

AMALIA ULMAN

Selected Press

Art in America

MARCH 2015

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



View of Amalia Ulman's exhibition "Stock Images of War," 2015, at James Fuentes.

AMALIA ULMAN

James Fuentes

To enter Amalia Ulman's first solo show in New York, called "Stock Images of War," you had to push aside a tall black curtain while listening to Rage Against the Machine and the Bloodhound Gang—the kind of aggressive rock music favored by someone who decorates a bedroom with posters of swimsuit models and smokes from a plastic bong. There were more curtains inside, completely covering the walls, and a few spotlights to illuminate the body of work that anchored the show—a series of spindly and wonky metal-wire sculptures. Air fresheners dispensed a baked-apple-strudel scent. It could have been a torture chamber or interrogation room, or your own personal hell.

Ulman's sculptures are airy and light but almost feel treacherous, as they look like they're on the verge of collapse and the wire they're made from vaguely seems barbed. Each of these works renders a wheeled vehicle: tricycle, wheelchair, tank, automobile. While walking among them, you started to think about all the people a war affects: a child on a bike, a soldier in a tank, a wheelchair-ridden veteran. The sculptures benefited immensely from the show's theatrical context. If you singled one out and imagined it without the surrounding chaos, the craftsmanship suggested something a Sarah Lawrence sophomore might have made for a 3-D assignment.

Encountering means of movement under a banner of wartime art led you to reflect on the meaning of everyday life in a world constantly at war. The tabloids we look at, the music on the radio and the food we eat can all be seen as facets of the production of a generic and tacky military-industrial complex.

Even with the noise and smell, the room seemed absolutely still and quiet, as if you could hear a bullet shell hit the ground with absolute clarity. After being in the installation for a bit, you started to feel claustrophobic and uneasy. The sculptures were hard to see, so you tiptoed around, hoping not to step on a land mine. The dramatic curtains and the spotlights made you feel as if you'd suddenly gotten stage fright in a one-person play.

Yet moments of fantasy occasionally broke through the bleak surface. If you caught a wire chair from just the right angle, it glimmered. The canned apple-pie smell became a warming whiff of Americana. "Maybe I should have given the Bloodhound Gang a chance," you might have thought to yourself. "This song is honestly kinda tight."

—Dan Allegretto

ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

AMALIA ULMAN

May 18, 2018 • Amalia Ulman on her new book and internet performances



Spread from Amalia Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections* (Prestel, 2018).

Amalia Ulman's Excellences & Perfections, 2014, a durational performance that took place on her Instagram account, featured the artist playing a young ingénue with the kinds of finely calibrated displays of taste we've come to recognize as typical of the pageantry of aspiration many people gamely engage in across social media platforms. By virtue of its placement on Instagram, the artist garnered attention for being a person she wasn't, just as the rest of us do all the time. Every post in the work, along with public comments, was published earlier this month in a book by Prestel with essays by Hito Steyerl, Rob Horning, Natasha Stagg, and Rózsa Farkas. Here, the artist discusses her use of social media, making work with brand endorsements, and her Instagram performance Privilege, 2015–16.

AUTHENTICITY IS AN EXPRESSION OF CLASS. Everyone that I've seen who tries to be authentic is very rich, and I'm working class. I've always had to deal with this romantic ideal of not needing money as an artist, which I think is based on the fact that most artists in America come from wealth. I think it's very classist to denounce people who have to do commercial work so they can continue making art instead of working at McDonald's. This is a very European-American thing. When you look at other places, like in China, they don't have these biases against brands as much as people do here. I'm very interested in how different cultures approach such things, and I had to learn a lot of codes of conduct from living in the US and Britain that are very different from those in the culture I came from. It's funny to subvert that.

Even with something like the color red. As someone from Spain, red is a leftist color and signifies communism and anarchism. If you're red then you're from the left. But here in America, the Republican party uses this color. My performance *Privilege* took place on the internet from 2015 to 2016, leading up to the 2016 presidential election in the US, which really was a part of the work because the piece was influenced by whatever was happening at the time online. I was using red a lot for other reasons in this particular performance because I was trying to look for things that supposedly defined me, and then seeing everything in red and blue during the campaigns and how differently those hues were being utilized, it was a lost in translation situation for me. The ambivalence that some might sense in my work comes, I think, from being foreign.

I'm interested in playing with different platforms that aren't really supposed to be in art, or be the art. With *Excellences & Perfections* in 2014, I started doing fictional work on social media because you're not supposed to really make art in it, only promote work exhibited somewhere else. There is an expectation now that artists should be online and on social media promoting themselves, but that the promotion shouldn't be the work per se. It felt like a requirement, especially as a woman, to expose oneself to sell the work in a way. I've also tried to undermine that expectation by making art with other social and commercial media, such as magazines and fashion brands, for *Privilege*. I did photoshoots for magazines like *L'Officiel* and *Vogue* which were also later incorporated into my feed as part of the performance itself. Paid posts were part of it too, such as for *Gucci*. Some were real and some were fake, but they were all part of the same story I was creating. *Gucci* and *Chanel* were real, and then *Prada* and *Miu Miu* were fake—everything was mixed up, but the real ones look fake too. The character developed in *Privilege* was meant to be a caricature of myself, and there are a lot of ideas in that character that come from my own childhood. When I was a kid, I would go into characters, and just be a secretary or a businesswoman, for instance. I would sit on the kitchen table with my mother's typewriter, a broken phone, and my pens, getting very angry on the phone.



Amalia Ulman, *Privilege* 2/22/2016, 2016.

Using a pigeon in *Privilege* was the most successful element of the whole performance. Pigeons are unremarkable, and I like looking at things that are almost invisible, then trying to make work about it. My first challenge in this vein was when I was younger and trying to make work about the working class of southern Europe. My British colleagues in art school were really not into it, because it wasn't ethnic looking enough, so it wasn't interesting to them. It was just boring. They were like, "You're Argentinian, just make work about Argentina, Latin America is really cool," etc. But I actually grew up in Asturias, Spain, and it's just industrial, bland,

boring, and working class. Regardless, I wanted to work with that as material, and it was a challenge because it didn't look like anything. The pigeon in *Privilege*, named Bob, was very similar in that sense, because I had no attraction whatsoever to pigeons, ever. So I thought this character needs to be a pigeon, that was the challenge: To make him cute, lovable, to make work about him, and to have this story with an animal that has zero charisma. I bought him for nine dollars—I had never actually touched a bird before in my life, and he was disgusting, pooping everywhere. But I kept him for two years, and the relationship changed. I fell in love with him, and that really affected the work, because then all the work was really made from the heart. People thought he was funny and requested more and more work about him. Changing a point of view is very prevalent in my work, or how something that we don't care about, or find disgusting or scary, can become the total opposite just by learning its language. Bob was, in a way, this idea of the underdog, and that was a very prevalent concept in the public discourse during the election, so in turn he became the most important element in the piece.

The tone of this project was comedic, as opposed to the tragic mode of *Excellences & Perfections*, and people weren't vicious about *Privilege* as they had been with *E&P*. *Privilege* is the last work that I will ever do on Instagram, but both performances needed each other. *Excellences & Perfections* was easy to understand on the surface, since the easiest thing to get people to look at is a hot girl. Only by doing that first piece could I gather the audience to show something weirder later. It couldn't have happened the other way around.

The reality of my life during *E&P* was very, very different from what people were seeing on my Instagram. In the middle of the book between images from *E&P* are a series of letters I wrote from the Ananda Meditation Retreat in northern California, where I was in a forest, cleaning cabins, while online I was like a sugar baby staying in hotels. Most of the negative reactions I got for that work were from men that didn't really understand the performance. Their ego made them not want to feel stupid and my work made them feel stupid. I can't even believe that I got it done, because I had been in a bus accident right before and was using a cane and relearning to walk. I think seeing that piece through was some sort of coping mechanism to go back to normal, at least in pictures. I've used my body as much as I've used many other materials in my work, but the misogyny around me, and my work, is huge. Why would I be more respected if I were using someone else's naked body in my work? I'm just a good actress, that's all, but it has been very easy for people to assume that I didn't know I was doing, which is a very common reaction to women. And now that the book is done, I'm just happy to be able to frame the work the way I want, instead of being analyzed by other people.

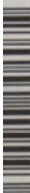
— As told to Paige K. Bradley

ArtReview



Tamar Guimarães

95



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Amalia Ulman

by Erik Morse



Utilising a vast array of media and disciplines, the Spanish artist seeks to track down and interrogate ideas of the self in an era of rampant global capitalism





above *International House of Cozy* (still), 2015, video

preceding pages *Excellences and Perfections* (Instagram Update, 10th July 2014), (nervous and excited!!!), 2014, Instagram; *Instagram Update*, 3rd June 2014, 2014, Instagram

In one of her recent domestic installations, waggishly titled *International House of Cozy* (2015), Los Angeles-based conceptual artist Amalia Ulman transforms Rotterdam's Showroom for Media and Moving Art (MAMA) into a Starbucks-inspired lounge crowned with a proprietary café logo. Inside, the gallery's ecru walls are accented with glass containers, glowing candles and other brand-name tchotchkes, between which are hung heart-shaped filigree and personal empowerment slogans. To one side of the space a collection of fold-up chairs sits beneath a flatscreen television, which plays a soft-focused short film of an art-industry couple encircled by the same glass decor and wheaten colour scheme. Choreographed in the manner of an Airbnb or Zara YouTube campaign, the film's attractive pair, clothed in high-end casual, discuss organic coffee, Los Angeles hotspots and artisan jam while thumbing through worn copies of *Artforum*. When the couple shuttles into a bedroom to perform the film's unanticipated sexual climax – sequenced in various positions to emulate a gonzo porn short – the sense of quotidian detachment and designer branding proves both uncomfortably titillating and playfully mocking.

The morphologies of the virtual and material in *International House of Cozy* typify the wide citational and conceptual filters at work in Ulman's 'post-Internet' oeuvre, which alternates between the millennial's social-media platform and more conventional object-accumulative environments, in whose displays of cultural curiosities are portrayed complex semiologies of class stratification, lifestyle trends and adolescent sexualities. A twenty-six-year-old graduate of Central Saint Martins in London, Ulman is often associated with feminist social-media artists like Jesse Darling, Kate Durbin and Ann Hirsch, and is perhaps best known outside of the artworld as the proprietor (or 'prankster' according to more disapproving critics) of the Instagram series *Excellences and Perfections* (2014). Ulman's performance, which lasted a period of five months, employed the popular photo- and video-based social network to invent a fictional persona based on tropes of the 'young girl'. The resultant *Bildungsroman* narrative, of a beautiful innocent who moves to the city to pursue a career in modelling; aspires to wealth and luxury; dabbles provocatively in drugs and plastic surgery; suffers severe emotional setbacks; and ultimately retreats to her homeland to mend and rediscover her 'true' self, was catalogued in frequent posts and accompanied by simulated, selfie photographs of the artist in character. Such promises of voyeuristic spectacle and salacious confession ignited her account's realtime fan base and drew mainstream coverage from pop-culture glossies like *New York Magazine*, *i-D* and *Dazed and Confused*.

Despite its very public staging, viewing the archive of *Excellences and Perfections* retrospectively reveals the kinds of complexities and intimacies of Sophie Calle's most arresting, and controversial, performances. The feminine visage of Ulman was the cynosure of the series' online viewership, but much of its compositional efficacy is due to the artist's acuity for design – graphics, costumes, props and setting – which trades on popular tropes of 'girlhood' and 'taste' as they circulate on platforms such as Tumblr, Facebook and Twitter. Ulman presents herself as a protean assemblage of designer clothing, gilded bibelots and decorative tableaux, seeking out the fantasy of

erasure through what she calls "the cosmetic gaze" – one aspect of the trending 'new normal', or 'normcore', the fashion-inspired celebration of the 'flattening' homogeneity of middle-class aesthetics. Similarly the motifs repeated throughout many of Ulman's exhibitions, such as butterflies, pearls, hearts and motivational slogans, suggest a Nabokovian *boutiquification* of youth and beauty, one in which the 'precious', personal symbology of girlhood is extruded at a gendered (and market) premium.

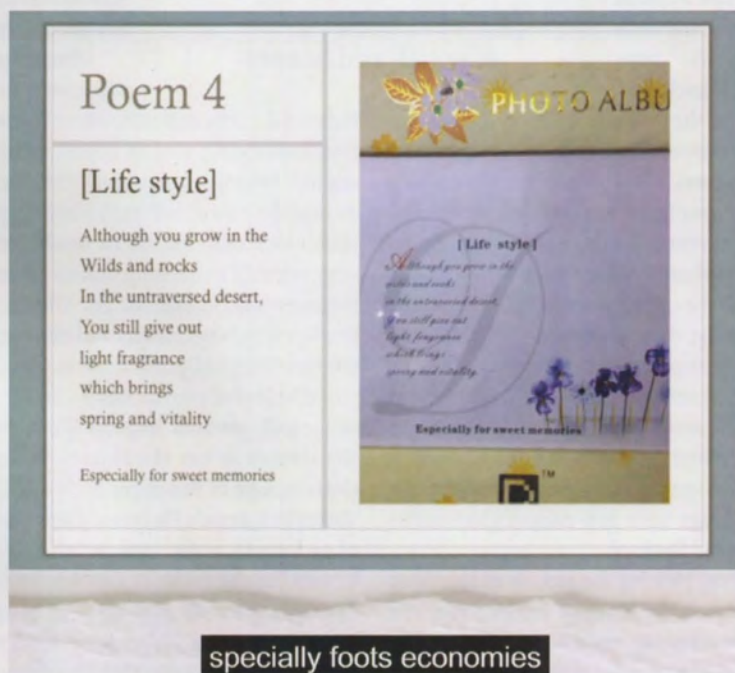
Aspirations for such cultural capital do not, however, emanate exclusively from the domain of the middle classes, as Ulman perceptively highlights in the less glamorous *Used & New* (2014). An antithesis of sorts to *International House of Cozy*, *Used & New* was presented at Los Angeles's threadbare LTD. gallery, wherein a series of glass cabinets and cheap Perspex shelves are stocked with heart-shaped mirrors, key-chains, decals, money boxes and lace panties, all ostensibly down-market goods vended as gifts. However, upon closer inspection, these objects are interspersed with blood stains and images of war zones and fetishised female bodies, all of which disturb the initial presentation of whiteness, softness and femininity, and hint at the underlying precarity and violence that ensure their production. Similarly, *Been There* (2010–12), a contemporary cabinet of curiosities from Ulman's show *Moist Forever* (2013), mixes aspirational tourist trinkets like Goldman Sachs golf balls, international currencies and premium cosmetics with lipstick-smeared shot glasses, hand-made bracelets and melted candles. Placed side-by-side as gifts or curated artifacts, the resultant bricolaging effect interrupts the stratified exchange values once impregnated in such objects.

Ulman's purview as an expatriate artist originates in a childhood spent in the industrial north of Spain, where she witnessed the country's transition from socialism to EU hypercapitalism and then bankruptcy. The region's mercurial, object-driven markets expanded exponentially during the 2000s, and the influx of speculative debt and consumer trends that followed are no doubt reflected in Ulman's fascination with capital's alternating desires for territorial circulation and accumulative interiorisation. For Ulman, the new psychogeographies produced therein contract and obscure traditional divisions between city/town, capital/purlieu and market/home.

"The fear of provinciality... makes me avoid nationalism, makes me... walk towards imports like a moth flies towards the light," she intones in her visual essay *Buyer, Walker, Rover* (2013), echoing the language of flânerie in Émile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883) or Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (1927–40) for a new global plexus of pedestrian malls, corporate hotels and transnational sweatshop labour. "In the midst of solitude, in the midst of isolation I receive messages from the metropolis through imported goods... Visiting these stores I can widen my mental map. I'm closer to everything and very quickly, I don't feel lonely anymore. The sharable qualities of these items make them something intimate, cosy. I've seen you before, yes."

To relegate this sensibility of 'cosiness' she extols (a domestic correlate to her other, somatic themes of 'cute' and 'pretty') to an ironic, Marxist ploy of false consciousness would be an oversimplification of Ulman's work. Rather, in exhibits like *Moist Forever* and

The motifs repeated throughout many of Ulman's exhibitions, such as butterflies, pearls, hearts and motivational slogans, suggest a Nabokovian *boutiquification* of youth and beauty



Buyer, Walker, Rover (stills), 2013, Skype lecture

the cloud-based ios photostream *Seeking Arrangements* (2013), whose titles play on sly double-entendre, the serialised placement of flower arrangements and willow stalks in corporate and resort settings evokes the temptations of what she calls the 'democratic judge' of rootlessness, one that leads to the ecstatic freedoms of the world experienced as dromological commodity. "From my delimited physical interior I dream of freedom," she continues in *Buyer, Walker, Rover*. "All streets lead to nowhere and all streets take me home... Drink your coffee in the morning and walk to work. Pretty. The world is yours!" Despite the institutional displacement of global capital, or perhaps because of it, the pleasures of commodity still trade on intimate fantasies of ownership, immanence and self-invention.

But in an increasingly multimedia marketplace, where both image and object are valued and traded at sublime speeds, what distinguishes the physical boundaries of the consumer and the commodity, the rational life of the capitalist and the secret life of the object? And how do our bodies negotiate between antagonistic fetishes of both intimacy and novelty?

Much of Ulman's recent interest in these questions of somatic displacement has focused on the increasing technologisation of the human. In late 2013, Ulman herself was involved in a severe

automobile accident that injured her legs and left her permanently disabled, a condition requiring long-term physical therapy. The experience, which stripped her of the comforting assets of her previous life and transformed her body into an object/specimen of mutation and medical intervention, contributes to her most disturbing works, *The Destruction of Experience* (2014) and *Stock Images of War* (2014). These installations utilise signifiers of hygiene and domestication

(eg clocks, calendars, motivational posters, room deodorisers, food) within threatening and disorienting tableaux – a doctor's office and a war zone, respectively – to explore how fragile and perishable is the clinical body. The installations' integrations of anxiety and mundanity offer a startling indictment of the 'soft' violences capital can inflict upon the human under the aegis of acquisition.

What continues to fascinate most about

Ulman's progressing oeuvre is not only the vast conceptual net under which she interrogates theories of identity, domesticity and fantasy, but the challenging heterogeneity of disciplines and templates that she engages from exhibition to exhibition – from poetry to design to online performance. In the era of social media's generic 'new normal', Ulman's quiet ambitions for difference qualify her as a vital, feminist voice. ar

Despite the institutional displacement of global capital, or perhaps because of it, the pleasures of commodity still trade on intimate fantasies of ownership, immanence and self-invention



above *The Destruction of Experience*, 2014 (installation view)

all images Courtesy the artist and, on the opening spread, Arcadia Missa, London

Mostly True

CULTURE | BY T MAGAZINE | FEBRUARY 13, 2015 11:30 AM

Two writers and one artist reflect on the slipperiest of all literary forms: their own diaries.

Amalia Ulman

An artist who, for a 2014 project called “Excellences & Perfections,” used Instagram to create a fictional alter ego that fooled thousands of followers.



Ulman, pictured at the Hotel on Rivington in New York, learned pole dancing and faked breast augmentation surgery for her Instagram art project.

NO FILTER Ulman, pictured at the Hotel on Rivington in New York, learned pole dancing and faked breast augmentation surgery for her Instagram art project. Credit Photographs by Nicholas Calcott. Still life: Marko Metzinger

AS A TEENAGER, I was so shy that I couldn't articulate my desires to myself, let alone write them down. My mother used to open my mail, and I had no doubt that she would read anything I hid under the bed. So my diary became a way to pretend I was normal, to edit out the thoughts I didn't want to be having. Eventually I stopped writing it. Now I just send long, confessional letters to a friend. I need an audience to make me explain myself.

But I've always loved reading other people's diaries. Growing up I was drawn to the autobiographical novels of the Belgian author Amélie Nothomb, who wrote about her childhood in Japan and China, with some artistic license, in books decorated with images of herself as a girl; she happened to look just like me. And I loved the "Claudine" novels by Colette, written in diary form and loosely based on the author's life as a sensual young woman. I liked the idea that the artist live whatever she preaches just as later, I would make work by putting myself in strange situations rather than inventing out of nothing.

It's interesting that one of the forms women have been most encouraged to write was traditionally meant to be kept private. A voyeuristic pleasure of mine is to seek out diaries published online. There are websites that women use to record their experience of fasting — the way, for instance, they become very lucid in the first three days and then fall apart, unable even to hold a pen. There are blogs in which sex workers describe their experiences of particular men in diaries that are at once essential for their colleagues' safety and surprisingly literary. There are forums for people transitioning genders in which they document the way testosterone changes their perceptions, or how, as they take hormones to transition into women, they become more emotional. One of my favorites is realself.com, where women can chronicle the process of undergoing cosmetic surgery in agonizing detail, step by step.

I've always used my iOS photo album as a sketchbook. Making the images public forces me to keep them in order, and stops them from getting lost in a jungle of folders that I would never be able to revisit otherwise. Among the still lifes and portraits, I take selfies — mostly to remind my later self of where I've been. But after being contacted by men who seemed to feel that they knew me from my photographs alone, I began to worry about my online presence, the lack of control I had over it.

And so the performance that I now call "Excellences & Perfections" began. I decided to fake an Instagram account to tell the story of a 25-year-old girl who was, in many ways, an absolute stereotype. The aesthetic of her feed was initially inspired by the Korean girls I saw on Instagram who seemed obsessed with beauty; they liked flowers, straightened hair, pale skin. I devoted two days a week to look for the right hotels to shoot in, buy clothes, get into character, take the photographs and return the clothes. Photoshop can only take you so far; to get my body into shape, I learned pole dancing.

I divided the project into episodes, phases in her story. In the second, "Amalia Ulman" had a break-up and — of course, as all girls do when they split from their nice college boyfriends — went crazy. I staged her relationship with a sugar daddy, her descent into drugs, the tearful

breakdown and then the apology to followers. I was interested in the “fake natural” aesthetic — those #nofilter, #iwokeuplikethis images that, despite looking effortless, also happened to reveal people’s beautiful houses, high-quality white sheets, good skin and lives of leisure. I faked her breast augmentation surgery. When it came time to post the final sequence of images I had taken — in which the character returns to her loving family, finds a new man and pulls herself together — I was on a meditation retreat. I have never felt a stronger disjunct between my fictional and real selves.

Since completing the project, I have returned to Facebook as myself, posting the sketchbook images that I didn’t publish during the time I was the fictional “Amalia Ulman.” I post them chronologically but with a lag of four months: pictures of L.A. when I’m in London, for instance, or of spring when it’s winter. It’s a small rebellion — more a confusion, really — but also a way of pointing out the manipulation inherent to social media, the way everyone’s public self, even in the most honest diary, is a fiction.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

‘I Was Raised on the Internet’ Review: Binary Reactions to the Digital World

Is the web an egalitarian tool with limitless potential or a vanity machine that severs real human connection? An exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago surveys artists’ reactions to the internet and the way it shapes our experience of the world.

By Brian P. Kelly

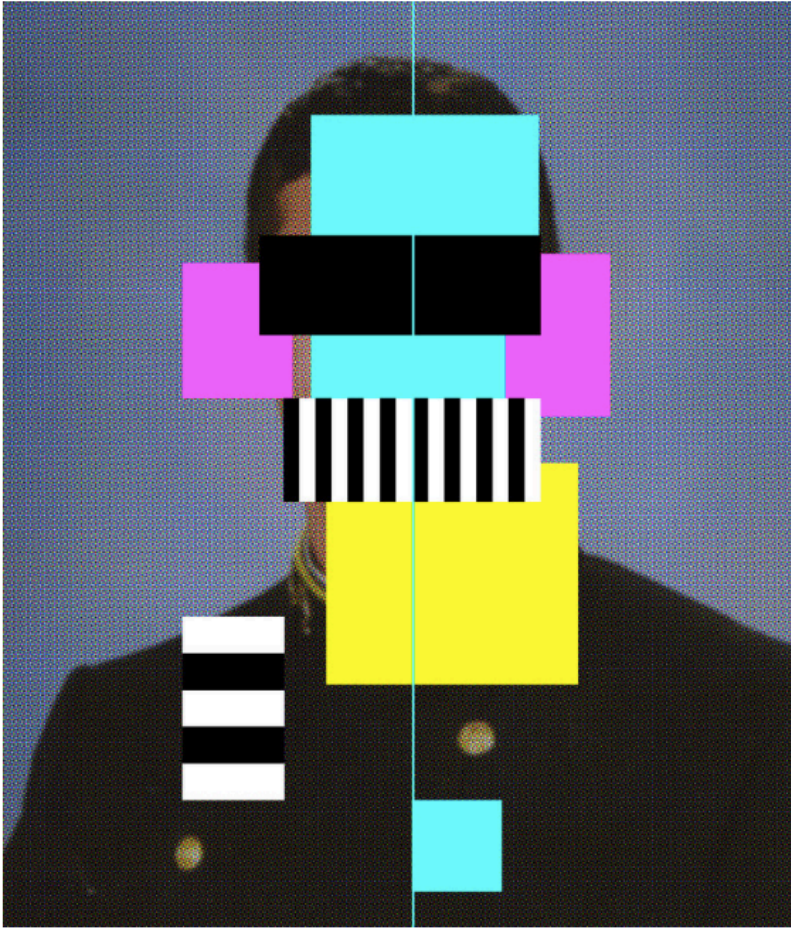
Sept. 15, 2018 7:00 a.m. ET

Chicago

With every step forward in human ingenuity, there have been technophobes warning that we’ve set the stage for our own demise and bright-eyed early adopters rushing to evangelize the newest fads. Guglielmo Marconi, inventor of the radio, felt the pull of both these poles. Worried about his creation and its uses, he once wondered, “Have I done the world good, or have I added a menace?”

Unsurprisingly, the internet has not been exempt from this duality. Partisans have praised it as an egalitarian tool with limitless potential, while others have decried it as a vanity machine that spits out echo chambers and severs real human connection. Now the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago has organized an exhibition that surveys artists’ reactions to the web and the way it shapes our experience of the world.

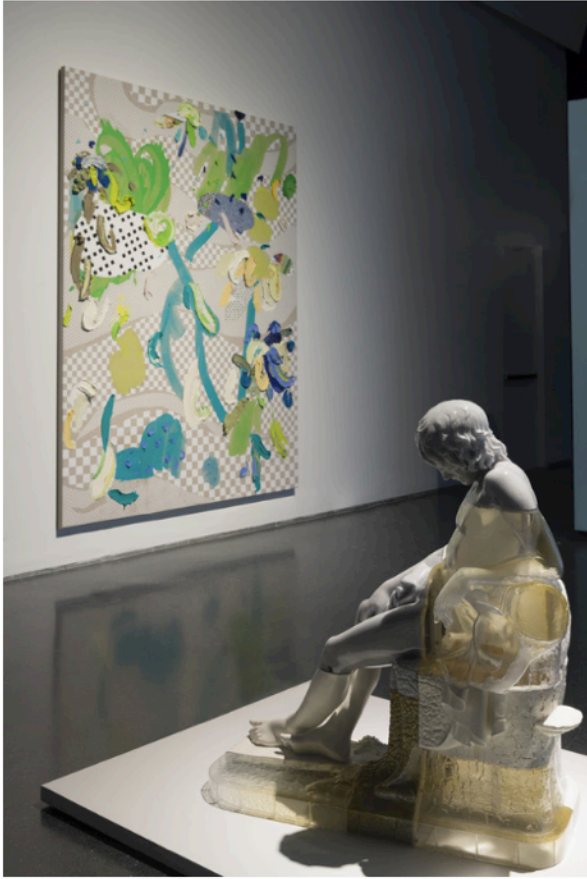
“I Was Raised on the Internet” (through Oct. 14), curated by Omar Kholeif, includes nearly 100 works by over 60 individuals, ranging from more traditional media, like photography, painting, sculpture, film and video, to emerging forms like interactive computer works and virtual reality. The size and scope of the show offer visitors the chance to see household names in the contemporary-art world working in both familiar and unfamiliar formats (Douglas Coupland’s acrylic paintings; Trevor Paglen’s encrypted computer-in-a-cube), while introducing them to lots of new artists doing the same.



Douglas Coupland's 'Delaware' (2016) PHOTO: DOUGLAS COUPLAND/DANIEL FARIA GALLERY, TORONTO

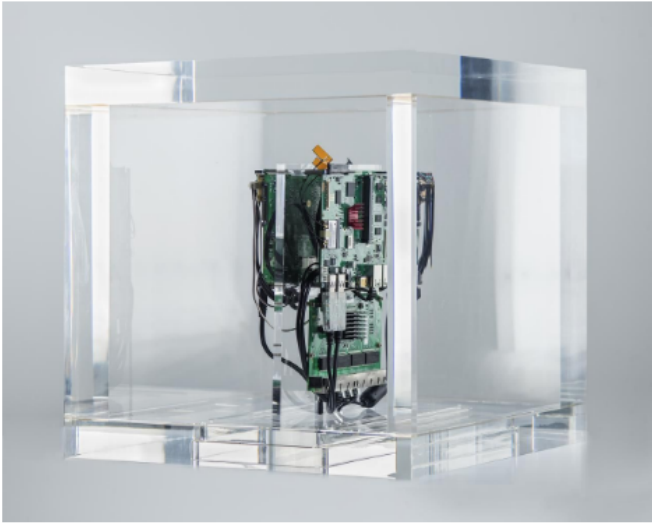
Taking on a subject as freewheeling as the internet, MCA faced the challenge of how to organize the show, and the museum has broken it into five sections dealing with identity; translating digital space into the real world; surveillance, data collection, and control; immersive and interactive experiences; and corporate culture and consumerism. Many of the objects in the show could have been displayed in multiple sections, and the categories occasionally feel arbitrary, as do some of the items included. Cory Arcangel's oversize ink-jet-on-canvas image of Adidas stripes, for example, seems to scream "Commercialism!" and not much else. All but one of the works were made after the turn of the millennium, and while the focus on the new is understandable, including earlier examples from pioneers in the realm like Roy Ascott would have provided some helpful context.

Even so, there's plenty worth digging into here, and the most interesting works are the ones that espouse the strongest belief in or worries about modern tech—the ones that transcend the curatorial categories and strike at the heart of what makes the web good and bad.



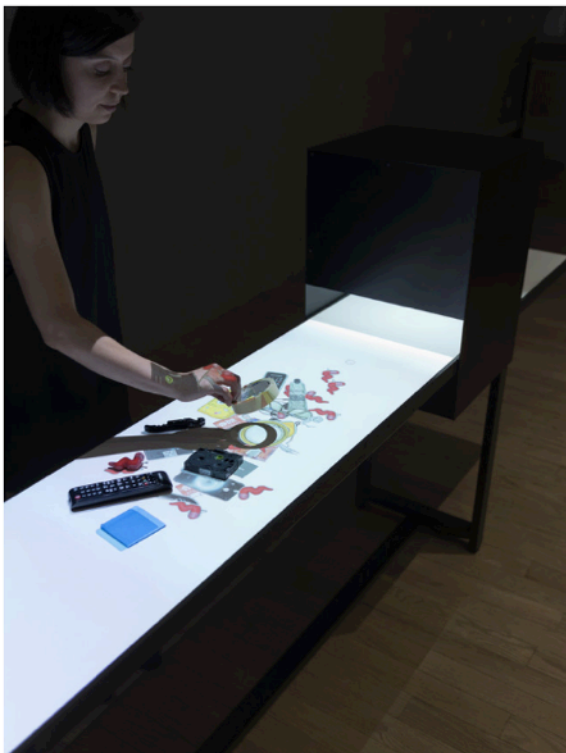
Installation view of 'I Was Raised on the Internet' at MCA Chicago with Laura Owens' 'Untitled' (2016), left, and Oliver Laric's 'Sleeping Boy' (2016), right PHOTO: MCA CHICAGO

Heavily in the pro column is Oliver Laric. His “Sleeping Boy” (2016) is a reproduction of John Gibson’s 1834 sculpture “Sleeping Shepherd Boy.” Channeling pre-modern art history, where plaster copies of masterworks made it possible for viewers around the globe to glimpse the hand of Michelangelo or Bernini, Mr. Laric updates the practice. Using a digital scan of Gibson’s original, he’s re-created it with a variety of materials and a 3-D printer. At once classical and strikingly contemporary, the sculpture holds promise for the future of digital preservation and the ability to make reproductions inexpensively available to institutions of all sizes. One can see Mr. Laric’s piece as a counterpoint to works like Daniel Arsham’s “Future Relic” sculptures (not included in the show), in which cameras, Walkmans and other gadgets are portrayed as crumbling artifacts. The former enthusiastically revives the past for the present; the latter sees our technological breakthroughs in an Ozymandian light.



Trevor Paglen's 'Autonomy Cube' (2014) PHOTO: TREVOR PAGLEN/METRO PICTURES, NY

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is far more suspicious of new technology. His “Please Empty Your Pockets” (2010) is a TSA-style conveyor belt on which visitors are invited to place their own objects. After they pass through a black box, they come out the other side and images of them are projected onto the belt, along with those of many other items that previous museumgoers had scanned and the machine has recorded. Mr. Lozano-Hemmer's piece serves as a simple but potent reminder that we give up a piece of ourselves in the name of security.



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's 'Please Empty Your Pockets' (2010) PHOTO: RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER/CARL & MARILYNN THOMA ART FOUNDATION

Not everything here carries a weighty message. A film pieced together from internet videos of cats playing the piano re-creates a Schoenberg composition, and a mechanized sculpture of an emoticon rotates, turning happiness ;) into sadness ;(. While undeniably influenced by the internet, these objects feel out of place in an exhibition that includes work like Mendi + Keith Obadike's "Blackness for Sale" (2001), an unnerving eBay posting in which the author's race was put on the auction block—complete with warnings such as "The Seller does not recommend that this Blackness be used during legal proceedings of any sort"—and whose echoes of slavery are unavoidable.



Amalia Ulman's 'Excellences & Perfections (Instagram Update, 5th September 2014)' (2014) . PHOTO: AMALIA ULMAN/ARCADIA MISSA

“I Was Raised on the Internet” can at times feel scattershot, but the duality of its subject is the one throughline that holds the show together. Where Juliana Huxtable has found the web a useful—if not always friendly—tool for expressing gender identity, Amalia Ulman was confronted with lust and violence when she underwent a months-long virtual “makeover” via her social media. In her video “Premium Connect” (2016)—part digital landscape, part hallucination, part history lesson, part anthropological interview—Tabita Rezaire proposes an internet that moves beyond bias. In contrast, Rachel Maclean’s film “It’s What’s Inside That Counts” (2016) imagines a postapocalyptic world with an underclass addicted to data and with hierarchies determined by social media presence and controlled by large corporations. MCA’s show is quick to point out that for every person who finds the internet liberating, another finds it oppressive; for every friend we find online, there’s a troll waiting to hurt us.



Jon Rafman’s ‘Transdimensional Serpent’ (2016) PHOTO: COLLECTION MAJUDIA/MCA CHICAGO

The centerpiece of the exhibition captures this double-edged nature of technology well. Jon Rafman’s “Transdimensional Serpent” (2016) lives up to its name. Viewers slip on VR headsets and take seats on a large fiberglass snake. Over the four-minute experience, we’re whisked through worlds both fantastic and familiar: soaring through treetops, huddled in a foreboding alleyway, surrounded by mystical beings in a desert. While not as shocking as Jordan Wolfson’s hyper-violent exhibit at the 2017 Whitney Biennial (in which the artist bludgeons a man to death), it is nonetheless one of the most engrossing VR experiences I’ve had in a gallery setting. The journey is disorienting, sometimes scary, but filled with the excitement of feeling like we’re truly exploring these imaginary places—not unlike the internet itself.

Mr. Kelly is the Journal’s associate Arts in Review editor. Follow him on Twitter [@bpkelly89](https://twitter.com/bpkelly89).

DAZED

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amalia ulman: meme come true

After her 'cosmetically enhanced' selfies hoodwinked the internet, the conceptual artist behind the Insta-scam of the century speaks out

Text Trey Taylor
Photography Dario Catellani
Styling John Colver

How would you feel if the last picture you double-tapped on Instagram turned out to be a booby trap? You might try asking the tens of thousands of people who followed the 'fake' social media account of Amalia Ulman, a radical conceptual artist whose work examines a post-#nofilter, post-Rich Kids of Instagram world where all social is aspirational and the self is something to be performed online.

The idea of deconstructing the tyranny of smug social network bragging came to Ulman during a period of forced incapacitation. It was October 2013, and she was lying in a hospital in rural Pennsylvania after surviving a horrific Greyhound bus crash on her way

from New York to Chicago, which left bones sticking out of her leg. “It was like a weird rollercoaster,” says Ulman of the experience. “Up and down – my mind was trying to erase it all. But I’m very good at dealing with trauma.”

Thousands of miles from her family and friends, the 24-year-old had nowhere to turn but the comforting glow of a hospital-loaned iPad. Here, in her regulation patient’s gown, she began to sow the seeds of her latest project in a prescription drug-addled haze, as she Instagrammed a series of risqué selfies and snaps of her hospital-prescribed diet.

In the spring of 2014, her thoughts crystallised with the launch of her *Excellences & Perfections* project, which she announced via a simple text-based image on Instagram stating “Part 1”. Taking social media as her canvas and ‘basic bitch’ selfies as her muse, she reinvented herself as an aspiring actress who relocates to LA and undergoes a series of cosmetic procedures in a quest to experience life beyond the velvet rope. For four months, she fooled her growing army of followers with her counterfeit luxury lifestyle as she fanned crisp \$100 bills, flashed her embellished manicures and posed at her spa-day downtime. The project climaxed with her cosmetic surgery hoax, which she termed #frankenboob. She counted down the days to her silicon gel implants in each consecutive upload. When the day finally came, she bound her breasts with the same kind of surgical tape used to treat her genuinely life-threatening wounds in hospital just a few months previously. Next she applied a flattering filter and published the discomfiting – and highly misleading – image to her online followers.



By bringing the commitment of hardcore method acting to her art, Ulman's aspirational selfies raised serious questions of how images of beauty are used against women and how social media can manipulate our attitudes towards the female body. That might sound straightforward, but keeping 72,000 followers entertained on Instagram takes real skill. So how did she do it?

On a pit-stop in London, Ulman suggests we meet at Sheer Bliss, a budget beauty salon in a weary east London brick building. In the flesh, the artist is slight and unimposing – she can't be more than 5ft 5in. Wearing a simple beige button-down and crotched cardigan, she's a far cry from the babelicious vision you see online – in fact, you'd hardly notice her if you weren't paying attention. Settling back for a foot massage, Ulman explains her motivations behind her project. By exposing the gulf between image and reality, she says, her aim was to make people reflect on the artificialities and unthinking 'likes' of online social interaction. "A friend of mine told me about this girl she knows who goes to luxury hotels to take selfies because that's what goes on Facebook; that's the new capital," she says. "Better to have her selfie in an environment like that than just in her shitty bedroom." In December of last year, Ulman neatly summed up the question underlying her approach on a panel at Miami Art Basel with Instagram founder Kevin Systrom: "How do we consume things and how do they consume us?" In this simple axiom – and woven throughout her nearly-nude selfies –was hidden a plain truth: even when you show it all, you reveal very little.

The real Amalia Ulman was born in Argentina in 1989 to a Gen-X mum and tattoo artist dad, and grew up in Gijón, Spain. Most of her time was spent milling about the skate park or getting inked by her dad, until she picked up a camera. "I was secretly mesmerised by body modification when I was little," she says, sipping a cucumber water. "I grew up in a tattoo shop. My dad pierced me as well when I was younger. Mostly I was just bored, I guess. When I was growing up I was an anarchist, whereas all my friends were communists. I grew up in an expat community and was always seen as the 'other'. I was too utopian, too artistic." That artistic bent led to her first solo photography show, *Lost Between Books*, featuring a model whose face was obscured by an open book. She bagged several local art prizes and eventually chose to study at London's Central Saint Martins after Googling 'art school London'.

“Most of the people who got it were women. Men were like, ‘What? I don’t get it, she just looks hot!’” – Amalia Ulman

Ulman’s work recalls that of other female artists who have gone to extreme lengths to explore perceptions of women in society. There’s French artist Orlan, who underwent (for real) a series of grotesque, Picasso-like body modifications in an emphatic rejection of the pressures women face to conform to an expected standard of beauty. And there’s Cindy Sherman, who wrestled back control of her body through her multi-personality, staged self-portraits, in much the same way that Ulman’s work mimics unrealistic images of women the media spoon-feeds us. Through provocative, exaggerated selfies of her slinking down a dance-pole, Ulman critiques the pressures women face to achieve a dancer’s bod and what it legitimately takes to get there. She’s the first to admit it was a slog – twice a week for an hour and a half she worked the pole. “I had a regime,” she says. “I went to the gym, pole dancing classes, got my hair and nails done – it was hours and hours of work.”

Ulman has other peers, like LA artist Petra Cortright with her YouTube self-portraits, and Alexandra Marzella, better known as @artwerk6666, who keeps her online viewers lapping up crotch snaps and nipple-pinching portraits. “I think they have the same issue that I do,” Ulman laughs of her friends. “Either people fall for them or feel really uncomfortable.” Together, this trio are shifting their body-positive, anticapitalist agenda closer towards their target market: generation selfie. “This is not a joke. This is very serious,” Marzella told us back in July, speaking about the intent behind her seemingly tongue-in-cheek dance videos.

As Ulman’s project drew to a close, some of her Instaciples caught on to the fact that something was amiss. “Is dis real? Soooooo confuzed,” wrote one of her stumped followers. But she concealed her intentions to the end. She knew the project served a deeper purpose. Did she feel pangs of guilt that her following was buying in to this counterfeit dream? “Kind of – at the very end because it was so long; it was four months and it was like, ‘Come on...’ My aim right after I finished the performance was to contextualise and detox and explain what was really going on.” And when she did? “Most of the people who got the performance and were attracted to it were women. They

really got it. They saw the amount of work it took to build up the body while men were like, 'What? I don't get it, she just looks hot!'"



The future for Ulman is looking a little less bootylicious. She's just wrapped her first solo exhibition in New York, *Stock Images of War*, at the James Fuentes gallery. Billed as "an immersive installation exploring themes of deconstruction, confinement, fragility and war", the show presents a series of wire sculptures in a room filled with the cloying scent of baked apple strudel. But despite the real-world concerns, narcissism is never far from the surface in her work: "We need mirrors to learn our poses," she writes cryptically on her website of the exhibition.

As Ulman removes her feet from the bubbling bath, she takes another sip of her cucumber water while the nail technician starts to apply a clear gloss. It's a more natural look than she's been accustomed to lately. As her focus turns away from body image to the frontlines of warfare, perhaps it's all the armour she needs. With her gaze no longer fixed on her iPhone camera, her work is beginning to speak for itself, even as her subjects become more difficult to grasp. "I don't want to make things easy for people to understand," she says. "The point is making something good." Now that's worth a double-tap.

See more on Amalia's projects on her [website](#), and watch her "Buyer, walker, rover" lecture [here](#). Her latest project, "The Future Ahead" is also viewable [here](#)

hair Brian Buenaventura at Management; make-up Ralph Siciliano at D+V; management using M.A.C; nails Geraldine Holford at The Wall Group; photographic assistants Brian Hahn, Marion Grand; styling assistant Beatriz Maues; digital operator Andrew Lawrence; production ArtList NYC

AMALIA ULMAN
interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Simon Castets



Amalia Ulman, Profit decay, 2012
Courtesy of the artist

Hans Ulrich Obrist/Simon Castets [HUO/SC]: What was your epiphany? How did art come to you or how did you come to art?

Amalia Ulman [AU]: I've experienced religious and philosophical epiphanies, never an artistic one. I've always done the same things since I was little... although a digital camera and the Internet, during adolescence, prevented a dreary and frustrated life as a terrible scientist.

HUO/SC: Who are your heroes?

AU: I had to think about this for a while, which means that I obviously have none. I don't believe in heroes because that's not the way I think or understand life. I'm an atheist and don't look up to anything. I'm a true believer that all humans have a shitty existence, despite whatever makes them exceptional or a "cult" figure. My hero would have to be a divine creature, but that's impossible as I'm not a believer. Hero is a word that promotes authority, distinction and fanaticism: I don't like that. I've appreciated and admired every single person that I've encountered throughout my life, despite the tears.

HUO/SC: I understand your resistance to the notion of the hero but can you talk more about your influences?

AU: Okay, some things I enjoy: Colette, Chopin, The Economist, Kusturica and Whit Stillman. Insomnia, artificially aided insomnia, yerba mate, Goldman Sachs and Lehman Brother's Memorabilia. Homes & Gardens, french manicures and cashmere sweaters. Poundlands, Euro Stores, Dollar Stores. Maybe Ervin Nyiregyházi; definitely: Carla Bruni.

HUO/SC: What role does the studio play or is your practice post-studio?

AU: Good question. I once got to a point of borderline-homelessness when I sold most of what I owned and threw the rest away. I had no books and used long London bus rides as an office. I researched on the go and produced on the spot. After that, I came to the conclusion that even if I really wanted to focus on my practice above all other things, I had to do it in a calm and unhurried manner because my health was at risk. That's why I decided to move back to my hometown to make a studio in my flat here, in Cimadevilla (Gijón, Spain). I used to be a great advocate of online documentation being more relevant than physicality...but out of necessity. No means to really produce what I had in mind translated into quickly made, disposable artworks. Now my practice has become more object based. Firstly, I cannot decorate offices with something other than an object. Secondly, I want to address the physical experience of my artworks. Once, at the Pompidou in Paris, I experienced this piece by Beuys: a room covered in felt with a piano. Everything, from the atmosphere to the smell, was absolutely marvellous and a total slap in the face. The possibility of having a house of my own and studio of my own is also the possibility of having a world of my own, a mental space to keep my own routine and to think and meditate when and how I want to. Basically: freedom. Building a home is important.

HUO/SC: What are you working on now? What are your next shows?

AU: I'm working on a brand new body of work, something I expect to be the culmination of a year long transitional period. Now that I've settled down, I'm ready for another essay on informal economies and imported goods as well as on artworks inspired by daily visits to euro-stores. Also, I'm trying to study and educate myself enough to be able to liven up dinner parties with interesting facts.

HUO/SC: Do you do projects outside the museum and gallery space?

AU: I guess I do. My personal life is too intertwined with my professional life to be able to make a distinction. I like mixing everything up without placing any boundaries, which gives enough space for the formulation of extra-institutional activities.

HUO/SC: Where does your catalogue raisonné begin? What is the first piece you no longer considered student work?

AU: I can't pick only one because I usually work in series and relate major changes in my art practice to certain feelings and memories. The first major change was to balance the intimate, autobiographical elements of an artwork with its ability to be part of a discourse. Art school encouraged everyone to eliminate any traces of humanism or subjectivity in favor of clinical theory-based conceptual artworks, which led to lots of perspex and references to Benjamin, Barthes & co. Combining this with a bit of cheesy, pre-artschool naiveté was a move that I consider one of my first adult decisions towards art-making. That, and not procrastinating ever again.

HUO/SC: Among the eight artists we invited to participate in our panel at the DLD Conference introducing the 89plus project, your presence on social networks was the most discussed. A lot of people seemed to already know you, even though you had never met. How would you describe your relationship to online socialization?

AU: I'm too sincere when it comes to sharing my life with people. Total transparency. That's why I never google myself. My biggest nightmare would be, à la Clockwork Orange, to be forced, eyes wide open, to witness the search results. My extroverted relationship with the web comes from being bored and isolated. I use the Internet in the same way I wrote to penpals and bought specialized magazines when I was younger. Now, all my activity is an exaggerated residue of that. I take selfies candidly and almost unconsciously. That's why I would never think of these images as something purposely fabricated. I always loved diaries and now I encounter myself without the time to write one. This means that all the images I upload are deeply personal. Global access to these images is an error derived from innocence; as I basically upload more than I see, produce more than I appropriate and stream more than I watch. Because I only look at a few things when I'm online, I have this idea that my material goes to a black hole when I upload them. This intensified with the iPhone: click click, to the vault, click click, to the vault. I never thought of universality, public exposure or exhibitionism. If I did, everything would be different. Now I'm sort of scared, but I guess it's too late to back off.

HUO/SC: What are your favorite social networks and why?

AU: Twitter and Instagram. I really like how these networks meld groups of people together; it's very democratic. I love how you can interact directly with celebrities via Twitter and how the explore section in Instagram gives you the chance to experience mainstream trends, as well as to discover non-western celebrities or Korean girls who document their plastic surgeries in between lots of pictures of flowers, cupcakes and teddybears. Facebook is too cliquey to be interesting. Do you know when you print something and it comes out wrong but you keep it in a drawer to scribble and take notes? That drawer is my Facebook. And that's what it makes it so sincere and raw.

HUO/SC: What is your favorite brand? Is your consumption influenced by the potential ripple effects of its online visibility?

AU: I don't really have a favorite brand, but I do have a thing for Miyake, which might be a post-Saint Martins thing. When I need to relax I do yoga or look for cheap Issey Miyake garments. I used to make most of my clothes and I believe in outfits more than in garments or labels; but it's true that when someone likes what I'm wearing, I can't help but namedrop the designer and wink—which might be a terribly lower class thing to do.

HUO/SC: How do you think that the redundancy through algorithms will affect the Internet's apparent open-endedness?

AU: It will affect it badly. I'm still trying to figure out how to fix the recommendations in my YouTube. They have suddenly changed and now only Bjork and David Bowie come up because I watched all their videos one very boring afternoon. It's like being trapped in the past and not being able to be forgiven for one's mistakes. My YouTube is a purgatory at the moment.

HUO/SC: Where do artists rank on the social scale and what role does their physical appearance play? Can an artist look rich and be taken seriously? How do you choose your own clothes?

AU: Artists are creatures that are generally broke but relate to the wealthiest people. Art is at the very top of the pyramid of needs. The whole of society needs art indirectly (without owning it) because it's a form of creative thinking. But who "needs" to own art? Only those who already have everything else. Appearance might be important because there's lots of seduction involved. Most of the artists I know are attractive and many of them look rich. But artists can look however they want, and that's an amazing privilege. I choose my own clothes depending on my mood. I like to match the work I'm doing and I love role-playing, so it's a vicious circle. I'm playing around with preppy aesthetics now, so I'm dying my hair lighter and wearing my pink shirt tucked into my white jeans.

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Amalia Ulman, app, 2011
Courtesy of the artist

HUO/SC: Can you tell us more about projects you have not yet been able to realize? Utopias? Dreams? Censored projects? Or as Doris Lessing says, self-censored projects that you did not dare to do? Projects that were too expensive to realize? Too big or too small to be realized? Forgotten projects? The unbuilt roads of Amalia Ulman...

AU: I have a few. Some of them are more abstract and improbable, involving aqua-parks, macro-parties, body modification, orgies or large-scale public sculptures. I have two PDFs on my desktop for two, plausible and viable, projects that are giving me a hard time in terms of production: a Smartphone App and a group exhibition of flower paintings that I'm curating. I wish I were more of the dreamy type. I guess it's part of my Capricorn nature to only sign on to a project that I know I will be capable of executing. I tend to dream big, but I never dream impossible. I think Pisces and Virgos are more into that. I love listening to them and stealing their ideas. Ludwig II of Bavaria was a Virgo. My utopia is to involve myself in politics more deeply and to create a system where shelter and basic needs are covered for everyone. Finally, a project too expensive to realize is to get plastic surgery, in the line of Orlan, but just to be more beautiful, without going back to normal. A proposal I thankfully never dared to approach an institution with.

HUO/SC: Your favourite color?

AU: I go through phases. Sometimes I go through the grey and yellow phase, when I make artwork and dress in those colors. Now I'm in the beige and blue phase. I hate green. I don't like nature much because of its greenness (and that's why I like the snow). I think I had a miserable time in high school because I'd wear this big green coat, without yet knowing that I despised that shade of chartreuse. Also, I "suffer" from synaesthesia, which makes me quite passionate about all this, I think.

HUO/SC: Do you go to the movies?

AU: I do, I go by myself as an escape. I love crying at endings.

HUO/SC: What kind of music do you mostly listen to?

AU: I like piano music. Romantics like Chopin, Schubert and Tchaikovsky. I tend to have migraines and this is a fact that forces me to filter down many things. No Baroque clavichord for me. Nirvana, Sublime and Elliot Smith remind me of home, mom and dad. I also like very silly sounding music and enjoy really fast techno since I'm little. For years, I danced insomnia away.

HUO/SC: What are your favourite museums?

AU: The Tate makes me anxious while the Centre Pompidou makes me feel good and excited about contemporary art. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago is awesome. The ones in New York... I don't know because I could never afford them. I like the Impressionists, so I guess I like the d'Orsay. Oh, I feel embarrassed that I haven't been to that many museums. I like the Casa Natal de Jovellanos and the Evaristo Valle Museum (both here, in Asturias).

HUO/SC: What was your first museum visit as a child?

AU: I can't remember the museum, but my mother says it was a Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition. So I was confronted with lots of male nudes as beautiful subjects from a very young age—although it took me a long while to recognize them as such.

HUO/SC: Can you tell us about your first gallery show at age sixteen?

AU: No, it's embarrassing. I can tell about my third show, when I was eighteen but that's boring, so nevermind.

HUO/SC: What was your experience of the DLD conference?

AU: Confusing at a personal level, painful at a physical one. Encouraging work-wise. Psychologically reinforcing. I liked the smoothies and the female sax-players.

HUO/SC: You talked about being mostly influenced by your contemporaries. Do you see generational creative patterns?

AU: Yes, and it is very exciting.

HUO/SC: What is dirty gentrification?

AU: Gentrification is the swirl on the foam of a latte. It is kicking people out of their houses by raising the price of real estate and opening cupcake shops. It is the act of fetishizing poverty.

HUO/SC: If your work could be described by keywords what would they be?

AU: #tagsforlikes #instacool #picoftheday #cute #violent #pretty #tagstagram

HUO/SC: What is your biggest work?

AU: Not being in a mental home. Collaborating with talented contemporaries.

HUO/SC: What is your smallest work?

AU: Solo shows.

HUO/SC: Do you have pseudonyms?

AU: My real name has become one.

HUO/SC: What prompted your family's move from Argentina? Do you still feel connected to the country?

AU: Economic crisis. I weirdly do.

HUO/SC: What will change everything?

AU: War. Maternity.

HUO/SC: What is your plan for the next years?

AU: Continue. (and maybe getting Korean plastic surgery)

HUO/SC: What role do books play for you in the digital age?

AU: I lied to myself when I defended eBooks: a book you can hug is a book you can love.

HUO/SC: What role does chance play?

AU: I mostly leave everything to chance. I'm a shit planner. Don't ever let me organize a dinner party! That's one of the reasons I work non-stop, because I don't trust my planning: whatever happens, happens and I'd better be prepared. My life is a sequence of the most random, unplanned, extravagant and unexpected events.

HUO/SC: Do you believe in the horoscope?

AU: I don't but it totally works. What are your star sign Simon and Hans Ulrich? Are you two compatible workmates?

Re: OMG OMG OMG URGENT

Hans Ulrich Obrist wrote:

I am gemini birthday may 21st. Simon what's your sign

Simon Castets wrote:

Pisces march 19

OMG HK bday

HUO/SC: What is your new work that you created in March 2013-03-07?

AU: In March 2013-03-07 I created the first item from a series of limited editions. A lingerie set consisting on a white brief, a white tank top and white headband, which from top to bottom states, in Swarovski crystals: upper, middle, lower. Social Stratification Lingerie Set (provisional working title).

HUO/SC: Your work is concerned with the effects of the Spanish welfare system on youth. How do you think it affects its creativity, and what is your personal take on it?

AU: The Spanish welfare system was closely related to a socialist notion of equality, which in theory had the best prospects but in practice turned out very unsatisfactory. This made everything extreme in its blandness by censoring eccentricities and punishing overachievements in a fear of disruption. A generalized passiveness drowned out talent and creativity. I believe in equality but also believe that differences should be celebrated.

HUO/SC: Could you describe the work you presented at HQ, Zürich?

AU: I was interested in repetition and accumulation [as a stance??] against purity and minimalism; as a metaphor for the binary good/bad taste or rich/poor aesthetics. When I was an otaku in high school, I'd draw all these eyes, just because they were the easiest and most gratifying part to draw. There was this sense of instant pleasure over effort, this notion of accumulation against a solid final satisfaction. That's why I decided to make references to all these teenage class differentiators, as well as to stickers, as referential marks of status.

HUO/SC: How did the "Weeping Image" work come about?

AU: Weeping Mountain was the first idea I materialized after a two year pause. That was definitely a big step for me. It started an all-or-nothing way of working where everything was thrown away after being documented. The work had a physical life-span of thirty minutes and a digital life-span of, by now, three years. Aside from that, the piece was pure juvenilia, post-internet and a very big etcetera.
I'm really fond of it but never liked it completely, now I realize it has some green in it ... that might be it!



Amalia Ulman, Sketches 1, 2012
Courtesy of the artist

HUO/SC: Your show at Galeria Adriana Suarez ironically commented on the gallery's target customers. How do you think the gallery benefited from that and how do you think it speaks to the potential of institutional critique?

AU: I don't think they ever knew it. The show was proper; I looked neat during the private view and posed with some children in front of my paintings. Everything was pretty legit. I don't like irony or exaggerated mockery. I really did paint while doing Gwyneth Paltrow's face and I took inspiration from interior design books I already had. I think I'm too empathic to be cynical. I can't make a strong critique without thinking about the reasons that led to the thing I'm criticizing.

HUO/SC: Are you a Situationist?

AU: That's like kind of related to Sartre, no? I'm more on Simone's side, she's way cuter. There is analysis and critique in my work, but I wouldn't say I'm a Situationist. If I go to the Wikipedia page, I can't do more than pick and choose. Maybe it is a generational thing. At this point, I only want to use images and visuals that I genuinely love. I hate working from irony and mockery. For example, if I've used the logos of Avene and Lancôme in a recent painting, it's because I love to line up my Avene products to stare at them and because I'm personally attached to Lancôme. I want to answer the question: "why do I feel so attached to these products?" from sincerity. I aim to shed light on consumerism and gender problematics while being true to myself—instead of giving a lecture and being cynical. I'm not influenced so deeply by those around me, by situations and places. They can nurture me, but they don't alter me. The only thing that still influences me is love and attraction. I have to admit that I don't really pay that much attention to someone unless I'd feel sexually attracted to him/her. Thank god I'm sort of sapiosexual.

HUO/SC: The 20th century is the century of the collage. Is the 21st century the century of the collage?

AU: I have many friends who work brilliantly in this field. Personally, I don't do many collages. I don't think I'm very talented when it comes to assembling stolen images. I have a weird necessity to touch everything/create everything from scratch.

HUO/SC: Are you a doodler?

AU: I've never sketched anything. I do all tests in my head: from gluing to varnishing. I always materialize my thoughts with minor changes, and never start with something unless I have a perfectly detailed 3D mental image of it. This is a technique that arose from a need to be resourceful.

HUO/SC: How is your iPhone app project coming together?

AU: Badly. It's hard to find an investor when there would be no revenue. The app is in itself non-commercial and anti-capitalist in its structure. When you write with water on hot ceramic, it evaporates. Well, this application functions on the same premises. It's a confessional Twitter-like app. As an anonymous user you could type something, publish it and see it disappear before your eyes. The front page would be this constant flow of thoughts, just for the sake of it: no feedback, no accounts, no usernames and no archive. I think it'd be a great way to analyze human nature and how cultural capital and feedback as currency keep social platforms afloat. This app is therefore an experiment, something that intentionally sees its own failure as a positive aspect, as a response to the questions and doubts about the economics and sociology in cyberspace.

HUO/SC: You learned how to use Photoshop in order to look "cute" in the pictures you posted of yourself on the Internet at age fourteen. How do you think that your generation's relationship to sexuality has been influenced by the Internet?

AU: It's funny, I actually had a conversation about this at the DLD dinner, with an investor who was funding a project to protect children online. We were discussing how these things can be controlled (or not) and I ended up telling him about my first experience with porn, to which I was interrupted by an intermezzo of Chinese contortionists, to which he continued "So, you were saying you were shocked the first time you saw a cock." Sexuality is part of a human's *raison d'être* and sooner or later it comes up in some way. What I was trying to explain is that this encounter with sex at twelve, through codified cable television, wasn't strange to my generation, and that many of my peers were confronted with porn in a similar manner; something that has shaped my generation's sexuality differently from the previous' one...and from the forthcoming one. I think that the next generation will be much more familiar with fetishes and rare practices, something that is sort of inherent to the Internet. For example, I think they wouldn't find crashing, nail tapping and long hair fetishes as funny or abnormal because they will be raised with it and see it in YouTube all the time.

HUO/SC: Your work often takes sculptural forms. How do you value its physical presence, and how do you see it translating in documentation, which you said you value above the work itself?

AU: I believed in documentation over real life experience for a long period of time, but this belief mainly emerged out of need. However, photography still plays a special role by being the culmination and last step of my production process. My intention now is to make my work and its documentation complement one another, instead of neglecting one for the sake of the other. This is something I was satisfied about my show at HQ in Zürich. My intention was to make it look photoshopped in real life and somehow I feel I accomplished that. The documentation, aside from the color, wasn't modified at all. Nowadays I'm really interested in the sculptural and corporeal aspect of my works. There's more to life than the Internet.

HUO/SC: You said that you produced most of your work in a "trance-like" state. Can you elaborate?

AU: 3,2,1... I haven't slept in two days. I do work everyday but when it comes to finishing things I leave it all for a consecutive row of days and nights. I start with something and don't finish until I think I'm completely done with it. After a while, I start losing consciousness of what I'm doing and start becoming more and more unaware of my actions even though I become gradually more lucid over time. At the very end I pass out and when I wake up I'm surprised by all that I've done because I can barely remember anything about it, or how I got there. I don't know if it has to do with the migraines or not, but I'm pretty much used to not being very focused and live my life feeling as if I'm in a very steamed-up shower. I sort of know how I get to do things, but I don't really know how to, to be honest.