KARLO ŠTEFANEK

CHEERS! SO SHE GOES



GALERIJA MIROSLAV KRALJEVIĆ
ŠUBIĆEVA 29, ZAGREB
31. 03. — 04. 04. 2026.

Osjećaj neprekidne, površne komunikacije, koja pritom poprima sizifovsku jalovost, tematsko je žarište izložbe umjetnika Karla Štefaneka pod nazivom Cheers! So She Goes. Referirajući se na koncept ne-mjesta francuskog antropologa Marca Augéa, Štefanek galeriju pretvara u kafić, ali mu oduzima antropološki značaj mjesta društvene razmjene, čime takav prostor počinje funkcionirati kao svojevrsno Augéovo ne-mjesto. U njemu umjetnik kroz svoju digitalnu prisutnost evocira osjećaje otuđenosti, isključenosti i samoće. Takva se digitalna prisutnost materijalizira kroz nekoliko međusobno povezanih radova: video radove raspoređene za stolovima u galerijskom prostoru, video instalaciju smještenu u WC-u te popratni audio rad koji odjekuje galerijom. Takve osjećaje često artikuliraju i druga ne-mjesta poput aerodroma, metroa i supermarketa, svojom arhitekturom te hauntološkim svojstvima bezvremenosti i identitetske praznine. U tom se ključu može čitati prvi segment postava, u kojem se galerijski prostor transformira u interijer nalik kafiću: stolovi i stolice raspoređeni su u ambijentalnu cjelinu, a svakom je stolu pridružen TV ekran na kojem se reproducira video umjetnika koji sjedi u istovjetnom položaju, s pogledom usmjerenim ravno prema promatraču. Iako su lokacije pojedinih videa različite, osjećaj koji ih prati – kao i interakcija na koju umjetnik kroz digitalne radove poziva – ostaje obilježen nedohvatljivim, tupim osjećajem distanciranosti. Interakcija između umjetnika i posjetitelja nikada se u potpunosti ne ostvaruje, pa njegove geste i reakcije na okruženje djeluju kao pucanj u prazno. Čak i prilikom umjetnikova TikTok live performansa, izvedenog povodom otvorenja izložbe, Štefanek se pojavljuje u istom položaju tijela u svom amsterdamskom studiju te publici dopušta komunikaciju putem chata.

Unatoč toj mogućnosti, komunikacija se doima bezlična i jednosmjerna. Time se dodatno naglašava kritička oštrica Štefanekova rada spram digitalnih platformi kao ne-mjesta povezivanja. Nadovezujući se na isti motiv alijenacije, drugi segment postava čini video instalacija smještena u intimno, za selfie uobičajeno poprište – WC. Video rad, generiran i uz pomoć umjetne inteligencije, stvara nekoliko verzija snimke autoportreta umjetnika u ogledalu koje se u petlji ponavljaju i mijenjaju. Iteracije snimaka prati podtekst koji istodobno replicira isprazne fraze i internetski sleng, ali i izdvojene riječi i usklike kakve možemo razabrati u žamoru kavanskih razgovora. Video instalacija kroz ponavljanje u petlji tako pokušava simulirati neprestano, kompulzivno osvježavanje obavijesti na društvenim mrežama, što dodatno ulijeva tjeskobu atmosferi izložbe koja oponaša različite mehanizme otuđenja karakteristične za društvene mreže u stvarnosti. WC tako postaje prostor koji više nije rezerviran samo za privatnost, nego se pretvara u liminalno mjesto u kojem se datosti digitalnog prostora – poput dijeljenja, konfesionalnosti i (samo)nadzora – prelijevaju u fizički prostor. Preplavljenost koju stvaraju interakcije u digitalnom svijetu umjetnik evocira i u popratnom audio radu koji odjekuje galerijom. Sastavljen od nasumičnih audio isječaka s TikToka, rad povezuje rascjepkane riječi u narativnu cjelinu koja dočarava prekid odnosa ispričan iz perspektive jednog sugovornika. Kroz pozorno slušanje publici se otkriva da je riječ o umjetnoj inteligenciji, personificiranoj nadimkom Archie, s kojom umjetnik prekida odnos. Disocijativnost u prekidu odnosa s neživim, digitalnim bićem satirično prikazuje još jedan element postkapitalističke proizvodnje digitalnih sfera, u kojima ponekad jedini pažljivi slušač i podrška u moru neuspjelih interakcija postaje upravo inteligentno osmišljen korporativni sustav.

Kada pričamo o Štefanekovoj umjetničkoj praksi, kvir aspekt uvijek je od nje neodvojiv, a umjetnik ga njeguje i u ovoj izložbi. U njegovu se pristupu kvir dimenzija najsnažnije očituje upravo u načinu na koji promišlja digitalnost. Stvaranje online persona, redefiniranje identiteta i necenzurirano bivanje sobom oduvijek su u matricama interneta bili dio svojevrsnog obreda prijelaza mladih ljudi koji su u tinejdžerskim danima pokušavali formirati sebe izvan heteronormativnih nametanja i njihovih temporalnosti. Rastom interneta, koji postupno postaje plodno profitersko tlo, kvir osobe sve se češće nalaze na online ratištima na kojima se bore za svoj komadić digitalnog bespuća. To su prostori u kojima ih korporacije neće prisiljavati na podvrgavanje kroz besramnu krađu osobnih podataka, plasiranje proizvoda i cenzuru umotanu u celofan zaštite njihovih marginaliziranih identiteta. Štefanek stvaranjem performativnih alter ega raskrinkava optičku varku zajedništva koju društvene mreže promoviraju te ih razotkriva kao suštinski izvještačene digitalne komplekse, u kojima i kvir osobe teško pronalaze sigurnost koja im je nekoć na internetu bila zajamčena. Kvir autentičnost zamjenjuju lukave korporativne doskočice – u svojevrsnoj kustoskoj maniri selektiraju se i komercijaliziraju persone na internetu kojima bi kvir osobe navodno trebale stremiti. Baš kao i različiti inertni kvir likovi koje Štefanek utjelovljuje, korporacije marketinški promiču kvir osobe koje se uklapaju u heteropatrijarhalni predložak poslušnih, politički atrofiranih i jednoličnih potrošača. To su subjekti koji se za svaku situaciju moraju prilagoditi kapitalističkoj agendi koja im se nameće. Upravo kroz Štefanekovu uporabu ironije izložba kritički propituje opstojanje kvir osoba ne samo u svijetu interneta nego i u realnom svijetu. Pritom se on

pokušava uhvatiti u koštac s pitanjem kako se trenutačne društvene promjene i stavovi prema kvir osobama preslikavaju na naslovnicama naših društvenih mreža. Ono što izložbu dodatno usmjerava u kvir teritorij jesu brojna pomno promišljena umjetnička rješenja, koja u umjetnikovu radu funkcioniraju kao posveta kvir kulturi. Tako Štefanek, primjerice, daje omaž kvir kulturi kroz odabir internetskih žargona koje aktivno koriste kvir osobe, selfieje koji nalikuju uobičajenim thirst trapovima gej muškaraca na dejting aplikacijama, vrlo camp inscenacijom prekida homoseksualnog odnosa s umjetnom inteligencijom, pa čak i detaljem raznobojnih IKEA stolića i stolica. Oni su, zahvaljujući memovima o IKEA-inim inkluzivnim marketinškim strategijama, postali nišni simbol unutar dijela kvir internetske kulture. Štefanekova uronjenost u kvir pop-kulturu, ali i njegova svjesnost o široj problematici toksičnih online kultura uspijevaju iz različitih točaka gledišta okupiti publiku koja će se, neovisno o vlastitoj uključenosti u digitalne svjetove, moći pronaći u njegovu radu.

— Leopold Rupnik

The sense of continuous, superficial communication—one that takes on a Sisyphean futility—forms the thematic core of Karlo Štefanek's exhibition Cheers! So she goes. Drawing on French anthropologist Marc Augé's concept of the non-place, Štefanek transforms the gallery into a café, while stripping it of its anthropological function as a site of social exchange. In doing so, the space begins to operate as a kind of Augéan non-place. Within it, the artist evokes feelings of alienation, exclusion, and solitude through his digital presence. This presence materializes across several interconnected works: video pieces arranged on tables throughout the gallery, a video installation located in the restroom, and an accompanying audio work that reverberates through the space. Such affective states are often articulated by other non-places—airports, subways, and supermarkets—through their architecture and their hauntological qualities of timelessness and identity void. This framework is key to understanding the first segment of the exhibition, in which the gallery is transformed into a café-like interior: tables and chairs are arranged into an ambient whole, and each table is paired with a TV screen displaying a video of the artist seated in an identical position, gazing directly at the viewer. Although the locations of the individual videos vary, the affect they convey—and the interaction the artist invites through these digital works—remains marked by an elusive, muted sense of distance. The interaction between artist and viewer never fully materializes; his gestures and responses to the environment feel like shots fired into the void. Even during the artist's TikTok Live performance, staged for the exhibition opening, Štefanek appears in the same bodily position from his Amsterdam studio, allowing the audience to communicate via

chat. Despite this possibility, the communication feels impersonal and one-directional. In this way, the critical edge of Štefanek's work toward digital platforms as non-places of connection becomes even more pronounced. Extending this motif of alienation, the second segment of the exhibition consists of a video installation situated in an intimate, selfie-familiar setting—the restroom. Generated in part with the help of artificial intelligence, the video produces multiple looping variations of the artist's mirror self-portrait. These iterations are accompanied by a textual layer that simultaneously reproduces empty phrases and internet slang, as well as isolated words and exclamations reminiscent of the murmur of café conversations. Through its looping repetition, the installation simulates the compulsive refreshing of social media notifications, intensifying the anxiety that permeates the exhibition's atmosphere—one that mimics the mechanisms of alienation characteristic of social networks in everyday life.
The restroom thus becomes a space no longer reserved solely for privacy, but a liminal site where the conditions of digital space—sharing, confessionality, and (self-) surveillance—spill over into the physical world. The sense of overwhelm produced by digital interactions is further evoked in the accompanying audio work that echoes throughout the gallery. Composed of random audio fragments sourced from TikTok, the piece weaves together disjointed words into a narrative whole, depicting a breakup from the perspective of one interlocutor. Through attentive listening, it becomes apparent that the speaker is an artificial intelligence, personified under the nickname Archie, with whom the artist is ending a relationship. The dissociative quality of breaking up with a non-living digital entity satirically points to another dimension of

post-capitalist digital production, in which, amid a sea of failed interactions, the only attentive listener and source of support may be a carefully engineered corporate system.

When discussing Štefanek's artistic practice, the queer dimension is inseparable from it, and the artist sustains it in this exhibition as well. In his approach, this dimension is most strongly expressed in the way he engages with digitality. The creation of online personas, the redefinition of identity, and the uncensored freedom to be oneself have long been embedded in the fabric of the internet as a kind of rite of passage for young people attempting to form themselves outside heteronormative impositions and their temporalities. As the internet expands—gradually becoming fertile ground for profit extraction—queer individuals increasingly find themselves on online battlegrounds, fighting for their share of digital wilderness: spaces where corporations will not coerce them through shameless data extraction, product placement, and censorship wrapped in the guise of protecting marginalized identities. By creating performative alter egos, Štefanek exposes the illusion of togetherness promoted by social media, revealing it instead as an inherently artificial digital complex in which even queer individuals struggle to find the sense of safety once promised by the internet. Queer authenticity is replaced by cunning corporate strategies: in a curatorial gesture of sorts, online personas are selected and commodified as aspirational models for queer users. Much like the various inert queer characters embodied by Štefanek, corporations promote those queer subjects who fit neatly into a heteropatriarchal template of compliant, politically subdued, and homogeneous consumers—

subjects who must continuously adapt to the capitalist agenda imposed upon them. Through his use of irony, the exhibition critically interrogates the conditions of queer existence not only within digital environments but also in the real world. At the same time, Štefanek grapples with the question of how contemporary social shifts and attitudes toward queer individuals are reflected across the surfaces of our social media feeds. What further situates the exhibition within a queer register are numerous carefully considered artistic choices that function as tributes to queer culture. For instance, Štefanek pays homage through the use of internet slang actively employed by queer communities, selfies reminiscent of typical "thirst traps" found on gay dating apps, a highly camp staging of a breakup with artificial intelligence, and even the detail of multicolored IKEA tables and chairs. Thanks to memes surrounding IKEA's inclusive marketing strategies, these have become niche symbols within segments of queer internet culture. Štefanek's immersion in queer pop culture, coupled with his awareness of the broader issues surrounding toxic online environments, succeeds in bringing together audiences from different vantage points—allowing viewers, regardless of their own level of engagement with digital worlds, to find themselves reflected in his work.

— Leopold Rupnik

Karlo Štefanek je multidisciplinarni umjetnik čija praksa istražuje kako se identitet konstruira, dekonstruira i rekonstruira kroz autoportret i performans. S osamnaest godina Štefanek se seli u Amsterdam, gdje počinje postavljati temelje svoje umjetničke metodologije. Serija Self-titled (2022–), koja integrira vizualne i performativne elemente, te propituje promjenjive predodžbe o sebstvu i percepciji, postala je temeljni dio njegove prakse. Štefanek je izlagao i nastupao u CC Amstel, Amsterdam, Nizozemska (2022); Stedelijk Museum, Rietveld Uncut, Amsterdam, Nizozemska (2023); Treehouse, Amsterdam, Nizozemska (2024); 2nd Floor, Groningen, Nizozemska (2024); La Biennale, Venecija, Italija (2024); Muzej suvremene umjetnosti, Sounded Bodies, Zagreb, Hrvatska (2024); The Holy Art Gallery, London, Ujedinjeno Kraljevstvo (2024); SerformanceP Festival, São Paulo, Brazil (2024); Echo Studio, Amsterdam, Nizozemska (2024); KIC, Zagreb, Hrvatska (2025); Vagon Gallery, Banja Luka, Bosna i Hercegovina (2025); Multimedijalni institut MaMa, Zagreb, Hrvatska (2025); ARL, Dubrovnik, Hrvatska (2025); HDLU Istok, Osijek, Hrvatska (2025); HDLU, 60. Zagrebački salon, Zagreb, Hrvatska (2025); EMAD, Perforations, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2025); Performance in Flux, Immerse, Orlando, SAD (2025); Bijenale mladih, Beograd, Srbija (2025); Biennale del Vesuvio, Napulj, Italija (2025), među ostalima. Umjetnik živi i radi između Zagreba, Amsterdama i New Yorka.

Karlo Štefanek is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice explores how identity is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through the mediums of self-portraiture and performance. At eighteen, Štefanek moves to Amsterdam, where he begins laying the groundwork for his artistic methodology. The series Self-titled (2022-), which integrates both visual and performative elements, has become a cornerstone of his practice, challenging evolving notions of selfhood and perception. Štefanek has been showcased at CC Amstel, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2022); Stedelijk Museum, Rietveld Uncut, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2023); Treehouse, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2024); 2nd Floor, Groningen, Netherlands (2024); La Biennale, Venice, Italy (2024); Museum of Contemporary Art, Sounded Bodies, Zagreb, Croatia (2024); The Holy Art Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2024); SerformanceP Festival, São Paulo, Brazil (2024); Echo Studio, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2024); KIC, Zagreb, Croatia (2025); Vagon Gallery, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina (2025); Multimedia Institute MaMa, Zagreb, Croatia (2025); ARL, Dubrovnik, Croatia (2025); HDLU Istok, Osijek, Croatia (2025); HDLU, 60th Zagreb Salon, Zagreb, Croatia (2025); EMAD, Perforations, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2025); Performance in Flux, Immerse, Orlando, USA (2025); Youth Biennial, Belgrade, Serbia (2025); Biennale del Vesuvio, Naples, Italy (2025), amongst others. The artist lives and works between Zagreb, Amsterdam and New York.

Galerija Miroslav Kraljević
Šubićeva 29, Zagreb

31. 03 — 04. 04. 2026.

otvaranje / opening
utorak, 31. ožujka: 19:00
Tuesday, 31 March: 19:00

Radno vrijeme / opening hours
utorak — petak /
Tuesday — Friday
16:00 — 19:00
subota / Saturday
10:00 — 13:00

qIZLOŽBE redovni su program kolektiva queerANarchive koji doprinosi formiranju kvir diskursa u gradu Splitu.

queerANarchive kolektiv je za razvoj, istraživanje i propitivanje queer kulture koji djeluje od 2010. godine. U vrijeme normalizacije LGBT zajednice i retradicionalizacije društva bavi se partikularnostima queer kulture.

Na međunarodnom nivou sudjelovao je u programima Queer Art Lab SpaceID Madrid, Madrid (2013.). Activist in Residence u Baltic Art Center, Visbyju (2014.), Young Queer Europe (2015.-2016.), What's masc, Berlin (2022.), W/ri/gh/ting Archives through Artistic Research, Beč (2023.), Doing history - methods of artistic historiography, Bauhaus University, Weimar (2023.) te konferencijama Unstraight Museum Conference, Stockholm (2016.), Organ vida, Zagreb (2017.) i Queering Memory ALMS Conference, Berlin (2019.).

Kolektiv je članica Platforme Doma mladih, saveza udruga Klubtura i platforme LGBT centra Split.

qEXHIBITIONS is a program run by collective queerANarchive that opens queer discourse in the town of Split.

Since 2010 queerANarchive works as a collective that develops, researches and questions queer culture. Its curatorial and educational programs deal with particularities of queer culture at the time of LGBT normalisation and re-traditionalization of society.

At the international level the collective participated at Queer Art Lab Space ID Madrid, Madrid (2013), Activist in Residence at Baltic Art Center, Visby (2014), Young Queer Europe (2015 – 2016), What's masc, Berlin (2022), W/ri/gh/ting Archives through Artistic Research, Vienna (2023), Doing history - methods of artistic historiography, Bauhaus University, Weimar (2023) and conferences Unstraight Museum Conference, Stockholm (2016), Organ Vida, Zagreb (2017) and Queering Memory ALMS Conference, Berlin (2019).

The collective is a member of Youth Center Platform, Clubture Network and LGBT center Split platform.

Umjetnik / Artist:
Karlo Štefanek

Kustos izložbe /
Exhibition Curator:
Leopold Rupnik

Kustosi programa /
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Prijevod / Translations:
Leopold Rupnik

Donatori / Donors:
Ministarstvo kulture i medija Republike Hrvatske, Grad Split, Grad Zagreb, Zaklada Kultura nova

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Galerija Miroslav Kraljević

Dizajn / Design:
Nikola Križanac

Produkcija / Production:
queerANarchive 2026.

Zahvale / Thanks to:
Vedran Grladinović (tehnički postav), Val Mačukatin (tehnički postav), Mia Laura Jurčić (producentica), Luka Pešun (fotograf), Noa Lončarić, Tomislav Paviša, Rada Iva Sibila, Kruno Štefanek, Noa Štefanek Snježana Štefanek

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