



## Teri Donovan's Net Works

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Mixed-media artist Teri Donovan continues her ongoing investigation into the development of selfhood in Circa, an exhibit examining the ways in which technological devices contribute to our understanding of ourselves, as well as the world around us. Taking on the role of a group of fictitious archeologists (the “Navonod” group), she mounts her works as an ersatz museum showcase of “artifacts” recovered from demolition sites around downtown Toronto. The faux relics on display feature hundreds of painted, printed, and collaged designs on reclaimed ceiling panels, which, according to the Navonod group, provide viewers with a glimpse into the zeitgeist of the early 21st century, particularly as it related to the rise of the Internet.

Pictures of mobile phones, laptops, and game controllers span many

of Donovan's works in patterns echoing wallpaper, which highlight the ubiquity of technology at the dawn of the 21st century. Among the array of gadgets, the artist has interspersed images of dodo birds, this juxtaposition emphasizes the accelerated pace with which mechanical objects become outdated and fall into disuse.



Donovan's works stress the revolutionary aspect of the technological, and its contribution to the construction of culture in the new millennium with clear references to prehistoric cave paintings and early forms of writing. In *Circa 2009 B*, the glowing bonfires around which humanity's ancestors gathered and shared oral histories have been replaced by glowing screens, which now barrage us with information at an unprecedented rate.

The documenting of such information is the focus of *Circa 2014*, which reads as something of a visual catalogue of popular application software. Icons for "apps" such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr are arranged like contemporary hieroglyphs, drawing attention to how technology has transformed the ways in which we communicate with each other. The irony here is that while such operating systems have displaced many long-standing forms of communication, they too quickly fade into obscurity. Donovan's reference to MSN Messenger, a once popular app that was discontinued in 2013, illustrates how such software falls victim to the fickle tastes of teenagers and young adults.

Though her work is undoubtedly playful, Donovan also addresses some of the more serious concerns that have been raised by critics of

social networking over the past decade. The teenagers huddled together in the aforementioned Circa 2009 B are obviously friends, yet their offline bonds are supplanted by their absorption in their cell phones, an idea underscored by their obscured faces. Donovan suggests that the frequency of “faceless” communication is causing us to increasingly withdraw from the offline world into the online world, and as such, neglect our closest relationships.



Meanwhile, Circa 2011, a triptych that occupies its own wall, speaks to the cultish devotion inspired by society’s widespread dependence upon technology, and encourages us to consider the value with which we imbue our mobile devices. In this work, meant to recall a centuries-old church altarpiece, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been displaced by a modern Holy Trinity comprised of laptop, iPod, and smartphone. With every moment of our lives forever chronicled through text messages and status updates on social networking sites, technology now grants the immortality once promised exclusively by dedicating one’s life to God.

For better or for worse, the Internet and social media have transformed the way we perceive the world and assert ourselves within it. Donovan’s works encourage neither blind devotion nor stubborn refusal of the high tech accessories which pervade our lives, but rather the acceptance that such objects merely augment what is most instinctual and primal—the human desire to make contact.

Circa is on display at Red Head Gallery until November 1st.