

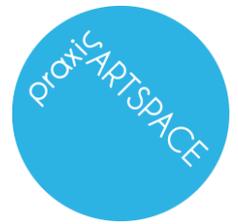
INSTANT GRATIFICATION | Catalogue Essay

It is perhaps so self-evident that group exhibitions are founded in dialogue. The assemblage that gallery visitors will encounter has grown from a series of intersecting conversations—between curator and artists, artist and materials, artist and artist, representatives of funding bodies, installation staff, essayist—that all happen before the exhibition itself comes into being. We speak about the exhibition because it doesn't exist yet. What are the artists' intentions? What is its curatorial rationale? How might it assume a place in the space of the gallery? What might it contribute to cultural discourse? None of us, however, knows what the exhibition is, what it really means. There are other conversations that must take place before these understandings can emerge. The word exhibition implies that a giving or gifting occurs—think, too, of the double meaning of present. An exhibition doesn't mean anything until the artists have given (given up) their works, first to the space of the gallery, and then, to those who will galvanise that space and those works with their presence. The sacrifice of intention that a group exhibition demands from the artists should not be underestimated. The most significant dialogues occur only after all those fraught preliminary conversations have been concluded and necessary compromises made. In the space of the gallery, the works themselves carry on a conversation more affective and significant than anything the artists could say to each other. Visitors to the gallery participate, not in conversation with the artists or curator, but in *this* dialogue, with and between the works.

Instant Gratification is a kind of dialogue in and of itself, it is 'about' the way in which communication technologies mediate our experiences of the world and each other. This exhibition comprises aerograms, magazines, old telephones and telephone books, mobile phones, allusion to the tropes of social media, and the paper and wires that carried information before wireless technology. Among eight artists involved—Nerida Bell, Ty Brookhart, Janine Dello, Bernadette Freeman, Jane Heron-Kirkmoë, Simone Linder-Patton, Kylie Nichols, Chris Webb—ambivalence regarding the exhibition's theme is articulated. All express trepidation over the potentially deleterious effects on our well-being of the 'too-much-too-fast' of contemporary technologies. Brookhart's savage collages, FEED, for instance, depict the self-fashioned echo-chambers generated by the fragmented information overload known as the news.

Freeman's *Con_ected* summons common parental fears about teenage screen addiction. The adolescents in these paintings are simultaneously over-networked and completely isolated. Nichols's neon *In pursuit of perfection* broaches the effect of 'swipe-right-to-like' dating apps on interpersonal relationships. In other work though, both Nichols and Freeman suggest the potential for transformative communication inherent in such technologies. Similarly, Dello's photographic homage to inspirational Instagram posts is tender and perhaps even genuinely affirming—at least, it is not thoroughly ironic. Webb's saturated paintings of *Unreal Landscapes* address the way in which social media tourism (re)presents nature while keeping online consumers aloof from it. Still, their hyper-colour seems more ecstatic than judgemental.

Reverently displaying the calligraphy of inherited letters, Bell's *Messages to a Bloodline* overtly rejects the instant gratification of contemporary communicative technologies; yet a sad separated-ness that Facetime could have eradicated nevertheless arises, providing counter-point to her stated intentions. Such concerns and ambivalences are



not new. An ancient Egyptian myth tells how the first god, Atum, warned the moon god, Djehuti, that his invention of writing would cause humans to lose the use of memory. And in the Renaissance, parents worried that the new information technology, the printed book, distracted their children from more healthy activities.

An exhibition like *Instant Gratification*—a group exhibition, founded in dialogue, allowing equivocality—is an effective way of demonstrating concern while accepting ambivalence. Even if an individual artist makes a declarative statement with their work, it is always already moderated in the space of the gallery by the presence of other works. What, for example, do the ideologically neutral wires of Heron-Kirkmoë's *The nodes that bind* say to the imprisoning wires of Freeman's *Con_nected*? Or the ceramicised paper of her *Hardbound* to the juxtaposition of paper and ceramic in Bell's *Messages to a Bloodline* or Linder-Patton's *Redundant Vessels*? Or Webb's and Brookhart's flashing palettes to each other? Some works require our active participation, or at least directly implicate us in their presence. Linder-Patton's *When the phone rings...* obstructs our entry to the gallery space. Just as we sometimes have to force our friends to look up from their phones to see and hear us, so must this imposing plinth (from which a Bakelite phone looks down) be negotiated before the rest of the exhibition can be accessed. Both Freeman and Nichols's *Interaction*—the sole collaborative work in the exhibition—also compels us to physically navigate our own engagement with the work; long mirrors on the ground reflect our gaze back to us, beyond which we might discern facets of an exhibition of which we have now become a part. The metallic sheen of Dello's photographs echo their forms. Meanwhile, the lights of Nichols's *Hybrid minds* and the lightly pinned aerograms of Bell's *Messages to a Bloodline* both respond to our presences, flickering or fluttering as we traverse the gallery space. This material crosstalk is generative of embodied relational understandings. Together, the works in this exhibition resist the instant gratification of the contemporary mediascape to demand our awareness.

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