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**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

FEELING SAFER



Imagining post-
human, futurological
speculations as core
to contemporary
artist practice.

Type of output:
Exhibitions

by

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Andrew Rohtmaa-
Jackson

Front cover image: Jackson
performing as “the Vril” with
Plastique Fantastique in
They Call Us The Screamers,
TULCA, Galway

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SUMMARY

Feeling Safer was a curatorial research project that explored how contemporary artists are imagining post-human, futurological speculations as core to their practice. It took the form of a series of exhibitions and associated activities (talks, workshops and performances). Jackson acted as overall project director of *Feeling Safer*, and curator of 4 of the 5 exhibitions comprising project activities.

From zombie fiction, conspiracy politics and climate change, contemporary artists are incorporating narratives of apocalypse into their methodologies and practices. *Feeling Safer* responded to this tendency, working with artists to realise works that revealed links between these narratives, art-making and broader forms of exhibition practice.

The programme ran for an extended period between 2015 and 2019. It sought to foster research relationships and innovate practice-based methodologies that:

- Examine and reveal how artists imagine post-human, futurological speculations within their practice(s).
- Demonstrate how engagement with fictional and science fiction narratives in contemporary art are impacted by wider gallery cultures.

The research and development for *Feeling Safer* was supported by iMT Gallery and the Arts Council England. Partners included Goldsmiths, University of London, Annelly Juda Fine Art, London, P.P.O.W., New York, and THISISTOMORROW. The project culminated in a curated series of three group exhibitions and four solo exhibitions at iMT Gallery, London and Brooklyn Fire Proof, New York, and a radio programme scripted and performed for Resonance FM.

Jackson's writing from this research appeared as the catalogue text 'Donnerrollen/Rolling Thunder' (Jackson 2017) and the conference presentation *Your Walgreens points are expiring* (Jackson 2018).

TIMELINE

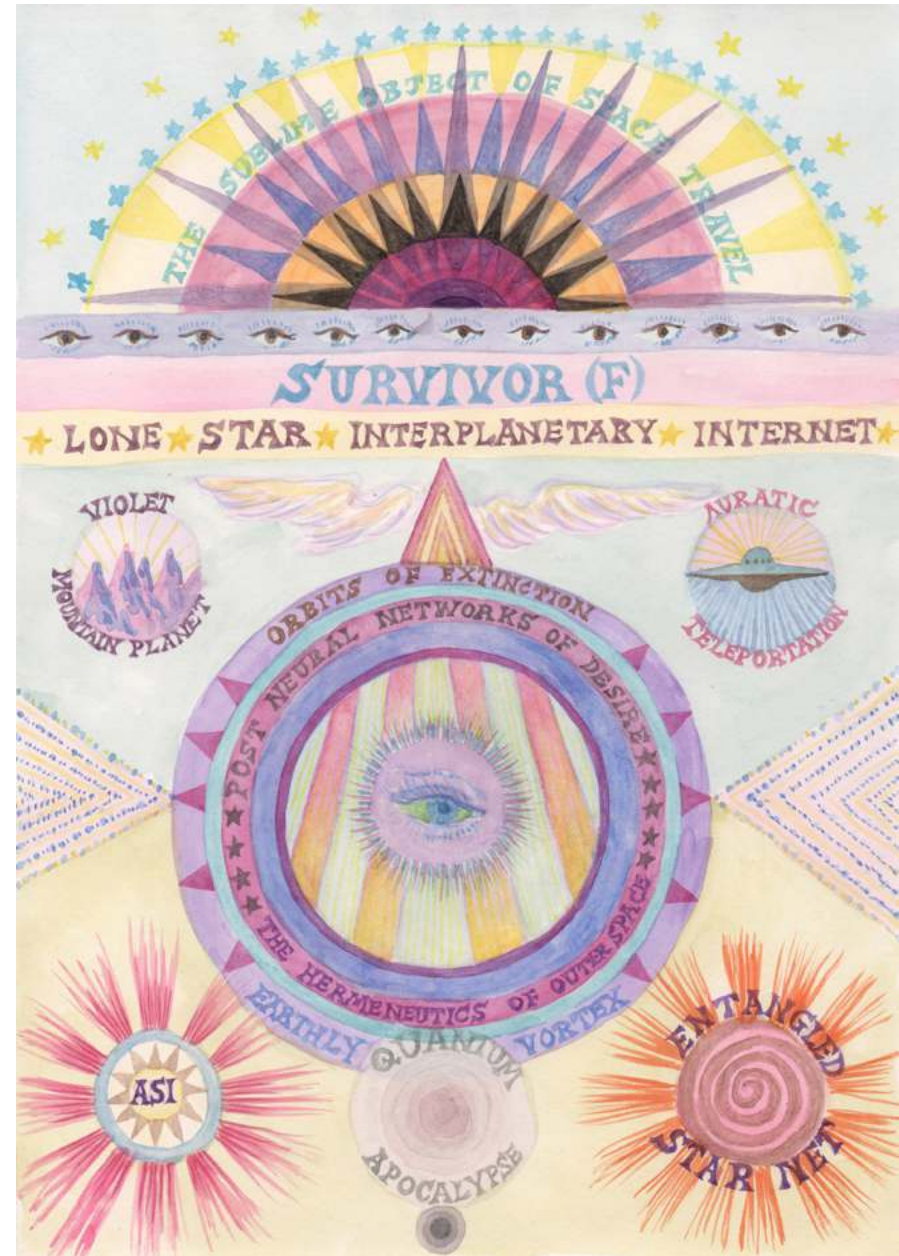
2015 NOV	2016	2017	2018	2019
<p>Commission and early discussion of <i>Feeling Safer</i> for iMT Gallery.</p>	<p>31ST MAY <i>Feeling Safer: The Turd Sessions</i> on Resonance 104.4 FM.</p> <p>3RD JUN–10TH JUL <i>Feeling Safer</i> at iMT Gallery, London.</p> <p>20TH–23RD OCT <i>Feeling Safer: Bugging Out</i> at Brooklyn Fire Proof, New York.</p>	<p>6TH OCT–26TH NOV <i>Suzanne Treister: Works From Survivor (F)</i> at iMT Gallery, London.</p> <p>4TH NOV <i>Linda Stupart: After the Ice, the Deluge</i> at iMT Gallery, London.</p> <p>18TH NOV <i>White Noise Propositions</i> at iMT Gallery, London.</p>	<p>12TH JAN–25TH MAR <i>Paola Ciarska: Cześć, Pani Ciarska</i> at iMT Gallery.</p> <p>4TH MAY–7TH JUN <i>Maggie Roberts: Glimmer Breach</i> at iMT Gallery.</p>	<p>11TH JAN–10TH MAR <i>Snow Crash</i>, curated by Kirsten Cooke at iMT Gallery.</p>

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

The *Feeling Safer* programme was designed to explore apocalyptic anxieties in contemporary popular culture through an analysis of how they were being represented, politicised and reworked by contemporary artists in the UK. Exhibitions were developed in response to diverse popular representations ranging from science-fiction narratives of zombie apocalypse (as evident in TV series *The Walking Dead*) to scientific narratives of climate collapse, political narratives of post-Trump conflict escalation and real threats posed by capitalism and patriarchy.

Through careful selection of artwork, commissioning, writing and event creation *Feeling Safer* explored how contemporary artists were using apocalypse narratives to build synergic communities and plans of living, thereby assessing the place and significance of post-human futurological speculation within artistic communities.

Below: Suzanne Treister, *SURVIVOR (F)/Lone Star* (2016-2019).
Image courtesy the artist, Annelly Juda
Fine Art, London and P.P.O.W.
Gallery, New York



CONTEXT

The context of Jackson's curatorial work for *Feeling Safer* developed from his wider research activities around science fiction narratives as practice.

This can be seen in his creative and critical work with art collective Plastique Fantastique, particularly in the *Traitor Meme* installation and performance for the Hayward Touring Exhibition *Shonky* (2017-2018). These themes are also explored in a journal article co-authored by Jackson and fellow group members (Burrows et al 2015).

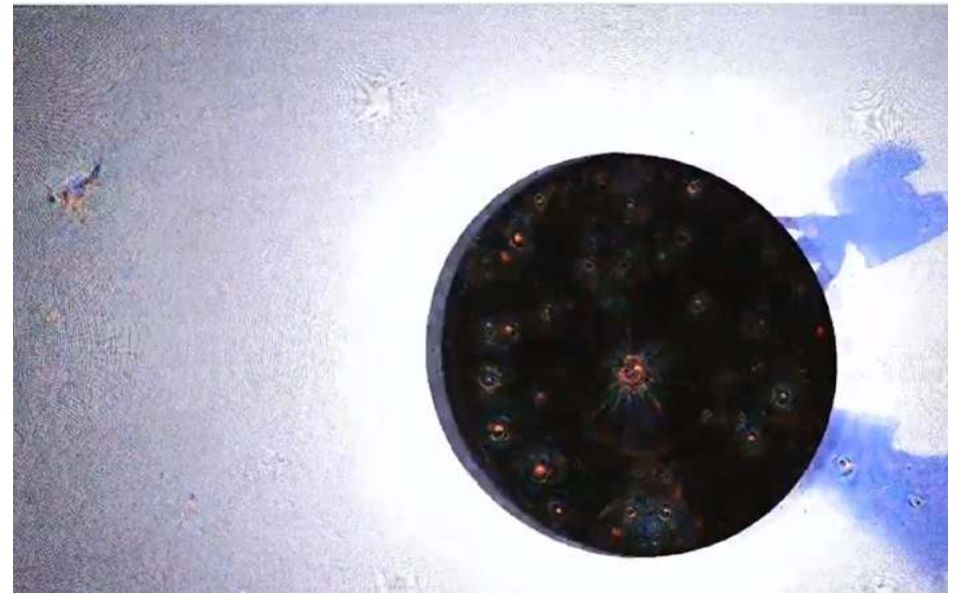
Feeling Safer was also informed by Jackson's intermedia curatorial work with artists using comic book devices (culminating in exhibitions at iMT Gallery, London, 2014; Worcester City Gallery / Perrins Gallery, Worcester, 2015; and Gallery North, Newcastle, 2015) and earlier curatorial work engaging with sociopolitical strategies in science fiction narratives (including [Dead Fingers Talk](#) at IMT Gallery, London, 2010, and *Dead Fingers Talk 2012: The Mayan Caper* at [Galleri Box](#), Göteborg, 2012).

Feeling Safer shares commonalities in the broader field of curatorial research activity (including Sames 2013-14) and is related to Simon O'Sullivan's work on the production of subjectivity, myth-science and "fictioning" (O'Sullivan 2013, Gunkel, Hameed and O'Sullivan 2017, Burrows and O'Sullivan 2019). It also is situated in dialogue with the revisiting of Deleuzian concepts of "becoming other" and diagrams as "abstract machine[s]" in contemporary art and culture (Deleuze, 1988, 1994). Jackson's specific viewpoint on these areas of exploration is through the lens of cybernetics, conspiracy research and the legacies of Scientology arising from his curatorial research on the tape-experiments of William S Burroughs (Jackson 2014). *Feeling Safer* also looked to the recent critical examination of quasi-apocalyptic traits of Survivalist / prepper / TEOTWAWKI culture (as described, for example, in King 2014).

Jackson's contribution to this field of enquiry began by surveying a range of practices appropriate to the project's themes. Work on the first two *Feeling Safer* exhibitions in London and New York revealed the undue visibility of male artists engaged in work around science fiction and apocalypse narratives. From this point, from *Suzanne Treister: Works From Survivor (F)* onwards, Jackson's work on the programme focused solely on non-binary and female-authored exhibitions and events.

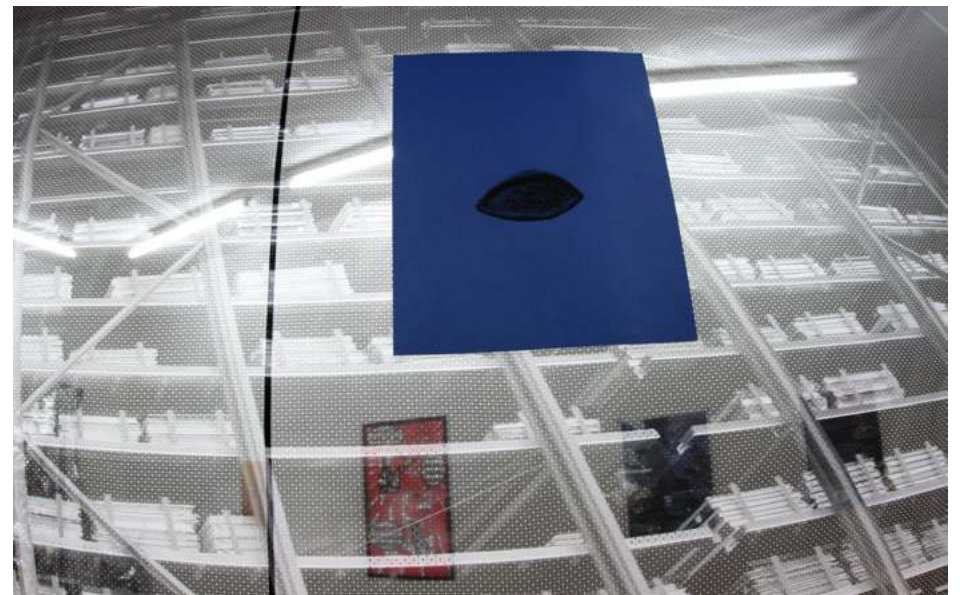


Above: Installation view of *Feeling Safer* (2016). Image courtesy Luke McCreadie and iMT Gallery.



Top right: Still from *Cat Ice Trickster Remix* 2018. Image courtesy Maggie Roberts and iMT Gallery.

Below right: Maggie Roberts' *Glimmer Breach* exhibition. Image courtesy the artist and iMT Gallery.



METHODS AND PROCESSES

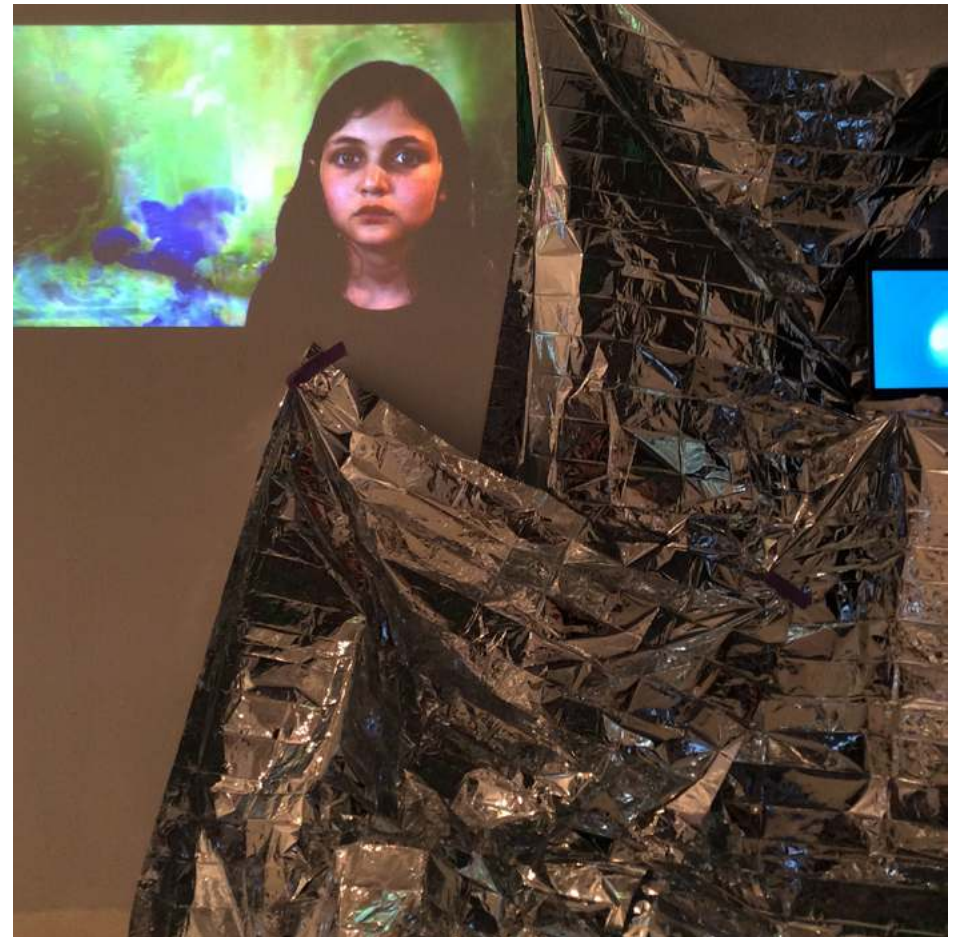
Jackson was commissioned by iMT Gallery director Lindsay Friend to develop an exhibition programme, including necessary funding bids, invitations to artists and collaborators, acquisitions and identification of partners. Jackson submitted a proposal for a group exhibition (eponymously titled *Feeling Safer*) as a starting point for the programme. It was followed by others that took place at iMT Gallery, London, and Brooklyn Fire Proof, New York between June 2016 and March 2019.

Jackson identified contemporary artists whose work demonstrated key themes and aesthetics derived from apocalypse narratives: David Burrows, Joey Holder, Elliot Dodd, Verity Birt, Luke McCreadie and Maggie Roberts (Orphan Drift). They became exhibitors and collaborators on the first *Feeling Safer* exhibition, launched iMT Gallery in June 2016. With McCreadie, Jackson went on to write and broadcast a radio programme on Resonance FM that introduced the broad themes of the project.

Jackson was then offered the opportunity by the curatorial network Sluice to utilise an exhibition space in New York as part of the Exchange Rates programme, and following a 'prepper' methodology (where something can be disassembled and reassembled at speed) devised a version of the iMT exhibition as *Feeling Safer: Bugging Out* (Brooklyn Fire Proof). This featured work by AAS, Paul Barron, Verity Birt, David Burrows, Paola Ciarska, Joey Holder, Luke McCreadie, Motsonian, Maggie Roberts (Orphan Drift), Theo Scott and NaoKo TakaHashi.



Above: *Feeling Safer* at IMT Gallery (2016). Image courtesy Luke McCreadie and iMT Gallery.



Right: Detail from audio-visual installation *Omens of the Pleistocene* by Verity Birt in *Feeling Safer: Bugging Out*. Image courtesy the artist and iMT Gallery.

Following these projects, Jackson developed a series of solo exhibitions featuring women and non-binary artists. These projects all took place at iMT Gallery, London, from 2017-2018 and were: Works from *SURVIVOR (F)* (Suzanne Treister); *After the Ice, the Deluge* (Linda Stupart); *Cześć, Pani Ciarska* (Paola Ciarska); and *Glimmer Breach* (Maggie Roberts). Each of these projects presented work that was commissioned by iMT Gallery or had never been exhibited before in public.

During this process Jackson identified contributors, including Lucy A Sames, to write responses to the works installed.

In tandem with this Jackson worked with curator Kirsten Cooke to develop a new group exhibition, curated by her, that would act to build upon the themes of the programme. This final exhibition became *Snow Crash* (2019).

ACE funding:

£7,447 (Works from *SURVIVOR (F)*, ref: GFTA-00058491)

£14,575 (*Snow Crash*, ref: ACPG-00137140).

Partners include: iMT gallery, Northumbria University, Goldsmiths, Annely Juda Fine Art, London and P.P.O.W., New York, and THISISTOMORROW.

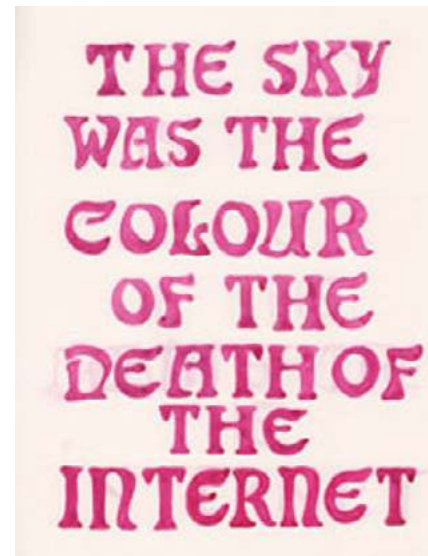
Summaries of these projects follow.

Right: Lucy A. Sames, Maggie Roberts
and Suzanne Treister in conversation
within works from *SURVIVOR (F)*
at IMT Gallery.
Image courtesy iMT Gallery.

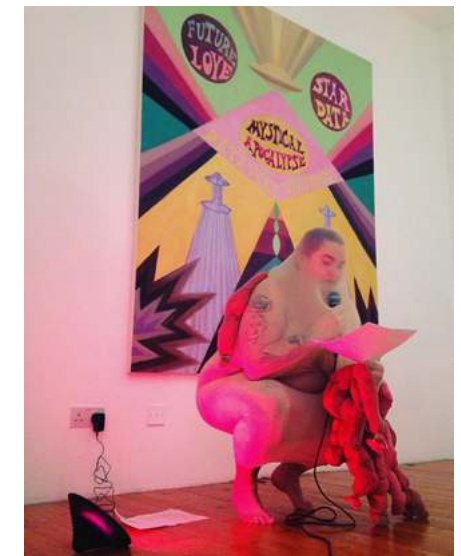


The first of these projects included the two-month-long exhibition *Works from SURVIVOR (F)* (Suzanne Treister). This presented Treister's diagrammatic conception of a Last Woman (the eponymous *SURVIVOR (F)*) and the first paintings made by the artist since their turn to digital arts in the 1980s, including a watercolour work *SURVIVOR (F)/The Sky Was The Colour Of The Death Of The Internet*.

Jackson arranged for Linda Stupart to perform during the run of the exhibition, and one of their series of five separate performances of *After the Ice, the Deluge* can be seen in front of the Treister painting. Stupart's performance foregrounded themes of a queer, time-travelling "flesh machines" in an environment of collapse and added key variations to Treister's last-women-on-Earth narrative. The performance was live-streamed from IMT Gallery by [THISISTOMORROW](#) and developed into a new dual projection 16mm film which was screened at no.w.here, London and LUX, London.



Above: Suzanne Treister, *SURVIVOR (F)/The Sky Was The Colour Of The Death Of The Internet* (2019).
Image courtesy the artist, Annely Juda Fine Art, London and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York



Above: Linda Stupart performing *After the Ice, the Deluge* at iMT Gallery in front of Suzanne Treister: *SURVIVOR (F)/Mystical Apocalypse*.
Image courtesy the artist and iMT Gallery.

This project was followed by *Cześć, Pani Ciarska* (Paola Ciarska) (2018).

The exhibition imagined a series of digitised avatars: fictional digital inhabitants in semi-fictionalised spaces that presented a rich political narrative concerned the isolation of home in an increasingly technologically-connected world.

By contrast *Glimmer Breach* (Maggie Roberts) (2018) demonstrated Robert's cosmic / shamanic dissolution of human subjectivity into Google Deep Dream code. It examined ideas surrounding post-human or extra-human forms of intelligence via specific texts, fauna and digital tools. In these works Roberts used 'fictioning' to interrogate contemporary forms of technologized embodiment.



Right: Paola Ciarska, *Untitled*
(*Cześć, Pani Ciarska* Series), (2017).

Image courtesy the artist and
iMT Gallery.

Below: Installation view of *Glimmer Breach* at IMT Gallery.
Image courtesy Maggie Roberts
and iMT Gallery.



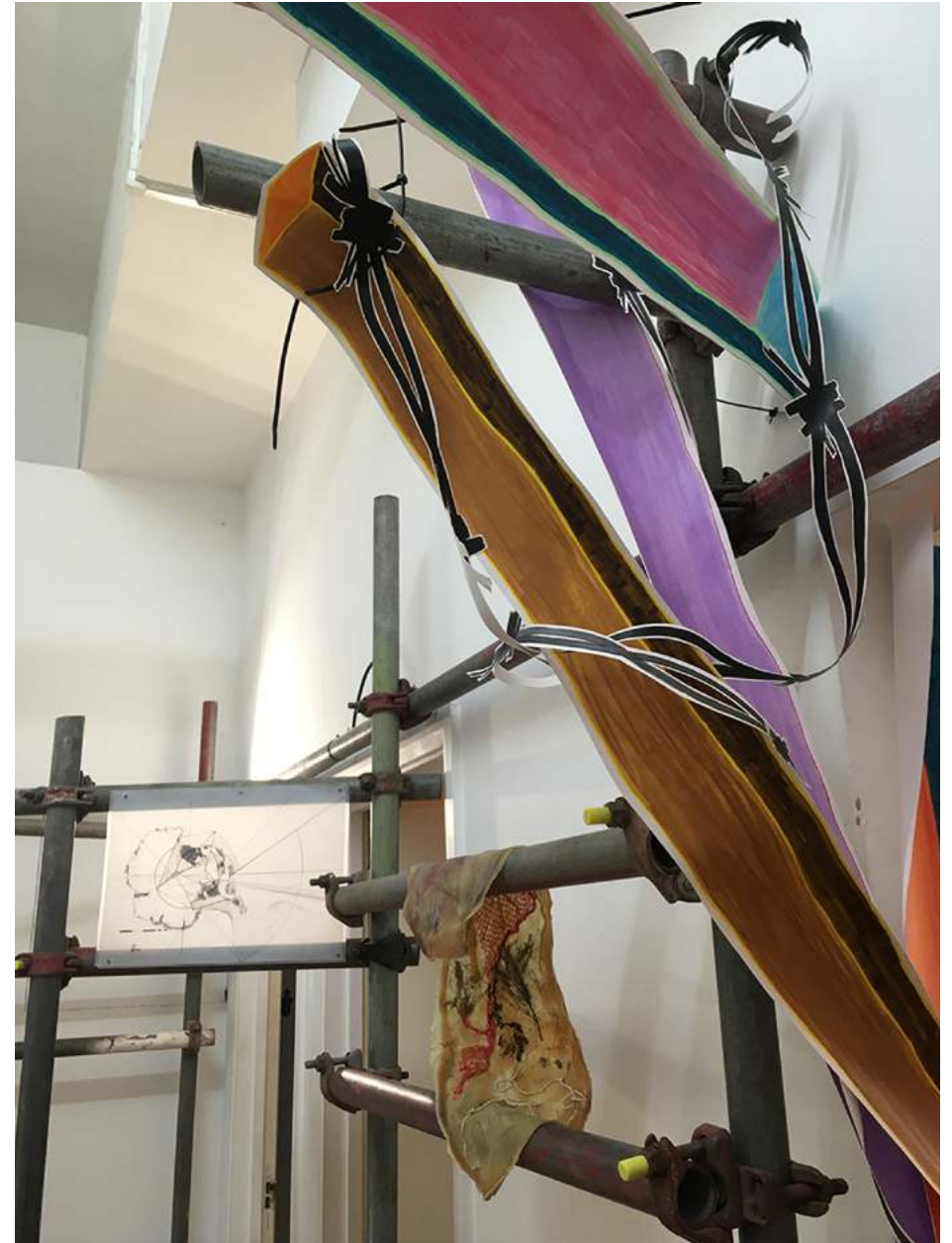
Lastly, in *Snow Crash*, Cooke managed to successfully draw together some of the key themes apparent in the earlier exhibits of *Feeling Safer*. The title came from Neal Stephenson's novel set in a fictional future America, in which all land has been privatised and each area/suburb is run by a franchise.

It included further work by Stupart, and contributions from Diann Bauer & AST, Amanda Beech, Melanie Jackson, Pil & Galia Kollektiv, Claire Potter, Tai Shani, Lynton Talbot and Ayesha Tan Jones.

This last exhibition also included:

- Performances by Stupart and Potter at iMT
- A talk by Bauer, Cooke and Talbot at iMT
- A workshop on climate change and environmental collapse by Stupart at Art Lacuna
- An 'Apocalypse survival skool' workshop by Tan Jones at Art Lacuna.
- New commissioned writing by Talbot, which resulted in a published exhibition text distributed during (and as part of) the exhibition.

See [project site](#) for further details.



Right: Installation image of *Snow Crash*
at iMT Gallery.
Image courtesy iMT Gallery.

DISSEMINATION

These different elements of *Feeling Safer* brought Jackson's academic research to a broad, national and international gallery-going public. iMT Gallery functioned as a testing ground for Jackson's research and allowed parts of this project to be pitched to other institutions afterwards.

31st May 2016

Feeling Safer: The Turd Sessions on Resonance 104.4 FM.

3rd Jun–10th Jul 2016

Feeling Safer at iMT Gallery.

16th July 2016

Talk, NewBride Books, Newcastle. *Stuff to Handle the Human Condition: Scientology, William S. Burroughs and the Counterculture*, coinciding with the exhibition *Freaks!* The Alternative Press & The Psychedelic Underground.

20th Oct–23rd Oct 2016

Feeling Safer: Bugging Out at Brooklyn Fire Proof, New York.

13th Jan 2017

Commissioned by Galerie Karin Sachs, Munich, to write the publication *Henrik Schrat: Orangerie bei Nacht*, which came through acknowledging Jackson's work with science fiction narratives and art practice. The text was an important workshopping of some of the ongoing curatorial work of *Feeling Safer*, and was published by Stadt Backnan.

6th Oct–26th Nov 2017

Suzanne Treister: Works From Survivor (F) at iMT Gallery.

3rd–19th Nov 2017

They Call Us the Screamers, TULCA festival, Galway. Included Jackson's research into isolationist, prepper science fiction history looking the fascist legacies of the Vril in Edward Bulwer-Lytton hollow Earth science fiction novel *The Coming Race* (1871) in the *Plastique Fantastique* performance *Past-Future-Catcher-Repeater*, a commission by TULCA.

4th Nov 2017

Linda Stupart: After the Ice, the Deluge at iMT Gallery.

18th Nov 2017

The talk *White Noise Propositions* at iMT Gallery, part of *Suzanne Treister: Works From Survivor (F)*.

12th Jan–25th Mar 2018

Paola Ciarska: Cześć, Pani Ciarska at iMT Gallery

4th May–7th Jun 2018

Maggie Roberts: Glimmer Breach at iMT Gallery

8th Sep 2018

Jackson was invited to deliver ideas developed from this research in a paper 'Your Walgreens Points are Expiring' at *What can Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence technologies offer artists and curators?*, Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle.

11th Jan–10th Mar 2019

Snow Crash, curated by Kirsten Cooke at iMT Gallery.

Feb 2019

Work from *Paola Ciarska: Cześć, Pani Ciarska* is selected for a solo presentation in Art Rotterdam 2019 (also curated by Jackson).

Sept 2019

The text Jackson commissioned for *Suzanne Treister - SURVIVOR (F)* (written by Maggie Roberts and Lucy A Sames) is republished in the fully illustrated book *Suzanne Treister - SURVIVOR (F) to The Escapist BHST (Black Hole Spacetime)* by Serpentine Galleries and Koenig Books London. ISBN-10 : 3960986866 ISBN-13 : 978-3960986867

Reviews

Feeling Safer was featured in: Lars Bang Larsen, 'Portrait Suzanne Treister' in Spike Art Magazine, no. 58 Winter 2019; a review of Ciarska's project by writer Daniel Culpan as a 'Critics' Picks' review in ArtForum, Feb. 1st 2018; *Snow Crash* received discussion in Henry Broome, 'Snow Crash', Art Monthly, no. 424: March 2019 and Mimi Chu, 'Alternative Truths: How Small London Shows Are Reviving Popular Subcultures', Frieze, no. 203 May 2019.

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David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan (2019) *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Gilles Deleuze (1994) *Difference and Repetition*. New York, Columbia University Press.

Gilles Deleuze (1988) *Foucault*. London, Athlone.

Henriette Gunkel, Ayesha Hameed and Simon O Sullivan (2017) *Futures and Fictions: Essays and Conversations That Explore Alternative Narratives and Image Worlds That Might Be Pitched Against the Impasses of Our Neo-Liberal Present*. London: Repeater Books.

Mark Jackson (2014) *Nothing Short of Complete Liberation: The Burroughsian Ideal of Space as Curatorial Strategy in Audial Art*, University of the Arts, London (PhD thesis).

Mark Jackson (2017) 'Donnerrollen/Rolling Thunder' in *Henrik Schrat: Orangerie bei Nacht*, Stadt Backnang, pp. 6-25.

Lydia King (2014) *Preppers: History and the Cultural Phenomenon*. New York: Prepper Press.

Simon O'Sullivan (2013). *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lucy A. Sames (2013-14). *Sci-Fi Paganism* [exhibition programme and publication]. Enclave, London.

Back cover image: Still from Maggie Roberts' *Glimmer Breach*.
Image courtesy the artist and iMT Gallery.

