

Emile Zile
Annika Koops
Surface Creep

Text by
Diego Ramirez

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**CREATIVE
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I fell in love with a human mirage in the desert of the Internet once. I was 13. This arid ‘love’ lasted for several years and it was sustained by MSN, which acted as a mediator for our poor grammar, delusional emotions and the sharing of our irrelevant lives. We became so enmeshed that they created a new email account with the numbers 4957, which stood for the letters of my name on the alphabet: D(4)-I(9)-E(5)-G(7). We eventually incorporated the phone to our ‘relationship’, where our voices resonated with a perfect ring while our pictures (mine were masterfully staged to hide that I was dramatically overweight) hinted at the existence of a soulmate.

This amorous ghost, an absent presence that manifested through fragments of the human (a distant speech with an intangible yet perceivable physicality), became more real than my surroundings. Since we were separated by distance and united by technology, our only

means of sensing each other was the dork gaze—an inept practice of looking premised on technology’s capacity to mimic and surpass reality. We summoned our digital specters in a dial-up séance with the intensity of an addiction, fearing and desiring what we became: the pixel.

Remembering this moment gives me the creeps. The word ‘creep’, according to Merriam-Webster (a fittingly pedantic title for a dictionary), originally referred to the crawl of snakes and animals with short legs, such as spiders. Later, the verb evolved to denote a form of fear, as the unsettling feelings associated with this motion appear to creep on the skin. It was eventually transferred to the human to cypher a repellent figure, as the human creep manifests with the uneasiness of a slimy creature.

The mock music video “The Creep” by The Lonely Island parodies this notion by turning creeping (mainly in the form of peeping) into a dance move (“do the creep, haaaa, do the creep, haaaa”). Based on the persona of director John Waters (self-proclaimed pervert), the video features three characters wearing a thin pencil mustache, slicked flat hair and a khaki suit. Their movements are fashioned to shorten the length of their arms (which is mockingly described as ‘T-Rexing’) to evoke the uncanny movement associated with short legged vermin. While the video caricaturizes the analogue pervert most commonly associated with porn theaters, it overlooks the wretched creatures that wriggle in the barren lands of hyper-connectivity.

For instance, the sweaty freelance editor carrying a phone crammed with dating apps, lacking enough memory to even receive an automated SMS from Telstra. This entity dreams in the highest resolution available to the prosumer market—8k multiplied by the degree in which they are a disappointment to their parents and divided by how much embarrassment they cause to their extended family. Screen damage to their eyes is such, that they

need to visit Bailey Nelson to tell the difference between Cheetos and Doritos. Their essential characteristic is staring and fetishizing, like a 4chan gladiator eyeballing a Taylor Swift look-alike from the draconian depths of a Wendy's burger chain.

Annika Koops and Emile Zile manipulate today's scopophilic debris in their collaborative exhibition *Surface Creep*, where shapes are rendered with criminal sensuality. The show includes material drawn from the artists' individual practices such as Zile's *Liquid Cooled*—a series of ironic prints showing rocks that serve as resting places for multiple camera lens caps and Koops' CGI works, which disrupt the human form by juxtaposing highly rendered objects.

The shiny, hyper textural folds of silk (or vinyl) are a recurrent motif in the exhibition and one that speaks to both artists' practice, as it is a form that invokes a myriad of fetishistic spaces designed for the lens: ranging from the vampire's attire in Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* to the sheets in *The Room's* pathetic attempt at a classic love scene. These surfaces are impossibly pleasurable to look at, waving with the rhythm of a wicked, sinful touch. *Surface Creep* captures the excesses of representation, where a dork gaze and its fixation with the ultimate, mythical render (perhaps one called 'excalibur') is at play. This cultural obsession with lines, contours and patterns is equal parts unnerving and hilarious, like a 13-year-old falling in love with a screen phantom that hovers at 155.7 kbits/s. The heightened atmosphere of this show is akin to crossing the desert while carrying a MacBook Air and a LaCie hard-drive in the hope of finding an oasis—which must be wired with electricity and multiple power points to truly classify as a relief from entropic dehydration.

Text by Diego Ramirez

Emile Zile is an artist, filmmaker and performer. Performances in 2018/19 include *Becoming the Icon* with Lilian Steiner at Arts House North Melbourne, *Audience/Performer/Lens* (after Dan Graham) at Brunswick Mechanics Institute and *This Image is No Longer Available* at Modern Art Oxford. Emile received a BFA degree from RMIT Media Arts Melbourne before relocating to Amsterdam in 2007 to commence an MFA degree at the Sandberg Institute. In 2012 he began a two year studio residency at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Amsterdam. In 2018 he commenced full-time practice-based doctoral research at Digital Ethnography Research Centre, RMIT Melbourne. His work is profiled in *Australiana to Zeitgeist: an A to Z of Australian Contemporary Art 2017*

Annika Koops is a Melbourne based artist working primarily between painting and digital media. She has been the recipient of a number of significant grants and prizes including the Australia Council Arts Projects for Individuals and Groups, Australia Council British School, Rome Residency, The Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Traveling Fellowship, and an Australian Postgraduate Award. She has been invited to participate International exhibitions such as *Roman Remains*, Transition Gallery, London and the inaugural Bristol Biennial as well as having exhibited at a range of public institutions, artist run spaces and private galleries in Australia. She has undertaken National and International residencies as well as having work in significant Australian public collections such as Art Bank and MONA Hobart. She is represented by Bett Gallery, Hobart.

Diego Ramirez is a Mexican-born, Melbourne-based multidisciplinary artist and writer, working primarily with video and pictures to develop installations for gallery contexts. His research based practise explores the legacies of colonialism in visual culture; the rhetoric of the image and concept of terror as a response to the 'other'. Ramirez Often seeks to reconfigure vernacular archives and popular images that embody these themes.

Ramirez completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at RMIT University and an Honours Degree of Fine Art at Monash University. He has held solo exhibitions at MARS Gallery; The Substation; Seventh Gallery and the Perth Institute for Contemporary Art. In addition, his work has been included in group exhibitions at Art Central, Hong Kong; 17th Media Art Biennale WRO, Wroclaw; Torrance Art Museum, Los Angeles and the Hong-Gah Museum, Taipei. In 2016, he was awarded a City of Melbourne Arts Grant for Postcard eXotica. Ramirez is currently represented by MARS Gallery, Melbourne.

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