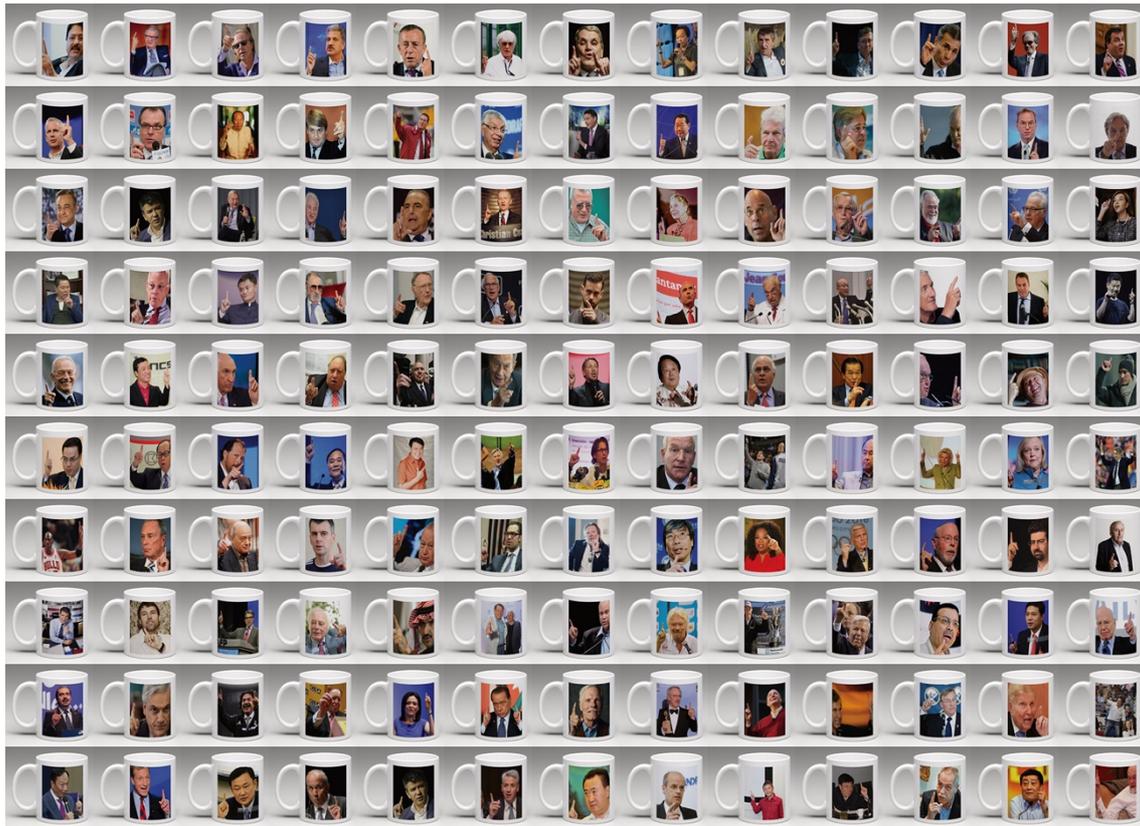


# Portfolio

Kailum Graves

**STATEMENT**

Kailum is critically obsessed with the Web and born-digital content. He is particularly interested in image-rich technologies and the way global media communication—a landscape controlled by a handful of multidimensional oligopolistic corporate-run networks—can be sampled, organised, and considered in new philosophical, sociological, and political terms. He uses the Internet, which has normalised the act of collecting and compiling information, to preserve and curate found images and raw material. The aim is to engage with the cultural space and aesthetics of the Internet—and the vast amount of digital information it contains—as a subject, material, and tool of artistic production.



#1

2016

130 ceramic mugs

Each 12cm x 8cm, overall dimensions 204cm x 116cm

Edition of 6 + 2 AP

Billionaires—the crème de la crème of a society in which money is the principle gauge of success.

#1 presents 130 of the world's 1,810 billionaires in the congratulatory style of #1 Dad mugs found in cheap gift shops. The work is the product of obsessive online surfing and the desire to order and rearrange the seemingly endless amount of information available online. 2015 was another record year for wealth; however, this was the aggregate net worth of the world's richest people—the billionaires—not the general public. This is undoubtedly the future of capitalism as, according to French economist Thomas Piketty, there's a simple equation to explain the rise in wealth inequity:  $r > g$ . The rate of return for owned capital ( $r$ ) exceeds the overall rate of economic growth ( $g$ ). Thus, those who control wealth will accumulate it at a faster rate than the economy can produce it. The plutocratic rich, who influence the economy and society, will get proportionally richer, while the poor will get proportionally poorer. #1 attempts to flip the celebratory logic of wealth on its head and give a middle finger to an economic system—neoliberalism—that values greed, self-interest, and extreme personal wealth.



*Fuck kale. Fuck yoga. Fuck bamboo cotton. Fuck vegetable smoothies. Fuck slim legs. Fuck organic. Fuck quinoa beet salad. Fuck berries. Fuck alternative. Fuck cold-pressed juice. Fuck airport selfies. Fuck summer. Fuck leafy greens. Fuck detox. Fuck athletic. Fuck the inherent bullshit of palatable capitalism disguised as wellness on Instagram.*

### **The Otherness of Self**

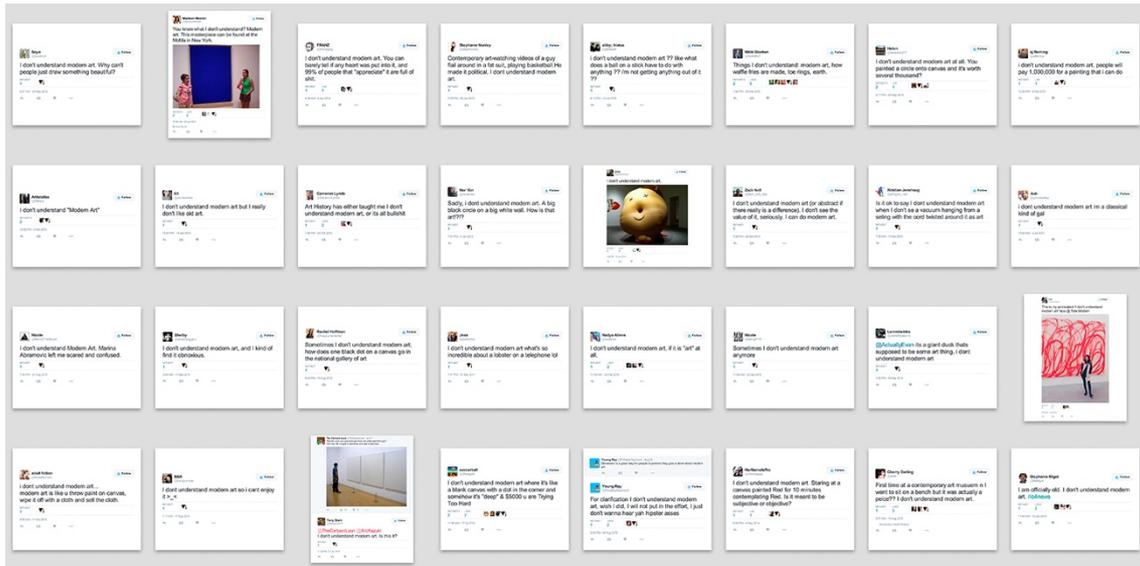
2014–ongoing (printed in 2016)

450 digital c-type prints

Each 10.16cm x 10.16cm, overall dimensions 304.8cm x 152.4cm

Mirrors for sale on *Gumtree*—the images form part of a larger project to preserve and curate *Gumtree* classifieds.

Photography isn't a tool to document and record reality; it's a means to manipulate it. Nonetheless, these accidental self-portraits seem to capture the nuances of human existence—the absurdities, the ironies, and the small dramas of contemporary life—overlooked by the deliberately flattering selfie, or constructed photojournalistic image. They lack the technical expertise of traditional or mainstream art; yet, they capture a vulnerability that's almost impossible to recreate. This has been achieved both consciously and by mistake. Appropriation is never truly random, it invariably requires some selection and presentation by the artist; however, the self-portraits themselves are a happy accident—taken to sell a mirror. This accident does away with the idea of a trained and self-aware self-portrait (selfie) photographer, and perhaps even the idea of trained or self-aware artist. Printed in the square format of *Instagram*, the work was inspired by Penelope Umbrico's *For Sale/TVs From Craigslist* series and Walker Evans' *Subway Portraits*.



*Heidegger realised that at some point in time we're bound to be confronted with anxiety (Angst). Anxiety is that rare and subtle mood when the self first distinguishes itself from the world and becomes self-aware. In anxiety, nothing really makes sense anymore. The world turns into something remote and strange. Ordinary objects look strange, everyday activities pointless, and common sense objectives outlandish. A toilet is no longer just a toilet, but rather some kind of alien and uncanny object with a peculiar ominous presence. One could just hang a toilet in a gallery and call it fucking art, and really, that would be okay.*

## I Don't Understand Modern Art

2015-ongoing (printed in 2016)  
 32 ChromaLuxe transfers on aluminium sheet  
 Each 20.32cm x 25.4cm  
 Edition of 6 + 2 AP

*I Don't Understand Modern Art* originated in 2015 as a *Twitter* feed that re-tweets posts featuring the phrase 'I don't understand modern art'. The aim is to engage with the cultural space and aesthetics of *Twitter*; and to examine Tweets as a subject, material, and tool of artistic production. Basically, to make art out of Tweets. The Tweets intrigue me because, on the one hand, they are honest and real, but on the other hand, they are indicative of outdated thinking about art. The criteria and boundaries of art have been challenged by a great lineage of artists over the last two hundred years; however, it's this provocation that makes contemporary art seem so alienating. The work is—hopefully—a humorous attempt to showcase that art encompasses a broad spectrum of traditional and experimental media; and it doesn't matter if it is understood or not, its purpose is to elicit a response. Art itself is a response to the world—an attempt to capture an aspect of life as experienced by us—and is a catalyst for an ongoing open discussion and inquiry about the world. I hope to show that it's okay to hate an artwork, but it shouldn't be dismissed because it doesn't adhere to preconceived notions of what art is, or ought to be. It's interesting to ask 'what is art?' However, I think it's more amusing to ask 'is it interesting?' Besides, it's fun turning Tweets that reject contemporary art into an artwork that celebrates unrestricted creative experimentation. Viewed like this, the work—although created intuitively—can be understood as a response to the dismissive and apathetic 'I don't understand modern art' assertion often given to contemporary artworks that don't resemble art created by the Old Masters.

Detailed view:





### **The Celebrity That Therefore I Am**

2015

72 Fujifilm Instax Mini Film, framed, museum glass

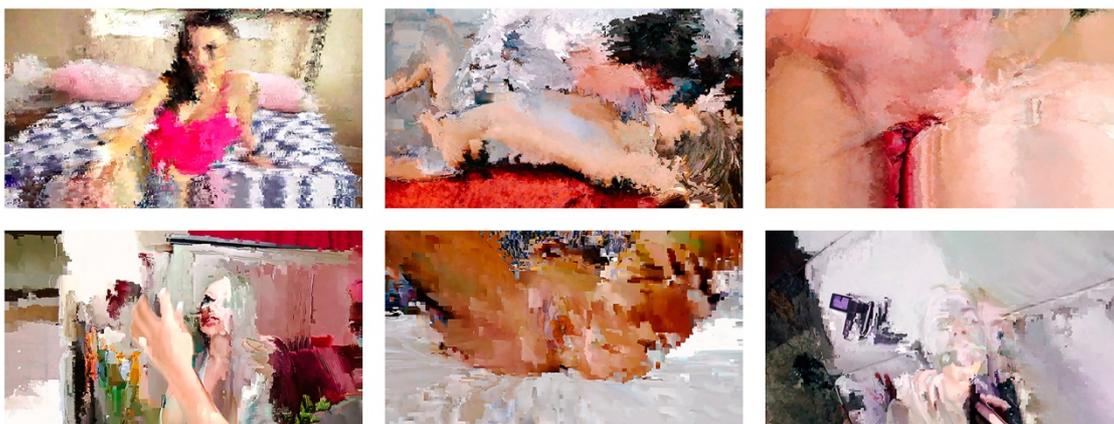
Each 8.6cm x 5.4cm, overall dimensions 76cm x 70cm

Edition of 8 + 2 AP

A self-portrait.

*The Celebrity That Therefore I Am* attempts to explore the relationship between the Self and the Other—the celebrity, as well as the celebrity photographer accidentally captured in their eye—as a way to examine the identity of the postmodern Self. In our celebrity [obsessed] culture, the ideal human being is the celebrity, and becoming one is, arguably, the purpose of life. In postmodern societies, organised around Baudrillardian simulacra and simulation, and the play of images and signs, identity is constructed on appearance, which in turn is constructed through the machinery of the mass media and capitalism. Artists, for example, are required to act like rock stars to please collectors; and rock stars are obliged to live fast and die young, creating an impression of premature mortality and cementing posthumous fame. In our celebrity culture, fuelled, in part, by our desire to see and be seen, the image of the celebrity plays the role of the gaze of the Other—images of celebrities determine how we perceive ourselves. However, the irony is, in postmodern culture the self is unable to exist, for it has been swallowed by the totalitarianism of capitalism. Postmodern culture erases the category of self, and replaces it with saturated images from the media. The postmodern subject, like postmodern art, music, and literature, is—to borrow from Jacques Lacan’s account of schizophrenia—schizophrenic. Postmodernism creates a fragmented self that has no essence, only images.

The project originated as a *Tumblr* blog.



*"When we get too close to the desired object, erotic fascination turns into disgust at the Real of the bare flesh."  
~ Slavoj Žižek*

### **Reclining Nudes**

2014-ongoing (printed in 2016)

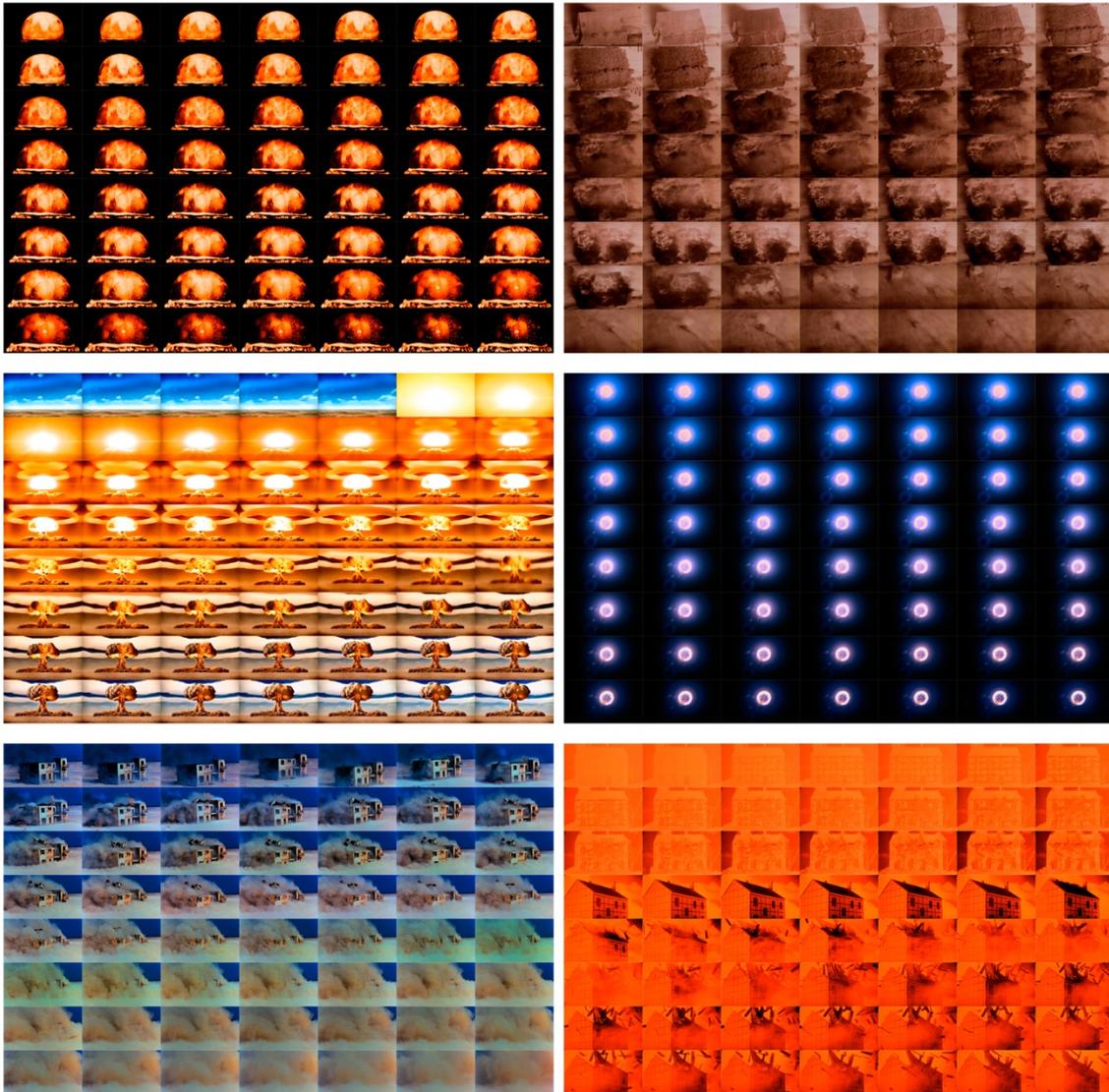
6 pigment prints on cotton rag, framed, museum glass

Each 30.48cm x 45.72cm

Edition of 6 + 2 AP

Still frames from partially downloaded *BitTorrent* porn movies.

Images of the female body are so prevalent in Western art that the female nude, particularly the reclining nude, has come to connate Western art and culture. However, the representation of the female body—and through it female sexuality—has largely been a male pursuit. Given my interest in the Web and born-digital content, pornography was the obvious medium for me to gravitate towards in order to examine the reclining nude and the infinite nuances she represents. Pornography is one of the most vexed aspects of online culture; seen by some as degrading and misogynistic, and by others as liberating. This is a debate I don't wish to address; rather, I am interested in examining what is ostensibly an ideological impossibility—the portrayal, by a male artist, of the radical and raw beauty of the female body that doesn't contribute to the sexual objectification of women. Pornography might seem like an odd medium; however, my intention was to depict women in control of their sexuality and behaviour, and not defined by it, as the reclining nude—the words alone conjure up a vision of voluptuous femininity, soft fabric, and downturned eyes—deprived women of this right. Whether this is the case with pornography or not, I don't know; but I like the idea of contributing to a constructive sexual debate. If anything, I think this project shows that reclaiming sexualised images of women and re-contextualising them as feminist empowerment offers no real alternative to patriarchal portraiture; yet, doing nothing is not an option. I'm philosophically obsessed with the Absurd—the fundamental disharmony between our search for meaning and the meaninglessness of the universe—so I enjoy examining lose-lose paradoxes like this.



### Sweet Obliteration

2014

6 digital projections, or 56 individual screens (each)

Variable dimensions

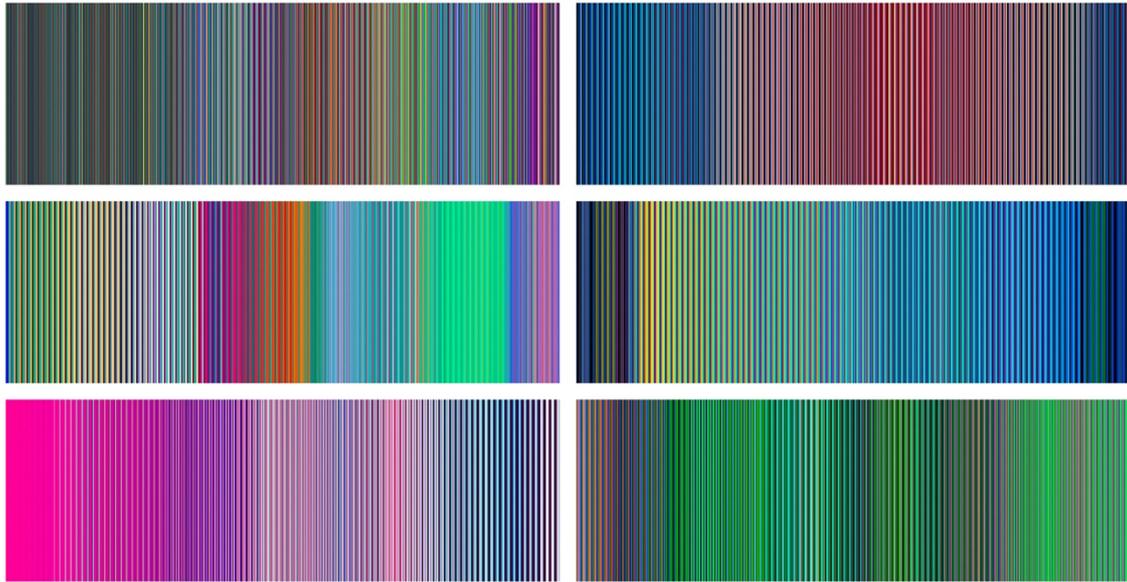
Coming from the realisation that movies are only an illusion of time and motion comprised of thousands of still images, the project forms part of a larger ongoing experiment to visually represent film, or moments in film, in a single image. The name of the series, although incongruous and purposefully so, refers to the moments of pleasure we experience when confronted with extraordinary physical phenomena, such as the tremendous power of a nuclear explosion. The profound impact of an atomic blast can be best understood by placing it in the context of the sublime. Almost as soon as the first devastatingly beautiful mushroom cloud evaporated, the scared awe and terror of the nuclear sublime quickly degenerated into a new atomic aesthetic of the familiar and the banal. The bomb, and its iconic mushroom cloud, which featured on everything from newsreels, newspapers, and magazines to bikinis, t-shirts, posters, stamps, records, and even corporate logos, was promptly reduced to nuclear kitsch. Thus, the project is an attempt to undermine the image by way of the image itself.

The work is intentionally silent, to contemplate on the imagery itself; however, it's hypothetical soundtrack—the one that plays in my head when viewing it—is *Sine Wave* by Mogwai.

Video URL: [kailumgraves.com/sweet-obliteration/](http://kailumgraves.com/sweet-obliteration/)

## **STATEMENT | PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE**

Kailum's photographic practice, which differs from his web-based appropriation work, explores the disappearance of clear boundaries between culture, environment, and technology. He is particularly interested in the way humans use technology to transform, manipulate, and transcend natural environmental limits. There isn't a one-way correlation between culture, technology, and environment; instead, a culture develops a technology, such as agriculture, to change the environment, and this technology, in turn, changes the culture and society that created it. The three—culture, technology, and the environment—are in a circular relationship, where the last object references the first, resulting in a closed loop. He explores the closed loop by creating large-scale prints that sit somewhere between imagined landscapes and abstract portraits.



**Data Rock (Take Me Somewhere Nice)**

2016

6 pigment prints on cotton rag, framed, museum glass

Each 121cm x 40cm, or 61 x 20cm

Edition of 6 + 2 AP in both sizes

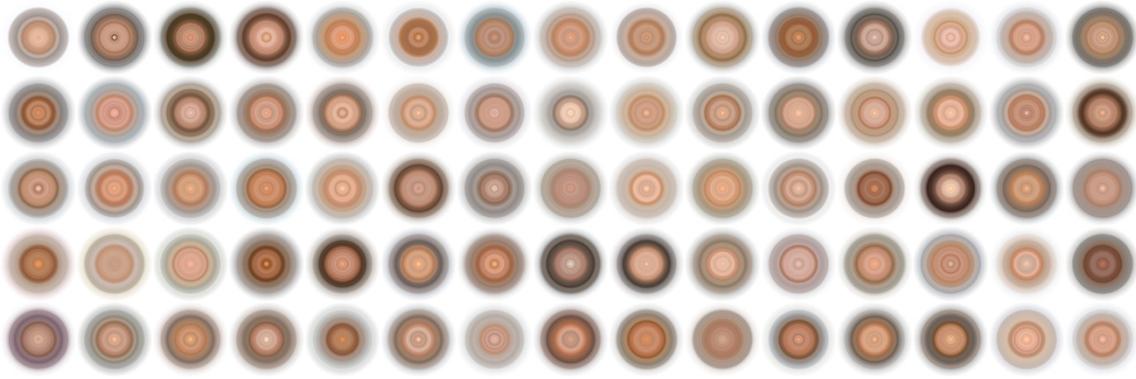
Digital c-type or digital inkjet print on metallic paper, framed

Each 61cm x 20cm

Open edition

Landscapes created out of the cultural material I have—and can afford—access to.

*Data Rock (Take Me Somewhere Nice)* is a series of abstract landscapes created by sequentially copying the colour of every pixel in six 100px x 100px images and pasting it successively to create entirely new images from the sampled pixels. Interestingly, each sampled pixel is already a sample of an original image. However, as numerous theorists have pointed out, the fictions of original and copy are so entwined that it is impossible to say where one begins and the other ends. Pixels interest me because they are the smallest controllable element of a picture. Moreover, the aesthetics of copy and paste—which is nothing more than the transfer of data—is, to me, the epitome of the transformative philosophy of sampling, and is the perfect response to the bombardment of media imagery. I believe that everyone should be able to create art, and thus meaning, out of the cultural materials of the everyday.



**Thank You Machine Elves!**

2015-16

3 pigment prints on cotton rag, framed, museum glass

Each 75cm x 75cm, overall dimensions 225cm x 75cm

Edition of 6 + 2 AP

*Thank You Machine Elves!* is an attempt to emphasise the algorithmic nature of digital photography by disrupting and manipulating the way light is converted into digital data. The aim is to invoke awareness of the medium itself by reminding us that a digital camera is nothing more than a computer with a lens on it. The work, which began life 'in camera' as headshot portraits of seventy-five different people, forms part of a larger ongoing experiment to create new interpretations of portraiture, and is a natural extension of my interest in the photographic process. I'm more interested in post-production, which can last months, than I am in the actual act of taking a photograph, which usually only lasts a hundredth or a thousandth of a second. The aim of the project is to challenge conventional photographic representation, and, in doing so, explore the creative possibilities of digital photography.



**No. 13 Baby**

2016

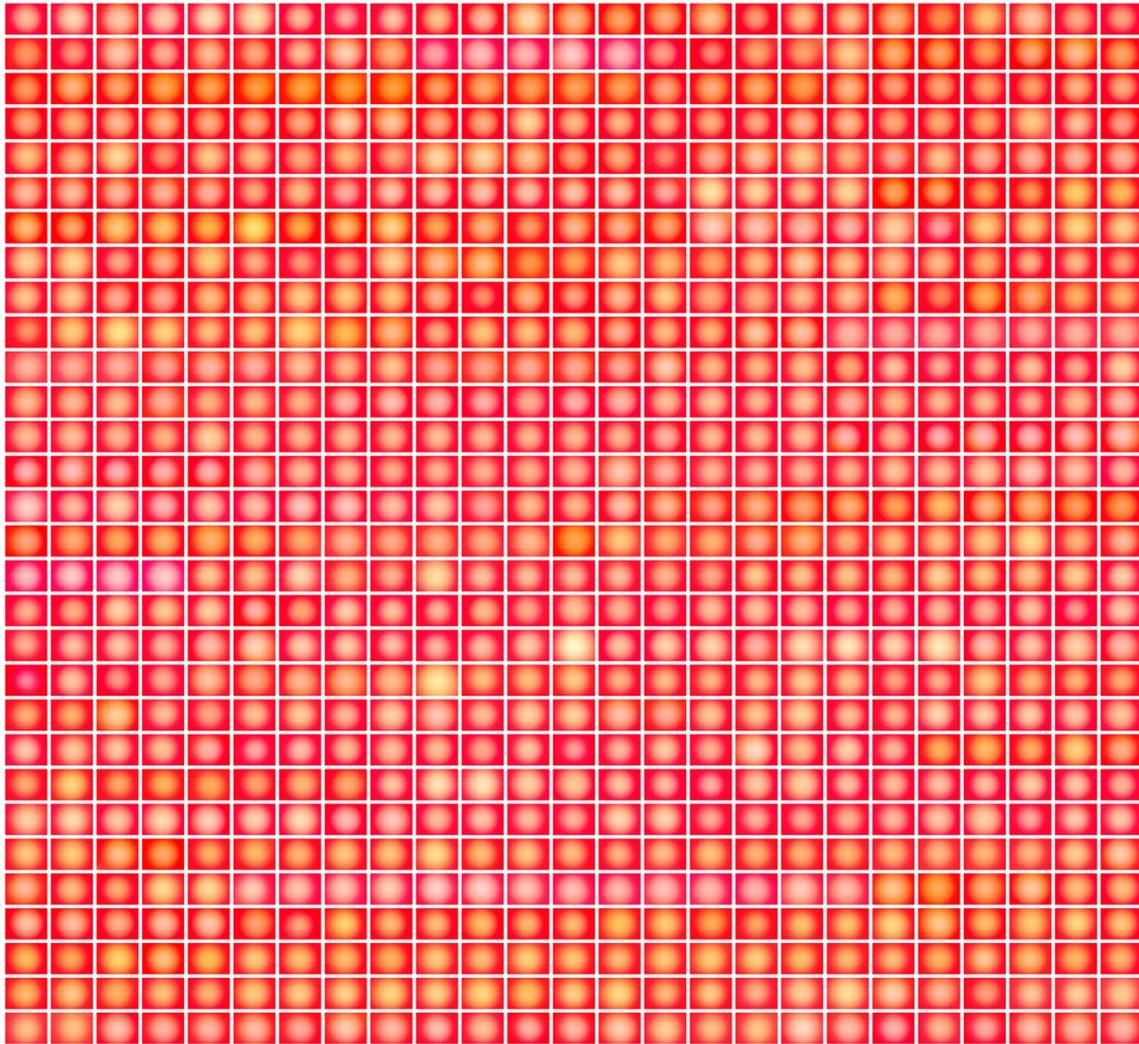
Archival pigment print on canvas, museum grade varnish laminate, framed

212cm x 70cm, or 121cm x 40cm

Edition of 6 + 2 AP in both sizes

The nothing that is—a slit-scan of a slit-scan.

Order and chaos, simplicity and complexity, organic and inorganic, are not at the opposite ends of the spectrum; rather, they are intertwined—one couldn't exist without the other. Without order, nothing could exist; without chaos, nothing could grow. It is here, on the knife-edge between programming and art—between the instinct for order and the impulse towards anarchy—that I believe digital art exists. Likewise, it is here, poised between our tendency to seek meaning, and our inability to find any, that I believe art exists. Arts purpose, if there is one, is to create something thought-provoking and, perhaps, alluring. By merging the muted organic tones of nature with the loud inorganic colours of modern artefacts, such as automobiles and crystalline skyscrapers, I hope to have achieved this—an abstract landscape as ordered as it is chaotic, as simple as it is complex, and as meaningful as it is hollow.



### **Transillumination**

2015-16

Pigment print on cotton rag, framed

173cm x 160cm

Edition of 6 + 2 AP

*Transillumination* is a photographic project comprised of hundreds of self-portraits created by capturing the transmission of light through different parts of my body. The work is a result of experimentation with mobile phone photography to create new and unexpected interpretations of portraiture—specifically the selfie. Transillumination of the skin is performed to visualise subsurface blood volume and blood oxygen saturation; however, by repeating the process—there are seven hundred and fifty photos in total—the effect is subsumed to create an ambiguous sequence of images that exist somewhere between art and life, and the organic and inorganic. There's nothing more intimate than a blood portrait—in a way it's the ultimate selfie. However, equally, there's nothing less ordinary than a mobile phone selfie. I view the work, which itself is a hybrid process between performance and photography, as both an abstract self-portrait and binary landscape. Viewing it like this displaces the human/non-human duality, and reflects upon the shifting boundaries between bodies and technologies, and humans and machines.