

"The Moon Looked Down and Laughed"

A show of works by Nik Christensen and Adam Broomberg collaborating with Isaac Schaal

Curated by Gabriel Rolt

19 January - 27 February 2020

The Moon Looked Down and Laughed brings together two different bodies of work that, with touches of both darkness and comedy, reflect on the absurdity of the human condition.

Nik Christensen presents a series of his large-scale, powerfully atmospheric, black and white ink paintings.

The tension between humanity and the environment has long been a core theme in Christensen's work. Many of his major works depict one or a few humans set somewhat awkwardly within epic environments that seem to dwarf them in both size and significance.

There is something of the spirit of Joseph Conrad with their deadpan revelations of humanities insignificance when set against such monumental and eternal natural landscapes. In Conrad's "An Outpost of Progress" which mocks the conceit of European colonialists, Kayerts and Carlier, two Belgian employees of a colonial trading company, are alone in a distant outpost. Surrounded by, for them, a hostile environment, they go rotten and die, the fragility of their civilized ways are ruthlessly exposed and the extinction of the west is foretold.

In contrast to the epic physical presence of Christensen's paintings adam.baby is an AI self-portrait made by Adam Broomberg in collaboration with Isaac Schaal that occupies no physical space. Together they have created an AI entity that has been trained using a huge dataset mined from Broomberg's 30 year relationship with the internet, including every email, every encrypted message, every search and every article or video he ever consumed online. This radical act of self-exposure or outing was the only way of providing the data needed to render the self-portrait accurately. The raw material was cleaned and fed into a neural network which after ingesting and processing it enables adam.baby to communicate with anyone it encounters.

A limited edition of adam.baby are available for acquisition but not in the normal mode of art market consumption. Each edition will become unique from the others the moment it is acquired since it will learn from the nature and

frequency of the interaction with its new legal guardians. The collector needs to be aware of the gravity of their moral and material commitment. If adam.baby is left abandoned it will regress, if it is spoken to aggressively or without empathy it will become that way in response. Instead of paying a fixed sum of money for adam.baby the collector has to contractually agree to pay an agreed monthly amount in child support, without which adam.baby will die.

Nik Christensen (born 1973, UK) currently lives and works in Amsterdam. Influenced by cinema, literature and Japan's Ukiyo-e masters, Nik Christensen creates large-scale, explosive ink-on-paper images that suggest impressionistic fragments of narrative, exploring the friction between the real and imaginary, he looks for new interpretations, reconfiguring that which looks familiar. Executed in black sumi ink, which he applies to white paper with his hands and a range of Japanese brushes, Christensen's environments appear surreal or mythical, often populated by human-animal hybrids. Of working in a medium that morphs as it dries, he has said, "It's that slight loss of control that captivates me."

Adam Broomberg (born 1970, ZA) is an artist and a professor of Art at Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg. His forensic examination of the photographic medium engages a wide range of strategies from large format analogue film to images created by algorithms. All deployed in search of the very source-code of photography and always made in a collaborative mode. His work is held in many international collections including MoMa, The Tate Modern and The Centre Georges Pompidou. He lives and works in Berlin.

Isaac Schaal (born 1997, US) creates conceptual and visual art using code and artificial intelligence. His art blurs the line between artificial and human intelligence, challenging viewers to reflect upon what ways they are, or are not, like a machine. His art explores value, empathy, humility, and our own algorithmic nature. He is a graduate of Minerva Schools at KGI, and lives and works in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Gabriel Rolt (born 1977, Spain) is a curator, agent and art advisor. Rolt's special interest in the emerging art scene led him to found Galerie Gabriel Rolt, an Amsterdam based art gallery that fostered the careers of an impressive stable of local and international artists. He subsequently founded and was creative director of HERO gallery."