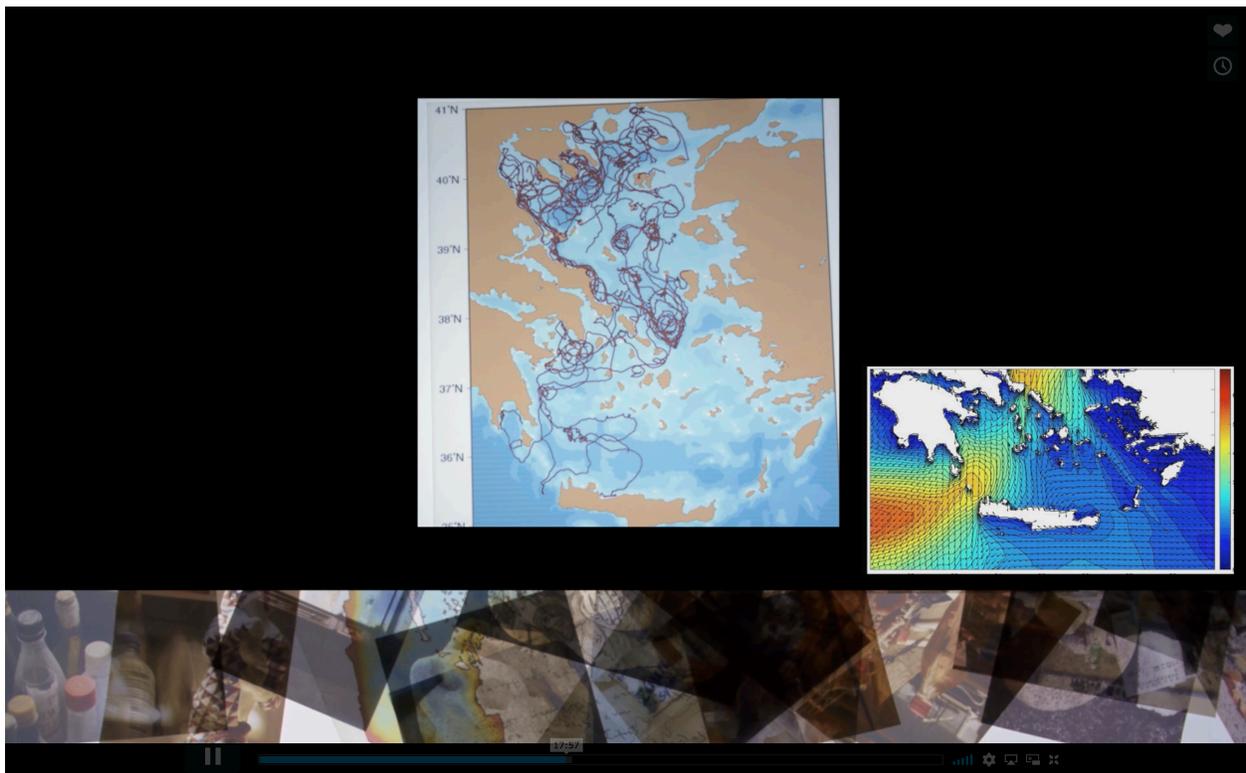


Hybridity in Ellie Ga's Gyres

01 - Overview

This work was produced by an artist whose body of work primarily explores the human desire to understand the unknown. She tends to take on esoteric topics as a point of departure to see what she, as an artist, can contribute to fields of inquiry such as journalism or science by allowing them to collide in her works. This idea about redefining the position of the artist to contribute rather than represent a subject matter encapsulates her work with Gyres which was shown at the Whitney Biennial - the space where I was able to meet the work.





The Biennial is interested in exhibiting the most relevant work being created in the art world at this very moment. As you walk into the exhibition you see an animation of NFL players kneeling as the national anthem plays softly in the background - an unabashed political statement. Within this highly political frame, the positioning of Ga's work seems out of place. Gyres is a quiet work that presents stories about the oceanic currents of the Aegean Sea using a light table, photographic transparencies, moving hands, and a narration, spoken in the most straight forward monotone. Presenting Ga's considerate and quiet film in a space overtly framed by the political leads me to wonder about its curation into the exhibition. The form of Gyres is a collage of the artistic, scientific, and utilitarian - bringing the perspectives of many fields onto a single table of light. I can't help but compare the complexity of her stories to the maximum character length of a tweet.

In Gyres, Ellie Ga investigates items (particularly but not limited to bottles) that washed ashore in the Aegean Sea. For a while, she talked about messages in bottles and how they

were frequently used to send prayers to the Archangel Michael. Along the way, she juxtaposes oceanic information about currents with personal stories about her time with locals. She incorporates many sources into her stories. At times it feels as if she is telling an antidote about a story about a historical object about the 2011 tsunami in Japan. This layering leads the work to feel extensive and holistic in its representation. The primary images we see are her hands moving countless transparent images on a light table - functioning as a visual aid to the information she lays out through her narration.

The presentation of information in *Gyres* is dry and methodical but alluring at the same time. When I walked into the theater and began listening to Ellie Ga's narration, I felt consumed by the eclectic stories and charts. It felt as if I was reading an academic essay with a soul. The form is minimalistic in appearance and very visually appealing. The center frame features an unbroken top-down shot of a light table - illuminating the transparent images. Below there is an oblong projection holding the repository of transparencies. As the story is told, the lower frame slowly becomes opaque as the transparencies accrue. Lastly, there is occasionally an additional projection of video that occurs on the right or left side of the primary projection.

I find this form very alluring as it presents several different mediums compiled together to convey scientific information within a narrative - accruing an innate complexity over time. Transparent images, verité footage, and maps are all layers of this film which are woven together into a rich texture of artifacts and images that aesthetically fit into the space of a dark theater.

After looking into her previous work, and Gyres in more depth, I have come to appreciate the intention of the films most of all. The research bridges a vast array of specialties - exploring a new definition of inter-disciplinary artwork. This results in a presentation that is nuanced, complex, and considerate most of all.

02 - On Hybridity

It's strange encountering this piece as it is hard to understand where it lands categorically - perhaps mirroring the essence of hybridity. That said, I have done a few exercises re-viewing the work as a way of working through this confusion. I began by choosing two elements, image and sound, to compare. Subsequently, I looked for modes of address present within these two elements as a way of exploring the work's hybridity.

The narration and transparent images read as one throughout the film. I was prepared to write about both together as they work in a perceived uncomplicated simplicity. This simplicity can also be described as fusion, togetherness, or seamlessness as there is no innate invitation to question the pairing. It fits the form of oral storytelling or going through a photo album with your grandmother. I decided to watch through the film twice, once with only image, the other with only sound as to isolate the elements.

The image alone departs from the warmth of a photo album by presenting transparencies upon a light table. I can't help but consider the vast array of metaphors for light. As Ellie Ga places an image down, she covers a portion of the light thus illuminating an image - a paradox of sorts (Ex 1). Illumination also speaks to the gesture of education which leads me to think of the primary projection as coming from an overhead projector. I think about my encounters with these technologies as entwined with my time in school and academia. I believe

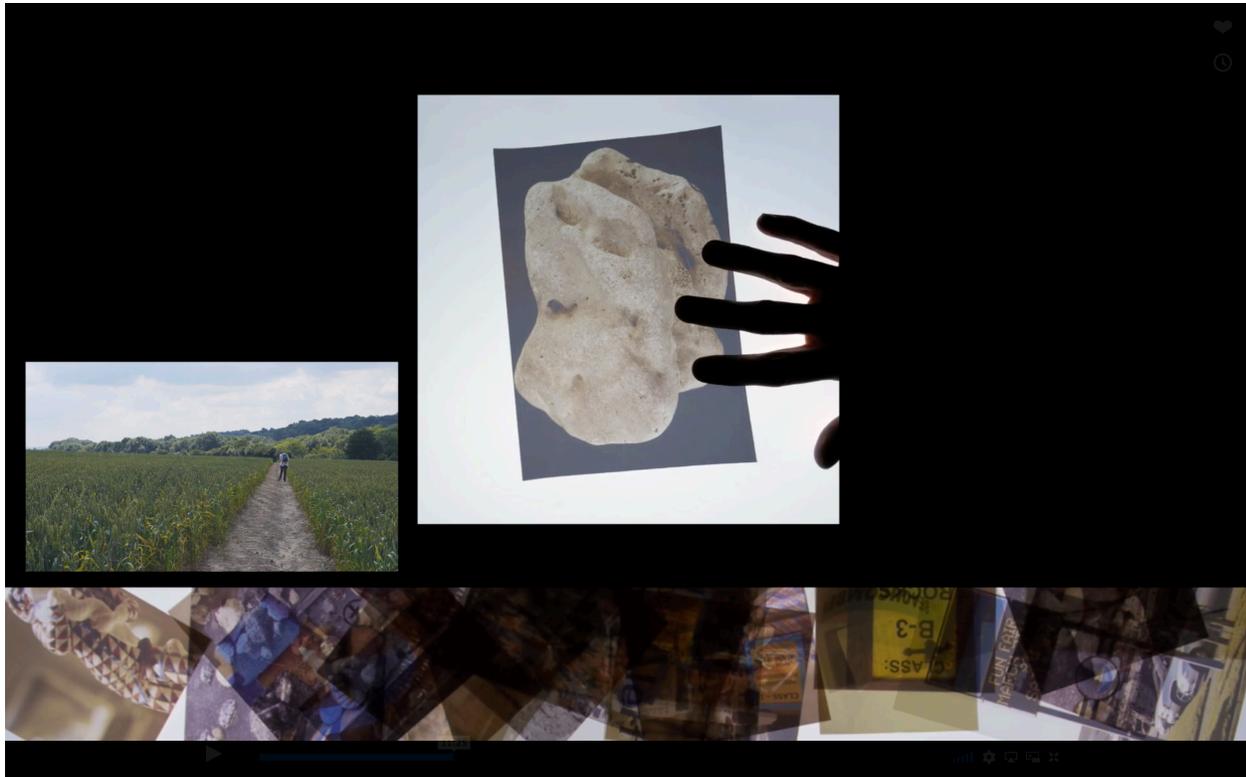
this is the origin of the “coldness” I felt throughout the film as each photo is presented with an scientific realness.



Ex. 1 - Layering of Images over Time

Similarly, the narration is monotone and cold in its articulation. The words have the essence of being read from an academic paper - not straying away from the scientific vernacular. The cumulative effect aligns with that of the light table - it is academic, scientific, and impersonal most of all. However, there are many moments that misalign with the label of “academic” as the scientific information is very much grounded in a linear narrative story being told about Ga’s experience with space. I recall the personal experiences Ga brings up, and how each interaction becomes a container to talk about another story - sometimes but not always related to the scientific or cultural. The compounding of stories is mirrored by the

compounding of images. By the end of the film, the images have obscured almost all light from the lower repository.



Ex. 2 - Intimacy

The hands are an essential part of this experience. The gesture of touch is intimate and speaks to a personal connection to the material creating a sincere realness to the story (Ex. 2). Sincere realness is different from scientific realness as the former focuses on the experiential/ sensorial realness that is narrative in nature - a retelling of personal events. The collision of these two "realnesses" results in something more inviting than an academic paper, but more educational than a traditional narrative documentary.

In considering a photo book as a genre, I think of touch as an essential element - connecting the teller to image but also to words. I currently am making a film that has a

sequence where my mom is going through a photo album, and to mask a mistake I tried to cover it up with a different shot of her going through another part of the album. The misalignment was obvious as the hands moved without connection to the words. The point of this story is that it showcases the expressiveness of hand gestures, and how subtly/prominently hand gestures align/misalign with speech. Within Ga's work, the hands become apart of the image as much as the narration. Earlier, I called the pairing of narration and image seamless as there was no invitation to question the connection. The hands are an essential part of this seamlessness as it makes the paring between sound and image truthful and genuine. They contribute an element of warmth not found in the narration or presentation. In many ways, it is the most expressive part of the film as we see the narrator's hand interact directly with the images and words also. The subtle way in which she places a photo down or complies the repository all speak to collection and connection - two words that also describe a photo album.

I wonder how the film would read if the narration was purposely misaligned. Would it create an experience opposed to its current form? Would there would be a mistrust of sound to image - a break in the seamlessness inviting wandering? The work's elements generate a trust to the information presented, but without trust in the image/sound relationship would the audience trust the details? As it relates to hybridity, I wonder how the exercise of questioning seamless pairings (such as the one described here) can result in revelations about hybrid forms, given the subjective qualities that define something as "hybrid".

In exploring the elements of this work I am coming to see that the hybridity in Gyres is tied to the juxtaposition of genre. Where that lands for me is the blending between the qualities of an academic essay and a family photo album. The mixing of these two genres

generates a realness as I have described above with the qualities of being both sincere and scientific. It is strange encountering the work as it is both dense and homogenous in its way of telling - much like a grandmother and her scrapbooks or academic essay.

The intersection, as hard as it is to define in words, reads as genuine to the subject matter. The story Ellie Ga is telling is complex with numerous elements and layers that stretch around the globe. The story reads to me as a genuine portrait of the way Ga encounters space. Within that, the collision of personal and academic seems like an essential part of the whole.

The most baffling thing about this relationship is the feeling it brought about in me while viewing the work. It possesses qualities of being "behind the scenes" in its depiction of Ga's personal narrative that seems to function as a mode of exploring a larger thesis. Perhaps it is a cultural collision that academic forms should not be mixed with the personal as a mode of distancing one from the subject matter. In early Ethnography, this was a common element - demanding the relationship between image and subject to be strictly observational.

In Ga's previous work she enjoys breaking down this wall as a way of exploring the ways she can connect different modes of inquiry. The formal elements of the work seem to clearly showcase this relationship by exploring qualities of encountering different kinds of knowledge such as personal and academic. The presence of the hands, the monotone narration, the light table, and the photographic transparencies all work together to generate a nuanced experience that considers, both in its content and aesthetics, a combined experience of exploring numerous modes of inquiry.

Overall I think this film's hybrid form works to question modes of inquiry as well as modes of address. It further works to question the illustration of information within academic

fields. Illustrations of academic findings generally use the form of time-based media in much the same way they might use a microscope or survey. They isolate elements as to objectify their essence with the intention of capturing a non-biased image. However, this objectification leaves out the personal touch that has been present in oral histories and knowledge since time immemorial. Ga's work illustrates a fluid blending of knowledge into a form that wears bias on its sleeve by centering presented knowledge around its container (the author).