# QWERTY

A Show About “Work” in the Digital, Information Age
Artists **William Mead** with special guest **Lauren Kelly**

**William Mead’s Artist Statement**

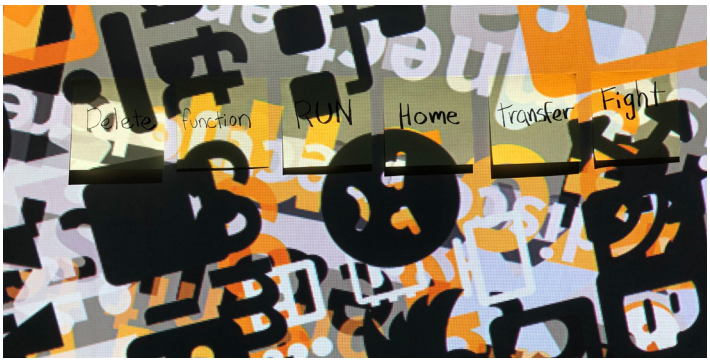
Conceptually, my work today is driven by technological developments and the modern digital tool set. Our tools allow us to shape our world, but that world also shapes us, and our perceptions. If, as Steve Jobs said, the computer is the bicycle of the mind, then the potential creativity unleashed by all the computational power we have at our fingertips might be the bicycle of the imagination.

Perhaps our imaginations don’t need bicycles, but in spite of that, for over thirty years I have been infatuated with the creative power our digital tools give us. Certainly, the meteoric rise of processing power, and the accessibility of devices that harness this power, has brought with it unprecedented practical and ethical challenges. But these challenges, and the narratives they expose are essentially and explicitly human, and therefore, from my perspective, they add to our expressive potential.

Artistically, I came of age in the 1980’s while attending art school at Parson’s School of Art and Design in New York City. I was inspired by the visual acuity of Cézanne; the draftsmanship and boldness with color of Matisse; the creative fervor of Picasso; the sublime beauty created by Rodin; the internal spaces of Pollock, Chagall and Twombly; the attention to details and materials of minimalists like Serra and Judd; the social and visual impact of Christo; and the visceral and conceptual impact of Joseph Beuys, Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman and many others. It is a canon of mostly European white men, to be sure, but these artists taught me to be visually sensitive, open to symbolism, and excited by the possibilities of imagination when it crosses boundaries of gender, culture, and history.

My artistic education enables me to deeply enjoy and value a range of visual work, while also showing me how that work connects the past to the present and then into the future. Though my art-making has changed dramatically over the years, an openness to new media and the beauty found in the expressiveness of programming languages, and the craft of coding has created what for me is a direct line from then to now. Though Cézanne or Chagall or Hesse may not see their work in mine, I see it, even as I forge ahead, into a digital landscape of work driven by an information age.




*Digital Prints on Metallic Photo Paper*
*William Mead, 2019*




*Title:* QWERTY

*Artist:* Lauren Kelly

*Medium:* Painted MDF and electroluminescent wire

*Size:* 70″ x 20″

*Date:* 2019

*Price:* Not For Sale

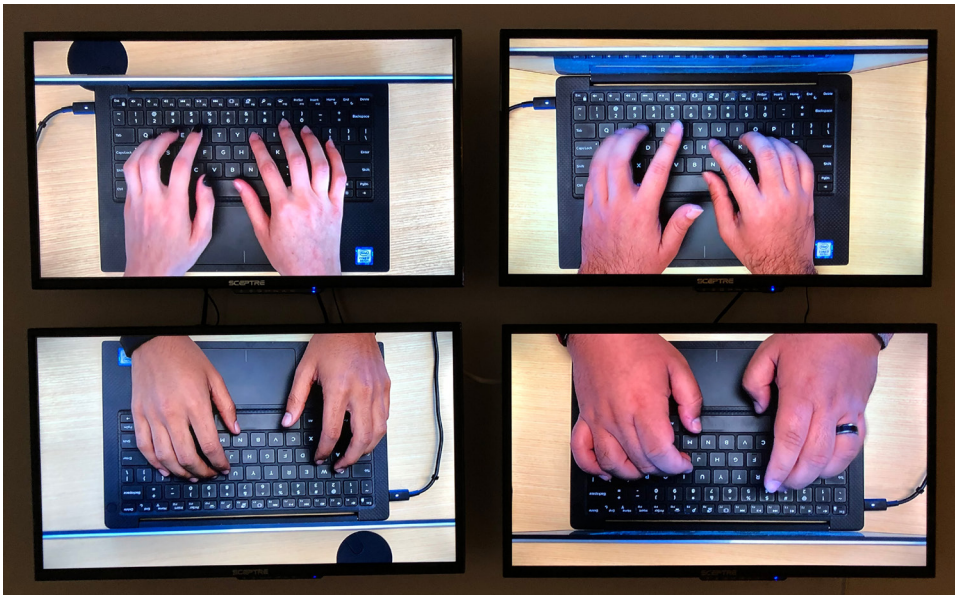
**NOTES FROM THE ARTIST**

If an artist is a painter, and crafts their work using traditional media, that work is easily recognized as "art". It is unique, and when it is well executed, can be a pleasure to behold. And while the specific value of such work may not be easy to determine, it is easy to recognize that there is value in that work, because (at least partially) of its uniqueness, artistry and craftsmanship. But what about when work is not created in traditional media? Where is the artist's hand in this work? How can the value of such work be made explicit to the viewer?

These are a few of the questions fellow artist and collaborator Lauren Kelly and I discussed as we developed ideas for the show. I'm not sure we have found any answers to these questions.

Lauren had previously worked with electroluminescent wire, and was excited to construct a new piece that would become the standard bearer for the exhibition and express some of the themes found in this body of work.

Digital type, as well as the act of typing, whether it is the process of crafting code, or the mundane act of writing emails, are key elements, deeply embedded in this body of work. The QWERTY piece is deliberately constructed using the San Francisco typeface (rounded version), which is the first typeface created by Apple in 20 years, and is used throughout their interfaces, including the keys on their keyboards.



*Title:* typing@theoffice.com

*Artist:* William Mead

*Medium:* Video installation

*Size:* four 32″ televisions

*Date:* 2018

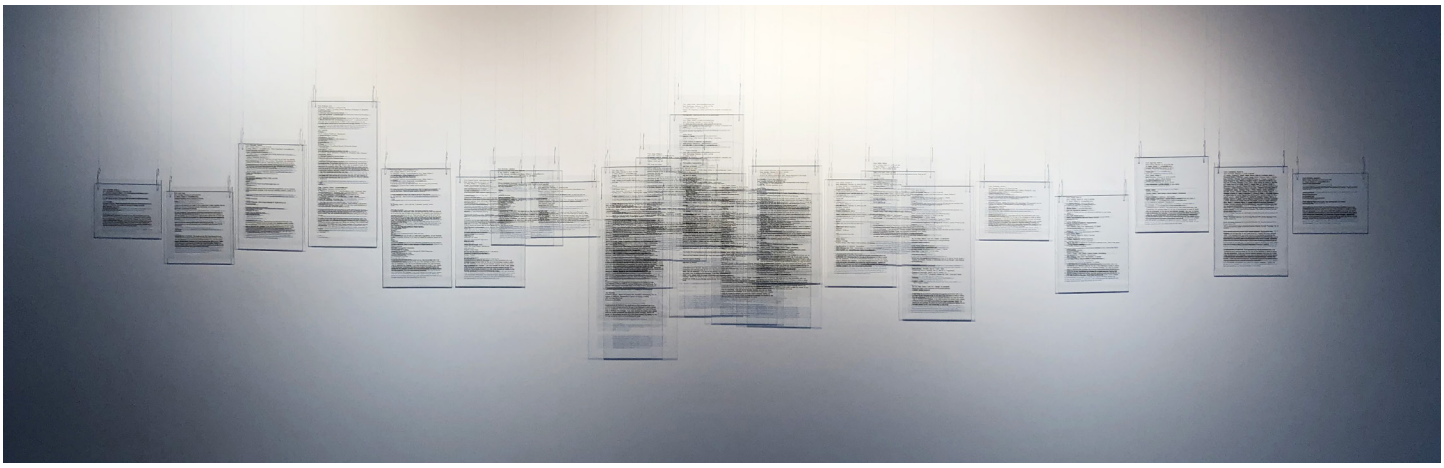
*Price:* Connect with the artist about pricing and installation.

**NOTES FROM THE ARTIST**

We spend more time reading and writing today than we ever have in any generation before. The keyboard is both the symbol and the device for much of this human effort. Often overlooked as just another ordinary thing, my goal here is to elevate the keyboard, and the practice of typing, from a mundane object and ordinary act to art.

The piece itself is intentionally minimal. The same tvs, same keyboard, same lighting in the videos, same impersonal perspective of the act. Yet, hopefully something of the personalty of the typists comes through. The sound of typing is like the sound of the ocean, and can range from soothing to enraging.

My hope is that viewing this piece is like standing at the edge of the ocean. On the beach, listening to the waves crash, you can observe the vastness and the power of nature. Here, you view the vastness and the power of something else...



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*Artist:* William Mead

*Medium:* Plexiglass and light

*Size:* 168″ x 20″ x 4″

*Date:* 2019

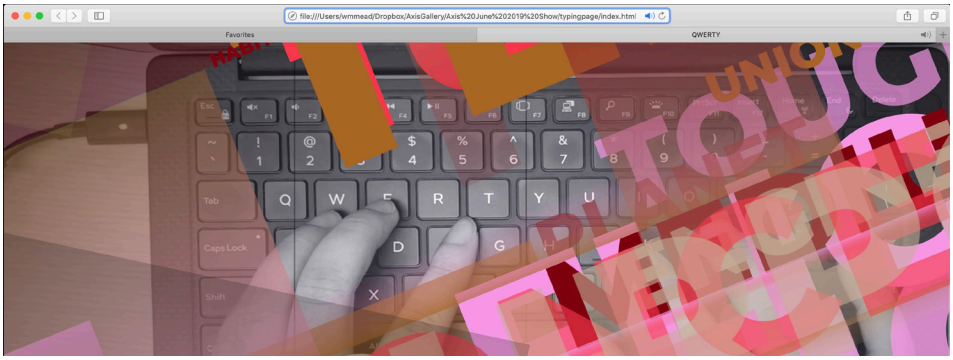
*Price:* Connect with the artist about pricing and installation.

**NOTES FROM THE ARTIST**

If our Information Age were a forest, email would be the detritus on the forest floor. Sometimes fertile, sometimes flammable, it piles up and decays. If you're an information worker, chances are you have lots of email. What do we do with it all? We don't need it, but we don't really want to delete it either. It remains as evidence of the work we have done, but is rarely the actual work itself.

Taking old emails and printing them out on a hard, durable surface and displaying them as art in a gallery seemed to me an interesting way to call out the role of email in our "work" lives. The clear material and the ability for light to shine through and put the shadows of the words on the wall behind the piece is an apt visual metaphor for the role of email in our "work".

The piece makes me think of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, where the emails, or the shadows of their words represent reality, but are not reality. Yet we cling to them. For many of us, they are the only concrete evidence of our accomplishments.



*Title:* Work In Progress

*Artist:* William Mead

*Medium:* Recursive JavaScript Visual and Audio Display

*Size:* Scales to any size

*Date:* 2019

*Price:* Connect with the artist about pricing and installation.

**NOTES FROM THE ARTIST**

This piece brings together the typing, the emails and the randomly recursive JavaScript programming that has been a source of continued work and exploration for me over the past few years. The piece is always different, and continually in a process of building or tearing down, randomly generating compositions that could be both meaningful and meaningless.

I hope the ebb and flow of this piece communicates something about the process of work in the digital, Information Age. Whatever meaning you pull from it, is of your own creation, like much of the information work we do every day.



*Title:* Client / Server

*Artist:* William Mead

*Medium:* Found objects & electrical tape.

*Size:* Installs at multiple sizes / formats

*Date:* 2019

*Price:* Connect with the artist about pricing and installation.

**NOTES FROM THE ARTIST**

This piece, made from materials liberated from a construction site, plus some electrical tape, explores the client / server relationship found in both our interpersonal and technical networks. The contrast between materials associated with physical labor and the symbolic relationship set up between the different elements within the piece is an important part of the concept behind this work.

During the Industrial Age, we organized our lives much like factories: Live here, work there, and shop somewhere else. It is probably obvious today that these choices were linked together, but I imagine that at the time, choosing to organize our lives like production lines in factories was largely subconscious. After all, these factories and the cheap goods they produced represented a huge opportunity to many people, providing not just a livelihood, but a lifestyle.

I hope this piece encourages us to think about, and talk about, how the Information Age, and our service industry, is affecting our decisions about how we live and organize our lives now. We may not recognize the connections between these decisions so easily in this moment, but they will perhaps be obvious to future generations. In what ways should we be content, or not, with these choices?










*Title:* The Deconstruction Series Part 1: Contact, Edit & Trash

*Artist:* William Mead

*Medium:* Digital print on aluminum

*Size:* 20″ x 60″

*Date:* 2019

*Price:* $700 each panel or $2000 for the series

**NOTES FROM THE ARTIST**

This series consists of compositions constructed from elements pulled from a customized version of my recursive JavaScript programming, as well as imagery from the “real world”. However, this imagery has been highly digitized and stylized to push it further way from the “real” and towards abstraction, again, evoking Plato, and his analogy of the divided line.

The imagery created by the randomly recursive JavaScript creates and places shapes, icons, and words related to work in the Information Age. They create a texture that is both representational of our digital lives, and a canvas within which we live those lives.

These pieces are also largely inspired by web design. When designing for the web, we often create long pages that tell a story as you scroll down them. They include clear calls to action and hopefully the case they make for the user to take that action is compelling. In this case, the stories are muddled and left to the viewer’s imagination.

The titles of the individual pieces within the series are meant to be like commands you might find in a menu for a website, or web application, and they hopefully add to the playfulness and narratives that could be constructed from these pieces.










*Title:* The Deconstruction Series Part 2: Search, Save & Home

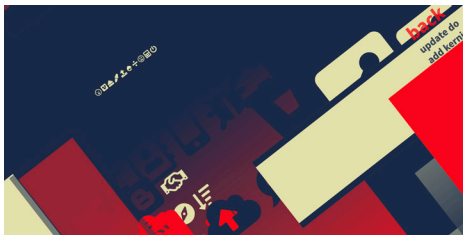
*Artist:* William Mead

*Medium:* Digital print on aluminum

*Size:* 20″ x 60″

*Date:* 2019

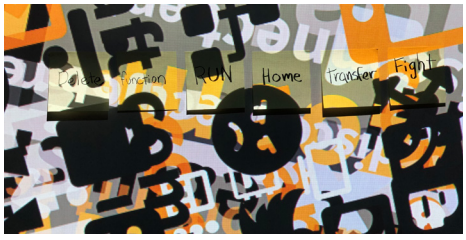
*Price:* $700 each panel or $2000 for the series

















*Title:* Digital Prints

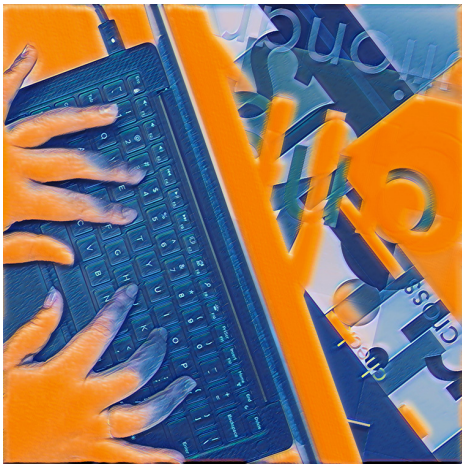
*Artist:* William Mead

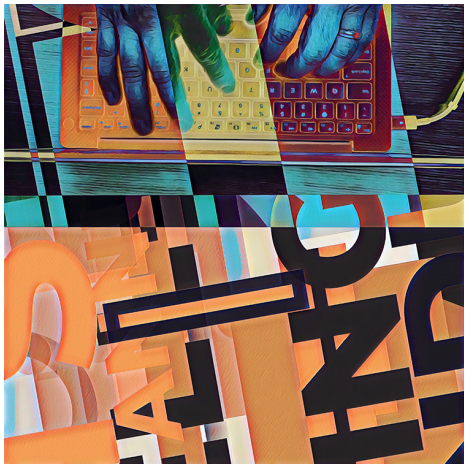
*Medium:* Digital print on metallic photo paper

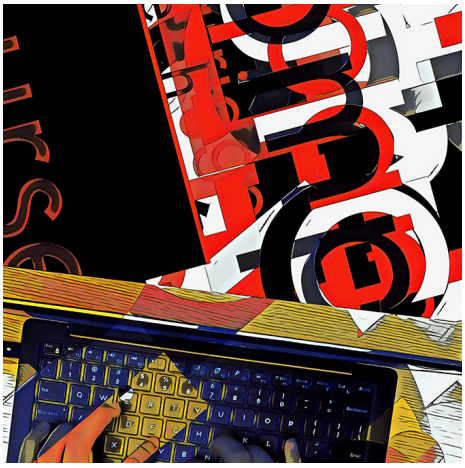
*Size:* 30″ x 15″

*Date:* 2019

*Price:* $90 each










*Title:* Quadrants of Time Management Series

*Artist:* William Mead

*Medium:* Digital print on aluminum

*Size:* 20″ x 20″ per panel. Approximately 42″ x 42″ installed

*Date:* 2018

*Price:* $500 for the series, $150/per panel

| | URGENT | NOT URGENT |
|---|---|---|
| IMPORTANT | Quadrant 1 **Crisis** | Quadrant 2 **Productivity** |
| NOT IMPORTANT | Quadrant 3 **Distraction** | Quadrant 4 **Waste** |

**NOTES FROM THE ARTIST**

This piece brings together elements from my work and remixes them into something unique and dynamic that further explores the themes of this body of work. Randomly generated recursive JavaScript images are combined with images pulled from from *typing@theoffice.com*, which have been further manipulated to create chaotic compositions that I hope are recognizable and yet without time or place.

The title of the series and the individual panels in the piece, as well as their square shape and configuration, refer to a specific diagram found in the sort of quazi-motivational business platitudes information workers are subjected to in trainings, to help them categorize the meaningfulness of their work, and to perhaps understand their place in the grand scheme of things. I hope these pieces bring you much joy and profit.