

Art

Meet the artists using tech to preserve our history

Im/material: Painting in the Digital Age brings together artists who combine the digital with the physical to create truly immersive work



By **SIAN BRADLEY**

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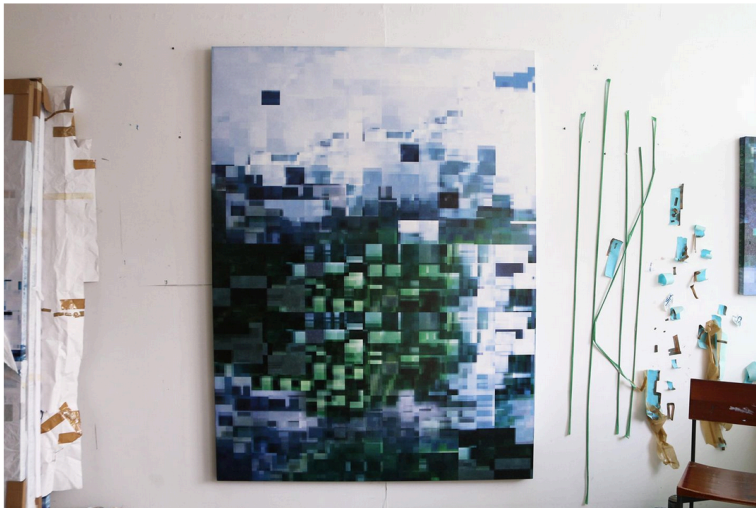


Konrad Wyrebek in his studio

Credit **Mustafa Sarikaya**

To create his paintings, Konrad Wyrebek pores over a TV show for hours on end, searching for a moment when the stream pixelates. Once he captures this flicker of distortion, he starts over, looking out for the next glitch with just the right light and colours.

Wyrebek then layers still images of the glitches over one another until he's left with something that's so corrupted it's hardly recognisable beyond blurred shapes. To create these distortions, Wyrebek streams footage at high speed between two devices. It's a little like watching a YouTube video when your Wi-Fi connection is low and looking out for the inevitable buffering.



***DdrfattGoBlue* emulsion, acrylic, spray oil paint, ink, varnish on canvas
200x150cm**

Credit **WIRED**

Next, he projects the final screenshot onto a canvas. From this, he paints in the pixelated image - using brushes, stencils inks and sprays - before covering some sections in tape to correct any mistakes with a programmed spray painter.

And so he alternates between human and machine, each correcting the others errors. When complete, his paintings are five or seven layers thick. The result? A series of paintings and video-paintings called *Data Error*, captured from television, film, and print. They are all politically or culturally relevant; he's more likely to pick a newsreader discussing the Ukrainian war than an advert, for example.

Two of his pieces, which were taken from footage on climate change, will be shown in *Im/material: Painting in the Digital Age*, an exhibition at the [Sophia Contemporary Gallery](#) in London's Mayfair. The pixelated representations of climate change will be on display alongside seven other digitally-inspired artists including Martin Basher, Michael Bell-Smith, Ry David Bradley, Chris Dorland, Matthew Hansel, Anna Ostoya, and Josh Reames. The exhibition is open until November 17.

[Ry Bradley](#)'s work attempts to capture augmented reality in a physical form using a Japanese-made polyester mesh that is so tightly woven it's almost invisible. "This is the closest I've got to finding a true analogue for augmented reality," he says. "I wanted it to feel ethereal, super lightweight - like it's there but not truly. I'm trying to preempt this AR layer that I know is coming."



Ry David Bradley stands behind two of his paintings from the Realities series

Credit **WIRED**

To build the illusion of an AR layer, 37-year-old Bradley starts with a decolourised image. He adds vibrant purples, greens, blues, pinks and yellows using a Wacom stylus, and prints this onto special paper with a dye. This dye makes direct contact with the mesh as it goes through the roll press and heats up to 205°C. Like ironing a transfer onto denim, the print turns from liquid to gas and seeps into the mesh where it settles, baking into the textile.

Bradley, who says he became an artist by accident after years of boredom working as a security guard in a museum, has also preserved his file on a USB, tucked neatly into the frame of the physical canvas. "It's a bit of an experiment to see which one will last the longest and be the easiest to access. In fifty years, I'll think I'm lucky that I preserved it in something permanent like that because the flash memory has corrupted," he says.

His respect for preservation is rooted in his mistrust of data storage, after he lost eight years of photographs because of a corrupted hard drive. "That experience made me really want to ascribe history," he says. But Bradley thinks the immediacy of technology will leave a black hole in history, and that concerns him. "Even the apps on my phone are being constantly updated; you live in the current version of everything. I feel like getting my work out of the computer into physical format and a permanent state is the best way we can write digital history."

His work for *Im/material: Painting in the Digital Age* is called *Realities*; scenes of forests and cable rooms stretched on mesh canvas. Each is named with the exact second he finished working on it. Bradley draws visual parallels between the vines of his canvas forest, and the pipes of the internet network. "The world's hyperconnected now, but the ecosystem of the forest has always been – and it's much more sophisticated than ours."



REALITIES 21/08/2017 14:33:21

Credit **WIRED**

When I meet Bradley and Wyrebek in their white-walled studios on opposite sides of London, they are both clad in white tees and black jeans. Each are driven by a desire to preserve traditional art and by an enthusiasm for the potential of technology.

Wyrebek studied art history in Poland, the country of his birth. His piece *2DkMoMonetClBLK* echoes Monet's *Water Lilies*. Yet Wyrebek's work, and mind, is fixed on what's coming next. "I imagine a future where we transfer our minds into a machine," he tells me with casual enthusiasm. To prepare for this future, he combines the imperfection of human touch with the precision of a machine. "To be able to make mistakes is what life is about." That's why he leaves his human marks on the side of the canvas, to show the tension between what humans and technology can achieve.

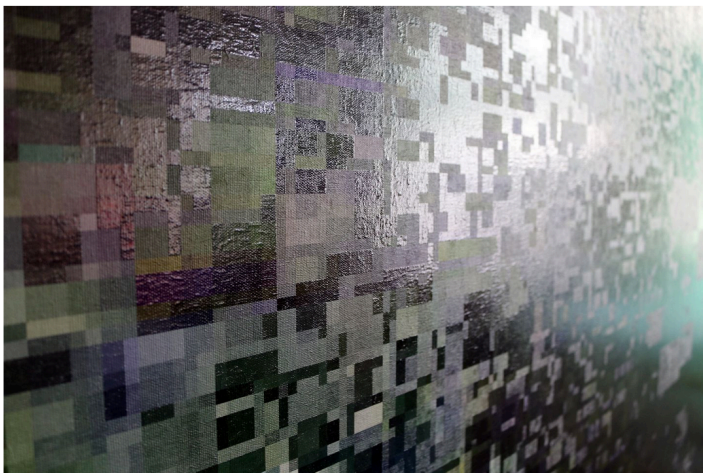


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Credit **WIRED**

He's interested in data errors in the same way he's interested in the subjective nature of perception. "We live in a culture where we take information in without questioning the source. Every image has data errors inside, so its conceptually interesting to question this."

Wyrebek wants people to consider his work, but not as an art critic; it's about understanding that there are many different ways of interpreting the finished piece, as with the original footage. Yet when you peel back the smart technology and the high-end materials, you're still left with two people who are painters at heart.



***2DkMoMonetCIBLK*, 2017 Oil acrylic, spray paint, uv ink, varnish on
canvas 200 x 150 cm**

Credit **WIRED**

"I think like a painter," says Bradley, when I ask what sets him apart from other digital-focused artists. "I colour in those images myself because it reminds me of the 20th century when photographs were hand coloured." As with Wyrebek, he doesn't let this nostalgia stop him using the latest high tech art gear. "When I did more traditional painting I just felt like I was being romantic. I am immersed in tech all day long so it feels facetious to not use it."

Wyrebek says he can collaborate with machines whilst still using traditional processes, such as finishing with varnish. Adding varnish creates another dimension to his work. If you move to stand at the paintings side and look across it, you will see the differing layers; some pixels gleam with shine and others are matte.

"I am still making aesthetic and creative decisions based on the colour, composition, and where to stop the recording," he says with conviction. "This is the new kind of artwork you can create with technology but still be strongly grounded in art history and in the process of painting itself. It is a painting at the end of the day."

Im/material: Painting in the Digital Age will be on show at the Sophia Contemporary Gallery on 11 Grosvenor Street in Mayfair, from September 29 through to November 17.

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