Face Value –
Augmented Reality Enhanced Photography

Elke E. Reinhuber
School of Art, Design and Media
Nanyang Technological University
81 Nanyang Drive, 637458 Singapore
elke@ntu.edu.ntu.sg

1. INTRODUCTION

Famous surrealist Hans Richter knew about the ‘Dreams That Money Can Buy’ (1947), yet most of the time, they are not for sale but priceless. Still, money can buy many things and some of those are beyond the realms of reality. Concurrently, banknotes are nothing more than colourful inks and holofoils on paper or plastic but have the implicit power attributed to them by mighty institutions and individuals. So the bond between money and dreams is fragile but prevalent since both depend on the powers of imagination.

The “Face Value” series are enlargements of eyes from ‘heroes’ on banknotes from various countries. The presented edition focuses on former European banknotes, which were replaced by the Euro in 2002.

![Figure 1: Face Value (JPY), Elke Reinhuber, Giclée (OCE Crystal Point Print) on Tyvek, 33×33”](image)

2. CONCEPT

The world of finance can be viewed as the domineering force of today, but hardly anyone appreciates the artistic significance of our currencies or even compares the aesthetic value of the range of banknotes with dead presidents, dictators, poets and reigning sovereigns. These ruling or otherwise influential heads got replaced with soulless generic monuments on account of the introduction of the common European currency. And then, everything went downhill.

In current economic discourse, counterfactual thoughts are often discussed in regard to the continental European currency, the Euro. What if some countries would have kept their individual legal tender? Or, what would have happened if more countries had joined the system? And in regard to individual countries – how would their financial development differ today, if the Euro had never been introduced?

The concept of counterfactuals, well-established in the humanities – especially historiography and psychology – proposes the consideration of possible alternatives to the actual here and now after a major turning point in the past. In the world of the arts, this idea has not yet been manifested, but seems ripe for further deliberation.

In my work, my research and my artistic endeavours, I create immersive installations in which the viewer may contemplate possible alternatives to the experienced work. I apply this method using visuals with lenticular imaging techniques, in which possible realities merge. Likewise, in my documentary videos, I let the moving image contradict the aural information. In the presented work, Augmented Reality (AR) is applied to suggest an alternative layer to the actual displayed content.

In the arts, Augmented Reality did successfully find its place mainly in science museums, but also at archaeological sites and guerrilla-style artistic interventions. Several approaches have been applied to establish AR as a new form of art, for example in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.
With this work, it operates as a content enhancing addition to an original wall piece, utilising the recognisable features of the image to trigger the hidden layers, when viewed with knowledge-enhancing devices.

Figure 2: Face Value, Elke Reinhuber, 1st edition (international), as installed at 5&33 gallery during the GRID biennial photofestival, Amsterdam, 2014

The eye has often been labelled in literature and, particular in surrealist art, as a window to our soul; “The light of the body is the eye” (The King James Bible 2000, Matthew 6:22). If we look a person in the eyes, we mean to see the truth. But now, it is all about money. Why do we tend to believe that today’s money is not worth anything – we have lost trust, as on the bills, no face stands in for the soundness of the issuing institution. Now rather our faith must depend, if not anyway only on the tiny chip on a plastic card, on bridges, doors, windows, gates, facades and entrances, anonymous structures, devoid of any actual location, because they are merely idealised forms.

3. EXECUTION

The work began with my painting ElIR of a detail from an Australian 5 AUD note and soon developed into the screening of Polymer She-Heroes on a façade of Sydney’s Sussex Street in 2010 (Gridgallery, curated by Deborah Turnbull). For me, as a foreigner moving to Australia, the first contact with women who wrote history was on domestic banknotes. In international comparison, it is rather unusual to find on each banknote a different female role model. The outdoor screen with the particular dimensions of 512 by 32 pixels on the length of 39’4” matched perfectly the intaglio printing technique.

Fascinated by the beauty of the hugely enlarged eyes, in 2014 I began a series for an exhibition of the GRID Biennial Photofestival in Amsterdam. The macro photographs were edited, vectorised, about two-hundred times enlarged and printed with Océ CrystalPoint™ printing technique on Tyvek. In this way, a similarity to the surface feel of the intaglio print of the banknotes was maintained, although printed on a much more durable material.

A second layer was added to the aesthetic prints through Augmented Reality. The text and figures of the first edition, which consists of six international banknotes (Japan, America, Thailand, Singapore, United Kingdom and South Korea) are quotes from specialists on finance and graphs of different conditions.

Figure 3: Augmentation on mobile device: Face Value (SGD), Elke Reinhuber, 2014

4. SUMMARY

In the past not everything was better, but those currencies used to have a value which extended beyond paper, ink and numbers. Since money has no longer a real value like the precious metals which preceded it, the attributed worth relies not on numbers but on trust and faith in the issuing institution. At least, this much is for sure, a wide range of numbered editions did then exist. Each bill was individually enumerated in inflationary quantities. Sadly their artistic value could never be fully appreciated until now.

5. REFERENCES


