

Adina Glickstein, "Seth Price's Digital Dissolution," *Hyperallergic*, December 29, 2018.

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ART • WEEKEND

Seth Price's Digital Dissolution

Price works over his photographs with chemicals, polymer fluids, and powdered earth — decimating digital data through analog means.



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Seth Price, "Untitled" (2015–2018), dye-sublimation print on synthetic fabric, embroidery, aluminum, LED matrix, 80 x 90 x 4 inches (all images via petzel.com)

layers of tech-speak — the site aggregates photos of international art investors, all gazing at the camera with a transparent lack of affect. This is one of several projects Price has undertaken during his six-year hiatus from the Chelsea gallery scene, finally broken with *Hell Has Everything* at Petzel.

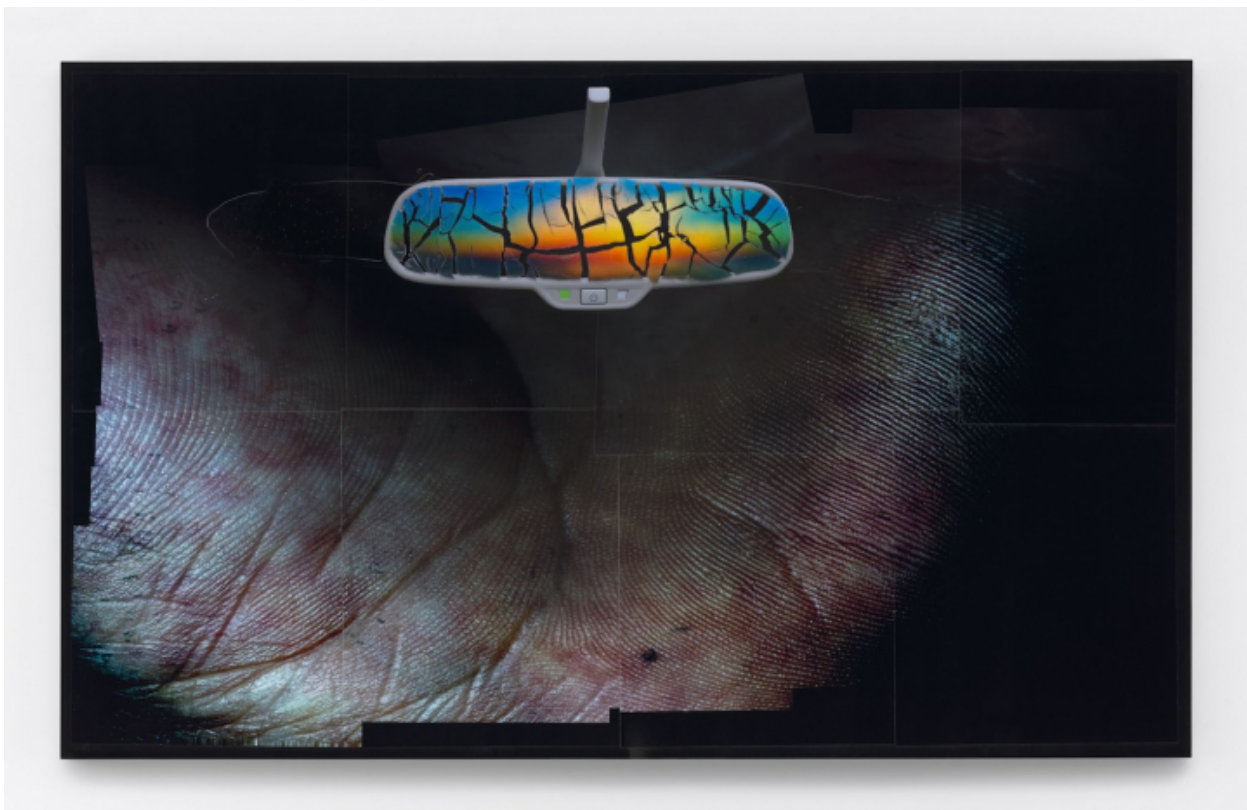
Organic Software might well serve as a subtitle for Price's new show: a diverse accumulation of media and processes united wending their way through the valley between netscape and meatspace.

My brief stint working for a Chelsea gallery was strange in more ways than I care to recount, numerically or legally, given the NDA I can't remember if I signed. But one particular eccentricity has stuck in my brain: the vast database of "face charts" on the company intranet, methodically naming and picturing the gallery's most prized collectors, ostensibly so we could tell the Real Big Spenders apart from hordes of well-dressed nobodies. This is probably a common practice, yet scrolling through the chart felt somehow illicit — like snooping through a parent's embarrassing high school yearbook, or checking off a hit list.

That experience is eerily recreated in *Organic Software*, an anonymously coded website published by Seth Price in 2015. Using a "propriety algorithmic perception tool" — obscured, like many of Price's methods, beneath

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Seth Price, "Untitled" (2018), inkjet, paper, acrylic polymer, glue, aluminum, wood, 52.5 x 84.75 inches

"Untitled" (2015-18) hangs at the entrance, a single, large, backlit tessellation saturating the space with brightness. From a distance, the image resolves: fine creases of human skin encircling a knee or an elbow, cut and splayed against a hazy background. The skin's jagged edges bear the clean splices of digital manipulation, but occasionally mistakes in the process are revealed: data mistranslated, resulting in a blur or a series of bars. In the lower left corner, the words "New York City" are embroidered in red, with long, loose threads dangling off the bottom of the physical frame, jarring in their unkempt materiality.

Price has written at length about the process of making such a work, which involves physically manipulating digital images. No Photoshop retooling here; instead, Price works over his photographs with chemicals, polymer fluids, and powdered earth — calculatedly decimating digital data through analog, elemental means.

Two other "Untitled" companions hang in the central gallery, both featuring similar blown-up swathes of skin. These works are striking in their intensity of detail, rendering the ridges and discolorations at once familiar and abstract. This hi-def clarity tapers off at the edges, where, as in the image at the gallery entrance, chunks of background cut in at canted angles; rich streams of information are abruptly overwritten by blackness, seeming to encroach on the skin of the screen.

Across these works, the digital is exposed in all its fleshy vulnerability. "UnQuantifyWorld" and "Grew up in a box marked Freedom" (both 2018) smear silvery, abstracted photographs of varying textures against stark white canvas. Unmoored from space, they are endlessly manipulable, melting into the emptiness around them. It's an architect's rendering gone wrong, Dali meets Diller, Scofidio, and Renfro.

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Seth Price, "UnQuantifyWorld" (2018), inkjet, acrylic polymer, acrylic paint, glue, bronze powder, plastic, wood, metal, 64 x 41.75 inches

Lacanian mirror — psychological distance is foreclosed as it draws the viewer into a soup of bodily sensations, a film more felt than seen.

Video installations are notoriously hostile in their construction of physical space, frequently offering but a single, shitty bench to squat on. Here, the discomfort — as well as the attendant dignity — of sitting upright is denied. Humbled on a shockingly comfortable beanbag, the audience is compelled to offer itself before the film. Price here invites a more playful form of spectatorship — one where knowledge is divined by surrendering to sensory stimuli.

This interplay between artwork and spectator extends throughout the exhibition, with each of Price's works stirring something on a bodily register. His disillusion with the digital is reflected right back at us: increasingly networked, flesh and tech are both alarmingly susceptible to corruption.

Rigorous in their clarity and illusion of three-dimensionality, these images nevertheless behave in ways that binaries shouldn't: denied the stability of numerical data, their forms thaw and seep and squelch, running across the surface in liquified streams and pools.

Can digital input rot? Can it fall ill, or fade away? Recalling the immersive videos of Pipilotti Rist, Price's *Social Synth* (2017) is projected flat on the gallery's ceiling — for a front row seat, lie prone on the beanbags covering the floor, and sink in. The video's imagery is unidentifiable, but should frighten any dermatologist.

Price captured these images with a robotic camera, snapping thousands of stills as it panned across a squid's skin. The photos were then ingested by some map-making software, yielding a video that plays in a slimy, seamless loop. Technologies like GIS (geographic information system) mapping may augment humans' field of vision, but in encounters like this one, we can only hope to wander untethered.

Social Synth is equal parts mesmerizing and nauseating, a result of its physical organization as much as its content. This screen is no

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Seth Price, "Grew up in a box marked Freedom" (2018), inkjet, acrylic polymer, acrylic paint, glue, plastic, wood, metal, 56.25 x 41.75 inches

Hell Has Everything continues at Petzel (456 West 18th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through January 5, 2019.

<https://hyperallergic.com/477577/seth-price-hell-has-everything-petzel/>