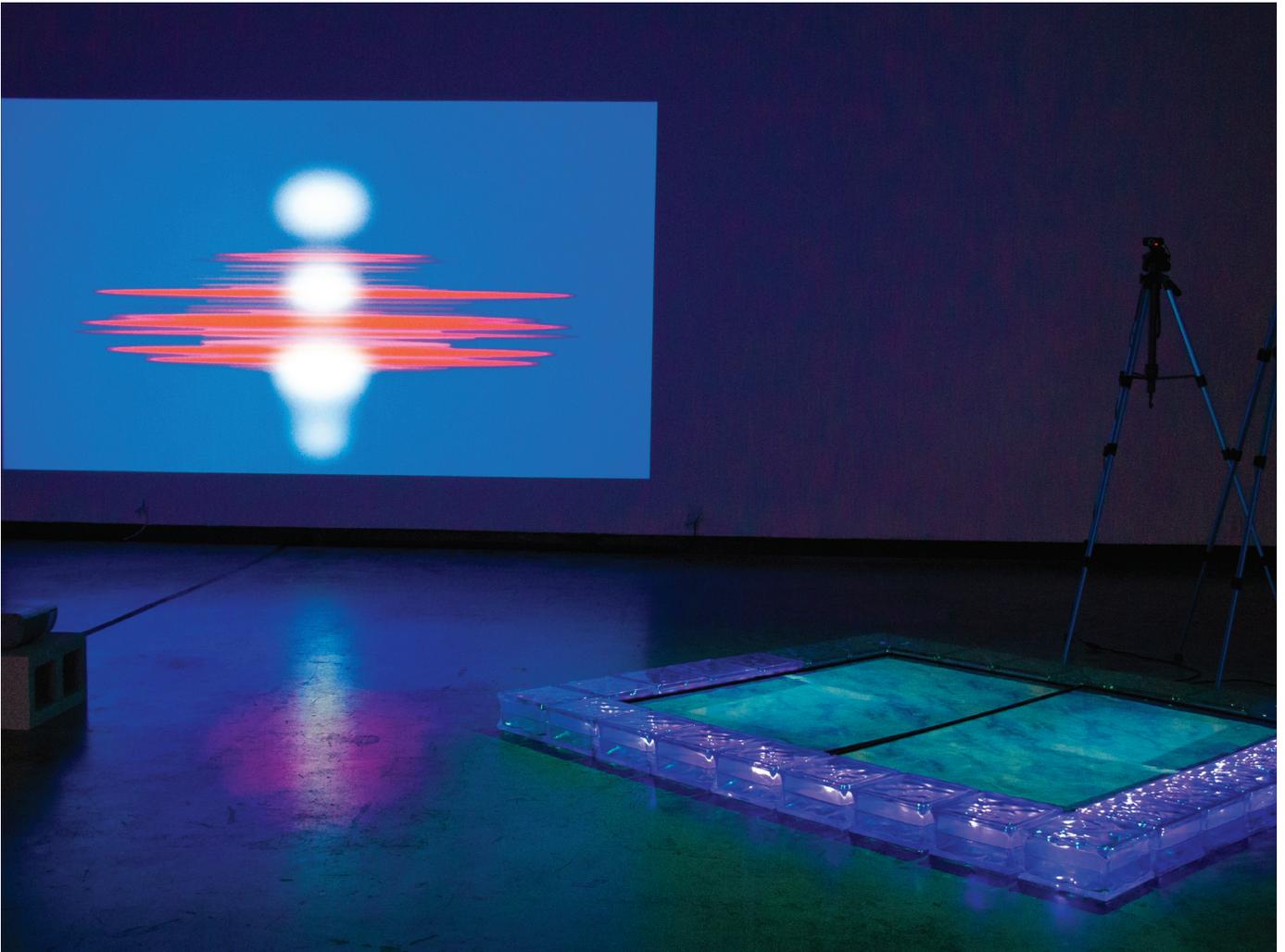


MELANIE CLEMMONS

LIKES CHARGE



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

AUGUST 13 - OCTOBER 9, 2020

AUSTIN, TEXAS

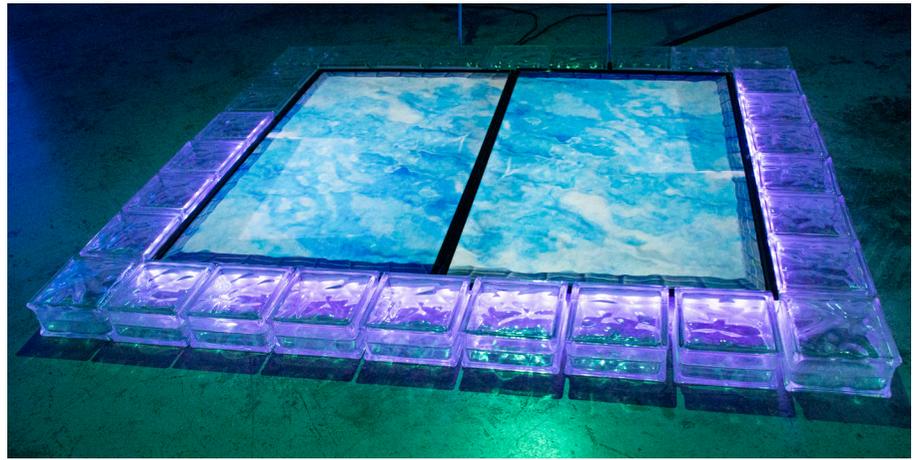
LIKES CHARGE



In 2015, the concept of the “emoji spell” appeared on the internet via Tumblr along with the phrase “Likes ‘charge’ and reblogs ‘cast’ a spell.” Digitally performed by self-identified cyber witches, colorful emojis were rearranged into magically crafted social media posts that communicate a desired outcome for a personal or collective cause. The emoji spell as an online phenomena is symbolic of our complex relationship with technology, characterized by *Techgnosis* author Erik Davis as one in which “Technology is neither a devil nor an angel. But neither is it simply a ‘tool,’ a neutral extension of some rock-solid human nature.” The more we lose sight of ourselves in the technosphere, the more we lend our futures to those who desire and dream on our behalf: technology is no longer neutral. *Likes Charge* is a multimedia exhibition that is in dialogue with these contentious spaces of technological imagination.

Melanie Clemmons is a media artist who explores a wide-range of themes that conceptually and philosophically investigate the effects of technology on humanity, society, and environment. From digital images, videos, performances, sculptures, and installations, to VR, her expansive multidimensional and multimedia(im)material practice merges old and new emerging forms of technology. As a critical practitioner of the internet and an autoethnographic cyberfeminist she also writes immersive browser-based experiences with an audiovisual language (including re-mixed .gifs, ready-made images and found audio clips) that resonates with early 1990s net.art and 2000s internet surf clubs or blogs.

“Enter if you Dare.” The landing page of melanieclemmons.com provokes our curiosity with a soft glowing text that points us to a mysterious dark portal twinkling with rainbow stars. Click. We spiral into the artist’s fantastical universe of synthesized artificial and natural interactive dreamscapes, hypnotic loops of digital ephemera, soft-spoken diaristic



Reflect (Reflection Pool), 2020, live input video sculpture, 60” x 80,” 1920 x 1080px

monologues, enticing cyber wiccan rituals and sparkly crystals, mystical artifacts from long-lost net archives, we find ourselves captivated by an otherworldly experience of time and space that feels all too familiar as 21st century digital nomads. Through the lens of art and magic, Clemmons destabilizes our position in the technosphere and reimagines our relationship with technology.

In *Likes Charge*, Melanie Clemmons explores the dichotomy that constitutes our complicated sentiments with digital devices and platforms. Technology is a double-edged sword that has the potential to either harm or heal our collective present and future. The multifaceted installation includes moving image projections, livestream and closed-circuit videos, sculptures, and website components that can be experienced both online and in-person. The experiential “livestream temple” invites us to hypnotically traverse into a state of trance. Mediated versions of ourselves are transmitted through multiple screens in real-time and our attention slows down as we start contemplating on our reflections. Wandering into a series of “metaphysical havens,” we are in constant negotiation with our presence that simultaneously exists and operates in the physical and digital realm. Included in the exhibition are web portals, cloud-based web translations of the gallery for online viewers that thicken this blurry relationship and further (de)materialize both physical space and

visitors into active participants of the remote virtual experience. With no prescribed beginning or ending, or directions as to how the work should be viewed, we become our own guide; we start shaping a meditative experience that reaches beyond gallery walls or web browsers, into a state of infinite continuum.

In the heart of the temple, *Reflect (Reflection Pool)* glistens on the floor with simulations of water lapping slowly on flatscreen monitors. Two nearby cameras on tripods render and distort our images in the pool, alluring us to fall into our own reflections. As Narcissus, a hunter in greek mythology who fell in love with his own image to his own detriment, we too contemplate on our obsession with selfies and perpetuation of filter bubbles -- a concept proposed by internet activist Eli Pariser on how algorithms selectively customize, predict, and recommend web searches based on our personal browsing history and has the potential to close us off from new ideas and information. The piece calls for a moment of calm and self-care, urging us to attend to ourselves that we ever so often easily detach from with meaningful slowness.

Just as we shape technology, technology shapes us by influencing the way we shape ourselves and each other. Where does this shaping take place? Whose dream are we living in and what values are perpetuated through the technologies we use everyday? Are we dreaming of a future that includes all of us? We find ourselves in the

eye of technocapitalism begrudgingly shaking hands with next-big-tech ideologies and values of innovation and exponential growth. We exchange our intimate and vulnerable moments, data and privacy, to access networked technologies that often leave us with a conflicting after-taste: connection yet isolation, protection yet violence, belonging yet division, truth yet misinformation. How do we ward off the darker side-effects of technological advancements and protect ourselves from being dragged into a black-mirrored dystopia?

Magic Circle holds the architecture of the temple. The video installation consists of four animated net.art projections created as a series of CSS compositions, a coding language that is used for stylizing HTML websites. The projections represent the classical elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Each are positioned corresponding to the cardinal directions of north, east, south, and west, casting a magic circle within the gallery. Clemmons refers to the magic circle's use in Wicca and other pagan spiritual traditions as a sacred space, in video games as place for the character to rest or build a skill, and in VR environments as the area of interactivity—each creating access to an “other” realm. In *Likes Charge*, *Magic Circle* is a protected space that is concentrated with sacred energy, in hopes of deflecting any nefarious consequences of technological dreaming.

It should be noted that the exhibition opened in the midst of a global pandemic. 6-foot-socially-distanced-human-beings were grateful to be connecting with one another through video chat applications, yet were feeling extremely exposed and fatigued with the intensification of screen-time in isolation. The Black Lives Matter movement refueled nationwide. Protesters and activists advocating against racially motivated crimes and violence towards Black people live-streamed raw footage that uncovered police brutality, yet were subjected to facial recognition without consent, resulting in numerous arrests of those in the frontline. *Observe (The Eye)* is a video sculpture that speaks to this paradoxical relationship we have with social technologies that surveil our daily activities. How can we secure a sense of agency and maintain a balanced relationship with personal electronic devices without erasing parts of ourselves in



Recharge (ClickfarmCrystalGrid), 2020, video sculpture & livestream, 3D resin prints, 38" x 30," 1920 x 1080px

the process? The eye of the temple livestreams the exhibition to both the web portal and a small screen that is physically attached to the piece itself. As the sculpture rotates and surveys the space, we have the option to either passively view our images being recorded live or actively engage and interact with the work. In other words, by moving with it or letting it move us, we make the decision on how we want to be seen, choose whether or not to be seen.

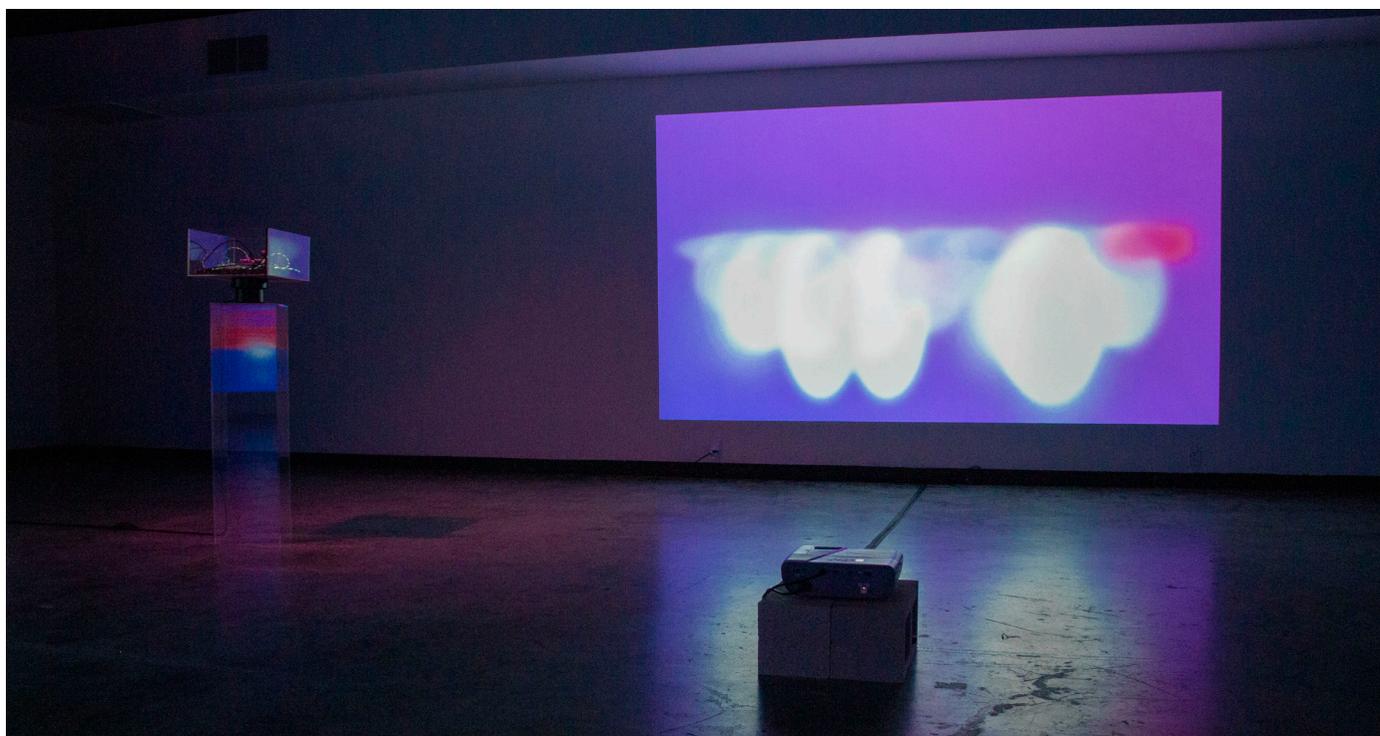
Every aspect of digital technology that has become akin to skin—including the smart devices we hold, user profiles we wear, algorithms we see through, information we think through—requires ongoing individual and societal care-work and maintenance. Clemmons reminds us that the moment we lose our love for humanity, we break our own magic circles of protection; we are driven into a fever-dream state of exploitation and exhaustion, left salivating for the vibrancy of human touch and compassion. *Recharge (ClickfarmCrystalGrid)* intends to help us mindfully reinvigorate and sustain an attentive relationship with technology through metaphysical and spiritual healing. The multimedia sculptural work is visually enchanting and reminiscent of early sci-fi portrayals of cyberspace, such as in the 1982 picture *Tron*. Seven smartphones, colorfully wired into a radiating hub, glow with videos that correspond to seven main chakras of the body and are each surrounded by 3d printed healing crystals. The worked-in abilities of each crystal *View Source Quartz*, *Securitate*, *Disruptine* are further delineated in a series of lenticular prints of .gif images on an adjacent wall.

Deriving inspiration from “click farms,” physical locations operated by real humans who generate fraudulent likes and follows for social media account holders seeking clout and traction, Clemmons farms energy from (im)material healing crystals as a remedy for an internet phenomena called “doom-scrolling.” Also known as the portable version of doom-surfing, doom-scrolling is an addictive information-seeking behavior exhibited by internet users who infinitely scroll through (often negative) social media feeds in a hyper-aroused state until the point of physical anxiety. The work rotates and fortifies the magic circle, doubling as a speculative generator that powers the mainframe of the temple and as an invigorator that rejuvenates the body.

Melanie Clemmons explores the (a)synchronicity between spiritual practices and beliefs on technology. Casting a spell that reawakens intuition and protects our agency in the technosphere, she reimagines networked technology as a metaphysical antidote for modern mind-body-spirits. *Likes Charge* is a magic circle, a mythic temple, a mesmerizing haven-in-the-making with no gatekeeper: open and accessible to those who seek to recharge and recenter their relationship with technology in order to critically navigate the world.



Laura Hyunjee Kim is a Korean-American multimedia artist and a PhD Candidate in Intermedia Art, Writing and Performance (IAWP), College of Media, Communication and Information at the University of Colorado Boulder.



Magic Circle: Earth, 2020, CSS Composition (& Video), 1920 x 1080px (gallery view)

Cover Panel: *Likes Charge*, 2020 (gallery view)

MELANIE CLEMMONS

EDUCATION

- 2015 MFA, Digital Art, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO
2010 MPS, Digital Art (Incomplete), NYU Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP), New York City, NY
2008 BA, Photocommunications, Honors Program, St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *AFTER WORLD CAM (Clemmons & Loyd)*, Sweet Pass Sculpture Park SP2, Dallas, TX
2019 *Virtual Healing*, Radial Gallery, Dayton, OH

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS / PERFORMANCES

- 2020 *World on Fire*, SUPERNOVA, Denver, CO
AREA 3, Dallas AURORA, Dallas, TX
My Life is A Movie, Emerald Gallery, Montréal, QC
Hydrangea, Nightstand Gallery, Twitch & Dallas, TX
Living Room, Light Exchange, San Francisco, CA
All Natural, Manhattan Bridge, Brooklyn, NY
Inner Worlds, 9th Street Gallery, Wichita Falls, TX
Brutal Realities, Dairy Arts Center, Boulder, CO
2019 *Cosmic to Corporeal: Contemporary Queer Performance Practices (Local Performances)*, The MAC - Dallas, TX
Brandon Maxwell Spring/Summer 2020 Fashion Show, New York Fashion Week, Brooklyn, NY
The Other Art Fair presented by Saatchi Art, Dallas Market Hall Dallas, TX
Aggregate Animated Shorts, Aggregate Space Gallery, Oakland, CA
Big Summer T-Shirt Show, Ex Ovo, Dallas, TX
Dallas Pavilion 2019, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
Vignette Art Fair, Women's Museum, Dallas, TX
Live From Cicada, Cicada - Ogden, UT
Spring/Break Art Show L.A.: Ways of Something, Transfer Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Cityscape, Czong Institute for Contemporary Art (CICA), Gimpo, South Korea
Away Message, Sweet Pass Sculpture Park, Dallas, TX
Videos displayed during 2019 Pussy Riot Performances, multiple locations
2018 *TECHNE LAB*, Made in NY Media Center By IFP
Marfa Open Arts Festival: COMPUTER P\$YENTOLOGY, Tacheles, Marfa, TX
Ways of Something, Telematic, San Francisco, CA

E.A.S.T (East Austin Studio Tour): Selfie Gauntlet, Museum of Human Achievement, Austin, TX

Live Video and Lighting for Pussy Riot's first North American Tour, multiple locations

Fusebox Festival, COMPUTER P\$YENTOLOGY, Museum of Human Achievement, Austin, TX

2017 *Now Playing*, The Porch Gallery, Minneapolis, MN

Amator 03: Art+Cinema+NYC, Millennium Film Workshop, Brooklyn, NY

Detail(s) from GRAMMATRON, Upfor.Digital Gallery, Portland, OR

Near Water - IRL, Museum of Human Achievement, Austin, TX

Vidkidz Texas Revival, Museum of Human Achievement, Austin, TX

PAT Summer Tour, PAT Mobile Art Event Space, CO, NV, CA

MediaLive: The Void, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO

OFF Cinema presents Contemporary Psychedelia, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO

MALfunction #0: Materiality, Museum of Natural History, Boulder, CO

Spam's - The Internet: The Restaurant, Fusebox Festival, Austin, TX

Cultural Cul-de-Sac: This is Gonna Take A While: A BBQ Sampling, BMOCA, Boulder, CO

2016 *Ways of Something*, House of Electronic Arts, Basel, Switzerland

Open Walls, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO

Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Amator 2.0 Art + Cinema + L.A., Echo Park Film Center, Los Angeles, CA

Another D.A.M.N. Show, Visual Arts Center University of Colorado, Boulder, CO

Play Nice!, Good Thieves Press, Denver, CO

TEDxCU, Platform Cooperativism, Collaboration with speaker Nathan Schneider, Boulder, CO

VJ / ONGOING COLLABORATIONS

2018 Pussy Riot

2009 *Vidkidz, Clemmons & Loyd (Collaboration with Zak Loyd)*

OFFICIAL VIDEO RELEASES

2019 *Missions, Confused*, Holodeck Records

VVV, *Living Above Your Head*, Holodeck Records

2018 Pussy Riot, *БЫ БОПЫ / ELECTIONS*, CHAIKA

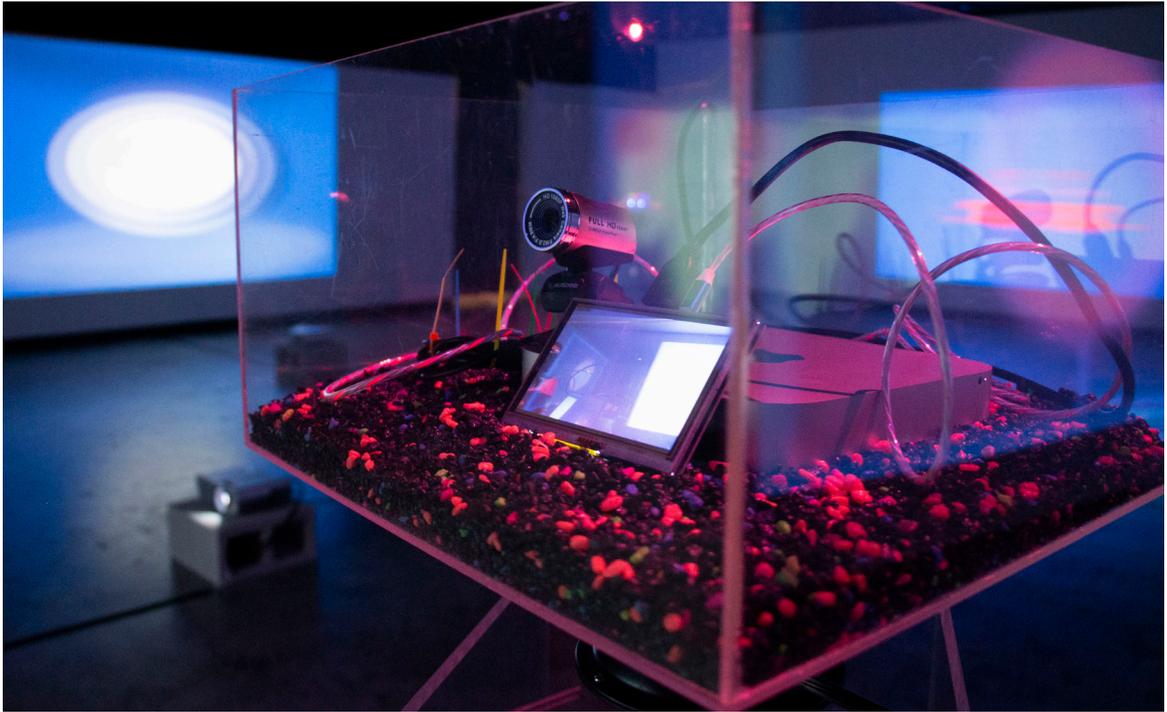
Pussy Riot, *Track About Good Cop*, Big Deal Beats

Pussy Riot, *ЕДИНРОФ / UNICORN FREEDOM*, CHAIKA

RESIDENCIES

2019 *Signal Culture Artist in Residence*, Owego, NY

2017 *Welcome to My Homepage Digital Artist Residency Program*, online & Austin, TX



Observe (The Eye), 2020, video sculpture & livestream, 45"x 11.5", 1280 x 720px (variable)

WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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Photographs courtesy of Ariel René Jackson

This project is supported in part by the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Austin Economic Development Department. Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work is a visual and performing arts organization located in Austin that serves as a catalyst for new ideas in contemporary art. For over 40 years, Women & Their Work has brought groundbreaking art created by women to Austin with exhibitions, performances and education workshops. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented over 1,900 artists in 327 visual art exhibitions, 155 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 720 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *ArtForum*, and on National Public

Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 850 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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