

Rubén Grilo

CIRCA Projects, Newcastle upon Tyne



Text by Rachel Hill
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Spanish artist Rubén Grilo brings his multi-disciplinary practice, utilising cutting edge lasers and mundane objects, to built interfaces between distinct historical epochs and explores the digitisation of human experience. Conflating industrial era and contemporary technologies, Grilo's current exhibition *The Need for Speed* is a meditation on the acceleration of daily experience.

A title appropriated from an 90's racing video-game, *The Need for Speed* references the migration of human experience, moving from direct visceral reality to a simulated, virtual-world, typified by speed. It also references George Stephenson as progenitor of the exponential speed which characterises our post-industrial society. Situated in the Stephenson Works, site of former locomotion factory, Grilo builds on the resonance of place in the second show of Circa's "Space Release" series, a curatorial programme of 3 solo shows, aiming to generate discourse around the role of site within artistic practice.

Immediately upon entering the space, images fade in and out, projected onto a grid of blanched denim, a lattice work of scenes in-synch with an industrial dance beat. A series of multilayered images, audio-visual piece *Candle Riddle Videogram. Light-Junk TV Redux, Burn Again* (2013) amalgamates mundane objects, plugs (our contemporary "Light-junk,") with their antiquated equivalent; replacing prongs with candles, creating a "redux" of elemental forms of energy to "burn again." With its circular, tautologous title, *Candle Riddle Videogram...* is a rebus which rhythmically swings between presence and absence, a synergy of different historical epochs, in which outmoded technology is simulated and projected by their digital progeny.

Ascending the stairs to the main exhibition space, and hung from the rafters like fine pelts or ancient tapestries, *Pattern Free: Ripped from Zara* (2013) – swathes of denim – make a looming presence in a large open expanse. Grilo's appropriation of laser techniques from high-street fashion, imprint these denim draperies with of a single mark, replicated several times over. Executing an image with potentially infinite precision, Lasers hijack the traditional, quasi-sacred position of make-making within artistic practice. Sequestering the emblem of authentic human agency and identity, contemporary technology instead offers infinite simulation. With the marks of physical labour becoming rarified in the digital era, artificial signs of toil increasingly become exoticised.

Amongst the suspended fabrics, birdsong colonises the light and sky flooded former industrial space. Ambient sounds recorded on disused train-tracks capture a former industrial site sliding into entropy, reclaimed by nature. The momentary calm is interrupted by the contemporary technological cacophony of phone signals. The sonic din continues with a static laden sample in which a prehistoric man vehemently denies the magical status of fire. Layering historical spaces into an uneasy convalescence, Grilo deploys sound to dislocate and relocate experience of site, conjuring parallel times which inhabit the same space, revealing an archive of latent content embedded in past technological endeavour.

All Grilo's work functions as closed systems, oscillating in a self-referential circuit, excavating the historical origins of technologies, whilst highlighting the impeding obsolescence or evanescence of materiality within the increasingly cybernetic world. Creating work which interrogates and reactivates dormant spaces, Grilo reveals that as we hurtle forwards ever faster, it is the finger-prints of the industrial era which has set the tempo and built the blueprints for our future digital evolution.

Rubén Grilo: The Need for Speed is on display at CIRCA Projects, Newcastle upon Tyne until 18 May.

Rachel Hill is a writer and artist based in Newcastle.