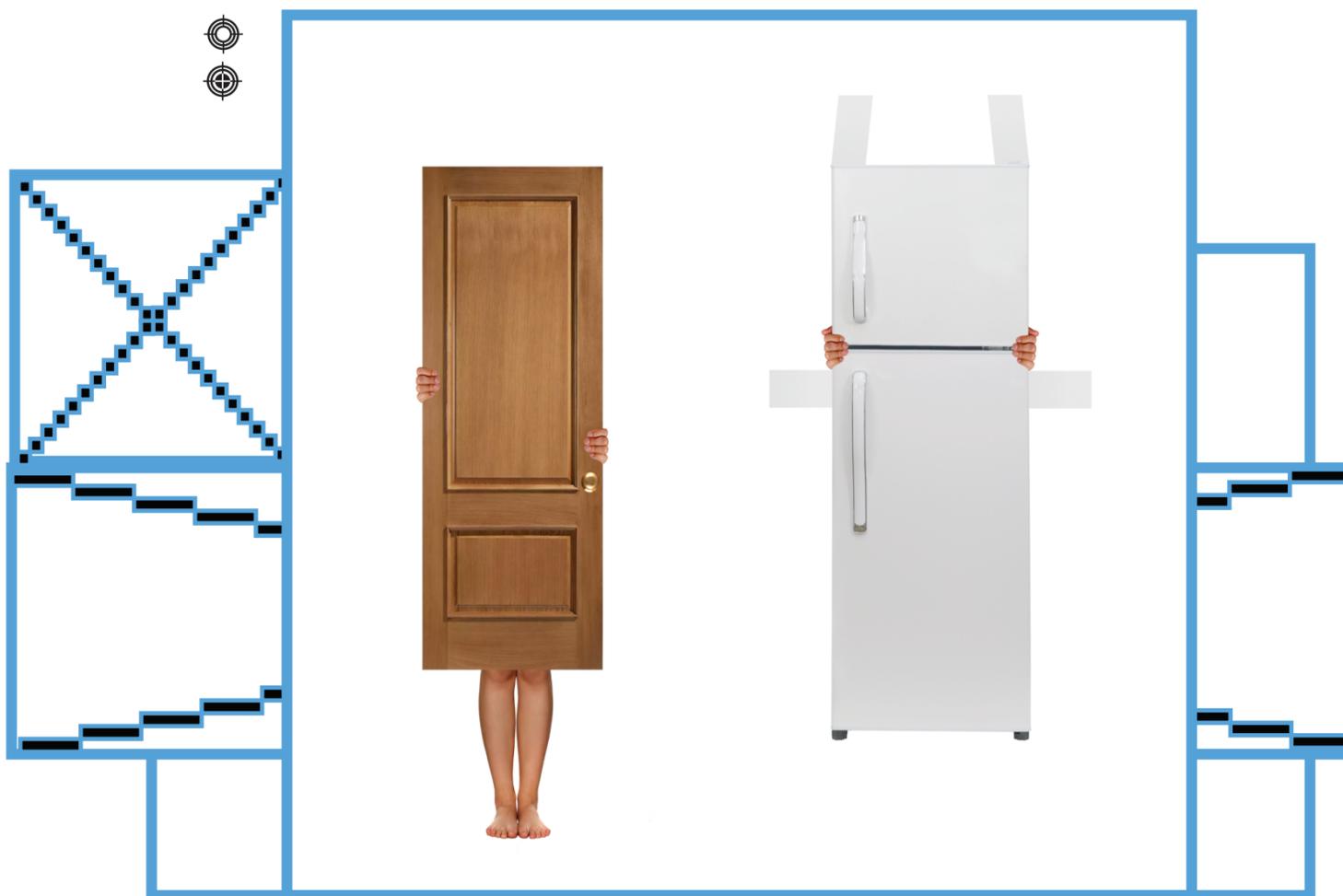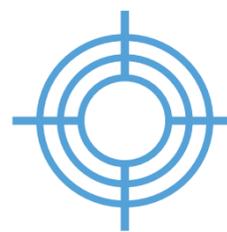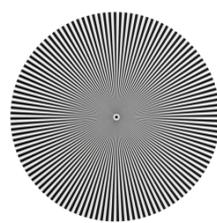**THE PRINT OUT**

RUJUTA RAO

INTERVIEW
Q&A

**Pulp
Society**

Rujuta Rao (b.1989) is a conceptual interdisciplinary artist. Working with sculpture, text, photographs, sound, video and participatory installations, Rao uses fiction to think through cinematographic techniques, photographs (as physical objects and as digital images), programming languages and technological glitches by extending their qualities to the human body, especially to the female body. In doing so, she addresses the fragmenting effects of trauma on the bodies, minds and memories of women. Her work reflects her keen interest in alcoholic spirits and the ways in which they are made, used and imbibed.

Rao earned a BFA in sculpture from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in 2011, and an MFA in interdisciplinary art from Parsons School of Design, New York in 2014. In 2019, she founded RAO, a platform for the non-binary, single edition garments she makes as a part of her art practice. Her works have recently been exhibited at Printed Matter, NYC (2020); Goa Open Arts Festival (2020); Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore (2020); Serendipity Arts Festival, Goa (2019); g39, Cardiff (2018) and more. She lives and works in India and the United States.

What's inside your packet and how do you want people to engage with the contents?

My packet for The Print Out contains 3 folders and a README file. You may begin by reading the document which will walk you through the contents of each folder and how to engage with them.

This packet includes both tactile and digital components. The tactile components can be printed out, drawn over and cut out into objects which you can engage with. You may print these pages as many times as you wish to.

The digital component of this packet can be watched on your computer.
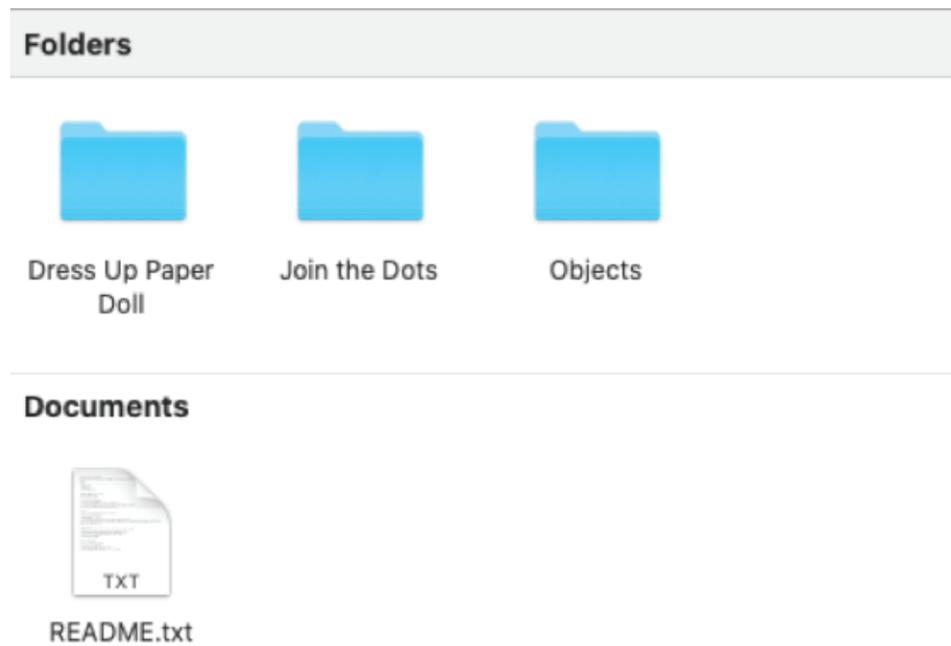
In your previous exhibits, you've been around to mediate the audience's interaction with the objects. How does it feel to relinquish that control?

My exhibitions that you are talking about were a part of the Serendipity Arts Festival 2019 and Goa Open Arts Festival 2020. My presence was a part of these works, primarily because the objects were placed as tools to mediate my interaction with the viewer, rather than me mediating the viewer's interaction with the objects. My attempts at mediation were a part of the performance.

My packet for The Print Out doesn't require me to be present. In fact, the work is designed for the online platform, to be sent as a zip folder with a text file to walk the viewer through the contents of the folder. Hence, my physical presence would be detrimental to the work. In this work, I attempt to introduce the packet through the text file. Here too, this file is subsumed by work and becomes performative.

To me the most exciting part about this work is precisely where I relinquish control. For instance, when the viewers find novel ways of engaging with the work or when the same sheet is printed multiple times causing objects to double or when different printers will print the same sheet differently.

Puzzles, numerical orders and codes seem to be common elements in the work. Can you say a little more about these elements?

The form of the puzzle was a way to juxtapose seemingly disparate ideas on the same plane. The puzzle's familiar form makes engagement easy rather than forced.

I use several elements which reference tools of prophecy - numerical orders being one of them. I also use numbers to talk about sequencing (or the lack of it). I am fascinated by what the Fourier Transform, a mathematical transform, does to digital images. I use numbers as they are used in programming languages. Here, the language isn't used for the process of encoding technology but rather for literary purposes.

My work involves extending the language and characteristics of technology to the human body, especially the female body and to extend human qualities to technology. Here, like a digital image, I talk about the body as encoded. This code, if corrupted, could lead to a glitch in the body.

Much of your work includes everyday objects mutated into absurd forms. How did you explore that within The Print Out?

You're right - I use the familiar as a gateway into the absurd. I try to find a balance between the two. You see this in JoinTheDots_Recipe.png in the instructions for how kitchen objects are to be used and in Dress Up Paper Doll where everyday objects replace garments and symbolize something else altogether. This isn't through a mutation of their form but through an absurdity in how they are used.

There are many references to spirits and mixology in this work. What kind of cocktails have you been experimenting with in lockdown?

I've experienced an unparalleled level of focus during this lockdown which has enabled me to learn new techniques in cocktail making and the chemistry behind them. Apart from the classics, modern classics and their variations, here are some of the the new techniques I've been using and the cocktails I've made with them:

Technique	Ingredients	Cocktail
Fat Washing	Olive oil washed vodka	a) Vodka Martini b) Aubrey 2 by Broken Shaker, LA (with a homemade sichuan pepper tincture)
Emulsifying	Emulsified olive oil and lemon juice with egg white	Minneapolis' Marvel Bar's Oliveto
Pickling	Pickled grapes	Gibson with pickled grapes (instead of pickled onions)
Drinking Vinegar	Raspberry and blueberry	Shrub
Clarification	Clarified a cocktail by adding whole milk and curdling it with lemon juice	Clarified Milk Punch
Smoking	a) Hickory smoked honey syrup and lemon wheels b) Hickory smoked demerara syrup	a) Bee's Knees b) Old Fashioned

I've now learnt to make one of my favourite cocktails, Jim Meehan's Black Flip, which is served at his iconic modern speakeasy PDT (Please Don't Tell) in New York City's East Village. It is made with blackstrap rum, demerara syrup, one raw egg and decar-bonated chocolate stout.

Your attention has recently been your wearable garment and textile work through RAO Studio. How do these different mediums come together in your work?

I see my garments as objects first. After having made a set of garments as an extension of my art practice under the platform RAO, I am now contemplating the question of when an object starts becoming a garment/accessory. The folder in my packet called Dress Up Paper Doll stemmed from this question as well as from the hyper-domestic life Covid-19 has imposed on most of us. The body image (in the context of the female body) is something that I have been preoccupied with and it reflects in my work. In this work I have used the form of the Victorian paper dolls which came with a variety of interchangeable paper garments. Through these dolls, fashion became accessible to those who couldn't afford the garments and they were also used as toys for children. These dolls reflected Victorian sartorial ideals for women. In this work, the garments are replaced by household objects behind which the doll is partially hidden. These objects, like the Victorian paper garments, can be alternated.

What's the role of intimacy in your work?

Intimacy plays a role at several stages in my work. I feel very close to my practice, which is largely solitary and the work is always personal. I see the work as a facilitator of intimacy between me and the viewer. In my last two exhibitions, I encouraged viewers to touch the objects, to move them around and to wear them. My packet for The Print Out is an extension of this. In this case, people aren't walking into a space, but the work is sent to them. My hope is that through active engagement they will make these objects their own and an intimacy will emerge between them and the work. I see this as a collaboration, especially with the Join the Dots sheets. Here, the sequence isn't suggested with numbers but is left up to the viewer and in the process of sequencing a drawing emerges.

How have you coped with the 'flatness' of engaging with the art world via a screen for the past few months. How has this changed/expanded/limited or affected your practice?

I find looking at exhibitions online, those which are made to be experienced in person, quite boring. I partly understand why galleries were quick in turning to online platforms as countries went into lockdown but the flat screen as a viewing platform does not work in favor of most of the works that are being shown online. I would like to see more works on the flat screen which were designed to be viewed on online platforms.

Although we are socially separated, as courses and talks have moved online they have become more accessible than they would've been in person. It wouldn't have been geographically possible to attend them otherwise.

The lockdown for me coincided with my sudden move across continents and the disorientation that came with it. I also experienced a lack/loss of resources to continue making the work I was making. As I have always worked with the materials at hand this hasn't been a problem. I now write, work with movement and use discarded materials that I collect such as packaging materials. I also make art which is digital and which can be shared online, parts of which assume a tactile form after reaching the viewer, such as this packet.

During the lockdown, artist Alejandro Yoshii and I created STUDIO TIME, a virtually shared studio to overcome the isolation of our studio practices. For two hours each week anyone anywhere could join STUDIO TIME, start or join conversations, share their work or simply work in silence in the company of others.