

Universal Objects

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The entrance into Tanja Vujinović's artworld represents a magical, overwhelming, intriguing and, above all, an inspirational experience. The new media artist Tanja Vujinović represents the selection of video works created in the computer game engine, digital prints and ambient installations within her exhibition Universal Objects on show in the Lucida gallery space. The exhibition consists of five art entities under four media: digital prints *Omen* and *Observers 2*, video works *Legacy 1&2* and *Formations 4&5* as well as the interactive video work *Still Life 2* and objects within spatial installation *Still Life: Warehouse*; the works are linked by the presence of "universal objects" after which the series they belong to, as well as the exhibition itself, was named. What, in fact, are "universal objects"? The term "object" implies all forms that appear in a virtual environment, whether they are anthropomorphic (avatars), zoomorphic or subject matter; these objects can be found in digital databases that are accessible to everyone, they can be transformed, manipulated, and therefore, are "universal" by their nature.

Tanja Vujinović's artworks bring us into new, virtual environments, situations and intriguing, indicative-narrative and non-narrative "events." The **Omen** trilogy is represented by prints from two different segments of this series: on the black background, monumental, uniformly reduced avatars' bodies resembling puppets above which is the fairy-tale floral world of almost fluorescent, vibrant colours stand out, while the space between avatars and plants is filled with a thick web of fine roots; the second segment is represented by four digital prints of monochrome, gray colour, which depict compositions that resemble science-fiction landscapes and hyperrealistic human figures (sometimes placed upside down) and abstract compositions of geometricized surfaces of gray matter. For *Omen* prints, the author says they represent "hermetic digital maps filled with landscapes from segments of digital noise, digital dust and objects." Although self-contained, the compositions displayed on prints are removed from the wider context, so that the indications of symbolism and possible narrative elements seem intriguing at first, but at the same time they open up space for a whole range of possible interpretations and emotional reactions.

In the **Observers** series prints, anthropomorphic avatars are placed in the virtual gallery (museum) environment; they observe works of art (paintings and sculptures) portraying these same avatars caught at the moment of metamorphosis - formation, disassembly, or change in shape. The bright background accentuates the vivid colours of objects. Humanoid objects - avatars are both subjects and objects of the composition that displays the "picture within the picture". These relationships emphasize new areas of contemplation and understanding of the diversity of relations in the virtual space, as well as issues related to the position and role of artwork in the digital world.

In her video works titled **Formations**, Tanja Vujinović presents eight masked avatars of both sexes in different virtual environments. The artist plays with the form of mask and the concept of masking - a mask can be a surgical one, but also a turtleneck put over the nose; it can be a painted avatar's body and face, and sometimes it is represented by a uniform or an unexpected garment. The mask conceals the avatars' true nature but also points to the state of their consciousness. The avatars move around the virtual scene in a strange, at first glance somewhat disoriented way, being aware that they are followed by the gazes of other participants in the "event"; one of the avatars starts to play a "game" - a series of ritual movements that all other avatars successively begin to imitate. When this circle of choreographed, ritual behaviour ends, the "game" is interrupted by one of the avatars returning to the state of the previous behaviour, while the other avatars follow it again. These sets of autonomous and group behaviours rotate endlessly. The avatars' movements maintain a subtle balance between the state of rest and movement. Tanja Vujinović says about the Formations video works: "The avatars cohabitate in the group, while they are constantly regulated by the views of other bots, which we can understand as a *Look*, a regulatory instrument about which J.P. Sartre wrote. Like in the Noh theater, the slow rhythm, the "masks" that suggest the states of consciousness, the accentuated gestures, the movements inspired by Zen priests movements as well as the movements derived from martial arts, create an infinite non-narrative that embodies the repressive forces of technological control, and the transfer of consciousness in the digital domain ". Tanja Vujinović accents the sociological context of her work - a ritual game opens the question of belonging to the group, the psychological phenomenon of imitating others so that the individual will be accepted as part of the group unit. Speaking about the significance of the game ritual in her work, Tanja Vujinović refers to the philosopher Vilém Flusser, who often emphasised the importance of the game and celebrations as a way of overcoming the "thrownness" into the life.

In her video works **Legacy 1 & 2**, the artist presents anthropomorphic avatars of elemental forms in a virtual dark-colour environment featuring reproductions of famous artworks by three eminent 20th century artists - Kazimir Malevich's "Black Circle" and "Black Square", Yves Klein's blue balloons (as a reminder of the act of releasing 1001 blue balloons in Paris in 1957, also repeated fifty years later during the closing of his retrospective exhibition in the centre George Pompidou) and Piero Manzoni's "Artist's Shit". The avatars feature a reduced outer appearance, although some parts of individual avatars are shown in extreme detail (freckles on the back), partly deconstructed anatomical forms (eye, nasal and mouth cavity). They stand in groups of three in front of the virtual settings of the artwork that includes the aforementioned artists' quoted artworks and the installation of universal objects that includes fire and smoke. In the background, we can hear the sound of rain and thunder. Avatars simulate awareness of the environment; they move slowly, ritually, they enter each other's bodies and turn their heads observing the world around them, as generated forms that change and evolve. The identical and simultaneous avatars' movements are repeated as in a video loop, while the "camera" enters their bodies, revealing the structure of these anthropomorphic virtual objects. The quoted artworks once openly confronted the tradition, as well as raised concerns of the ephemerality of artistic work and the finding of new ways of its preservation and reproduction. Tanja Vujinović says that "Legacy

1 & 2 raise questions of the materiality of the computer games media as a medium for the creation of contemporary art, its "intangible" digital nature, ease of reproduction and, at the same time, the extremely large possibilities for file loss."

Video works Legacy 1 & 2 reflect a specific moment in the art history: the moment of the impetus of artistic considerations about the very nature of the artwork - its ephemerality, immateriality, conservation and reproduction. At the conceptual level, Tanja Vujinović draws a parallel between these three exceptional 20th century artists' works and the importance of new media for the future art development.

Still Life 2, an interactive 3D work, was created with the help of computer game engine technology. Tanja Vujinović creates still life virtual settings from digital "universal" objects and virtual reproductions of images, prints, drawings and prints from her artwork or the artwork especially made for this occasion. In the frames on the walls of some of the rooms, on the floor or the objects' bodies, there are fragments of the generic text "Lorem ipsum", originally created by partial altering the wording of Cicero's *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* text and nowadays generated by random scrambling of various Latin texts. The artist adds a temporal dimension to the composition and allows the visitor an interactive approach - the visitor can move independently through this sophisticated virtual interior and explore from all angles the rooms where the settings of still lifes are placed. For her work, the artist says that she "refers to one of the traditional themes of classical painting, the setting of a still life, as a means of contemplation". By combining a classic theme with the practice of new media, the artist opens an "in-between space" that points to new digital perspectives of perception of art.

Spatial installation **Still Life: the Warehouse** is a kind of memorial ambient structure, representing homage to the previous period of Tanja Vujinović's artistic practice which has been ongoing for twenty years. A set of various shaped bottles containing fragments of black coloured cloth (*black cloth*), fragments of the "Lorem ipsum" text, and so-called "placeholders" make up the elements of this interesting composition, presenting carefully selected quotes of her artwork's details. The composition *Still Life: the Warehouse* can as well be seen as a segment of the universal objects library, because the artist also treats the details of her earlier works as a kind of universal objects within her recent production.

Tanja Vujinović uses computer game technology to explore the position and reach of art in the digital age. In all of her artworks, representations of the avatars indicate the presence of consciousness within the digital world. The artist does not create the illusion of space, but through exploring various possibilities of noise poetics which segments she transposes into the domain of virtual, she creates new visual and sound forms, environments and situations that have their anchorage in the noise. Vujinović does not commence from the established forms of digital communication but, using a different angle of perspective, she uses glitches and remains of the information in the code of the computer game programmes to which she applies the new set of algorithms establishing new, unexpected forms of relations within the infinity of her artwork. Tanja Vujinović says that the beauty of the objects conceals

deformed, broken 3D vectors and random glitches on which their forms are based and which originate from the digital noise that she treats as a substance, but also as an organisational principle.

Tanja Vujinović modifies universal objects and incorporates them into non-narrative events and situations. In her artworks, the form is constantly being deconstructed and re-established, at the same time remaining attached to its non-narrative context. Objects are not phenomena for themselves; they are the inexhaustible source of different concerns regarding their function and manipulation. All Tanja Vujinović's artworks contain the characteristics of traditional art forms, but the artist keeps overcoming them by deconstructing and reconfiguring them, thus creating 3D virtual environments that exist in real time, last endlessly and suggest the state of existence governed by assigned algorithms.

With her exhibition "Universal Objects" in the Lucida Gallery, Tanja Vujinović creates a space of virtual and realistic ambiences - she commences from virtual environments that she incorporates into the real space of the gallery and, in that way, gives meaning to a new, self-sufficient artistic whole. Virtual works represent a kind of "port hole", the connection between the real and the virtual world. By merging real and virtual, Tanja Vujinović indicates that virtuality is nothing but an extension of reality, its integral part. "The attractiveness of new technologies, the dependence on them, the proximity that is established with them are just some of the current topics related to a close and complex connection that is created over time between people and their devices," says the artist.

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