

FIRST LOOK



Rhonda Holberton:
>QR CODE< (FOIL),
2014, fragrance in glass
atomizers, 6 by 1½ by
1½ inches each.

Rhonda Holberton

by Ceci Moss

RHONDA HOLBERTON examines military practice in order to consider how technology is used to view, read and track humans. In her earlier works, Holberton, who lives in Oakland, Calif., attempted to collapse the distance between herself and obscure sites of nuclear testing and research. For *As Close As I Can Get* (2012), part of the body of work she produced while pursuing an MFA at Stanford, she rolled soft resin beneath the gates of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). The pliant material cured into long rods imprinted by the pavement and the gates. To make *Displaced Holes* (2012), the artist dug large holes in the earth at LLNL and similar locations and cast them in foam and plaster. This process allowed her to map largely cordoned-off places through their physical impressions, an investigation that led the artist to elaborate other means of accessing the sites and the surveillance tools of the military-industrial complex.

For her 2014 solo exhibition "YOU BECAUSE FREE INSTANTLY NEW" at Pro Arts in Oakland, Holberton

rerouted technologies developed for military purposes into everyday items. Her perfume >QR CODE< (FOIL), 2014, for example, uses CIA-developed methods of detecting genetically unique human scents to distill a fragrance from T-shirts worn by anonymous volunteers, that would cloak the scent of the wearers, making them undetectable to olfactory surveillance. Across a large wall of the gallery, Holberton affixed repetitive black-and-white wallpaper with a pattern that, when printed on streetwear, would help people hide in an urban landscape. In front of this wall stood two identical mannequins wearing unisex clothing made from a fabric complementary to this visually dazzling display, their silhouettes suggesting bodies beneath the camouflage. By integrating dubious techniques of tracking or disguise into mundane items such as clothing and perfume, Holberton signals the subtle ways in which military research filters into civilian life, posing a threat of pervasive military control through biopower. ○

CURRENTLY
ON VIEW
"You Are Something
That the Whole
World Is Doing,"
at the Berkeley Art
Center, Berkeley,
Calif., through
May 3.

CECI MOSS is
assistant curator
of visual arts at
the Yerba Buena
Center for the Arts,
San Francisco. See
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