



AKSIOMA
Institute for Contemporary Art
Ljubljana

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PRESS RELEASE

Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana, in collaboration with Škuc Gallery, Ljubljana, and LINK Center for the Arts of the Information Age, Brescia, presents:

ETERNAL SEPTEMBER

The rise of amateur culture

Group exhibition and side programme

www.aksioma.org/eternal.september

Curator: Valentina Tanni

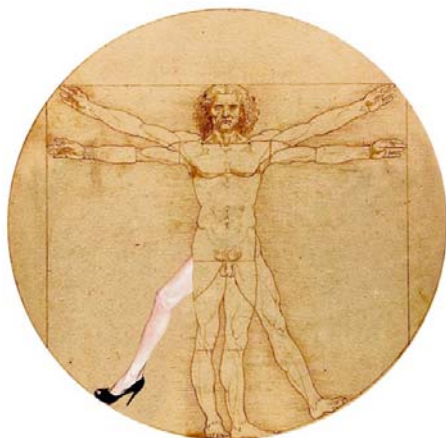
Škuc Gallery

Stari trg 21, Ljubljana

2 – 26 September 2014

Opening hours: TUE-SUN 12 pm – 8 pm

Exhibition opening and curator-guided tour: Tuesday, 2 September 2014 at 8 pm



Photos available for free download:

<http://www.aksioma.org/press/eternal.september.zip>



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Eternal September is a group exhibition that aims to explore the relationship between professional art making and the rising tide of amateur cultural movements throughout the Web, a historical event that has triggered a huge, fascinating shift in every field of culture, especially the visual one. The exhibition includes works by 15 authors and artistic groups (professionals and amateurs alike) and a series of special projects and accompanying events that will take place both offline and online.

Featuring: [Anonymous \(The Game Pro\)](#), [Tymek Borowski & Pawel Sysiak](#), [Mauro Ceolin](#), [Paolo Cirio](#), [Paul Destieu](#), [Electroboutique](#), [Matthias Fritsch](#), [Colin Guillemet](#), [David Horvitz](#), [Maskull Lasserre](#), [Aled Lewis](#), [Dennis Logan \(Spatula007\)](#), [Valeria Mancinelli & Roberto Fassone](#), [Mark McEvoy](#), [Casey Pugh et al.](#), [Steve Roggenbuck](#), [Smetnjak Collective](#), [Helmut Smits](#), [Phil Thompson](#), [Wendy Vainity \(madcatlady\)](#) (*)

Side programme:

- **Screening, Casey Pugh et al.: *Star Wars Uncut***, 20 – 29 August 2014 (venue: Aksioma Project Space, Komenskega 18, Ljubljana)
- **Street project, Paolo Cirio: *Street Ghosts***, 30 – 31 August 2014
- **Screening and artist's presentation, Matthias Fritsch: *The Story of Technoviking***, 2 September 2014 at 6 pm (venue: Aksioma Project Space)
- **Online project, Valeria Mancinelli, Roberto Fassone: *The Importance of Being Context***, 2 – 26 September 2014 (www.linkcabinet.eu)
- **Online project, Various Authors (edited by Valentina Tanni): *The Great Wall of Memes*** (<http://eternal-september.tumblr.com>)
- **Talk, Smetnjak Collective: *We started a meme, which started the whole world crying***, 9 September 2014 at 6 pm (venue: Škuc Gallery)
- **Exhibitor tour guided by Vladimir Vidmar**, 17 September 2014 at 6 pm (venue: Škuc Gallery)

"Nothing like a little disaster for sorting things out."
Blow-Up (1966)

"Eternal September" is a slang expression that was coined by David Fischer in a comment sent to the Usenet group alt.folklore.computers in 1994 ("*September 1993 will go down in net.history as the September that never ended.*"). The sentence refers to September 1993, the year in which the major providers began offering access to all their customers. Up to that time, the network population was composed mostly of university members, a group that would get a little bit bigger every year in September when a number of freshmen would enter college and have their first net access. Every time a fresh influx of "newbies" joined a network, its community had to confront their "net illiteracy" and general lack of netiquette; their behaviour was, in fact, considered annoying and potentially dangerous for the quality of content and discussion.

After 1993, this influx of new users became permanent, and this "Eternal September" is still happening today at exponential speed. Internet access, which is now global, is constantly growing,



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despite the well-known “digital divide” issues. This phenomenon, which transformed from a tidal wave into an unstoppable tsunami, gave birth to an enormous cultural shift.

This “access” topic needs to be addressed in a very broad sense: the opportunity to access information, as well as that to use production tools and distribution channels. Every system previously used to managing and controlling cultural production is now experiencing a deep crisis, which is also causing the inevitable collapse of all the related business models.

The ultimate consequence of this scenario is also the most radical one: the questioning of “professionalism”, an event that has been foreseen by many observers ever since the 1970s. Gene Youngblood, for instance, wrote about it in the 1982 Siggraph catalogue: *“A tool is ‘mature’ insofar as it’s easy to use, accessible to everyone, offering high quality at low cost and characterized by a pluralistic rather than singular practice, serving a multitude of values. Professionalism is an archaic model that’s fading in the twilight of the Industrial Age.”*

The *Eternal September* exhibition also aims at highlighting another fundamental feature of the emerging cultural scenario: the speed that characterizes the production and distribution of creative content. This hectic and unstoppable circulation of ideas and digital artifacts has led many critics and journalists to use words and adjectives borrowed from biology jargon: viral contents, mind viruses, contagious media. Some also refer to a controversial scientific theory that was born in the 1970s in the context of the genetic research boom: the so-called “memetics”. This theory postulates the existence of “memes”, units of human cultural transmission analogous to genes, arguing that replication also happens in culture. In a fast and liquid environment such as the Internet, in which any content – images, sounds, texts – can be edited in real-time and fed back into the communication circuit, the *metamorphic* nature of any cultural product rises exponentially.

In an era like the present one, in which image production is so advanced and refined that it can be easily considered scientific matter, the amateur “look and feel” of many contemporary cultural products also seems to function as proof of authenticity, passion and enthusiasm. This attitude reminds us of what happened in the early twentieth century, when the simplicity and spontaneity of archaic and exotic artifacts was seen as an antidote to the weariness of Western culture, considered decadent and artificial. Today, the new “primitivism” coincides with the “amateur”.

This exhibition comprises a mix of artworks by professional artists and “non-professional” ones, comparing images, aesthetics and languages. A great number of contemporary artists, in fact, actively and fearlessly confront this new scenario in which the boundaries between professional art making and amateur products are increasingly blurred and intertwined. The project also aims to show how some of the aesthetic and stylistic strategies normally associated with cutting-edge contemporary art have been assimilated by popular culture that is born and happens online.

Our definition of art is once again changing radically, challenging both artists and viewers, two categories that are getting more and more unstable and interconnected. *Eternal September* is an attempt to acknowledge the revolution that is subverting today’s visual culture, a colorful and messy catastrophe that is rapidly wiping away all our landmarks in the artscape. This show does not offer any new certainty, though. Instead, it’s an invitation to dive in together, and start figuring things out.

ARTWORKS IN THE SHOW

This group exhibition consists of a wide range of artworks, a selection that includes almost all artistic media: paintings, photographs, videos, software art, installations, performances and web-based



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projects. **Phil Thompson** (UK, 1988) addresses the complex issue of copyright with a series of oil paintings made by anonymous Chinese workers. These images are copies of the blurred artworks (hidden for copyright reasons) that we can find browsing through the virtual rooms of international museums using Google Art Project. A humorous comment on intellectual property is also present in **Aled Lewis'** (UK, 1982) work, an illustration that borrows the "Not Sure If" meme to make a clever commentary on the nature of appropriation and copyright in the Internet age.

Paul Destieu's (FR, 1982) installation *My Favourite Landscape* is a re-appropriation of the well-known desktop picture by Windows XP, one of the most popular images of our age, here represented in a classic bug configuration accidentally generated by a computer error. The other major installation on view is the one by **Mauro Ceolin** (IT, 1963). His project *Memezology* focuses on the strange, viral and pervasive history of memes in a fascinating attempt to build a taxonomy of collective imagination through contemporary folk imagery. Memes are also the theme of the anonymous *Nyan Cat 10 Hours Reaction Video*, a crazy performance done by an Internet user known as **TheGamePro**, who recorded himself watching the famous Nyan Cat meme video for ten hours straight.

Somewhat in between an extended performance and a net art work, **David Horvitz'** (US, 1982) *Public Access* project, an artist's infiltration inside Wikipedia, is a very poetic research that deals with the issue of image circulation on the web. Similarly, but in a different form, **Mark McEvoy's** (UK, 1973) work analyses the nature of image making and authorship in the contemporary age, an ongoing visual research that uses appropriation and remix as its major tools of investigation. Remix, of course, is a practice that is strong and visible in numerous artworks throughout the show, both in the main exhibition and in the collateral projects and screenings. *Artomat*, a software artwork by **Electroboutique** (RU, founded in 2005 by Alexei Shulgin, born 1963, and Aristarkh Chernyshev, born 1968), explores this issue through a system for the automated production of art, employing algorithms capable of generating images. "The viewer becomes a user-artist, creating artworks to suit his or her own taste."

Another great example comes from an amateur video. *Cat Slap Joy Division* by YouTube user **Dennis Logan (Spatula007)** juxtaposes some weird found footage of a man slapping his cats on an ironing board with the song *Atmosphere* by the rock band Joy Division, resulting in a strangely compelling short film. **Wendy Vainity** (also known as matcatlady) is another extremely creative YouTube user. The 3D animations made by this self-taught and very prolific Australian woman are incredibly bizarre and somewhat disturbing, but also pervaded with an undeniable sense of humor. Another YouTube star is **Steve Roggenbuck** (US, 1987), poet, blogger and performer. His research is focused on building a new kind of poetry based on Internet language, styles and aesthetics, reconnecting the ancient art of literature with the social potential of Web communities.

Sculptural works are a very important part of the exhibition. We have chosen a group of works that prove, with their strong presence, how materiality still matters a lot, even in a world where immaterial artifacts seem to be winning the game. *Around the World* by French artist **Colin Guillemet** (FR, 1979) is both a sculptural work in the traditional sense as well as also being strong and poetic visual statement about diversity, inventiveness, self-building and unconventional behaviours in the Internet era. **Maskull Lasserre's** (CA, 1978) *Incarnate*, the figure of a life-sized human skull carved into old software manuals is another powerful visual allegory, a true contemporary *vanitas*. The work by **Helmut Smits** (NL, 1974), which completes this sculptural trio, is a minimal and playful intervention on the wall consisting in eight little nails resembling a very familiar, usually immaterial, image: the YouTube loading wheel, a static, motionless icon you can do nothing but stare at.

Last, but surely not least, comes the video by **Tymek Borowski & Pawel Sysiak** (PL, 1984) entitled *How Art Works? A serious movie about problems and solutions*, a thoughtful and engaging visual essay that raises important questions about the quality of the artworld and about the (long-lost) sincerity and boldness of artists.



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SCREENINGS

Casey Pugh et al.: *Star Wars Uncut* / www.starwarsuncut.com

Star Wars Uncut is a crazy fan mashup remake of the original *Star Wars* movies. It is the brainchild of Casey Pugh, a developer dedicated to creating interactive experiences on the Web. In 2009, Casey was inspired to use the Internet and an ever-ready pool of passionate *Star Wars* fans to crowdsource the classic film *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*. This pet project turned into a labor of love and creativity on a large scale. Nearly a thousand fans came together to participate, and the resulting movie is equal parts fun, kooky and dearly nostalgic.

Matthias Fitsch: *The Story of Technoviking* / www.subrealic.net

The Story of Technoviking is a film project by German artist and filmmaker Matthias Fritsch. While one of his videos became the world famous Internet meme “Technoviking”, known by tens of millions of users, he is all alone in a legal battle in Germany. One decade after his video was first published online, the video’s protagonist emerged, sued him over uncleared personality rights, demanded financial compensation and the removal of the meme including user reactions. Matthias is making a film about this case, telling the story behind the Technoviking meme and give a voice to fans, lawyers and specialists that can help other active users and artists to protect themselves against old laws that have yet to catch up to contemporary meme culture.

TALK

**Smetnjak Collective: *We started a meme, which started the whole world crying* / www.smetnjak.si
(Language: Slovenian)**

Was it ever possible to practice critical theory within a form of meme? The problem is not just that its concept was invented by evolutionary biologist and that the cats they are a-LOLin’, entailing all the misgivings of informatics, communication, like/dislike binaries, quantification, valorization... it’s also that critical theory has a crisis of its own on its hands, or as Tiqqun puts it: “We don’t need any more critical theory. We don’t need any more professors. Now critique works for domination. Even the critique of domination.” In short, has subversion been reduced to a joke or does the joke itself have to be taken seriously?

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Paolo Cirio: *Street Ghosts* / www.streetghosts.net

Life-sized pictures of people found on Google’s Street View were printed and posted without authorization at the same spot where they were taken. The posters are printed in color on thin paper, cut along the outline, and then affixed with wheatpaste to the walls of public buildings at the precise spots on the walls where they appear in Google’s Street View images. *Street Ghosts* reveals aesthetic, biopolitical, privacy and legal issues, which can be explored through the artist’s statement and theoretical considerations. The artwork becomes a performance, re-contextualizing not only ready-made informational material, but also a conflict. Ghostly human bodies appear as casualties of the



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info-war in the city, a transitory record of collateral damage from the battle between corporations, governments, civilians and algorithms.

Valeria Mancinelli, Roberto Fassone: *The Importance of Being Context* / www.linkcabinet.eu
(online from September 2, 2014)

The Importance of Being Context is a web project that intends to develop some reflections on the performing practice. The website is an archive of the most famous performances of contemporary art history. Marina Abramovic's, Vito Acconci's, Bruce Nauman's and other artists' works are substituted by YouTube videos in which different individuals unwittingly perform similar actions to the ones performed by the performer in the artistic context.

Link Cabinet is a curatorial project by Matteo Cremonesi for the Link Art Center.

Various Authors (edited by Valentina Tanni): *The Great Wall of Memes* / <http://eternal-september.tumblr.com>

The Great Wall of Memes is a research project in the shape of a visual archive. It began in 2012 as a collection of art-related Internet memes (*Contemporary Art People: y u no have irony?*, available on Facebook and Pinterest) and made its first appearance in physical space in Milan the following year in the form of a giant wall covered with found images (*Nothing To See Here*, Swiss Institute, Milan, June 2013). In Ljubljana, this project will reach a whole new stage, both online, through a dedicated Tumblr blog, and in the exhibition space, with a new custom installation. The project is loosely based on the "Mnemosyne Atlas" by Aby Warburg, updating his idea in light of the current cultural context (participatory and viral). The goal is to re-trace the traveling of some images through time and space, highlighting the different ways in which they have been used, remixed and re-invented.

THE CATALOGUE

On the occasion of the exhibition, **Link Editions** (the editorial branch of the Link Art Center, Brescia) and Aksioma will co-publish a catalogue of the show, featuring all the participating artists and projects, along with contributions by **Valentina Tanni**, **Smetnjak Collective** and **Domenico Quaranta**. Designed by **Fabio Paris** and edited by Domenico Quaranta, the catalogue will be available for print on demand and free download along the exhibition, which will be visually documented in the book. More: <http://editions.linkartcenter.eu>

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Valentina Tanni (1976, Rome, Italy) is a contemporary art critic and curator. Her research is focused on the relationship between art and new media, with particular attention to Internet culture. In 2002, she graduated in Art History from La Sapienza University in Rome with a master's thesis on net art (Net Art.1994–2001), and in the following years she published a great number of articles, reviews and essays about new media art, web culture and contemporary art in general. She is the founder of *Random Magazine*, one of the first web columns entirely dedicated to net art (that also gave birth to a book in 2011, *Random*, Link Editions), and she is the co-founder of *Exibart* and *Artribune*, two important Italian art magazines. She also directed the online version of the magazine *FMR* (*FMR Online*).



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She curated the Net section of the art show *Media Connection* (Rome and Milan, 2001), the exhibitions *Netizens* (Rome, 2002), *L'loading. Genetically Modified Videogames* (Syracuse, 2003), *Maps and Legends. When Photography Met the Web* (Rome, 2010), *Datascares* (Rome, 2011), *Hit the Crowd. Photography in the Age of Crowdsourcing* (Rome, 2012), *Nothing to See Here* (Milan, 2013) and numerous solo shows. She also collaborates with many digital arts festivals and she's been one of the guest curators of *FotoGrafia. International Photography Festival* in Rome from 2010 to 2012. She has written articles for Italian and international magazines and she works as a teacher and lecturer for universities and private institutions.

www.valentinatanni.com

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Street Ghosts will be realised as part of the citywide celebration EMONA 2000.

EMONA | MM
LJUBLJANA 2000

Thanks to: [Ultrasonic audio technologies](#)

** DISCLAIMER: Every effort has been made by the galleries and the curator to get in contact with all the authors of the works in the show. Nonetheless, due to the particular nature of the project, in some cases, we have not been able to trace the source, or we attempted to get in touch but got no response. We invite everyone who recognizes his/her work and wants to be credited, to contact us at aksioma@aksioma.org. The nature of the project is non-commercial and the works in the show are not for sale.*

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