

Details of nominated artwork:

Ecstasy 1.0, Ecstasy 2.0, & Ecstasy 3.0, all 72" x 90", oil, spray enamel, on Canvas, 2015.

The exhibit *A Question of Faith* by Paul Bernhardt contained large canvases of muted colours and laboured textures; the work was on display at Gallery @ 501 from July 8th – August 28th, 2016. Bernhardt's paintings depicted machines, both historic and contemporary that related to communication and technology. Images of machines, equipment and technology became manipulated painted surfaces, questioning our faith in science and technology's ability to solve society's most pressing crises, be it ethical or moral.

Bernhardt's painted machines and representations of technological advances brilliantly evoke the metaphor of the double edged sword, "it cuts both ways". The work questions the validity and practicality of these machines; are the benefits intrinsic or detrimental to man and society? In *A Question of Faith* we see machines that were used for Stanley Milgram's electric shock experiments - one of the most famous studies of obedience in psychology, carried out by Milgram in 1963 (a psychologist at Yale University). The experiment focused on the conflict between obedience to authority and personal conscience. Machines depicted in Bernhardt's work include an apparatus used for psychological experiments, lie detectors, machines that control us and machines that end our lives. Machines such as the ones we find in the paintings *Play, Work, My Brother's Keeper* and *Waiting for Evolution* can be inferred to be for communication or compliance. What are these machines really purposed for? Are these machines necessary and to what ends, and who's?

A Question of Faith challenges the technology used in communication. In *Apparition*, we see an image of a church with a cell phone tower layered with camouflage patterns, scratched in tree's and muted references of sky & spaces. Across the country, telecommunication companies are installing an increasing number of cell sites inside church steeples and bell towers. With the growing use of tablets, smartphones and other wireless devices, the telecommunication industry have approached churches because their height and residential locations provide access to locations where putting new towers would be difficult. It can be inferred that religion, to some degree, is a collective ideology that sets out to reinforce sentiments that strengthen society through rituals and festivals. Religion is not only a cultural phenomenon, but also an historic platform for cultural expression and communication. Thus, it is through the medium of communication that religious messages are transmitted within society. The question is, what is the message now being transmitted from these camouflaged cell towers found in churches? Considering wireless communication is used widely by the military for use in combat, not for messages of peace and forgiveness typical of religious organizations, this new system appears to be an oxymoron.

Looking at *Ecstasy 1.0, 2.0, 3.0* we can see how Bernhardt introduces pop culture to his repertoire of psychological games of power and control via the technological advances, beginning with the seemingly mundane television set. In *Ecstasy 1.0, 2.0, 3.0* we can witness the progression of technology in our homes. First the television set, then video games, and now personal drones. The green monotone of this piece mimics that of night vision technology, primarily used for hunting and military operations - thus inferring the unseen presence of military technology in everyday life.

Ecstasy 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 is the concluding narrative of works included in the exhibit *A Question of Faith*.

Televisions began to enter our homes in electronic format post World War Two, as a popular consumer product. The addition of color to broadcast television after 1953 further increased the popularity of television sets in the 1960s, and an outdoor antenna became a common feature of suburban homes. The television set became the display device for the first recorded media in the 1970s, such as Betamax, VHS and later DVD. It was also the display device for the first generation of home computers and video game consoles.

In the late 1970's video games such as *Space Invaders* came into our homes; now we have drones invading our space in real life. We have witnessed, and are living in an era of technology used for entertainment and surveillance purposes. Drones are a controversial technology, with both sides of the argument over the advantages and disadvantages hotly debated. Drones can be extremely beneficial to society in many ways. They are being used in search & rescue operations, package delivery, hurricane hunting, 3-D mapping, protecting/monitoring wildlife, precise agricultural monitoring and filming for T.V/Movies to mention just a few.

Drones, known as (UAS) unmanned aerial systems are known for their military and intelligence operations like aerial surveillance and targeted assassinations. This, some would consider to be a disadvantage of drone technology, depending on what side of the argument you are on. Enter the legal, ethical and moral debates over the use of drones - a weapon that can find and strike a single target via remote control or a tool that can find and provide information not available by other methods for positive identification. The first *Predator Drone* consisted of a snowmobile engine mounted on a radio-controlled glider. When linked via satellite to a distant control center, drones exploit telecommunications methods perfected years ago by TV networks (cell towers) to navigate. Now, through advanced technology, drones are capable of finding and killing someone just about anywhere in the world. Drone operators have been compared to video gamers, who sit at their desk in front of a monitor with essentially a "joystick" to create commands.

Choice of Artwork and Why:

Ecstasy 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 is a monochromatic painting (triptych) that is very clever in its use of analogies with multiple layers of meaning and innuendos - a chronological conclusion of the paintings exhibited in *A Question of Faith* by Paul Bernhardt.

The word monochromatic is explored in multiple layers within *Ecstasy 1.0, 2.0, 3.0* and other paintings in the exhibit. The definition of monochromatic is – containing or using only one color; monochromatic in physics refers to light or other radiation of a single wavelength or frequency. Bernhardt utilizes both definitions of this word (colour & physics), while creating visual puns in reference to the prefix of the word, i.e. "mono". We can see that the triptych is a monochrome of greens, similar to the lime greens found in radiation symbols, the green alien's from *Space Invaders* and similar to the green text used in IBM personal computer monitors from the 1980's. When we look at the multiple definitions of the word drone ("a male bee", "monotonous speech" and "a

remote-controlled pilotless aircraft of missile”) we see the use of “mono” in “monotonous speech” similar to “mono” in “monochromatic”.

Bernhardt’s use of monitor’s and antennae in his paintings creates another scenario for us to consider. We see a variety of (malevolent) monitors used in the paintings *Work, Play, My Brother’s Keeper* and *Waiting for Evolution*. It is in *Ecstasy 1.0, 2.0, 3.0* that how we see progression of technology in the production of the domestic television set (monitor). The monitor is a common vehicle of general entertainment and used for watching television as well as playing video games such as *Space Invaders*. TV’s from this time period (1960’s & 70’s) utilized outdoor antennae towers for better reception or to acquire more channels. In the painting *Apparition*, we see the use of cell towers disguised in a military camouflage pattern. This offers a far more cynical and ominous view of this technology compared to the seemingly innocuous, domestic “bunny ears” we had sitting on top of our consoles.

The video game *Space Invaders* can also be viewed as a double entendre. *Space Invaders* is one of the earliest shooting games and the aim is to defeat waves of aliens with a laser cannon to earn as many points as possible. Now read the description of *Space Invaders* from a drone pilot’s perspective: *Space Invaders* is one of the earliest shooting games and the aim is to defeat waves of aliens (Al-Qaeda and Isis) with a laser cannon (drone) to earn (kill) as many points (targets) as possible. How different is flying a drone from playing a video game? Is training for drone pilot’s all that different from a 15-year-old boy’s average Friday night? A study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology showed that video game players were uniquely suited to drone operation due to their increased attention to multiple details at a time. The drone operator/pilot can actually kill human beings thousands of miles away; compare this to a video game of a fantasy battlefield. The difference in the action is minor but the difference in consequences is enormous.

The artworks found in *A Question of Faith* by Paul Bernhardt are an investigation into technology and its diversified uses in our culture and society. This quiet and poignant show progresses and finally culminates in *Ecstasy 1.0, 2.0, 3.0* with its exploration into the use of drone technology.

From the beginning of time, when man discovered fire, it has been realized that we cannot stop our need to learn, or develop new technologies. It is not in our nature.

A scorpion asks a frog to carry it across a river. The frog hesitates, afraid of being stung, but the scorpion argues that if it did so, they would both drown. Considering this, the frog agrees, but midway across the river the scorpion does indeed sting the frog, dooming them both. When the frog asks the scorpion why, the scorpion replies that it was in its nature to do so.

Unfortunately, the same fire that kept our ancestors warm also helped them set their enemies houses on fire.

By Brenda Barry Byrne