Sandbox Mode
Mitchell F. Chan, Stine Deja, Andreas Gysin, Sara Ludy, Cezar Mocan, The Roedalming Group

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curated by Maria Paula Fernàndez, Stina Gustafsson and OFFICE IMPART

Sandbox Mode is a gaming mode that freely allows gamers to explore the narrative and the game in a nonlinear way to open up for free experimentation without little to no limitations. This process, which emphasises a free-roaming approach to a wider world, is relevant as a concept to broaden the current curatorial direction of digital art. The multifaceted medium should be approached with the notion of free exploration and experimentation when it comes to working, researching, exhibiting, and contextualising it.

The wide area that it offers, with everything from more delicate code-based works to physical pieces that unforgivingly demand a certain bodily presence, is based on a craftsmanship that considers, combines and contextualises offline and online spaces, and immaterial and material subjects, with a deep understanding of technological creativity. In **Sara Ludy's** *A Large Room with Some Room In It*, the physical space is incorporated into the digital via AI, only to be reintroduced into its physical state through a photograph. Arriving from a place of experimentation, Ludy takes this notion further in her series of video works *Metamimics* in which the artist explores the true nature of AI and as a result our own. Artists have for a long time questioned these notions, putting subjects in opposing lights, and examining the fluid boundaries between the state of being and non-being, and what new technology can tell about our existence.

Just as Ludy considers the physical and the digital and our own state of being through AI, **Stine Deja's** *Hard Core, Soft Bodies* reimagines the physical aspect of the human body in a technological environment. Always with a simple question at the centre - *What does it mean to be human in the age of artificial intelligence and the technological takeover?* - Deja's installation examines the soft inner space of the human body through a technological lens.

Though the practice itself has a wide array of outcomes and approaches, the presentation of digital art tends to sometimes be restricted to a very static approach, only to be limited to outcomes that perfectly fit on screens. In Deja's case, the boundary between the screen and the audience is minimised through 250 kg of gravel, grounding it in the physical space, naturally growing the piece outside the screen, and connecting it with the floor. It is this reach beyond the screen that makes digital art a practice that naturally seeps out into areas we have little control over, both physical and digital. The lives that some of the pieces have on their own, online or even in the viewer's mind, open up for an uncontrollable exploration of concepts and ideas, a free-roaming mode with little to no limitations.

The idea of a piece elevating its existence beyond the physical space is exemplified in **Mitchell F. Chan's** *The Boys of Summer*. The participatory piece, unfolding online as a game, allows its collectors to partake with their generative PFPs. Whilst reflecting upon deeper questions around what is considered success in modern society, *The Boys of Summer*'s multifaceted nature offers a

natural extension beyond the piece that is exhibited in the gallery, with outcomes that neither the curator nor the artist can control.

This notion, of a potential continuation and existence beyond the physical, is also manifested in **The Roedalming Group's** piece *TURE*. With its poetic approach and consideration of creativity, the new art movement forgoes all control of the performative aspect of the piece. The idea of control is completely written out of this work as the artist refrains from all their authority from the start and opens up for free exploration of what creativity in a communal setting might mean. *TURE* is a gentle and poetic piece that is created in the setting of the community in which it exists.

Furthermore, the importance of the communal aspect of the digital space is reflected in **Andreas Gysin's** *LDC 1*. First stating the tiny object contains everything the artist knows, Gysin later elaborated on his statement, saying that the artwork contains intelligence and knowledge from others in the artist's circle, all of whom played a role in the realisation of the artwork. Though *LCD 1* has a much more physical element in its presentation, the concept becomes more fluid when considering the care for communal intelligence that is arguably essential to its creation process. Though small, *LCD 1* contains a wealth of ideas and knowledge, and acknowledges the importance of others in its creation, offering a glimpse into the complexity that is oftentimes present in digital art.

The acknowledgement of communal intelligence and knowledge is vital to digital art space and, arguably also, vital to its presentation. By nurturing the shared outcomes that it brings, we also open up for recognition and consideration of interdependencies throughout the space. These interdependencies don't need to be exclusively between humans but can be between machines and humans, or even between machines, where the human factor is sometimes simply present in the creation of the display.

In **Cezar Mocan's** new work, *World Upstream*, the coexistence between man and machine, nature and technology, is blurred, reflecting upon what shape a *more-than-human community* might take. In Mocan's world, AI has moved beyond its metaphorical state of being, taking a more bodily shape. Their umwelt is negotiated by the landscape, rather than server farms, exposing them to the dangers and truths the physical landscape might hold. *World Upstream* imagines a new genre of painting for the late 21st century, a place where different intelligences can exist in less hierarchical ways, and in more communal settings.

Though highlighting very different questions through their ideation and realisation, all pieces reach beyond the traditional notion of presentation. A single-minded approach to a medium with multitudes of outcomes narrows it down to a very formal way of thinking, whereas this is an area that requires an open-minded approach, from ideation to exhibition. Even though presented in controlled and formal settings, the works often seep through into areas which can't be controlled either by the curator or the artists, presenting a complexity that requires consideration for curatorial decisions about aspects that sometimes reach outside the walls of the gallery.

Text by Stina Gustaffson