

Combining style, information and exchange, *iD2K16* both emulates and disturbs corporate imagery, critiquing and parodying the economic networks that exist between fashion, art and advertising. Each work is in dialogue with the body and with the relationships bodies have with space as both object and subject. This dichotomy is represented in the practices of each artist; their works are inherently performative, proto-digital,<sup>1</sup> multidisciplinary and focus on the body.

In a proto-digital age, there are so many personifications of the 'self' that the concept of an 'individualised self' becomes essentially a constructed fiction. This 'individualised self' is made apparent in *iD2K16* through the branding of the exhibition on a range of merchandise. Drink bottles, t-shirts, caps and tote bags situate the surrounding artworks in an *iD2K16 experience* and act as framing devices as well as strategic anchors. Each artist's work is then able to meditate on a variety of concerns that stem from the brand: labour, performativity, tensions between craft and fashion, advertising and art.

Central to the branded, individualised self is the body, a subject for consumption that is mitigated in the exhibition through a series of visual references to a 'shopping' or 'mall' experience. This includes the decorative use of an LED lightbox and rope light, PVC curtain strips and cheap hanging devices that encourage the audience to *consume the lifestyle you deserve*. It is through these visual signifiers that *iD2K16* explores the mixing of socio-economic strata through society's obsession with capitalist institutions.<sup>2</sup> Malls are spaces that people of all backgrounds come to interact with on one ubiquitous platform based on consumption.

The blatant use of fake (but real life) corporate 'sponsors', such as *Nutribullet*, *Dunedin's Golden Centre Mall* and *Nike* seek to expose and parody an excessive corporate branding of so-called 'choices' consumers make everyday. Just as fashion events, most notably *iD Dunedin Fashion Week*, rely on the patronage of these organisations, *iD2K16* relies on the illusion of sponsorship as a means to scrutinise the way that institutions function within a market economy.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Curatorially, the exhibition space is in a constant state of activation. In this way, two of the Dunedin-based artists in the exhibition have been invited to intervene with the curator's initial arrangement of the space, redirecting the works as they see fit. This not only gives the participating artists an autonomous voice, it also offers several different ways for the audience to gain a sense of what the *iD2K16* experience encompasses.

While the interventions offer the local audience of *iD2K16* access to the artists' continuously evolving practices, a coinciding *Google Doc* offers a similar experience for those not able to physically visit the exhibition. The *Google Doc*, has been an ongoing collaboration between the six artists and the curator over the past six months. Combining individual research, thoughts and ideas in a 'chat-room' like forum, the use of digital media during this exhibition is a means to alleviate geographical restrictions for the artists involved, as well as to expand and encourage digital participation within the project.

Online engagement through the document (now also open to the public) functions as a direct confrontation with the supremacy of the 'white cube gallery space'. Using the internet as a means for communication and the sharing of information was an essential strategy for bringing the six artists together to respond to the curatorial provocation of *iD2K16*. Giving the exhibition a strong online presence also intensifies the 'individualised self' for example, through the now standardised use of individualised hashtags as a way to self brand on social media.

Additionally, the use of 'brand ambassadors' at the exhibition opening to coordinate a flood of social media activity merges the online and offline paradigms of *iD2K16*. These ambassadors work to sell the 'individualised self' and intensify the art opening as a spectacle.<sup>4</sup> During the opening performance, these ambassadors fulfil the roles of 'product demonstrators', 'security guards' and 'peer support leaders', imposing the *iD2K16* brand ethos: *curate the lifestyle you deserve*.<sup>5</sup> As the ambassadors mix with the physical audience and use social media to integrate a digital audience, they encourage participation and disrupt the hierarchy between IRL and URL experiences.<sup>6</sup>

Whether IRL or URL, lifestyle is a consumable commodity that employs a certain kind of underlying 'capitalist subjectivity'. As 'subjects', we (society) are controlled and dependent on neoliberalist tactics that define our identity, conscience and self-knowledge.<sup>7</sup> This results in a collective conscience that is constantly bombarded by a stream of online and offline media designed to entice consumption, but also to sell a belief in capitalism. Essentially, *iD2K16* highlights this problem by forcing the consumer to become a product as much as an identity consuming the product itself.<sup>8</sup> In this proto-digital age, we as 'users' do not have the ability to construct an 'authentic' identity both online and offline. Through our adaptation to digital language, it has become apparent that we express ourselves through codified, formatted networks that construct our 'personal brand' identities.<sup>9</sup> We are essentially adopting the incentive structures of capitalist social order as our own.<sup>10</sup>

1 In this text, 'proto-digital' insinuates an ongoing use of digitality within a creative practice. Similar but more permanent than a 'post-digital' insinuation.

2 In this instance, capitalist institutions range from established brands such as Nike, to established spaces such as MoMA. Although these brands are culturally unique, society consumes them in the same way. A visit to MoMA is consumed just like the purchase of a pair of *Nike Free* sneakers.

3 A market economy is defined as an economy in which decisions regarding investment, production, and distribution are based on supply and demand, and prices of goods and services are determined in a free price system. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market\\_economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_economy))

4 A similar performance was undertaken at Fresh and Fruity as a part of the exhibition opening *Celebrity Solstice* (Dunedin, December 2014) on Instagram, Tumblr, Facebook and Ustream.

5 Some of the taglines the ambassadors promote during the opening performance: *Health equals wealth, strong is the new skinny* and *tranquility can be yours*.

6 IRL: in real life. URL: an online resource aka a website. These colloquialisms are used in context with online (URL) and offline (IRL).

7 Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rainbow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

8 Fareed Zakaria (Washington Post), "Why America's obsession with STEM education is dangerous" in Umano, accessed 11 March 2015, <https://umano.me/c/bgnnk/why-americas-obsession-with-stem-education-is-dangerous->

9 Rob Horning, "Social media is not self-expression" in *The New Inquiry* (14 November, 2014), accessed 11 March 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/marginal-utility/social-media-is-not-self-expression/>

10 Ibid.

Much like society's ongoing need for self-expression through social media, the offline world is becoming more and more supported by a complex, live ensemble of code, hardware and infrastructure used to communicate in social digital life.<sup>11</sup> *iD2K16* offers a way for art, fashion and advertising to exist beyond the exclusionary 'white cube' of the gallery space and within the individualised self. In the creation of the *Google Doc* and the brand ambassadors' performative engagement with social media, *iD2K16* seeks to challenge and critique capitalist authority within a fine arts context.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Alessandra Banal

Anchoring the curatorial concept of *iD2K16*, Auckland-based designer and artist Alessandra Banal has been commissioned to brand a series of merchandise that aesthetically portrays the *iD2K16 experience*, as a critique of particular modes of consumerist lifestyle, especially health and well being. The merchandise—drink bottles, t-shirts, caps and tote bags—parodies object-based advertising and questions the commodification of the self as a consumable product. Embedded within these works is a calming therapeutic energy, achieved through the use of composition, colour and shape of the objects. Banal's day job is as a florist who uses plants, such as water lilies and anthuriums, as well as tropical greenery for corporate clientele. Overtime, these kinds of plants have become signifiers of a neoliberal utopian aesthetic, referring to the biophilic properties of nature (particularly plants) and questioning the way that the idea of 'paradise' is consumed as a physical and metaphorical representation of 'tranquility'. Similarly, plants are used in 'corporate' environments (board meeting rooms, office entrances, etc.) because they have supposedly proven to: reduce stress, improve air quality, improve workplace efficiency, reduce noise and help people find their way around buildings.<sup>12</sup> It is common knowledge that plants also enhance the interior aesthetic of a space and brand image. This is why so many retail stores and offices—especially recently—have begun to invest in plant displays as a kind of inverted psychological projection of what the consumer associates with health and wellbeing as a lifestyle choice. In this way, the merchandise Banal has created for *iD2K16* unashamedly mimics this kind of consumerist aesthetic, and in doing so questions the visual language of brands, especially within fashion and its codified signifiers of authority. Banal's works satirise the fast and repetitive nature of consumer culture, challenging ubiquitous authorship and patenting by corporations, who so often use the body as a space for product placement via free merchandise.<sup>13</sup> The irony of Banal's merchandise is that her works are not a consumable commodity—they are not given away en masse as a promotional exercise. The works as one-offs simply suggest the way in which we (society) have become products, as well as consumers.

### Motoko Kikkawa

Floating in the window and scattered throughout the space are suspended sculptures resembling a kind of alien seaweed. These alluring works are theatrical in their clustered occupation of space and work alongside a finger knitted body shield presented during the opening performance. Established Dunedin local Motoko Kikkawa's practice has always contemplated the performative intersection of bodies in relation to spaces and objects. Notably, she questions the relationships between contemporary and traditional, man-made versus natural and wearable versus unwearable. Kikkawa has a methodical interdisciplinary approach to the 'production' and 'manufacturing' of an artwork. She physically collects objects like seaweed and documents them through photography, her approach to sculpture and craft are innately intuitive, but driven by action—primarily performance. These works are part of a larger and long term series of different iterations of the body as: an object, a substrate; a material support, as something which can be enacted and as a tool.<sup>14</sup> Through these labour-intensive processes, performances and documentation, Kikkawa's actions become vehicles for the rendering of ideas and as means of self-expression. The sheer size and volume of Kikkawa's finger knitted body shield renders the wearer vulnerable to anything outside of her or his periphery. The light use of material is ironic, given the associations we make between the handmade and knitted wool, because this material suggests a certain level of protection from the environment. Furthermore, this work cocoons the front of the wearer's face, like medieval armoury blocking all facial expression. When worn, the piece conjures up images of barbed wire, particularly when the body twists and turns within. Almost burqa-like, the work echoes Rick Owens' masked headwear accessories from his Fall 2012 womenswear collection.<sup>15</sup> Along with the series of painted seaweed sculptures, the knitted shield also employs colour as a means of offering a 'trend forecast'. When looking at these works one can't help but recall some of Kikkawa's other works, including her music performances and her ongoing series of intricate paper cut-outs. Her work has a rhythmic quality, which is evident in the dynamism of the appropriated marine algae. The seaweed sculptures range in size and colour and some of these can be worn. The largest, in black, appears like an extravagant head piece towering above and recalling the ominous alien in the film *Alien* (1980). The use of enamelled black in this work blends with the thin black rope that suspends it from the ceiling. Also used to display Severine Costa's choker works, the rope mirrors the gallery's use of black (lining the window and door interior).

### Severine Costa

Working through a process of endless repetition, emerging Dunedin graduate Severine Costa transforms mundane, often discarded materials into beautiful, intricate adornment objects. For this exhibition, she has made a series of neck pieces, using dressmakers pins and a selection of packaging materials. By investigating the semantics of these materials, Costa comments on the nature and usage of the jewellery object. Loaded with blunt connotations, the pieces rely on one's sensorial memory to unravel their meaning. The use of pins alludes to an element of danger—of pricking or piercing the wearer, and the viewer might imagine the work wounding and the blood flowing, staining the white and disturbing comfort of the foam.

11 Ibid.

12 "The benefits of indoor plants" in ambius, accessed 11 March 2015, <http://www.ambius.co.za/indoor-plants/benefits/index.html>

13 Enrolling at a university or entering a sports event are two examples of when 'free merch' is in abundance. Pens, diaries, bags, backpacks, hats, socks, sweatbands and notepads are cheap, brandable items that are used in everyday life.

14 Thinking around the premise of the Bernadette Corporation. See *Bernadette Corporation: 2000 Wasted Years* (London: Koenig Books, 2014).

15 "Caged Mask Accessories" in *Trend Hunter Fashion*, accessed 11 March 2015, <http://www.trendhunter.com/trends/rick-owens-fall-2012>

In continuation with her previous works, such as *Choker #1* (2013), an accumulation of hand-made wool cushions choking the wearer stuck in their comfort zone, and the *Sas Series* (2014), this new series sees Costa play with oppositions: tacky and beautiful, soft and sharp, strong and fragile in order to express the ambivalence of the adornment act. The first of these is made with packaging straw and pins knotted together, while the second is made using leather, pins and packaging foam. The latter is made in a meticulous manner, with each pin piercing small pieces of fleshy leather. The third piece is a long necklace made with pantry-liner and cotton thread, designed to encircle the body. The pantry-liner “beads” make the necklace glisten, but only from one perspective; it otherwise appears grey. In the light, there is a silver-lining, and it looks almost watery, like a mirage. Another work, to be displayed later in the show, is made with bubble wrap and pins, and underlines the importance of the gesture in Costa’s practice. In this piece, through a penetrative action, she has methodically and maybe obsessively destroyed each one of the factory-made bubbles. Doing this, she spotlights the repetitive, labour intensive process of making jewellery.

In Costa’s work, the ‘body making the object’ is almost always present; either being referenced in the work, or literally, as in her recent performance *Put Together* at V-Space in the Robertson Library in October 2014. In *iD2K16*, Costa’s pieces are displayed in a manner that critiques and undermines the typical presentation of jewellery, with one of the works suspended above a plinth and another work leaning on a shelf, placed on an angle.

### Josephine Mead

Like Costa, Melbourne-based practitioner Josephine Mead’s work is embedded within labour intensive processes, analysing different relationships to the gendered body, and how the body acts as a negotiation of the space in between bodies and minds. Mead creates work that investigates sculptural and performative practice through creating installations comprised of objects, video and photography. In this way, labour acts as a means to examine functionality, support, intimacy and exchange as a cis-identifying woman.<sup>16</sup> Displayed close to the street-front window is *Support me and I’ll (try to) support you*, a photographic print of a sculpture Mead presented in 2014, her graduate year at RMIT, Melbourne. This sculpture was part of a larger body of work exploring the act of giving and receiving support. The work consists of a chair gleaned from her family home and a recreation of the same chair made of fabric and wadding leaning on the top of the chair. In piecing these two objects together, the chair underneath begins to lose its functionality, yet retains its sense of support. Both the chair and its recreation together seem bodily, as though recalling the way two human bodies would intersect (Mead did several experiments for this work that involved her sitting on her partner, James and vice versa). While the first chair is encased with personal histories, the secondary chair never had a functional purpose except to comment on the original, becoming merely a representation of support. Furthermore, the physical process of creating these experiments in sculptural practice acts as a means for Mead to comprehend her emotional experiences.

Displayed on a small television screen, Mead also presents three videos: *Making and Re-Making* (2014), *Movement video 1* (2014) and *Working out where to locate oneself (with others)* (2014). The first is a video of Mead interacting with a sculptural cluster of different materials, including fabric and balloons. Walking around this work, she gently alters its appearance and performs a sequence of choreographed gestures towards the un-making of this installation. This work recalls sculptural installations by Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse; the latter two videos also recall some of the performance work of Valie Export and exercises enacted during training in physical theatre and dance. The video works also feature Mead in relation to other bodies; she becomes an interchangeable slew of sculptural forms while her relation to these other bodies explore the way in which Mead negotiates her own relationships and experiences. Similarly, the movements when interacting with the forms became a catalyst to choreograph movement scores.<sup>17</sup> All of these works also note the process of making and of being in relationships as physical experiences that lead to learning and attempting to further define who you are.<sup>18</sup>

### Clara Chon

Set prices profess that most clothes are meant to be thrown away, discarded like a used condom. Forgotten before there is a chance to be loved and savoured, most clothing that exists teaches young consumers that fashion has no longterm value.<sup>19</sup> Auckland-based practitioner Clara Chon often works with leather using time consuming, intricate processes and for *iD2K16* she has made an embellished leather jacket to be presented alongside a series of bags. Hanging from custom made chains and ropes, the bags she has made exist within a ‘vanitas’ style—or ‘vanity’ in dutch—since popularised by several luxury brands, most notably Versace. Much of her leather work is informed by what she calls ‘tangible oxymorons’, this meaning that they are corporeal but change in context given the hefty conceptual consideration of space in relation to these works. Thinking about the prevalence of ‘momento mori’ that is over saturated within art, fashion and advertising histories, Chon’s works offer both a critique and celebration of the retail space. Recently, she has been playing with the pun of ‘hanging’, which is expressed through an interest in the glamorisation of death in the media, especially of notable fashion celebrities.<sup>20</sup> The subtle references to forms of punishment and torture play off against her objects, which recall a kind of amoury that links to Kikkawa’s knitted work. This is especially evident in how clothing and accessories are designed for the practical purpose of covering and protecting the body and act as a way of holding on to objects we need in order to function (keys, cell phone, etc.), but they also offer a veneer of individuality and self-expression.

Chon’s works are unique and are innately individual, through the sheer nature of the work not one garment Chon produces is identical to the next. These objects recall the fast pace of fashion and how through the process of making, Chon is challenging this speed, as the works take such a long period of time and amount of labour to construct and finish. In this way, the works are celebrating the problems of fashion’s reliance on labour, thereby holding on to and celebrating the value of her craftsmanship. The use of suspension in Chon’s display is reflected throughout *iD2K16* with Kikkawa and Costa’s work also suspended, alongside elements of suspension within Mead’s videos works. Thinking through fashion as a system, Chon focuses on what fashion embodies but also the way that objects are often adopted as symbols of luxury, wealth and social class. In exploring the construct of ‘fashion’ within retail spaces, Chon has uncovered aesthetic parallels between ‘white cube spaces’ and ‘concept’ stores: similar lighting, the whiteness and cleanliness of the space and the visual merchandising or configuration of objects as consumable products.

16 Cis- is a prefix most commonly used with gender (cis-gender) referring to the alignment of one’s gender identity with one’s biological sex assigned at birth.

17 Josephine Mead, artist statement, 2015.

18 Ibid.

19 Marcus Fairs, “Li Edelkoort publishes manifesto explaining why ‘fashion is obsolete’” in *Dezeen Magazine*, accessed 11 March 2015, <http://www.dezeen.com/2015/03/02/li-edelkoort-manifesto-anti-fashion-obsolete/>

20 For example: Alexander McQueen and Isabella Blow.

### Rose Thomas

It is a truism that sexuality can be communicated through dress. Throughout our contemporary life, the primary representation of sexuality is the experience of heteronormative, masculine desire. Normal cis-female experiences such as menstruation, breast feeding and sexuality are often censored from view, especially within the realm of social media, and most-certainly within mainstream fashion, art and advertising. *Your Demons Will Feed* (2015) a film made especially for *iD2K16* by Nymphets explores sexuality, the ‘grotesque’, fantasy and the way clothing operates as means to express ourselves sexually. Nymphets is a multidisciplinary project by Auckland-based fashion-designer and artist, Rose Thomas (currently working overseas). Like so many of Nymphets other projects, the film is a collaboration between a diverse range of creative practitioners: film maker Mike Kumagai, Electronic musician Tawahinga Butt, and the performer Harriet Ellis. For Nymphets, clothing is merely a device for storytelling and self-expression and the clothing Nymphets creates is a reconceptualisation of androgyny, grounded in expressions of femininity, rather than anything to do with masculinity. *Your Demons Will Feed* plays with the dynamic between power and submission; it is essentially softcore surrealism. There is a textural quality to the film, which is expressed in the appearance of flashy gold chains, mixtures of fabric, blood, the close up shots of various body parts and intensive soundtrack.<sup>21</sup> To watch *Your Demons Will Feed*, like many ‘R18+’ store sections, one must walk through a curtain of PVC strips at the entrance of the gallery. The premise of the film is centered around a dream like sequence between three figures—the first figure appears as the dominant with two submissives. As the film plays, the two submissives become engulfed by desire and rapidly grow more animalistic as their clothes are torn from their bodies and covered in blood. The climax of *Your Demons Will Feed* is the implosion of menstrual blood that the gleeful submissives feed from, as though they are demonic creatures that survive from it. While it would be easy to dismiss this work as the frivolous expression of sexy, pretty girls—it does not seek to parody femininity. Naturally for the viewer, the film temporarily offers a deeply uncomfortable and abject experience, yet it presents an intensely decorative and attractive performance within Thomas’ wider creative output.

\* \* \* \* \*

To conclude, *iD2K16* explores a range of individualised concerns around the body and the state of anxiety in which society finds itself in today’s proto-digital age. By using fashion, art and advertising, the exhibition critiques the lack of value placed on online engagement within institutional spaces in New Zealand, particularly within ‘white cube’ spaces. For me as curator, online engagement lies at the heart of performance; it eases geographical restrictions and encourages expansive audience participation. *iD2K16* also critiques and celebrates society’s growing reliance upon economic institutions within art, advertising and fashion. It does this through an exploration of individualised capitalist subjectivity, a.k.a the consumer as product. This comes through with the blatant use of self-help jargon in many of the performances and is reiterated within the overall branding of the exhibition, as well as in a series of texts gleaned from lifestyle-centric digital interfaces.<sup>22</sup> The use of the digital platform as a means of collaboration was crucial to bringing these artists and these concepts together. The digital acted as a means for the artists to communicate and find parallels between their practices in developing the curatorial premise of the exhibition. *iD2K16* is founded on fluid exchanges both IRL and URL and throughout this exhibition there is a public Google Doc and a series of public programme events support this approach. A ‘life coaching seminar’ mimicks artist talk, a ‘yes to success panel’ offers a series of external critical responses and an ‘in store makeover’ responds as a performance piece. These events will be recorded and posted as series of a podcasts alongside associated social media. I encourage you to engage with the ideas in this project by documenting your experience with the hashtag #iD2K16 and join the conversation within the *Google Doc*.

Hana Aoake

### iD2K16

Josephine Mead, Clara Chon, Rose Thomas, Motoko Kikkawa, Severine Costa, Alessandra Banal and Hana Aoake

### Exhibition Runs

Wednesday 8 April - Saturday 25 April 2015

### Product Demonstrations

Tuesday 7 April, 5.30pm onwards

### Life Coaching Seminar with Hana Aoake

Wednesday 8 April, 5.30pm onwards

### Yes to Success Panel

with Dr. Natalie Smith, Mya Middleton and Chloe Geoghegan  
Thursday 16 April, 5.30pm onwards

### In Store Makeovers

Thursday 23 April, 5.30pm onwards

### iD2K16 Google Doc

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1p7PZkurGLsWHDw5SuMn84NaOwJvYrbEe7SKz0sIBBr/edit?usp=sharing>

### #iD2K16

21 The film’s sound can easily be described alongside that of the quintessential ‘Twin Peaks’ sound, a mix of grating noise, horror and suspense carries the narrative.

22 For Example: *Goop* (celebrity blog by Gwyneth Paltrow) and *Instagram* (owned by Facebook).