The Archive to Come

Curated by Carla Gannis and Clark Buckner

By Charlotte Kent


Telematic Media Arts and Mozilla Hubs
The Archive to Come
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Archives are complicated spaces these days. Who founded them, and why? What is included, what is not? The name of this place, where records are kept, comes from the Greek word *arche*, meaning government. In other words, archives are always partly associated with the task of determining who and what matters, and how the narrative of that mattering will be constructed. On the other hand, as anyone who has sifted through archives well knows, they never feel quite that determined. In *The Archive to Come*, curators Clark Buckner and Carla Gannis invited artists to contribute a work of their choice that responded to "questions of loss, memorialization, crisis, and re-invention … questions about what we value and want to preserve as we work to recover from their ravages and build for the future." From the works received, the curators identified five major thematic areas that they collected in screenings at Telematic Media Arts gallery, with stills available in a specially designed social VR site. On the Telematic website, viewers can access the works within each screening by selecting them individually or letting them autoplay.

COVID-19 is the topic of the first screening. As a nod to our current (and likely continuing) age of the virus, all the works were produced in the last few months, and many of them are ongoing projects. It opens with Sean Capone's *THEO TW'AWKI: Chapter One : Dispatches From The Interior* (2020), a delightful and clever animated work in which the virus contemplates the meaning of existence. Laura Splan's *Unraveling (Pandemic Panorama)* (2020) is another animation, using molecular visualization software and SARS-CoV-2 structures to present mobile fractals that made me want to learn more about COVID's biological formation. Mary Flanagan's *Colors of Remembrance* (2020) is an abstract work, with lines representing the number of people who die each day. For this exhibit she contributed the piece based on the number of deaths from September 11, 2020, a sharp reminder of how the virus and the science around it has been politicized and delegitimated. For those of us who find ourselves now perpetually on web conference meetings, Darrin Martin's *Zoom Meetings (with myself)* (2020) provides a change of tone, with a much-needed injection of humor.
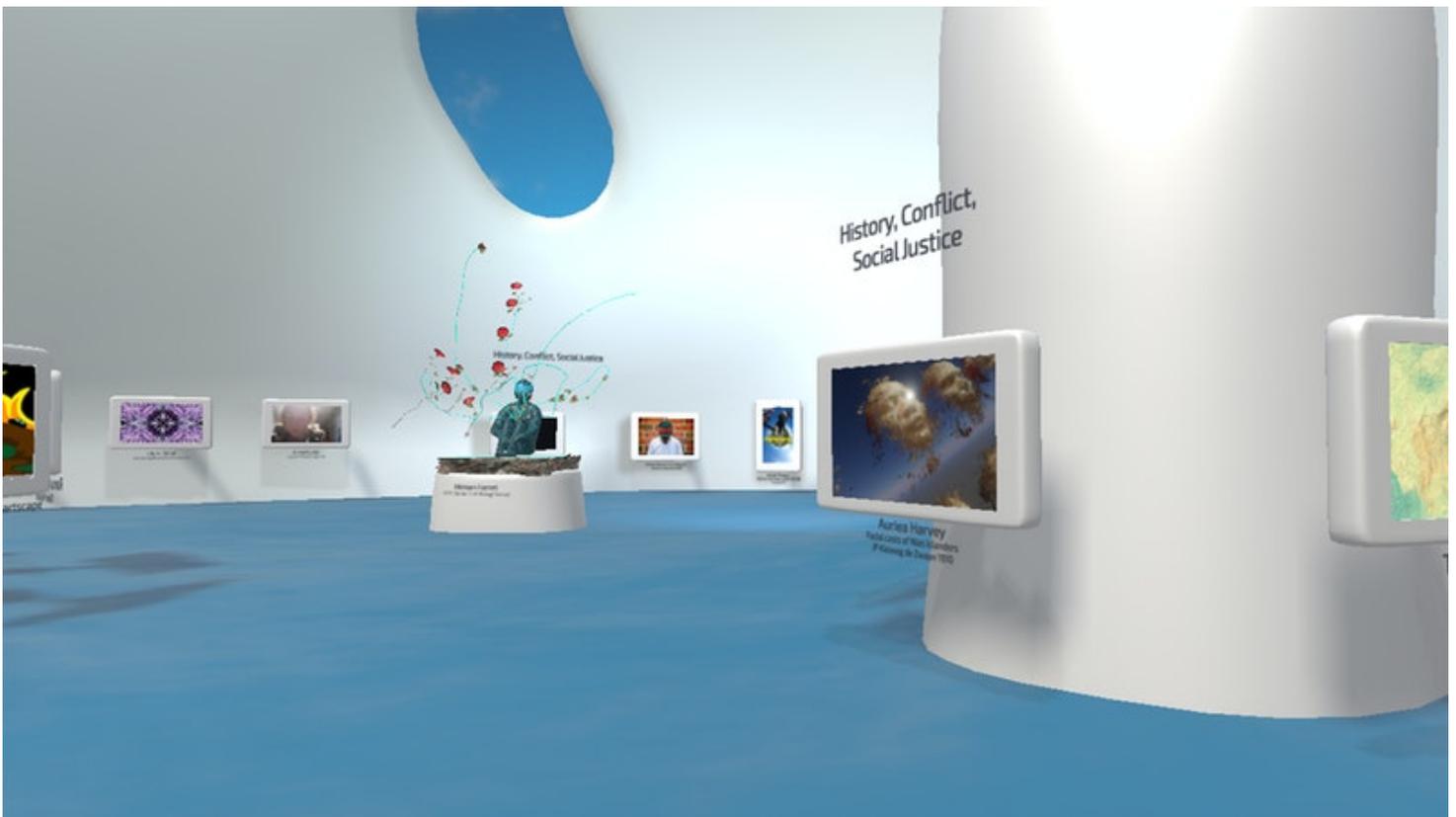
Installation view: *The Archive to Come*, Telematic Media Arts, 2020.

Screening 02 launches with Auriea Harvey's *Islanders* (2020), which presents 3D scans of the face casts of Nias islanders at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. This work condenses all the dilemmas broached by the screening's title: "History, Conflict, and Social Justice." At just over six minutes, it is one of the longest in this series, with Antonio Roberts's *Submerged* (2020) being the shortest at 17 seconds. The advantage of the online screening format is the ability to roam around the offerings, and to review works at your leisure. I was stunned by Tiare Ribeaux's

Halemaʻumaʻu (2019), which shows LIDAR and aerial footage of the Hawaiian volcano Kīlauea, Halemaʻumaʻu Crater and Puʻu ʻŌʻō crater, spaces associated with Pelehonuamea's sacred body that typically require offerings and chants to approach. The work's soundscape includes such chants to juxtapose these two systems of belief and highlight the sense of invasion that the technology produces.

Many of the works in the third screening, "New Sensibilities: Cyborg Eco-Feminism," make us reevaluate our human-centered perspective. Two remarkable pieces adopt the cognitive and behavioral realm of the octopus, one by Maggie Roberts and another by Orphan Drift, of which she is a member. Another by Gretta Louw slips into the mindstate of the jellyfish. The hand-painted images of Yuliya Lanina, as animated for Dodo-Valse (2010), have a naiveté that was utterly charming amidst the intense digital prowess on display in the rest of the exhibit. The fourth and fifth screenings, respectively titled "Digital Culture, Surveillance, and the Afterlife" and "Speculative Fictions: Past and Future," address the use of technology directly and the many concerns raised by the rampant effects of digital culture.

Installation view: *The Archive to Come*, Telematic Media Arts, 2020.

The social VR space of the exhibition can be accessed on Mozilla Hubs through a VR headset or using a computer interface. Viewers encounter a gleaming white splash rising out of a sea, with an archway leading into a large ovoid room with a still from each work "hanging" on the wall. Artists selected a still (or one image for those works that are a series of photographs) to represent their contribution, and here the works are not positioned in relationship to any overriding theme or category, freeing audiences to make their own connections as they walk around the space. Tamiko Thiel's cherry blossoms petals from Suspended Spring (2020) provide a floating sculpture with an accompanying soundscape for the whole room. Overall, the stillness of the works in social VR contrast to the time-based energy experienced viewing the whole works, which viewers can call up on demand, accessing the screenings through an interface outside the ovoid exhibit space. One work is only available at Telematic: Hank Willis Thomas and Kambui Olujimi's Winter in America (2006). Some things are location dependent, and the show's choice to exhibit works in distinct ways across the various platforms reminds us to account for where we are and how we come to be there. These are issues of accessibility and accountability that we are all still navigating.

With so many works in The Archive to Come, each visit offers something new. More could be added to each of these topics, and yet more topics and works identified. Net art has a history of group shows featuring a far greater number of artists than is typically found in gallery shows. There is a communitarian feel to such projects, which comes from net art's embrace of the web as a space that breaks down the barriers of entry rigidly maintained by the art world. Like mail art before it, the purpose is to encourage people to create and find a freedom of expression that is resisted elsewhere. Such openness was the original dream of the internet, and may serve our examination of archives, histories, and canons of all sorts. There is a sense of wonder in what archives store and reveal, but a sense of urgency too. In moments like the one we are currently living through, the information we generate and preserve has a profound effect on what will come.