# H3K

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**House of
Electronic
Arts**    **Basel**

Warning:
Triggered by lightning flashes, severe dizziness and seizures can occur in some users of
VR glasses (1 of 4000). Even if you are not suffering from epilepsy.

**The Unframed World.**
*Virtual Reality as artistic medium for
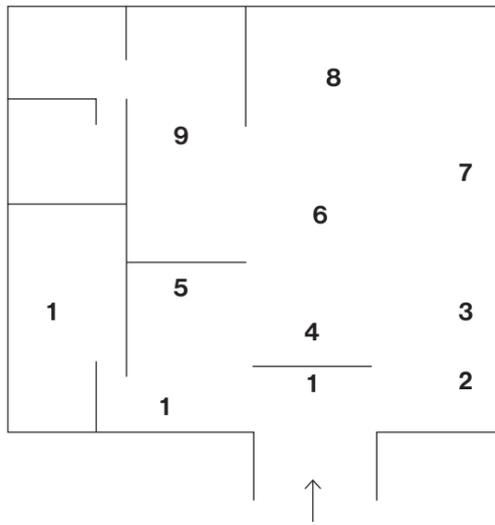the 21st century*
19.01.2017 - 05.03.2017

**hek.ch**

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*Virtual Reality as artistic medium for the 21st century.*

# The Unframed World.

*Virtual Reality as artistic medium for the 21st century*

19.01.2017 - 05.03.2017



*In Virtual Reality the viewer overcomes the limited surface of a computer screen. Instead of looking through a window, the viewer exits real surroundings to become part of another world. The exhibition presents various artistic approaches towards the medium, conveys its aesthetic potential and examines its role as a critical medium for reflection on states of being in the world today. The works address architecture and urbanity, bodily perception and physical laws, social issues, poetry, performance, gender and identity. VR experiences by nine international artists that are embedded in their installations, projections, video works or sculptures in the exhibition space.*

*The desire of humanity to become immersed and to delve into new worlds has always been present — like the inner chambers of Egyptian pyramids, the frescoed rooms of the Renaissance, panoramas or vast cinema screens. Looking at a flat surface remains a passive experience for the viewer, ever aware of the limited screen and the real environment. In Virtual Reality, the beholder now perceives surroundings in a 360-degree all-round range in 3D from a personal point of view and explores them using a head-mounted display, a controller and body movement. As an active component and central point, the viewer or user moves around in the illusionary space and senses a self-presence as well as the proportions and dimensions of the surroundings. In the exhibition, the visitor becomes a part of virtual artworks, which are thereby lifted from the pedestal of sublime admiration and brought closer to the reality of the viewer›s life.*

*Curated by Tina Sauerländer (peer to space).*

**1** Mélodie Mousset & Naëm Baron (1981 in Abu Dhabi, lives and works in Zurich / *1987 in France, lives and works in Geneva)

In the virtual world of *HanaHana* (2016), the user grows arms with hands as chain-like plants in a desert-like sandbox. The title refers to the protagonist Nico Robin of the Manga series *One Piece* who — thanks to the power of the Hana-Hana fruit — can infinitely sprout and reproduce body parts outside her body. The repetition of Hana (Japanese for flower or bloom) refers to the replication of the hands in VR as well as to the self-reproductive system of nature. The endless copying of own body parts (the self) reduces the meaning of the original and of the individual self in general — especially in the digital and virtual realm without any "originals".

When looking down, the VR user perceives swarming blood-like particles (where the physical body would be), as if stripped down of one's own outer shell. Therefore Mélodie Mousset's wall piece *Pattern For Hysterical Change* (2017) in the exhibition space — a replication of a UV map of a hand — could be seen as the VR user's missing "skin". A UV map is a 2D texture covering a 3D object (usually used in digital 3D modeling). Here, it represents the material world itself as well as the physical human presence in the exhibition space. The floor projection of *Femme sans fin seizes* (2017) this notion as it shows the artist's body ever-changing to the circular loop of a donut.

**2** Rachel Rossin (*1987 in West Palm Beach, Florida, lives and works in New York City)

In Rachel Rossin's installation *Just a Nose* (2016), the viewer emerges on the rough surface of the open sea. In the real surroundings, paintings on the wall hang close to the water's moving surface. In VR, similar painted fabric pieces float around. The user can grab them with a horn-like nose reminiscent of a sailing ship's jib boom. Elements from the real and the virtual layers are transferred onto the other and create a unity, just like the two worlds merge in our real, daily lives. Rossin uses digital data that she transforms into paintings, which then find their way in a digitalized form into the VR space. They reveal abstracted, deformed versions of real objects of the artist's surrounds. "In both realms, there's an interpretation. There's an interpretation in the virtual world of what reality is, and then there's an interpretation by myself of what the virtual world is in a physical reality", says Rossin.

**3** Martha Hipley (*1987 in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, lives and works in New York)

Manual: In Martha Hipley's installation *Ur Cardboard Pet* (2016), the user first takes an online test on the computer and then receives a personalized result that can be viewed with the Cardboard device in the same color: the "ideal" pet / boyfriend. The user activates the vibrating and glowing add-on with his thumbs.

In her work, Hipley satirizes the romanticized depiction of "humanizing" technology by making it female and over-the-top twee to make it less frightening. This happened with the release of New Wave Band's *Bow Wow Wow*'s album *Your Cassette Pet*, the first cassette-only album, released in 1980. With the ironic dualism of "pet – partner," Hipley criticizes the depiction of female self-identity as being relational to male as she experienced while watching the Manga Chobits: The female AI (artificial intelligence) robot Chi dedicated her "life" to finding her one true male soul mate. The quiz is an ironic version of the tests in teen magazines that give "advice" to young females. Here the result is experienced true-to-life in VR and physically sensed with the fleshy add-on to the cardboard that evokes the human body. Therefore the work explores the intersections and boundaries between humanity and the artificial devices that try to simulate human conditions.

**4** Fragment.In

Simon de Diesbach (*1987 in Bern), Laura Perrenoud (*1991 in Lausanne) und Marc Dubois (*1985 in Basel), live and work in Lausanne

The multilayer virtual reality experiment *2199* (2017) ironically aims to give visitors the power to reshape sounds through a virtual space. Seated in motorized turning chairs, the user moves around and explores the virtual surroundings and their way of functioning. The space is shared with two other individuals. They see the actions of each other and can interact, e.g. by synchronizing head movements and rotating plates together to create a choreography. In their work the Swiss interaction design studio *Fragment.in* creates innovative, interactive art projects by mixing installation, video and game design to explore the boundaries between digital and tangible interaction.

**5** Alfredo Salazar-Caro (*1989 in Mexico City, lives and works in Chicago, New York und Mexico City)

In his very personal series, Salazar-Caro creates virtual portraits of individuals important in his life. He started the series using 3D scans as a way to freeze time and capture people in a way that might transcend their physical bodies. *The Portrait of Elizabeth Mputu* (2017) characterizes the artist, activist and herbalist in different versions: She appears as the plant goddess with her lush garden; another reveals a more realistic, human-like side of Elizabeth. The VR experience allows the viewer to explore the portraits by moving in the VR space; whereas the miniature sculpture can be looked at in the physical exhibition space. With his works, Salazar-Caro examines the perception of dimensions and proportions in the virtual space and in contrast to the real world. He explores concepts of identity, memory, and time, often using digital avatars and virtual reconstructions of environments to create a hyper self-portraiture for participatory engagement and viewing.

**6** Rindon Johnson (*1990 in San Francisco, lives and works in New York)

Manual: Enter the link www. rinjohnson.com/meet-in, then select the cardboard icon in the lower right corner of the video. When the 2-part video appears, place your smartphone in the Google Cardboard and plug the headset into the port.

With *Meet in the Corner* (2016), Rindon Johnson extends poetry into the VR space and creates an intimate surrounding for the viewer to experience his spoken word about contemporary critical issues and dilemmas and humanity in general: racism, sex, war and love. He creates imagined, meditative and confusing realities for his extremely personal yet political lines. Each little scene functions as a transition between poems but also as a way to relive and construct various memories. Johnson is interested in the ways different kinds of language can be articulated through new media, the relation between image and text and the naming and un-naming of things via internet communication. Further he explores how individuals feel their bodies in virtual or actual space.

**7** Friedemann Banz (*1980 in Mainz) & Giulia Bowinkel (*1983 in Düsseldorf), live and work in Düsseldorf

In the VR Experience *Mercury* (2016), artist duo Banz & Bowinkel relocate the viewer on an archipelago connected by footbridges. Elements of nature, culture or technology intertwine into a surreal terrain in which known physical laws are overridden. Both worlds are interconnected via interfaces such as a webcam. In their work, the artists focus on the human fascination with development, permeation and visualization of so-called reality. This includes the fusion of man with his tool — the computer, which has increasingly become a multifunctional prosthesis (or extension) of our society and the individual. It has proven to be extremely effective at representing reality, as VR simulates a credible alternative to analog, visible world for the eyes: a suggested space where one seems "actually" to be located.

**8** Li Alin (*1976 in Montréal, Kanada), lebt und arbeitet in Berlin

In her installation *Enter Me Tonight* (2016), Li Alin seats the visitor in the center of a circle of chairs. In her virtual experience, the viewer then appears in the middle of seven cloned versions of the female fictional character DeNA. Li Alin recreates another world where women reflect and take action to upgrade the reproductive system that seems to become more and more artificial and inhuman. She talks about the dysfunctional reproductive system that should be protected and improved. She emphasizes the role of women and female orgasm, as well as the principle of love as the best evolutionary strategy. DeNA supports collecting endangered semen in pyramids, giving female maximal orgasmic pleasure during insemination and pleasing the economic system with semen beauty products collected through a mass extraction program. She introduces several (artificial) methods of insemination like the Vibro Gun.

**9** Marc Lee (*1969 in Switzerland, lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland)

*10.000 Moving Cities — Same but Different* (2016) by Marc Lee deals with urbanization and globalization in the digital age. The user moves through visual worlds posted publicly by others on social networks such as YouTube, Flickr or Twitter. Here, these personal impressions are streamed in real time like window to the world. The viewer participates in the social movements of our time and makes a virtual journey into constantly new image and sound collages. In virtual space, this information is visualized on cubes that rise at different heights to become a kind of skyline. The work deals with how our cities are continuously changing and increasingly resemble one. This results in more and more non-places/places of lost places in the sense of Marc Augé's book and essay Non-Places, which could exist all over the world without any true local identity (mostly anonymous transition zones such as hotel rooms or airports).