

**The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge,
Issue 07: *TILTING (1)*, *TILTING (2)*
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by Anj Fermor

We don't have to pretend like an online version of something that was supposed to be experienced in person is an acceptable alternative—not even out of solidarity with the artist whose show was unfortunately cancelled, or dramatically permuted. It isn't constructive to write in disingenuously positive ways that ignore the reality of our situation, nor to adopt a perfunctorily encouraging tone in order to cushion an inevitable letdown. These ad hoc online exhibitions can't exist or be seen in the way they were intended to, and connected as they are to their well-intended pre-pandemic origins, many are bound to fall flat.

Blackwood Gallery's most recent issues of their Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge broadsheet publication, *TILTING (1)* and *(2)*, have acknowledged this fact of our shared present. In late March, the gallery released a call for submissions inviting people to respond to the new circumstances created by COVID-19, providing a frame not only for thought, but for creatives with a sudden and critical need to get paid. As a gallery attached to a university and therefore to significant funding, these issues were devised as a meaningful way to share resources newly available from the temporary suspension of their operations. They described the publication-to-be as an "urgent and provisional" platform that would "index participants' responses to this especially unstable moment." The works herein certainly adhere to the term "provisional," many by highlighting that it is the publication's medium—the internet—that make their texts or artworks possible. Often condemned for its mercurial quality, the internet has been embraced here as a counterintuitive site for collective pause and reflection.

Musician and artist Nicola Privato's project *W.E.I.R.D.* (2020) comprises a computer program and musical compositions produced by it, called "Uncertainty" and "Emergency," published in issue 1 and

issue 2, respectively. The program downloads tweets happening in real time that contain a chosen keyword (in this case, the respective names of the two compositions) and then Privato translates the frequency of those tweets into a musical score. The first composition, "Uncertainty," sounds almost shaky and skittish at first, with soft but unpredictable and cramped piano notes. Over the course of the piece, it becomes fittingly apparent that no reliable rhythm or melody will ever form. "Emergency" uses low and weightier notes, first at a rate that is slow and burdensome, then quickening to be chaotic, and finally overwhelmingly crowded and relentless. The project title acronym stands for "Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic," and, in the words of Privato in their project description, "reflects the inherent bias in knowledge production, where a small fraction of the global population—roughly 15 percent, the W.E.I.R.D. demographic—speaks on behalf of the whole." Privato has deliberately chosen Twitter, the platform they see as an especially concentrated site of W.E.I.R.D. discourse. Though the open-source bot that Privato uses to collect the data for *W.E.I.R.D.* had been in use well before the pandemic (and is as old as Twitter itself), the three movements, "Uncertainty," "Emergency," and "Identity" (the last of which will be released independently by the artist soon), are unique recordings taken during the first months of 2020 that capture the world's collective panic in real time.

Whereas *W.E.I.R.D.* mines information from the internet, "This Text is a Monument" by Mark Dudiak reports on a project whose significance stems from inserting information onto it: an ingenious digital memorial for the Chinese whistle-blower Dr. Li Wenliang created by an anonymous coder on the online platform Ethereum. Ethereum is an open-source, blockchain platform that is being used for an emerging cryptocurrency,

LEFT: Cover Image: Sara Graham, Conjecture Diagram no. 05, 2014, graphite on mylar
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
RIGHT: Cover Image: Ivetta Sunyoung Kang, Proposition 1: Hands, 2020, single-channel video, performed by Ivetta Sunyoung Kang and Eric Dong Ho You
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Ether. Unlike other cryptocurrency platforms, Ethereum users can create codes named “smart contracts” that ensure credible transactions. No third-party financial authority has to validate the interaction and ultimately no organization has the authority to delete or restrict access to viewing the contract by those who visit the site (because it is open-source coding, anyone can view it).

Li was one of the first whistle-blowers who, on December 30, 2019, spread warnings of a new virus and explained its seriousness over the Chinese social media app WeChat. Within days, Li was reprimanded by local police for spreading allegedly false information. Later, while working at Wuhan Central Hospital, Li contracted COVID-19 himself and, after a period of hospitalization, died. Before passing, Li uploaded an account of his experiences to Weibo, a Chinese micro-blogging website. But quickly afterwards, Chinese authorities suppressed all online information about the doctor, his death, his warnings, as well as the public uproar surrounding the suppression (the Chinese government has since exonerated Li and apologized for previously reprimanding him). The Ethereum memorial that the coder created evades censorship. Dudiak’s text in *TILTING (2)* explains how this online memorial works within the tradition of finding or creating a site for memorial while also retaliating against censorship by utilizing new tools for global communication in unconventional ways. Li’s Ethereum memorial proves that, in addition to being the provisional site of the online media frenzy surrounding the pandemic, the internet may also serve as a permanent site for our memories of recent events.

Ivetta Sunyoung Kang’s *Proposition 1: Hands (2020)* is an atypical example of an artwork that is transformed meaningfully by the tragedy of its impossibility to be performed. Originally planned as a participatory video installation for a gallery setting, the work instructs audience members on how to perform a hand-warming

exercise called “Make Electricity on Hands,” a children’s game played in South Korea. It involves grasping another person’s wrist, slapping their palm, and rubbing saliva on their index finger and palm, all to encourage blood flow. The project description as it appears in *TILTING 2* reads, “this project’s hope to encourage touch among participants has become unadvisable.” Imagined pre-pandemic, *Proposition 1: Hands* has gained a new and extreme relevance to the experience of living in 2020 given our hyperawareness of what our hands touch, our apprehension around the spreading of saliva, and our collective desire to be in contact with one another again. It’s obvious, almost laughable, how impossible participation in the performance is now, although the disappointment of it no longer being able to come to fruition is precisely its relevance.

The works I have described here are a fraction of the 41 included in the two publications. Taken together, *TILTING*, unlike many other recently released projects, seems to have acknowledged that the internet is not an obliging substitute but rather a space with an accessibility, style, and structure unique to itself. These projects have taken the route of existing *within* the internet rather than *on* the internet. The reason that so many online exhibitions and publications are failing is, in my mind, quite simple: they are denying the reality of our present—an understandable knee-jerk psychological response to change or pain, but one that ultimately prevents us from taking meaningful next steps toward a more considered future. *TILTING* is a success within this new paradigm of destined failure.

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darkness is as deep as the darkness is:
Rita McKeough
Walter Phillips Gallery,
Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity
February 1–May 31, 2020

Since I’ve moved back to Vancouver, what’s struck me most is the amount of construction. There are the buildings fenced off and boarded up with plywood, the rezoning notices posted like billboards. There are the piles of broken-up buildings—bricks and blocks, glass and wood and dust, amid earth-shaking noise and other debris. There are the scruffy sheets of plywood adrift across huge pits in the ground where some low-rise buildings once stood.

In Banff, the salvaged wood in Rita McKeough’s exhibition *darkness is as deep as the darkness is* might have come from these sites, or from other, rural sites feeding them metals, sand, fuel, and lumber. Many worn and varied pieces of wood were cobbled together, repurposing leftovers from the Banff Centre’s woodshop to form an imagined underground animal burrow, built up around the entrance of the Walter Phillips Gallery, and dimly lit. Back and forth through the burrow were the voices of plants and animals. After their homes were dug up and turned under, they took refuge here.

Through the noise of chainsaws, jackhammers, tractors, and other equipment, and over the sounds of

by sophia bartholomew

insects buzzing, Bear speaks to Cranberries over the radio, saying: “I can’t hear anybody. Is anybody out there? Cranberries is that you? You’re breaking up...” Cranberries replies: “Yes, this is Cranberries... It’s terrible... Where did all the rest of the forest go?”

Bear: Well the trees are all gone of course. They’re long gone...

Cranberries: How did they get the roots out of the soil?... Why do they want to have the land this way?

Bear: There’s something down here in this darkness that they really want... I think it’s... It might be oil. It might be coal. It might be food. It might be us. I’m not sure...

Bear continues: “It’s time we show our claws... and show our teeth. It’s time to get them to listen. It’s time that they stop. No matter what they’re looking for, *that’s enough...*” Cranberries agrees. “We can’t give up.”