

## Thread

The term *thread* has many connotations, relating to craft and technology in the contemporary artist's studio and in culture at large.

The curatorial model of *Thread* physically emulates the structure of a web log. Here at Wood Street Galleries, the exhibition is parsed into four categories, simulating threads in a conversation about the resurrection of craft aesthetics within technology-based contemporary art making.

Craft and technology have always been linked. *Craft* has many meanings, all related to the making of art or objects: a mastery of skill; the hand-made quality of a designed object; an object that has a purpose; a hobby form. Craft itself has always been based in material technologies, but technologies also exist in the form of languages, as tools to transfer information. Today we have advanced these earlier technologies – languages – as media to facilitate our need for exchange.

Earlier crafts included a multitude of materials used for domestic, social, and ritual purposes. Today the materials include computers, programming languages, software, cell phones, and mass media. These materials result in crafted forms that are not unlike iterative, hand-me-down, repaired and collectively infused objects that are loaded with plural narratives generated from a rich legacy of many makers and many voices. The objects are both things, and containers for socially rich ornamentation and personal expression, like desktops, ring tones, hacks, and customizations. Applied crafts have ancient roots; these are passed down through generations, both through vocation, and as markers in history. Contemporary, technologically-based crafts might not be made of literal materials like wood, ceramic, cloth or metal but rather of code (with coder as craftsman), signal, or interactive objects.

Craft is generative; it reproduces in both form and mastery of medium. Today's technological objects embody a collection of crafted actions, and are malleable in how they might be realized as designed objects– as tools and instigators of intellectual contemplation. The frame for these constructed works has shifted towards a more sociological context, one that explores the evolving terrain of technology's effects on the individual and group, or public.

Computer and internet technologies act as extensions of our physical bodies and minds, to a virtual space in which we play and live. These constructs allow the user to devise new ways to collect, navigate, communicate, and even develop multiple identities and landscapes. Now that almost two decades have passed since personal computers and the internet have existed, the public is fluent with these new languages and objects as part of everyday use. This fluency in turn empowers makers to continue the evolution of technology at large. Here the makers' skills enable them to recraft these platforms, and question the utopian ideas that are currently grafted onto the currency of technology.

Contemporary objects have dual functions of utility and ornament, and like hand-crafted relics of the past, they push at the processes of production and definitions of art. These applications of traditional craft aesthetics within contemporary art practice provide the most democratic of the arts to date.

The exhibition, *Thread* and the works all refer to craft in the functional sense of the word: as expertise in a medium, and as the construction of an object that is multidimensional – either as a sociological tool or as a personal perspective. The application of traditional craft, aesthetics, which are sometimes sentimental, and often tactile, positions the makers' viewpoints both against and among the flood of technology today.

Within four physical threads inside of the gallery, twelve artists' use information that is derived from information technologies, software, gaming, mass media, and video.

### **1st Thread**

Making direct use of traditional craftworks, these installations create narrative illustrations from information related to layered societal patterns, information technology and science.

**Ursula Endlicher's** *Website Wigs* installation is formed from microsoft.com, google.com and apple.com. These objects are manifestations of the way websites are written – how they are scripted and programmed – into a set of instructions for braiding, color-coding and knotting the hair of wigs. The wigs articulate the human's and the network's reliance on one another, and make a relationship of purposeful objects – the wig, the browser, the site, the code. Here the language of code is rendered as a wig; the wig itself is a useful object for a wearer, just as the internet is a useful tool for a surfer.

Endlicher incorporates these physical and sociological viewpoints in her performances as well, in which she does web "impersonations," taking the source code and traffic as a directional map to express movement. *Website Wigs* visualizes data traffic and translates its nature into a parallel design structure. The wigs become accurate temporal markers of data traffic on the net, as well as literalize the conveyance of information by using the raw material of web data as the impetus for a sculptural installation.

**Yael Kanarek's** sculptural installation *SPIN\_LOCK* is composed of embroidered sheer organza ribbon. At once ironic and literal, the ribbon is a rendering of the twenty-seven files found in the kernel directory of Linux source code. Concurrently displayed is a video loop, *Schedule\_task*, in which the narrative states, "the ribbon is tested as a second skin that traps her traveler in a soft wear causing the traveler to execute over and over some basic functions of an operating system such as multitasking and sleep mode."

Both of these works are derived from Kanarek's ongoing project [www.worldofawe.com](http://www.worldofawe.com), a journal based on a traveler's journey between Manhattan and the virtual landscape of sunset-sunrise. The traveler is looking for an unknown treasure. The dualities of player/traveler and game/life are realized as one navigates through the journals and effectively becomes the traveler, in search of the treasure. Within the gallery space, one finds an artifact from the artist's experience of her own sojourn in creating the *world of awe*. She too acts as the traveler or narrator and, like the video of the traveler, becomes trapped in her own information. Kanarek makes a poetic statement about the mirroring of human experience in both her narrative and in the uses of technology. The *world of awe* grounds us in the realization that we too *schedule task* and *spin and lock*, as we adapt to our environment and the technologies available to us, just as the Linux source code embroiders itself into her crafted sculptural installation.

**Marina Zurkow's** new sculptures, *Data Buoys*, push the definition of the animated. The vertical forms presented are animated with videos, nested within coiling silicone structures. The videos reference computer graphics' filters, but are actually unadulterated captures of nature. Throughout the artist's career, she has created layered narratives from a combination of moving images and icons, used to navigate both personal and complex social commentaries. This installation activates the evolving term of sculpture, and choreographs information as a time-based installation that adheres to Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message." Both media are part of the narrative: the silicone structure as an inert conductor and transmitter of information, and the computer crafted "filters" of documented incidents of nature. The layering of medium and information explores the pervasive language of "data" and questions, what is natural? How can we pursue "natural" through the filters of technology (e.g. language, systems, and media all being designed information)? Zurkow approaches her perceptions of nature through the use of first person narratives, and uses both video and sculptural vocabulary.

**Devorah Sperber** exhibits *After Vermeer 2, 2006*. Based on *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*, (1665-1666) by Johannes Vermeer, Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague. Sperber utilizes digital technology in order to explore the biology of vision: how the eyes and brain process sensory data. Like many artists that merge science and art, the artifact is the representation of intensive research and experimentation. Through iconic composition and ordinary materials, Sperber engages the viewer in an experiment. At first glance the image is received as an abstraction, likened to an enlarged pixilation, with beautiful gradated colors of an almost-noticeable pattern; then through the lens that she literally provides, the viewer comes to see the iconic image. This visual climax gives a temporal dimension to the piece, leading viewers through an experimental investigation that culminates in the recognition of a perceptual object.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Thread**

Communal crafts exist throughout the history of society. These social networks continue to thrive in contemporary, technologically driven works.

**Knitta** employs the tactics of graffiti in the public domain, and in the structure of the “crew.” This collective of seven create site-specific installations which “represent” as colorful knitted shields for the urban terrain. Street art, including Graffiti, is a honed craft and a sociological discipline. Knitta addresses street aesthetics with regard to skills, production, and autonomy. The collective says, “We prove that disobedience can be beautiful and that knitting can be outlaw”.

The Dalai Lama said “Learn the rules so we can break them properly”. Rules allow for a conversation that begins from an equality of voices, allowing for debate and evolution. All creative interventions are strengthened by principles of laws and traditions of a society.

**Andy Deck** flips the script with his *Screening Circle, 2006*. The work gives the user a central role in producing the images that are projected for this exhibition. The title *Screening Circle* recollects the collaborative tradition of the quilting circle, as well as participative forums like the round table. The medium – the software written by the artist – focuses attention on the nature of software-mediated creativity and freedom of expression. The traditional roles of artist and spectator are reversed, but the role of software remains a structured, interactive platform that invites new modes of interpretation. *Screening Circle* bears a direct relationship to the quilting circle, through the convergence of individual contributions to a community that is creating an ongoing narrative.

## **The 3<sup>th</sup> thread**

Collage could be seen as a method of “quilting” a layer of information. The process of collage requires a data bank of information (material). To make collage, all action is predicated on collecting, and today people are voracious collectors of information. We collect our favorite web sites, songs, images, and even friends through the use of data banks, browsers, P2P platforms, and network communities. Exhibited are several approaches to collage, from artists who use the medium of collage to make visual representations of their collections, to audio visual assemblages.

**Michael Anderson** takes a traditional approach to the medium of collage. He is a mad collector of mass media, reforming the actions of advertising. The streets are his source; he looks at the repetitions, and formulates pictorial narratives from designed information. Anderson’s iconic landscapes act as a pictorial language that has been remixed, layered, and reformed to position the maker’s perspective as it is drawn from the pulse of a consumer society.

**Gunthrie Lonergone** is an internet collector; exhibited are a series of collages entitled *My Thumbs & Robot Stoppers* that come from the hundreds of thumbnails and “Captchas” that he has hand picked and amassed. “Captchas” is an acronym for “Completely Automated Public

Turing Test to Tell Computers and Humans Apart". "Captchas" are tests developed to protect the human from the ID thieves'; the artist says he likes these types of tests because "they're sort of a validation of your human-ness, which is a nice feeling. A test you don't really even have to think about," he continues, these tests are intended to create a sense of accomplishment when you are identified as Human. In *My Thumbs & Robot Stoppers*, Lonergone uses his collection of found objects as trophies that stand as a parody of humanness.

**Tal Hadad** presents *Loaded*, a series of micro-radio broadcasts of American music hits configured as an audio visual installation. These pop anthems are transformed into the sonic context of their reception; to a specific public in the gallery. Artist-created bootlegs are remixed with field recordings from places such as China, Turkey, Rio and New York, creating a global sonic composition with iconic visuals obtained from mass media. The installation *Loaded* is loaded, and inserts the aesthetic of the bootleg culture into the context of the gallery.

**Cat Mazza's** *Knitoscope Testimonies* is the first web-based video using "Knitoscope" software, a program that translates digital video into knitted animation. The software generates a stitch that corresponds with each pixel's color, based on imported video source material. The title "Knitoscope" is based on Edison's early animation technology, the Kinetoscope, which was a "coin operated peep show machine; watched through a magnifying lens, this machine eventually led to the birth of American movie culture. *Knitoscope Testimonies* was realized under Mazza's multidisciplinary project Microrevolt (<<http://turbulence.org/works/microRevolt>>), whose dynamic name suggests social change through community acts. Mazza's community is a network that upholds open source principles, craft and digital aesthetics. Here the "testimonies" consist of professionals who work against sweatshop labor. This piece is one action of Microrevolt's that engages the public through art and craft, towards political ends.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> thread

The use of video and the structures of game engines create complex narratives that intertwine medium, production and the effect of games on society at large. Here we will see two works that use the game as metaphor in their first person narratives about life. Each uses the game as an historical context, in relation to ideas of psyche and identity.

**Anne-Marie Schleiner's** *PS2 Diaries* (2004) is an eleven-minute machinima video. Machinima is a form of video generation that uses a game engine to create narrative works, by manipulating the prepackaged characters, stage and platform of the game itself. In *PS2 Diaries*, Schleiner collages a first person narrative into a complex of five game engines: *The Sims*, *Final Fantasy*, *SSX Tricky*, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, and *Grand Theft Auto*. Proceeding from the Sims, we explore an autobiographical account of the development and experience of a teenage girl. Schleiner efficiently crafts a cyclical relationship between the gaming world and homogenized society.

**Carlo Zanni's** *The Average Shoveler* was inspired by the graphic layout of *Leisure Suit Larry I* (1987). This piece is presented as an online game that straddles the aesthetics of movie, game and real life. *The Average Shoveler* contains a simple set of rules that provoke the viewer/player into trying to "win" the game by shoveling a clean path in New York City during a snow storm. Each snowflake contains imagery taken from an assortment of web channels. It is impossible to clear a path in the falling snow, between the crowds of people and constant interruptions. This character is defeated before he begins, exposing the impossibility to consume – or shovel away – the massive amount of information being fed daily to the average citizen.

In *Thread*, the crafted object is not as literal as an ornamental object; rather, it is a mediated object that positions the maker's explorations of the abundance of information. The maker is establishing a position in the constant state of flux of information and evolution of technologies. Today's makers are called upon to use their skill in order to carve out the marks of human traits, sentiments, heritages, and a sense of communal – a base place for the you, the we and the I.

