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## Art in the Age of Information Saturation

By [Will Heinrich](#)  
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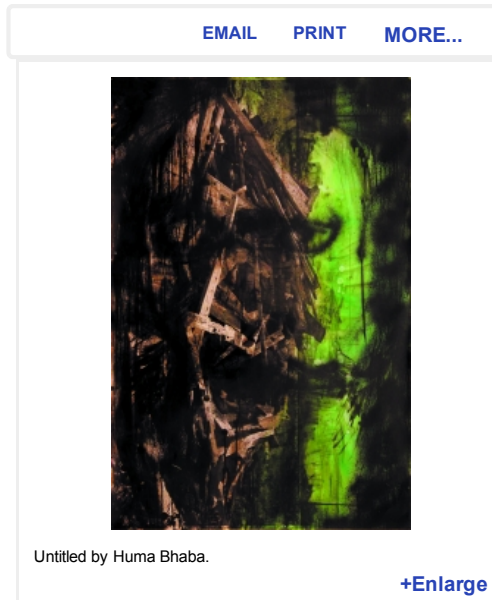
How is the Internet changing art? Or, to put the question another way, what is the significance of movable type? And is it important that the codex is beginning to replace the scroll? It is, of course—but also, it isn't, so it takes a particularly deft hand to engage questions like these with as much wit, humor and intelligence as "Free" at the New Museum, a show assembled by Lauren Cornell from thoughtful wall labels, a beautifully designed online catalog and the disparate sensibilities of 22 contemporary artists.

Seth Price, to begin with, engages the question directly. His piece "Dispersion," a perpetually and deliberately unfinished essay on the distribution of art and ideas, shows up printed on empty vacuum-form plastic packing material and mounted on the wall as a sculpture called *Essay With Knots*. Jon Rafman, in a similarly earnest vein, mounts blown-up Google Street Views images that Google, presumably, regrets, like a house on fire in Arkansas, or a naked woman on a beach, or teenagers in Northern Ireland giving the finger to Google's own all-seeing eye. David Horvitz explores Wikipedia; Hanne Mugaas explores eBay; and Takeshi Murata animates Popeye in 3-D wearing a Biggie Smalls-style T-shirt of his own golden face.

Jill Magid and Trevor Paglen touch on the dark side of the new information technology, the expanded reach of surveillance and the expanded new field available for censorship. Mr. Paglen's *They Watch the Moon*, a large and striking C-print, shows an eerily beautiful nighttime view of a listening station, run by the Navy and the N.S.A., in the wooded hills of the U.S. National Radio Quiet Zone in West Virginia. Jill Magid's *Becoming Tarden* documents the artist's experience of being censored and redacted while trying to carry out an artistic commission for the Dutch secret service.

Photographers like Andrea Longacre-White or Harm van den Dorpel use methods related to the topical questions but produce work, in the end, of more aesthetic than conceptual interest. Ms. Longacre-White's handsome, apparently abstract black-and-white photos, produced by shooting and reshooting stock images, like Mr. van den Dorpel's drastically transformed movie posters, are more beautiful than they are thought-provoking, as is Lisa Oppenheim's slide show *The Sun Is Always Setting Somewhere Else*, in which the artist printed out photos of sunsets in Iraq and Afghanistan—taken by soldiers and uploaded to Flickr—and rephotographed them against her own Manhattan horizon.

Two pieces fully engage the show's questions about the changing landscape of information while also exposing the timeworn substance beneath the questions' topical veneer. A transcript, two drawings and a newspaper clipping document Kristin Sue Lucas' *Refresh*, in which the artist, purportedly inspired by the Web's constant self-replication to seek a spiritual rejuvenation, went to court to have her name



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changed to Kristin Sue Lucas. (The court, of course, was in California.) And Alexandre Singh's hilariously brilliant *School for Objects Criticized*—a 50-minute-long, Molière-inspired radioplay with light effects performed by two pompous tape recorders; a shiny, moneyed toaster; a sleazy bottle of Clorox; a Slinky; the Slinky's assistant (an unfinished abstract sculpture); and a stuffed skunk—denounces itself explicitly as the same kind of "self-reflexive, tautological garbage these young artists are all up to these days."

TWO DOORS DOWN from the New Museum, meanwhile, at Salon 94 Bowery, sculptor Huma Bhaba has solved the problem of making art in an overfull, overfed, oversaturated world in a different way entirely, building elegant and extraordinarily precise variations on the human figure out of postindustrial garbage.

Assembled from blue and white styrofoam, wire, plywood and air-dried clay, and ornamented lightly with colorful acrylic scrawls, pieces like *Finger* or *Tupac Amaru* seem at first like allusions to the airplane of Creationist satire, assembled in a junkyard by wind and random chance. No obvious system explains the relation of any one component to the next. But the inexplicable details are justified by the whole, by the heavy perfection and delicately balanced asymmetry of the final resulting shapes.

Ms. Bhaba's steles and her people—in *Cel*, a naked woman carved from cork and scorched with black paint, and *Lecturer*, a male figure cast in bronze from a cork original, as much as in the assemblage pieces—are halfway abstract, and given their materials, it would be reasonable to see them as picturing the melting or destruction of more complex forms. But in fact, they're more hopeful and more ambitious. Rather than the wearing down of the complex, decadent pictures and ideas with which we've filled the world, Ms. Bhaba describes the archetypes that underlay them, or the new, half-born figures beginning to emerge from their decay.

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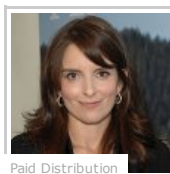
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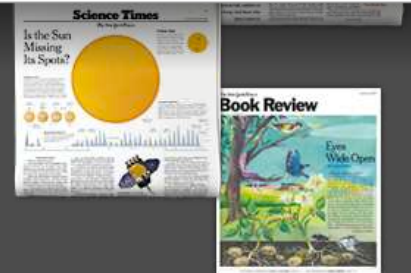


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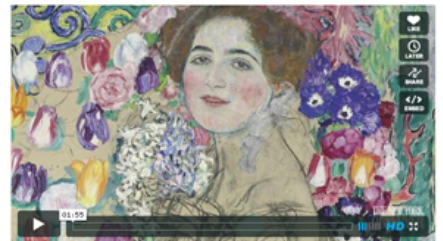
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