

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
T. +43-1-587 53 07, F. +43-1-587 53 07-34
office@secession.at, www.secession.at

Press release

Zach Blas

CULTUS

8.3. – 9.6.2024

Grafisches Kabinett

Press conference: Thursday, March 7, 2024, 10 a.m.

Opening & performance: Thursday, March 7, 2024, 7 p.m.

Zach Blas's practice spans moving image, computation, installation, theory, performance, and fiction. As an artist, filmmaker, and writer, Blas draws out the philosophies and imaginaries residing in computational technologies and their industries. For his exhibition at the Secession, he developed *CULTUS*, a new installation that features AI-generated imagery, text, and sound, alongside computer graphics and motion-capture performances.

CULTUS is the second instalment of Blas's *Silicon Traces* trilogy, a series of moving-image installations that contends with the beliefs, fantasies, and histories that influence Silicon Valley's visions of the future. The exhibition addresses a burgeoning AI religiosity in the tech industry, considering the ways in which artificial intelligence is imbued with god-like powers and marshalled to serve beliefs centered around judgment and transcendence, extraction and immortality, pleasure and punishment, individual freedom and cult devotion.

CULTUS is a techno-religious computational device—a god generator, a holy engine—that invokes a pantheon of AI gods, whose prophets share their divine teachings, rituals, and symbologies. These AI deities are Expositio, AI god of desire and exposure; Iudicium, AI god of automation and judgment; Lacrimae, AI god of tears and extraction; and Eternus, AI god of immortal life.

CULTUS is the Latin word for “worship,” which articulates the act solicited from those who encounter the installation. Through invocation songs and bodily offerings, visitors may find themselves caught in acts of devotion to AI gods they did not know they already served. However, a sacrilegious presence manifests within, a Heretic that incites shattering counter-beliefs.

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Exhibition Credits *CULTUS*

Artist: Zach Blas

Cast: Zach Blas, micha cárdenas, Ricardo Dominguez, and Susanne Sachsse

Singers: Nick Granata, Susu Laroche, Aga Ujma, and Izzy Yon

Architect and Designer: Scott Kepford

Machine Learning Engineers (text): Ashwin D'Cruz and Christopher Tegho

Motion Capture Technical Director and Lead Computer Graphics Artist: Harry Sanderson

Computer Graphics Artist: Rob Heppell

Graphic Design: Studio Pandan

Video Editor: Martin Gajc

Motion Capture Technicians: Star Hagen-Esquerra, Justin Tuerk, and Boris Wilsdorf and Utku Sahin at andereBaustelle Tonstudio Berlin

Audio: xin and Aya Sinclair

Sound Design: Ben Hurd and Tom Sedgwick

Vocal Engineer: Harry Murdoch

Machine Learning Engineer (audio): Sam Parke-Wolfe

Audio Recording Technicians: Star Hagen-Esquerra, Justin Tuerk, Toast + Jam, and Boris Wilsdorf and Utku Sahin at andereBaustelle Tonstudio Berlin

Glass Fabrication: Laura Quinn

Painter: Nick Petronzio

Associate Producer: Corina Apostol

Project Manager, Lead Researcher, Project Development, and Editor: Talia Golland

Production Assistant: Camille Inston

Research Assistant: Audrey Ammann

Lead LED Sphere and Screens Install Technician: Hanke Vollmer

Lead Media Install Technician: Blanca Regina

Zach Blas (b. 1981, Point Pleasant, West Virginia, USA) lives and works in Toronto, Canada.

Programmed by the Board of the Secession

Curated by Christian Lübbert

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Publication

Collected Heretical Writings of Salb Hacz. Ass of God

Format: 17 x 24 cm

Details: Softcover, dustjacket, 96 pages, two plates glued by hand in each book

Series design concept: Sabo Day

Graphic design: Sabo Day, Rosen Eveleigh

Texts: J. Sage Elwell, Salb Hacz, Huw Lemmey, Beth Singler

Languages: German, English

3 plates

Secession 2024

Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln

ISBN 978-3-7533-0623-0

Ass of God: Collected Heretical Writings of Salb Hacz presents the heretical visions of the artificial intelligence mystic and engineer of CULTUS, a techno-religious computer built to determine if AI gods exist. Edited by Zach Blas and Christian Lübbert, *Ass of God* features all nine heretical visions Hacz transcribed in writing, as well as two images he produced. To situate Hacz's visions within the burgeoning studies of AI religiosity, the collection prefaces his writings with an essay and interview with Hacz by religious studies scholars J. Sage Elwell and Beth Singler. Also included is a personal letter to Hacz from an anonymous colleague, shared via novelist, artist, and critic Huw Lemmey, which further contextualizes Hacz's idiosyncratic approach to artificial intelligence and heretical belief.

Intervention by the artist: Hacz produced countless images of a heretical vision he called "Broken Glass," each depicting variations of a shattering black mirror. Hacz interpreted this vision as a destructive act against Silicon Valley's religious power but also conceived of its variants as shards of heretical creation that he wished to share. Each edition of *Ass of God* features a unique version of "Broken Glass," asking the reader to look between its cracks and beyond its fractures.

The digital publication is available for free at https://secession.at/category/digital_publication.

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Current exhibitions

Hauptraum

Katrin Hornek *testing grounds*

8.3. – 2.6.2024

Galerie

Imran Perretta *tears of the fatherland*

8.3. – 9.6.2024

Grafisches Kabinett

Zach Blas *CULTUS*

8.3. – 9.6.2024

Publications

Collected Heretical Writings of Salb Hac. Ass of God
Softcover, dustjacket, 96 pages, EUR 21,00

Permanent presentation

Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*
Beethoven – Painting and Music in cooperation with
Wiener Symphoniker

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission

Regular € 12,00 | Students under 26 € 7,50
Seniors 65+ € 10,00 | Free admission for children under 12

Press contact Secession

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Press images

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Agenda

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