



Pixelsurgeon

CONTEMPLATING MY COMPUTER SCREEN, IT OCCURS TO ME HOW MUCH TIME MANY OF US SPEND DOING JUST THAT - WHETHER OR NOT IT'S PART OF YOUR SCHOOL OR WORK LIFE, CHANCES ARE YOU'RE A PLAYER OF COMPUTER GAMES, OR AT LEAST HAVE A PERSONAL E-MAIL ADDRESS.

Artist Stella Brennan has also found herself fascinated by this notion, making a series of embroidered works exploring the link that she'd found between her needlepoint stitch count and computer screen pixels. One year on - those works which depict her computer desktop and its all too familiar icons will now hang on a gallery wall as part of a new exhibition at Auckland's Artspace: 'Dirty Pixels' - a show of which she is also curator.

The idea of reducing an image to its basic form by gridding it up has an artists tool stretching from classical mosaic to Pointillism to your latest grainy photo i.d. Big and bold, pixel graphic forms have experienced a fashionable resurgence of late as art directors and graphics boffins, a generation who have grown up in the true computer age, create magazine layout and record cover art chocka-block with chunky gifs and pixel fonts recalling memories of Lego strewn bedrooms and all-night Atari binges.

'Dirty Pixels' is about ideas and attitudes that feed into and out of digital culture. The title follows on from the early ideas and fears of what the Internet would turn out to be: an all-to-easy access gateway to the seedier side of life, porn and drugs. It is also a puzzle: how can pixels be dirty? The two seemingly mutually exclusive concepts don't really seem to fit. Pixel implies a hard, plastic feel, a squeaky clean digital place where your work is saved, rot free, whereas 'dirty' is the exact opposite: messy, chaotic, unrestrained.

This show is an excursion to the places in-between, where "the grid gets grubby in the real world". Thinking outside the square, Stella has brought together diverse works, in media ranging from video to photography to her own embroidery, that she feels bridge the gap by artists connected by their

observation and subversion of the little building blocks that permeate our lives: exploring existence before and after the pixel. The featured artists come from many contrasting backgrounds and countries. From extremely slick pieces such as director Michael Gondry's 'Fell in Love with a Girl', this meticulous stop-frame animation music video made for Detroit artpunk duo, The White Stripes, plunders the possibilities of Lego, the final effect betraying the intense production values behind the work. The band was filmed, each frame was then mapped and re-formed out of Lego blocks and filmed again resulting in a dynamic combination of hi-fi and low-tech, capturing the arch simplicity of the drum and guitar.

At the other end of the spectrum, there's ex-pat artist Joyce Campbell and her piece "LA Bloom", an enormous grid of one-to-one scale photographs charting her adopted city of Los Angeles with microbes gathered in the field. Printing the cultures after the colonies of fungi and bacteria have grown into their characteristic splotches and nets, the final work creates a kind of photographic map of the sprawling city formed from the bodies of its lowliest inhabitants. Then there's the "gear-crunching digital video freak out" of young Sydney artist, Tim Ryan's 'Crash Media', turning renderings of racetrack car crash footage into boiling tumbling psychedelic smears and blocks of colour and a lo-fi white noise soundtrack. This is contrasted with the disturbingly intricate and dizzying work of paper and pen of Martin Thompson. Using standard 1mm graph paper, Thompson builds up paired drawings. Working freehand and colouring directly, using tape a scalpel to graft new sections, these original paper works are created and grungy, being worked and reworked by hand over time.

Make sure you go and check these and more block rockin' treats at Dirty Pixels: Artspace, From August 8 - 31.