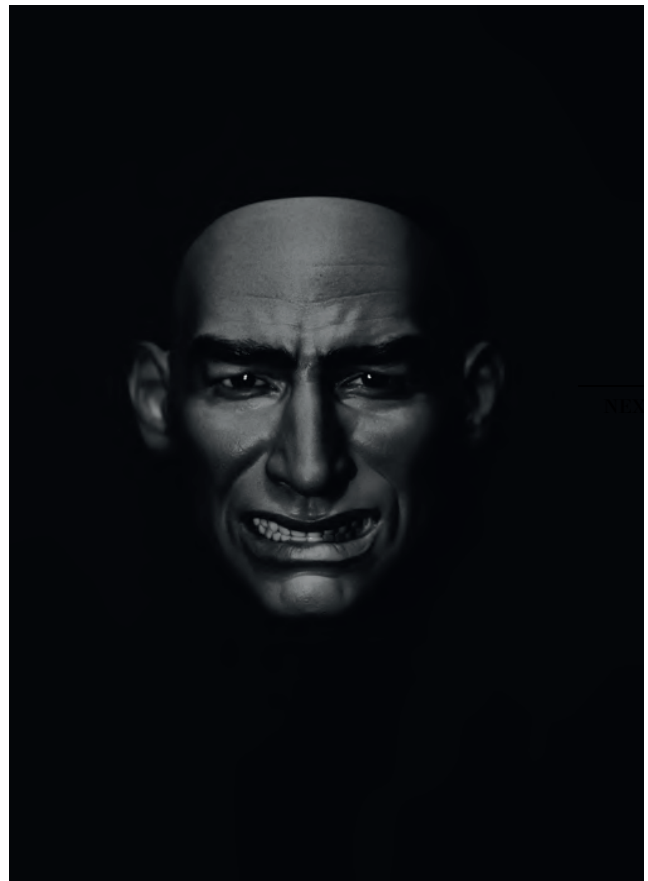


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Cécile's World

MULTIMEDIA ARTIST CÉCILE B. EVANS PRESENTS AN EXHIBITION
AT THE MUSEUM MODERNER KUNST STIFTUNG LUDWIG
(MUMOK), VIENNA.

EVANS' MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATIONS CREATE EXPERIENCES
WITH A DIRECT IMPACT. IT IS STRIKING HOW QUICKLY ONE'S
OWN RELATIONSHIPS———BOTH PERSONAL AND WITH
THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA———ARE CALLED INTO
QUESTION. EVANS APPLIES HUMANIST BENCHMARKS TO A
WORLD WHICH IS PER SE METICULOUSLY CONTROLLABLE, A
WORLD WHICH WE HAVE INHABITED TO DATE IN THE FIRM
BELIEF THAT WE ARE FREE AND INDEPENDENT.

Photos: by Matthias Ziegler

Text: by Kimberly Bradley

*I want to change the world. It sounds wrong when I say it out loud. I want
to express my-self, but I can't find the words.*

The titular protagonist of Cécile B. Evans' newest video work, *Amos' World*, announces his intentions in the 25-minute piece with these words, uttered in a fit of frustrated mega lomania. Amos is a puppet with a fixed facial expression, and the architect of a completely engineered building, a microcosm, a world.

The film is on view in Vienna's Mumok as part of a larger installation, in which viewers enter a multi-story structure, something like a Brutalist housing estate in miniature, in front of the screen. Each sits alone in a cubicle, mirroring the single apartments in the work. They see Amos trying to create his world, complaining, in dialogue with an off-camera voice who identifies herself as the weather, that the building's tenants aren't behaving properly.

It's soon obvious that their lives in this controlled structure are unravelling, that the building's infrastructure has huge problems. It's unclear how things will play out; *Amos' World* is a three-part episodic series, and this is Episode 1 [Episodes 2 and 3 are in development]. But considering Evans' previous work, *Big Questions* will be considered and major metaphors for our contemporary lives put into play.

The work usually starts with a broad question, says Evans, who speaks in measured sentences that only at first seem dispassionate. But whether addressing power structures, digital rifts or more, the works are ultimately about what Evans has often called her elevator pitch: how we address human emotions in the digital age, and what value we place upon them.

What's the economy of feelings? she asks, eyebrows raised, explaining that the infrastructures of modern technology are not only about flows of information, but also flows of emotions. In the past twenty or thirty years that the Internet has existed, we've created an entire network for our feelings to circulate through, she explains. Sadly it's incredibly controlled and restrictive. Imagine a continent with only three toll roads owned by two companies, instead of a broad network of decentralised, organically developed side roads, and we have the idea of what bodies like Facebook, Google and such have created since the wider public began using the World Wide Web in the 1990s.

Evans' work could be categorised as Post-Internet Art, a contentious art-movement label that deals with the effects of the Internet on society and aesthetics. What triggered me in the beginning is Cécile's humanistic point of view in thinking of what the world does with us, as it is today, says the artist's Vienna gallerist, Emanuel Layr. It's about what's happening to the body, our mental state, dealing with the environment as it is, based on digital exchange: based on the Internet not as something separate, but an integral thing.

Watching Evans' films or entering her installations can be an unsettling experience, making us wonder what we're seeing and whose world we have entered. They're uncanny in the Freudian sense, often raising the question of where we are as a species, and what the notion of what human might mean.

The casts of characters include humanoid [but often not human] figures, like the animated Lovers in the film *What the Heart Wants* from 2016: one a bad copy of a famous actor, the other a woman, both animated with unique technology that draws over filmed footage. Their faces can't be read, so they're free from surveillance. There's a digital rendering of the late actor Philip Seymour Hoffmann, named PHIL. Some are objects, like a jar of mayonnaise [a nod to object-oriented ontology: Evans is an avid reader of philosophy] or an animated pair of scissors dancing to a digital take of an old Sade song.

Then there's Agnes, the tinny voice of a spambot that Evans installed on the London-based Serpentine Gallery's website. In the film *AGNES [the end is near]* [2014], Agnes contemplates her [its?] precarious existence [what happens to the bot when the server goes down? Does it die, or just disappear?]. Evans has orchestrated exhibitions with robots interacting with filmed performers, creating a system including disarming dialogues between the two. And early on in *Amos' World*, an audio vignette, seemingly a historical radio clip, illustrates the effects of an early Artificial Intelligence experiment where a secretary communicating with a computer program asked her supervisor to leave because the conversation with the machine was getting too personal.



The dense storylines and staged scenarios plumb our digital lives with references to pop culture, peaceful scenes of cloud landscapes and soothing voices [many are disembodied and one distinctive and recurring voice is that of Evans herself; by the way, one reason she does her own voiceovers is to ease the editing process]. There are also non-peaceful scenes of abandoned shopping malls and post-industrial settings, and many other scavenged or assemblaged elements. Soundtracks are both composed original material and manipulated pop songs. The stories' scripts jump between topics in a way that simultaneously connects and digresses, just like toggling browser tabs or clicking through links on Web. Evans is in fact fascinated with hyperlinks and hyperlinked thinking [our conversation is a bit like this, in fact, which is refreshing], and even named one of her films *Hyperlink* or *It Didn't Happen*.

The characters become a way to form different positions within the work, and develop more nuanced strands within the question, Evans explains. They can contradict one another or find commonalities all within the same framework, so that the narrative itself is linear, in the sense that it's fiction and stuff happens; but non-linear in the sense that any conclusion happens through the viewer's perception rather than final moral or answer.

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