

# DIGITALISATION

**Culturala**

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## Editorial Note

Dear friend – hello!

Welcome to culturala's digitalisation issue, we're glad to have you here with us.

Digitalisation is a phenomenon that we're all too familiar with, but it is rare that we actually speak about it. So, what is really digitalisation all about? Is it when we perceive things to be from the digital realm? Is it our current obsessions with phones, or the fear connected to anxieties and excitement over algorithms?

In this second issue of culturala, we deep-dive into the topic through the lens of thirteen writers, artists, art historians and poets. The issue is combined with a [public program](#) where you can find all our on- and offline events and publications. This issue is continuously expanding, and there's an upcoming audio version, too! You can access this as well as a continuously updated library and keyword-based access through the web version of the issue.

The web version of the *digitalisation* issue is available through [culturala-digitalisation.webflow.io](http://culturala-digitalisation.webflow.io) with the password digitalisation-of-the-21st-century.

Hope you enjoy!

With love,  
culturala

# IN A WAY EVEN THE RAINBOW IS DIGITAL

*by Akane Kawahara and Maria Kruglyak*

# 1. The Digital Rainbow



*Akane Kawahara, Vision of seeing things invisible (2021). Music by Yunsoo Kim. View [here](#) with the passcode: digitalisation-of-the-21st-century.*

I've known Akane Kawahara's work since I met her after a DJ set in a small Japanese restaurant in Hackney. I was studying Japanese art history at the time and Akane was studying Material Futures, a Master's program at CSM blending design, art and technology. It's a no-brainer that we had loads to talk about, and soon enough we were exchanging skills and knowledge back and forth.

So while I'd been following her work for a while, watching her exploring the impact electricity has on taste and the poetics of the senses, I was surprised when she came back from a residency in Kyoto, Japan and showed me a series of photographs and videos that have since developed

into *Visible Invisible*, *Vision of seeing things invisible* and *Vision of the Invisible*. Simple at first glance, impossibly complex after a closer look. ‘What are they? How did you make that? As in what is it?’ I remember asking her over and over again, struggling to place the works.

Simply put, they’re plastic containers seen through a polarising lens filter. The lens effectively filters out light waves so that the light that falls on the plastic is one-directional. What we see when we look at anything is light bouncing off the surface of the object and into our eyes, so when the unidirectional, filtered light enters our eyes we see things in the plastic that otherwise would have been invisible to us: a vision of things invisible.



*Akane Kawahara, Vision of seeing things invisible, Study in Kyoto #5 (2021).*

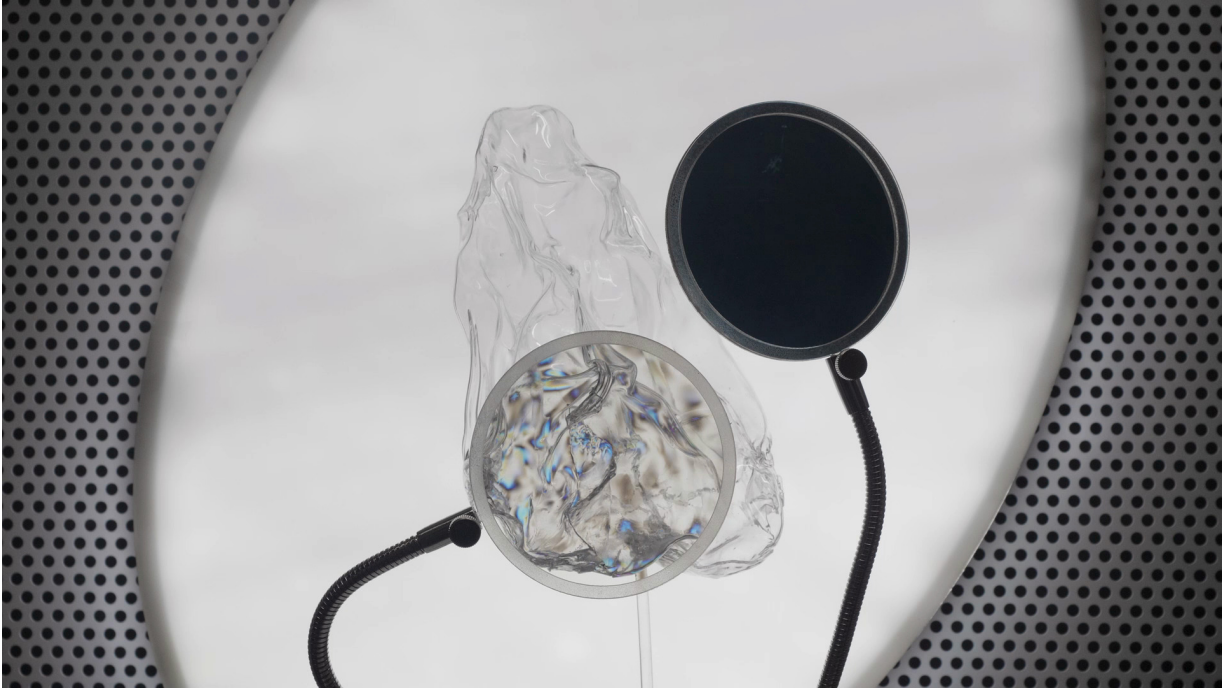
My immediate feeling however, especially when seen on a screen, was that the artworks are digital pieces, rendered colourful through computerised processes. As it turns out, many others that Akane has shown her work to believed the same. Wondering where the feeling came from, I began to dig deeper.

It turned out that the reason for the filter to make visible the rainbow of colours has to do with the manufacturing process of plastic. The more stress the plastic is under, the more it's bent and heated, the more colour we see.

Just like when we see petrol in a puddle reflecting a rainbow of light, the plastic reflects it too. The more stress it's under, the less it is reusable or recyclable as [the material has already taken all the stress it can](#) and breaks upon manufacturing. In fact, how colourful the plastic food containers are under this filter shows that we cannot recycle the plastic into new plastic. The more colour, the worse for the environment.



## 2. Materiality



*Akane Kawahara, Vision of seeing things invisible (2021): exhibition view at AIR 1/2F at the BnA Alter Museum in Kyoto (2021). View [here](#) with the passcode: digitalisation-of-the-21st-century.*

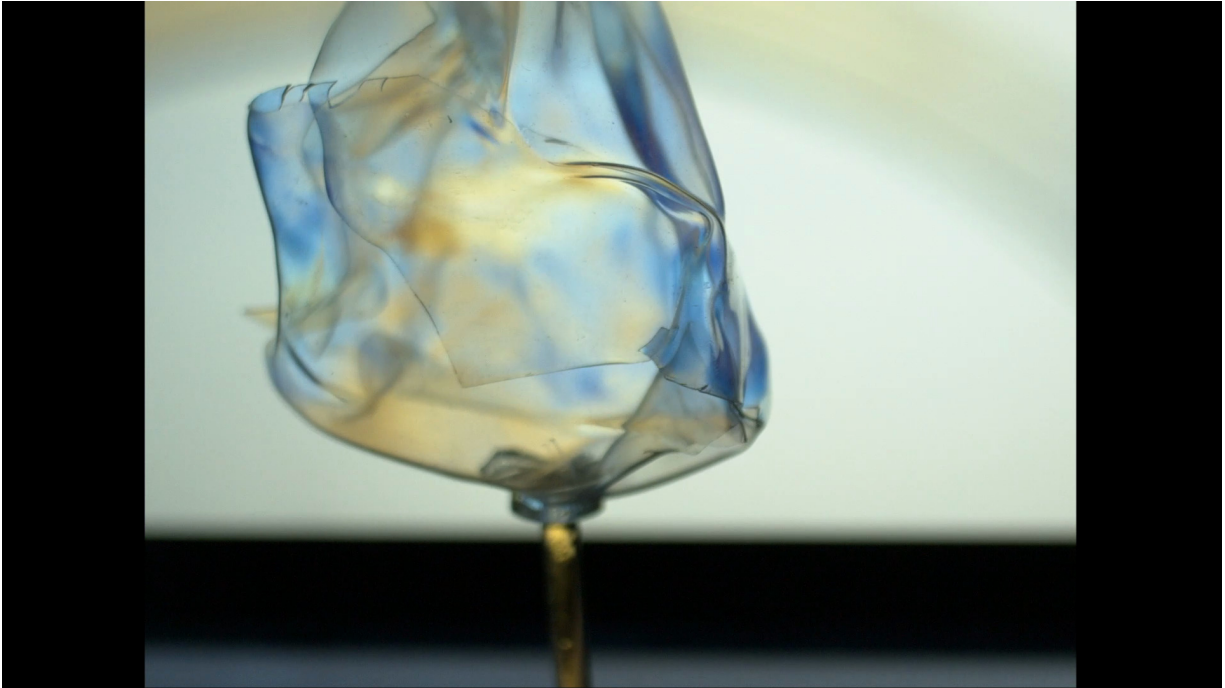
Using this knowledge and wanting to showcase what the materials we use in our day-to-day life really are (most takeaway boxes in Japan, where the work was made, are plastic), Akane created a sculpture out of plastic that she bent over and over, putting the material under increasing stress. She then placed the resulting gemstone-shaped sculpture on a slowly rotating plinth and placed two crossing polarising filters between the audience and the sculpture with the lenses showing us various parts of the sculpture's invisible structure.



*Akane Kawahara, Vision of seeing things invisible, Study in Kyoto #9 (2021).*

This piece rather than being purely digital is a sculptural work, created in our real, analogue life. Perhaps it even speaks more to [the art and technology crossovers](#) that began in the postwar era than the current digitalisation wave of computerisation, although the works are often shown in their digitised form. When I spoke to [computer art historian Catherine Mason \(who is also featured in this issue\)](#) about Akane's work, she began to speak of E.A.T. (Experiments and Art and Technology, an experimental collective established in 1967), Robert Rauschenberg and how artists have always been interested in technology, using any tools they can to get their hands on to get their message across. As our technology today encompasses so much that we consider digital, many artists choose to let their works undergo a digitalisation process that we hardly even think of as separate – it's largely become a part of life.

### 3. Colours

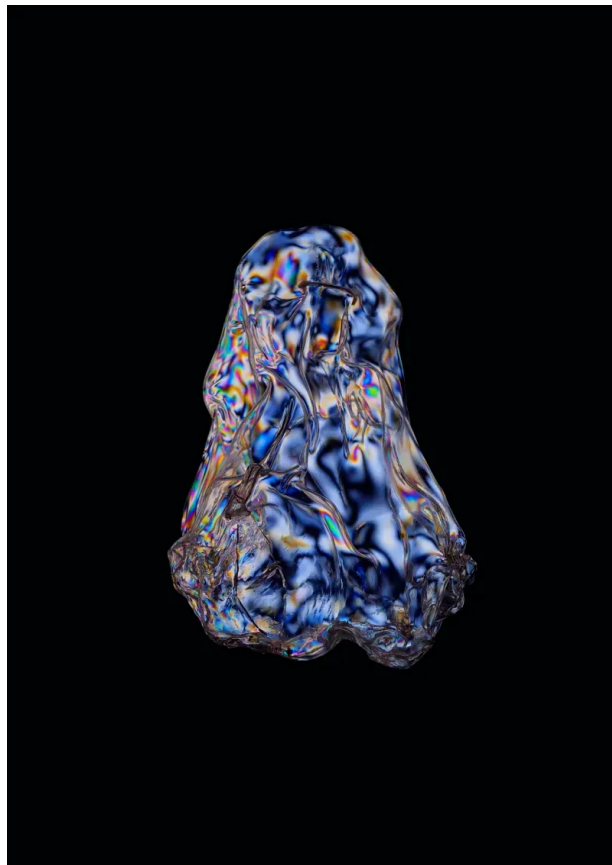


*Akane Kawahara in collaboration with SWAROVSKI, Visible invisible (2019). Shot by Florencia Schneider, edited by Yunsoo Kim, music by Ryo Kyutoku. View [here](#) with the passcode: digitalisation-of-the-21st-century.*

**S**peaking to Akane about what makes the pieces have this strong digital feeling, we realised that the reason was threefold: the digitalisation process placing them within the digital format, their colours and the habits of the audience they're shown to. While the initial work is sculptural, Akane showcases it as photos and videos, often on an iPad or a screen in the exhibition space, and sometimes even in collaboration with the VJ artist SWAROVSKI.

[The colours that appear in the plastic also have an effect on our perception of the pieces as digital.](#) The digital realm has its own colour scale and

dialectics that we're used to: neon lights, neon colours, bright LED-transmittable hues rather than the soft, pastel and earthy tones that we associate with the analogue. The colours of a rainbow, when seen in a photo or a video also seem digital as they appear with the full spectrum of light that is rarely visible in the physical world.



*Akane Kawahara, Vision of seeing things invisible (2021).*

Finally, the digitalisation of our society has a lot to do with this common perception of Akane's *Invisible* series as digital pieces. We're so used to images being altered digitally that it being real and not a Photoshop filter or a video projection on a sculpture is surprising to us. Akane told me about how she exhibited the real sculpture and the video together at AIR 1/2F at the BnA Alter Museum in Kyoto in 2021. The two versions of the work were placed in a way that made people see the digital version in the beginning of the exhibition and encounter the physical first towards the end. 'Everyone was shocked, they couldn't believe it. People would come up to

me and ask, “How did you print it out into physical form?” she laughs. It seems we’re keen to trust the digital reality more than the physical.

From a wider perspective, Akane’s work speaks of a digitalisation of both art and society. It also shows how narrow the border of digitalisation is: as artists working across mediums increasingly use digital tools, as we live closer and closer with digital elements/realities/tools/visions, perhaps we end up in a space where the digital and the analogue coexist. The border of digitalisation is becoming thinner and thinner until even the rainbow, in a way, becomes digital.

Akane Kawahara is an interdisciplinary artist based between Tokyo and London whose work concerns the future of our bodies through sculpture, photography, video and installation. In her current work, she researches sensory perception of the world around us and the way we engage with ephemeral phenomena. Seeing the senses as tools through which we engage with our immediate surroundings, her work highlights how materiality can influence a viewer’s sensations and behaviour. Akane graduated from an MA in Material Futures from Central Saint Martins in 2020, and went on to exhibit as part of the group exhibitions AIR 1/2F at the BnA Alter Museum in Kyoto (2021), Let’s Play with Chaos at the Aram Gallery in London (2022) and in the Hotsheet exhibition at The Department Store, Brixton, London in 2023. You can follow her work on her instagram, [@akane.kwhr](#).

Maria Kruglyak is the founder and editor of culturala. She also works as an art researcher and writer, focusing on themes of contemporary art, art theoretical language, ecology and marginalisation. She wrote the piece on Akane's work after continuous conversations in person and over Zoom, trying to establish the development of her work. More than anything, it was a collaborative process. You can keep in touch with what she's doing through her instagram, [@m.kruglyak](#), or get in touch with her directly at [maria@culturala.org](mailto:maria@culturala.org).

# CREDITS

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