



HOLLY HERNDON

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BY BIANCA STOPPANI

Apparently, the cyber-utopian non-lieu that is the Internet has the power to free both our digital and AFK personas from the hindrance of physical movement, thus insuring an absence of borders and a diffused accessibility. But whereas geographical borders do not exist on the Internet, geopolitical borders still persist and are constantly shifting, depending on the jurisdictions of the providers. Furthermore, the accessibility of the services is subordinated to the users' agreement to donate them their data.

It's in this scenario that Holly Herndon operates, searching the sound of now and pushing her music to critically engage with it. Despite the disquieting prospects on the future offered by surveillance states and accelerated capital, the San Francisco-based composer and performer accelerates instead on the urgency of now solutions—or, to borrow a song title from her forthcoming album *Platform*, of “New Ways to Love.”

Herndon's second LP, co-released on May 10 by 4AD and RVNG Intl., is a ten-track compendium of the musician's research and influences. Involving as many collaborators as design studio Metahaven, composer and drag performer Colin Self, artist Spencer Longo, producer Amnesia Scanner, Berlin Community Radio's ASMR ambassador Claire Tolan, soprano voice Amanda DelBor Barrett and digital-DIY artist Mat Dryhurst, *Platform* is a stimulant for our nervous proprioceptors.

Its first released single, “Chorus,” sounds like a choral transposition of our multi-tasked use of the laptop, processing together excerpts from YouTube videos, Herndon's conversations on Skype and her browsing activity sampled with Dryhurst's “net-concrete” music system. All these scattered voices come together to convey

Holly Herndon (American, b. 1986) is an artist based in San Francisco. Alongside touring the world to perform and exhibit new work, she is a candidate for doctoral study in Computer Music at Stanford University.

Co-released by 4AD and RVNG Intl., Holly Herndon's album *Platform* is out now.

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Photo credits: Stan Maslák

the horizontal experience of life through our devices, where all contents and communications, including the most intimate, are equally mediated; our sense of domesticity is entrusted to our laptops and smartphones; and our home key is the Wi-Fi. Of course, in a post-Wikileaks era, Herndon doesn't overlook having to confront what's behind these familiar glowing screens. Starting with a bouncing ball bass sound that seems to be getting out of hand, “Home” continues with Herndon's voice declaring her awareness of being spied on, and her vulnerability in the (anonymous) face of the NSA's mass surveillance techniques, but in the end she is not *dropping the ball*. In the visuals, elaborated by Metahaven, Herndon's figure is both exposed to a flashing camera and veiled behind a data rain of the leaked NSA's projects.

While her academic background is in experimental music composition, Herndon's nomadic practice is invested in crossing preconceived frontiers: taking Pop music as a “carrier signal,” she uses her laptop as a musical instrument with its own voice, creating inclusive connections between atoms and bits. For the project *Expanding Intimacy* (2014) at the Guggenheim in New York, Herndon staged five pieces in an 8-channel ambisonic environment where she manipulated the sounds to interrogate the audience's ability of being touched.

Through her gestures and her voice(s), Herndon seeks an empathic proximity with her audience, experimenting with the vernacular to challenge dominant power structures. As we all can stand on that *Platform*, our pending task is to devise alternative ways to represent ourselves—not in order to respond to given interfaces, but to design our own. ☞

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HIGHLIGHTS