

A home is made up of banal stuff like sinks, utterly familiar things routinely interacted with but difficult to recall in detail. The reconstruction of a lost object can transform the substance of its memory. By presenting the sink as turquoise, Namazi can make us forget that it might not have been that color at all. But who knows? His brother wonders whether the sink wasn't purple. The objects in this exhibition were thus steeped in uncertainty. They neither resolve the past nor reconcile with the present. Their purpose seems not to be reenactment; they are neither fictional nor real. History is not settled. They are things subject to fickle memory and poised by the artist to remain undetermined. Rather than exactness and historical accuracy, what they evoke is the impassioned need for their remembrance. Outside the edges of the images lay not only the objects themselves but also the reasons for a home being vandalized, an art of persecution whose effects linger continues to this day.

—Theodor Ringborg

TALLINN, ESTONIA

Merike Estna

KUMU ART MUSEUM

Merike Estna's exhibition "Blue Lagoon" forces the visitor out of the comfortable position of being merely a viewer: One can step on painting, eat it, wear it. Painting spills over to the floor; it takes the form of cakes, cocktails, books, and videos, while the vivacity of light pastel colors and vibrant patterns immerses the visitor in an overall sensory-cultural experience. On entering the expanded space of painting, one finds the hierarchies separating it from the decorative arts and everyday life dissolving. The installation is filled with all sorts of objects. But whatever they are—hats, pieces of clothing, strips of canvas, ventilators, TV screens—all aspire to one single thing: to be paintings.

The young London-based Estonian artist challenges the tradition of abstract painting, from color and composition, form and materials, through display and perception. Estna conducts her rebellion against convention with lightness and humor. Heroic macho abstraction is replaced by tongue-in-cheek patternmaking. By choosing pastel blues, yellows, and pinks, Estna pushes painting to a discomfort zone—can such combinations be treated as serious abstract art? And who makes the decision? This disquiet is enhanced by the use of unconventional materials that are not generally considered "painterly," among them

Merike Estna,
*Camouflage Painting
Show*, 2014, oil on
canvas, house paint.
Installation view.



apparel, food, and liquids. The pieces of clothing, hats, TV screens, and other objects are not integrated into paintings on canvas; rather, painting itself is integrated into the array of things dispersed around the exhibition space on the floor, on a rack, or hanging from the ceiling.

Finally, with the immersive display, Estna destroys the privileged single point of view for exploring a paintings and for the installation as a whole. She challenges another old norm of painting—the Greenbergian value of flatness—by removing a painting from the wall and putting it into various, often slightly bizarre situations. The video *Traveling with a Painting*, 2013, shows Estna taking a canvas off its stretcher and placing it outside in a wintry landscape, creating various sculptural shapes with it as she manipulates it. The canvas becomes a character in a sort of adventure story. One finds oneself purposely disoriented visually, spatially, and, finally, art-historically. By dismantling the established structures of perception, Estna makes us question our assumptions about how to look at or engage with art objects and things in general. The conventional rules of those encounters are reversed: While paintings gain the quality of "readiness-to-hand," to use Heidegger's famous term, articles of clothing become things to look at. Estna treats painting as a constant negotiation between artistic authority and the viewer's perception: Being everywhere and nowhere at the same time, painting becomes a state of mind.

At Kumu, Estna's solo project is paired with an international exhibition, "I'm a Painting," involving fifteen artists. Instead of being presented as separate exhibitions for comparison, the two shows are spatially blended: Estna's works seep into the space of the group show—which she co-organized in collaboration with the curator of her own exhibition, Kati Ilves—and vice versa. Such layering and merging replicates the current conditions of life, in which unrelated things are integrated into one another without our being able to trace the point zero of this mash-up. Through this simple but smart spatial decision, the impossibility of autonomy—whether of art, of authorship, or of influence—is revealed.

—Nerenga Černiauskaitė

LISBON

Musa paradisiaca

3 + 1 ARTE CONTEMPORÂNEA/KUNSTHALLE LISSABON

Eduardo Guerra and Miguel Ferrão started their partnership as Musa paradisiaca in 2010 with the aim of focusing on dialogue. At first their efforts mainly took the form of audio pieces available on their website, but they have also made slide works and performative events, and, since 2013, sculptures and films as well. "*Audição das flores*" (Flowers' Audition), their first solo show in a commercial gallery, overlapped with "*Audição das máquinas*" (Machines' Audition), their first solo show in an institution. The exhibitions proposed to refute the idea that humans and nature are separate entities, presenting two almost animistic scenarios: that of a man-flower and of a man-machine. Also important was the mile and a half separating the two venues; a sort of pilgrimage was required to visit them both.

The two exhibitions presented a series of sculptures made of pitch and painted in oil, belonging to the series "*Aumentário*" (Augmentarium), 2013–. These replicate an array of easily recognizable but seemingly unrelated everyday objects, such as surfer boots, motherboards, and ropes. More than simply reproducing the objects they resemble, the two groups of sculptures express the idea of flowers on the one hand and machines on the other, but without ever representing either directly. Instead, their attributes are evoked by the traits of each object. But it was the viewer who had the task of activating these implications, as if

View of "Musa paradisiaca," 2014; Kunsthalle Lissabon. From left: *Pau-mão* (Stick-hand), 2014; *O sono do Francisco* (The Sleep of Francisco), 2014.



they were latent until each individual projected onto them his or her own memories and desires and started an intimate conversation with them. One might say that these objects functioned as oracular or totemic icons to which one could return when in need of answers or comfort.

Furthermore, each of the two exhibitions represented a sort of distinct cosmology, united under a particular point of view, perhaps represented by the sculpture of a human head that was included in each show; the flowers were displayed under the watch of *Nuna beijando o sol* (Nuna Kissing the Sun), while the machines were presided over by *O sono do Francisco* (The Sleep of Francisco), both 2014. Nuna, whom the artists met on the island of Príncipe, is a kind of witch doctor, an enchanting character with a special relationship with nature. This bust captures a moment when Nuna was basking in the sun, as if her body were engaging in photosynthesis. She represents a new (or perhaps quite old) kind of symbiosis with nature. Francisco, on the other hand, represents a symbiosis with a machine. He spent his life operating a steam engine that powered a whole factory on the outskirts of Lisbon. After it closed, Francisco continued his daily ritual of going to the empty factory to awaken the machine and put it to work. Activating the steam engine gave him a reason to exist and it lived, in turn, only through his dedication. The work would make Francisco sleepy, as though this symbiotic relation with the machine put him in a dormant state like the engine's own; like all of the sculptures in the exhibition, Francisco is waiting to be woken up.

—Filipa Oliveira

BEIJING

"Thingworld"

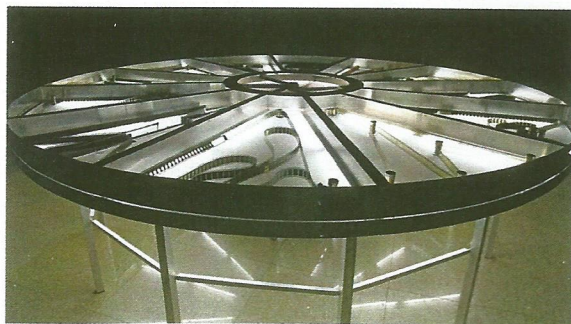
NATIONAL ART MUSEUM OF CHINA

The "new" in new media—in some accounts—derives from the rupture created by an object's materiality and its effect on human senses. "Thingworld: International Triennial of New Media Art," however, focused on objects themselves. And yet curator Zhang Ga kept the premise of this third edition of the New Media Triennial closely tied to theory. Spread over eleven rooms, the ambitious exhibition was divided into three parts: "Monologue: *Ding an Sich*," "Dialogue: Ding to Thing," and "Ensemble: Parliament of Things," referring to Kant's unperceivable object and Bruno Latour's actants that come into indirect contact through a system of translation. The influence of speculative realism—the work of anti-correlationist thinkers attempting to untie the knot between epistemology and ontology—was demonstrated by the presence of its core figure, Graham Harman, who spoke at the triennial's

symposium and contributed to the show's catalogue. Dealing with imported theory and fifty-eight works from twenty-two countries, the curator pragmatically used Zhuangzi's third-century BC theory of *qiwu*, the "equality of all things," to reconcile with Chinese culture.

The absence of human figures was one method used to pay tribute to objects in the exhibition. In Adriana Salazar's *Machine That Tries to Tie Two Ends of a Shoelace Together*, 2006, the device tying the laces of shoes worn by nobody thereby renders its own functionality vain. Similar to the Japanese practice of *chindōgu* ("weird gadget"), the use corresponds to no one's need, like a broken hammer that gains a moment of freedom. Dialogue between objects was another thread of the exhibition, which was entwined with a suspicion of language and the systems of representation. Several artworks included in "Thingworld" call into question the laws and consistency of assumptions drawn from language. Christopher Baker's *Murmur Study*, 2009, displays a waterfall of thermal paper in which gradually fading text echoes the short life of language on the Internet, where information appears with its disappearance. Noise is another weapon used against language. In Petra Gemeinboeck and Rob Saunders's *Accomplice*, 2012, one wall in the museum was filled with holes through which one could periodically see a robot with a battering ram and a camera; noises are exchanged but fail to weave a pattern of communication. Zimoun built *80 prepared dc-motors, cotton balls, cardboard boxes, 70 x 70 x 70 cm*, 2011, cardboard boxes with tiny balls continuously striking their surfaces, creating tides of noises.

Although "Thingworld" gestured toward speculative realism and the democracy of objects, whose connection with art is partly made manifest through Harman's notion of "allure," by which art objects intermittently separate from their sensory qualities, the exhibition's conceptual matrix actually involved a renewed attempt to anthropomorphize objects. In the end, the works remain deeply embedded in humanism and the use of tropes like personification. The philosopher Levi Bryant points out that, in making objects a blank screen for projecting language and emotions, humans can see only their own likenesses,



Rosa Barba, *Stage Archive*, 2011, 35-mm film, Perspex, guiding rollers, neon lamps, engine, 3' 3" x 10' 6". From "Thingworld."

just as the protagonist in *Being John Malkovich* (1999) sees his own face projected on his face. Every work in the exhibition was accompanied by a detailed description, paradoxically emphasizing language's function and guiding role. At the show's entrance, Jacob Tonski's *Balance from Within*, 2012, a sofa supporting its own weight on a single leg, perhaps served as a metaphor for the exhibition: a Bakhtinian carnival in which the hierarchy between the subjects and objects seems to be overturned, but the independence of the objects is overshadowed by the act of anthropomorphization, reflected by the the unstable couch that is waiting for a person to sit down and end its fragile, temporary independence.

—Venus Lau

Translated from Chinese by Lee Ambrozio.