

## ***Short Circuit***

**New work by: Barber, Sheida Soleimani, Cassie Tompkins, and Lauren Valley Curated by Elizabeth Lalley**

**April 6 - April 28, 2018**

**Opening reception: Friday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 6-9 PM**

Through photography, collage, video, and textile, the four artists in *Short Circuit* respond to the circulation of imagery and information within digital mass media, as they disrupt, reject, or dissect contemporary modes of image production and consumption. Employing strikingly different visual languages and critical sensibilities, these artists are united by an attempt to redirect digital currents towards a material grounding, rooted in the messiness of human output. At moments wry and dissonant, each work in the exhibition draws out issues of identity, subjectivity, and politics embedded in globalized media.

Created from mash-ups of Instagram screenshots, Barber's collaged prints expose the influence of algorithms on the imagery in our social media feeds. Fused side-by-side, the screenshots show how particular contents, signifiers, and shapes morph from one image to the next: digital equations that analyze our virtual identities and suggest if we like that, we might like this. Overlaying his own marks on each image, Barber adopts a critical distance, exposing how virtual computations are tailored to each human subject.

Layers of symbolism and recombined imagery can likewise be found in the work of Sheida Soleimani, whose practice melds sculpture, collage, and photography to expose socio-political currents in Iran, often sourcing material from popular press, media trends, and the dark web. In the artist's newest body of work, "Medium of Exchange," staged tableaus explore the tangled dynamics of power, corruption, and violence that play out between leaders of oil-rich OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) nations and the West. In the work on view in *Short Circuit*, a female body is masked by the face of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman—Time Magazine's "Person of the Year" in 2017—as the letters of "Time" drip ominously with oil: a gesture to the petroleum industry's male-dominated systems.

Adopting the alter ego of "Junie Genius" for her YouTube channel, Lauren Valley riffs on the archetype of the "mad scientist"—typically male and white—as she invents robotic devices to aid her with various dilemmas, which are often outlandish or wryly existential (a robot to wipe your tears, for instance). The devices are frequently unsuccessful, however, as each video contains a degree of structured chaos and an aesthetic of failure. Unlike the polished finish of typical "maker" videos, Valley's series balances rough, lo-fi elements with considered cuts. Expertly weaving together art, robotics, and satire, "Junie Genius" is, among many

things, a humorous display of counter-technology and an embrace of creative possibility.

Cassie Tompkins deliberately departs from the digital realm and turns to analog methods for her vividly colorful, hand-printed textiles. The colors and shapes of quotidian life—increasingly steeped in the digital worlds behind our screens—take on a shifting, ambiguous nature within Tompkins' textiles. Improvised and organic, each piece of cloth presents tactility and the relational nature of color (unmediated by a device) as means of revising the sensory overload of virtual space.

Graduating Cum Laude in the MFA program at the University of Iowa, **Barber** uses interdisciplinary art practices to articulate various testimonies within and surrounding Black America. Most recent scholarships include fellowship at The Union Contemporary, Stanley Grant award from the University of Iowa, Alonzo Davis Award from Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Selected exhibitions include but are not limited to Englert Theatre (Iowa City, IA), Museum of Science (Chicago), Public Artwork on Atlanta BeltLine (Atlanta, GA), Rialto Theatre (Atlanta, GA), C4 Atlanta (Atlanta, GA), Lexington Theatre (Kentucky), Mason Murer Gallery (Atlanta, GA), Gallery 4731 (Detroit, MI), Levitt Gallery, (Iowa City).

**Sheida Soleimani** (b.1990) is an Iranian-American artist who lives in Providence, Rhode Island. The daughter of political refugees who were persecuted by the Iranian government in the early 1980s, Soleimani makes work that melds sculpture, collage, film, and photography to highlight her critical perspectives on historical and contemporary socio-political occurrences in Iran and the Greater Middle East. She focuses on media trends and the dissemination of societal occurrences in the news, adapting images from popular press and social media leaks to exist within alternate scenarios. Soleimani's research and work critically references the Eurocentrism that pervades the study of art and art history. She is specifically interested in the intersections of art and activism, as well as how social media has shaped the landscape in current political affairs and uprisings. Her work has been recognized internationally in both exhibitions and publications such as Artforum, The New York Times, The Huffington Post, Interview Magazine, VICE Magazine, amongst many others. She is most recently a recipient of the MacColl Johnson Fellowship, and is currently a professor at Brandeis University.

**Cassie Tompkins** is an artist and designer based in Chicago, IL. In 2001 she graduated with a BFA in photography from the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design and in 2011 received a BFA with a concentration in visual communication design from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has presented solo exhibitions at the Comfort Station and The Annex at Spudnik Press, both located in Chicago, IL. Tompkins was an inaugural FIELD/WORK resident at the Chicago Artist Coalition and this summer, she will attend the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts Open Studio Residency. Using a language of geometric and organic shapes and the sensational experience of color, she aims to capture the ephemeral of the everyday.

Her work encourages viewers to reconsider their own surroundings—to revise their perception of commonplace life—through material and designed transformations. She currently works as senior designer at the Art Institute of Chicago and is a freelance designer for Illinois Humanities.

**Lauren Valley** is a robotics and new media artist based in Pittsburgh, PA. Through video and mechatronic installation, Lauren attempts to explore stereotypes and gender barriers present in tech industries. Her work has been shown internationally at venues including the Athens Digital Arts Festival, the traveling exhibition of feminist video work, FEM TOUR TRUCK, and the Two Minute Film Festival at the Carnegie Museum of Art. Lauren completed a residency at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) in 2016 and at ACRE, July 2017.