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In her relatively short career, Anna Révész has turned her literal and metaphorical lens on such expansive subjects as architecture, temporality, and memory. Her most recent body of work, *Divine Machina*, sees her developing a system of iconography that is suffused with the anxieties of the digital age.

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The scale, format, and materiality of Révész's recent photographic works irreverently allude to the form of the holy card (or prayer card) that originates from the Roman Catholic tradition and in which the deeds of saints and other Biblical figures are succinctly rendered. True believers encountering Révész's work for the first time might even expect to see likenesses of divine personages related to the artist's areas of interest, such as Saint Veronica, patron saint of photographers, or Saint Isidore of Seville, whose portfolio was expanded to include the internet and adjacent technologies by the decree of Pope John Paul II in 1997. However, no such altruistic benefactors are in attendance. Rather, we are met with a pantheon of gods and monsters from the cybernetic age, in which 'the new flesh' (to borrow David Cronenberg's term) coalesces with the hardware of information technology. In light of these disquieting images, the viewer may feel unsure whether the poetic fragments of text dotted throughout the exhibition should be read with a liturgical cadence or in the voice of Siri, the virtual assistant embedded (or perhaps imprisoned) in various Apple products. This convergence of theological and technological trappings is further apparent in the intricate, decorative edges of the prints. Here Révész references the die-cut lace edges commonly found on prayer cards, the binary punch cards that formed the basis of computer programming up until the mid-1970s, and more contemporary computing motifs such as data chips and circuitry. Her decision to painstakingly hand-craft these borders using a book-binding screw punch recalls a bygone era of information technology, whilst also asserting the physicality of the artist's hand in an otherwise digital making process.

FIGURE 1: Anna Révész, 'I shall not wholly die', 2022, Digital print on vinyl adhesive, opal acrylic panel, MDF, enamel paint, foil tape, LED lighting, 180 x 60.5 cm

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The exhibition's title, *Divine Machina*, knowingly evokes the notion of 'deus ex machina' (literally, "god out of the machine"), an oft-critiqued plot device that has its origins in ancient Greek theatre. While typically used as a means of tying up the loose ends of a narrative by means of some divine intervention, the entities inhabiting Révész's work offer troubling questions rather than comforting answers, suggesting that it may be a case of 'diabolus ex machina', being more infernal than deific.

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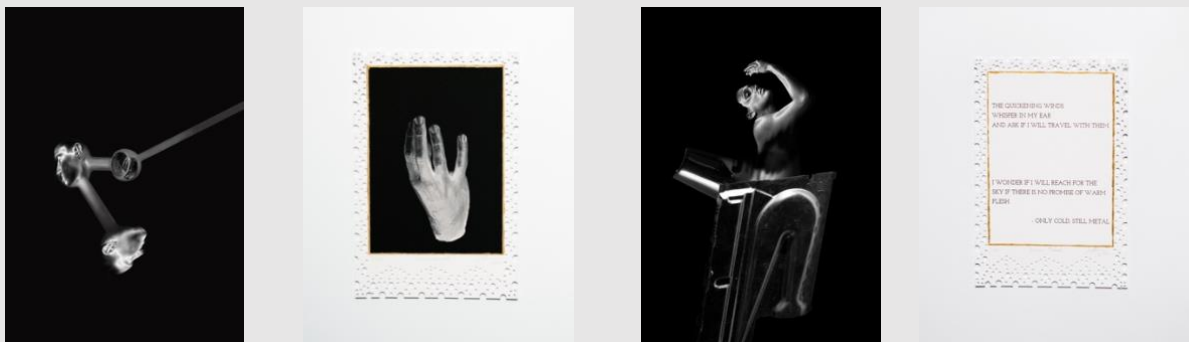
The staging of the work carries a similar weight to its discrete component parts, with Revesz conjuring up a setting that is equal parts shrine, funeral parlour, and museum. This in turn suggests a space that functions in a simultaneously votive, commemorative, and archival register. It is notable that the only image of a purely human subject, devoid of technological augmentation, is presented to us at one-to-one scale in a structure that evokes both coffin and macabre reliquary.¹

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While *Divine Machina* certainly belongs to the continuum of cautionary tales about technology menacing its human creators (from the golem of Jewish folklore to the dystopian fiction of William Gibson), it should be noted that Révész's attitude to technology is nuanced and equivocal. This ambivalence is most powerfully expressed in the act of using digital media to critique the pervasiveness of such technology, the irony of which is not lost on the artist.² Similarly, anxiety around human obsolescence in the face of advancing technology has, ironically, been the catalyst for some of humanity's most arresting flights of imagination in the fields of film, literature, and, increasingly, the visual arts. While Revesz (along with such forebears as Charlie Brooker, Mary Shelley, and Stelarc) might be motivated by a sense of mourning for our abating humanity, the imaginative power of her work is a testament to the fact that the fictional, the speculative and the poetic remain, at least for now, the provinces of humankind rather than machines.

ROY ANANDA

Written to accompany 'Divine Machina' exhibition by Anna Révész, at Praxis Artspace.



FIGURES 2 - 5 [FROM LEFT TO RIGHT]:

'*Augmented*', (detail), 2022, Archival inkjet print on Hahnemühle Hemp, hand-cut edges, acrylic paint, 15.2 x 10 cm.

'*Immemorial*', 2022, Archival inkjet print on Hahnemühle Hemp, hand-cut edges, acrylic paint, 15.2 x 10 cm.

'*Repurpose*', (detail), 2022, Archival inkjet print on Hahnemühle Hemp, hand-cut edges, acrylic paint, 15.2 x 10 cm.

'*Warm Flesh*', 2022, Archival inkjet print on Hahnemühle Hemp, hand-cut edges, acrylic paint, 15.2 x 10 cm.

¹ In the same way, the thumb of Saint Thomas Aquinas is currently housed in the church of Sant'Eustorgio, Milan, might the thumb drive of Saint Fujio Masuoka (the engineer responsible for the invention of flash memory) be similarly enshrined in decades or centuries to come?

² Similarly, as Révész's essayist, I find myself helped and hindered in equal measure by the laptop on which I write. My word processing software constantly interjects with suggestions concerning vocabulary, grammar, and clarity and my pre-writing procrastination ritual consists of scouring YouTube for suitable background music to accompany my scribing. I eventually settle on the soundtrack to Mamoru Oshii's 1995 film *Ghost in the Shell*. Its blending of choral arrangements with post-human, cyberpunk modalities feels apt.