ASCENDING TO OUTER SPACE TO FIND ANOTHER RACE
vinyl
dimensions variable
2015

GHOSTS IN THE DISCARDED MACHINE

In Alan Moore's genre-reset graphic novel Watchmen (1986-7), the vigilante Rorschach is both societal outcast and the story's moral core. Trapped and captured by a brutal police force, he is put through his namesake inkblot test by a psychiatrist trying to probe his 'demented' mind. Looking at the ink splatter, Moore's antihero visualizes dead children, dismembered limbs and a dog's split-open head– all from moments of the near past when he crossed lines of legality to extract vengeance for victims of brutal crime. Looking up the ink soaked paper, he tells his interrogator, with the smoothest of poker faces, that he sees only flowers, birds and beauty.

Elements of Jaret Vadera's work in *the closer i get, the further i find* build a similar schema, looking at violence and silencing, and then refracting it through abstraction and distraction, leaving a puzzle box for viewers to unravel. Instead of the Rorschach test (invented by Hermann Rorschach in 1921), he parses contemporary Search Engines (invented in sequence by Archie, Magellan, Infoseek, AltaVista, and others) that map the searcher and searched. In Jaret's small-scale dystopias, unemotional algorithms have taken over from the human mind, but prove just as prone to refraction, distortion and deception.

In a site-specific installation (2010) for the Ballard Estate Project in New Delhi, Jaret linked J.G. Ballard and a colonial port in Mumbai through search words common to both. In the subsequent build-up of *ALL WE SEE IS VISION* (2015), the results of image searches are layered in the computer to create a new aggregate image that is then outputted as a single vinyl form and mounted onto the gallery wall, annotated with the file names, IP addresses and server locations of the original source files. In the newest version *ASCENDING TO OUTER SPACE TO FIND ANOTHER RACE* (2015), he proposes new mythologies to replace older beliefs.

Vadera cites Stanislaw Lem's novel *Solaris* (1961) as a conscious influence. *Bladerunner* (1982) is another film that he has materialized in his studio. Vadera made a blue chroma video using the dialogue between avenging replicant and his creator Dr. Tyrell (called, inverting the original title syntax, 1982 (*Bladerunner*). In an ironic twist that is familiar to all of us who mistook motherboards as permanence, this project was lost in the digital graveyard of failed hard drives.

I walk through Jaret's work and think of other dreamscapes, where nightmares are rendered through the economy of comic books: the murderous superheroes of Alan Moore, or the conniving dream players of Neil Gaiman. His search engine games also seem akin to the moment in Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997) in which one of the protagonists picks up a remote control and 'rewinds' the film in order to prevent his colleague from being shot. A person may choose what to remember and what to forget, but Palo Alto databases ensure you never escape the event.

[Expanded from a text originally written for Future Greats Asia 2014: Eleven artists to look out for for Art Review (2014).]

~Naeem Mohaiemen is a writer and visual artist working in Dhaka and New York who explores the history of the international left and utopia.