

**Alternate Presence**  
**Petra Szemán**  
**David Blandy**

23rd February – 1st April 2023

PV Thursday 23rd February 6pm



Alternate Presence is a two person show composed of four films, two by each artist, displayed over a wallpapered landscape by Petra Szemán. Similar concerns and strategies link the two artists' output, one being their use of a digital version of 'themselves' within film. This can range from the effective and commonly used first person narrative voice that as viewers we are familiar with, to generating a digital or animated avatar that then performs on behalf of the artist. This representative, named Yourself in the case of Szemán or a majestic Cormorant in one of Blandy's films, can then be filmed within a landscape, whether that's a pre-existing digital environment generated for another purpose or a geographical location captured on camera.

Szemán presents two films from their *Monomyth: gaiden* cycle. *Departure* (2018) and *Master of Two Worlds* (2020) explore the artist's relationship to their digital avatar, Yourself, as well as the processes involved in the creation of a multi-layered image world. As a self-aware protagonist moving along the frayed edges of fictional and real worlds shaped by narrative traditions, Yourself attempts to navigate landscapes that have become oversaturated with movies and fiction. Starting with the statement "I am both myself and a character that looks like me" the avatar makes a journey, progressing through static landscapes then floating multiplanar images and eventually crossing in and out of the pictorial plane itself.

The narration also implies an interplay of roles between the Character and the Player, describing how visual decisions such as clothing or piercings might be driven by either party, at one moment recounting how their 'real life body' had to be changed in order to better represent the latest, levelled-up version of the avatar.

*How to Fly* (2020) is one of several works by Blandy that employs the form of an online video tutorial to explore ideas around patterns in nature and existence. Each of them begins with the artist giving a step-by-step tutorial explaining how to make a short video about a specific subject, using only the tools available via a computer – through the Internet and video editing software to video games. This very practical tutorial at first playfully undermines an audience's faith in the sanctified process of creation. Within the Grand Theft Auto V cinema mode, one of the tools favoured by Blandy to generate work, he talks the viewer through the process of quickly generating script, roughly capturing a scene, finally selecting the seabird as an avatar in order to fly. The work pivots elegantly, having shown the viewer behind the curtain, the ironic detachment is abandoned and the narrator delivers a monologue with unexpected sincerity and meaning. Made in 2020, reflecting the recent period of collective tension, the work offers insight into the spectrum of artifice and sincerity, without having to abandon sincerity itself.

In *Androids Dream*, Blandy deconstructs the cyberpunk aesthetic popularised by Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) which has since proliferated becoming ever more ossified. Formed of multiple simulacra, the work involves Unreal Engine assets and uses scenes from Hideo Kojima's *Snatcher* - itself a replay of *Blade Runner* in video game form - and even deploys an algorithmic likeness of the artist's own voice rather than his own. Breaking down the aesthetic form, the film in turn breaks down, repeats, refracts.

### Notes on the artists

Petra Szemán (b. 1994 Budapest, Hungary). Recent exhibitions include NEO N Festival in Dundee, Scotland; Big Screen Southend; BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland, ICC in Tokyo. After spending two years in Japan, developing a body of work as a recipient of a research scholarship from the Japanese Ministry of Education and Culture (2018-2020), Szemán is now based between North-East England and Tokyo, Japan. They are currently running the project 'On Animatics', commissioning videos about the overlapping area between artists' moving image, games and anime; and co-authoring the accompanying book *WEEB THEORY* with Jamie Sutcliffe, coming out in 2023 with Banner Repeater (London).

David Blandy (b. 1976 London, UK) is currently on show at John Hansard Gallery, a solo exhibition titled *Atomic Light* which will run until 6th May 2023. He has also exhibited at Towner Gallery, Eastbourne; Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea; Kettle's Yard, Cambridge; Art Tower Mito, Tokyo; Kiasma Contemporary Art Museum, Helsinki; Tate Modern, London; The Baltic, Gateshead; Turner Contemporary, Margate; Spike Island, Bristol; Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Germany & MoMA PS1, New York. Most recently he has undertaken a residency at Delfina Foundation, London, as part of *The Politics of Food* programme.

This exhibition will run concurrently with a solo by Susan Collis.

### Images:

Still from Petra Szemán, *Master of two worlds*, 2020

Still from David Blandy, *How to Fly*, 2020