

Jacob Robert Whibley, dot-dot-dot, 8eleven Gallery, Toronto

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Jacob Robert Whibley

← *a hurricane of divine roads*, 2017.

Photo : Yuula Benivoiski

← *sequence anxiety*, 2017.

Photo : Yuula Benivoiski

↑ *SPUTTER PRUNE FEAST • RUPTURE SPENT FATES*, 2017.

Photo : Yuula Benivoiski

Jacob Robert Whibley

dot-dot-dot

Contemporary Art has invariably played a role as translator and sense-maker for the present. It tends to manifest as a distillation of the past, using the materials and sentiments of the present, and—when at its best—directing its sights acutely toward the future.

Jacob Robert Whibley's recent exhibition embodies this pursuit in a site-responsive installation of sculpture and digital collage. Whibley's practice has long been concerned with visualizing the internal workings of modern culture, and *dot-dot-dot* does well to embody the paradoxical and perplexing notions of time and progress. Whibley's choice of imagery, materials, and display is complex by design, inviting viewers to embark upon an intellectual thought process of conceptualizing the intangible. What has been mined here is not only the content, but the *mood* of our current networked culture, and the resulting exhibition is equally imaginative, optimistic, and anxious.

dot-dot-dot is a non-linear installation of plexi-framed digital collages mounted at varying heights and orientations onto a scattered forest of steel Post Shores. One, an anomalous life-size sculpture of a warped and discontinuous ladder stands out as an anchored metaphor for subjective, non-linear time. Sandwiched at the top and bottom of each post, is an MDF disc ringed with laser-cut, computer-generated anagrams that stem from every possible combination of the letters contained within the words "past," "present," and "future." The resulting variations form a sort of concrete or Dadaist nonsense poetry, reading at once like ancient scripture and proclamatory messages from the future. As companion to these ancillary pronouncements, the central panels play host to image and text compositions sourced from the twentieth-century science and technology lifestyle magazine *OMNI*. Human figures engaged in varying degrees of technological tasks are juxtaposed with planetary

bodies, dramatic ecological landscapes, and pull-quotes offering meditations on time. The surface of each uniquely-shaped panel is etched with reproductions of margin doodles, drawings, and diagrams from some of Whibley's most treasured archives of science fiction and paper ephemera. Two circular panels, *omniscient observer* and *universe rigid*, feature life drawings and still lifes from a 1950s instructional book for art students. Like ghosts from the past, these etchings are remnants of personal gestures that have traced their way through time into a present that has become apt at blurring the line between found and fabricated, fact and fiction, observer and observed.

These collages provide a venue for romanticizing the soft panic of the past; a time when technology was intimidating, yes, but still embodied the promise of a better future to come. Contemporary attempts to come to terms with the present are fraught with anxiety and contradiction. While we live in an age of increased access to information and rising global standards of living, we are all too aware of the continued injustices suffered by so many, and the impending ecological collapse that could end us all. The Anthropocene in which we now exist presents a unique mash-up of hope and change. In *dot-dot-dot*, Whibley has illustrated some of the nuances and contradictions of our times, begging the question: "How much have we actually progressed after all this so-called progress?"

Alex Bowron

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