

TANJA VUJINOVIĆ

AvantGardeTopia

23 December 2022–20 January 2023

artKIT

The solo exhibition by internationally renowned artist Tanja Vujinović questions the socio-political, bodily, and economic implications as well as broader cultural transformations influenced by the merging of the physical and the virtual. Tanja Vujinović's practice is deeply rooted in the overlaps and in-between spaces of art, technology, and science. In her multidisciplinary projects, she intertwines virtual reality, principles of video games, storytelling, 3D modeling, AI, and electronic music to create new poetic and immersive worlds as social spaces for rethinking the present and imagining a potentially utopian future anew.

AvantGardens are metaphorical gardens in virtual reality in which the artist reflects on our complex relations and attitude towards the technologically enhanced environment and bodies and problematizes the nature-culture divide. Historically, gardens were enclosed and protected environments in which humans sought a space for reflection and recreation, while also being microcosmoses separating humans from the rest of the world, thus corresponding to Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia. As Foucault would say: »The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world.«

These virtual worlds are built by the artist for various social VR platforms such as Sansar and VRchat, both considered as *a non-game game*, a class of software offering the player unbound possibilities of freeform play, identity with a great degree of self-expression and explorational interaction without the limits of conventional or imposed goals, norms, and objectives. Tanja Vujinović explores these spaces as spaces of connectedness and environments of the possible, the actual, and their mutual interplay. The artists build these so-called *spheres* as visions of the future environments where avatars, bionic and other non-human agents co-exist in harmony with humans, nature, and ever-emerging new technologies. Her constantly evolving artistic practice is heavily underlined by pressing urgencies we face today such as the environmental crisis, extreme processes of extraction of natural resources, terraforming, loss of biodiversity, species extinction as well as surveillance and disciplining of bodies.

In her worlds, Tanja bridges the real and the imaginary. She inhabits the virtual environments with proto-machines and other non-human agents like extinct carboniferous plants from Earth's geological past, inspired by speculative ideas about renewable energy resources, clean industrial development of goods, and hopeful dreams of a world without pollution. Although a multitude of alternative ecological solutions is being developed nowadays, we are yet to see if any of them will be used on a wider scale. Until then, we might think along the lines of these semi-imaginary, intelligent, self-operating, and self-assembling machines that are working synergistically with their surroundings.

Recently, the artist has been developing a series of audio-visual artworks, video camera filters and digital images based on research on being embodied in immersive spaces and the development of avatars. The urge to create, approach, and communicate with our Synthetic Other intensifies.

Images depict the growth of body parts, soft electronic tattoos, and the harvesting of a mysterious substance that can be used as a starter culture for all sorts of bones, plant-like structures, and flash extensions. Like some mysterious manna or soma, both referring to food or mysterious beverages essential to human survival, this mysterious pink and white substance never entirely reveals what it is exactly, what might be its origins or ingredients. It seems like it is crucial for the survival of these undefined characters roaming their world and searching for clues. This yet another fractal segment of the *AvantGardens* gives us hints about our posthumanist nature and transhumanistic tendencies.

Furthermore, to create these *gardens*, the artist does not only re-think the anthropogenic imprint on our physical environment on a planetary basis and technological enhancements of the body, but she also draws on the ideas of Villem Flusser, who identifies human beings as *homo ludens*, a playing animal, and play as a defining feature of humans, Hakim Bey and his *Temporary Autonomous Zones* and interconnects them with rave culture and electronic music. *AvantGardens* are thus not inhabited only by avatars, proto-machines, extinct flowers, and other objects, but by relations, emotions, desires, and longing, and they do emerge as spaces of escapism and »alternative« ways of connectedness.

The exhibition will thus offer to the viewer a unique immersive experience and an opportunity to critically reflect on contemporary urgencies as well as the possibilities and pitfalls of new technologies and technologically enhanced future in envisioning the process of generating synthetic life. The selection of the individual works of art from the *AvantGardens* series invites us to dive into a collection of meditative landscapes that unfold as multidimensional poetry, while we observe a myriad of entities and objects, which, similar to the seeds of the *AvantGardens*, spread and sprout through different layers of Tanja Vujinović's artistic practice.

BIOGRAPHY

Website



Tanja Vujinović is a new media, visual and sound artist. Her works have been shown in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Strasbourg, Kunst Palast Museum in Düsseldorf, Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, Kunsthaus in Merano, Museum of Contemporary Art in Istanbul, KIBLA PORTAL in Maribor, Kapelica Gallery in Ljubljana, Museum Vasarely Foundation in Aix-en-Provence, and Künstlerhaus in Vienna. She has presented at festivals such as ISEA2009 in Belfast, Ars Electronica in Linz, Kinetica Art Fair in London, Spor Festival in Aarhus, FILE Festival in Sao Paulo, FILE RIO in Rio de Janeiro and KIBLIX 2020–2021 and KIBLIX 2022. She completed her Bachelor studies in Fine Arts, and in 2010, she obtained a PhD in Philosophy and Theory of Visual Culture. Tanja is the founder of Ultramono, a cybernetic art hub. As a passionate supporter of rave culture she has created a few techno albums and is also DJing herself.

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artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor

Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.