

« News from Nowhere »  
a solo show by Robert Brambora

January 14 – February 25, 2023

For a few more instants, a resting man daydreams. The star is in its firmament. Not a blade of grass moves. The peri-urban landscape that welcomes the visitor to Robert Brambora's third solo exhibition at sans titre is bathed in the weightlessness of dreams. It is a non-place, a mental space torn from the hassles of everyday life. Soon, however, the sleeper will awaken. He will find himself far away, somewhere else. By analogy, this could resemble the year 2102, the time period of the novel *News from Nowhere* (1890) by polymath William Morris, where the narrator finds himself catapulted into a utopian society governed by egalitarian socialism. There, alienating labor has been abolished in favor of the free development of everyone's creative faculties.

If the exhibition takes its title from the novel, it is because the artist started from comparable premises: what would happen if he placed his universe, usually dystopian, at the site of a utopia? As the rooms progress, the depiction opens up, the atmosphere lightens. The opaque sulfurous drizzle that soaked his previous paintings gives way to a cerulean vapour; his formats, previously intimate, grow in scope to absorb the body of the viewer. We find canvases cut in the shape of profiles, which have become characteristic of Robert Brambora's practice: here, however, the image includes the text even inside its surface, like so many glitches perforating a stratified reality to better open it up to a pure spatiality, a pure virtuality.

Pictorial space is immediately signified to us as *generated*. More specifically, two registers of technological images contend from within the history of the painted medium. The first concerns the technique of the green screen, which permits the integration of filmed objects, or objects created digitally in a same final rendering; this the artist relates to an undercoat of oil paint. The second derives from recent applications of artificial intelligence to create images or text from instructions<sup>1</sup>. Robert Brambora says he has long attempted to integrate textual collage into his painting. Here, the text-image is represented as so many banners signifying the mental overload of the characters: a permanent interference, given form by these phylacteries<sup>2</sup> of the era of the infinite scroll.

Through this stratagem, the emotional palette becomes clearer. The cortices of connected humans are too encumbered with the slag of images and text snippets to manage to express anything fully subjective. What takes the place of dreams for them are Wikipedia definitions or Doctissimo self-diagnoses, the taxonomies of image banks or the incessant media thrum. One of the recurring motifs in the series - the gaping mouths twisted in a primal scream - testifies to the interstellar void of a saturated communication space, where the infrastructure of Web 2.0 pushes prosumers<sup>3</sup> to ever more engagement – share! comment! evaluate! – in the very absence of available brain time.

Concerning the growth of artificial intelligence, researcher Kate Crawford writes: « The AI industry is making and normalizing its own proprietary maps, as a centralized God's-eye-view of human movement, communication, and labor. »<sup>4</sup> For Robert Brambora, technology is never

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1. For example, DALL-E, for images, and GPT-3 for text.

2. In Medieval painting, banners called phylacteries contained words pronounced by the characters.

3. For the philosopher Boris Groys, social networks mark the inauguration of an era of "mass artistic production" which follows the previous era of "mass artistic consumption." Groys, Boris. *Going Public*. Berlin: Sternberg Press/e-flux journal, 2010.

4. Crawford, Kate. *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021. p. 11.

more than a tool to respond to certain pictorial issues. And if the realistic representations generated by AI leave open the field of its hypnagogic presentation, these are indeed, for the artist, the thoughts that create reality, and not the reverse. To empty the too-full, to target the *atopos* of a nowhere: utopia is perhaps nothing other than the uncertain immensity of possibilities, won back from the overdetermination of predictive algorithms and other targeted recommendations.

Ingrid Luquet-Gad  
(translated by Aaron Ayscough)

*Robert Brambora (born in 1984, Germany) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. He completed his studies in the class of Rebecca Warren at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 2015.*

*Solo and duo exhibitions include 'Alternate Endings' at Zentrale, Karlsruhe (2022); 'Retro', Motto Books, Berlin (2022); 'Outro' with Sans titre, Milan (2022); 'Good bye euch' at Tobias Naehring, Berlin (2021); 'La Ballade des Sardines' at Sans titre, Paris (2020); Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2019); 'Too much of Nothing' at Sans titre, Paris (2017); 'Forward to History' (with Jan Kiefer) at Kunstverein Wiesen, Wiesen (2016) and 'The Hunt' at Salon Kennedy, Frankfurt (2015).*

*Recent selected group shows include the Nice Biennale, Le 109, Nice (2022); Weberknechte, Verein für Kunst e.v. - Hinterconti HellsClub, Hamburg (2021); CAN – Centre d'Art Neuchâtel (2020); Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof (2020); Ginny on Frederick, London (2020); Nagel Draxler Gallery, Cologne (2019); Haverkamp Gallery, Berlin (2019), Tobias Naehring, Leipzig (2019); Kunstverein Mönchengladbach (2019); Neuer Kunstverein Essen, Essen, (2018); Basement, Leipzig (2018); Walz, Frankfurt (2018); PIK, Cologne (2017); Schkeudi, Leipzig (2017); Real positive, Cologne (2016); Fiebach|Minninger, Cologne (2016); ABC Kolonie, Copenhagen (2015); Salon Schmitz, Cologne (2015); Museum Kunstpalast, Dusseldorf (2013) amongst others.*