

Photographic Cues

by Keziah MacNeill (2022)



Image credit: Keziah MacNeill

In a world increasingly mediated by algorithms, artist Keziah MacNeill asks a provocative question: what happens when the tools we use to see the world become indistinguishable from the world itself? Through 'Photographic Cues,' she explores a speculative future where the boundaries between natural lenses (like bodies of water), mechanical cameras and AI systems dissolve into one another.

Concept and vision

MacNeill's work points to the year 2072 – 50 years after the project's creation – imagining a time when the distinction between image-making tools and the images themselves has completely broken down. The project emerged

from a fascinating parallel: both a Scottish loch and a camera serve as lenses on the world, one natural and one mechanical. But in an age of AI, where both images and the tools that create them are ultimately reduced to the same digital code, what happens to our understanding of reality?

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Technical journey

MacNeill's approach to The New Real Observatory platform was uniquely exploratory. She uploaded two distinct sets of images: pinhole camera photographs of a loch and digital photographs of the pinhole camera itself. By feeding both the tool and its output into the AI system, she created a deliberate collapse of categories – the observer and the observed, the medium and the message.

how AI systems might eventually create a self-referential world where synthetic content and the algorithms that create it become indistinguishable.

The work

The resulting work is presented both as a physical installation and a digital interface. In its physical form the images are presented on a digital screen, with new ones emerging when the

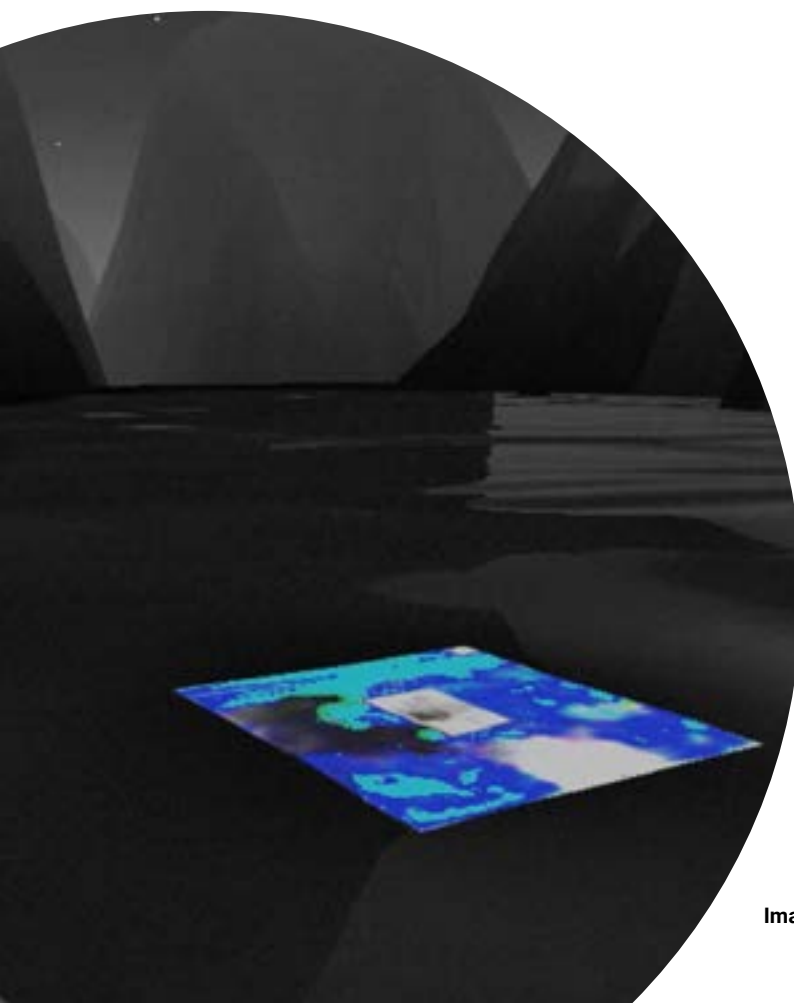
MacNeill's generated images exist in a liminal space between photograph and algorithm, natural and artificial.

This technical approach reflected her broader conceptual investigation. Just as the platform allowed her to blur the boundaries between different types of images, she was exploring

viewer disturbs the water in the scaled model of the loch in front of them. Thus, MacNeill's generated images exist in a liminal space between photograph and algorithm, natural and artificial. The work suggests a future where a body of water, such as that of a Scottish loch, might serve as the last truly analogue lens in a world where digital tools have merged with their outputs.

Significance

'Photographic Cues' offers a crucial insight about our algorithmic future. The speculative collapse of categories raises profound questions about how we'll understand reality in a world where the boundaries between natural, mechanical and digital ways of seeing have dissolved. The work serves as both warning and meditation on the future of perception itself. When the distinction between tool and topic, media and medium, breaks down completely, what happens to meaning?



MacNeill's exploration suggests that we might need to preserve some forms of analogue seeing – like the natural lens of a loch – to maintain our connection to the physical world.

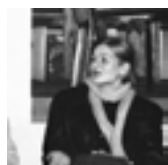
Footnotes

The New Real Observatory is part of [The New Real](#), a partnership between [University of Edinburgh](#), Edinburgh's Festivals and [The Alan Turing Institute](#). Featured artists [Adam Harvey](#), [Inés Cámara Leret](#), [Keziah MacNeill](#), [Lex Fefegha](#).

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'*Photographic Cues*' was commissioned as a project of The New Real Observatory, first presented simultaneously as a hybrid experience and as a digital experience live at [ARS Electronica 2022](#) in Linz, Austria.

Artist bio



Keziah MacNeill is an artist based in Scotland. Working across construction, narration and analogue photography, her practice employs a loose-parts methodology; seeking direction from props. Utilising sensory actions such as building, looking and listening, her practice aims to grow closer to the character of her moral compass; most vulnerable to feelings of pride and embarrassment. Guided by the response of props, Keziah explores how we

may reframe the competitive spirit to support the build of alternative decision-based logics.

Keziah MacNeill graduated from Edinburgh College of Art in 2021 with an MA in Fine Art, receiving the Clason-Harvie Bursary upon graduation. Her artwork has been exhibited at Ars Electronica (Linz, 2022), Street Level Photoworks, (Glasgow, 2022), Inspace (Edinburgh, 2022), Hidden Door Festival, (Edinburgh, 2022) and der Lichtspiele des Westens (Leipzig, 2021). Her works have also been broadcast on radio shows for '*-algia*' (2021) and Radiophrenia (2020). Keziah was an artist in New Photographers Guild (2022) and is currently a board member of Hidden Door Festival.

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Links

1. [Keziah MacNeill](#)
2. ['Photographic Cues'](#)
3. [The 'Photographic Cues' Digital Experience](#)
4. [The New Real Research](#)