

Mind Body Phone

Mind Body Phone consists of video and installation works, presented in a darkened gallery space, which emit light through projection and LED light installations. This work offers quiet spaces in which viewers encounter screens and images of technology in unexpected ways.

This statement addresses and contextualizes the show's three central themes: spirituality, the virtual, and time.

Introduction

Societies often instrumentalise technologies to accomplish tasks quickly and effectively, and overlook their forms and characteristics (outside of the pragmatic) in the process. The history of one such technology — artificial light — goes back several millennia through religious, scientific, commercial and cultural practices; the ways that such forms of light shape both viewers and what is being viewed is worth considering. *Mind Body Phone* investigates these forms of viewership in a contemporary and art historical context, with regard for the physical body and the mind.

Spirituality

This body of work stemmed from my interest in comparing two kinds of embodied practices: the physical postures and meditative exercises present in all main schools of yoga and several religions; and the rise of social media and digital devices. Both practices have tangible effects on the mind and body, but where the first is undertaken to improve health and well-being, the second acts to improve productivity and connectivity, and to provide entertainment. Both practices involve specific gestures and physical positions, both involve new qualities and forms of light, and both affect mental awareness, either heightening or lessening it. These two practices are rarely examined together for their similarities, especially the ways that both draw upon forms of ritual and fetishization. I'm particularly interested in the inadvertently ritualistic aspects of daily practices with technology, and how these contrast with the deliberate ritual of traditional meditative practices. The habitual connection with a mobile digital device that commands attention and results in physical, mental, and affective reactions (in response to a ring or vibration, or the absence thereof) stands in opposition to meditative practices, which aim to eliminate superfluous thoughts and actions.

The dark gallery space of *Mind Body Phone* allows the light of each work to become present against the emptiness of the surrounding darkness. The brief moments

between light and dark are highlighted through many instances of flickering light, as well as in “LED - S” which emulates a twilit sky. The focus on light and dark references life and death, a key topic of contemplation in meditation and pranayama (yogic breathing exercises). A full inhale represents life and the bottom of an exhale represents death. This imagery is referenced in “Prana” which uses a fan to push air into the gallery space in front of a recording of a flame wavering in sync with the breeze. The extinguishing of a flame is symbolic of the extinction of life, the virtual flame featured in this work never goes out.

The virtual

“Prana,” “Phone light,” and “Sceening” present an illusive connection between virtual and physical worlds. These works highlight the magical qualities attributed to digital devices, qualities fostered in part by effective marketing campaigns, along with the difficulty of end users in understanding technological black boxes that can create a reverence for the glowing, artifact. In “Prana” the illusion is transparent — the fan is not causing the flame in the video to flicker — yet because of the timing it’s easy and delightful to imagine the physical and virtual interacting. There is a willingness to believe in this connection that transcends understanding and highlights a desire to see more than what is present in the work’s parts. This tendency is similar to the suspension of disbelief employed by traditional media but the boundary between viewings and real-time visual life has become permeable as the media now clings to the body, always within reach, becoming an ever-present part of real-time visual life.

“iOS Meditation” presents an exercise in mindfulness while being exposed to an Apple iPhone 5c commercial playing on an iPhone. The content is not watched or heard but is brought into the physical space where it meets the body in the form of light. Light is the medium of the digital age, ever-present yet invisible.

Time

Mobile devices have made online media accessible in more places than ever and have resulted in an increased demand for media, quickly and from almost everywhere. Multitasking is considered an increasingly common habit, with the possibility of doing more in every moment resulting in less awareness of what is happening in the space surrounding a mobile screen.

Mind Body Phone is engineered to slow viewers down through architectural considerations and other elements (such as lighting and audio) that create quiet spaces that feel outside of the everyday. An illuminated screen may be ubiquitous but in reconsidering the screen as a light source rather than a source of images or text, there

is no longer a need to consume the content and the form itself can be considered instead.

“iOS Meditation,” for example, plays in a very dark room with a double-curtained entrance. Viewers are invited to take a white cushion into the space to sit on the floor. Inside, viewers’ eyes accustom to the dark room and they see a video composed of phone light. Ideally this experience presents the phone in a mode that contrasts our usual engagements with it, and upon exiting the space the differences between the pitch-black room, the gallery, and the outside world are be emphasized.