

Media Release

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Hirshhorn Presents Exhibition “Suspended Animation”

Opening Feb. 10, 2016

Features Artists Working With Digital Animation, Curated by Gianni Jetzer



Roughly a century after the production of the first animated film, the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden presents “Suspended Animation.” The exhibition, which runs Feb. 10, 2016–March 12, 2017, brings together six artists who use animation as a tool to challenge conceptions of reality: Ed Atkins, Antoine Catala, Ian Cheng, Josh Kline, Helen Marten and Agnieszka Polska. Their works explore the actualities of the information age, such as the impact of virtual worlds on tangible physical experience or the digitization of identity.

“Artists are addressing themselves to the spaces between ever more sophisticated approximations of the real and reality itself,” said Gianni Jetzer, the exhibition’s curator and the Hirshhorn’s curator-at-large. “But the point of the animated image is not simply to

mirror reality as faithfully as possible. The animated image has evolved into another kind of reality, to be entered into imaginatively at will. It now competes with reality on equal footing.”

In science fiction and medicine, the term “suspended animation” refers to slowing down vital processes in order to extend life. Applied to contemporary computer animation, the notion refers to the virtual replacement of the physical body. An important part of human experience today is occurring on screens, and a disembodied consciousness is taking over. This phenomenon has led the artists in this exhibition to redefine the body by reworking the relation between self and technology.

Rather than mimicking the real, their artworks use the medium to examine the embodiment of reality within a digital world. Animation provides the means to investigate the relationship between reality and simulation, fact and fiction, human beings and avatars. Such works ultimately ask whether the virtual body marks the end of the real body.

About the Artists

Ed Atkins (British, b. 1982, Oxford, England; lives and works in London) works mainly with computer-generated characters and scenes that are built upon self-performance and explore the creation of alternative notions of space and time. He has been the focus of major solo exhibitions at MoMA PS1, the Bonner Kunstverein and Tate Britain.

Antoine Catala (French, b. 1975, Toulouse, France; lives and works in New York) pairs animation with pneumatic sculptures and holograms, creating encounters that drift into the humorous but also investigate the edges of perception. He has had solo exhibitions at Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon and the Carnegie Museum of Art.

Ian Cheng (American, b. 1984, Los Angeles; lives and works in New York) studied cognitive science at the University of California, Berkeley. In his live simulations, familiar objects are programmed with basic properties but are left to influence each other without authorial control. He has had solo exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation.

Josh Kline (American, b. 1979, Philadelphia; lives and works in New York) draws inspiration from advertising, social media and the latest technological innovations. His sculptural installations reflect on digital transformations and their impact on the social and political sphere. He has a solo exhibition at Modern Art Oxford this summer.

Helen Marten (British, b. 1985, Macclesfield, England; lives and works in London) creates animated objects and interiors whose artificial surfaces give them an uncanny presence. Voiceovers unrelated to the action onscreen add deliberately enigmatic explanatory undertones. Marten has had solo exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Kunsthalle Zürich; and CCS Bard.

Agnieszka Polska (Polish, b. 1985, Lublin, Poland; lives and works in Warsaw) creates immersive, hallucinatory animations that exploit ambiguities of understanding in visual imagery, verbal language and science. She has had solo exhibitions at Nottingham Contemporary, the Salzburger Kunstverein and the Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle.

Related Public Programs

Polska will present the latest program in the ongoing Meet the Artist series Thursday, Feb. 11, at 6:30 p.m. in the Ring Auditorium. Other programs will be announced.

“Suspended Animation” is organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and has been made possible through generous support from Max and Monique Burger, Burger Collection Hong Kong; the Hirshhorn International Council; and the Hirshhorn Collectors’ Council.

For more information, visit hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/suspended-animation.

Photo caption: Agnieszka Polska, Still from “I Am the Mouth,” 2014
Courtesy of the artist and ŽAK | BRANICKA, Berlin