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We don't want to live in a Universe, We want to live in a Pluriverse!



Elena Bajo, Buried in Your Petals (Datura Dreams), 2023, plant dye on woven cotton textile, jacquard loom, seeds, leaves, flowers, branches, roots, 119, 4 x 91,4 cm, © Elena Bajo, courtesy PRISKA PASQUER GALLERY

We don't want to live in a Universe, We want to live in a Pluriverse!

Warren Neidich, Elena Bajo, Edgar Calel, Mithu Sen

Galerie Priska Pasquer (<https://priskapasquer.art/>)

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By JOSEPH NECHVATAL September 3, 2023

As society unseeingly sleep walks along the path of cultural applications of Artificial Intelligence towards the approaching post-human pop apocalypse, we must be grateful to Galerie Priska Pasquer (<https://priskapasquer.art/>) Paris for providing a venue for artists-thinkers to inject their perverse subjective potholes into that smooth and slippery path. And in so doing, marking pock marks of cultural authenticity that trip up the AI avalanche—if ever so slightly. *We don't want to live in a Universe, We want to live in a Pluriverse!* is a four person group show of AI-reflective works by

Warren Neidich, Elena Bajo, Edgar Cael and Mithu Sen that stresses plurality/diversity—indeed there are many forms of AI, not one. As such, the show presents a captivating exploration of how art ideas and artist's identities can resonate and interact with the AI-manipulated media world around us so as to keep things interesting as art.

Given some applied concentration, the fusion of AI technologies and artistic expressions here enables a weirder (if not always deeper) understanding of the interplays being conducted these days within the viractual: those interplays between the virtual and physical (actual) realms. As Argentinian artist, curator, writer, researcher and musician Syd Krochmalny explained in his talk at the opening of *We don't want to live in a Universe, We want to live in a Pluriverse!*, these four artists probe into the complexities of truth and ownership and its influence on our sense of cultural worth. The convergence of Art and Artificial Intelligence, plays a pivotal role in this context, with its capacity to not only analyze and remix data but to generate novel information—thereby becoming a powerful tool for questioning truth—questioning What is Art?—and exposing the multifaceted layers of our intentions and identities as cultural producers.

The root prefix *pluri-* comes from the Latin *plur-*, meaning plus, many, or more than one: Multi. Like the rhizome concept in post-structuralism that connects any point to any other point according to French theorists Gilles Deleuze (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilles_Deleuze) and Félix Guattari (who used the term in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* to refer to networks that establish connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles with no apparent order or coherency) a pluriverse challenges the modernist ontology of universalism or universal truth in favor of what could become a poetic multiplicity of possible worlds and means of expression. It challenges the idea that scientific rationalism is epistemically superior to all other traditions by making room for other forms of wisdom tied to alternative future histories of strangeness.

Perhaps this is best exemplified by *Words Buried in Your Petals (Datura Dreams)* that was created in 2023 by the Madrid-born New York-based artist Elena Bajo. She uses generative AI to create bizarre textiles woven with an algorithmic-based

Jacquard loom.

Under the self-induced hallucinogenic effects of the indigenous plant *Datura* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datura>), Bajo first fabricates her work by hand, assembling abstract fragments of found textiles into preliminary works. These are then digitally photographed, and the data thus produced is fed into Google's creepy Deep Dream (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DeepDream>), which outputs them in new forms of rather ugly color choices. The resulting suspended textile works are composed of a multiplicity of multicolored whorls or eyes. Bajo's work is a psychedelic experiment that poses the question: Can one induce a "trip" in a machine?



Warren Neidich, *A Proposition for an Alt-Parthenon Marbles Recoded: The Phantom as Other #2*, 2022, neon installation, neon glass tubes, neon gas, photograph, aluminum, 426,72 x 243,84 cm, © Warren Neidich, courtesy PRISKA PASQUER GALLERY

But the star of the show is Warren Neidich's neon speculative philosophical wall piece *A Proposition for an Alt-Parthenon Marbles Recoded: The Phantom as Other #2* (2023). It schematically proposes that the illusory sensations of imaginary

phantom limbs might operate metaphorically as a means of empowerment to the future despotism of what the political philosopher Antoinette Rouvroy calls *algorithmic governmentality* or what Bonaventura de Sousa Santaos (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boaventura_de_Sousa_Santos) calls *epistemicide*.

Opposing accelerationist ambitions, Neidich's work here—presented as a symbol of optimized deep learning neural network or open AI—seems directly directed against Ray Kurzweil's right-wing favorable digital singularity (the hypothetical moment at which machine intelligence might outperform human intelligence—thus resistance) and such forms of AI as Chat GPT by pointing at the loving complex connectivity involved in creating cognitive justice within the pluriverse.

A Proposition for an Alt-Parthenon Marbles Recoded: The Phantom as Other #2 acknowledges that reality is always mediated by our perspective as mediated by technology. It creates an interface in which perception is not a passive act of observation but an active engagement with the diversity of the world which allows us to see the connections and phantom gaps between different viewpoints.



Mithu Sen, How to be A SUCKcessfull artist, 2019, video, 1'11", © Mithu Sen

The New Delhi-based artist Mithu Sen's *How to be a SUCKsuccessful Artist* (2019) is a black-and-white instructional video that uses “poker face” satire to address the avarice of the art world and the models of capitalistic productivity that it prioritizes—especially in relation to artists of the Global South.

The work is tongue-in-cheek and joins other works of institutional critique such as those of Andrea Fraser or, more notably, Lee Lozano's *General Strike Piece* (1969).



Edgar Calel, At nu jukukempe / Te traigo arrastrando / I Drag You With Me, 2016, video, 2'7", © Edgar Calel, Courtesy artist and Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City

With the 2017 video *At nu jukukempe / Te traigo arrastrando / I Drag You With Me*, Guatemala-born artist Edgar Calel explores the complexities of the indigenous experience, as seen through the Mayan Kaqchikel cosmovision, spirituality, rituals, community practices, and beliefs. Such wisdom is set in juxtaposition with the systematic racism and exclusion that the indigenous people of Guatemala endure.

Though perhaps short on answers, *We don't want to live in a Universe, We want to live in a Pluriverse!* asks the right (albeit trendy) questions and so acts as a catalyst for art and technology introspection. It certainly does not fail to foster dialogue about the intricacies of truth and beauty in our increasingly AI-mediated-interconnected wonder world. All four artists push the cliché boundaries of our techno-perceptions, inviting us to critically examine the dynamic relationship between human subjectivity connected with fine art and the AI-juiced hyper-reality we seek to better

comprehend. Creative thinker-artists such as these are essential as they ask us to look behind the ideological curtain and unveil what is hidden beneath the many hidden layers of AI processing: intellectual theft, machine learning, automation, enormous environment-threatening energy consumption, and forever surveillance. Thank heaven they poke the sacred black box to discover a bit if—and how—and why—these quasi-intelligent computer systems make our human-embodied culture better or worse. **WM**



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Joseph Nechvatal is an American artist and writer currently living in Paris. His *The Viral Tempest* (<https://pentiments.bandcamp.com/album/the-viral-tempest>) limited edition art LP was recently published by Pentiments Records and his newest book of poetry, *Styling Sagaciousness: Oh Great No!*, (<https://punctumbooks.com/titles/styling-sagaciousness-oh-great-no/>) by Punctum Books. His 1995 cyber-sex farce novella *~~~~~venus©~Ñ~vibrator*, even (<https://orbistertiuspress.ca/works/>) was published by Orbis Tertius Press in 2023.

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