

21ST CENTURY INFORMATION OVERLOAD

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When we think about the vast amount of information available to us at the press of a button, it can be mind-boggling. Scratch that, it *is* mind-boggling, to the point that it can be categorically linked to the rise in the population's decreasing mental health. Yet it is hopelessly and endlessly addictive. A phone screen may have more germs than the average toilet seat, but it also gives you more endorphins than looking at a newborn's face. From advertisements that are tailor made for us to international news stories that break down any illusion that we have control in this world, this is undoubtedly the Age of Information (as well as misinformation). This feeling of both intense dread but also intense distraction, can be seen in these works by Ben Polkinghorne and Scott Kelly. The artists have also coined it "The Overwhelming Age", due to the staggering amount of stimulation, and choice of stimulation at that. Here this has been represented by overlaying of newspaper headlines from April 14th, the words becoming faded, as the brightly coloured buzz of stimulation begins to take over one's senses. Screen printed by hand, one news source at a time, the information from the newspapers becomes a blur; although they are doubtlessly expressing similar sentiments, the repetition of it all becomes incomprehensible.

However the time when this term was initially coined in the 1940s, a period that seems positively prehistoric in technological comparison. Many consider the Primary Information Age to have begun in the mid 1940s as the production of new technologies became considerably cheaper by exporting labour to the global south, where it was easier to pay workers less for doing more. As a result, former luxury items such as television and radios, became more accessible to the general public, and the news cycle began to move all the

more rapidly, as well as innovations in entertainment such as the invention of the soap opera. This was, of course, not the case for everyone everywhere. Freedom of information is not a privilege awarded to all, particularly considering how widespread fascism and totalitarian regimes were during this period. For leaders such as Franco or Stalin, these innovations were simply the means to an end, a useful means to spread propaganda and amplify their own voices while ultimately silencing others, by way of either fear or sheer brutality. However hope was most certainly at the core of this period, with radios being a way to check in with the world, either as a way to entertain and distract or to hear about the progress of one's side (and potentially, family) in World War II. The further boom of technology post-war was certainly not seen as something designed to overwhelm and erode our brains, but give them freedom, so we could do more of the things we wanted, rather than those we had to. Although 2021 may arguably be more George Orwell than Judy Jetson, Polkinghorne and Kelly have not abandoned the optimism this first age was built upon, the electric colours of their work being a vibrant reminder that there is still joy to be found here. This may be an increasingly digital age of information but the artistic duo have not forgotten the printing press, perhaps the beginning of it all, and its most persistent accomplishment: the eye-catching, infuriating, and ever informative newspaper.