

## Exhibition Review

*Centre for Fine Print Research Showcase, curated by Sofie Boons*

Centre for Fine Print Research at the University of the West of England webpage, 9 December 2020 - present

### Abstract

*This review documents the ideas and inspiration behind the CFPR showcase, a digital exhibition which was launched as part of the 'Touch: Reflections on Making' event co-organized by the Centre for Fine Print Research and the Crafts Council. The showcase, which had to be moved online due to the pandemic, was re-imagined to invoke an embodied experience for the viewer.*

KEYWORDS: Digital Showcase, Digital Tactility, Curation

Our shift towards the digital in response to our current context has provided us a new challenge: how can we offer an alternative experience that surpasses a physical visit to an exhibition? With many exhibitions either cancelled or moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic, audiences have been largely stripped of the opportunity to engage with artist practices in the conventional embodied manner enabled by galleries, museums and exhibits.



Figure 1: Sofie Boons, *Social Distance*, 2020. Silk, pearls, silver. 1,4 cm x 29 cm. United Kingdom. Copyright Sofie Boons

As part of the digital research dissemination event 'Touch: Reflections on Making' organized by the Crafts Council and the Centre for Fine Print Research (Fields 2020; Ho 2021), a digital exhibition showcasing work by the various CFPR researchers was developed. It was produced sensitively in response to the lack of embodied experiences during the pandemic. In line with the topic for the overarching event which the showcase accompanied, it was the curator's intention to consider a format and methodology that would evoke an embodied experience for viewers of the digital page. Following the theorisations of Minelli and others in the article 'MOVIO: A Toolkit for Creating Curated Digital Exhibitions' (Minelli *et al.* 2014: 29), a digital exhibition cannot just be a collection of digital media; it requires careful curation of digital content in a logical itinerary contributing to the narrative of a theme, involving the digital audience in a process of discovery. For this reason, the showcase – structured around providing a tactile insight into nine sets of objects and their maker's practices – included a range of images, videos, and words, all ordered in a considered sequence offering both visual and conceptual diversity and progression. To overcome the lack of 'tangible interaction' (Petrelli and Ciolfi 2013: 60), the images were taken with a plain background, from numerous angles and vantage points, in order to focus on various properties of the physical objects.

By 'zooming into the object' (Thein 2018: 5) and focusing on the material texture, the patterns they displayed or the structure that supports their build, the viewer is intimately introduced to the objects. As visible in Figure 1, the images enable the viewer to notice the structure of the silk string, the shape of individual knots and dull lustre on the pearls. In addition, the image which shows the maker's hand holding the necklace was included to both provide a sense of scale and evoke the embodied feeling of stroking a pearl necklace. A short video showcases a reel of the images overlaid with audio recordings of the practitioner reflecting on their tactile making process, the experience of touching and interacting with the object and the importance of touch in their individual practice. The grid layout of the images and videos was pared down, enabling the viewer to flow from one object to the other seamlessly. A range of words, evocative of the tactile experience of the object and its physical properties, as well as title and maker descriptors, were incorporated into the grid to mimic the scattered thoughts that arise when physically holding an object. When the viewer's gaze travels over the grid, their attention is pointed towards a specific quality of the object; its weight, its size, the material it is made of, or its texture.

The showcase (Boons, 2020) was launched during the online 'Touch: Reflections on Making' event, and most viewers had the opportunity to engage in discussions on the display during the event. The digital exhibition successfully enabled participants to engage with objects they would not have been able to experience in the current context (due to the national restrictions). It offered an experience which did not aim to replicate a physical show but instead offer an alternative dimension, providing access to the minutiae of audio-visual information to viewers, which they would probably not have accessed through a physical display. The digital exhibition remains live with an open feedback box, so that viewers who visit outside of the event can share their thoughts on the webpage and engage in discussion. With only a small number of comments received to date, this appeared to be a less successful tool to inspire engagement. Though more research should be conducted to accompany future experiments in relation to the true achievement of an embodied experience by viewers, another step (Petrelli and Ciolfi 2013: 63) has been taken towards re-imagining the opportunities and benefits digital exhibitions can offer virtual audiences.

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