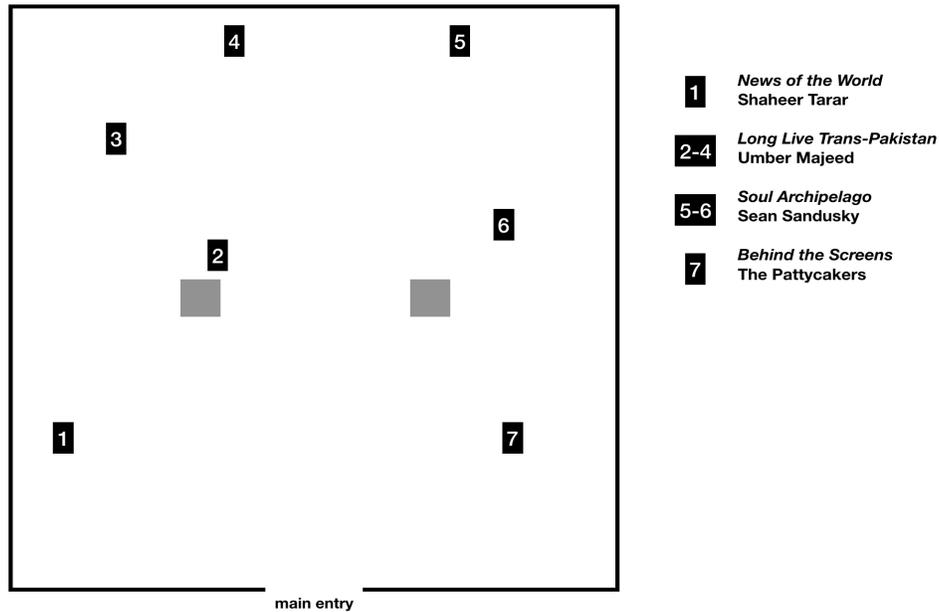


Networked Justice

Shaheer Tarar, UMBER MAJEED, Sean Sandusky, The Pattycakers (Adrienne+Keiko).
Curated by Karina Iskandarsjah



Garden of Earthly Delights is the most ambitious and ambiguous project by 15th century Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch. This large triptych is a complex and multifaceted painting presented on two-dimensional surfaces. Its overwhelmingly chaotic subject matter is contained not just by the flatness of wood panels, but also the flatness of Bosch's bold colours, picture plane, and illustrative details. Digital networks present themselves similarly: a seemingly infinite realm in which cultures, economies, and societies are observable through the flatness of screens.

The Internet is a planetary-scale infrastructure that makes it possible for individuals to have an effect on distant people and places. From instant messaging to fundraising and information sharing, Internet users have cultivated new ways to relate to and mobilize with each other during times of crisis. *Networked Justice* is a group exhibition that considers "the digital" not just as a medium, but as a context in which social, political, and artistic forms arise, combining to develop methods of working together, rather than against each other. It addresses the following questions: how have information networks reshuffled the dynamic relations between notions of citizenship, social awareness, historiography, and collective memory?; In what ways can imaging technology offer perspectives of the state of societies and environments?; And how can we form relationships to and between culturally and geographically specific issues?

Newly commissioned works by **Shaheer Tarar**, **UMBER MAJEED**, **Sean Sandusky** and **The Pattycakers (Adrienne+Keiko)** unpack these questions in a playful manner through interactive, generative, and immersive installations. Experimenting with entertainment and engagement as modes to access meaning, the works discuss intersectional issues of identity, cultural appropriation, environmental justice, land-use, gentrification, and literacy of mass media.

There exists a tendency to think of the Internet as an infinite flow of data that transcends the limits of our individual control, however, digital reproduction is always topologically determined (each digital file

is dated and located to an IP address somewhere in the world). Nevertheless, the amount of information made available through computers and mobile devices can be difficult to navigate and impossible to fully grasp. Instead of processing one narrative at a time, we are faced with many narratives simultaneously. This endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other records has caused a shift in the way we convey and consume cultural expressions: from linear narratives to algorithmic databases. For example, web-based radio (Spotify) or television (YouTube) platforms offer a collection of programs simultaneously instead of a singular broadcast.

If the world is increasingly computerized and our attention is sparsely fractured, it is crucial that we develop an ethics, aesthetics, and poetics of algorithmic databases as a form of cultural expression. Shaheer Tarar tackles this in *News of the World*; a web-based generative artwork that visualizes a landscape purely shaped by the text, images, and videos circulated by online news media. Formally inspired by Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Tarar imagines an evolving and growing garden environment by developing a program that connects to online news articles. The program gathers the most viewed news stories every day and uses their content and metadata to generate various objects, figures, and backgrounds that spawn and interact with one another within the frame of a web-page.

News of the World emphasizes that by circulating information, the news media actively recreates the world which it aims to represent, ultimately affecting mass social and geographical understanding. In this way, the accumulated news articles call into being the world it depicts through the expression of a database. Subsequently, Tarar creates visual representation for the properties of this database (geolocation tags, face detection, textual information etc.) in the form of humanoid figures, plants, and monuments. *News of the World* is a world-building exercise that deconstructs and contemplates the complex elements of databases as cultural expression, and provokes the biases and algorithms ingrained in representations of the world.

While Tarar's work equates and generalizes vastly different narratives in one plane, Umer Majeed finds a way to effectively communicate a culturally and geographically specific issue through speculative fiction and immersive technology. *Long Live Trans-Pakistan* is Majeed's ongoing investigation into current urbanization claims in Lahore, Pakistan. Following the years of martial law and post-War on Terror, activities between and within urban spaces in Pakistan became heavily policed by state and neoliberal ventures. These security measures were co-opted as a desirable feature in the making of supposedly safe gated communities, primarily catered to Pakistani diaspora (in the last 20 years there has been an influx of a return migration, proving diaspora to be a gentrifying force and an important economy within the homeland).

Majeed's multidisciplinary installation consists of a video animation, posters, and a virtual reality work that presents and emulates a place called Bahria Town, a privately owned real-estate company accused of corruption and land-grabbing. Drawing from a range of familial archives, digital telecommunications, and mechanisms of the Pakistani tourism industry, Majeed revitalizes her uncle's failed tourism company, "Trans-Pakistan", to promote a walking-tour service of Bahria Town. *Long Live Trans-Pakistan* offers a critical perspective of geopolitical issues within South Asian diasporic cultures through performative gestures, satire, and symbols. For example, there are motifs of Sphinx, Eiffel Tower, and Taj Mahal reproductions that act as actual tourist attractions in Bahria Town, blurring the lines between citizens, foreigners and tourists. Moreover, the viewer is encouraged to loiter and walk counter-clockwise within the virtual reality space, demonstrating an act of resistance to the harmful idealism of speed, progress and internationalism embedded in Bahria Town's imagination.

The gesture of occupying a digital space as a way to illustrate the shuffled dynamics of cultural expression, identity and consumerism driven by vast digital networks is also pertinent in the work ***Behind the Screens*** by The Pattycakers. An art-duo comprised of Adrienne Matheuszik and Keiko Hart, The Pattycakers investigate the ambiguous permutations of multi-ethnicity through performance and new media installation. While the Internet can be a site of chaos and clashes in ideology, it also carries the potential for innovative cultural hybridity, collaboration, and connectivity. *Behind the Screens* highlights processes of adaptation, appropriation, and translation embedded in the internationally popular cultural phenomenon of Karaoke.

Behind the Screens is an interactive installation that allows viewers to step inside and perform within a karaoke video. "Karaoke" is a transliteration of the Japanese language term for the entertainment activity meaning 'empty orchestra.' Musical backing tracks are provided for an individual to simulate a music video performance, inhabiting a digitally mediated appropriation.

While the music video performer is behind the 'screens' in a green screen room, viewers outside are invited to singalong with the lyrics that appear on screen. Despite a suggestion of cultural hollowness in the reenactment of idol identities, there are also opportunities to exercise empathy and sincerity in the performer-audience exchange that implicates spectators as participants. Qualities of identity are adopted through cross-cultural pollination and recontextualization, whether consciously or not. *Behind the Screens* utilizes karaoke videos as a framework for exploring methods of collaborating and connecting with each other as well as experimenting with notions of private and public realms in relation to physical and digital spaces.

Finally, Sean Sandusky fosters solidarity and attachment to environmental and traditional entities in their ongoing project, ***Soul Archipelago***. In this project the artist draws upon the dissociating experience of multi-ethnicity as well as the back-and-forth movement from one political, environmental and economic climate to another. Sandusky's auto-ethnographic practice is situated between Toronto, Canada, and Honolulu, Hawai'i. This iteration of *Soul Archipelago* addresses the attention that needs to be cultivated to our relationship to bodies of water. A video work and sculptures focus on an image of the Pacific Ocean as it acclimatizes to increasing pollution and rise in sea level.

While all the footage and sound of the video was recorded in Hawai'i, depictions of the environment are rendered in a way similar to how Westerners often see island and tropical societies, namely the tourism industry's emphasis on relaxation, leisure, and resort lifestyle as well as the aesthetic trend of vaporwave with its motifs of palm trees and orientalism. *Soul Archipelago* recontextualizes this skewed perspective of the equatorial region that usually detracts from the seriousness of urgent environmental and political issues and uses it to bring attention to the Pacific Ocean's sublime power.

The world is marked by ideologies of deep separation as well as pervasive networks of connectivity. Within these networks are communities that can be mapped out in relation to both geography as well as cultural and ideological affinities. However, our current capacity to see and experience almost the entire world at once establishes just how discordant we can be. In order to make sense of conflicting socio-cultural manifestations, works by Shaheer Tarar, Umber Majeed, Sean Sandusky, and The Pattycakers embrace technology and digital networks with their potential for inciting empathy in artistic expression while revealing the connecting issues of power, abuse, moral ambiguity and complicity in the acceleration of environmental degradation.