

## nowhereness | an installation

Nowhereness implies a lack of place, or a place defined by absence: absence of body, of consciousness, of self. It's also an awkward word, something one might say, and that places the one who says it, grounds the one in nowhere, as in nowheresville - in other words a place defined by others, a weak place, almost but not quite nonexistent. Kelk's works in this exhibition deal with aspects of this place/lessness.

Nowheresville relates to Gertrude Stein's 'There is no there there,' a form of rootlessness. Pottery, clay, relates to the opposite, to a grounding in the earth, an insistence on place defined by clay and glaze. Village on a Motherboard veers between figure and ground, between real and virtual; its ostensible subject is that of the rootless, people who are displaced, placeless, in the real world - people who might or might not connect with the virtual, through computer technology. The Village is almost adobe-like, as if it were built from local ground; the earth, however - the motherboard - is Mother or Matrix, but this Mother carries the virtual through her circuitry. So the work has an uneasy basis; it's neither here nor there, but an object of and for meditation, a vessel for thinking through the real.

The Characters are another story, their own story, told through their immersion, their entanglement with the keyboard itself. Kelk wanted to give them a chance to speak, the potential for speech; at the same time, as inert clay, they're rendered, were born, mute. Think of them as giving life to the Village, or the Village as a kind of processing of their lives. The Screening piece carries this further: the characters are embedded in computer monitors, which allows them both to be screened, and to screen. To the extent that the Characters reference the extremely old, the Screening exists as a parallel to the nursing home, to a Screening of lives fading out. To the extent that they reference other outcasts, they relate to social classification systems, for example energized by the keyboard itself, sent through the motherboard. These pieces together mutely interact with computer technology and human beings - human bodies tending towards abjection, towards decay.

What fascinates me about these three assemblages is their sway between ontologies and systems, between states of being and the programming structures inherent in computation. The fiction is everywhere obvious; the motherboard, keyboard, and monitors aren't functional; they're models. But it's this modeling that takes the pieces out of the realm of collage, and into something else, this moment of contemplation.

The fourth group, the Mirrors, is more of a grouping of pieces; the heads are present, but in landscapes that seem simultaneously to embed them, and to represent their own internalized embedding, their encapsulation within a bleak habitus or social reality. The computer paraphernalia has been absorbed within the heads, which then projects the virtual as foregrounding them. In a sense, this is the endpoint, the finality of the virtual-digital, our

digital hallucination - when the virtual becomes absorbed to the extent that it appears real, and therefore returns the bodies to themselves, with all the disaster and forlorn presence that might imply.

I tend to think that one might invert this interpretation (just as there are already many inversions in the work), that one might think that the heads, the Characters, are not only gaining control or speech through the keyboard, but also a kind of mastery of the world around them. In this sense, the assemblages are reassembling as a kind of production-machine, breathing life both into the fictitious computer and clay heads and environs - and in this sense we have Golems on our hands...

- Alan Sondheim

*Nowhere* by Margie Kelk, an installation in five components, June 20 to July 14, 2012 at the Red Head Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.