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Brass Art

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Digital Doubles

Replication of the self and engagement with liminal spaces has informed our collaborative practice. 3D body scanning, processing and digital printing proffered new methods of engagement as yet uncharted to capture ourselves faithfully. (<http://www.brassart.org.uk>) Test body scans suggested the potential to reveal public and private aspects of 'the self' – representing both the physiological and psychological aspects of a subject.

Digitised Doubles was a practice led enquiry funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK). The aim of the investigation was to examine how artists might creatively engage with the possibilities afforded by advances in 3D scanning, 3D software applications and 3D rapid prototyping to achieve self-portrait exploring the poise and unique character of an individual subject.

The enquiry was informed by two non-invasive 3D body scanning sessions in which the artists explored the creative potential of this technology. Imagining how each artist's body would fold around or into a virtual counterpart enabled us to individually enter a state of reverie where the real and the imagined could co-exist in this liminal framework. This performative process was determined by the dimensions of the booth and our ability to hold a position for the requisite 8 seconds.

Cloud data, derived from the two sessions, was collected, converted and exported into 3D modeling environments where it was painstakingly repaired and manipulated. This retained the faithful representation captured by the reflected light which was closer to a photographic image or cast than a portrait modelled from observation.



Fig. 1: Brass Art: Inside the Invisible

Nothing has made me realise the perceptual change between a sculpted figure and a 'real' print, formed from the coordinates of the artists' bodies, more than these semi transparent figures. They appear to be miniature facsimiles of the artists and at first sight make you blink in disbelief; more super-real than any Duane Hanson, Ron Mueck or waxwork sculpture. (Lilley, Clare, 2008, p11)

Virtual 3D objects were physically incorporated into each portrait to occupy the predefined spaces articulated in the scanning booth. The playful manipulation of the body's anatomical boundaries through metamorphosis coupled with the evolution of individual narrative tableaux, enabled the artists' portraits to shift between the real and the virtual – as they had in our imaginations. It is this virtual suturing that informs our practice and has led to a series of installations including Moments of Death and Revival, Inside the invisible and Rooted and Established.

An uncanny feeling is evoked by the digital doubles. This is true both for ourselves and those who know us, as well as strangers who often describe the memories they stir. The digital doubles enable us to occupy a place outside and beside ourselves. Our 3D replicas are a literal outworking of our narcissistic capabilities for self observation, rendering new meaning for the idea of the double.

As Freud observes,

The double was originally an insurance against the extinction of the self or, as Rank puts it 'an energetic denial of the power of death', and it seems likely that the 'immortal' soul was the first double of the body. (Freud, Sigmund, 2003, p 142)

In the kinetic work *Moments of Death and Revival 2008*, the 3D artefacts produced through this process became props in an expanded shadow play, where the artists were presented as replicated and morphed hybrids engaging in a mythical danse macabre. A travelling light allowed transformations to appear and disappear, the metamorphic elements to spring to life and the shadowy tableaux to unfold.

[...] in Brass Art's phantasmagorias, animated shadows have the quality of spatial singularities; they open another dimension inside the photographic world, a dream-like register. (Milne, Louise, 2008)

The desire to further explore the out-of-body experience of our virtual selves resulted in the three screen video installation *Inside the Invisible*. In this work each screen represents the space occupied by one of the three artists – their wire frame images brought to life, in turn, by the journey of a virtual camera. The resulting data field re-imagines the conjoined body of artist and animal as a grid like carapace, navigable as both an external and internal landscape, and through this passage an intimate and shifting relationship between each of the artists and their counterpart is revealed. This is emphasised as the sonic composition by Monty Adkins traces the visual exchange between their data and resonates with the unfolding narrative.

References

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