

DATA MINE

Colin Miner Lili Huston-Herterich Maggie Groat

Curated by Noa Bronstein

Sept 12 to Oct 18, 2014

Within the current cultural climate of looking back and an intense interest in the archive, the almanac seems to me a particularly seductive object. As a collection of astrological and seasonal predictions this is not an appendage of the past but of the future, manifestly routed forward. Annual compendia for recording and predicting astronomical events (the rising and setting of the Sun, for instance), tides, weather, and other phenomena, the almanac offers a meditation on the cataloguing of time and accuracy. Yet, almanacs of the 18th century, and earlier, were not simply meant to help farmers determine when to commence with seasonal planting but have also been anthologies of fiction, proverbs, horoscopes, and medical advice. In this way, almanacs have tended towards cross-over knowledge, merging astrological data with what has been referred to as 'folksy wisdom.' Taking the almanac as a point of departure artists Colin Miner, Maggie Groat and Lili Huston-Herterich's vitrines installations consider almanac-related themes, visually tracing the discursive possibilities of collapsing expert and informal knowledge, informational patterns, and alternative research collections.

Huston-Herterich explores Internet-based communities formalized around the sharing of information related to fermentation practices. *Shards (Fermentation of a Whole New Earth)* involves culling images and text from informal, how-to sites related to cultivating kombucha, kفير, yeast, or the like, which are then printed and transferred onto hand-formed shards of clay. When placed together in the vitrine the shards take on the appearance of relics unearthed in an archaeological dig. The glossy glaze finish, however, betrays a contemporary provenance. As with the materiality of the clay fragments, the network of sharing referenced here conflates current and traditional practices. The recipes, journal entries, blog comments and

G44 Centre for
Contemporary
Photography

other ephemera impressed onto the clay are derived from sustenance methods that can be traced to antiquity, yet the forum that supports this complex is contingent on peer-to-peer-generated, digital platforms and open access software. Here, Huston-Herterich is interested in forms of generational display, whereby the images subtly reveal the ways in which personal and cultural approaches to fermentation are set in motion across geographies and between groups, and how individualized methods merge with one another. The clay shards become less of an exercise in documenting expertise and more about locating this *ad hoc* community. And on a final note it would seem remiss not to mention that one of the pivotal terms when discussing fermentation, as noted by Sandor Katz, is *culture*: “We call starters that we add to milk and yogurt, or to initiate any fermentation, cultures. Simultaneously, culture constitutes the totality of all that humans seek to pass from generation to generation, including language, music, art, literature, scientific knowledge, and belief systems, as well as agriculture and culinary techniques (in both of which fermentation occupies a central role).”¹

As with Huston-Herterich, Colin Miner and Maggie Groat’s processes are also rooted in amassing and reassembling images. Miner’s research involves scanning and photocopying pages from photographic technical manuals from the 1980s to the present. The pages are then debased of instructional utility as Miner carefully removes the captions and text. The residual compositions in the most recent of this ongoing series, *everything under the sun*, remain markedly anonymous. Grids, geometric patterns and what appears to be an oil stain are not easily placed within any specific context. While the images are redacted of syntactical references there remains a communicative quality to the compositions. Miner replaces didactic content with dialogic arrangements, with mirrored shelves, images that are set askew or hanged in grids, or subtle coloured backings. The linguistic framing, therefore, becomes based in contextual gestures rather than the textual. These forays into removal and the codicillary points to Miner’s acknowledging, as he notes, a silence in photography and a condition that can be both vague and precise. This silence relates, in part, to an inability to resolvedly pronounce an absolute demarcation between past and present, time and space, visibility and concealment.

Employing a similar process, Groat pours over printed materials and publications from the 1960s through the 1990s – such as National Geographic, Architectural Digest, Life, natural history magazines, and educational texts, including Time Life Series – and methodically and intuitively removes images. As with Miner, the images are uncoupled from didactic pragmatism. Somewhere between a librarian and a taxonomist, Groat re-indexes the found images within an intuited and adaptable typology. Adhered to cardboard and layered along shelves, the images in *77 vision cards: marginal psychedelics, magnified fields and gathered ineffables, for directions, wayfindings, wanderings, unseeables, wonderings, outsiders, action reportings, future findings and interconnectivities* take on the translative quality of tarot cards, mediated by a kind of impermanence. The assemblage in the vitrines is just one possible iteration that will likely be re-collated elsewhere. The catalogue

¹ Sandor Katz, *The Art of Fermentation: An In-Depth Exploration of Essential Concepts and Processes from Around the World* (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2012), xvii

becomes indefinite, as the order of classification might find itself later reworked, and stability becomes truncated by an inclination towards reposition. As with tarot cards, each image is dependent on another for meaning. Provisionally, the images are leaned against one another – with most obscured from full view – so that what is hidden becomes the domain of the adjacent images. In most instances, the images are cut out from the margins of a larger image. The remaining segments of magnified details or microscopic organisms are refocused so that the unseen or overlooked is propelled from the fringe to the centre. Groat is interested in harnessing the unseen and using the periphery to distill, as she says, a “non-objective, non-linguistic, pre-cognitive knowledge.”² Rather than the image’s primary use of explaining something that has happened, or something that is, this alternative research collection is meant as a tool kit for a yet to be determined future utility. Disrupting the categorical enables meaning to reverberate across spatial reasonings, opening the image to new resonances of things that might be or could be. Bringing disparate images together in a somewhat implacable archive and abstracting each from fixed instructiveness, seems to posit that, as with almanacs, systems of knowledge are inherently compounded.

Shared between the artists is a desire to foreground slow and protracted processes. In Miner’s work, for instance, the process unfolds over numerous procedures. The photocopied pages are scanned and physically altered and these images are then pinned to a corkboard and (re)photographed. The resultant negative is printed to the same scale and size as the final photocopied print that was pinned to the corkboard, and this black and white image is then mounted to Dibond and displayed on a shelf. Correspondingly, Huston-Herterich’s successive practice journeys from on-line mining to the kiln, in a prolonged progression of material interchanges. While Groat pulls thousands of images from hundreds of publications and once collected these are sorted and resorted, ordered and re-ordered in boxes and folders until called upon for a specific project. Unfolding in a ziggurat-like progression, these processes are not quick to materialize and as Miner says, permit a kind of wandering. This seems to aptly reference the almanac as a tool of farming (a slow process in itself) and cycles of fallow, in which cultivated land is left in idleness during the growing season. In this moment of instantaneousness and disposability, it is significant that the found images in each of these works are permitted a certain amount of dormancy, left in fallow for future cultivation.

Taken as a whole, *Data Mine* considers what possibilities might emerge when linear knowledge is recast as ambiguous, unstable and unofficial. As with the almanac, in which the scientific is not necessarily privileged over the intuited or anecdotal, the artworks point to an informational transience. Images borrowed from one site are adapted towards new forms, allowing for aberrant legibilities.

A big thank you to Maggie, Colin and Lili for being part of this project. Thank you also to Maria Paz Almenara for her assistance with the research for the exhibit.

² Email conversation with the artist on September 9, 2014

ARTIST BIOS

Lili Huston-Herterich was born and raised in Chicago and lives and works in Toronto. Most recently, she has exhibited a solo exhibition *The Pleasure of A Lazy Laity* at XPACE Cultural Centre in Toronto, and co-curated *Don't Call it a Breakdown, Call it a Breakthrough !*, a site-specific one day exhibition with collaborator Nadia Belerique. Forthcoming projects in 2014 include exhibitions at Birch Contemporary (Toronto) and OCAD University (Toronto). With a background in photography and image making, her studio practice is rooted in everyday forms and their inherent connotations, and often takes a multidisciplinary form.

Colin Miner is an artist from Halifax now based in Toronto. Since completing a BFA and MFA at The University of British Columbia he is now finishing a PhD in Visual Arts and Culture at Western University. Miner has presented solo exhibitions nationally and participated in group exhibitions both nationally and internationally in Germany and China. Alongside an art practice Miner works with writing, design, and a curatorial practice through the publication *Moire*.

Maggie Groat is a visual artist working in a variety of media including collage, sculpture, artists' books, site-specific interventions, and field studies. Forming an ongoing research-based practice, Groat's work explores studies for possible futures, salvage practices, relationships and reconnections to place and ancient knowledge systems from an indigenous perspective. Through reconfiguring and recontextualizing found materials, she assembles collages, sculptures and tools that enable moments of envisioning and the potential for action. Maggie studied visual art and philosophy at York University before attending The University of Guelph, where she received an MFA degree in 2010. She is represented by Erin Stump Projects in Toronto.