

INTERVIEW - 08 JUL 2016

Network Control

BY HARRY THORNE

Yuri Pattison, winner of the 2016 Frieze Artist Award, talks about his new show at Chisenhale Gallery and his forthcoming project for Frieze London

HT Your show at Chisenhale, 'user, space', deals with elements you've taken from your year-long Chisenhale Gallery Create Residency – researching shared workspace for tech and creative start-up companies for example. When did you first become interested in co-working spaces?

YP I've always been interested in different forms of work – in networks, nomadic places of working and the ways in which the internet has effected work – but in this case it came from using London Hackspace, a non-profit hackerspace in the east of the city, and thinking about why that organization exists.



Yuri Pattison, 'user, space', 2016, exhibition view, Chisenhale Gallery, London. Courtesy: the artist; mother's tankstation limited, Dublin; Helga Maria Klosterfelde, Berlin; and Labor, Mexico; commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London; photograph: Andy Keate

I first started working there because it was useful. It had all the equipment and tools I needed, and operated with this particular ethos that promoted the sharing of knowledge – which was also the motivation behind the World Wide Web. Tim Berners-Lee and his collaborators gave software to the world in the hope that users would gift knowledge to others and would be gifted knowledge in return. I'm a big believer in that: if you make information free then it becomes more beneficial, more powerful.

It's also interesting how co-working in the tech industry has become so 'on trend', and how the design of these spaces is often so ridiculous. I've always had an interest in architecture and design, and so I began tracing the ways in which particular design features have come to be adopted. Co-working spaces often reference the home and the industrial environment. Within a co-working space the visibility of work is quite low – just people with their laptops, it's all very social – so companies feel that they have to go in the opposite direction and ramp up the markers of 'real labour', with warehouse racking and raw industrial materials, for example.

HT That intentional blurring of leisure and work is interesting. The two seem to have become false binaries in contemporary offices spaces.

YP They have, and I've been trying to trace that back and determine exactly when the tech industry formalized itself as a lifestyle as well as a profession.

There was a time when a lot of companies began to take on cool advertising agencies like Wieden+Kennedy. Their offices have always looked like play spaces: they have game rooms, 'inspiration rooms'. You're meant to spend a lot of time in them.

Google definitely took a lot from them in the early days, and my Chisenhale show thinks about that dissolve, the architectural inclusions of life that are intended to direct focus and stimulate work.

HT Did you visit any of these offices as research for the show?



Yuri Pattison, communal table for user, space (detail), 2016. Courtesy: the artist; mother's tankstation limited, Dublin; Helga Maria Klosterfelde, Berlin; and Labor, Mexico; commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London; photograph: Andy Keate



Yuri Pattison, half relief shelter zone for user, space (hexayurt configuration), 2016. Courtesy: the artist; mother's tankstation limited, Dublin; Helga Maria Klosterfelde, Berlin; and Labor, Mexico; commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London; photograph: Andy Keate

YP For my Chisenhale Gallery Create residency I made a number of slightly antagonistic pieces of lobby sculpture that I then installed in various tech spaces. In part, I installed them with this show in mind, so that they could be documented in those surroundings, but I also used the works as an excuse to get into creative workspaces – London Hackspace, Second Home, and Google Campus, in particular. Google got very nervous actually. They wouldn't let me hook up my server to their internet connection.

HT Can you tell me about the use of furniture in this show? These clear plastic chairs, for instance, look as if they're based on Charles and Ray Eames designs?

YP I began noticing these models in a lot of co-working and tech spaces – both the originals and the cheap Chinese copies that I've used here. They seem to have become elevated to status symbols, markers of a certain ethos and a certain level of taste, which is representative of a lot of these co-working spaces. As well as infrastructure, the main thing you're provided with is a branded space. Branding is key, everything else is disposable, and that typifies the disposability of trends within this industry. With the Eames chairs, the more they're utilized, the more they'll near the tipping point of undesirability.

HT The plants you use, I presume they're referencing this same co-working aesthetic?

YP A number of the office design systems that I've been looking at incorporate 'chill out zones' or designated no-tech zones. They're made to make people feel a certain way and often they will include tokenistic hints towards certain things, like plants or art works. I chose these plants from a list that NASA put together in the 1980s of common, hardy houseplants that were the most effective tools to clean out toxins from the air. It was NASA thinking towards the future, thinking about what we could do in highly polluted cities and what we could do if we ever set up permanent colonies on Mars.

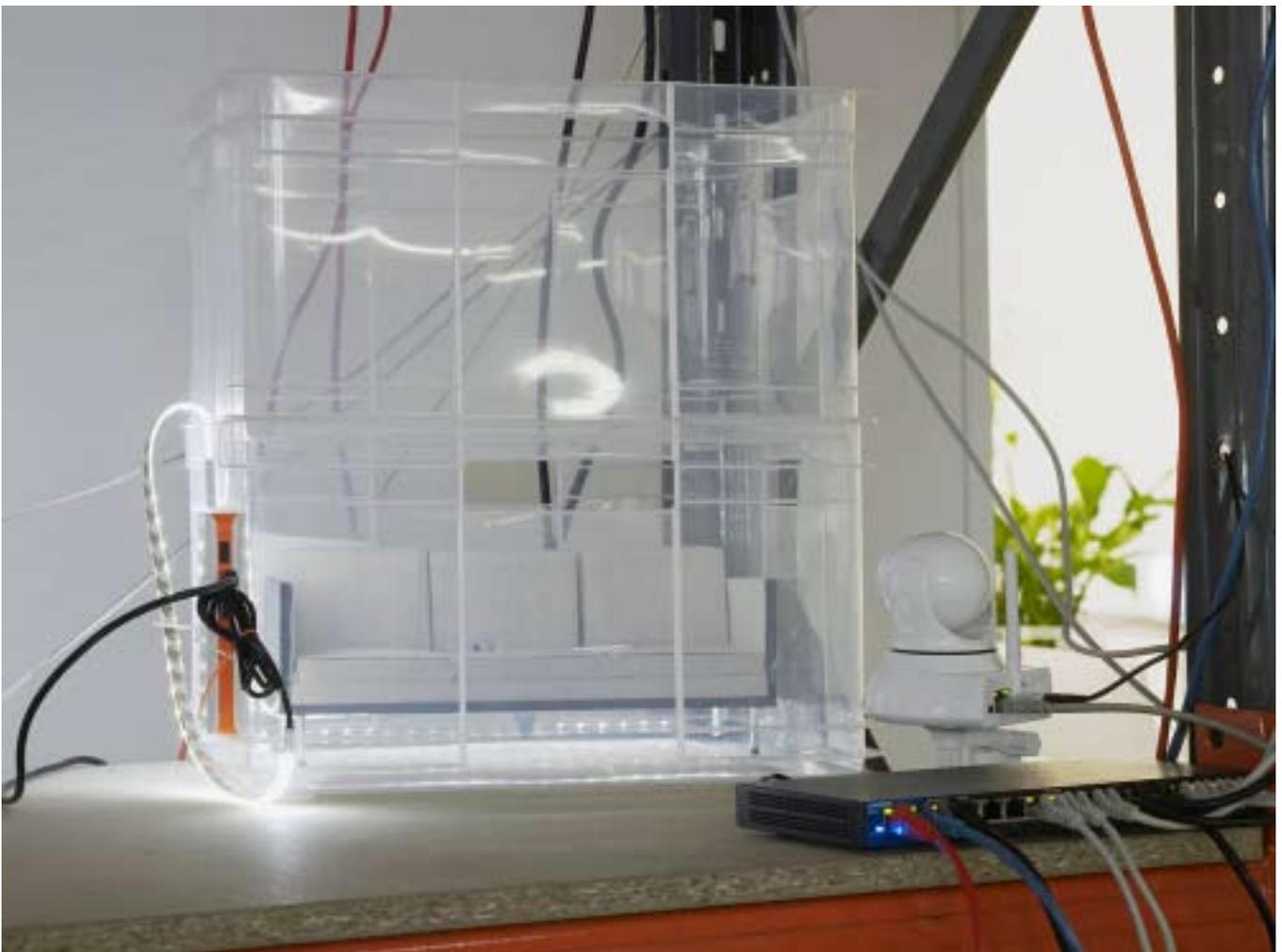
The plants are standing within a hexayurt, a disaster relief structure invented by Vinay Gupta. In a Hurricane Katrina-type situation, you could simply tape together a bunch of installation boards and you would have

a shelter. Here it's a pretty extreme representation of the temporality that comes with this flexible working lifestyle. The entire show is constructed with temporary materials, they're not long-term solutions, and that mirrors the recent use of freight containers as homes, shops or offices.

HT The tables and shelves you use remind me of Playmobil; it looks like you could disassemble this exhibition in a few hours.

YP I've always had a big interest in flat pack and the point where modular solutions became co-opted by creative industries and were slightly stripped of their ethos as a result. It refers back to a 1960s ideas of DIY culture, one which has now been stylized and determined as a luxury thing. Here, the temporary materials relate to temporality as well, to the short-lived boom and bust cycles that are characteristic of the industry, and to the idea of controlled time. As 'user, space' continues, these daylight spectrum lights will change in accordance with a prescriptive programme, as will the amount of daylight allowed in through the windows.

I was interested in the idea of things being controlled from a distance. In many senses we as 'users' have lost a lot of control, and the title of the show refers to that. User space is the part of the computer operating system that you are actually allowed to work within, while the more critical system operations are securely cordoned off. This is done for security reasons, but it also brings a very strict, defined delineation of power. You're in the user space, the public sphere, but all of the decisions that are being made somewhere entirely separate, and I was interested in thinking about that in more broadly special terms.



Yuri Pattison, enquire / Living for storage space 1 (London Hackspace), 2016. Courtesy: the artist; mother's tankstation limited, Dublin; Helga Maria Klosterfelde, Berlin; and Labor, Mexico; commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London; photograph: Andy Keate

HT Despite the supposedly open nature of these work spaces, we keep finding our way back to this idea of control and observation from a distance – through design quirks, through architectural introductions, through slight alterations to the environment.

YP Co-working spaces are most profitable if they can be run 24 hours a day, with different waves of people moving through the building at different times. It's the most efficient model, but it's also about minimizing staffing, and that's why you see many of these interface-based services like Uber or Airbnb put a lot of responsibility on their users. You train people to use the service themselves, and then you hope that the

community self-polices. The same goes in co-working spaces and the same goes in this show. If you have an open-plan office where everyone can see each other, then there's a certain type of behaviour that can be expected.

HT Will any of these themes make it into your commission for Frieze Projects at Frieze London this coming October?

YP I'll definitely be working with the same sort of operating system, with everything running from a single server, and there'll be a controlled network element to the work that will connect to other things and will react to the space that is the art fair. It will confront that.

HT At this point you've only released a single image, the back of a stack of monitors?

YP It's the back of a monitor that Heathrow Airport bought a bunch of a while back. It's called a 'crisis trolley', and it's kind of an austere thing. It's an array of five monitors on wheels that have two security cameras built into them. They display flight information, but they can also show a live news feed on a lower monitor. I've had a longstanding interest in how data is displayed, how it's utilized and how it can be aestheticized.

While it was probably intended to be a short-term solution, the one at Heathrow has become a permanent feature. This crisis trolley seems to signal a permanent state of emergency. Then by putting the news on the screen, you encourage people to look towards cameras that will then capture the faces of everyone below. So the project will look at this model of display and distribution in that sense, and it will also draw on various feeds of open information on the internet. Most of it is going to be sourced from thingful.net, a map of 'Internet of Things' objects that picks up any open signals from around the world: unsecure webcams, security cameras that don't have passwords, or even baby monitors.



Yuri Pattison,
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Andy Keate

HT I played around on the site earlier. It's addictive, fascinating, and occasionally incredibly intrusive. One moment I was looking at the number of available bike docks in Shoreditch, the next I was monitoring the BMI of a woman in California ...

YP It's bizarre. You have people broadcasting their health stats, the air quality stats in their apartment, or their various unsecure cameras. I was fascinated by the way that all of these objects were often impulse buys, like plant monitors that tell you how your plant is getting along. When I first looked around I found a plant in Japan that had died 18 months before, but its beacon was still sending a signal that the plant was dead. I kind of like the idea of these objects speaking, and the slightly gothic aspect of objects haunting the network. Ultimately, the project comes back to that idea of everything being allotted a numerical value, to material things becoming information, and to our obsession with data for everything.

*Supported by the LUMA Foundation, the Frieze Artist Award allows an emerging artist to realise a major commission at Frieze London, as part of the non-profit Frieze Projects programme. Frieze London will take place from 6-9 October 2016. For more information, on this year's projects:
<https://frieze.com/article/frieze-projects-2016-artists-announced>*

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