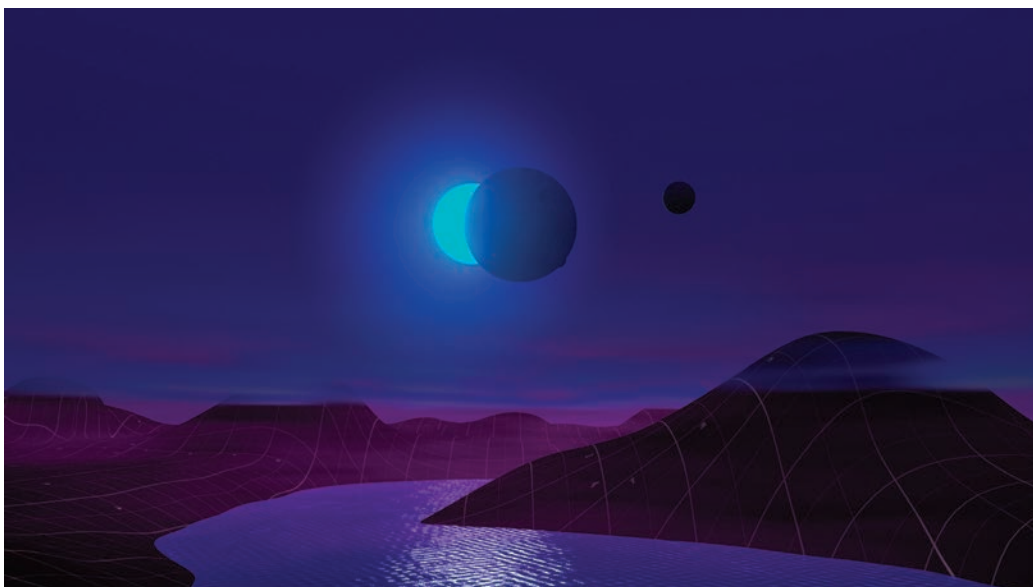
With this in mind our observation of the figure in *Caress* is not just fluctuating between the various archetypal gestures of a reclining nude, but is instead a painful recapitulating of these gestures as a means of showing a profound grief in art historical representation. Hart complicates our viewing not only of this figure, but of any familiarity audiences might have with this form within art history. In turn, Hart suggests a need for reconsidering the objectifying gaze of the canon of the Reclining Nude by repossessing it as a woman and therefore as a *subject* within Romantic and early Modern figurative artworks. Again, the sublime for Hart (and Lee, as we will see later) is both a site of unnerved digestion, but also a location of extrinsic critique.

In *Caress* and works like *Empire* and *The Seasons*, Hart's sublime contemplation comes from her return from a kind of representational saturation with the female form within art history. That being said, even though the female figure prominently plays within Hart's work, the non-gendered, occasionally ambiguous, computer animated body that also occurs within more recent pieces, is also a site of Romantic origin. This figure is drawn from the theatrical androgyny that the Dandy displays within Romantic literature and imagery. With this in mind, Hart's sublime return is then positioned as a critical response to the ways in which the gendered body ? regardless of ambiguity ? has been typified and indexed as an object within art history. In creating ambiguity, however, Hart's contemporary sublime is marked by an insistence for a decentralized body as described by Anthony Vidler in his *Architecture Dismembered*.

As expressed previously, the departure between these two artists rests in the varying scope of their interests in the sublime. Where Hart looks into the interiority of the body, Lee gazes to the stars, seeing into a deep metaphorical horizon of speculative physics and improbable measurements of time. In work like *Alternate Framework*, Lee creates a solar system where the bodily heavens operate contrary to our current understanding of Newtonian physics.



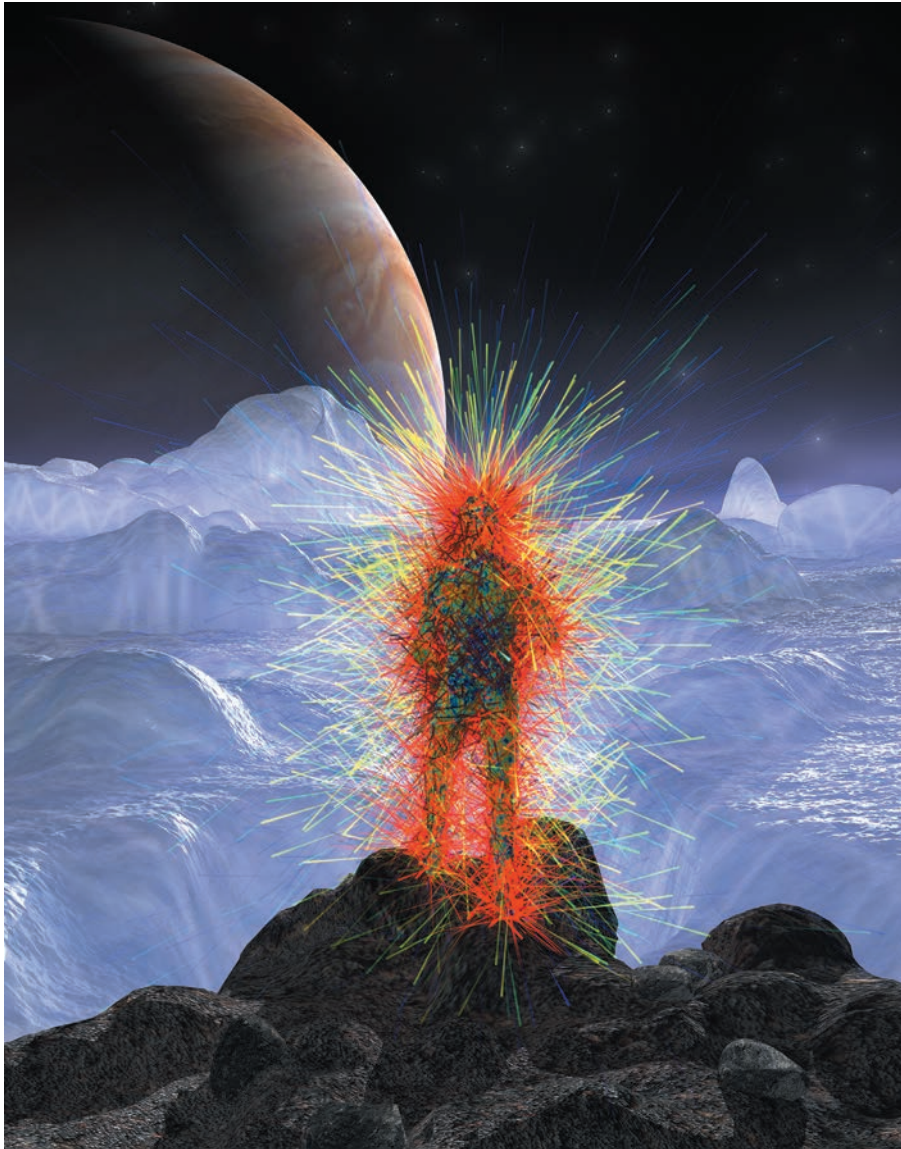
Claudia Hart
The Seasons
2009



Alex M Lee
An Alternate Framework
 2013

The computer model that Lee has created for this work, and for *The Frequency of Space/Time*, runs contrary to the widely used Kepler Orrery, which maps all extra-solar planets found to date. The contradiction here is that the larger, denser, more massive object of the sun rotates around a lesser planetary object, completing one revolution - or day cycle. As the sun illuminates a gridded mountain range and wispy horizon, viewers begin to abandon any doubt that this physical system is defunct. This system ? as the title suggests ? unfolds as an alternative proposal by Lee to the ways in which the cosmos continue to occupy a contemplative location even if their mechanics are unnatural. The Sublime here comes from a faulty representation, harkening to the imaginative and allegorical location of landscape painting proposed by German Romantics such as Caspar David Friedrich.

For Lee, the adoption of Friedrich's allegorical landscape is made intentional with his re-rendering of the well-known work, *Wanderer Above Sea and Fog*. In Lee's reimagining of this canonical work, he substitutes the wandering gaze of the figure looking over the misty mountaintops of a fictional craggy landscape for a barren surface of an alien world. The wanderer's gaze out into the unknown is not bound to the horizons of our terrestrial home, but has expanded into a new horizon that has just begun to be mapped by contemporary science. Thus, in borrowing the sublime gesture of the outward contemplative vista pioneered by Friedrich, Lee reconstitutes what our vision is capable of imagining. Likewise, the crystalline figure in this reimagining is in itself a container for this type of deep vision. The vibrant colors and geometric deformity come from a map of cosmic microwave background radiation as recorded by the Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe.



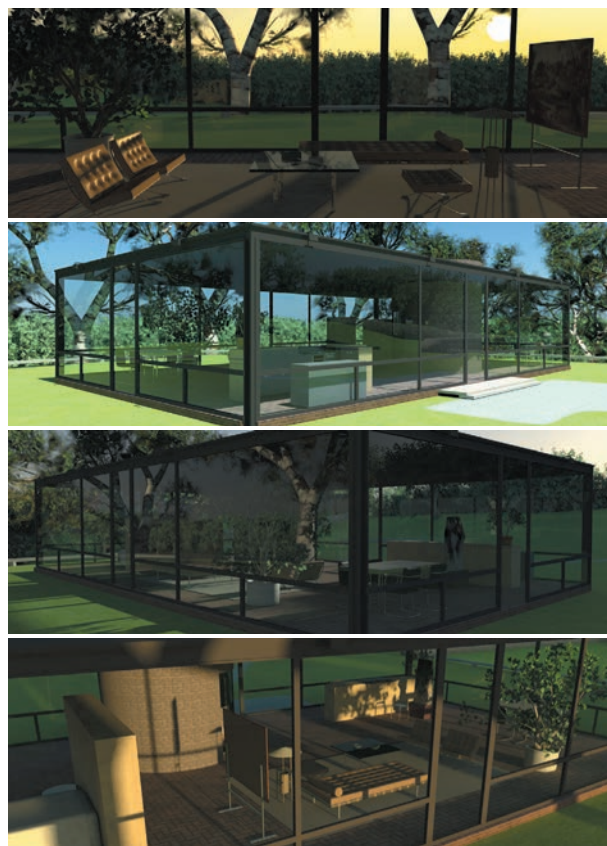
Alex M Lee
untitled (The Wanderer)
2013

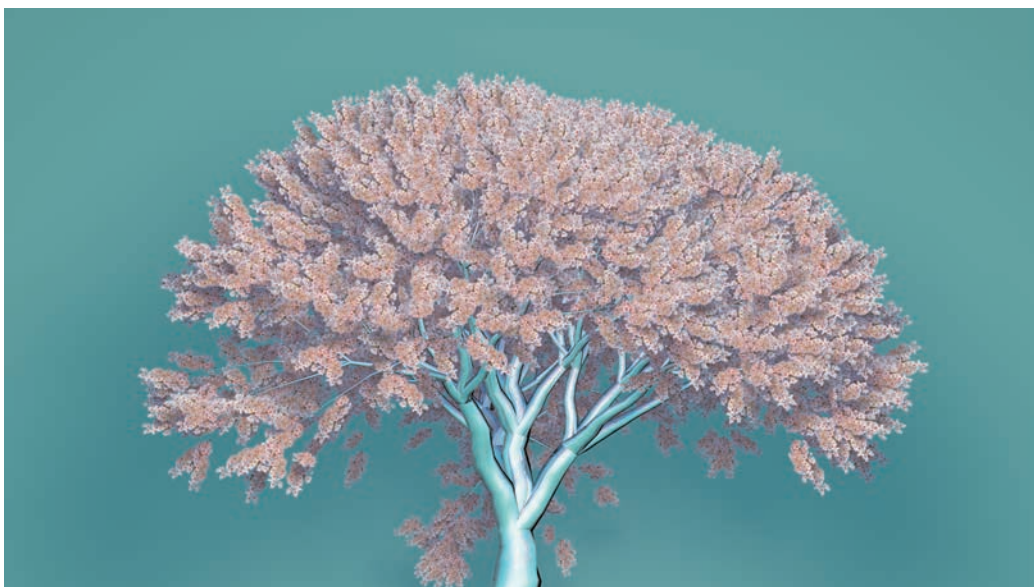
Lee's reworking of this piece points to ways in which vision and contemplation have radically been altered by contemporary technology. Our contemporary vision does not look through the spyglass of a hand-held telescope, but is instead informed by autonomous satellite imagery. Where landscape painting once stood as a standard for objective representation, digital imagery's pursuit of perfection has uncovered the hidden subjectivity of Romantic painting, and has rooted human vision squarely in technological rhetoric. The return from awe for Lee is in trying to decipher the profundity of the known universe with nonscientific eyes. In other words, the terror found within these pieces is not simply in a metaphorical void or absence as expressed in existential thinking, but a more "real" or calculated void as represented by contemporary science.

Although each artist arrives at different visual tropes and outputs for their work, the unavoidable similarity that binds these two together is the ways in which they use computer imagery to speak about the natural and the Romantic. This is not to say that these artists are similar merely because they both use a computer; this categorization would include an entire array of makers. Instead, the important distinction here that binds these artists together is *how* they employ these tools to discuss a need for reexamining the sublime within a context of the digital. Both artist's work demands an inquiry into the sublime in a way that other digital artists rarely broach.

Their marked difference, however, can be expressed in how these artists choose not to fetishize their craft for the sake of exploring gadgetry and fad-driven market appeal. Their work does not fetishize military-grade Research and Development, or elevate the industry of social media in a way that often plagues ? and in the opinion of this author, undermines ? many practices within the scope of digital art. Instead the important precedent for Hart and Lee comes from historical, conceptual, and perhaps most importantly, emotive destinations that typically lie on the periphery of digital practices. These motivating forces all too often seem to be characteristically un-technological, or else fly in the face of digitally driven work.

Alex M Lee
The Glass House
2011





Claudia Hart
Didital Death
 2013

With this in mind, both artists express a kind of lamentation for a profound lack of criticality and art-historical relevance when it comes to the typical subject matter that pervades most digital art. This lack of art historical precedence plagues the medium with an all too frequent ghettoization. The partitioning of the digital into a secluded camp of Internet fandom and social media championing is usurped by these two artists as a result of their investment in a conversation that is shaped by the non-digital. In essence, their work can carry forward a conversation sparked more than two centuries ago, due in part by the fact that their lines of inquiry are not overly hampered by the ways in which digital media is disseminated. This central desire to reinvest in Romantic thinking and the role of the sublime within a digitally imbricated culture makes their work both deeply personal and yet more easily accessible.

Instead of opting into the culture and industry that the digital imposes, their shared focus is aimed more precisely on the affect that these tools have on our psyche and vision. Hart and Lee avoid the familiar trapping of digital art's limited rhetoric in favor of a more humanist approach - a process that prioritizes an examination of literature, art history, and philosophy over the short-term investment in the latest gadgetry and software.

As a result, the work of Claudia Hart and Alex Lee is intricate and meaningful in that it attempts to continue a discourse that others might readily dispose of in order to perpetuate postmodern pluralistic apathy. For this duo, the moment of overly referential one-liners has passed, and that part of the future of work that seeks to consider the digital-technological must look back in order to look forward.

Claudia Hart

Associate Professor, Department of Film, Video New Media and Animation, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Education

New York University, 1978, Art History, Summa Cum Laude, Founder's Award, B.A.,

Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, 1984, M.S.

Solo Exhibitions and Special Projects

- 2013 Rendering Time, Claudia Hart & Alex M Lee, Gallery DOS, Seoul, Korea
- 2011 Recumulations, interior installation and site-specific performance-object, with Roberto Sifuentes, Black and White Project Space, Brooklyn, NY
When a Rose is Not a Rose, personal exhibition, bitforms gallery, NY
- 2010 Claudia Hart and Rim Lee, Chicago Festival of the Humanities: The Body, Kasia Kay Gallery with other invited galleries and participating Institutions
Empire, exhibition and performance, Wood Street New Media Galleries, Pittsburgh, PA.
- 2009 Twilight, bitforms Gallery, NY, NY
- 2008 Ophelia, scologram project, collaboration with art-n and Ellen Sandor, Kasia Kay Gallery, Chicago, IL
Digital Baroque, personal exhibition, Kasia Kay Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2007 Machina, animated video installation, Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Machina, animated video installation, PS 122, NY, NY
A Child's Machiavelli, "Project Space, Andrew Edlin Gallery, NY, NY, curated by Michele Thursz,
- 2003 "Braingirl, E, and Pussyweeval", two person show with Marina Zurcow, Bitforms Gallery, NY
"Save Me", public intervention, animated LED billboard, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust
- 2000 "Playworld 2000" collaboration with Sam Samore, Clinica Aesthetica Gallery, NY, NY
- 1999 "Over the Hills and Far Away," Sandra Gering Gallery, NY, NY
- 1998 residency and exhibition, Beaux Arts, Nimes, France
"The Beast Inside Us", collaboration with Sam Samore, The Center for Contemporary Art, Geneva, Switzerland
"A Child's Machiavelli," The John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, London
"Romeo and Juliet," residency and production, Banff, Alberta, Canada
- 1997 "Dr. Faustie's Guide to Real Estate Development," Shift Kunstverein, Berlin Galerie Sylvia Steinek, Vienna
"Beauty And the Beast", residency and edition, the Villa Arson, Nice
- 1996 "A Child's Machiavelli: Deutscher Remix", Galerie Wohnmaschine, Berlin
"Dr. Faustie's Guide to Real Estate Development", Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
- 1995 "Bild-Malerei: Positionen in Berlin: Claudia Hart", group catalog, Galerie Wohnmaschine, Berlin
"Claudia Hart presents the Institute of Theore(c)tical Painting presents Claudia Hart", Galerie Laage-Salomon, Paris
"A Child's Machiavelli", with catalog, "Kunstlerhaus Am Acker" e.V., produced by the Realismus Studio, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin
"A Child's Machiavelli", Galerie Christian Gögger, Munich
- 1994 "The Institute of Theore(c)tical Painting", collaboration with Kathrin Becker, with catalog, project from June 1994- June 1995, Likorfabrik, Kunst-Werke, Berlin
"Not an Angel", Galerie Blancpain Stepczynski, Geneva
- 1993 "New World Order", Tanit Galerie, Cologne and Munich
"Not an Angel", Künstlerhaus Bethanien, with catalog, Berlin
- 1992 Galerie Laage-Salomon, Paris
Dennis Anderson Galerie, Antwerp
Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin
- 1991 "The Contingency of Selfhood (the artist as Byron)", Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris
"The Grotesque", Tanit Galerie, Munich
- 1990 Lino Silverstein, with catalog, Barcelona, Greenberg Gallery, Saint Louis
"The Contingency of Selfhood (the artist as Rousseau)", Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
- 1989 Barbara Krakow, Boston
Pat Hearn Gallery, New York

Alex M. Lee

Assistant Professor, Department of Digital Art & Science, Clarkson University, Potsdam, NY

Education

- 2009 MFA The School of the Art Institute of Chicago emphasis in Art & Technology
- 2005 BFA The School of the Art Institute of Chicago emphasis in Photography

Solo and Two Person Exhibitions

- 2013 Rendering Time, Claudia Hart & Alex M Lee, Gallery DOS, Seoul, Korea
- 2012 Temporalities, Gallery DOS, Seoul, Korea
- 2009 Manifold Structures, a virtual installation involving the recreation of Chicago's corner of Monroe & Wabash street at the online fictional venue: Waymaker Gallery, New Calodon, Yorktown.
http://www.waymakergallery.com/shows/Lee01/Lee01_install.html
- 2009 Epic Theater: New Work from Alex Lee, February Gallery, curated by Jamilee Polson
(a project gallery dedicated to work specific installation rather than site specific), Chicago, IL
<http://twelvegalleries.com/artwork/733506.html>

Group Exhibitions

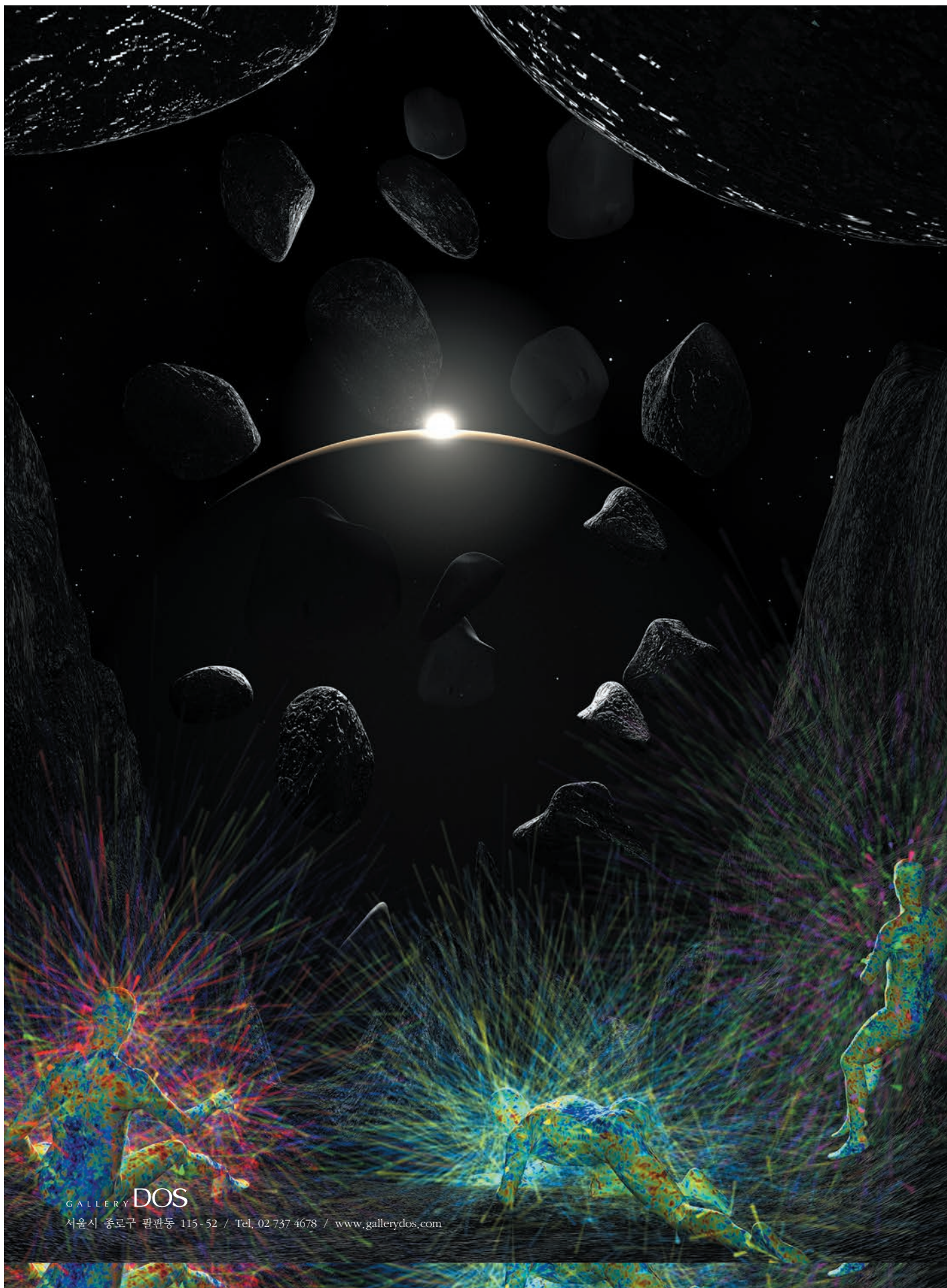
- 2013 AXIS: Gallery DOS, Ravenswood Center, Chicago, IL
- 2011 The Aesthetics of the Fake, group exhibition, curated by Rachel Clarke, William Paterson University, Wayne, NJ
Prak-Sis Experimental Film Screening, group exhibition, curated by Mi-yeon Kwon, Chicago, IL
The Aesthetics of the Fake, group exhibition, curated by Rachel Clarke,
Sacramento University Library Gallery, Sacramento, California
- 2010 Prak-Sis [SMB Project], group exhibition, curated by Mi-yeon Kwon, Chicago, IL
Long Beach Island Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, National Juried Competition:
Digital Works, curated by Marisa Olson, Long Beach Island, New Jersey
- 2009 Barewalls, benefit auction for The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL
Art Chicago: NEXT Art Fair: Waymaker Gallery, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL
Sugar: New Media Work, Around the Coyote Festival, Chicago, IL
Graduating MFA Exhibition, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL
Mio Photo, Mio Hall, Osaka, Japan
- 2008 Wordplay, South Side Community Art Center, Chicago, IL
- 2006 Active Liberty, SUG Gallery, SAIC, Chicago, IL
- 2005 Everybody Paints!, Parlour, Chicago, IL
Postcard Show, The Contemporary Artists Center, North Adams, MA
Made in NA, MA, The Contemporary Artists Center, North Adams, MA
Then & Now, Gene Siskel Film Center, group show, Chicago, IL
Turn Over Across A Revolution, G2 Gallery Space, group show, Chicago, IL
Nippon Awards Show, Nippon Steel, Inc., Chicago, Illinois
- 2004 Exquisite Pktnik, Doubner Space, group show, Prague, Czech Republic
Social Alterations, SAIC admissions gallery, group show, Chicago, Illinois

Curated by

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서울시 종로구 팔관동 115-52 / Tel. 02 737 4678 / www.gallerydos.com