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REVIEWS FEB. 25, 2015



Cécile B. Evans

LONDON,
at Seventeen

by Harry Burke



Cécile B. Evans:
*Hyperlinks or it didn't
happen*, 2014, HD
video, 22½ minutes; at
Seventeen.

A hyperlink is a “reference to external data that a reader can open either by clicking or by hovering over a point of origin,” to quote the first entry in the press release-cum-glossary for Cécile B. Evans’s solo exhibition “Hyperlinks,” which itself quotes Wikipedia without attribution. Hyperlinks are the operating logic of the World Wide Web, as was evident in its early years, when homepages would often include a list of links to other interesting sites. Innovations such as Google’s PageRank algorithm and the hashtag evolved from this technology as metadata became more profitable than singular connections.

Opposite the entrance of the gallery was a looped 22-minute video, *Hyperlinks or it didn't happen* (all works 2014), which questions the identity of the mediated subject. “PHIL,” a “bad copy” of recently deceased actor Philip Seymour Hoffman, narrates a procession of bodies generated or augmented by computers. The most alluring among them is the Invisible Woman, who—like the anti-hero of Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel *Invisible Man*—is invisible not because of magic but because she is unseen. She is a metaphor for all the women in the film: Yowane Haku, the synthesized, holographic pop star developed in Japan; AGNES, the bot that Evans was recently commissioned to embed in the Serpentine Galleries’ website; the Computer Girls, programmers in the 1960s; and Evans herself—all of them under-recognized workers who maintain the system that oppresses them.

Herein lay the exhibition’s irony: its attention to subjects misrepresented through unavoidable participation in corporate data

flows. This would have been a strong enough statement on its own. But the rest of the gallery was filled with prints and sculptures that might be read as “hyperlinking” to the video, yet looked like any other grouping of art objects in a gallery. Evans framed stills from the video with metallic network maps. She also displayed two replica Eames chairs, one in the corner of the room, the other upturned and with a 3-D resin print of a prosthetic foot triumphantly atop it; a limited edition beauty oil and three framed prints of its advertisement by Haku in *Harper’s Bazaar Art Arabia*; and a sculpture of two resin-printed arms emerging from a transparent screen balanced by a rubber plant.

Hyperlinks are relations authored by their writer, not by their reader. Their use as organizing logic in this exhibition was at best nostalgic and at worst nullifying. The video’s critique of how subjectivity is paradoxically lost in representation is incisive, but unfortunately contradicted through its repeated representation in art objects. The “perfect loop” of entrapment described by the video spirals outward, rendering the artist’s sincerity invisible under the pressures of the art market. One wonders why the artist needed to fill the gallery space.

Unlike the poetic clamor of, say, ’90s hypertext art, which is a methodological precursor in its playful disruption of the horizontal connections facilitated by hyperlinks, the prints and sculptures don’t offer any productive disjunction to the video they stem from. On a carpet in front of the monitor were scattered postcards and a copy of *Invisible Man*. The book looked unread, and Evans hasn’t fully learned Ellison’s provocative lesson. Objects, like subjects, are sometimes most powerful when, or indeed because, they’re unseen.

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