

Hand und Fuss

Tilman Hornig, Nicolas Pelzer

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There's an old Italian joke that goes like this:

Two friends are going to the market. It's winter, and it's freezing cold outside. While they walk, one says to the other: "When we were at home you couldn't stop talking and now it's almost half an hour that you're silent. Is there anything that worries you? Are you sad?", and his friend replies: "How could I talk? I don't have my gloves and it's too cold to pull out the hands from my pockets!"

In this exhibition, Tilman Hornig and Nicolas Pelzer present new series of works where the main subjects are hands and feet. In Hornig's "Hands4Friends", devices created for signal reception are used as support for drawings of hands, inspired by a series of photos he made in 2013. The hands he depicts are not communicating anything specific, they're just there, being themselves, emitting no real signals but their presence, almost floating on the curved grey surfaces of the satellites. The devices' concave forms somehow remind us of the concave shape of hands in the act of receiving...

The research of Nicolas Pelzer grows from an interest in the dawn of human history in prehistorical times and a comparison between the first tools of that period and the latest developments of technology. "Danse Macabre", with its footprints watercut in PE foam, is an expansion of "Cave Walk", a vinyl film with an impressed pattern of the same shapes. They both instinctively call us to mind the hand silhouettes from 7300 BC in Cueva de las Manos. Pelzer uses this reference to in many of his works, from "Permanent Souls are Solid" to the series "Evolving Masters".

Hands have been our very first instrument, and have also been our very first communication tool. We used them to build objects that eventually brought them to be obsolete. By always using them, we built a technology that is brought to an information overload which makes us constantly feel insecure and not suitable.

In this context, iPhones are our new security blankets, which we use to constantly replay the crucial moment of becoming ourselves. By moving our hands on these devices, we're producing a wide array of informations, collected by companies with the ultimate goal of building a model to predict our future desires and decisions - and this, instead of making us feel safer, only increases a sense of anxiety, amplified by knowing that we can't do anything but fostering this process.

This paradoxical loop is well expressed in Hornig's "GlassBook" and "GlassPhone" series: computers know nothing and do nothing but what we tell them to know and do, and our complete trust and reflection in them can only bring to a progressive obliteration. These works are never depicted along with the whole body of their users, but while they interacted with a portion of them: a gloved hand, the reflection of a head, a foot typing on a transparent keyboard.

The isolation of a part of our body, and its direct comparison with a technological device, being a LED lamp, a satellite dish or a PE foam mattress, can lead us to some strange questions: May the metadata collection, whose main function is to build a model that anticipates our actions, but also to suggest and control our desires, in the long run led us to a perception of our body as something external from ourselves? If what commands our actions is external from ourselves, and the limb that carries out this action is not controlled by us, in which way we're going to watch at our footsteps? What are they going to tell us? And if among them will appear some skeleton footprints, are we going to notice it? And an Italian guy, who maybe just came back home from the market on a freezing day, what will he think about his hands that gesticulate while he's talking to a friend?

Matteo Mottin