

Vous n'avez pas besoin d'y croire pour que ça existe

Jul 1 — Oct 15, 2023 | Frac des Pays de la Loire, Nantes, France

Théo Casciani questions the future of works of art in the next world, that of multiverses and avatars, both treasures and guinea pigs, by transforming the Frac's Nantes site into another space, fictitious and digital, between storage and data-center. This exhibition is the seventh chapter in a series of readings and events accompanying the writing of his next novel, *Maquette*, to be published in 2024 by Éditions P.O.L. novel.

An exhibition written by Théo Casciani

A slight variation on the definition of reality given by American author Philip K. Dick[1], the phrase “it doesn’t go away even if you stop believing in it” both introduces and recounts this project: our markers and perceptions troubled by the digital age[2], the need to update our form and discourse-reading software, as well as the will to hijack the standard exhibition format, its codes, its function and its method, to turn it into an alternative space. This navigation is less the work of a curator than the fiction of an author. DEFINITION: It doesn’t go away even if you stop believing in it translates the eponymous chapter of a text conceived like a cosmogony of the world to come, that of multiverses and avatars, of blockchain and artificial intelligence. Since nothing is more virtual than a novel, the exhibition’s mechanisms are replaced by the narrative logic of its pages: checking your device first thing in the morning, relationships, the good and the bad brought on by algorithms, the everyday so contaminated by cyberworlds that one has to wonder whether the reel itself has become just another app[3].

A character steps outside their home to venture into the large warehouse they stare at everyday from their room. What is it? A storage zone, a data center, in any case, it is a laboratory. By staging this mysterious environment in the exhibition space, the public participates in the simulation, in a future[4]. The point is then to fulfill the missions of a Frac, among them collection, mediation and conservation, by asking what happens to artworks, whether they are relics or test subjects, exploited, hacked, or corrupted[5], in these knowledge-preserving institutions once known as museums or libraries.

Whether this downpour of data is a trap for those who wish to understand whole systems[6], or the opportunity for a fragmented reading of the world[7], it is in any case about delineating the limits and content of concepts, of objects and beings, in other words, both for us and for what surrounds us, it is an attempt at establishing a definition. Some will see it as a wild ride, terrifying because dystopian, others as a cozy shelter, reassuring because futuristic. Nevertheless, in the spirit of Philip K. Dick, who swore to always tell nothing but the truth, it is useless to comfort ourselves by believing that this role-play is fake: it is not a sci-fi fantasy but the dark side of the present.

By embracing a multiplicity of forms, including exhibition, performance and edition, unfolding through events in partner venues, this hybrid endeavor brings together specially commissioned pieces with collected works displayed on large shelving. These surviving treasures are the witnesses of a twilight. Our character progresses through the warehouse, wondering what their digital footprint really is. What becomes of signs and traces we leave throughout the internet? What do we teach machines? What can they offer us? Fields and ages cross paths in the program while examining the mirage of generative AIs converting media into organs[8], creation into calculation and error into revolution[9].

Halfway between ultra-connectivity and emotional capitalism[10], the exhibition morphs into an expedition through the jungle of storage, into the darkness and noise of machines, accompanied by our riddle turned slogan: “it doesn’t go away even if you stop believing in it”. Crimes, orgasms, lies, captchas, memes and likes, sentences and artworks are nothing more than a mass to dive into, a forest to drift in while we remember the journey. It is time to use your imagination, your instinct and intuition, all of this mental wealth[11] that allows us to invent our own networks and test the relevance of the reality principle.

It doesn’t go away even if you stop believing in it is the seventh chapter (DEFINITION) of a series of hybrid and collaborative readings accompanying the writing of Théo Casciani’s next novel, *Maquette*, to be published in 2024 by Éditions P.O.L., and whose previous episodes took place, among others, at the Château d’If (Marseille), Reference. Point (London), The White (Tokyo), Terranova (Barcelona), Mucem (Marseille), Left Bank (Tbilisi) and Newton (NYC), with participants such as McKenzie Wark, Michèle Lamy, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Joana Preiss, Félix Maritaud, Nkisi, Thibault Lac, Claude-Em-manuelle Gajan Maull, Aurore Clément, Brother May and Marina Herlop. This cycle of events is supported by the Centre National du Livre and the New Worlds program of the French Ministry of Culture and the Centre des Monuments Nationaux.

Translated by Gabriel René Franjou

- [1] “Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away”, in. Phillip K. Dick, *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon*, Playboy, 1980.
- [2] Manuel Castells, *The Information Age*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 1996-1998.
- [3] B. Stiegler, *La Société automatique*, Fayard, Paris, 2015
- [4] “Simulation is the Future”, in. Grimes, *Miss Anthropocene*, 4AD, 2020.
- [5] McKenzie Wark, *A hacker manifesto*, Harvard University Press, 2004.
- [6] “I count some parts and say I know” in. Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, Dover, 1962.
- [7] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton Press, 2005.
- [8] “Normally, media is seen in the history of art as a representation to depict the world, but I have a different position: I say they are extensions of all sensory organs, artificial sensory organs; and with these organs, we don’t only receive the world, we also produce the world.”, Peter Weibel, in. *Korea Times*, 2023.
- [9] Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, Verso, 2020.
- [10] Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, University of California Press, 1983, and Eva Illouz, *Les marchandises émotionnelles*, Premier Parallèle, 2019.
- [11] “Mental wealth” in. Chris Cunningham, *Commercial for Sony PlayStation*, 1999.