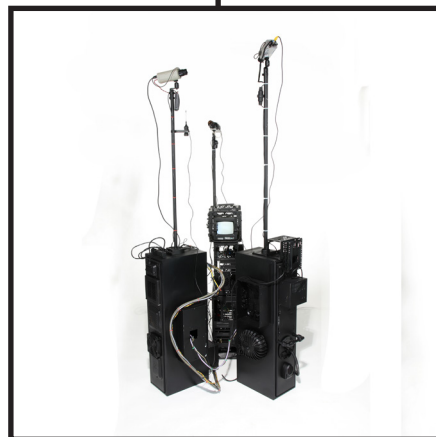
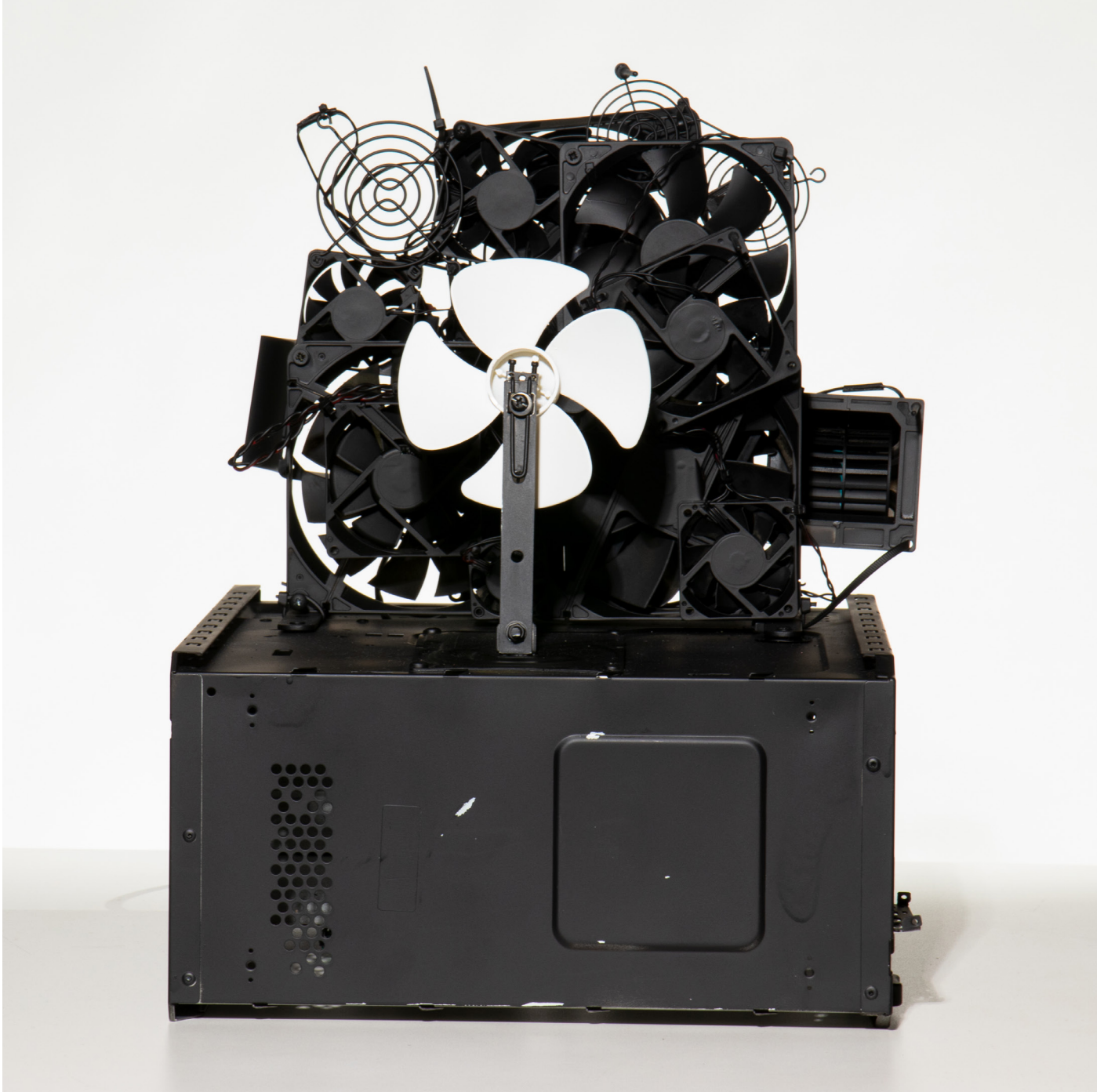


Us vs. Now

Simon Britton
Art & Design: Interdisciplinary Practice
Final Major Project 2021

planetsimon.co.uk/fmp





Entropy

(2021) Simon Britton

Found industrial objects, computer case and fans.

Entropy is inspired by the imagery of server farms, bitcoin mines, and air-conditioning plants in its aesthetic.

Often we cannot see the underlying mechanisms that we daily rely on... or we choose not to see them for our own convenience.

Each and every technical aspect of our lives has an impact. That may be the power used in simply Tweeting a comment or sending an SMS message. It may be the steel pedal bin we use in the kitchen, recycled from beached container ships by armies of underpaid and endangered workers with no protective equipment.

It may be also be the heat generated by the air-conditioning machines we use to eliminate heat. Heat is indestructible. It doesn't mysteriously disappear: The machines we use simply move it around, and in doing so generate more heat.

Physicists call this entropy, and will ultimately lead to the chaotic heat-death of the universe.

This movement of energy, the displacement of wasted power - and the shifting of responsibility - is the focus of this work.

Us vs. Now - an installation by Simon Britton



Panopticon (2021) Simon Britton

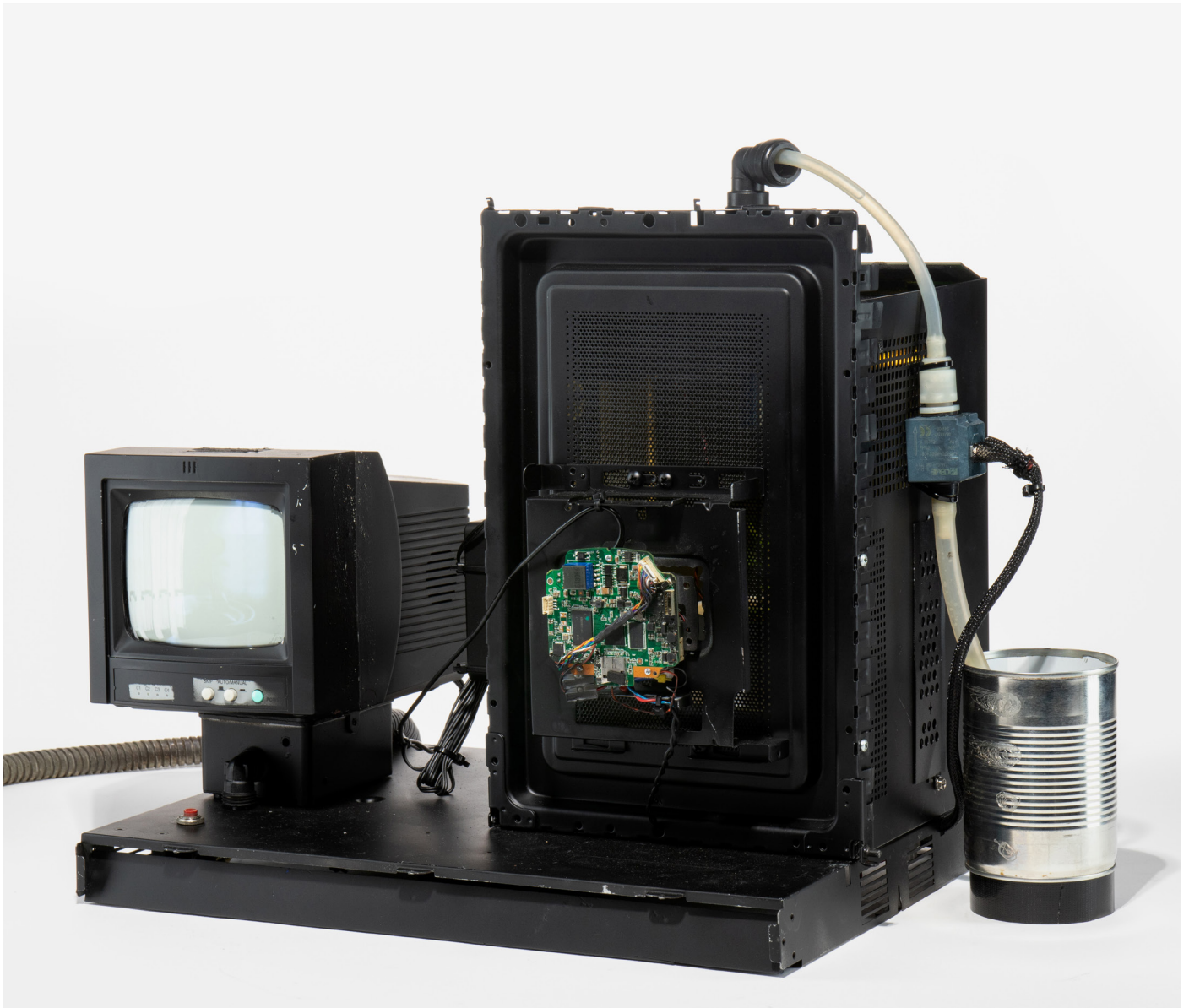
Found industrial objects, CCTV camera system, computer components and cables.

A commentary partly on surveillance society, **Panopticon** takes inspiration from Foucault's writing on "the gaze" and Juvenal's well-known and oft-misquoted phrase "who watches the watchmen" from his Satires. It is literally translated as "Who will guard the guards themselves?".

The power dynamic of watched or recorded CCTV provides an interesting centrepiece for Us vs. Now, especially in Britain, where we are regularly cited as one of the most surveilled countries in the world with an estimated 1.8 million CCTV cameras - and some (now regularly challenged) sources citing the figure as high as 4.3 million.

The reality is that, in urban areas, there's a very good chance that in the UK we're observed and recorded at least several times a day. I wanted to remind people, using Panopticon, that this was just another part of living in a pre-apocalyptic society.

Is the act of constant Orwellian surveillance changing the way we behave? Are we happy to be compliant in a society that records our every move, online or in the real world?



Support Mechanism

(2021) Simon Britton

Found industrial objects, houseplant, CCTV camera system, computer and microwave components.

I wanted to use living organisms as part of Us vs. Now to highlight our relationship with the natural world.

Nature has a way of reclaiming the structures of quiescent industry, just as we have a propensity to claim the natural world as we would other types of property.

I wanted to promote debate around the area of eco-adherence, and the desperate virtue-signalling used by industry and major corporations. Yes, you may be supporting a green agenda, but at what cost? Do the benefits of business' relatively minor expenditure on environmental issues actually solve any issues, or is it just a marketeer's posturing?

As a society, we seem to be increasingly isolating ourselves from the natural world. We regularly watch nature documentaries, but how often do we actually go out into a forest and pick litter? We swim in chlorinated artificial pools, and breathe air-conditioned breezes.

But at what cost?

Us vs. Now

Where we are in an industrial society, and what happens next.

We are all aware that humanity has had a massive impact on the earth's finely-tuned biosphere, most notably since the industrial revolution. The interplay between industry and nature, technology and ecology, is always fascinating and continually evolving. As industry falls and the resources are abandoned, nature quickly takes over: it is invariably changed and diminished, but it has a powerful will to survive. Conversely, industry can consume massive amounts of space, resources and resilience. Sadly, it does this at a rate that easily outpaces nature's ability to thrive. As a species, we're not helping enough.

Rather than speak in terms of "post-industrialism" or "post-apocalyptic", I have started to describe my practice using a new phrase. As a society, we are definitely not "post" anything industrial - our species are still, in the main, voracious, unceasing and filthy. Neither has the apocalypse occurred, though some would say we are fairly close. Rather, my work is heading towards "pre-apocalyptic" in its direction. I see my practice as a warning: another voice amongst the multitude of eco-influencers, conservationists and environmental campaigners. If enough of us, using as many channels as possible, can help to increase the volume of the message, maybe it will start to get through to those in a position to make decisions, encouraging them to make the right ones for us now and in the future.

My work is influenced heavily by what I see of the industrial landscape of the Midlands, and of the comparatively bucolic Worcestershire countryside where I now spend a lot of time. Even in the green spaces that surround our cities, especially the industrial cities of central England, there are significant footprints of industrial processes on the land. Whilst I am fascinated by our industrial heritage, and the science and machinery that has driven it, I am simultaneously appalled by the scars that the last couple of hundred years have left on the world.

Some of the sculptures I am producing combine an industrial aesthetic with resilient, living nature. Others ask us to look at our society to examine not only our impact on our environment, but our attitudes towards the industrial "now" and our place within it. Are we to become a support system for what remains of our crumbling biosphere, or are we at the critical turning point where we can still atone for our past extravagances, and make good on our evolutionary crimes against the earth?

It is my hope that with the increased volume of the message, and the ideas provoked by my practice, we can ensure that ideas of a "pre-apocalyptic" dystopian future remains a fictional genre, and what we're actually doing will become known as "pre-utopian".

In this project, the work is intended to raise questions and encourage debate about our position as the globe's caretakers, referencing works from a number of eco-artists and industrial sculptors. The work will aim to demonstrate our relationship with "now", using the threat (or encouragement) of a "pre-apocalyptic" message to facilitate discourse around the topics suggested.

The installation uses found industrial objects, computer parts, obsolete technology, and cables which would otherwise have been consigned to landfill. All the parts used in construction are recyclable, and the work can be easily dismantled and reconfigured. Whilst all redundant technology carries a negative environmental footprint, this work has prolonged the life of its component parts and given them new purpose.

The centrepiece Panopticon, flanked by similarly-sized sculptures Support Mechanism and Entropy, form a cohesive tableaux. This collage of technical obsolescence deliberately shares an identical aesthetic and colour palette, and are intended to be exhibited together.

