

IN REAL LIFE

Maria Cepeda



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In Real Life

Artcore invited artists to apply to In Real Life (IRL) a two month residency that asks the question of how the digitisation of the world is affecting knowledge, communication and relationships today. In an increasingly online sphere artists have considered how social media has radically changed our experience of the real. The residency aimed to question what does 'real' mean today? To critically explore how the curation of our online selves shape and redefine and transform the way we interact with people and our environment, artists were invited to investigate two central questions:

-To what extent digital art space democratise, educate and socialize the way in which our identity is consumed?

-How does digitisation democratise and affect artists identity by making art pieces accessible without time, money or location barriers?

The catalogue collects two months research and production outcomes as a form of documentation and visual experiments to interrogate the notion of over exposure and censorship as well as how social media and digitisation affects our reflection on the world and influences our perceived models of connections.

As a result of two-months residency at Artcore the show features new works by the artists in residence: Tom Van der Meulen and Maria Cepeda. The works on display make use of new technologies, such as photospheric cameras and Virtual Reality headsets, and touch on themes of body image, social media addiction and online gaming.

In Real Life examines the digital world as both an outsider and a participant, and focusses on distinctions between the real and the virtual. The exhibition seeks to open a dialogue on the uses of digital technologies, our growing addictions to mobiles phones and other devices, and the ways we present ourselves online.

Maria Cepeda, a Fine Art student at Leeds University, works in a wide variety of mediums including ceramics, paint, photography, video and digital art. Her work is interactive and often includes wearable art and participatory elements. During the In Real Life residency, Maria created wearable artworks that replicate the different costumes and armours adorned by avatars in online role playing games. These wearable pieces are displayed alongside a Virtual Reality installation that can be experienced by audiences through a VR headset.

As audiences interact with Cepeda's VR installation, the digital motion of the headset may lag behind the wearers movements. For Cepeda, these glitches reveal differences between the virtual and the real world; differences that may start to fade as VR technology improves. Her work explores the conflicts that arise from these blurred lines between the real and the digital world. These glitches also mean that each viewer will experience her artwork in a different way, giving them autonomy over how they interact in a digital environment. How we present ourselves online is a key concern for Cepeda, she believes our use of digital technology alters how we perceive our bodies and the bodies of others.

Through creating avatars and modified versions of ourselves on social media platforms and role playing games, the imagined images associated with our identities and appearances become distorted and warped.

Tom Van der Meulen, a recent Fine Art graduate from the University of Reading, creates paintings inspired by digital glyphs and images. His works appear as windows to a surreal, digital landscape and often extend beyond the canvases they occupy. Van der Meulen's work is concerned by the aesthetic validity of flatness following the advent of digital reproduction; images of artworks are now shared so widely that many people become familiar with pieces of art without ever seeing the physical works. The imagery used in Van der Meulen's work presents a conflict between the benefits of digital technologies, and the issues that arise because of them. He acknowledges that digital devices have revolutionised the way we experienced art and visual imagery, and draws inspiration from the graphic elements that we see every day. Van der Meulen reimagines these digital designs as painted forms making use of acrylic paints and household gloss, adding a reflective element that cannot be replicated digitally.

Contribution by Frank Abbott

Both Maria Cepeda and Tom Van Der Meulen have, over the last two months, developed a new body of work for this exhibition. It has given them the opportunity to extend their work, particularly in relation to the theme of In Real Life. This exhibition is both a development of each artists individual work and an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the emergence of a shared virtual realm, operating in ways which we are only beginning to understand.

Maria Cepeda reflects on what it is to be entangled with physical and online worlds. In her sculptural practice she explores the augmentation of the body with ceramic enhancements. Atmospheric photographs of her character figures point towards the further elaboration of identity which emerges from online interaction. The worlds of gaming and virtual presence are evoked through the creation of a 'glitched' imperfect doubling of the territory entered through the virtual reality viewer. Moving between different media, this exhibition creates a series of dialogues across the physical and the digital divide, exploring the duality in virtual reality.

Tom Van Der Meulen's paintings embody on their surface our entrancement with the screen and all its trivial inducements. The tricks and tropes of the graphic games which play before us on websites, adverts, streaming servers and self published channels are brought back to canvas. Laid out in the cold light of day they coalesce into logos, graphic simplifications and floating compositions, carrying their content as their attractiveness. Or, should we say 'attraction', as, like dubious insects, we hover around the slightly toxic flower of digital dopamine. Everything is on the level in these paintings, serviceable as a background, as a logo, a like, or a sale.

Frank Abbott is an artist whose work has developed over the last 40 years in relation to the emergence of new media forms. Initially working as a filmmaker and performing with new music group The Scratch Orchestra he created experimental work for television in the early days of UK Channel 4. He has subsequently combined media production with performance in work shown internationally whilst teaching Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University. Recently retired from teaching he has concentrated on a range of long term works with other artists which explore the nature of dialogue and collaboration. He is part of the team which runs Nottingham based Film Free and Easy and a member of the Board of Primary Nottingham, where he is based.

Virtual Encounters by Maria Cepeda

For the In Real Life residency I have worked on immersive Virtual Reality (VR) environments. I have started with experiments at a smaller scale in which I would create a very simple set and use a 360° camera to either record myself or a volunteer dressed up as an avatar, while interacting with objects in the set. I then recreated this set originally made with real objects, by using translucent materials like butter paper. This played with the idea of mirroring and reflection as important elements in our perception of reality. I slowly increased the number of characters and the complexity of the set to work towards an environment like the ones found in a massively multiplayer online role-playing (MMORPG) game.

The idea questions reality and our perception of it- a room made of butter paper, appears real but is useless, does that make it less real? Realness is different to reality. However, blurring the lines between them can be very easy, since sensing something as real is irrespective of its ontological status as reality. This not only talks about a virtual world like the MMORPGs which have greatly affected how many people decide to communicate and relate themselves to the world in which they live, but also affects our perception of our own identities and communities.

I think it's important to investigate and question ourselves about how far we can push the performative powers of our vision and perception through mechanisms like VR, before it gets overwhelmed. I believe investigating the limits of technology is important in a larger scale, as our contemporary society faces dissociation from their bodies and begin to interpret the world in abstract instead of material terms. My interest as an artist lies in how our contemporary society modifies the way which we perceive our bodies and our sense of self. This builds on my explorations of accessories that modify the perception of the body, taking it to another level by not only addressing the body, but its environment as well.

Conversation with Maria Cepeda



Maria Cepeda, Wear, Ceramic, 2018

Where are you based?

I'm originally from Colombia but I'm based in Leeds.

How would you like to use this residency to develop your current research and how do you think the time spent at Artcore can benefit your process of doing?

My current research deals with the idea of a saturated self that receives so much stimuli and information from its surroundings that it becomes an abstract entity that takes on multiple identities. I'd like to use the In Real Life residency to develop this by relating it directly to the cybernetic world we are all a part of- more specifically linking this idea to video games where players take on a different identity. I'm not used to planning my art practice ahead of time, and I think my time in artcore will benefit my process of making in the sense that I am working following an action plan and so will be more organized with my time.

In the proposal you mentioned you would like to question reality and our perception of it and that for you it is important to investigate and question how far we can push the performative powers of our vision and perception by using mechanisms like VR. Why you are interested in it and how you aim to connect it with your current practice?

I've recently been reading a lot about new materialism and the way technology impacts the way we perceive the world and our own bodies. The concept of what is "real" is much more difficult to define now than it would have been some years ago. In the present day we can take virtual worlds as being real because we sense them that way, even if ontologically they're not- they're just the product of coding and exist as data in the internet. By using virtual reality in my project I'm looking at how we face dissociation from our own material bodies when we immerse ourselves in these virtual environments- we understand the world in more abstract terms. I intend to connect this perception of the world in abstract terms to the understanding of the human in abstract terms as well, which is what my current practice aims to look at.

How and when have you decided to use the medium of clay to investigate how our contemporary society modifies the way we and others perceive our bodies?

I decided to use clay for its organic qualities that I think relate it very well to the body and its carnality. I usually mix the medium of clay with other materials like metal and plastic to make a reference to the contemporary society we live in as well. I've been using clay for around a year now as main medium in my practice- many consider it to be more related to crafts, and there's a constant debate about whether or not clay belongs to the world of fine art, but in the present day more and more artists are finding in clay the perfect medium to express themselves and I think it is very valid, especially when the subject of study is the body.

What is the most interesting or inspiring thing you have seen or been to recently, and why?

I really liked going to the Material Environments exhibition in the Tetley which finished in June this year. One of the artists showing her work was Phoebe Cummings, she had built an installation using unfired clay using as inspiration sci-fi books and the way they described the worlds their stories took place in. I bought the Vitamin C: clay+ ceramics, not long before the exhibition and I loved her work, so it was great to see ceramics being used in fine art in a major gallery with my own eyes.

What keeps you curious?

I read a lot, also watch movies that make me ask questions, or make me imagine things. I think the real way to be always curious is to not take things as granted, there's always something behind what seems to be institutionalized or obvious, so just observing things with more attention and being on the lookout to new interesting things everywhere



Maria Cepeda, On being, Mixed media, 2017

Which other artists' work do you admire, and why?

There's a lot of artists I admire, right now the artists I look up to the most to are Bart Hess and Lucy McRae, because it's amazing how they work with wearable art and digital mediums in such a brilliant way. I also really like Edmund de Waal and Richard Deacon as ceramicists.

What do you think is the role of artists who decided to work on the issues related to digital identity in the current society?

I think artists respond to their time, and most of us work in one way or another as a response to a digital era we are immersed in. The role of artists who precisely decide to work on digital identity in our current society is important as it is something many people ignore or overlook as non relevant, even when it's shaping our behaviours and understanding of the world.

What are your thoughts on being for two months an artist in Derby?

I think it's a good opportunity to work in a different environment. I know working outside of your comfort zone always brings interesting results so I'm looking forward to them

How do you see Artcore, as an art institution, to support you at this stage of your career?

I think Artcore is a really good institution for artists like me, who are in the first stages of their career. It gives us a lot of tools to develop as artists in the future because It's not only the studio space that we receive but also mentoring and support which I think are very valuable.



Maria Cepeda, New Human, Mixed media, 2018

Virtual Encounters by Maria Cepeda

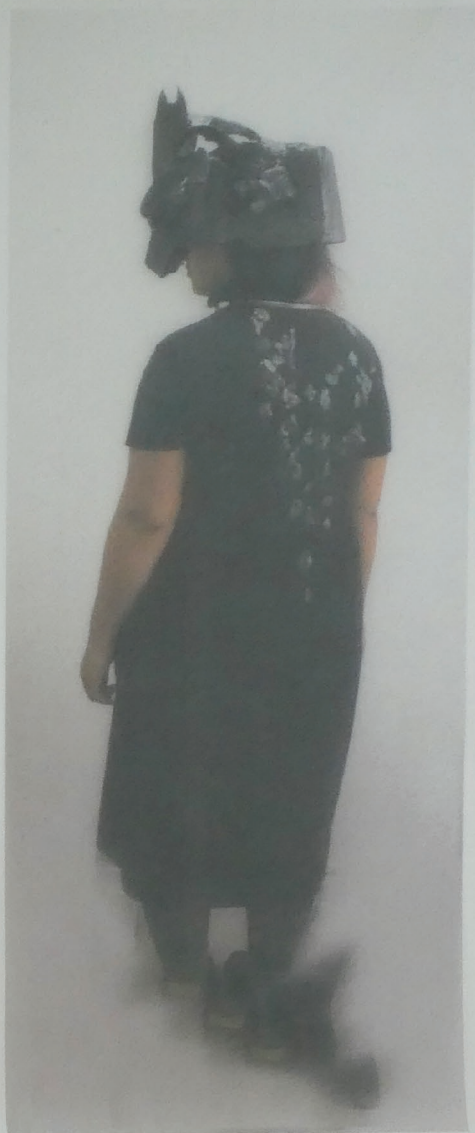


Maria Cepeda, Hand piece #1. Dorado series, variable dimensions, ceramic, 2018.



Maria Cepeda, Hand piece #4. Dorado series, variable dimensions, ceramic, 2018.







Maria Cepeda, Shoulder piece #1. Dorado series, variable dimensions, ceramic, 2018.



Maria Cepeda, Hand piece #2. Dorado series, variable dimensions, ceramic, 2018.



Maria Cepeda, Embodied echos, 91.5 x 180 cm, digital print on tracing paper, 2018.



Maria Cepeda, Astral projectionist- Zipa's hands, 91.5 x 180 cm, digital print on tracing paper, 2018.



Maria Cepeda, Data cardboy, 91.5 x 180 cm, digital print on tracing paper, 2018.



Maria Cepeda, Astral projectionist- Zipa's hands (detail), 2018.



Maria Cepeda, *Virtual Encounters* (Exhibition view) 2018.



Artist biography

My practice works around the idea of the saturated self- a self that receives so much stimuli from the outside world, that it becomes unable to define its own self, and takes a multiple identity stance in order to cope with its environment.

Although still following the same thread I had been working with in previous projects, I've taken a different approach and have grown apart from studying the human itself, to instead investigate the existing relationship between self-other-environment. This relationship which is studied by new materialism, stresses the impact of technology on the way we perceive our own material bodies.

The way machines function contrasts with the way humans do – as April Durham says, “Anxiety continues as we perceive ourselves as corporeal beings in a largely flattened, detached and fragmented cybernetic world”. I look to reflect in my artwork the idea of an organic but ever more technological human being which is never static- but is instead ever changing by forces from both within and outside.

María Camila Cepeda

b. 1996, Bogotá, Colombia

Education

2016- BA (Hons) Fine Art. Sculpture strand.
Leeds Arts University

2017 Barcelona Academy of Fine Art
Figurative Sculpture intensive summer workshop Grzegorz Gwiazda

2016 July Masterclass Project Art/Life Cesar Biojo. Raquel Riba

2013-2016 Araújo Santoyo Workshop-Chidaram Painting and drawing workshop
Alfredo Araújo Santoyo

2014- 2016 Fabula arts academy
Academic knowledge in Fine Arts

2013 Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Basic human figure drawing. Amadeo Rincón

Group Exhibitions

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| 2018 | Routes Roots
Merrion Centre Leeds
4-person exhibition |
| 2018 | Two
Wharf Chambers Leeds |
| 2018 | Just as Nature Intended
Leeds Arts University Leeds |
| 2017 | Y Not?
Wharf Chambers Leeds |
| 2016 | Fragmented Cities + identities
Jorge Jurado Gallery Bogotá |
| 2016 | It's LIQUID International Art and Architecture Festival
Venice Art House & Palazzo Ca' Zanardi
Fragmented identities Venice |
| 2016 | Fábula gallery
Thesis exhibition Bogotá |
| 2015 | Fábula gallery
"Projects" Bogotá |

Awards

- | | |
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| 2016 | Third Place
Fabula Arts Academy First Student Art Call
Galería Fábula with the support of the Ministry of Culture and
the Mecenartes Foundation |
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Artcore is a contemporary arts space that celebrates the Derby, East midlands and beyond cultural richness and diversity. The venue presents an ever-changing programme of art exhibitions, creative activities for adults and young people, film screenings, artist residencies, talks, and festivals. With our statement “together we stand” we want to engage and connect with diverse range of communities in Derby. Our key objective is to use art as a tool to strengthen community cohesion and engage with a wide range of audience, educate, raise awareness and provide a space to build self-confidence and mutual trust and respect.

We engage with society’s most disadvantaged and vulnerable people, by offering inspiring and motivating programmes in areas where there is a lack in provision and engagement with the arts is minimal. Our mission is to become a place where talent and creativity is nurtured and where art and culture are accessible to all. We aim to bring positivity and shine in people lives providing a platform to encourage dialogue between people of all ages, abilities, diverse cultural background through creative activities, skills sharing and development.

Artcore offers a contemporary gallery, workshop and artist studio promoting distinctive art and culture. Through a vibrant programme of events, exhibitions, residencies, art talks, screenings we provide a platform to showcase significant art locally, nationally and internationally by supporting early, mid-career artists and established artists.

At Artcore , education in general is fundamental to the work we do. We develop and strengthen the education role in a non-formal education approach. Our main objective is to engage young in learning experiences to enhance their curiosity and interest on their art skills, developing their uniqueness and progression as individual, also through volunteering and work experience.

We believe art acts as a learning tool, breaking down barriers and contribute in the production of knowledge and dialogue as a vehicle of analysis and growth. Moreover we engage with our audience through creative, imaginative and meaningful activities, offering the individuals the opportunity to experiment with creativity, enhance learning and broaden career prospects.



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