

# VACANCY

## Press Release

Artist: Rute Merk

Exhibition title:  $f(x)$

Duration: July 14–August 19, 2022

Venue: Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai

Gallery Vacancy is pleased to announce  $f(x)$ , the second solo exhibition by Rute Merk with the gallery from July 14–August 19, 2022.

In the cybernetic sphere we now inhabit, human beings are reduced to computational processes. Digital objects thus become the basic units recognised by both computers and human users. Here arises the possibility of what Merk describes as ‘technologized subjectivity’. Alluding not only to mathematics and science,  $f(x)$  is likewise an attempt in tracing forms of various xenologies - hybridity, syntheticity, alienness.

Eerily distorted and transparent, the images strike the viewers with familiarity yet distract as their identities remain unrevealed. These individuals are activated and constructed from scattered sources of internet and social media. Yet they all reflect the artist’s attraction and desire to beauty and its alienness. This kind of beauty is not natural. It is engineered, over-saturated and over-fetishized, the product of the data aesthetics of our contemporary life.

In *Aerica* (2022), Merk depicts a woman with lavishly shining hair extensions, or what she describes as prosthetic cosmetics. The hyper realistic representation of the hair is not manifested by natural growth, but rather industrialized or even programmed—the realness of CGI hair marks the development of modern technology as it’s considered the most challenging in 3D model buildings.

On the other hand, the engineered notion of beauty is expanded to our daily survival essentials, food. In Merk’s latest series, we can see macarons and steak in a state resembling image-loading. They remain intriguing as our desire for food still provokes, but in fact fleshless and inedible. This fits into the modern day experience of window-shopping through the internet and acknowledging how synthetic biology is transforming the food industry.

Employing oil painting as her medium, the traditionally trained artist reflects two separate sources of light, color and shade in her works: natural and artificial. The figurative approach of Merk’s works is grounded in photographs. There is a certain appreciation of realism about light, originating not directly from the sun (as a daylight), but from industrial electrical circuits, which power light-emitting diodes (LED’s) of our screens, and are interpreted by software of our devices before the digital pixel reconstructions of images are being beamed to our eye retinas. This attempt to capture and to reproduce contributes to the color characteristics of Merk’s paintings: sharp, contrasting, and synthetic.

**Rute Merk**, born in Lithuania in 1991, now lives and works in Berlin. She received her BA in Painting from Vilnius Academy of Arts in 2013 and acquired her painting diploma from Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich, 2020. Merk draws fuzzy lines among genders, anonymous identities, and also the integration of realistic fiction and virtual realities in the fracture of her painting which reverberates in its aesthetics of late '90s RPG video games. Staging her subject matters into the seemingly computer-generated imagery and scenes, Merk takes a deep look into the distance between a person and the phantasmal of the given image, which simultaneously becomes a document and distortion arisen from the triumph of digital world and reformation of the individual. Unknown figures become animated through resemblance to specific personage in the state of virtual existence, a reincarnation of human spirits in the context of technological achievement.

## VACANCY

Recent solo exhibitions include: *f(x)*, Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai, 2022; *Стрілецька*, WT Foundation, Kyiv, 2021; *SS20*, Downs & Ross, New York, 2020; and *Solitaire*, Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai, 2020. Her works have been featured in exhibitions at Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas; Kunstverein München, Munich; Marburger Kunstverein, Marburg; RUPERT, Vilnius; and Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius. Her works are in the collections of: Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva; MO Museum, Vilnius; M Woods Museum, Beijing; Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing; X Museum, Beijing.