

Scott Benzel
Vestigia
The Horse Dublin
March 30th – April 30th 2023

The **HORSE**

The Horse is overjoyed to be given the opportunity to present *Vestigia*; a solo exhibition by Los Angeles based multimedia artist and educator Scott Benzel¹. *Vestigia* is the culmination of an investigation into the doubling and trebling of personae by individuals whilst seeking to unravel hidden connections and cultural signposts that combined help construct value and meaning within the Anthropocene.

The genesis for *Vestigia* (meaning 'traces' in Latin) is an investigation into the fin de siècle circle surrounding W.B. Yeats. Benzel traces connections stemming from Yeats's life and interests, using them as a jumping off point for an analysis of the construction of identity, visibility, occultation, counter culture, early AI, 'expanded' economics, data networks, and Dada. Benzel explores the circles' conscious fragmentation of subjects, symbols, and identities, tracing its dizzying forms of 'extension'. The show attempts a tangent reconstruction, foregrounding obscured connections and delving into existence's fragility next to the state of epistemological (or actual) oblivion.

Vestigia is the 'magical name' attributed to Moina Mathers, member and sometime leader of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn², sister of the philosopher Henri Bergson, and friend of W.B. Yeats, to whom he dedicated the 1925 edition of his book *A Vision*. The book was Yeats's attempt to illuminate the relationship between imagination, history, and spirit through the process of Automatic Script, a methodology that would influence his writing for the rest of his career. Fiona Macleod, a Scottish writer, 'seer', and campaigner for the Celtic Revival with whom Yeats corresponded regularly was unbeknownst to Yeats the pseudonym of William Sharp, whose letters were administered by Sharp's sister's hand. Raccoona Sheldon is one pen name of Alice B. Sheldon whose better-known pseudonym was James Tiptree Jr., a Hugo-award winning science fiction writer. Sheldon was a CIA agent turned sci-fi author who, as Tiptree, befriended Philip K. Dick, Robert Heinlein, Harlan Ellison, and Ursula K. LeGuin via correspondence. Sheldon is also believed by 'online researchers' to have been the author of the *Project Serpo* and *Majestic 12*

¹ For a full biography of Scott's output please see his bio at – <http://scottbenzel.net/biography/>

Benzel's work has been shown or performed at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum Of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, LA><ART, Los Angeles, The MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, The Palm Springs Art Museum, and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and was featured in Made in LA 2012 at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Benzel has curated shows at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture (Schindler House), Los Angeles, Los Angeles Contemporary Archive, and the Welcome Inn, Eagle Rock, CA, as part of Pacific Standard Time organized by the Getty Museum, among others. Solo shows include Maccarone, NY, Shanaynay, Paris, Various Small Fires, Los Angeles, and Bel Ami, Los Angeles. He is a member of the faculty of the School of Art at California Institute of the Arts.

² Known Golden Dawn members include- William Yates, Bram Stoker, Aleister Crowley, Charles Rosher, Arnold Bennet, Edward Berridge, Robert Felkin, Israel Regardie, Dion Fortune, Evelyn Underhill, Charles Williams, William Sharp, Maud Gonne, John Todhunder, Algernon Machen, Arthur Machen, Sara Allgood, Pamela Smith, Charles Allan Bennett, Gustav Meyrink, Florence Farr, Chic Cicero, E.Nesbit, Sax Rohmer, Annie Horniman, Sam Webster, Violet Tweedale, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, Arthur Waite, Frederick Gardner, Samuel Mathers, William Westcott

ufology hoaxes. Raccoona/Alice/Tiptree's many secrets might suggest a motive for PKD's well known and deep paranoia³.

The triple personae Vestigia/Moina Mathers/Mina Bergson, Fiona MacCloud/William Sharp/Mary Sharp, Raccoona Sheldon/James Tiptree Jr./Alice B. Sheldon are shadowed by references to artists Edward Burne-Jones, Pamela Colman Smith, and Aubrey Beardsley, writers Oscar Wilde and Ishmael Reed, and actors Florence Farr and Maud Gonne. All these figures were commonly influenced by Yeats, on top of which they all assumed 'double' personae: either pseudonyms or 'magical names'. Benzel connects this web of doubled and trebled identities, unknown relationships, and secret orders diagrammatically; suggesting that there is truthfully a tenuous nature to persona, whose success relies on a known relationship to social archetypes and obscure interpersonal connections.

Alongside this analysis of multiple identities, Benzel compounds layers of biographical facts with esoteric connections that hint at the existence of a system of protected knowledge that by necessity surrounds itself with secrecy. The show's earliest reference is a diagram by a Dr. Falcon, an enigmatic figure in 18th-19th C London variously referred to as Hayyim Samuel Jacob Falk, the Baal Shem (practical kabbalist) of London, the Falk brothers, Dr Falckon, etc, advisor to William Blake. Yeats invokes the mysterious figure of Falk in his writing on Blake and employs the falcon and its gyre throughout his work.

What is remarkable is that these stepping stones crazily form a coherent path from a time before the Internet, promoting the existential concerns and preoccupations that we face in online life today⁴ (or have we always faced them)?

The central gyre of Francis Picabia's *Le Double Monde* is doubled and trebled: superimposed via lenticular print on a photograph of the racehorse Tammany featured in Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*, and pictured in a stochastic, brainwave-controlled 'electronic drawing' displayed on an oscilloscope. Picabia's diagram (originally tracing the form of the Mona Lisa in his friend Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*) is geometrically similar to a double helix as well to the gyres and generative diagrams that Yeats used repeatedly to demonstrate oscillation, movement, and change through stillness.

Another trebling occurs in the figure of the Triadex Muse⁵, an early "commercial" use of AI with a name suggestive of the 'triadic muse' of the poets: Hecate. Benzel presents an original 1972 Triadex Muse and two cabinets of the same design containing other, more current iterations

³ By his own admission Philip K. Dick grappled with paranoia, and self-deprecatingly called himself a "flipped-out freak." The paranoia was probably the result of speed. A prolific author who published 34 novels during his lifetime, Dick used amphetamines to maintain his productivity.

⁴ Religion placed itself as the framework for explaining this invisible metaphysical system, in Europe preceding Christianity and the Enlightenment the answer was paganism and humanities conscious connection with nature. The advent of modernism and the birth of the individual opened a space for identity to flourish, enabling new traces across these boundaries both socially and culturally.

⁵ Designed by Ed Friedkin and Marvin Minsky at MIT in 1969 and marketed under their own Triadex Company in 1972. The Tiradex muse was an early AI-driven tool that used deterministic event generators driven by several digital logic shift registers to compose relatively complex non-repeating sequences boasting a total of 14 trillion pitch combinations. Marketed as a compositional tool and entertainment device, the Triadex Muse was equipped with a color organ and amplifier. Less than 300 were made, with one given to Maryanne Amacher by Minsky during her residency at MIT, upon which much of *Eartone Music* was composed. Other complex derivations can be heard: Carly Ptak's *Prepare Your Self* (2002) and Florian Hecker's *Triadex Muse Traks* (2012). - AST

of computation: a fluid dynamics simulation of a double gyre (a Yeats rooted motif), and a 'tracker' for the shadow 'currency' *Vestigia* (Bataille posits 'the accursed share', a sort of philosophical photo-negative of the 'real' economy, as the root of the sacred), an ETH-based 'dark pool' financial index tracking the 'traces' of other 'dark pools' (see also Benzel's Beardsley and William Copley-sampling print).

Rose Sélavy/Marcel Duchamp/R. Mutt's final, posthumous work *Étant donnés* is represented here as a bootleg with the door only, a trace of the whole. The door, with its crude peephole, was intended by Duchamp to give viewers a blinkered view of a vast hidden world (the stone-like statue figure at the centre of *Étant donnés* is thought by some 'online researchers' to represent the Black Dahlia or Elizabeth Short...). Pinned to the door is a Family Dog psychedelic-era gig poster, the centre of the illustration a Hecate-like group holding aloft a disco ball. A hole has been cut removing the ball and through the resulting peephole a found fragmented disco ball can be seen near '*Vestigia*': a medical model spine with a vestigial tail screwed to the tailbone.

Unproven frameworks of the invisible, pseudo-realities, crank ideologies, occultations and blind alleys, lead-to-gold-back-to-lead, the material or electronic heart of money, accursed share or sacred economy: the density of the connections is a fractal labyrinth of knowledge and history – connections between all. A sea of unknown, or unproven knowledge, non-knowledge. *Vestigia*, traces are not proof – they are evidence – are they? A fascination with difference, with an individual's ability to project a persona, or different personae whilst being the same person. The complex arrangement and diagrammatic relationships that form *Vestigia* suggest a physical resemblance -in micro- to Benzel's own thought processes but -in macro- to our relationship to information, clickbait, the seductions of promised or withheld 'secret knowledge', and everyday life within the internet and the Outernet (subconscious magical 'other' layer). Sporadic and wide ranging fields of choice form the whole: THE INTERNET IS SO FUCKING DISTRACTING!! As we live out nostalgia-based existences seeking place-cards for meaning... The exhibition is open until April 30th.

Founded in 2021 The Horse is a contemporary art space in Dublin 1 that seeks to provide a platform for emerging, experimental and underrepresented art practitioners. For more information on this show and programming at The Horse please email Matthew Wilkinson: mw@thehorsedublin.xyz