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Future Obsoletes

It says a lot about our definition of the future that the definition of 'futureless' is "without prospects". To have a future is to have prospects, to have hope and purpose. Despite our continual concerns for the future, global warming, collapsing stock markets, failing pension funds, the future is nevertheless something we describe with optimism. Simply to have a future is fundamentally good.

If this is one half of the human condition, the other half is our concentration on the past. The future we imagine, the past we remember. It is our experience. It forms our identity, opinions, and tastes. Our past builds our future. Our collective memory is an imperative part of our condition as human beings, which allows us to communicate with one another on an emotional level. That is art.

Memory Weavings by Jacki Parry are photocopies of a box that once held tissues. The original belonged to the artist's mother who in her old age took to writing down everything she needed to do and had done as an aid to memory. The cardboard box was one surface she used. It was covered with her handwriting, still familiar to her artist-daughter if less controlled than it used to be, and so, after her death, Jacki Parry kept it to remember her mother. The resulting photocopies have been cut into fine shreds of paper and then painstakingly woven back together. Neither the original box nor the photocopy or even the final woven pieces are precious in any material sense but the careful crafting of the works makes their importance to the artist clear. The box could never mean to us what it means to Parry but there is poignancy in the mundane photocopy so minutely woven. Bits of writing thread through the designs that adhere to the grid of warp and weft and the larger ground plan of the flattened box. The privacy of the subject is maintained by the scrambling of shredded paper, abstract patterns take priority but close inspection hints at their very personal origins.

Craft is often perceived as the antipathy of technology, as a regressive form of making in a technically progressive world. Parry's work subverts the technically efficient photocopy by her cutting and weaving of it. As artists and printmakers we pick and choose our strategies of making to express ourselves from a vast arena of 'past' and 'present' techniques.

Digital technology has increased the speed at which technologies are invented and discarded. In 2028 there will be many more obsolete ways of working. The challenge of future obsoletes will be to access 'ancient' hard drives or use old software once nothing else is compatible, and resurrect impossibly large computers. Some will be lost but I'm confident that many will be maintained or intermittently resurrected by artists who feel the need to maintain a practice they are accustomed to, or by younger artists looking to the past to discover something new (to them).

James Houston graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 2008 with a degree in Graphic Design. His four-minute film, "Big Ideas(Don't Get Any)" is freely available on You Tube and Vimeo, but that is the extent of Houston's use of new media. The film remixes a Radiohead song, Nude, written no later than 1997, using sounds from a dot matrix printer, ZX Spectrum, old hard drives and a scanner. It

relies on the audience's recognition and affection for these obsolete technologies. Houston's film has gained hundreds of responses on the Internet, shot to number three in You Tubes' list of favourites, and is to be shown in Amsterdam and a number of UK film and music festivals. It seems that the appearance of these machines and the sounds they make have a resonance for us far beyond the mere usefulness they once had.

The history of printmaking is the history of many technologies that the rest of the world considers obsolete; once highly efficient forms of replication that artists continue to use for a number of reasons: particular means of making, unique qualities of surface, an 'aura' they have for the artist and spectator because we share and are emotionally bound to our collective memory of them. With each new technology there is born a future obsolete one.