

## ***Into the atmosphere***

*Look at the sky and watch it change. White clouds bloom and linger. Then wind picks up, and thin veils unfurl across an infinite expanse. Afternoon light casts lighter and then darker shadows until a low sun scatters deep colour across the horizon.*

Images fill the atmosphere in *Over Time*. Using photo-based installation, artist Hazel May Eckert creates conditions for the viewer to experience images as phenomena prone to atomization. Eckert's love of printed matter – print images, photography, and printmaking – is a fulcrum in her art practice. The starting point for *Over Time* is an ever-expanding collection of found images from print publications. Using the studio at The Rooms, a personal archive, and a digital darkroom, Eckert exposed found images to layered processes of deconstruction and textile printing. What emerges is an immersive environment in which images coalesce as sculpture and dissolve as contrails across an open sky.

## ***Evaporation***

In the gallery, strips of sheer fabric hang like rolls of photo negatives or image scrolls on social media. Though linear lines of images are familiar forms, Eckert's banners hover in a critical space between material and immaterial. As ambiguous message-carriers, they ask us to consider how vapours of visual information make up the air we breathe.

Grounding her experiments with light in the physical world, Eckert used a photocopier (a large object with considerable gravitational force) to reproduce, reconstitute, and recirculate found imagery already in the process of evaporation. Cut from the margins, cropped, or recaptured from her camera roll, Eckert used the machine's basic settings and pre-sets to alter patterns with textures and tones suggesting topography, landscape or organic growth. Allowing her paper-bound practice to expand into the field of textiles, Polysheer fabric gives volatile imagery a permeable, gossamer surface. As Eckert's images break down in floods of natural light what particles of meaning remain?

## ***Swift currents***

Eckert encourages images to linger in stillness while investigating how they move. She references the film reel as a well-worn – perhaps even weathered – technology. Film reels bring a sequence of still images to life at a standard 24 frames per second. Quantifying the speed of images in the digital ether is quite a different matter. Long since released into a weightlessness of pixelation, in what direction, at what speed, do digital images move?

Nowhere fast. This is the argument of filmmaker and writer Hito Steyerl. In her essay, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” she describes a visual universe in which images, shedding mass, or *resolution*, move faster and faster with every upload, download, resize, and re-share. The “poor image” is a low-resolution mutation travelling cheaply (on high speed Wi-Fi) from an unknown place of origin. Steyerl argues this “transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction.”<sup>1</sup>

In line with Steyerl, *Over Time* sets the scene for a powerful shift in value and meaning toward aimless, weightless images. Slipping seamlessly along unpredictable jet streams of photo sharing, a growing mass of images collect no dust and gather no moss. What, if anything, remains material?

### ***Shadow bodies***

It becomes a question of presence. At four o'clock in the afternoon, sunlight transforms the everyday objects in the studio: lamps, material samples, electrical cords, coffee cups, clippings, and test prints become a range of full-bodied shadows. Out of personal pleasure and curiosity, Eckert began to document each day's shifting light on her iPhone. Over time, the intimate play of light and shadow began to take form as a daily personal reflection on time and place. Keeping a notebook is an action. It is the very essence of staking claim to experience the here and now. Visual or otherwise, “our notebooks give us away, for however dutifully we record what we see around us, the common denominator of all we see is always, transparently, shamelessly, the implacable “I.”<sup>2</sup> Though no human subject or figure (or shadow of a figure) is visible in the frames, Eckert's shadow images give us glimpses into her personal relationship with time and place. Yet, as temporal compositions, Eckert's contrasts of form and shape remain open to interpretation, the way clouds lend insight into impermanence and the nature of the sky.

1 Steyerl, Hito. "In Defense of the Poor Image," *e-flux journal* #10, 2009, 1-9.

2 Didion, Joan. "On keeping a notebook," *The Short Prose Reader*, Gilbert H. Muller and Harvey S. Weiner, eds. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1979. 34-42.

Penelope Smart is an arts writer and independent curator.