

Oliver Laric

La semejanza por contacto

September 10 – October 31, 2024

Madrid

The debate around contemporaneity has been significantly marked by the advent of computational techniques, both challenging historically fixed concepts of image production within an algorithmic paradigm, while developing a new artistic praxis based on the reworking, reshaping and exhibition of technologically manipulated visual elements. Taking on the multi-layered and non-unitary vision where the algorithm becomes a renewed form of potentiality, “La semejanza por contacto” (“Resemble by contact”) constitutes Oliver Laric’s third exhibition at Pedro Cera and first presentation at the gallery’s Madrid location, with a group of new works following his long-established ideas on transformation, temporality, accessibility, virtual possibility, authorship and instant distribution.

Engaging with elements uncharged by historical narratives, Laric’s new engravings are based on 3D scans of two cherry plum trees located in Madrid’s Parque del Oeste, a common species in the city. Produced using a custom algorithm that translates shades of grey to create hallowed ridges and a dynamic play of light and shadow, the sculptures point to an idea commonly associated with a scientific “neutrality”, rendered from a frontal point of view, while suggesting a non-linear perception of time and form based on the viewer’s experience and movement around the piece. Made from a distance, with an “in situ” unique location presented by the coordinates in each title, the works escape classical ideas of engravings (in which the positive and negative spaces were used to print an image), to instead trap the result in the in-between moments of the process.

With a focus on the proclamation of the “common”, Laric’s works refer an orientation towards a multitude of meanings, from politically invested aspirations to the social spaces of projection and partition. His approach emphasizes that no point of view is ever neutral, emerging instead from the long-established and shared standards inhabiting the material world, and the contemporary flow of reproducible, hybridized imagery. Morphed into an A4 paper format within a visualization of the expanded time, the leaf insect becomes commodified into a highly controlled form of precise ratio, emphasizing its own hybridity within a sliding scale of pressing dichotomies (nature versus culture), while hinting at a new materialist approach regarding ontological validations in which subjects, objects and matter loosely coexist. However, human analysis continues to impose structure and regulation: the playful and associative metamorphosis of a natural leaf (an insect) to a paper leaf (a fabricated, highly consumed product) hints exactly at this anthropomorphic projection, bringing into discussion the theme of mimesis and the conventional understanding on concepts of representation.

The praying mantis replicates this anthropocentric influence over nature, modelling the “naturalistic” insect into a cartoonish version. By generating the developing moment of transformation, Laric blurs the traditional concept of left-to-right reading with its counterpoint analysis, creating a visual ambiguity on the initial state of the transition. The work delves into the anthropomorphizing tendencies of human perception of the world, where human traits are often projected onto non-human entities – an approach heavily shaped by the mediated ways in which children are first introduced to animals and nature. But instead of choosing a “heroic” portrayal, Laric opts for an animal that would most likely be positioned as a non-speaking and villainy character. The mantis, free from any anthropomorphic (a non-sociable

Pedro Cera

Lisboa
Rua do Patrocínio 67 E
1350-229 Lisboa, Portugal

Madrid
Calle de Barceló 13
28004 Madrid, Spain

info@pedrocera.com
www.pedrocera.com

species) or political symbolism (a non-common element in heraldry or flags), invites for a childlike reading that destabilizes conventional hierarchies of art consumption.

This theme runs throughout the exhibition, critiquing the representational norms that dictate “appropriate” portrayals. Stereotyping human action, the one-minute loop video *787 Cliparts* (2006-2024) combines one of Laric’s first art videos and a new iteration created 18 years later, a coming into “adulthood”. The original video, which went viral, compiled depictions of human activities based on form, creating a sense of movement when played in sequence. The new version explores AI image conversion, producing outputs of non-neutral data that reflect technology’s larger impacts on authorship (especially after the first video was repurposed beyond Laric’s control) and on the production of clichés. By prompting an AI algorithm to turn the characters, rendered from vector illustrations, into photographic looking images with generic features, what seems to be the “before” becomes the “after” moment in the creative process, creating a loop of enhancement by continuously influencing the result to get closer to the initial source.

The images are projected side by side, with the projector placed visibly in the center of the room. The old and the new come together at a small light, hitting at cues of a fabricated temporality between early cinema, analogic systems and highly capable contemporary tools. All these mechanisms are proposedly employed by Laric to turn the viewer hyper-aware of the larger impacts of the internet, accompanying the developments of the informational era. Questioning the spheric relationship in which humanity progressively evolves within technology, the work unveils the influence of late capitalism on how software shapes the representation of bodies, reflecting the ways in which the modern subject is conditioned to self-construct himself through narcissistic fantasies of idealized stereotypes.

Breaking with hierarchical ideas of consumerism and acquisition, Laric’s discourse goes full circle with a giveaway of posters, free to take by anyone interested. As a path of continuous analysis, the poster revisits a recurrent theme earlier explored in a work dating back to 2012, where illustrations from the fashion illustrator Antonio Lopez were juxtaposed with drawings by Japanese manga artist Hirohiko Araki, renowned for his series *Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure*. In this iteration, the poster compiles images predominantly from fashion magazines and juxtaposes them with Araki’s interpretations, organized in chronological order from oldest to newest. With an access to several “doubles”, Laric provides a metamorphic repertoire of new aesthetic relations of dialectical opposition, unveiling the tension between the original and the copy as a generative tool to approach the complex paradigm of copyright laws and the political agendas controlling taste, accessibility and production.

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Oliver Laric (Austria, 1981) has exhibited his work at SMAK (Ghent, Belgium), Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (Cleveland, USA), Guggenheim (Bilbao, Spain), São Paulo Biennial (São Paulo, Brazil), ICA (Boston, USA), Centre Pompidou (Paris, France), Whitechapel Gallery (London, UK), ExtraCity Kunsthal (Antwerp, Belgium), Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin, Germany), Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France), Saint Louis Art Museum (St. Louis, USA), among others.

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