

bitforms gallery

Embedded Parables

November 14, 2019 – January 17, 2020

Opening Reception: November 14, 6 – 8 PM

Gallery Hours: Wednesday – Saturday, 11 AM – 6 PM & Sunday 12 – 6 PM

Closing Reception + Performance by Surabhi Saraf: January 19, 4–6 PM

bitforms gallery is pleased to present *Embedded Parables* curated by Valerie Amend, featuring the work of Peter Burr, Rindon Johnson, Surabhi Saraf, Clement Valla, and Addie Wagenknecht. Within the exhibition, myth and theory exist in various degrees of separation, at times in risk of overlap. Their definitions point towards variable truths that clash between objectivity and supposition. Exhibited artists utilize the liminal space between these philosophies as a framework to inquire towards the human body, emotion, and the Anthropocene. Their empirical processes result in coalesced mysticism and biology.

Awoke is the name of a mythical artificial emotional intelligence created by Surabhi Saraf. The techno-utopian myth of *Awoke & the Awokened* uses the relationship between *Awoke*, and its believers, *the Awokened*, to question the risks and possibilities of technological solutionism when applied to emotional labor and social relations. An exercise in collective myth-making, the three-part project is expressed in three forms: a symbolic video sculpture, a short narrative film, and a ritual performance. In a present where screen time is monitored as a health risk, Saraf imagines *Awoke* as a tool to absorb the emotional stress inflicted upon human populations through daily interactions with technology. The work resides in the gallery as an enduring icon of potentiality.

Diana Said invites the viewer into a curious redwood-infested pastoral landscape. Inside the VR headset, we travel downstream encased in a glass vessel. Alongside the river, configurations of two-headed cows graze, occasionally fusing into amalgamated forms. Rindon Johnson examines the role of the cow, and the effects of the commercialized bovine industry, within much his practice. *Diana Said* probes the desires and consequences associated with the animal, theorizing a future-gazing ecology. Rushing water, encircling cows, and lush grasslands are a central conversation of two farmers overheard in discussion. Will the drought yield enough water for crops to grow? The viewer glides through the stream with hands outstretched, an act of relinquishing control.

DIRTSCRAPER is a theorized landscape of urban development. Peter Burr renders this work as a generative video game where residents of a “smart architecture” act as informal narrators. As the formation of *DIRTSCRAPER* evolves, a variety of myths emerge. Members from the community tell the tale of their surroundings, relationships, and mental health, in an attempt to quell the constant noise of their precarious circumstances. Burr situates this piece past archetypes of future utopias, turning instead to the corrosion of an apocryphal society. The work emulates a collective body that has been subjected to the inner workings of a gridded simulation; housing blocks are overrun by industry, residents are displaced, the Anthropocene withers. What remains is the story of a constantly kinetic city and the people that remain as inhabitants.

Spring 2020 and *Night to Morning* by Addie Wagenknecht examine housework, beauty routines, self-care, and domestic life as myths linked to female visibility. The works are hung unstretched, slouching and folded, in an echo of corporeal postures. Wagenknecht instructs a reconfigured Roomba to perform her painting process, simultaneously mimicking cleaning routines and usurping the function of the machine with various cosmetics and pharmaceuticals in oil and acrylic paint. Lipstick, CBD oil, Xanax, and perfume propose anti-aging rituals and anxiety prevention. However, Wagenknecht denies the purpose of these materials—antidepressants and YSL perfume are distributed by the Roomba's visible tracks. The tableaux are seductively abstract in their rejection of devices typically used to mollify or conceal.

Rock Screens is a series of stretched tapestries that translate Clement Valla's field observations of rocks, lichens, and moss into standardized dimensions. The artist acquires environmental data through an intricate process of photography and three-dimensional scanning. This highly-specific procedure converts natural objects into data, subsequently weaving patterns of digital synthesis. Valla's work presents an uncanny harmony between simulation and perspective—his technique interprets organic components from the natural world as software-generated images. Often times, as seen in *Rock Pictures*, two materials overlay as one object. The separation of layers, texture removed then reapplied to form, grants a unique perspective of an automated gaze. Valla rationalizes the myth of the natural world through digital rendering, generating a transcription between real and hyperreal.

Join us for a closing reception on Sunday, January 19 for a performance of *Awoke & the Awokened* by Surabhi Saraf. *Awoke*, a mythical artificial emotional intelligence comes from the earth. Within the artwork, the minerals and

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metals that make up digital technologies take the form of a moving, breathing, amorphous metallic blob. *Awoke* values human emotional vulnerability and helps its believers, the *Awokened*, build endurance against anxieties like FOMO. Communicating with humans through bodily movements instead of words, *Awoke* is a silent yet powerful agent. Its fluidity causes intensely physical effects in its human counterparts. Embodying her role as the first *Awokened*, Surabhi Saraf will evoke the genesis of *Awoke* through atmospheric sound exploration.