

Art and Cake, August 31, 2017

Katie Herzog, Rubbing the Internet Archive
By Jody Zellen



The Internet Archive is a non profit digital library based in San Francisco whose mission it is to provide free public access to digitized materials, bringing “universal access to all knowledge.” Founded by Brewster Kahle in 1996 with the purpose of archiving and preserving the World Wide Web, it now has copies of over 279 billion web pages (around 17.2 billion megabytes of data). Kahle also created the Wayback Machine—an online tool that captures every website made since 1996 in the form in which it was created. The Wayback Machine is often used to retrieve lost information on web pages that no longer exist. The Archive oversees numerous digitization projects including Grateful Dead concerts and the collections from myriad American libraries. Since 2009 the Archives have been housed in a former Christian Science Church in San Francisco. The relationship between the virtual space of the internet and the physical presence of the building makes for a curious irony. This juxtaposition fascinated Los Angeles based artist Katie Herzog.

The internet is an amorphous source of ever expanding information that in many ways has no definable physical presence. It is somewhat paradoxical that an archive of digital information is stored in an imposing classical building with columns on its facade. Herzog contacted Kahle and asked if she could make a rubbing of the building’s facade. Intrigued, Kahle agreed, so Herzog and her assistants arrived in San Francisco with rolls of fabric and special black wax used for gravestone rubbing and for four days proceeded to rub the entire facade. The finished drawing measures 84 feet wide by 10 feet tall and will be installed on the walls of Klowden Mann gallery

from September 9 – October 14 in an exhibition entitled “Rubbing the Internet Archive.”

Herzog’s work-life and art-life are inter-connected and many of her projects have focused on archives and libraries. She is currently the Director of the Molesworth Institute (an absurdist librarian organization founded in 1956) and a repository for librarians. Herzog has also worked in libraries at the Rhode Island School of Design, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Southern California Institute of Architecture, Monterey County Free Libraries, and the Whittier Public Library.

Her research/library related projects include Transtextuality (Senate Bill 48) (2012) a project that consists of 48 monochromatic oil portraits of Trans Men and Women of Letters, created in response to Gerhard Richter’s 48 portraits of Men of Letters (1972). While Richter made photorealistic paintings of images culled from the encyclopedia, the subjects of Herzog’s 48 Portraits have been systematically excluded from history books. Herzog’s research took place in community-built digital archives and many of the file sizes of the images she used as references for her portraits were too small to see, so in some cases she had to attempt semi-realism from an abstraction. The project not only functions as a record of transgender history but it also highlights the importance and growing dependence on digital archiving. For her Altered State Library, (2014) at Monte Vista Projects, Herzog created a suite of paintings depicting the interior of the public library branch closest to the gallery. Each view was painted through the lens of a different psychedelic drug. In this project Herzog sought to “comment on the way culture is moving toward an increasingly digitized realm and how library buildings are becoming defined through the experience of them versus their content.”

Herzog is interested in “the structure of knowledge in society” and her artistic practice involves translation and transformation. Her works are very much process driven and utilize a wide range of methodologies and materials, such as paint, yarn, encaustic or performance. Her current project, Rubbing the Internet Archive, is about the physicality of gesture, mark-making and the transformation of three dimensions into two. Herzog and her five on-site helpers climbed ladders holding large rolls of non-fusible interfacing over the facade, carefully rubbing the texture of its surface — doors, ornamentation, construction date (1923)— with Oldstone Cupcake Rubbing Wax. As the creators’ rubbing styles were different, the final drawing is not uniform in terms of its density or texture. But that was hardly the point of the endeavor. While the work functions as a map of the building and documentation of a physical place, what Herzog set out to do was call attention to the physical presence of something ephemeral and to question the relationship between a classical building and the bits of information housed on the servers within.

Rubbing the Internet Archive on view at Klowden Mann gallery from September 9 – October 14

<https://artandcakela.com/2017/08/31/katie-herzog-rubbing-the-internet-archive/>