

Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World

by

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Abstract

The thesis and exhibition, *Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World*, seeks to analyze digital portraiture today. I choose to depict concepts and ideas, as they relate to digital portraiture, through four distinct series of work, which encompass similar ideas and themes, but come at them from different perspectives. The work within the exhibition is comprised of several portraits of personal friends, family, and acquaintances, which have all been appropriated from online sources such as Facebook, and online dating sites. Because the portraits consist of people that I know on a personal level, are a collection of portraits that are derived from my personal social media profile, and represent individuals with whom I have frequently interacted with online, one could assess that in addition to being a collection of unique individual portraits, the exhibition is also a self-portrait of me, the artist. The exhibition includes Facebook Text Portraits, Nightclub Portraits, Online Dating HTML Portraits, and a Crying Girl Portrait, all of which strive to blur the lines between art and digital design, while addressing the function and meaning of digital portraiture today.

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For my mother, Nadine Yashcheshen

*Mom, words cannot begin to express how much you mean to me.
You were with me every step of the way, providing me with unending love,
support, and guidance. You sacrificed everything you had so that I could be here.
I am everything I am because of you; and I will spend a lifetime trying to repay you for
everything you have given to me.*

*From the bottom of my heart, thank-you for helping me make my dreams come true.
I am dedicating this thesis and exhibition to you. It is not mine it's ours. I love you.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Personal Background as Inspiration

My thesis and exhibition directly correlates to my personal interests in popular culture, computer-generated graphics, and art. These three areas have been a driving force throughout my life, have directed my education and career choices, and have collectively influenced my Master of Fine Art thesis and exhibition. *Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World* combines all of these interests into one body of work, in order to blur the lines between art and digital design.

My interest in popular culture started at a young age, and is a common theme that runs throughout my work to this day. Popular culture can be narrowly defined as entertainment media, such as, but not limited too, websites, comic books, Disney fairytales, Hollywood movies, television shows, and magazines that are distributed and consumed by the masses. Growing up, many aspects of popular culture, specifically commercialized fairytales, and comic books, aggravated me. No matter how hard I tried, I could not seem to relate to the stereotyped characters within them. This inspired a deep seeded interest in the characters, scripts, visual effects, and the industries that create this form of entertainment. It also influenced me to pursue a post-secondary education in graphic and web design.

Throughout my education and career, as a graphic/web designer, I was told to keep my graphic design and web design skills separate from my fine art practices. At that point in time and to some degree even today, the graphic arts were viewed as “lower” forms of art, because they are technology-based commercialized images, whose sole purpose is to sell products to consumers in a seductive way. The fine arts on the other hand, are seen as an elevated form of art, because they can express complex ideas and themes that speak to the human condition. As technology becomes readily available these misconceptions are starting to be challenged, but to a large extent digital design is still viewed as inferior to traditional mediums such as painting and sculpture.

The thesis and exhibition, *Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World* embraces all of my skills and interests in popular culture, fine art, and commercial graphic design. The

artwork in the exhibition is a hybrid of graphic design, web design, photography, painting, and mix media. My personal background in all of these areas directly inspired the format and many of the conceptual ideas surrounding the work. The work is intended to challenge the hierarchy between these forms of art, emphasizing that both art and design can express conceptual qualities that were once believed to be unique to fine art.

Chapter 2: The History of Portraiture and Portraiture Today

2.1 The History of Portraiture

Historically, portraiture was and to a certain extent still is a form of art that strives to visually depict a group of people or an individual's likeness through artistic means. The portrait according to this description, "encompasses distinct and even contradictory aims: to reveal the sitter's subjectivity or self-conception; and to exhibit the artist's skill, expressive ability, and to some extent, views on art."¹ Portraits can depict "likenesses as contained in a person's physical features, it can also represent the subject's social position or 'inner life', such as their character or virtues."² A "good" portrait is believed to convey the "subject's unique essence, character, thoughts and feelings, interior life, spiritual conditions, individuality, personality, or emotional complexity."³ In other words, a portrait's artistic merit rests on the notion that the image visually articulates a subject's interior and exterior character. This is achieved through the sitter's facial expression, posture, clothing, and the technique of the artist, which have all been given symbolic meaning within the canon of Western art.

Painted portraits, throughout history, have been reserved for the elite. To have an artist paint your portrait is time consuming, requires a tremendous amount of technical skill to

¹ Freeland, Cynthia. "Portraits in Painting and Photography." Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the

² West, Shearer. Portraiture. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 21.

³ Freeland, Cynthia. "Portraits in Painting and Photography." Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition (Vol. 135, No. 1 (2007): 95-109) 98.

achieve true-to-life facial features, and as such, was and still is extremely expensive. Therefore, painted portraits are unobtainable for many middle and lower class people.

2.2: Portraiture and Digital Technology

Today, with the rise of the Internet, social network sites, online dating sites, and digital photography, the means by which portraits are created and displayed has changed. Digital cameras, computers, Internet access, and so on, has become affordable and common. Therefore, more people than ever before are able to photographically capture, and display portraits of themselves in their homes and online. This has led to an explosion of photographic digital portraits that range from amateur snapshots to professional images. We no longer need to sit for an artist to paint our portrait, or wait for photographic film to be developed, in order to see our own likeness. A pose, click, upload, and a few strokes on the keyboard are all that is required to create cost effective, custom portraits that can be displayed to millions on websites that reach all corners of the globe.

Within the last ten years, social media and digital portraiture found online has become extremely influential to me. Social media sites, such as Facebook, have become a form of daily interaction with many of my friends, family and acquaintances that live across Canada, and in many places around the world. Through social media, I am able to see photos of, and interact with people who I have known in various phases of my life, but have moved to other places, or with whom I am unable to see in person for various reasons. By interacting with these individuals online, I started to see patterns and new forms of visual communication emerge, which inspired me to research the ways that portraiture has changed in the wake of digital technology.

2.3: Portraits Today: Popular Culture as Inspiration

Today many everyday portraits, taken with a digital camera, are heavily influenced by images of public figures. We are bombarded by portraits of celebrities, political leaders, and sports stars on television, in magazines, on the Internet, on product packaging, and even on

billboards. We know the latest fashion, hairstyles, poses, digital gadgets, and current trends by looking at images of celebrities.⁴ And our portraits reflect this visual knowledge.

Many portraits online today are “youth-specific in that their communication is oriented toward or refers to the symbolic codes of the market, youth and consumer culture, the advertising and celebrity systems, and the peer group environment.”⁵ Glamour photography techniques, such as lighting, composition, poses and gestures are common elements in many digital portraits today. Everyday people, whose portraits grace the pages of social media, online dating sites, and blogs on the Internet, use digital photography to create portraits of themselves that mimic the images that they see of celebrities within popular culture, in order to convey their own personal characteristics. Celebrity culture is pervasive, and it is seen everywhere. It makes sense that people would use the codes, conventions, and visual language defined in the media to represent themselves in their own portraits.

Throughout my research, I found that many individuals that post portraits online mimic codes, conventions and visual language that stems from popular culture, within their own portraits. This idea is evident in the portraits that I selected for the exhibition, which inspired my research. I found the ways that each individual chose to accept, reject, and at the same time draw on popular culture as a form of inspiration, fascinating and influential.

Chapter 3: Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World

3.1 MFA Exhibition

Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World is a thesis exhibition that analyzes the connection between portraiture, art, and digital technology today. Digital technologies, like traditional forms of art, offer the viewer windows through which to interact with images, ideas, and text. In traditional art, such as painting, the window is a picture frame. On the Internet that window is a web browser. Both traditional art forms and digitally created art, want the window

⁴ Nairne, Sandy and Sarah Howgate. *The Portrait Now*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.

⁵ Autenrieth, Ulla P., and Klaus Neumann-braun. *The Visual Worlds of Social Network Sites: Images and Image-Based Communication on Facebook and Co.* (Munich, Germany: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2011) 55.

to fade away in order to make the viewer or user's interaction with the work seem natural and life-like, and as such, transparent.⁶

The exhibition seeks to connect digital forms of art with traditional artwork; taking digitally derived elements such as text, images, HTML, windows, and pixels, and formatting them into analogue works of art, such as paintings, printed photographs, and installations that are hung in an art gallery. In doing this viewers are invited to interact with the work, and the ideas within them, in a physical analogue way, making the art gallery the computer. Rather than zooming in and out with a mouse to see text and images, or opening and closing windows, the viewer must physically move their body to see the work. Through this description, one can assess that my intention in creating the exhibition is to take the digital world and make it analogue, removing it from its original context on the internet, in order to explore what this form of media means within an art context.

The work that makes up the exhibition consists of portraits of people that I know on a personal level, is a collection of images that are derived from social media profiles, and represents individuals with whom I have frequently interact with online. Through this assessment, one could affirm that in addition to being a collection of unique individual portraits, derived from the digital world, the exhibition is also a personal self-portrait. All of the individuals represented in the exhibition, are people that I have known through various phases of my life, and as such come to represent parts of my own identity.

3.2 Facebook Text Portraits

Boasting over “700 million users”⁷ on Facebook alone, profile photographs have become a means of communication, a form of self advertising, and a visual representation of the user's body in a virtual space. Profile photographs are as diverse and unique as the millions of people creating them. “The profile picture, which is automatically attached to every online activity and conveys the characteristics of personal appearance and gesture,

⁶ Bolter, Jay David and Diane Gromala. *Windows and Mirrors: Interaction Design, Digital Art, and the Myth of Transparency*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003.

⁷ Autenrieth, Ulla P., and Klaus Neumann-braun. *The Visual Worlds of Social Network Sites: Images and Image-Based Communication on Facebook and Co.* (Munich, Germany: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2011) 9.

functions as the actor's representation in online interaction."⁸ Profile photographs reflect our appearance, inform people of what we look like at a specific point in time, and can be manipulated to emphasize personal traits and characteristics.

If we look at Facebook profile photographs today, we can conclude that portraits are a form of biography, that embrace beauty, idealization, fashion, and the consumer culture of the day, to promote the subject's wealth and position in society. In online portraits today, we mimic styles that "the photo studios of Hollywood developed, including the styles, body language and iconography of glamour."⁹ "As the phenomenon of glamour is familiar to us through mass media images, it gains its power of attraction through various qualities: glamour as a lifestyle is based on external beauty that is blended with values of the consumer society like fashion consciousness, costliness, and fame."¹⁰ Red carpet events, magazine ads, event photos, movie stills, celebrity paparazzi photos, and so on, show us what wealth, prestige and glamour look like in an everyday context. As such, many people imitate celebrity hairstyles, fashion, poses, gesture, and so on, within their personal photographs posted online, to allude to a personal biography.

Facebook Text Portraits is a series of photographic posters that have been appropriated from personal friends and acquaintance's Facebook profile pages. I took each person's profile photograph and status updates, including the dates they were posted, and overlaid the text on top of the image with graphic design software. I did this in order to configure the text and image into a movie poster format that seeks to blur the lines between art and graphic design/web design.

The portraits blur the lines between art and design, by combining fine art with digital design related techniques. On one hand the posters employ graphic related techniques, such as text with image, glamour photography, a glossy magazine type surface, and appear to read in an advertising manner. On the other hand, the images are expressive, creative, refer to

⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁹ Ibid., 108.

¹⁰ Autenrieth, Ulla P., and Klaus Neumann-braun. The Visual Worlds of Social Network Sites: Images and Image-Based Communication on Facebook and Co. (Munich, Germany: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2011) 106.

conceptual qualities that speak to the human condition, and question the meaning and function of portraiture today, concepts that analyze rather than sell, which gives them a fine art quality. The posters do not fit neatly into either category, therefore blurring the line between art and design.

I intentionally selected profile photographs with intense colour, rich blacks, dramatic lighting, and close cropping techniques, aesthetic qualities that mimic and recreate aspects of glamour photography, common in celebrity portraits, commercial advertisements, or scenes from Hollywood movies. In each portrait, I became fascinated with the ways that each person chose to accept, and at the same time reject, play with, or recreate, aspects of commercialized images, on their own terms, and in their own portraits.¹¹

Each photographic poster is made up of personalized status updates, taken from each person's Facebook page. While reflecting upon the meaning of portraits in a digital world, more specifically portraits on social network sites, I came to the conclusion that daily written accounts or status updates are just as important as profile photographs. We can draw conclusions about the person by looking at their portrait, but many of those inferences are based on intentional or unintentional visual clues, that do not necessarily effectively tell us about the inner workings of that person.¹² By overlaying each person's status updates on top of their photograph, my goal was to make it appear as though the text creates the image, to visually create tension between the text and image, emphasize the graphic-text based nature of the internet, and to give the people within each photograph a voice. I wanted the quirkiness, beliefs, ideas and mundane accounts of day-to-day life to become part of the image, and to frame the way we see the person within the photograph. I chose to include the date that each written comment was posted online, in order to give each comment a context, timeframe, and to emphasize that status updates are a digital version of a diary. Even though status updates are continuously changing in real time, on an online platform such as Facebook, posts that were created months ago often remain static. In addition, the status updates are separated by

¹¹ Gauntlett, David. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

¹² Wittkower, D. E. *Facebook and Philosophy*. Chicago, Illinois: Carcus Publishing Company, 2010.

month, with the greater-than sign (>). I used the greater-than sign (>) to displace or create movement within the text, add visual interest, to break up the text, and to fill the negative spaces with each paragraph, so that the text flows continuously throughout the image. When reading the text the viewers' eyes move from left to right, mimicking the actions of the printer that created the image. The text also appears to make up the image when viewing the prints close up, yet also fades into the photograph as you move further away from the work. Conceptually, the distance between the image and viewer addresses the way people interact with others online today. We have the ability to communicate with people around the world, but rather than communicating close-up and in person we are communicating with them in a digital space, that often means there is a great deal of physical distance between person-to-person.

The profile photographs are printed on glossy paper and mounted in the same manner that Hollywood movie posters are typically displayed. My intention is to reference the commercialized, popular culture inspired, aspects of the photographs, to draw attention to the overlaid text and glossy surface qualities, which are common aesthetic elements associated within graphic design, advertising and printed promotional material, and to highlight the nature of self advertising associated with social network site portraits.

Incorporating a reflective glossy surface into the work, I wanted the viewer to see their own, somewhat distorted, reflection when viewing the images. I did this to suggest that the viewer brings their own biases, meaning and interpretation to the work of art, thereby becoming part of the work and work's meaning. The glossy surface of the photographs, are also intended to visually reference the way we would see these images on a social network site, by looking at a computer screen.

3.3 Nightclub Portraits

One form of group portraiture that has become increasingly common today is nightclub photographs. Nightclub photographs depict individuals, or a group of individuals, out at the local bar or nightclub, partying, dancing, drinking and having a good time. Many partygoers choose to display these types of photos on their Facebook page, to provide their friends with

evidence of having been at a certain event. Friends that see the photographs are able to witness these events, second hand, through pictures that are posted online.

Nightclub Portraits is a series of photorealistic paintings on large-scale printed digital photographs. As I searched for the meaning of portraiture in a digital world, I became fascinated with the ways that individual's choose to represent themselves in nightclub portraits. I started the series by collecting digital images of Facebook friends and acquaintances in bars and clubs.

All of the images I selected for this project have direct references to popular culture. The individuals within the photographs, mimic celebrity poses, gestures, and mannerisms; they also dress, have similar hairstyles, and physical appearances as celebrities within popular culture. The aspect that interested me the most about these photos was that everyday people I know, are acting like, attempting to look like, and posting photographs of themselves in a nightclub setting that looks almost identical to images one would see of celebrities in the media.

I also intentionally selected photographs where individuals within the portraits, are looking out and directly engaging the viewer/camera. It could provide the viewer, looking at the photograph long after the event has taken place, the sense that they are part of the image, and could walk right into the image in order to participate in the party going on; an idea which prompted me to print the images life-size.

After selecting the photographs, I began continued research on portraiture. The idea that a portrait is a snapshot of an individual at a specific point in time was interesting to me. Just like any photograph of our youth, these moments are gone after the photo has been taken. What remains is an image of a person, or a group of people, frozen at a specific point in time, at a specific age, participating in a specific event. In many cases, all we are left with is a photograph of an event that happened in our past, a visual testimony to our personal history that will fade and eventually disappear.

This idea of fading and disappearing memories, prompted me to think of photographs as ephemeral objects that like memories, will also fade and deteriorate over time. Research on digital print technology suggests "the natural process of deterioration starts as soon as a color

image is printed, whether it is produced digitally or photographically.”¹³ Environmental factors such as temperature and humidity, gaseous pollutants, water damage, exposure to light, and mechanical damage are some of the ways that digital print stability can be compromised. These factors will cause photographic prints to lose their colour, and/or cause the image to disappear altogether, over an extended period of time. With an average life expectancy of one hundred years, or less, printed digital photographs today are not as stable as paintings that have been around for centuries. I began to think how ironic it was that Renaissance paintings will out-live the digital photographs that we create today. In other words, we have the capabilities to produce images at a tremendously fast pace, but our images, and in turn our visual history, is being erased at the same rate it is being created.¹⁴ These ideas prompted me to get the nightclub portraits printed on a large format inkjet printer, and account for the fading and image deterioration in the work.

The life-like characteristics of digital images today gave me the idea to paint photo-realistic sections onto the nightclub prints. I wanted to paint the figures faces, hands and outline their bodies, so realistically that the paint completely blended into the printed photograph. In doing this, the work becomes an odd hybrid, where the viewer may not be fully convinced whether the image is a painting or a photograph.¹⁵ In twenty to one hundred years, depending on the conditions the work is displayed in, the digitally printed photographs in the background will fade in color and/or deteriorate altogether, leaving only the painted sections of the portraits on the surface of the canvas, resulting in ephemeral images that have a life of their own, as the paintings intentionally change over time. The visual clues alluding to the nightclub will fade and disappear, and the only thing left will be the facial expressions, poses, and gestures of the individual's that have been delineated in paint, on the portrait.

I want the ephemeral paintings *Nightclub Portraits*, to visually and conceptually address concerns related to portraits in an instantaneous digital world. Questioning the

¹³ Image Permanence Institute. *A Consumer Guide to Traditional and Digital Print Stability*. Rochester, NY: Rochester Institute of Technology, 2004.

¹⁴ Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006.

¹⁵ Petersen, Anne Ring, Mikkel Bogh, Hans Dam Christensen and Peter Norgaard Larsen. *Painting In Context*. Copenhagen, S: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010.

meaning of youth specific nightclub group portraits today, analyzing the ways that individuals accept, reject, and frequently fashion themselves according to Hollywood and celebrity driven cultural standards and values, and analyzing the impact that instant digital technologies will have on shaping, or erasing our history for future generations, are all ideas that the work seeks to address.

3.4 Online Dating HTML Portraits

The series *Online Dating HTML Portraits* started out as an informal research project that included creating an online dating profile, messaging, interacting with, and meeting potential romantic interests online. I approached the project as though I was looking for a potential partner, and to be honest, I was curious to see if it could happen. It was also important for me to look for, speak with, and go on dates with individuals that I was genuinely interested in dating. All of the men that were a part of the project live in Winnipeg, and are between the ages of 28 and 44. Some individuals I messaged back and forth with, but never went on a date with, others lasted one date only, and a few I went on several dates with. The artwork, in the final exhibition, is comprised of the source code from the online dating profiles of the men that I met during the duration of the project, and dated in person. The participant's profile information, and the corresponding artwork, is named according to the pseudo names they chose for their online profiles at the time I dated them; therefore, their names and identity are not obviously displayed in the work.

Online Dating HTML Portraits are a series of mirrored living portraits that reference notions of narcissism, self-advertising, and self-reflection. When looking at a dating profile, we see images and text that strive to idealize, exaggerate, advertise, and even distort that person's characteristics. We relate that information back to ourselves and to our own life, to see if that person could be a match. As such, one could say that the experience of online dating is a process of projecting and reflecting. In an online world of idealized and perfectly presented photos that advertise the self to others, one could also assess that online dating is narcissistic. In the work, I highlighted narcissism and self-reflection, as they relate to online dating, through the use of mirrors that reflect the viewer's own image back to themselves,

with an HTML portrait etched on top.¹⁶ Self advertising and self idealization is further emphasized in the work, through the backlit, light box format, which mimics an advertising light box where posters or ads are displayed, or a bathroom vanity mirror, where you might check your appearance. In both cases the format of the work alludes to two real world objects that are associated with narcissism in everyday life.

The original source code, which makes up the text portraits, was copied from six online dating profiles. The programmed functionality that was present in the online dating sites original source code, such as buttons, the ability to e-mail users, etc., and the dating sites template graphics and information was removed, so that the HTML imprinted on the mirrors describes the aesthetic appearance of the user's unique online dating profile, and not the online dating site itself. Each users profile photographs, interests, description of who they are, what they are looking for, and a general description of their appearance, age, and ethnicity, is represented as HTML, creating a unique digitally coded text portrait of the individual.

I created code generated portraits, rather than using visual or photographic images, because I felt that the combination of HTML and the personal information contained within the code, successfully represented the process of online dating. By using the HTML, which is typically hidden to viewers when looking at a website, to represent the individuals, the viewer has to scan the code, or read between the lines, to pick out details that are specific to each portrait; I felt that this idea represents the online dating experience. People who are looking for potential partners online need to read between the lines of information presented, in order to get an understanding of who that individual is in person. There are numerous online dating site rules, codes, and conventions that apply specifically to online dating, which is why I felt the act of getting the viewer to read between the lines of code was an appropriate way to depict the portraits. In all cases, the information that would be visible in a traditional image-based portrait is still present, but rather than being described in visual terms they are described through text and computer generated code.

¹⁶ Pendergrast, Mark. Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003.

3.5 Crying Girl Portrait

Crying Girl is a large-scale pixelated painting, based on a faded kitsch reproduction print that my family owned when I was a child. In creating the work, I aim to commemorate my personal relationship to the print, and the symbolic connection it has to my personal history, as it relates to experiences and memories. For me, this painting is about relationships, more specifically my relationship to art and design; conceptually the work is a commentary on memory, and digital versus analogue media. The painting employs both realistic and abstract techniques, within the same work of art, and speaks to the ways that portraiture in a digital world is used to both communicate with people, which brings closeness despite physical distance; yet at the same time, creates distance because individuals interact with pixels rather than human beings. This idea is echoed in physical characteristics of the painting. The closer you get to the portrait, the more the image dissolves into colored squares. The further away you back up from the painting, the more the image begins to look like a realistic portrait.

On a personal level, the crying girl reproduction print, that the painting is based on, holds significant value to me as an artist. While investigating the meaning of portraiture, and why I am interested in creating artwork that investigates portraiture, I recalled the original reproduction print. A crying girl reproduction print, created by Bragolin, hung in our farmhouse, for as long as I can remember. No one else in my family ever seemed to care about it; it was just there. It hung in the same spot, on a mint green wall in the living room, for over 60 years. As a child, one of my favorite things to do when we went to the farm was to look at that print. I didn't understand why we had a picture of a girl, who was probably about the same age as I was at the time, crying on the wall. I was fascinated by the print because I could never figure out why the girl was crying, or why it was there. It seemed out of place. Years later the original print I had loved as a child was destroyed in the farmhouse, but it has haunted my memory ever since.

Because, the print was displayed in our house at the farm, for me it came to symbolize farming, a way of life that my family practiced for centuries. Yet, when I look at it in relation to my family today, it has also come to symbolize the death of farming. Farming, for this

generation of my family, is dead, due to the fact that no one has the desire to uphold that way of life, now or in the foreseeable future.

Having found the image on the Internet years later, after I thought the original was lost also carries significance for me. In choosing to leave farming behind, I sought to become an artist and graphic/web designer. Finding a digital image replacement of the print on the Internet seems like a fitting conclusion to the story. A personal symbol that once represented the farming way of life, for me, disintegrated and disappeared in the farmhouse. Yet, an intangible version of it still exists in my memory and on the Internet. My relationship with the print had morphed and changed, as I myself had done the same.

The process of creating the work, *Crying Girl*, highlights the conceptual meaning of the painting. After I found the image on the Internet, and decided to create a painting of the image, I intentionally altered the colour of the source image. I found a digital photograph of the crying girl print on eBay, and adjusted the colours of the source image I was planning on painting, so it matched the faded and unnatural look of an actual print, that would look similar to the print that my family once owned. I used this technique to reference memory. I then drew a grid on a large-scale canvas, and painted hundreds of uniquely colored pixels to make up the work. The result is a painting, that when viewed at a distance, looks realistic, yet the closer the viewer gets to the image the more it becomes distorted or abstracted, fading into a series of colored squares that visually reference pixels. In order to view the realistic image, the viewer needs to be at a great distance from the painting. I employed this technique to reference the way we communicate with others in a virtual space today. Ultimately, this quality speaks to digital versus analogue technologies, and visually references my personal relationship to the digital world. The large painting, when viewed at a distance looks realistic, and small or sentimental, much like my personal memories of the original print; yet, when the viewer gets close to the image it becomes large and overwhelming, all encompassing even, and the image dissolves into a sea of squares that references pixels.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The artwork in the exhibition is a hybrid of graphic design, web design, photography, painting, and mix media. In addition, all of the work relies heavily on digital technology. I choose to depict concepts and ideas, as they relate to digital portraiture, through four distinct series of work that encompass similar ideas and themes, but come at them from a different perspective. Three important functions and meanings that make digital portraiture today unique from predecessors is that it has become a means of self-advertising, a way of interacting with others in virtual space, despite physical distance, and have become instantaneous documents of our visual history. The work within the exhibition is not only a group of portraits that depict personal friends, family, and acquaintances; it is also a self-portrait of me, the artist. Overall, the process of creating the work has not only helped me learn and grow as an artist, it has also given me a new framework in which to think about and create art.

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Appendix: Thesis Exhibition Images



Figure 1. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World Exhibition*, 2013 (Installation View 1)

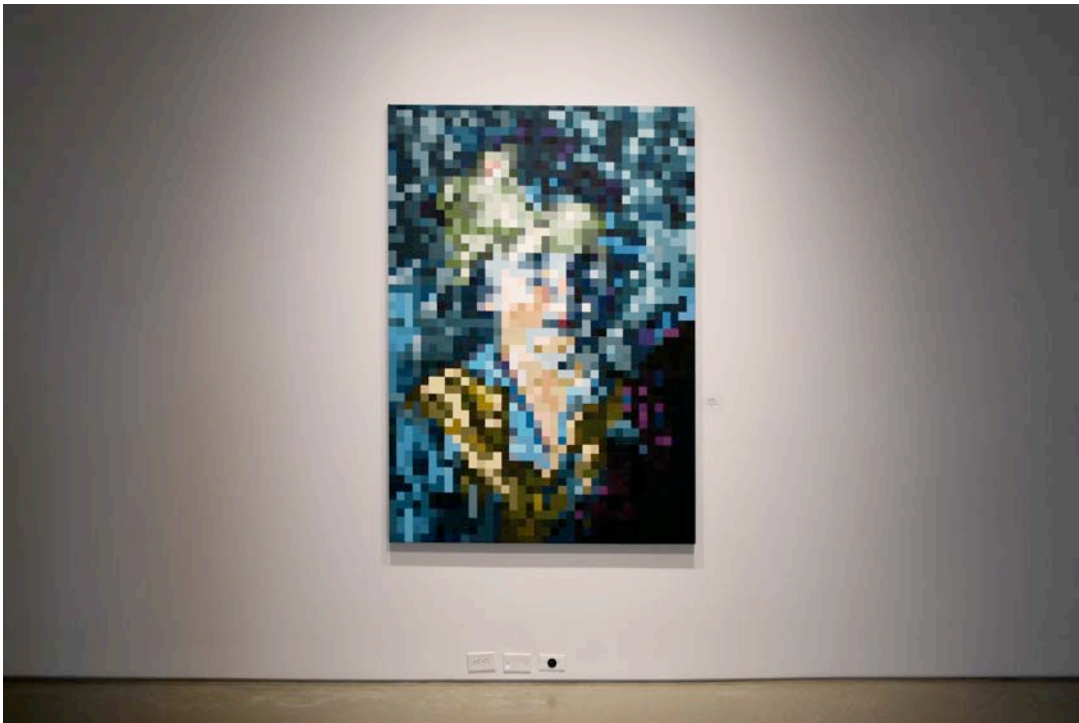


Figure 2. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World Exhibition*, 2013 (Installation View 2)



Figure 3. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World Exhibition*, 2013 (Installation View 3)

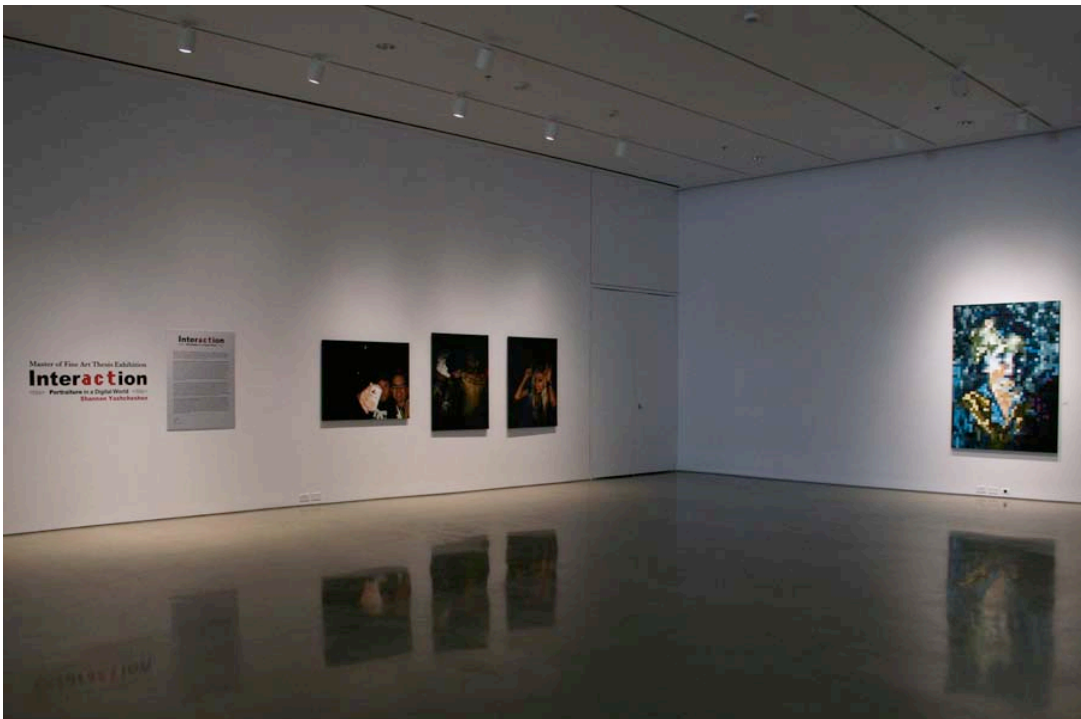


Figure 4. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World Exhibition*, 2013 (Installation View 4)

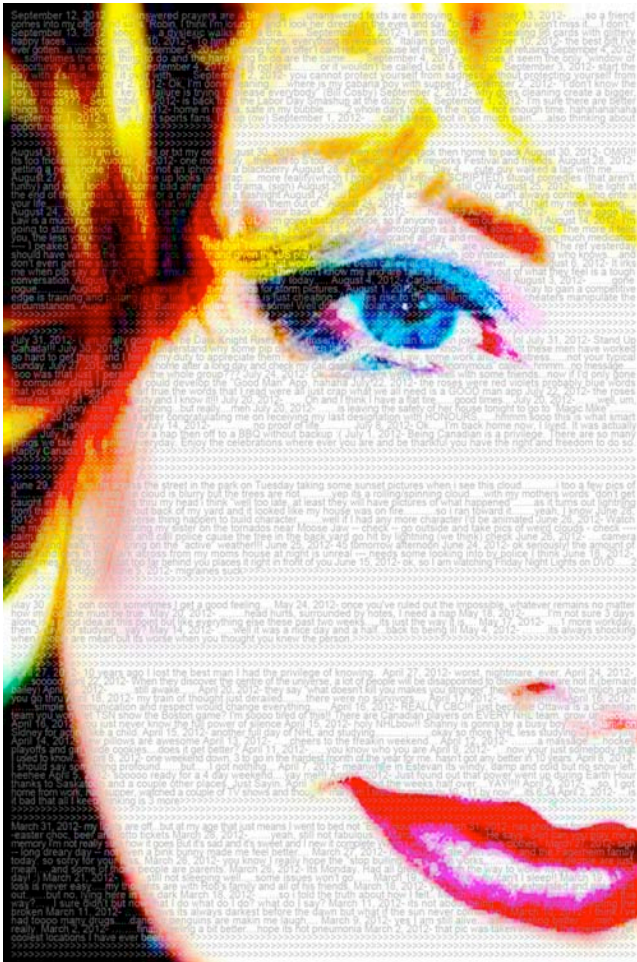


Figure 5. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Robin*, Colour Photograph, 2013



Figure 6. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Robin*, Colour Photograph, 2013 (Detail)

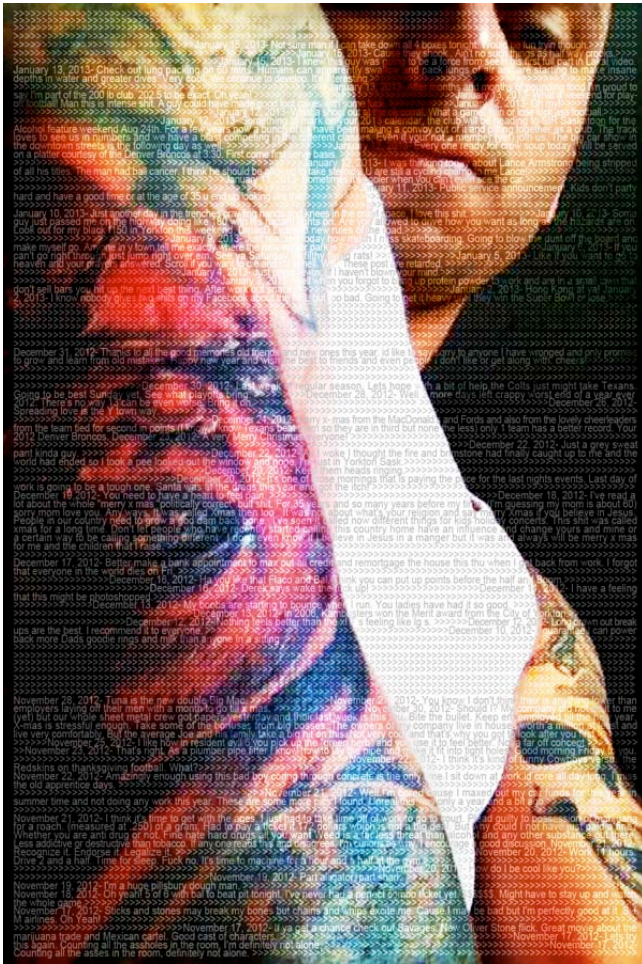


Figure 7. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Derek*, Colour Photograph, 2013

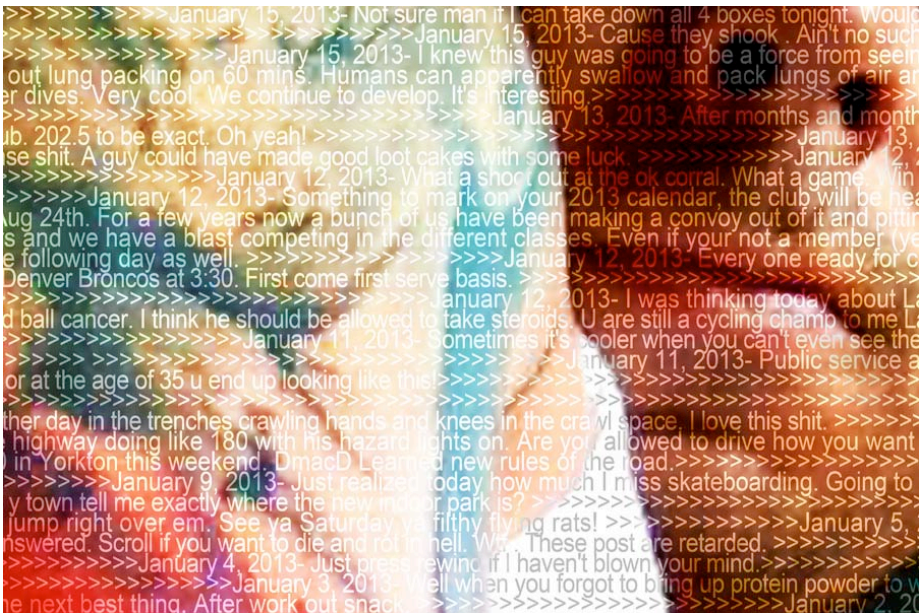


Figure 8. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Derek*, Colour Photograph, 2013 (Detail)

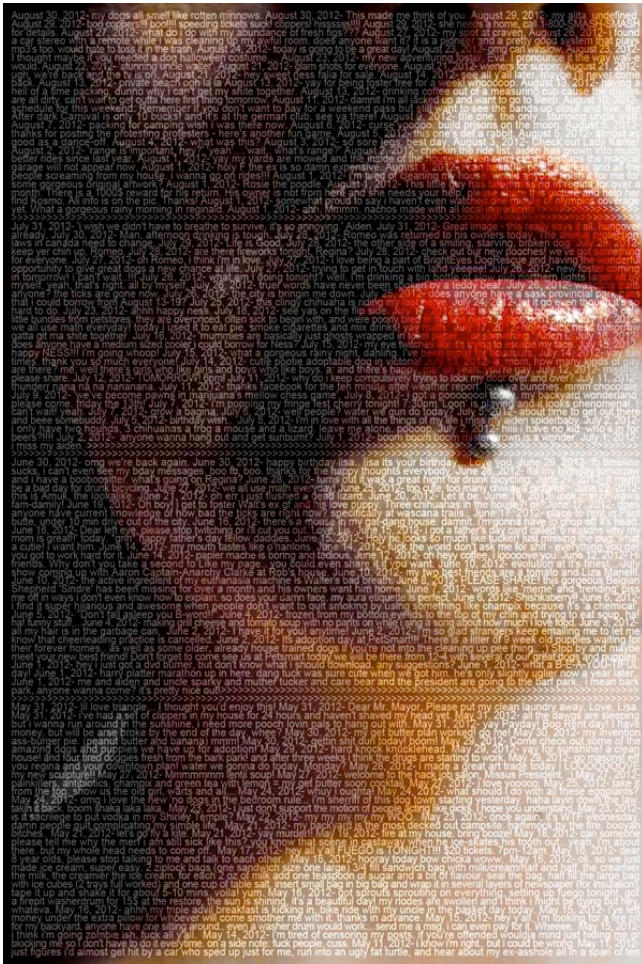


Figure 9. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Lisa*, Colour Photograph, 2013



Figure 10. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Lisa*, Colour Photograph, 2013 (Detail)

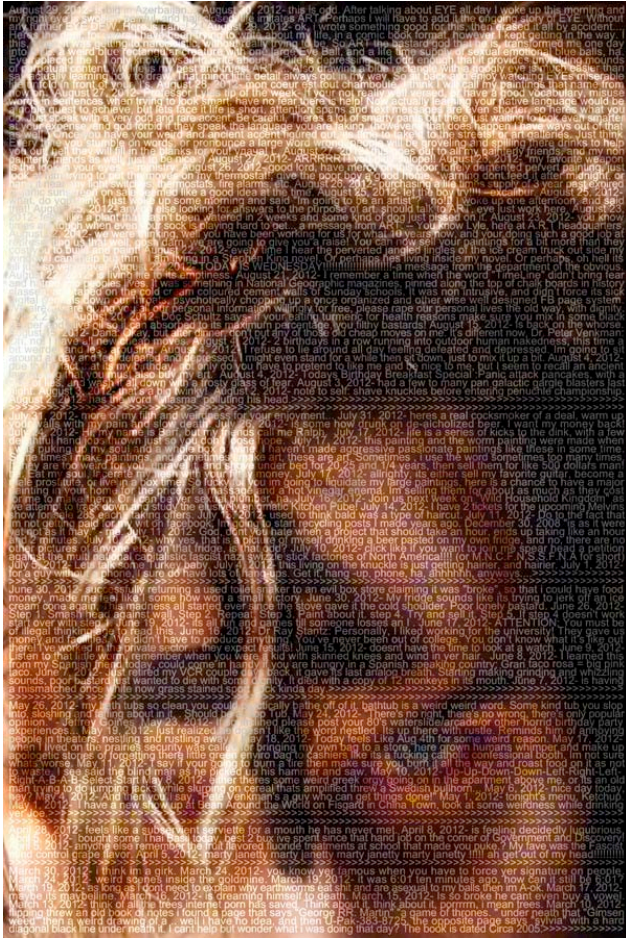


Figure 11. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Lyle*, Colour Photograph, 2013

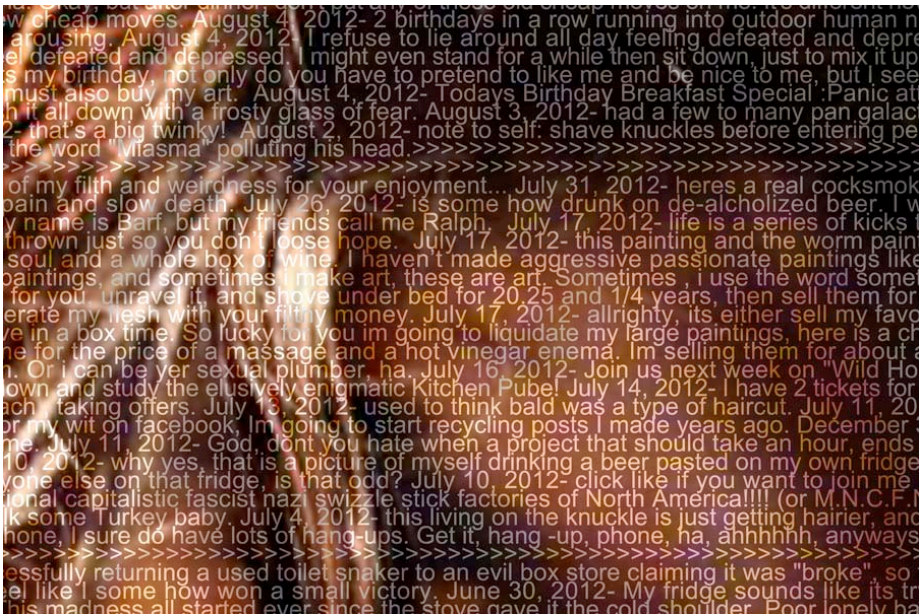


Figure 12. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Lyle*, Colour Photograph, 2013 (Detail)



Figure 13. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Nightclub Portrait 1*, Oil on Canvas Inkjet Print, 2013



Figure 14. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Nightclub Portrait 1*, Oil on Canvas Inkjet Print, 2013 (Detail)



Figure 15. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Nightclub Portrait 2*, Oil on Canvas Inkjet Print, 2013

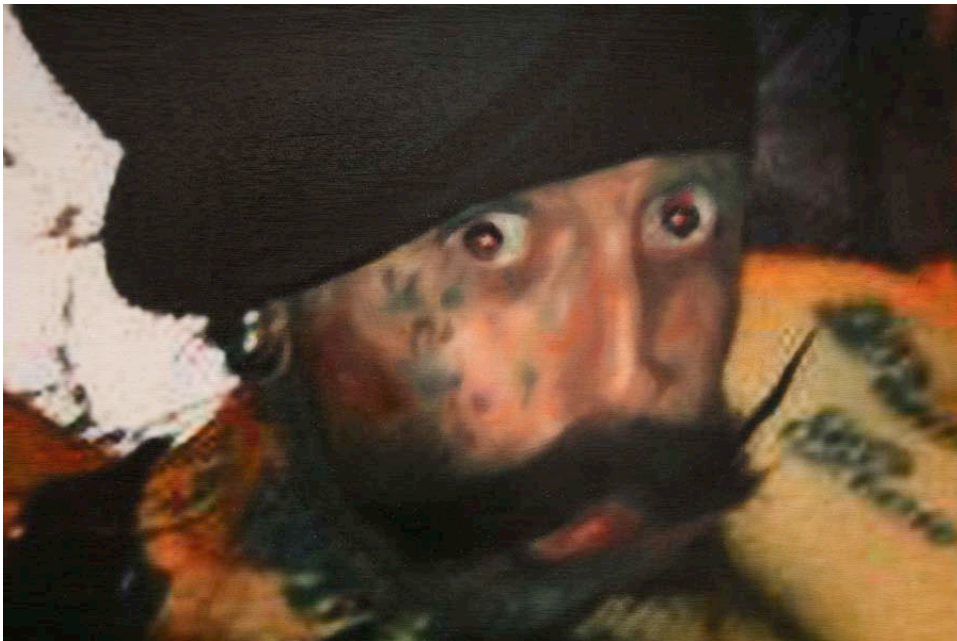


Figure 16. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Nightclub Portrait 2*, Oil on Canvas Inkjet Print, 2013 (Detail)

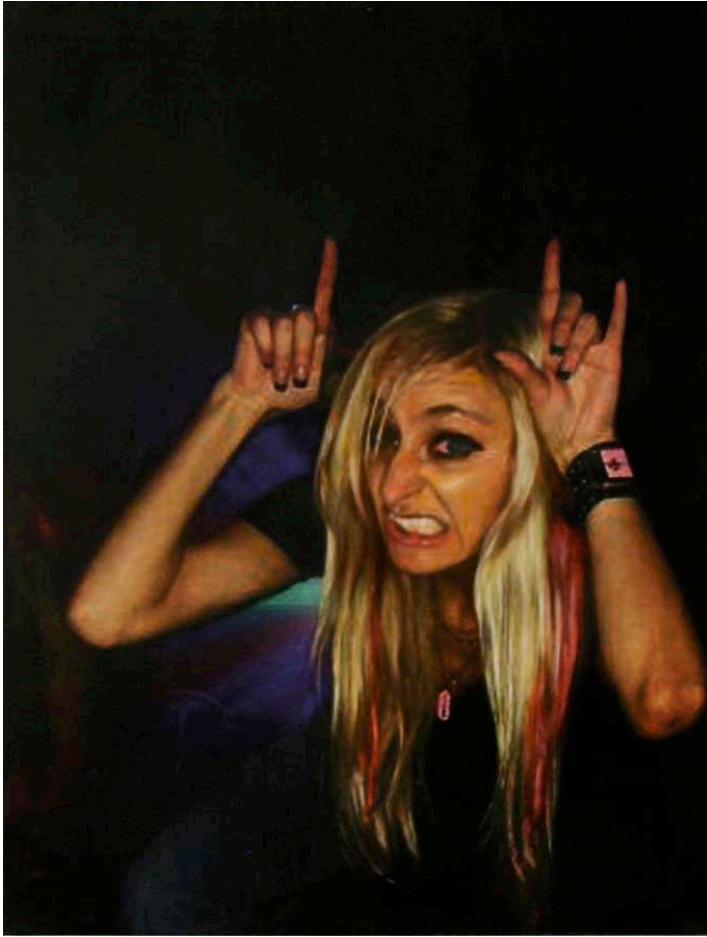


Figure 17. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Nightclub Portrait 3*, Oil on Canvas Inkjet Print, 2013

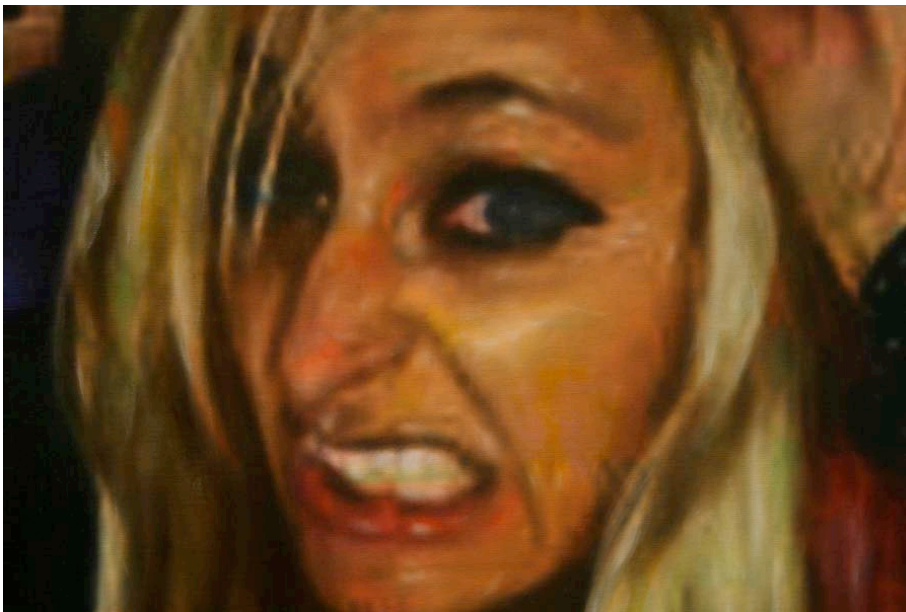


Figure 18. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Nightclub Portrait 3*, Oil on Canvas Inkjet Print, 2013 (Detail)

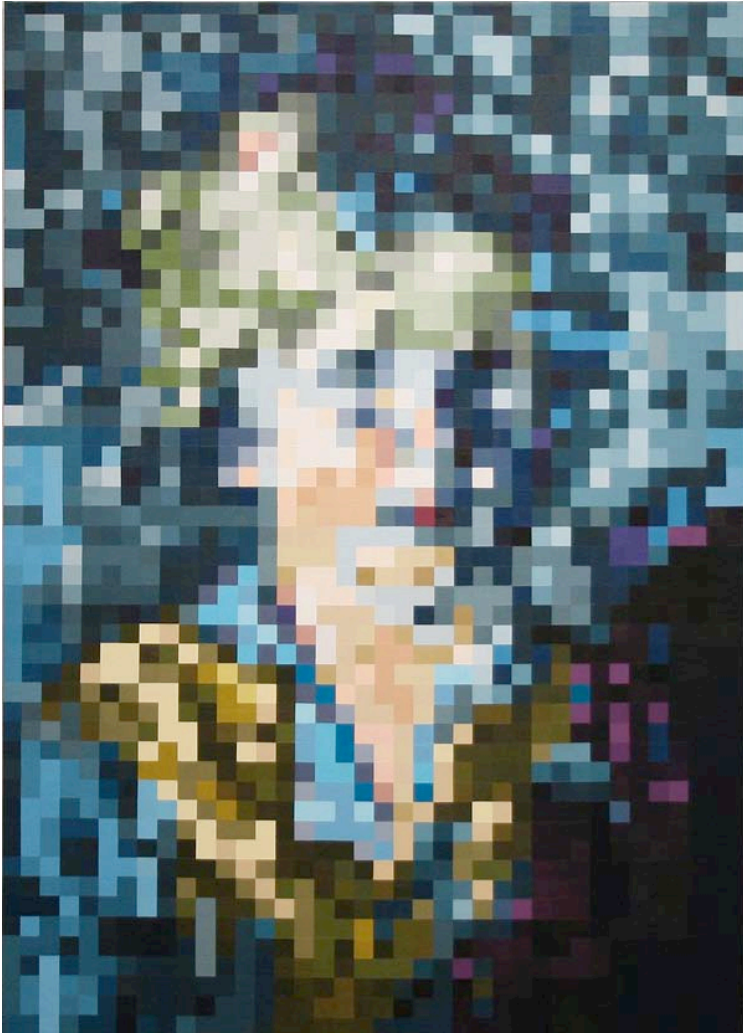


Figure 19. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Crying Girl Portrait*, Acrylic on Canvas, 2013

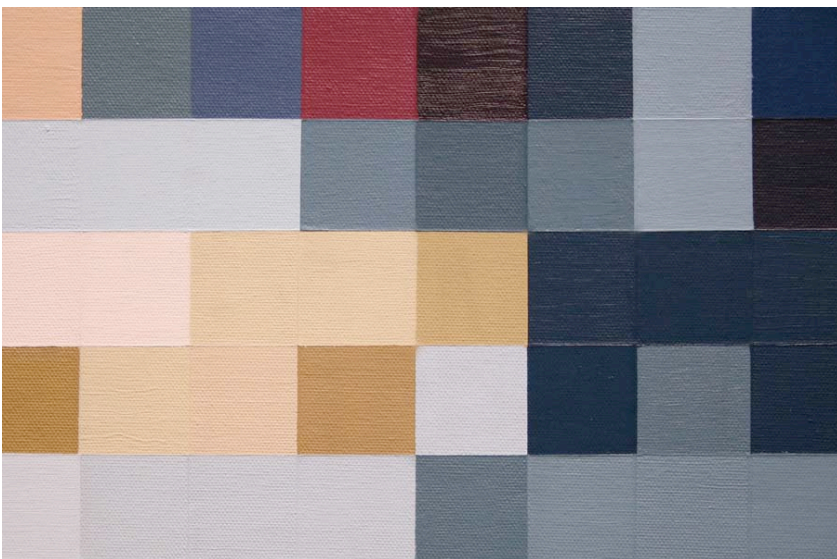


Figure 20. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Crying Girl Portrait*, Acrylic on Canvas, 2013 (Detail)

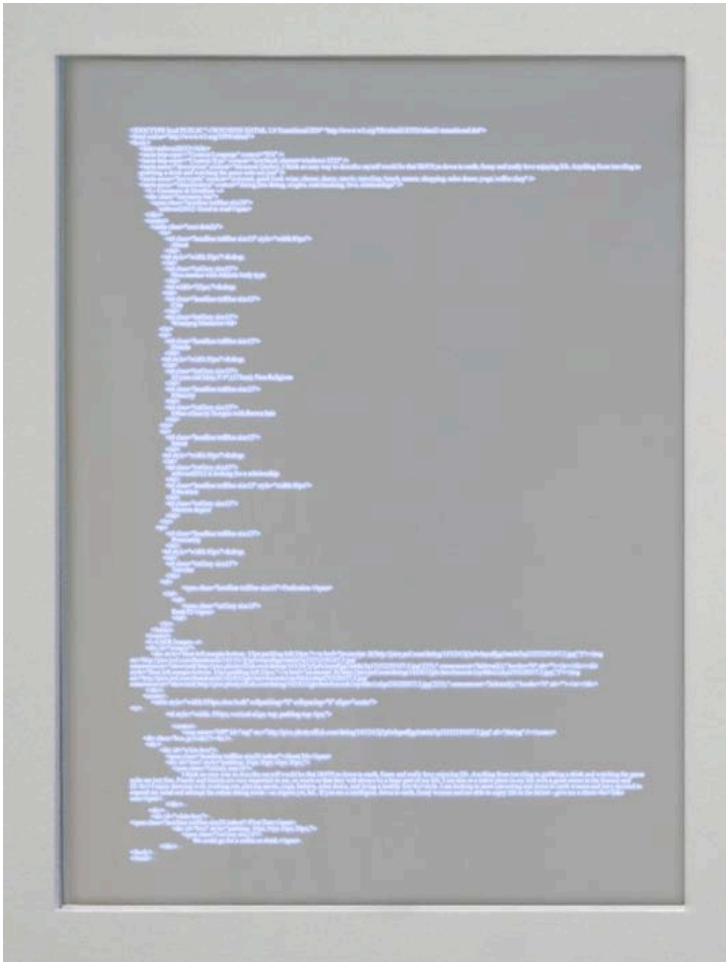


Figure 21. Shannon Yashcheshen, *mthword2012*, Mix Media, 2013

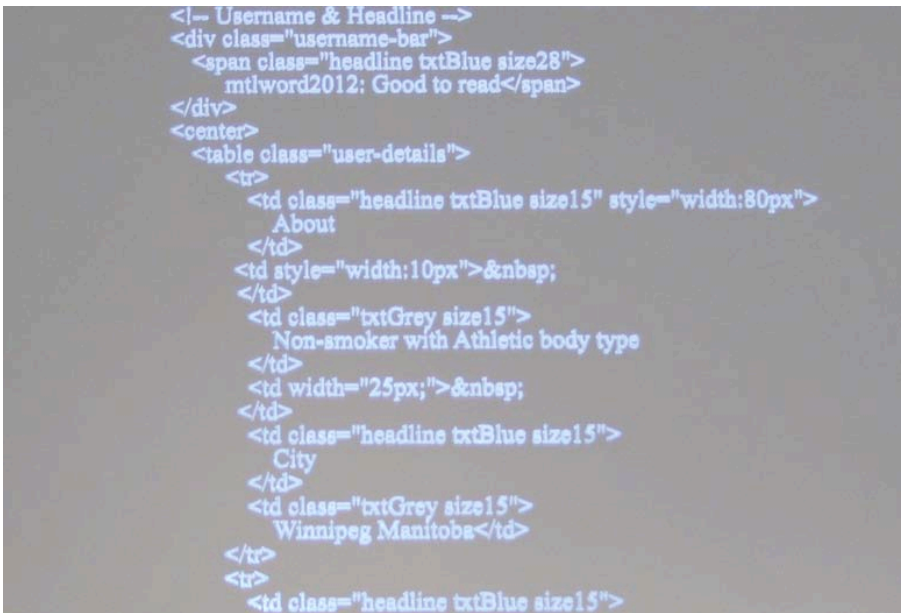


Figure 22. Shannon Yashcheshen, *mthword2012*, Mix Media, 2013 (Detail)



Figure 23. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Igoodspooner*, Mix Media, 2013

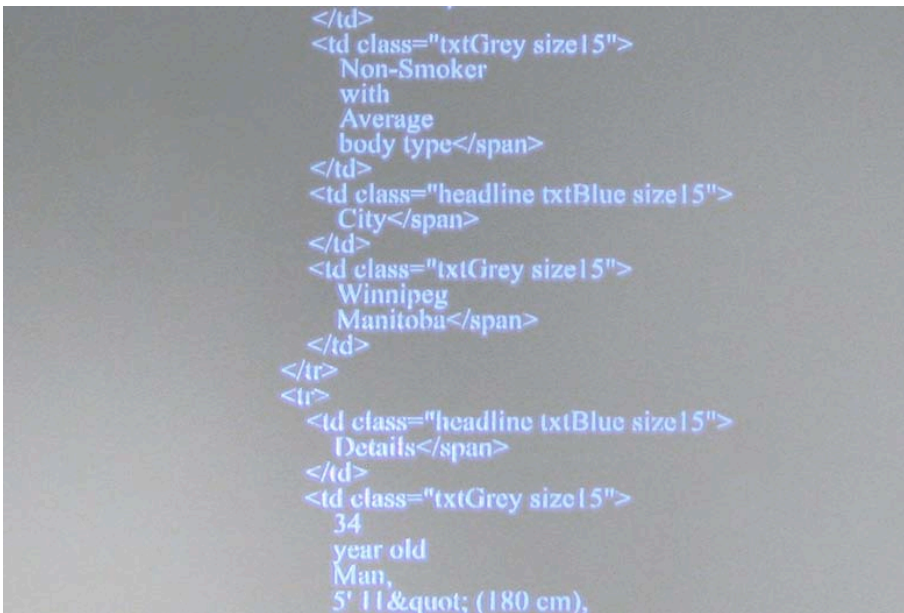


Figure 24. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Igoodspooner*, Mix Media, 2013 (Detail)

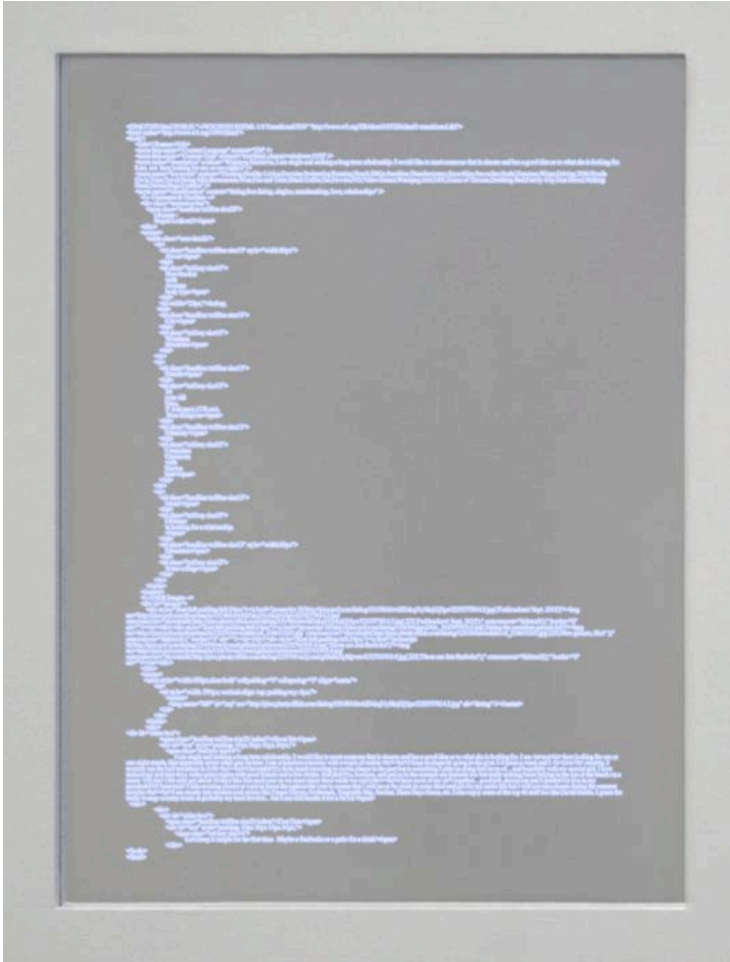


Figure 25. Shannon Yashcheshen, *i.Runner*, Mix Media, 2013

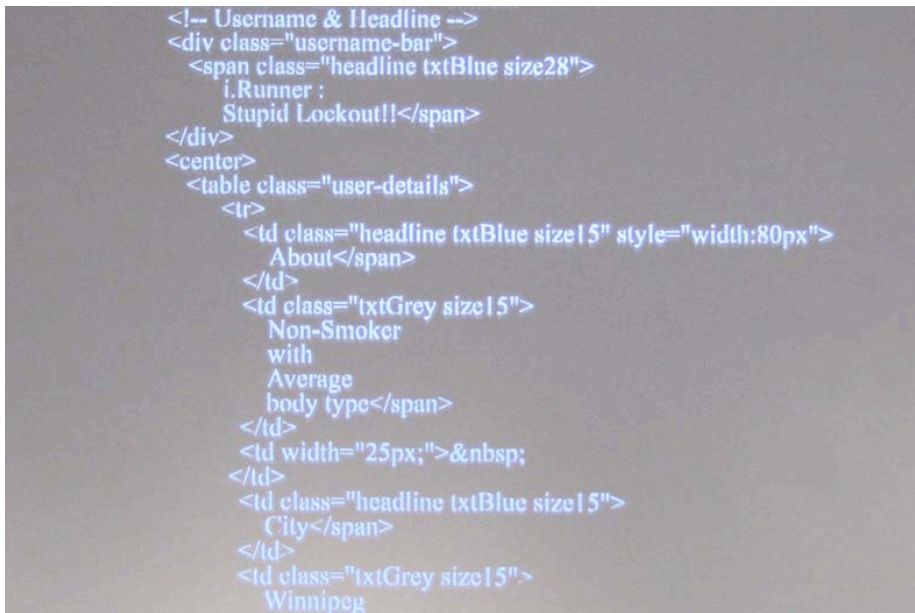


Figure 26. Shannon Yashcheshen, *i.Runner*, Mix Media, 2013 (Detail)



Figure 27. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Traveller-42*, Mix Media, 2013

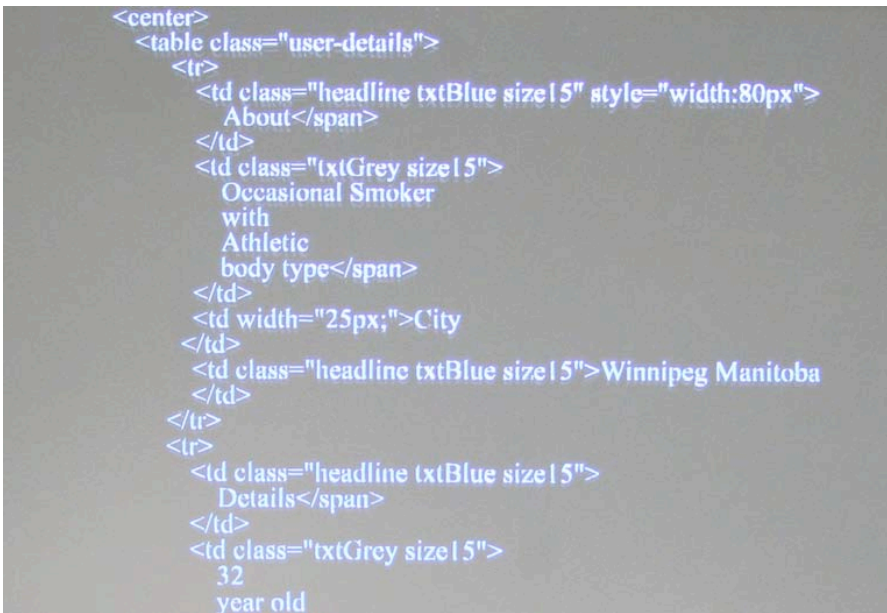


Figure 28. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Traveller-42*, Mix Media, 2013 (Detail)

Master of Fine Art Thesis Exhibition

Interaction

<title> **Portraiture in a Digital World** </title>

Shannon Yashcheshen



June 21 - June 28

Opening Reception:

June 21, 2013
4pm - 7pm

Thesis Defence:

June 24, 2013
1pm - 4pm

School of Art Gallery

180 Dafoe Road
255 ARTlab
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg MB

Gallery Hours 9 am - 4 pm



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Figure 29. Shannon Yashcheshen, *Interaction: Portraiture in a Digital World Exhibition Invitation*, 2013