

FRANZ JOSEFS KAI 3

YOUNG AMERICANS
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Depth of the Digital Realm by Arielle Bier

Don't be deceived by the Young Americans. Their youthful exuberance is seductive, but they have deeper and darker secrets to tell than first meets the eye. Underneath the pop aesthetics, the flashy branding, and the decidedly artificial surfaces, are Generation X and Y digital natives and artists, coming to terms with the alienating ubiquity of daily life expressed in new media.

One of the curious paradigms of the digital experience is that the increasing importance of image culture used on computer screens has been balanced with the growing potential of new materials available to produce physical objects IRL (in real life). Contemporary artists are increasingly transferring techniques used in computer programs directly to material objects and vice versa. When taken offline, the assumed limitations of the screen become endlessly generative as the need for material expression of ideas continues to flourish. Like a teenager coming of age, this approach is maturing, as are the nuances that define it.

However, the journey is far from over and has been more destructive than productive. The apparent equivalence of digital content and physical form has destabilized definitions of wholeness. Information and history have become mutable, just as much as fixed identities and the purity of 'truth' cannot be trusted. The boundaries between what is real, imagined, projected and seen are falling away, blending into lived experience as a mash-up of metaphysical philosophy. With the constant need to delete and refresh, memory and meaning are effectively wiped clean, leaving behind a feeling of emptiness – a neo-nihilism that underpins the digital experience.

From photographs about alienation and commodity by Ken Okiishi, to the post-apocalyptic landscape of Alex Ito's installation, and the self-conscious videos by Petra Cortright, the selection of artwork in the Young Americans forefronts each artist's unique digital output as well as their specific socio-political, ecological, and metaphysical concerns.

The American dream has long been tarnished as the façade of capitalism, power, and moral righteousness blinds the realities of rising poverty rates, institutionalized violence, and impending environmental collapse. There is an understanding of social degradation built-in to the American experience that bubbles beneath the surface, and feeds its way into the narratives that the Young Americans address.