

Banz & Bowinkel – BIOS

27 October – 22 December 2017

Roehrs & Boetsch is pleased to present the duo Banz & Bowinkel's solo exhibition 'BIOS' at our gallery.

'BIOS' stands for Basic Input/Output System, which is the first program a computer's microprocessor uses to get the computer system started after turning it on. It is also the Greek word for 'life'. In the four work groups shown in this exhibition, Banz & Bowinkel explore the relationship between the virtual and the real and its connection to the viewer.

The computer is thereby used as a tool to create a virtual reality and give life to an idea. This counterworld is controlled and ordered entirely by the computer, which in turn is completely dependent on humans to turn it on to come to life. Originally, we invented the computer to calculate and master the world. Ironically, however, Banz & Bowinkel use this very tool to build a virtual reality that does not need to answer to the rules of the physical world. And once again, we are unable quite to grasp this new reality.

The first part of the exhibition is made up of works from the series 'Substance'. At first glance, these prints look like digital renderings of drip paintings. And indeed, the visualisation of movement lies at the core of these works. The artists use recorded movements of a body performance session in the studio and translate this into an avatar, which then paints the movements as liquids in a virtual space.

The results are subsequently further rendered with colours and texture. Banz & Bowinkel then add the second layer consisting of an animated augmented reality sculpture, which can be seen with the aid of their especially developed application. The viewer is therefore confronted with the complexity of vision, as one movement is made easily visible but fixed in a print while the part that is actually moving can only be accessed with a device. At the same time, this very device calls attention to the connection between the viewer and the artwork, with the tablet serving as the physical bridge.

Furthermore, in a very abstract way, the artists call attention to the completely arbitrary nature of data representation. Because the only reason why the 'Substance' works keep their connection to the original representation of mo-

vement is the artists' choice to give this data the attributes of fluids. Banz & Bowinkel could have chosen any other characteristics. This therefore reveals how data can be used and interpreted at will to form any shape and serve any purpose. Given the predominance of companies like Google or Facebook with regard to data representation and manipulation, this becomes a very disquieting notion.

The second part of the exhibition is dominated by the large sculptural, interactive, virtual reality installation work 'Mercury'. Placed prominently in a frame is the open data processor, with its impressive computer cooling system running the simulation. By means of a head-mounted-display and controller, the viewer is invited to explore an archipelago of interconnected islands in the virtual reality. As the viewer travels through the designed spaces they encounter a number of avatar, a sculpture of Mercury, the Roman god of trade and communication, and a video installation in a building reminiscent of the Pantheon in Rome. This virtual space does not always adhere to the laws of physics and thus illustrates how Banz & Bowinkel do not attempt to imitate the real world. Rather, it is its counterpart, organized by the rules of the computer, which nonetheless feels real to the viewer. Through the visual experience, the deception of the eye, the virtual reality tricks the brain into believing the simulation, leading to complete immersion. The viewer therefore fuses with the computer, which acts as a multifunctional prosthesis serving human advancement.

The third part of the exhibition displays the music video 'Rushing into Water' – a collaboration between Banz & Bowinkel and DJ Detlef Weinrich, also known as Toulouse Low Trax – and features three avatars consisting of a silhouette clouded in smoke, an archaic priest in a grass skirt and a technoid female figure. It also redisplay the sculpture of Mercury, who is constantly changing materials, falling apart and reassembling. Toulouse Low Trax's song is based on Ken McMullen's 1983 film 'Ghost Dance' and the idea that ghosts formerly inhabiting nature now reside in human technologies. As we interact with these technologies we become ghosts ourselves and create ghosts, thus describing contemporary human communication and new possibilities like artificial intelligence. The avatars in 'Rushing into Water' are therefore the ghosts of the three artists in an endless stream of communication: data transfer through micro chips, memory sticks and cell phones.

The last part of the exhibition is made up of a video showing the Mercury statue falling to pieces and reassembling, and four large video still prints of the sculpture in different textures like marble, plaster and chrome. In this installation the symbolic significance of Mercury is very strong, characterized by constant reshaping. As we make increasing use of technologies, contemporary human communication is similarly detached from a physical form, as language is

broken down into binary code and is reassembled. But the statue of Mercury in its fluctuant state not only reminds us of this constant reconfiguration in contemporary communication, but also reflects the reshaping of society itself.

Friedemann Banz (1980, Germany) and Giulia Bowinkel (1983, Germany) are graduates of the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, Germany. The duo lives and works in Düsseldorf, Germany.

In a number of works Banz & Bowinkel explore the relationship between virtual and real spaces and how their separation collapses with the advancement of technology. By creating their works with the computer, they reflect on the new possibilities and challenges that the growing dependency on these devices pose. Computers have a binary reality that differs from the way we see the world. But increasingly the computer monitor serves as the window to the world. Banz & Bowinkel thus examine how this growing entanglement of man and machine changes our understanding of reality.

Text by Roehrs & Boetsch