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Metal in the Age of AI

Rebekah Walkarden

The noise of our online reality is loud and overwhelming, a swirling vortex of knowledge as vast as a great dark ocean. Over the last century the everyday person had increasing access to the facts and truth of the world around them. Over time this has led to a decreased tolerance for uncertainty. The rise of the internet opened a door to all the endless possibilities of the human experience but as we sit on the precipice of an Artificial intelligence explosion the endlessness of the capacity of modern technology leaves us at a tipping point of information overload. Suddenly the multiplicity of truths, the shades of grey slipping between real and imagined are all around us. In these times it can be scary to realise that our ocean of truth is becoming muddy. There are so many of us here stirring up the sand. But is it so bad to float in the unknown? To embrace its great mystery? Sometimes all we can know for sure is right in front of us. But isn't it fun to wonder.

I was given the task of curating the first FIND KEEP MAKE exhibition, I started with Keep, choosing an item from an existing collection.

KEEP

The piece I chose had an air of mystery to it, a metal vessel with no discernible marks. It was dark and heavy, holding it felt grounding. I wondered who had held it before.



Artist Lorissa Toweel examining the bronze vessel which comprises the KEEP portion of the exhibition



My initial enquiries to find out the origins of the vessel came up frustratingly empty but over time I found that it was either French and from the mid 1800s or a more modern Chinese piece. It might have been a match holder or an inkwell, accounts varied, as did its estimated value ranging from less than \$100 to \$1500. Had it sat on someone's writing desk or a kitchen table, in cabinets or drawers? The more people I asked, the more questions I was left with.

Trying to dig for all this information made me very aware of the tenuousness of story and knowledge that spans across time and people. Once the original maker is gone, all we can do in their absence is connecting dots no matter how sparse they may be. Though our ocean of knowledge today is vast, how much of it is dots and how much the lines we fill in between them?

The vessel is heavy in my hands, its surface is rough and cold. These things I know with certainty, But where was it yesterday? I am a little less certain. Last year? Even less. And so it goes, as time stretches back how do we know the things we know?



The mystery vessel borrowed from the fabulous WonderKarma collection



Modern generations are becoming less and less tolerant of uncertainty. We want truths and absolutes and in many cases we have access to them in ways previous generations never had before. If I want to know the speed of sound or the scientific name for a mulberry tree I can know it in an instant. As this new age of AI dawns, which facts are dots and which are the millions and millions of lines our computers can extrapolate between them?



MAKE

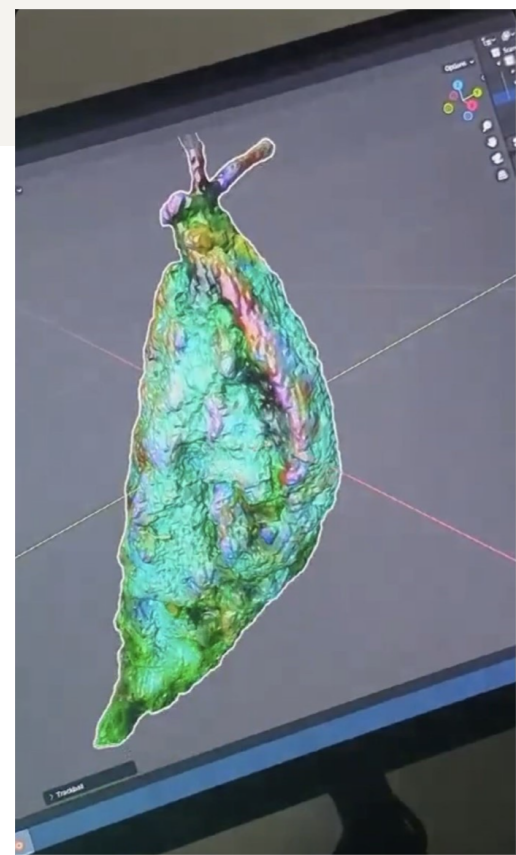
So what does this new world mean for Artists, Designers and Makers?

This was one of the questions I brought to Artist Lorissa Toweel. With her background in metal working, a bachelors degree in Fine Art (for which she received the highest grades of her year) and a strong interest in how data shapes our world, Lorissa was the right person to commission for the Make portion.

Lorissa had recently curated the exhibition 'Decompose: Decoding Knowledge' in 2022 Which questioned 'can we inherit knowledge and have we shelved critical thought in favor of data and facts?' so this wasn't a question she was unfamiliar with. Lorissas work for Find Keep Make contrasts human and AI making, responding to the original bronze vessels organic elements to create her own bronze shape. From this she prompted Artificial Intelligence to create several iterations of the evolving forms and 3D printed them in PLA. This mimics a way in which AI could one day both design then print off its own forms – introducing to the physical world elements dreamed up in data. At this stage of technology the AI still requires a human intermediary to transform the shapes it creates into something that can be printed. But a future where no intermediary is needed doesn't seem all that far fetched from where we are today.



One of the AI generated photos Lorissa used as part of her process of making



The start of a 3D form. Screenshot from video by Lorissa Toweel.



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Much like the invention of the internet I believe that AI is going to impact every aspect of our modern world. We are sitting at a historical moment that will define the coming decades with new language and ways of doing things. Initial reactions from the art world towards AI have been mixed with many concerned that AI will take jobs from human artists and lead to new and greater problems in the world of intellectual property. These concerns are both immediate and legitimate but in its essence, is this just a new technological wrapping of an age old worry? How do we know the things we know? And how certain are we that what we know is true?

My parents bought it from an antique store, a brass set of scales and weights held in a velvet lined wooden case, it definitely looked antique but a quick google search later and it became clear this was a modern reproduction made to look like an antique. I was fascinated by this tiny deception and it reminded me that our grappling with truth and authenticity has been going on for a long time and that AI is just another facet to it.

FIND

The study of provenance has had a resurgence in interest in recent years due to the BBC One show 'Fake or Fortune' which aims to find the provenance of Art works suspected to be valuable or historically noteworthy. The show is presented as the solving of a mystery with, in most cases, a satisfying conclusion as they weigh up the evidence and a verdict is delivered to the anxious owners of the artwork. The mystery was not so great in the case of the found object I chose for this exhibition.

A copy of my parents set of scales for sale on Ebay



Vintage Look Antique Brass Jewelry Scale With Weight Set And Velvet

Buying options

About these results ⓘ

\$78.18 + tax (USD 50.59 + tax)

Used

Free delivery

eBay.com.au

Visit site

Product Details

NEW Old Stock Vintage Look Antique Brass Jewelry Scale with Weight Balance Set and Velvet Box Brand new never been used old stocks. May show minor rust on the outside box ...



ARTIST Lorissa Toweel

Lorissa is a Brisbane-based visual artist, raised in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her art practice harnesses various media such as clay, metal, paint, photography, film and technology to create hyper-coloured, otherworldly landscapes and surfaces. These videos and art objects explore ideas around duality, identity and the synthetic nature of modern-life. Recurring motifs include diasporic identity, memory and digital manifestations of the human experience. With a particular focus on material qualities, tactile experiences and digital manipulation, the work interrogates the slippages between daily binaries. Her work disrupts the black and whiteness of absolutist principles and antagonises this behaviour by creating hybrid landscapes that lie between these polarised dimensions, nurturing acceptance of these opposing forces and offering a resolve in hybridity.

CURATOR Rebekah Walkarden

Rebekah is a multidisciplinary artist and curator interested in an ever evolving array of artistic and arts adjacent pursuits.



FIND - a found object

KEEP - a work from a collection

MAKE - a newly commissioned work