

RUBEN GRILO  
The Need for Speed



‘The Need for Speed’ explores the notion of speed in a post-internet society, looking to how we both relate with and mimic concepts of labour, time and energy inherited from our industrial legacy. The title of the exhibition surreptitiously cites the first of a well known series of racing simulation games – which have been surmised as “the next best thing to owning a \$200,000 sports car!”

On entering the building, a display of hardware projects behind onto a bleached denim screen which is stretched trampoline-like to a custom frame and suspended in front of the entrance window. Candle Riddle Videogram. ‘Light-Junk TV Redux, Burn Again’ (2013) refers to the belief of the digital image as an inexhaustible medium. The piece features the image of an electrical plug with two candle prongs appropriated from a ‘70s German advertisement for a government energy conservation initiative. The candles are digitally duplicated, modelled into a moving image and layered over footage taken on the old factory floor of the Stephenson Works, today occupied by web-designers and other creative professionals.

Continuing through the low-lit, white-walled space upstairs into the mezzanine of George Stephenson’s factory, three customised denim works are suspended from the ceiling, following the long run of windows which overlook the factory floor. Each panel of fabric has been laser-blasted, a technique recently introduced in the manufacturing of fast-fashion for major high-street labels to artificially distress the jeans. ‘Pattern Free. Ripped from Zara’ (2013) plagiarises the patterns used by the global Galician brand Zara in their latest collection.

Developed as a durable heavy fabric for workers in America’s Western states in the 18th century, denim was originally synonymous with the rural outback and working class, later becoming a symbol of individual freedom. These nuances are challenged by exposing a detached and digitally-driven process of speed ageing which simulates time, body and labour.

An audio excerpt from the film ‘The Quest For Fire’ (1981) overlays a field recording taken from abandoned sites of some of the earliest railways, Lockhaugh Rail Viaduct and Tanfield Railway in Gateshead. The recordings mimic background sounds from a scene in which an early human accounts to others that the fire is not a magical and scarce occurrence but a process they can reproduce and bring about through following set principles. This speech in a simulated primitive language plays over the sound recordings of a natural landscape but with the occasional modern interference – airplanes, cellphones.

Within a wall of the exhibition is ‘Still Framed (Junk Here, Junk There, Junk-Hole, Junk Through)’ (2013) an embedded rectangular frame with a glass front and back contains a half-melted car airbag, a cluster of candles sit inside on the bottom ledge. The glass frame reveals the space behind the wall, a concealed storage space. The airbag is made of flame-resistant, coated nylon. This object is an artefact, it was patiently heated with candles and filmed in order to emulate burning celluloid when a cinema projector jams. The video is then overlaid with footage of dust from the mezzanine windows - further simulating film and is presented as a triptych which plays this layered image beside two monitors with their power cables cut, hanging beneath them.

Finally, the work ‘New Logo’ (2013) changes the CIRCA logo, replacing it on all digital and printed media for the duration of the exhibition. The logo takes the identity of Monsanto’s Roundup – the world’s best selling weed-killer: “Roundup kills the root of the weed so that weeds never come back”.