

Ilona Sagar

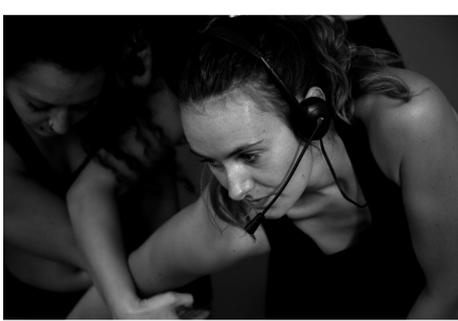
4 November, 2015

How would you sum up what you do in a sentence? How do you approach a new project? What drives your creative process?

My work explores our shared interactions in both public and private space. I often use the processes involved in making to construct a sense of fractured narrative. I always approach making new work, first through thinking intuitively about space I'm considering and its context. I'm fascinated by the bond between the physical, sculptural form and the less tangible effects of video, photography and performance. Audio acts as both a dislocation and a connecting element which has a profound impact on our physical and cognitive experience of the world. When I am making work whether it's a film, text, performance, or installation I tend draw from the context in which the work will be show. I am interested how a place frames the body. The history, design and social role that architecture plays is important aspect of my practice, but this doesn't necessarily make the work always site-specific.

Where do you go to for inspiration? Who do you enjoy looking at and how does that influence your work?

I draw from a range of references and collaborate with different practitioners. At the moment I have been looking speech therapy, phonics, fitness blogging, online forums, speech and movement, the raw food diet, Instagram, affective computing, haptics, cybernetics, medieval medical practice and the glass delusion...to name a few interests!



Ilona Sagar: *Mute Rehearsal*. 2015.

Image courtesy of the artist and [VITRINE](#).

Your current exhibition *Mute Rehearsal* at *Vitrine Gallery* incorporates sound, print, installation and performance. How do you navigate between the range of mediums that you utilise?

I consider working across disciplines really key to my work. I test, highlight and draw attention to spaces of interaction, which naturally lends itself to a cross disciplinary approach to making work. *Mute Rehearsal* investigates the relationship between body, surface and displacement through its manifestation in speech and design. The work explores the cultural obsession we have with how women speak and move. I focused on mannerisms and linguistic trends considered undesirable, such as vocal fry. These controls that we as a society impose on the female body are multi-layered and complex to unpick.

I referenced and spent a lot of time with online communities that have been set up to 'help' women act in a more acceptable and 'empowered' manner though voice, body and gesture. Speech and gesture combine as an interface to examine our multi-faceted relationship to design syntax, as an instance of technology and flesh. The work references fitness blogging and similar online forums focus on the supposed empowerment women's bodies but I see more as policing the body as the root of female identity.



Ilona Sagar: *Mute Rehearsal*. 2015.

Image courtesy of the artist and [VITRINE](#).

Physicality and the body are central to your practice, but so is film-making. Are you interested in any interaction or conflict between those two elements?

Both elements are part of an evolving narrative, I like to leave space for a dialogue with my audience, which I feel is created by using multiple approaches.

What difficulties do you face as an artist?

What difficulties are there in being any kind of freelancer? You have to be self motivated and confident in what you are trying to communicate within your practice.

Technology and virtual environments seem to be a consistent subject in your work. What kind of working relationship do you have with technology in your art?

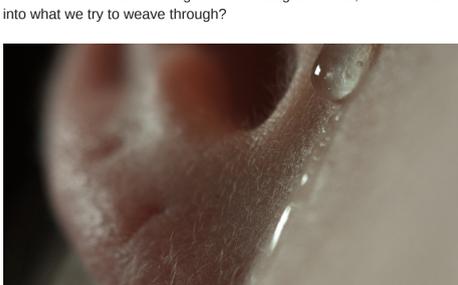
The link between language, surface, technologies and the body is an on going concern in my practice. We have an increasing complex relationship to the designed objects, the technologies that we rely on and absorb into our interactions and social bodies. It's a hard topic to cover without falling into cliché or science fiction, and I enjoy the challenge of trying to address these conditions within my work.

We are expanding our connectivity and modes of communication, are body schemas are spreading as we become more and more fluent with the technologies we use. I would say that haptic technology are ubiquitous and successful because of our innate impulse to interact with our environment.

Unlike many other species, humans have an elastic schema which means we readily absorb tools into the body. For example the iPhone is designed ergonomically with a loose grip that can rest forgettable in the hand. I am fascinated by the way this allows object/ tool to become compulsive subconscious methods of navigation. I do not think this is new, but keying into something far more deep wired and instinctual.

The technologies we use now to negotiate our world are already outdated by the standard of those at the forefront of developing them, there is a move away from haptic design to emotional or affective computing. The idea that emotional responses become a tool in themselves seems a further erosion of the limits of the body. I think the over abundance of choice is key to our anxious relationship to device and platform culture. The distinction between inside and outside is blurred. Where I begin and others finish has been eroded. That for me is within the anxiety lays, how to filter and define your individuality within a system of limitless choice and interaction.

How do we filler? Shift through a 1000 instagram feeds, do we vanish into what we try to weave through?



Ilona Sagar: *Haptic Skins of a Glass Eye*. Film still. 2015.

Image courtesy of the artist and [Tenderpixel](#).

You had another solo show recently at *Tenderpixel*, can you tell us more about the process & inspiration behind your solo exhibition *Haptic Skins of a Glass Eye*?

The newly completed piece, *Haptic Skins of a Glass Eye*, combines references to affective computing, flat design, haptic technology and virtual design systems with historical and medieval studies of the glass delusion.

Haptic Skins of a Glass Eye has been the result of in-depth research and collaborations with a number of different practitioners and institutions. I was advised by and conducted a series of interviews with Paul Fletcher Psychiatrist and Professor of Health Neuroscience, Cambridge University and Professor Edward Shorter History of Medicine and Psychiatry at the University of Toronto; Dr Stephen L. Hicks, Nuffield Department of Clinical Neurosciences at the University of Oxford. Stephen's work also features in the film, he is the inventor of Smart Glasses which can assist vision for a range of eye conditions and has a particular interest in the potential of technologies to expand body schema. It was fascinating speaking with a range of scientific experts during and my research has expanded in almost overwhelming way. *Haptic Skins of a Glass Eye* has already sparked further collaboration and I am very excited to see these dialogue progress over the next year.

Would you say that with *Haptic Skins of a Glass Eye* you're concerned with historicizing mental illness and psychology?

No, because the piece uses a variety of reference points to talk about our relationship to technology and the body within contemporary society. The work moves back and forth between historical accounts and contemporary scientific invention and research. The exhibition unpicks the corporal dialect of the contemporary body and reveals the relationship we have to it as both an advanced and primal signifier. In the wake of our conflicting relationship to the virtual, advancements in technology have left a messy physiological residue.

The first clear glass, *cristallo*, was invented 15th century, and it was around this time that the glass delusion was first reported. People feared that they were made of glass, pottery and wood and therefore likely to shatter into pieces. As the material became more affordable and everyday, cases of the delusion fell. In modern times, the glass delusion has disappeared, accounts of people believing themselves to be materials have been replaced with the development of neurological terminology such as hypochondria. It was technology that sparked this awareness of the body.

Technology or culture seems linked to the delusional mind, but also highlights how thin the line between 'well' and 'unwell' is.

Where would you like to go from here?

I am in the initial stages of a couple of commission which will be launching next year, plus two solo projects at the end of 2016....so keep an eye out more details coming soon.

Ilona Sagar is a London based artist whose work spans performance, film and assemblage; forming a body of work, which responds to the social and historic context found in the public and private spaces we inhabit.

With thanks to [Vitrine Gallery](#) for their support. Feature image courtesy of [Tenderpixel](#).

Art, Design, Film, Interview