



>>SCULPTURE/ INSTALLATION

PULP PRESS

May-October annually
Kistefos Sculpture Museum, Norway
Review by Herbert Wright

Above: The concrete pavilion, open at both ends, sits by a roaring river and houses the new installation by John Gerrard

In a concrete pavilion by a roaring mountain river 29 miles north of Oslo, the digital documentation of structure in 1,262,440 sheets of virtual paper has begun.

The process began in May and will finish in 2043, and is one of three elements that make an extraordinary new work by Irish artist John Gerrard, called Pulp Press, designed site-specifically in the open-air Kistefos Museet sculpture park. The other two elements are more visible: Gerrard has renovated the paper pulp press which chugged away there until 1950, but in virtual reality. A2 architecture practice in Dublin has designed the concrete pavilion in which to watch it, and to store the data the work generates.

Like Thomas Demand, the internationally exhibited Gerrard produces 3D-works for display in two dimensions, and they both meticulously map their subjects. But Gerrard's subjects extend beyond architectonics and, crucially, they are animated and recreated digitally. Some require historical research, for example

Dust Storm (Dalhart, Texas) (2007), which sprang from a Thirties photograph, and all require powerful software: Gerrard's tools include game engines used in rendering by video-game developers.

The original pulp press processed pulp from logged trees floated down the adjacent Rands river, and was powered by its flow. Gerrard's rendition of the machine is projected, the viewpoint making a 25-minute circuit around the machine, the same time for it to produce a bale of paper. The HD animation is incredibly accurate and evocative, for example showing the changing light through the windows around the grimy machine, or the flicker of a gauge's indicator needle.

The solid screen it is projected on fills most of the 4m x 6m cross-section of the hollow 12m-long box pavilion, open at each end. The pavilion is austere, a pure minimalist, brutalist Judd-like form. Adjustable screens at the front regulate the internal light levels for better viewing, and the screen at the far end is framed by light from behind, where the river is.

When a bale is complete, each sheet's structural description down to each pulp grain is downloaded to a hard drive. Five parallel bench-like shelves can each house 12 drives, and when all their memory is full, new layers of shelves will be added to accommodate more.

A river surge that would flood the pavilion's floor is reckoned to be a one-in-50-year event, but even so the shelf designer Jakob Illera (like Gerrard, Vienna-based) has raised the shelves on copper legs. Other natural invaders include bats or birds taking the structure for a cave and trying to nest – when Blueprint visited, a pair of what were probably pied flycatchers magically fluttered above the screen, but thought better of it and left. The

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pavilion's design is nest-resistant.

Pulp Press shares the park with works from a stellar array of artists including Olafur Eliasson, Dragset and Elmgreen, Bjarne Melgaard, Anish Kapoor and Shintaro Miyake. It is not the only site-specific work – there is Claes Oldenburg's huge, colourful Tumbling Tacks (2009), for example, and All Nature Flows Through Us (2011), a showy metal doughnut engraved with the scan of a pupil set in the river.

The river's roar provides a soundtrack to Pulp Press, and the weather changes the atmospherics inside, conducive to contemplation and creating an immersive experience. And it breaks new ground. With the dimension of time, Gerrard celebrates industrial process, in luminous hyper-reality. As artistic representation of industry, it is a quantum leap comparable to the Hilliers' industrial structure photography.

Yet its accuracy only goes so far. Entropy is not programmed in – in reality, the old press decayed a little every day. The real detail lies in the data mapping the pulp's configuration in a sheet, every one different from the last off the press. It seems as futile as documenting individual snowflakes, but there are deeper ideas at play. For example, it references unseen, ubiquitous, digital black-box processes. In this case, we see the drives on the shelves, which actually are black boxes, but neither what happens inside nor the virtual sheets they store. The accrual of useless information tells us something about the modern world, operating without human intervention and increasingly divorced from purpose.

Pulp Press is more than post-industrial comment. It is a beautiful and chilling take on the inexorable rise of the datasphere, made starker by its stunning semi-wild environs.