

To Make Measurable What Is Not So

Debble Westergaard Tuepah

Rosemary Burden

Judy D. Shane



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*Measure what is measurable, and make measurable
what is not so.*

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642)

Galileo wrote these words before the Age of Enlightenment ushered in the scientific revolution. Since then, the vast body of knowledge that has been established using the scientific method has shaped the world around us. Empirical thought and systematic methods have provided us with the overarching assurance that the world and everything in it can be measured, explained, improved. Though it may seem counterintuitive to the highly qualitative pursuit of the artist, these conditions have afforded resoundingly generative conditions for art-making. With each swell of scientific or technological advancement, artists absorb, interpret, critique and transfigure new knowledge, processing it in expressive ways.

Debbie Westergaard Tuepah, Rosemary Burden, and Judy D. Shane have developed bodies of work that arise from the exchange of scientific and creative thought. Barreling toward a globalized society where our interactions are increasingly mediated through digital technology—where we are at once closer together and further apart—these artists have attempted to translate the ephemeral nature of the information age into visible, tactile and experiential forms.

In a previous career, Debbie Westergaard Tuepah was a pioneer in consumer predictive modelling. Using complex data sets, Tuepah would determine the likelihood of a particular individual purchasing a given product in order to market to them directly. In deciphering an immense amount of information, patterns would emerge, establishing order from chaos and efficiently developing consumer profiles. Her large-scale installation, *By a Thread* invites viewers to move through a labyrinthine structure that challenges visual and spatial perception, disorienting the senses. Strands of yarn dipped in day-glo acrylic paint colours and suspended in a careful pattern from the ceiling form a sculptural installation akin to a three-dimensional op-art painting. Referencing the vibrant strands of colours found inside a fibre-optic cable bundle, Tuepah creates an embodied experience that invokes the glut of digital information we must navigate in our daily lives.

Moving through the work, lines of colour converge momentarily creating the illusion of solidity, only to become a profusion of incongruous lines with the next step. In traversing this maze we find ourselves back where we began, tracing a metaphorical path of what the artist has referred to as “a continuous state of desire.” Tuepah’s labyrinth is like a filter bubble made manifest; in the quest to move forward, our (search) histories interfere with our perception, narrowing our ability to manoeuvre outside of a prescribed path.

Rosemary Burden translates thoughts and phrases from the literary canon, great thinkers, contemporary authors and pop musicians into glittering strands of threaded beads. The words of Shakespeare, Galileo, Lewis Carroll, Lennon & McCartney and others are broken down into their alphabetic components, translated to the zeroes and ones of binary code and represented in corresponding colourful beads. These strands of language are suspended in an abstracted pattern across a dark wall: a web of words and ideas intersecting and diverging, intact but rendered unintelligible.



Debbie Westergaard Tuepah, Judy D. Shane, Rosemary Burden, *To Make Measurable What Is Not So* (installation detail).
The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford, 2016

The interplay between the handmade and the high-tech establishes Burden's artistic rationale in *Table of Content*. The strands of beaded thread represent a digital translation of sorts; word becomes patterns, patterns become ornamental strands, and these strands become mark making tools in the gallery space. At each step in this process, semiotic form is altered and the original meaning of the words is further obscured. These multiple transformations recall the breakdown and reconstitution of information that occurs in digital transmission as a result of the binary system. The thread spools that secure Burden's lengths of beadwork to the wall, connecting tendrils of language and tracing relationships between literary traditions across time and space, are equally important to this work. These objects call forth the evolution of craft-based traditions from handmade goods through to jacquard weaving, considered a conceptual precursor to modern computing. Large spools from the electrical and telecommunications industries are piled on the gallery floor, likewise draped and wrapped with delicate beading suggesting a parallel shift in communication technology from the rudimentary written word to digitally mediated experience.

Burden reduces iconic phrases to rhythmic patterns, altering the written word into an altogether different visual experience.

I loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are*

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

*Picture yourself on a boat on a river
With tangerine streams and marmalade skies.*

There is a correlation between the artist's choice of materials, her selection of written excerpts and the binary pattern that she employs. The words of literary giants commingle with lyrics from popular music, and the poetic nature of the original phrases is subsumed by the bejeweled, ornamental garlands of pattern. Opting for commonplace materials, simple beads that recall children's crafts and kitchen-table jewelry, the artist

creates a visual landscape where high and low culture are indistinguishable. Far from critiquing the democratization of taste, considered by some to be an inevitable outcome of the internet age, Burden's approach is a playful transformation of terms, a series of tactile translations as limitless as the night sky.

Like Burden, Judy D. Shane incorporates the oeuvre of a cultural heavyweight, this time Mark Rothko, in her series *The Painted Photograph: Multiforms*. Each work in this series takes the form of a large monochromatic rectangle of rich, saturated colour. A direct reference to Rothko's colour field paintings, Shane shares the Abstract Expressionist's interest in colour and figure-ground relationships. Rothko and his contemporaries sought to convey ideas that were inexpressible within the conventions of language or visual representation. The immediacy and material qualities of their paintings took precedence over any attempt to represent the world around them. Where these artists asked questions about truth in painting, Shane's works question the ontological status of the photograph in the digital age. Not only are these photographs about painting, more particularly they are photographs about photography.

The ability to digitally manipulate images has become available to anyone who owns a cell phone, obliterating the notion that photography represents an accurate record of "the real." As a former visual effects compositor in the film industry, Shane is especially well versed in the limitless possibilities of image manipulation made available through digital media. The works are created using digitally composited focus-stacked photographs of thick, individually formed brushstrokes of paint, each not much bigger than a fingernail. This process layers multiple digital photographs to eliminate depth of field, revealing silky, grainy, and pocked qualities of a surface that would be otherwise invisible to the naked eye. The lush, dimensional qualities of the artist's work belie its total flatness. Further disorienting our sense of perception is the fact that the image of the canvas visible at the borders of each paint sample is made from a life-sized scan that contradicts the dramatically enhanced scale of the paint samples.

Though subtler than a seamless sequence of a CGI King Kong thundering through the streets of New York, the process of synthesizing multiple photographs allows the artist to proficiently create a hyperreal document of an object that is borne of her own hand. This clever nod to the Abstract Expressionists, a group of painters who similarly concerned themselves with the nuances of material truth, underscores the radical shift that has occurred in visual culture precipitated by the digital age.

The full impact of the digital revolution upon our lives, now and into the future, is difficult to speculate. There are seemingly infinite possibilities for technology to change the way we communicate, relate and engage in the world. By mediating this vast prospect through modestly analogue materials like yarn, thread, beads, and paint, Tuepah, Burden and Shane remind us of the sustained importance of visual, visceral and embodied experiences.

Laura Schneider, 2016

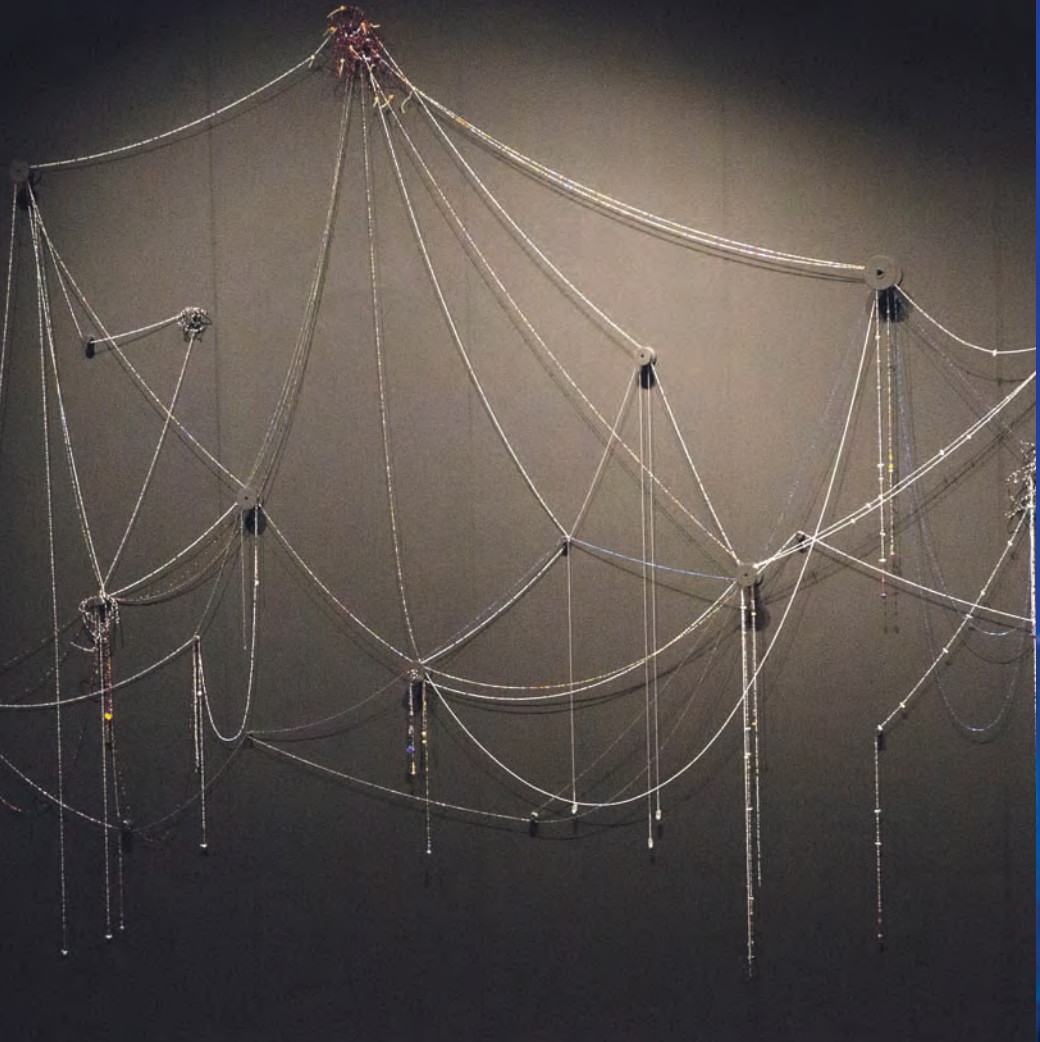




Debbie Westergaard Tuepah, *By a Thread* (detail), 2016, mixed media installation.
Facing page: Rosemary Burden, *Table of Content* (detail), 2015-2016, mixed media installation.

Debbie Westergaard Tuepah

Debbie Westergaard Tuepah received a BFA from Emily Carr University in 2011, where she was awarded the Chancellor's Award for Excellence. Exhibitions of her work include Vancouver Art Gallery's Family Fuse, Surrey Art Gallery, Bellevue Washington's Sculpture Biennial, Ontario's DNA Artspace, and Access Gallery—as a finalist for the 2016 CASV Emerging Artist Award. Debbie is on the Emily Carr University Alumni Board, is a founding member of the curatorial collective AgentC Projects, and is a member of CAM, a group working with Artscape BC and the City of Surrey to develop a contemporary artist-run gallery in Surrey.



Rosemary Burden, *Table of Content* (detail), 2015-2016, mixed media installation.

Rosemary Burden

Rosemary Burden loves books. As an artist she delights in taking the works and words of other artists - thinkers, poets, writers, musicians - all who use words to express their art, and reimagine their words in other forms. She has deconstructed old, worn books into butterflies, and taken digital versions of letters and made them solid strings of colourful beads. Words speak in new forms in her hands - and still they communicate!



Judy D. Shane, *The Painted Photograph: Multiforms* (detail), 2016, plexi-mounted lightjet photographic prints on metallic paper.

Judy D. Shane

Judy D. Shane is an emerging artist based in Vancouver, BC. Prior to completing her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from Emily Carr University of Art + Design (2012), she worked as a visual effects compositor in the film and television industry. Her current art practice challenges the space between painting and photography by using contemporary digital technologies to create multilayered photographic composites. These large-scale compositions use focal stacked macro photographs of individually sculpted strokes of paint to examine the micro world as seen through a macro lens and create three-dimensional realism and materiality in a two-dimensional format. She is represented by Jennifer Kostuik Gallery in Vancouver, BC.

The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford

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Front cover: Judy D. Shane, *The Painted Photograph: Multiforms* (detail), 2016, plexi-mounted lightjet photographic prints on metallic paper; Debbie Westergaard Tuepah, *By a Thread* (detail), 2016, mixed media installation.
Below l-r: Debbie Westergaard Tuepah, *By a Thread* (detail), 2016, mixed media installation; Judy D. Shane, *The Painted Photograph: Multiforms* (detail), 2016, plexi-mounted lightjet photographic prints on metallic paper; Rosemary Burden, *Table of Content* (detail), 2015-2016, mixed media installation.

