Arts+Leisure is excited to announce The System Is Down, an exhibition of new paintings and works on paper by Becky Brown. Grounded in experimental deconstruction and alteration of language, the artist presents an incisive and open-ended interrogation of contemporary communication networks and pathways of feeling, with an eye towards their intersections with morality and commerce, among others. Brown's painterly technique and use of formats with personal, diaristic undertones (a postcard and journal notebook, for example) offer a unique interpretation of digital information structures, and stages the online ecosystem as a site saturated with traces of human dynamics and paradoxes of emotion.

In her work, Brown focuses on individual words and their juxtaposition, rather than longer fragments of text, allowing her binary combinations to suggest their own meaning. These binaries, such as "Pride/Shame","Paranoia/Porn", and "Indictment/Dismay", are often charged with cultural and political allusions, functioning as if contemporary experience and the dialogue around current events was stripped to its fundamental syntax. In Hard Data, sexual innuendo is paired with the concept of data, which itself has diverging connotations given its status as a buzzword in discussions around issues ranging from privacy to election manipulation. As digital networks further embed themselves into our lives, it seems only natural that we will seek to engage them on human terms and conceptualize them as material objects, like the books that Brown uses as a formal device in Hard Data.

In other pieces, Brown approaches the digital realm as a sort of ambivalent, emotionally neutral, and amoral space. Fear Melancholy reduces internet browser pages to slabs of color, with word binaries placed like buttons in their bottom right corners. Contrasts such as "Privacy/Society", "Loyalty/Subversion", and "Independence/Accountability", appear without any indication of a value system, and like pieces of data, they have been transformed into signifiers, impersonal facsimiles of human feeling and interaction. Moreover, by presenting the word pairs as buttons, the piece suggests that the binaries are exclusive choices; one must choose, for example, between cowardice or confidence, privacy or society, the middle ground eliminated by the internet and its dialectical consequences. With its urgency and directness, Collusion also seems to prompt the viewer with a choice, though their grim options are split between "Collusion/Conversation" and "Coordination/Conspiracy".

In Search, multi-colored abstractions of search bars contain words ranging from addiction to laughter and destiny, mirroring the teeming multiplicity and expansiveness of digital networks. Floating in a void, each search bar is compartmentalized, recalling the independence and autonomy of information published to the internet. However, Search also frames the internet as a sort of oracle, a place of refuge and empathy as well as discovery and vicarious existence.
Brown questions the characterization of the internet as a machine-like, objective repository of information, conceptualizing it instead as a supple, dynamic fabric of reflexive interaction between humans and technology, though just as susceptible to seemingly human flaws.

A catalogue will accompany the exhibition with an interview between Becky Brown and Art Historian Cary Levine, and poems by Kristina Martino.

Becky Brown is a Bronx-based artist and writer. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at venues including The Drawing Center, NYC; Dixon Place, NYC; NARS Foundation, Brooklyn, NY; Fort Gondo Complex for the Arts, St. Louis, MO; and Religare Arts Initiative, Delhi, India. She has been an artist-in-residence at MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Jentel, and the Edward F. Albee and Saltonstall Foundations, among others. Her art criticism has been published in Art in America and The Brooklyn Rail. She received a "Bronx Recognizes Its Own" Award from the Bronx Council on the Arts; and earned her MFA from Hunter College and her BA from Brown University.