

Phantasmagoria

Audio guide

Joe Moss

**HENRY MOORE
INSTITUTE**

Stop 5.

Hi, my name is Joe Moss. I work with sculpture, video and events. I try to think about the increasing pace and overlap in our everyday encounters with fiction. This might be through making videos and breaking the fourth wall through events where something unexpected happens, or through making objects that talk about themselves, like these cardboard works.

I'm showing a series of laser engravings on cardboard. They are small works, around 30cm by 40cm, and they're framed in extruded aluminium profile.

The engraving is very fine, and through the engraving you can see the corrugation of the cardboard underneath. The cardboard is brown. There's no painting on the cardboard. There's no marking on the cardboard. It is simply just engraved noise.

So the images on the cardboard are collected from lots of digital noise, which have found images, images generated from AI, and they're all composed and processed in Photoshop. So in the details of the work, you can see different textures from different resolutions and file types, as well as occasionally recognised certain images.

I'm interested in how engagement with networks that exchange millions of images simultaneously flatten and complicates culture. It's sort of a collapse of an overarching worldview,

replaced by millions of images and short clips that have different takes on how to have a social culture. And these often disagree. I'm interested not so much in the perspectives themselves, which have long been considered through art, but in the actual frequency and density of these social cultures and how they are presented and distributed. If we zoom out, we might consider this constant buzz of information density to be the new culture, and this has implications on older value systems.

I like to consider these works as the material displaying their own effects on the world. So we consider cardboard to be a detritus like a nothing material or an inanimate object. But if we try to think about all the cardboard in use right now, all the shipments and all the storage is a really active material. And then if we consider all of the important objects that the cardboard hides, all the messages it's sending and all the meaning contained in those cardboard structures, it starts to become quite a fantastical material.

So the idea was to find imagery on the internet, the digital noise that might also seem like detritus, but is influential over us. And to mark the cardboard with this. So in this way, the physical material that distributes those ideas is marked with those ideas. So it's a little bit like a feedback loop, but zoomed way out from production to its effects.

And then the frame is made from the physical material that enables the marking of the cardboard. So it's essentially a physical material that is displaying the noise it creates. And it's in my mind, it's a way of being truthful to the material and its effects in the world.

I'm also a trained mosaicist, which has been my day job over the last five years. So there are obvious things that we can consider, like speed of production and the speed of the circulation of ideas. There's a sort of relationship between

those two things, which I think is quite interesting to consider, which is that in Roman times, in order to build new architecture, they would break apart old buildings and render down previous marble sculptures to make lime, and then to create new floors or new architecture they would assemble these bits of the old building and then use this lime to create finer and finer substrates until they had a level surface on which to make a new floor. So when you walk around Rome, you can see these levels and you have a sort of stratigraphic reading of the city as it's repeatedly built on top of itself. So you have layers of old buildings that make the new.

And in the same way, I think you can consider that that's something that's happening with digital culture, but it's just sped up massively, and it's harder to read because you don't have these easy layers to see as you walk around a city. It's something that we're still trying to work out how to read.

And so I think in my work, I'm often thinking about the relationship between those things. So between the physical and the digital and the way that despite the fact that it's speeding up and seems completely different, it's actually like, it's just a sort of very intense recycling that's going to make new structures that we're sort of yet to truly identify.

The best way to experience the *Time Compression* series is just to look at it for a while. And there are interesting moments that happen with the legibility of the works where if you stand back, you might see something, and if you move up close, you might see something else. You don't necessarily need to recognise any images within it, but that process of trying to read a seemingly inanimate thing is the experience that I want you to have, in like a complex culture, that process of attempting to read something that appears that is not doing something but is actually doing something, that's how I want you to experience it.

This is the end of Stop 5.

This is a transcript of an audio guide produced by Henry Moore Institute for the exhibition *Phantasmagoria*, on display from 15 May to 30 August 2026. For more information visit henry-moore.org/phantasmagoria