HEK

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Radical Gaming
Immersion
Simulation Subversion

02.09. – 14.11.2021

House of Electronic Arts

1-2

Theo Triantafyllidis
***Pastoral*, 2019**

Theo Triantafyllidis creates virtual worlds and semi-autonomous systems often characterized by absurd, surreal but also poetic situations. These are part of a larger body of work that includes performances, video games and installations. In *Pastoral* the artist subverts the fantasy genre, creating a transgender ogre, normally non-existent in such stereotypical universes and whom the player is invited to embody. In this small world, there are neither wars nor fights against mythical dragons: the player can simply enjoy a moment's rest in a hay- field. While conventionally the fantasy genre is characterised by a logic of violence and domination, for Triantafyllidis, the subversion of the fantasy universe lies above all in the elimination of the warlike character and the constant conflict between classes and races.

Theo Triantafyllidis (*1988, Athens, GR) lives and works in Los Angeles. Selected exhibitions include: *New Frontier*, Sundance Institute, Los Angeles, (2020); *ANTI-*, Athens Biennale (2018); *Hyper Pavilion*, Venice Biennale (2017); *UCLA Game Art Festival*, UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2015).

3

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley
***Resurrection Land*, 2020**

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley's practice focuses on recording the lives of Black transgender people to create media art works, performances and online video games in which real testimonies and fiction are intertwined. Their work can often be seen as a transgender archive where the experiences of Black trans people are preserved for the future. In *Resurrection Land*, the users are asked to identify themselves and declare their race and gender as well as their allyship position with regards to the Black transgender community. These declarations determine the experience of the game, which takes place in an imaginary city ruled by a Black trans community. If the spectator identifies themself as a member of this community, his, her or their inclusion will be greater than that of a player who identified outside of this community. The game is thus both an experience that allows the Black trans community to live in a virtual space of protected communion and at the same time offers the possibility for players who do not identify with this community to experience exclusion firsthand, and thus suffer what the Black trans community is forced to live through on a daily basis.

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley (*1995, London, GB) lives and works in London. Selected exhibitions include: *She keeps Me Damn Alive*, Arebyte Gallery, London (2021); *Genders. Shaping and Breaking the Binary*, Science Gallery, London (2020); *Amplify*, Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge, GB (2020); *Resurrection Lands*, Les Urbaines, Lausanne (2019).

4

Cassie McQuater
***Black Room*, 2017-ongoing**

Influenced by strategies of net art, Cassie's work approaches the practices of cyberfeminism, investigating online power structures. She creates interactive online works, aiming to subdue sexist tropes in video games and media. McQuater's *Black Room* appropriates female characters from famous video games and invite the player to explore an unconventional dungeon. Not only does her appropriation partly reveal the sexist nature of these female representations, but above all it offers them a second life. The characters who used to appear in supporting roles are brought into focus and given their own story. As the player goes deeper and deeper into the labyrinthine dungeon, he embarks on a surreal journey. Yet, in this journey the goal is not to find a treasure, slay a dragon or conquer a princess, as is traditionally the case in these games, but first and foremost the journey and the encounter with the various characters that populate the world is the purpose of the experience.

Cassie McQuater (*1987, Detroit, US) lives and works in Los Angeles. Recently, her work has been shown and featured as part of the Smithsonian American Art Arcade, with New Museum's *First Look. New Art Online*, at many DIY gallery arcade spaces and at alternative game festivals around the world.

5

Eddo Stern (with Alex Ricket, Wilm Tobin)
***Darkgame 5*, 2021**

Eddo Stern has been particularly interested in analysing and disrupting game mechanics. His work explores less known aspects of the connections between physical existence and electronic simulations. Using a variety of media, he investigates new forms of storytelling and documentation, while examining the way political debates are discussed and represented by various communication channels and the press. The work *Darkgame*, which Stern has constantly updated and modified over the years, challenges the usual interaction interfaces, forcing players to use custom-made equipment created by the artist. Rather than relying on the players' visual and auditory abilities, this device requires a sensation-based interaction. Players are thus forced to confront an environment and face challenges all while being deprived of their most common senses. In addition, the game is also designed for users who have hearing or visual impairments, and therefore consists of an approach that allows for the integration of a part of the population often excluded from commercial products.

Eddo Stern (*1972, Tel Aviv, IL) lives and works in Los Angeles. He is Professor at The Design Media Arts Department, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the Director of the UCLA Game Lab. He has exhibited and screened his work internationally, including The Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Sundance Film Festival; Tate Gallery, Liverpool; The New Museum, New York; Seoul Museum of Art; Ars Electronica, Linz; Museo Reina Sofia, Spain; ZKM, Karlsruhe and Australian Center for the Moving Image, Melbourne.

6

Sahej Rahal
***Antraal*, 2019**

Sahej Rahal creates new mythologies drawing from both folk tales and science fiction. By freely mixing elements of different traditions and cultures, he experiments with different narrative forms. His works take the form of sculptures, paintings, films and multimedia installations. In *Antraal* Rahal has created a world populated by mysterious creatures. The creatures, the environment and even the camera movements are governed by an artificial intelligence that determines their behaviour. The player does not have to fight against these creatures, but is invited to interact with them. Instead of using the usual interaction commands and interfaces, the player uses a microphone, which is the only source to determine the evolution of the game. This non-intuitive game mechanic can be frustrating, as it does not give the usual satisfaction that a traditional virtual character control would allow; however, it offers the opportunity to experiment with new forms of interaction.

Sahej Rahal (*1988, Mumbai, IN) lives and works in Mumbai. His participation in exhibitions include Gwangju Biennale (2021); Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2019); Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow (2017); Kadist, San Francisco (2016).

7-10

Lawrence Lek
***Nøtel*, 2016-ongoing**

The automation of work, in which artificial intelligence takes on increasingly predominant tasks, is a recurring theme in Lawrence Lek's work. Drawing on his experience as an architect, Lek creates virtual versions of existing places to develop fictional and dystopian geo-political contexts. The convoluted relationship between humanity and increasingly autonomous technologies develops into real conflicts in his fictional universes. The protagonist of his video game *Nøtel* is a zero-star hotel owned by the Nøtel Corporation. The fully automated luxury hotel is classified beyond the conventional ranking system, due to the absence of human employees in the hotel. The zero star classification mirrors the human absence that guarantees maximum privacy to all hotel guests. In addition, the hotel is characterized by enhanced preventive security, with protective drones seamlessly integrated into its architecture, and an encrypted network provided for customers, that is ensured by bulletproof servers with zero downtime. In *Nøtel*, Lek portrays an increasingly alienated society that relies more and more on the use of intelligent algorithms.

Lawrence Lek (*1982, Frankfurt a. M., DE) lives and works in London. Selected exhibitions include: *Ghostwriter*, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Prague (2019); *Farsight Freeport,* HeK, Basel (2019); *Nøtel*, Urbane Künste Ruhr, Essen (2019); *AIDOL*, Sadie Coles HQ, London (2019); *2065*, K11, Hong Kong (2018).

11

Debbie Ding
***Void*, 2021**

Debbie Ding is a visual artist who investigates how new technologies can influence the perception and representation of reality. She uses 3D scanning and prototyping to create digital reproductions of contemporary objects, houses and places, which the public can explore like an archaeologist of the present. Singapore's housing policy is the focus of *Void*. The authorities require that certain spaces on the ground floor of buildings be left vacant in order to allow activities that relate to the community life of the neighbourhoods, such as weddings and specific parties. Since opportunities to occupy these spaces are rare, they remain empty most of the time. In this virtual reality environment the player can navigate a small boat and explore the public spaces of Singaporean homes that the artist has digitised with 3D scanning. The title of the work refers to the emptiness of spaces devoid of life and activity, but also to the emptiness that often appears in virtual spaces, especially in those places where the player is not usually invited to go and which have been left out by the programmers. These visual glitches have always fascinated the artist, and have become metaphors for imbalances that also exist in real life.

Debbie Ding (*1984, Singapore, SG) lives and works in Singapore. She is a recipient of the National Arts Council Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate), and a Master in Design Interactions from the Royal College of Art, London. She has had exhibitions at Singapore Art Museum (2021); Galerie Steph, Singapore (2013); and The Substation Gallery, Singapore (2010).

12-18

Nicole Ruggiero, Daniel Sabio, Dylan Banks
***How the Internet Changed My Life*, 2021**

Nicole Ruggiero creates digital artworks, animations and interactive experiences in augmented and virtual reality, exploring topics related to online culture. Her work particularly focuses on how digital information technologies have changed people's social and emotional behaviours. Her work *How the Internet Changed My Life* tells stories about famous internet personalities. Bloggers, youtubers and influencers are portrayed by the artist by combining elements of reality and fiction. It is a reflection on the evolution of our behaviour, increasingly influenced by online interactions and identities created to meet the expectations of the community. At the same time, Ruggiero's work offers models of non-conforming identities, and of famous personalities who have been able to assert their personalities and alternative lifestyles precisely because of the possibility offered by social media to promote themselves and establish their communities.

Nicole Ruggiero (*1991, New York, US) lives and works in New York City. Selected exhibitions include: *Journey Through a Body*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2021); *Cyberfest II*, Stieglitz State Academy, St. Petersburg (2018); *Virtual Insanity*, Kunsthalle Mainz (2018); *Virtual Normality*, Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig (2018); *Slide to Expose*, Babycastles, New York (2017); Internet Age Media Festival, Barcelona (2017); *Wavelength III. Rhapsody in Lines*, Times Art Museum, Beijing (2017).

19-21

Lu Yang
***The Great Adventure of Material World*, 2019**
***Material World Knight*, 2018**

Lu Yang has created works filled with cultural, philosophical and social references, accompanied by reflections on religion, technology, sexuality and gender identity. Lu creates his fictional universes taking inspiration from subcultures such as animated films, science fiction and video games, developing his works in 3D animation, immersive installations, performance, virtual reality and computer programming. Lu's video game, *The Great Adventure of Material World* invites the player to evolve through various levels, in an itinerary that is as much a metaphysical reflection on themes related to identity, existence and destiny while developing a critical commentary on the now global capitalist ideology that exaggerates individualism and self-assertion through material possession.

Lu Yang (*1984, Shanghai, CN) lives and works in Shanghai. Selected exhibitions include: Asia Society Triennial, New York (2021); Cc Foundation, Shanghai (2019); Wacoal Art Centre, Aoyama, Tokyo (2018); Athens Biennale (2018); M Woods Art Museum, Beijing (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland (2017); Shanghai Biennial (2018 /2012); Liverpool Biennial (2016); Chinese Pavilion of the 56th Venice Biennale (2015); Fukuoka Museum of Asian Art (2011).

22

Sara Culmann
***Skolkovo. The Game*, 2016-2020**

In her multimedia works Sara Culmann reflects on themes pertaining to the cult of progress, technology and the monopoly of information. Developing speculative and ironic narratives, she explores the social and cultural transformations of the present under the influence of economics and politics. Her work *Skolkovo. The Game*, which lies between reality and fiction, is a commentary on the relationship between techno-capitalism and politics that goes beyond the specific reality of the Moscow quarter. Culmann has recreated a part of the Skolkovo Innovation Centre district in Moscow, the technological research centre developed over the last decade, immersing the player in a post-apocalyptic environment in which information elements such as posters, objects and audio files are scattered, revealing a context of corruption and financial speculation associated with the district. Players are invited to explore every corner of this abandoned neighbourhood and gather all the information they can to uncover the secret history of the place.

Sara Culmann (*1981, Kirovsk, RU) lives and works in Moscow and Amsterdam. Selected exhibitions include: *Semantic Noise*, De School, Amsterdam (2019); *IAM*, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2018); *Citizens-five*, International Contemporary Art Fair, Athens (2017); *Experience of Inhuman Hospitality*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art (2017).

23

Miyö Van Stenis
***Eroticissima*, 2021**

The video games of Miyö Van Stenis explore themes linked to biopolitics, patriarchy and the cult of violence. She is particularly interested in the limits of human-machine interaction while exploiting the immersive environments of first-person games and the narrative possibilities they offer. Having dealt with issues of violence, she wanted to create a more playful and sensual work for this exhibition. Her new work E*roticissima*, is an attempt to create a protected space for erotic encounters in virtual worlds, in order to explore different sexual orientations and practices. While it is true that many erotic games already exist, these are often single-player experiences and primarily targeted at a male clientele. Van Stenis has created for this exhibition a multi-player erotic game in virtual reality, which is still a novelty, with the intention of subverting the usual stereotypes. The game is presented in the exhibition in an installation reminiscent of rooms for pleasure games, with erotic toys modified by the artist.

Miyö Van Stenis (1989, Caracas, VE) lives and works in Paris. She is a founding member of the activist group *Dismantling the Simulation*. Selected exhibitions include: *Who Knows What Happened Here?*, Placement Produit, Paris (2019); *República Colapsada Vol. 2*, Babycastles, New York (2017), *GIF Fest 3000*, The Wrong Biennale, Vancouver (2017); *Flaneterie*, Noname Gallery, Hangzhou (2015); *Internet Lovers*, Contemporary Museum of Caracas (2013); *ACNLRYS Facebook Party #2*, Contemporary Art Museum of Colombia, Bogota (2013).

24-25

Mikhail Maksimov
***The Tool*, 2020**
***Sanatorium Anthropocene Retreat*, 2020**

Mikhail Maksimov uses video game programming techniques to put philosophical theories, religious beliefs or popular culture phenomena to the test. He uses the term 'transmedia

storytelling' to describe his interactive work, a form of storytelling that unfolds across multiple media formats. A seemingly absurd and nonsensical game *The Tool,* allows players to match very different objects, such as tools, animals, plants, planets and environmental phenomena. The combinations of objects can then be named as desired and finally saved in the programme. Players can finally engage in the online exchange of their object associations, thereby allowing them to formulate and share abstract thoughts. Evolution is instead the theme of Maksimov's sci-fi game *Sanatorium Anthropocene Retreat*. Set in a reconstruction of the Russian pavilion in the gardens of the Venice Biennale, the player embodies a non-human agent with the goal of moving up the evolutionary chain from a virus to a human being and eventually to an artificial intelligence. The nihilistic irony of the work is revealed in its destructive ending, as the culmination of evolution, in this dystopian game, seems to be to acquire devastating power. The robot that consists of the last stage of evolution is in fact a weapon of mass destruction capable of obliterating other existing forms in the surrounding environment.

Mikhail Maksimov (*1974, Moscow, RU) lives and work in Moscow. Selected exhibitions include: 17th Venice Architecture Biennale (2020); Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (2020); 71th Locarno Festival (2018); 14th Kansk Video Festival (2015); 36th Moscow International Film Festival (2014); Manifesta 10, St. Petersburg (2014); *Burning News*, Hayward Gallery, London (2014); Moscow Modern Art Biennale (2009 / 2011 / 2013).

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Leo Castañeda
***Levels and Bosses*, 2017-2021**

Leo Castañeda produces works that merge analogue and digital elements, combining paintings, sculptures, video games and virtual reality. He investigates the mythologies and power structures that govern social systems. For ten years he has been developing the series *Levels and Bosses*. In his eponymous game, Castañeda reflects in particular on the concept of player vs. environment which is common to the vast majority of commercial video games, where the player is constantly opposed to programmed forces governed by non-player characters such as monsters and so-called bosses. In this game the environment assumes a preponderant aspect and forces the player to confront the interface and game mechanics in order to evolve in a hostile context.

Leo Castañeda (*1988, Cali, CO) lives and works in Miami. Leo Castañeda is currently teaching 3D animation at New World School of the Arts, Miami. Selected exhibitions include: *Work from Home*, The Bass Contemporary Art Museum, Miami (2020); *Art of Illumination*, Wolfsonian Museum, Miami (2019); *Let There Be Light*, Espacio Art Nexus, Bogota (2017); *Visiones. Latinx Videogame Artists*, Indie Grits Festival, Digital Museum of Digital Art, Columbia/SC (2017); *All About Art*, Frost Art Museum, Miami (2012).

27

Keiken x obso1337
***Wisdoms for Love 3.0*, 2021**

The Keiken collective - whose name derives from the Japanese word experience - has developed a fantastic universe with its Metaverse series, with the aim of exploring alternative modes of existence. Their works are often characterised by the constitution of speculative universes that extend into virtual and real spaces, such as videos, computer-generated images, game software, installations and performances, which is precisely the characteristic of a metaverse, the sum of several coherently organised virtual and physical spaces. Their latest online video game *Wisdoms for Love 3.0* allows the viewer to embark on an initiatory journey to come into contact with hybrid entities and is asked to make ethical choices that determine his, her or their fate in the virtual universe. Furthermore, the game offers the possibility of obtaining digital works, called wisdom tokens, in the form of archetypes of alternative existential models. These tokens are representations of the objects and characters that the players encounter during their journey through the game and which give them access to further levels.

Keiken are a collaborative practice, co-founded by artists Tanya Cruz, Hana Omori and Isabel Ramos in 2015, based between London and Berlin. Selected exhibitions include: *How will we live together?*, Russian Federation Pavilion, 17th Venice Architecture Biennale (2021); *The Time Complex*, Yerevan Biennial, (2021); *Augmented Empathy*, FACT, Liverpool (2020); Mira Festival, IDEAL, Barcelona (2020); *Sessions. Block Universe*, International Performance Art Festival, London (2020); *The Eternal Network*, Transmediale, Berlin (2020); *Image Behaviour,* Institute for Contemporary Art, London (2019).

28-29

Jacolby Satterwhite
***We are in Hell when We Hurt Each Other*, 2020**

Jacolby Satterwhite, creates immersive universes in virtual reality, using the technique of motion capture and software associated with video game production such as Maya, an application for 3D visual effects. His universes, as in the case of the work *We are in Hell when We Hurt Each Other*, are populated by hybrid characters that confront the spectator with overtly sexual and eroticised images of predominantly queer and homosexual bodies. Satterwhite draws on plural references spanning queer theory, pop culture, music and the language of video games to invite viewers to experience inclusion, tolerance and respect first-hand.

Jacolby Satterwhite (*1986, Columbia/SC, US) lives and works in Brooklyn. Selected exhibitions include: *Room for Living*, Fabric Workshop & Museum, Philadelphia (2019); *Is This Tomorrow?*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2019); *New Order. Art and Technology on the Twenty-First Century*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2019); *Being Modern. MoMA in Paris*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2018).

Radical Gaming
Immersion Simulation Subversion

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Leo Castañeda, Sara Culmann, Debbie Ding, Keiken, Lawrence Lek, Lu Yang, Mikhail Maksimov, Cassie McQuater, Sahej Rahal, Nicole Ruggiero, Jacolby Satterwhite, Eddo Stern, Theo Triantafyllidis, Miyö Van Stenis

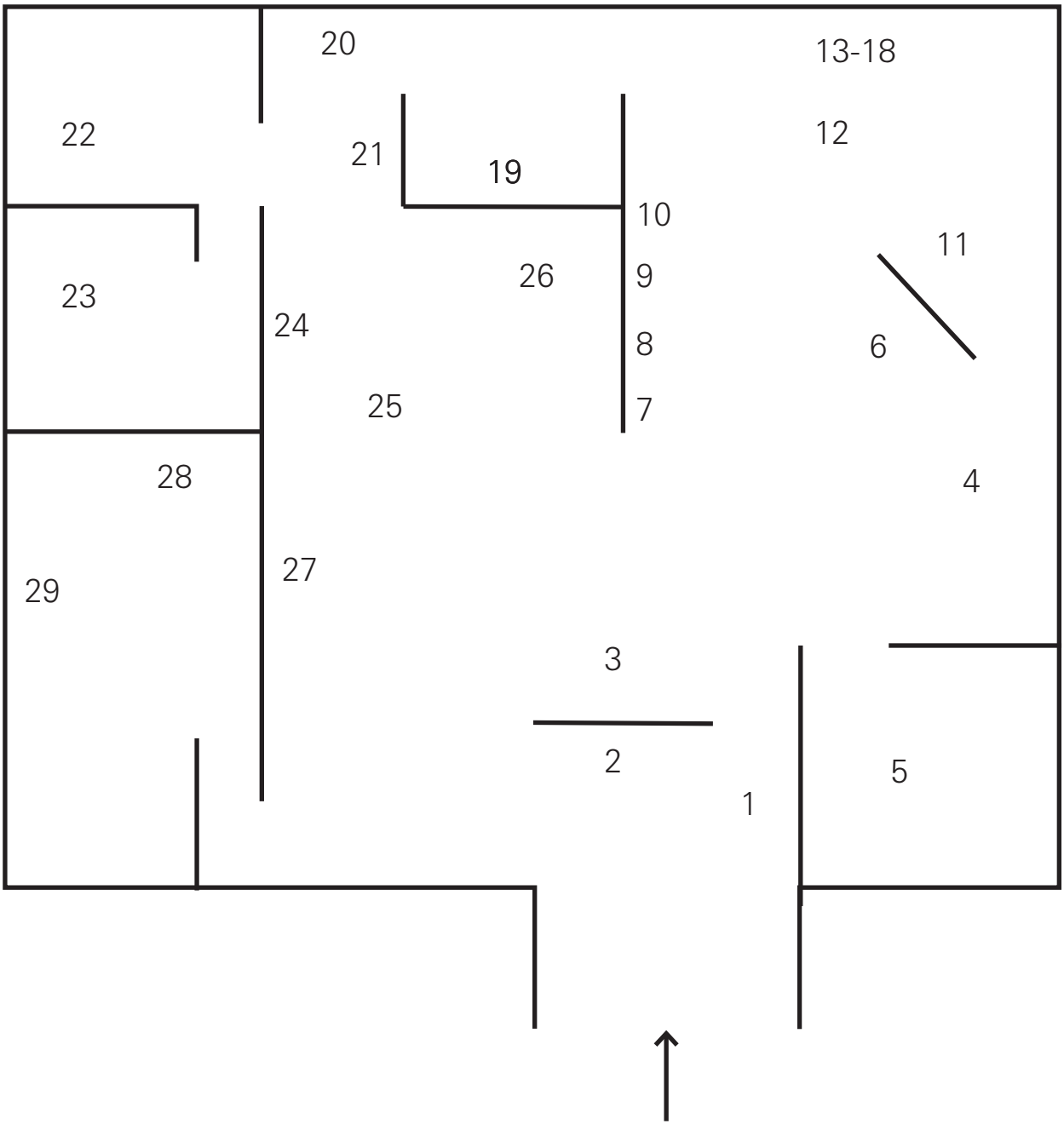
The international group exhibition *Radical Gaming* presents a selection of artists who investigate the structures, technologies and aesthetics of a global gaming industry. Their works are characterised by a particularly unconventional approach to employing the immersion and interaction inherent to video games, whose common narratives and stereotypes they subversively undermine.

This new generation of artists use contemporary game programming technologies to create virtual and augmented reality experiences, immersive environments, interactive stories and multimedia installations. By appropriating the medium for their artistic practice, they create alternative perspectives on identity construction, gender issues and social change. Their refusal to abide by the commercial and recreational logic of video games, sets the scene for their progressive, uncompromising, and thought-provoking works.

While all the international artists participating in the exhibition *Radical Gaming* have today's global digital culture in common, they represent a striking variety of cultural backgrounds. Many voices still consider gaming to be a purely recreational and escapist activity. However, the exhibition bears witness to the existence of a gaming production that thwarts this prejudice, as its artists counter both traditional narratives and aesthetic forms by inviting us to immerse ourselves in unusual, provocative and always compelling experiences.

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication of a comprehensive catalogue that documents the works on view and features current scientific contributions. An extensive programme of events and educational activities is also planned.

Curator: Boris Magrini



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HEK (Haus der Elektronischen Künste)
Freilager-Platz 9, 4142 Münchenstein / Basel, CH

hek.ch