



JILLIAN MAYER

BY MONICA USZEROWICZ

GETTING READY TO TALK ON SXSW'S PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE INTERNET AND ENTERTAINMENT, ARTIST JILLIAN MAYER GETS REALLY REAL

Now that Internet-centric art is analogous to all sorts that came before, it will perhaps eventually be embedded into the dialogue as an art-historical *time*—not just a *type*. A growing obsession with technology has led to the idea that it's somehow slightly removed from physicality—that it'll make us live forever. This is probably untrue, and every bit of uploaded fodder feels, simultaneously, like maybe it's being saved forever and maybe it's going to disappear when the whole structure collapses. (The Internet itself is some sort of structure, after all.)

The Miami-based filmmaker and artist, Jillian Mayer, toys with ideas about both the singularity and technological futures—a realm that feels both increasingly impending and still based in fantasy—and the very human body’s placement within. Doesn’t “the cloud” feel like preparation not only for a possible laptop crash, but a digital apocalypse? And yet, doesn’t this cloud also feel, somehow, possibly unreliable?

In the short film Mayer created with director Lucas Leyva, #PostModem, a program called Mega Mega Upload allows users to upload their entire selves into a portal for future access and download. In her latest work, *400 Nudes*—which premiered at the 2014 Montreal Biennale—Mayer superimposes her own face onto a set of anonymous nude selfies; they seem to unintentionally function as a real-life Mega Mega Upload: these bodies exist in this particular format for some kind of always and forever, but it’s determined by who chooses to keep them and for how long. Indeed, Mayer has already altered them. In this sense, *400 Nudes* speaks to the placement of the IRL human body in a digital forum: how does the soft, touchable, and fleeting translate?

You obviously have an interest in the digital realm, but you also care about the physical body—not only its place on the Internet, but its general fragility.

JILLIAN MAYER Without trying to be obnoxiously existential, I spend a lot of time thinking about our seemingly short human lives, what we can do in a few decades, and if any of it will ultimately matter. We create all these various and proficient ways of archiving our lives, which continually become obsolete when a better version comes along to serve our needs surrounding storytelling. But does any of it actually matter? Today, it is hard to think of our lives without a digital component and my generation might be the last to remember a time when we weren’t so utterly technologically dependent. I don’t consider this is a pro or a con. It is just an extension of contemporary living because the digital world offers us so much. Via digital means, we are given a global organizational system and instant communication boards. We are aware the Internet is another capitalistic system controlled by people with technical abilities, yet we still go to it for truths. For instance, when someone tells me something that seems false or erroneous, I find myself Googling it to seek some type of validity. Nonetheless, I am attracted to the idea of more truths, even if I have to navigate around falsehoods, advertisements, pop-up ads, blog posts, opinion posts, and comment sections. Meanwhile, I am also keenly drawn to the human experience, via our tangible bodies. We are stuck in these vessels and some serve us better than others. The body facilitates the process of creating one’s identity, while simultaneously it projects that identity.

I’m thinking of 400 Nudes, your face-measuring exercise for Flaunt, the image of you running in Scenic Jogging, even what you told the Miami Rail: “We will only have these bodies for a short amount of time and every few years they change. I look at it as an archive of what my form once was.” So much of what you do touches upon this idea of archiving or uploading the self, even I Am Your Grandma.

JM As I see it, there is no such thing as permanence, even if we wish to believe so in order to comfort ourselves. That extends from ourselves, down to the way in which we cite our history. Everything is malleable, editable. We have this vague idea of unlimited data stored in a cloud, safe from accidental hard drive fails or the computer that crashed and won’t turn back on. But where does that cloud function from? Behind the seemingly immaterial Internet lies an incredible physical infrastructure, a physical

form, a massive concrete building complex, a body, so to speak. Everything needs a body of sorts, and yet bodies break down. The future isn't robotics and 3-D printed food, it is the wild that reclaims the city after what we built no longer functions.

How does this subject play into *400 Nudes*?

JM I am interested in nude portraits because without clothing, a body can almost become timeless. Yes, there are particular tattoos, piercings, or hairstyles which denote a sense of setting, but when a person abandons their clothing, they often discard cultural connectivity. And there they are, in the image, nude.

In an interview with the Creators Project, you mentioned that you tend to lean toward humor as a mechanism for dealing with issues regarding the future of technology.

JM It's hard to think about the future without linking it to technology. Technology is something that we have a very sensitive and dependent relationship with and is limited. We often fetishize tech, while missing the point when a newer, revolutionary invention becomes accessible. But inventing tools that create revolutions in communication, tech, and health care is certainly a process. I see the future as a place where people will be problem-solving while simultaneously creating problems for ourselves at exponential rates. It is all just very precarious.

Talk to me about your upcoming projects.

JM Currently, Lucas Leyva and I are working on a short film called *Cool As Ice 2*. It is the unauthorized sequel to *Cool As Ice*. We were just awarded the Creative Capital grant for a feature film project we hope to shoot this year. In March, I am on a panel at SXSW called *Making Art While Entertaining the Internet* with awesome artists Jayson Musson, Sean Carney, Molly Soda, and Yung Jake. Also, I have a summer art show at Aspect Ratio in Chicago, and one at LAX ART in Los Angeles this fall.