

# CONTEMPORARY IDENTITIES

International Art Magazine

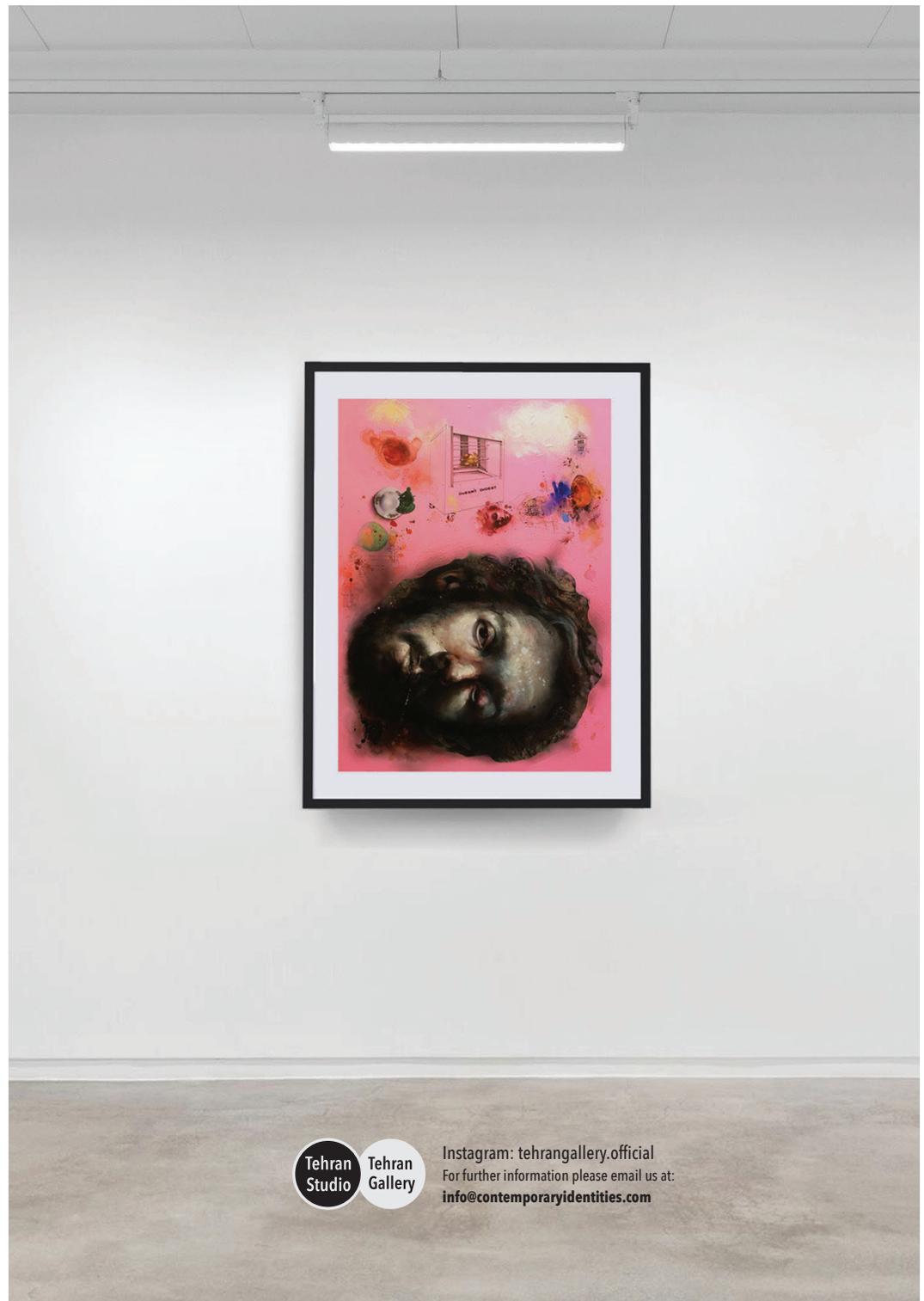
Sergis Adamos | Francesco Balsamo | Giuseppe Cavallini | Olga Jürgenson | Maria Kapajeva | Milorad Panic  
Caterina Sbrana | Marija Šnipaitė | Anna Szigethy | Júlia Végh | Anna Tihanyi | Matias del Campo



ISSUE #19 Sep. 2023

The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery.

Francis Bacon



## CONTRIBUTORS

### Art Writers:

Clive Barstow  
Anna Guillot  
Flounder Lee  
Zoltán Somhegyi  
Gabriella Uhl

### Artificial Intelligence Editor:

Fabio Gamberini

### Editors:

Sara Berti  
Elham Shafaei

### Art Director:

Soheil Hosseini  
tehranstudio.com

### Layout:

Fariba Rahdar

### Front Cover:

Anna Tihanyi, Away, 2022, Collage, Baryt  
print, Strings, Edition 1, 40x60 cm

### Media Consultant:

Emad Pournasiri



## ARTISTS

6 **Sergis Adamos**  
By: Flounder Lee

8 **Francesco Balsamo**  
By: Anna Guillot

10 **Giuseppe Cavallini**  
By: Clive Barstow

12 **Olga Jürgenson**  
By: Gabriella Uhl

14 **Maria Kapajeva**  
By: Gabriella Uhl

16 **Milorad Panic**  
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

18 **Caterina Sbrana**  
By: Anna Guillot

20 **Marija Šnipaitė**  
By: Flounder Lee

22 **Anna Szigethy**  
By: Gabriella Uhl

24 **Júlia Végh**  
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

26 Interviewed artist  
**Anna Tihanyi**

30 **Artificial Intelligence**  
Interviewed artist  
Matias del Campo

## EDITORS' NOTE

At the heart of ContemporaryIdentities is a commitment to inspiring individuals to embrace change, and our latest edition provides accessible avenues to jumpstart personal and societal evolution through artistic engagement.

In the nineteenth issue's spotlight, we feature an exclusive interview with Anna Tihanyi, a distinguished fine art photographer hailing from Budapest. Anna's work is a testament to her ability to craft timeless narratives within a single frame, delving deep into the recesses of the human subconscious. Her academic background, with an MA in communication and a degree in staged photography, sets the stage for her artistic prowess. Notably, her series "Berlin bhf" made its debut in a solo exhibition at the Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center in Budapest and the Balassi Institute in New York City. Anna's portfolio has earned her recognition on the global stage, including the prestigious Lucie Award Scholarship, Photolucida Critical Mass Top 50, LensCulture Emerging Talents, Fine Art Photography Award, and more.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to our esteemed artists and art writers who have contributed their remarkable talents to this issue. Special gratitude goes to our dedicated board member, Zoltán Somhegyi (Hungary), whose insightful contributions to the magazine continue to enrich our content. Additionally, we had the privilege of collaborating with renowned international art critics, including Clive Barstow (Australia), Anna Guillot (Italy), Flounder Lee (USA), and Gabriella Uhl (Hungary), whose expertise and perspectives have added depth to our discussions.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Fabio Gamberini, our editor in the Artificial Intelligence section, for his invaluable contributions to this issue and his ongoing dedication to advancing the intersection of art and technology. He interviewed Dr. Matias del Campo. He is an associate professor of architecture at Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan and the director of the AR2IL Laboratory, the Laboratory for Architecture and Artificial Intelligence, which is an interdisciplinary collaboration between architecture, computer science, robotics, and data science.

We invite you to immerse yourself in the captivating world of contemporary art and explore the transformative potential it holds within the pages of ContemporaryIdentities Issue nineteenth. Thank you for joining us on this artistic journey.

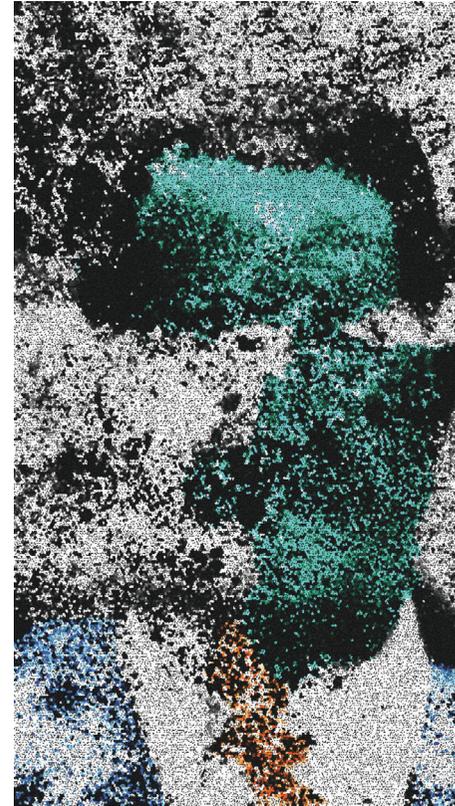
Best wishes,  
**Sara Berti & Elham Shafaei**

# Sergis Adamos

South Africa-Cyprus  
Flounder  
Lee



Almost vanished friends, 2023, Generated from decaying glass negative plates, Digital Art, Limited edition, Giclee Prints, 70x40 cm



Almost vanished friends, 2022, Generated from decaying glass negative plates, Digital Art, Limited edition, Giclee Prints, 70x40 cm



Almost vanished friends, 2023, Generated from decaying glass negative plates, Digital Art, Limited edition, Giclee Prints, 70x40 cm

Working with one of the oldest photographic technologies, Dry Glass Plate Negatives, along with established digital scanning techniques, and new NFT ideas, Sergis Adamos has created a series of works called Almost Vanished Friends. Glass Plate Negatives are notoriously fragile—in 1855, Roger Fenton struggled with them while photographing the Crimean War (the war itself is another echo from the past that is relevant today). Here, they were stored improperly and degraded over time, fusing, merging, decaying, creating. Adamos scanned these remnants and added color and other elements digitally to create new works that tell new stories, or at least fragments of stories.

# Francesco Balsamo

Italy | Anna  
Guillot



Pensa il fianco, 2022, Drawings, Installation, site-specific dimensions, Courtesy of On the Contemporary, Catania, Italy

Francesco Balsamo has always moved between different media, but drawing seems to be the privileged medium that he often combines with writing in verse. The poetic-literary dimension thus amalgamates with that of the visual researcher: the same cadence and content permeate his signs, both the visual and the scriptural.

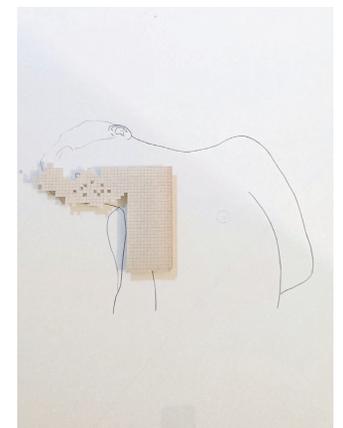
Almost always on paper in black and white, graphite, pastel, oil or tempera, at times characterised by openings in a material or object-oriented key, or flanked by the poetic word, the formal and graphic, imaginative and existential research developed by the author offers itself to multiple, even contradictory readings, always on the ridge of ambiguity, of possibility but also of doubt, of memory and uncertainty, posing itself as a 'sense of disorientation' at times even destabilising, aimed at subverting the viewer's expectations in order to resolve itself, laterally perhaps, as an unconscious investigation of the 'perturbing'.

All this seems to animate Francesco Balsamo's reflection on the theme of the body, the being of the body, the body exposed, the



Notte, 2021, Sewn fabrics, 290x142 cm, Courtesy of On the Contemporary, Catania, Italy

body at risk, the body yearned for and dreamed of. And he himself writes: "The body on the edge of the pencil is a bow. / Walking in the dark, target body. / Nape, leg, foot. / The body disguised as an animal. The fatigue of a climb. / An immobile body, the back has triumphed." Francesco Balsamo's "Pensa il fianco" was recently an intervention conceived ad hoc for On the Contemporary, an installation in the form of a structure intended for a precise corpus of unpublished drawings, derived precisely from a reflection on the theme of the body. The exhibition system and drawings formed a whole, going beyond a simple display solution.



Pensa il fianco, 2016-20, Pencil on paper and tissue paper, 70x50 cm

# Giuseppe Cavallini

Italy | Clive  
Barstow



Nature/sculpture, N.3, 2010, Iron, cement, 68x28x80 cm



Nature/sculpture N.2, 2010, Iron, cement, 73x23x81 cm



Nature/sculpture, N.5, 2010, Iron, cement, 25x15x42 cm

Giuseppe Cavallini's sculptural works present a dialogue between nature and man's attempts to tame it, beyond which the beauty and majesty of architectural forms are uncovered through the traditional process of stone carving. While these fragmented carvings are encased in steel, as if to embrace and make permanent a specific juncture in our cultural history, fractured elements of nature seem to escape, offering a moment of tension between what we can control and what controls us. This interplay offers a poetic mnemonic of such emotive events as the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, a stark reminder of the untamed and eternal power of nature. As climate change takes hold, Cavallini's work assumes a new significance, his circular stone armatures suggesting that time is against us, the clock is ticking and that our world will continue to fragment and self-erase unless we intervene. His sculptural works therefore become timeless, in tune with the idea that art aligns with heterochronic rather than linear models of time, constantly reappearing as a marker of our ongoing balancing act with the natural world.

# Olga Jürgenson

Russia-Estonia-UK | Gabriella Uhl



Washing line, 2015, Installation, Oil on canvas, Pieces of melamine board, 160x300 cm



Washing line, 2015, Oil on canvas, 70x100 cm

The installation titled *Washing line* by Olga Jürgenson explores the relationships of aesthetic politics by way of challenging traditional canons and stereotypes emerging a dialogue between Mauritian artist Krishna Lunchoomun and Estonian-British Olga Jürgenson. In her "answering work" *Washing Line* addresses one of such elements, the theme maternity. This is a personal comment, referring to the artist's moment when contemplating maternity and the cultural concept of its necessity. For the artist, the concept of maternity is shaped by potentially clashing traditionalism and realization of a personal choice. It is not linked in to work to an investigation of gender and female self-realization but rather a to a wider notion of an artist's creative freedom, thereby substituting the identity of woman-mother with that of a universal person creator.



Washing line, 2015, Installation, Oil on canvas, Pieces of melamine board, 160x300 cm

# Maria Kapajeva

Estonia-UK | Gabriella Uhl



I am a usual woman series, 2013, Quilt, 170x170cm, unique, and cushions, Edition of 10

Maria Kapajeva's work is strongly influenced by the moving, the temporality, the absence, and the desire for home. Born and raised as a Russian minority in Estonia, the artist settled and worked in England after the regime changes in Eastern Europe and moved back to her birthplace after Brexit. I deliberately use the terms birthplace and not country of origin or homeland, as these are played with by the artist herself in her work. Experiences of being a multiple oppressed minority in Eastern Europe have been instrumental that she devoted a prominent part of her work to artistic research and creation from a feminist perspective. She has continually shaped her work along the fault lines of assimilation, homemaking, radicalization, disengagement, and detachment. Not only the themes of her series but also her conscious use of media reflect the assumptions of feminist art history writing. In her work, practice and theory go together, constantly reflecting and complementing each other, holding together a world in constant flux.



Kreenholm, 2017, Fiber-based archival photographs, Variable dimension



Fifty / fifty, 2013, Installation with a cross-stitched tapestry, and a stereo sound piece, 13 minutes, 152x180 cm

# Milorad Panic

Serbia | Zoltán Somhegyi



Set A u B, 2014, Carbonate concretions, Variable dimension



Set Z, 2020, Carbonate concretions, 170x170x60 cm



Set KL, 2022, Terracotta, Variable dimension

The artworks created by Milorad Panić document a passionate interest in the various appearances and forms of the "form" itself. It is worth observing the exciting dichotomy between the randomly shaped, amorphous smaller constituent elements and the final piece that they make up. This latter however, i.e. the actual, final work is neatly and meticulously geometric, with

straight lines, balanced proportions and an extremely organised outlook. It thus invites the observer to think of questions like "naturalness" and (imposed) regularity, as well as of mutability and firmness – especially given the material of the works: clay, that is first mouldable and then becomes rigid.

# Caterina Sbrana

Italy | Anna  
Guillot



Gemme, 2018, Installation, white natural clay, Site specific dimensions

All of Caterina Sbrana's work lives as an underlying or direct reflection on the relationship that man establishes with nature and on the problems that nature poses today, having over time assumed the role of overriding subject. More often than not an explicit or undeclared protagonist, man has woven and defined, through personal and often opportunistic points of view, the conjugations of his own existence with respect to a delicate and complex habitat whose reconsideration and redetermination cannot now be postponed. Caterina Sbrana's work focuses on the relationship between the human and the non-human, between nature and culture. Sbrana places the landscape and its elements at the center of a timeless reflection, which is pressing and necessary today.

After classical studies in Pisa (Tuscany, IT), Sbrana gained experience in pictorial and wooden restoration and gilding techniques in Florence, Perugia, and Pisa. This was followed by studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Carrara and the creation of Studio17, which focused on experimentation and research in the visual arts, particularly in the field of ceramics, together with sculptor Gabriele Mallegni. These experiences related as much to thinking, speaking, and writing as to manual work



Self similarity, 2022, White ceramic glazed and painted with engobes, 10x9x11.11x 9x11.5 cm, Courtesy of On the Contemporary, Catania, Italy

have marked his aesthetic vision, his approach to the world and the way he approaches artistic research.

"In the 'Autosomiglianza' (Self similarity) cycle – says Sbrana –, a vegetal presence grows, like a concretion on neoclassical ceramics. The fractal forms that are repeated the same on a different scale refer to a primordial and original structure of spatial organization that continues to be used in science and technology. The plant fractal transforms the object and shifts the weight of vision: from the work of man to the incessant and irreducible transformation of nature".



Self similarity, 2019, White ceramic glazed and painted with engobes, Detail

# Marija Šnipaitė

Lithuania | Flounder  
Lee



The night is too long, 2023, Exhibition view, Photo credit: Evgenia Levin, Courtesy of (AV17) gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania

Lithuanian artist Marija Šnipaitė's works defy easy classification and make you work for the concept. Knowing that they are often found, manipulated objects, frequently textiles, gives you an inroad into the mundane, everyday ideas they can evoke. They push and pull simultaneously between minimal abstraction and bustling vistas. Much of the work feels like an echo of ordinary life from fringe to gloves to aprons, but it has echoed long enough to be distorted into a new form.



The night is too long, 2023, Exhibition view, Photo credit: Evgenia Levin, Courtesy of (AV17) gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania



The night is too long, 2023, Exhibition view, Photo credit: Evgenia Levin, Courtesy of (AV17) gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania

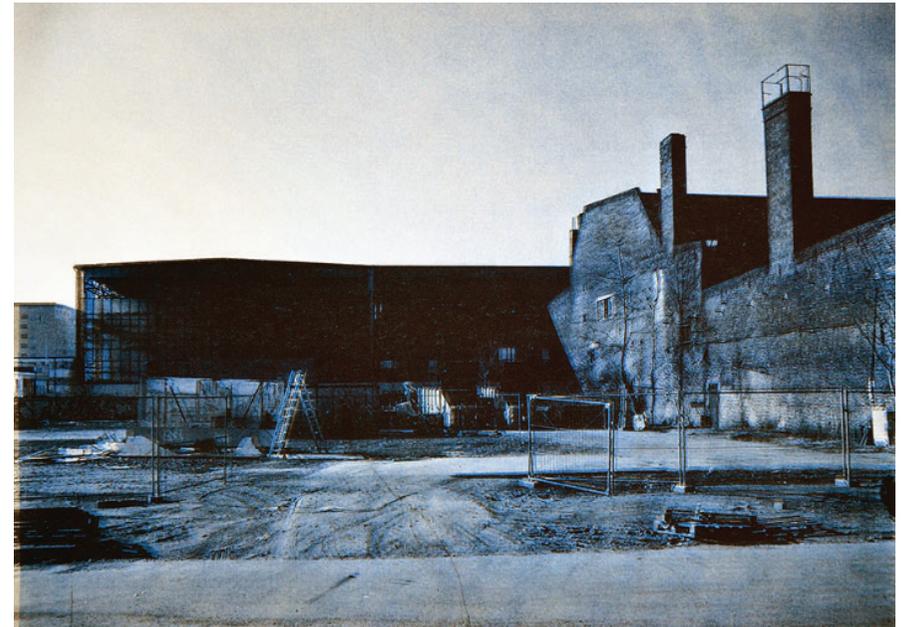
# Anna Szigethy

Hungary | Gabriella Uhl

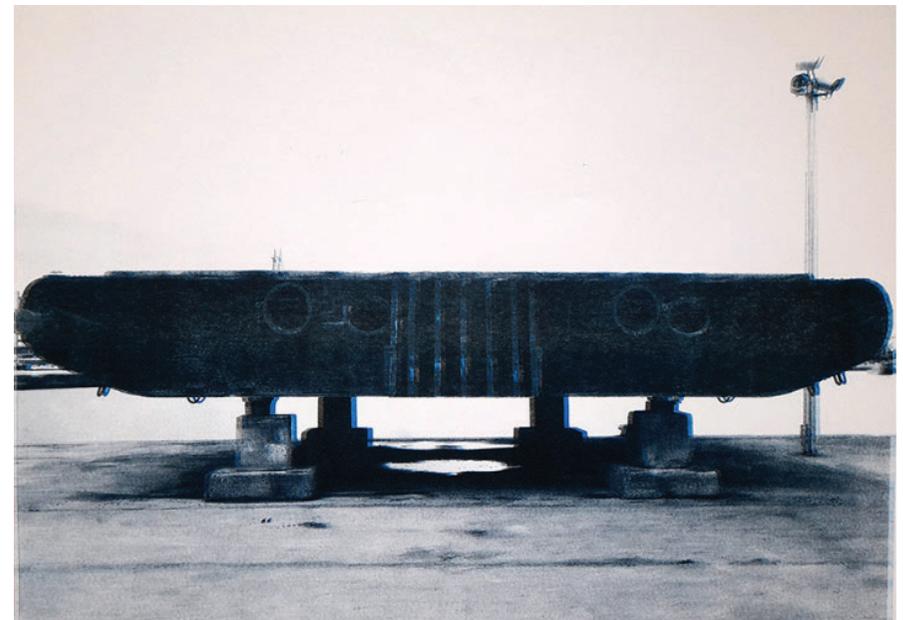


Budapest, Random Coincidences - Heightened uncertainty photo series, 2022-23, risograph prints, 60x84 cm / 140x202.5 cm

Szigethy captures everyday urban places during her travels using the method of so called "controlled chance". Like our urban world, Anna Szigethy's images are based on concrete, and with it, greyness. Her work is an imprint of industrialized, almost seamlessly globalized worlds. Her images are comparable to Bernd and Hilla Becher's homogeneous and sequenced industrial constructions, but they seem almost idyllic next to them. Our past is contained in these pictorial imprints and as time passes, they seem to encompass more and more people's pasts. Like the Becher's images, this is a world without people. In fact, we no longer miss the man, we are not surprised or outraged that as far as the eye can see, this is not a land fit for human being. We simply see the emptiness in its naturalness. This emptiness is the state of our world today, and it is what risograph prints can represent with their ghostly effects.



Berlin, Random Coincidences - Heightened uncertainty photo series, 2022-23, risograph prints, 60x84 cm / 140x202.5 cm



La Havre, Random Coincidences - Heightened uncertainty photo series, 2022-23, Risograph prints, 60x84 cm / 140x202.5 cm

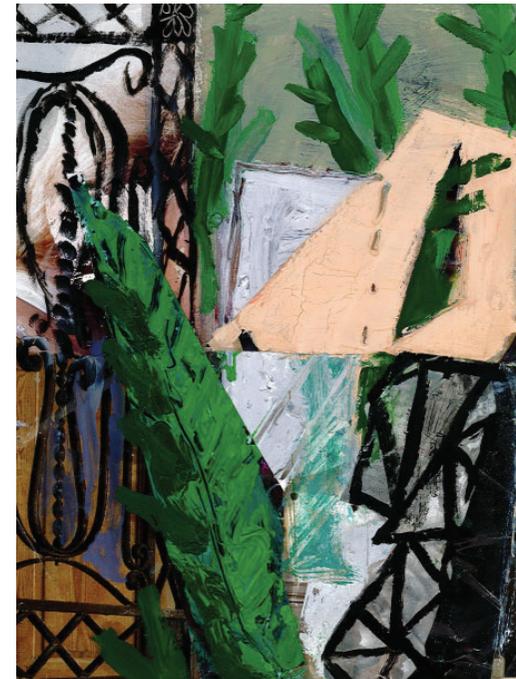
# Júlia Végh

Hungary | Zoltán Somhegyi



Open room, 2020, Acrylic, oil on paper, collage, 30x20 cm

Júlia Végh likes to unsettle the viewer through her subtle and caring irony. Her images often depict familiar environments and scenes from everyday realities, but she enjoys playing with the often-suspicious cosiness of these surroundings, thus showing how illusory can it be if we take these apparently too-well-known situations for granted. Through seemingly minor interventions – like insertion of collage or montage elements, or by highlighting some details with expressive brushstrokes – she disrupts the basic harmony and creates new emphases, so that we can happily accept the invitation to search for novel meanings in these contexts.



My plants, 2020, Acrylic, oil on paper, collage, 30x20 cm



Circus in paradise, 2023, Acrylic, oil on paper, collage, 130x110 cm

# Anna Tihanyi



Berlin bhf, Currywurst, 2014, Giclee print, Baryt paper, Edition 7, 100x66 cm

**CI:** Please introduce yourself.

**AT:** I am a fine art photographer based in Budapest. I create timeless tales about the human subconscious, producing detailed narratives within a single frame. I have always known that the milieu of fiction, the sets, and staging attracted me, but only a few years later have I realized that my real calling was to take staged still photos; started thinking in series and tried to consciously express myself through photographic frames. Using magical symbols as a photographer, my stories often transport my viewers into a feminine, surrealist wonderland.

I am interested exploring the female self and identity through processing memories. I operate by the reconstructing capacity of photography, that is by transforming elements from the existing world it shows us a parallel universe that still leads back to something faithful. Strangely enough, it is fiction that brings me closer to reality, because its presence gives me strength. It has immensely influenced my visual language as well.

I received an MA in communication and earned a degree in staged photography. With the series Berlin bhf. I debuted in a solo show in the Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center in



Berlin bhf, Still life, 2014, Giclee print, Baryt paper, Edition 7, 100x66 cm

Budapest and in the Bal-assi Institute in New York City, USA. Including this series my portfolio was selected for the Lucie Award Scholarship by the American Photographic Artists and Lucie Foundation and received a great recognition at the gala awards ceremony at the Carnegie Hall, NYC. My works made it to winning several prestigious prizes and awards like the Julia Margaret Cameron Award, Photolucida Critical Mass Top 50, LensCulture Emerging Talents, Fine Art Photography Award and were shortlisted at the Aesthetica Prize and most re-cently the BMW ArtMakers Prize. Besides my long-term photo essay, "A Woman's Chambers" that is focusing on the complexity of the female psyche, I am parallel working on my projects that relates family heritage, processing dreams, loss, traumas, and memories.

**CI:** Can you tell us about your early influences?

**AT:** It started at a very early age with my fascination towards movies and tales; classical films, revues, the North American aesthetic of the 50's/60's. I have always found movies omnipresent, but literature only hit me a bit after, from which I get great inspirations now.

I majored in Experimental Photography at photography school, where I came across the concept of staged narratives compressed into frozen moments, a tool through which I was able to express the magical realism I literally live in. My thesis at the university was a comparative study of staged photography stills by Jeff Wall, Cindy Sherman and Gregory Crewdson, and film frames of Hitchcock, Godard, and Antonioni. I found Fellini's surreal dream scenes in my relation to others, experienced the cruelty of reality in the work of Diane Arbus, the inexplicable from David Lynch, the psychologically unsettling situations from Hitchcock. F. S. Fitzgerald, Alessandro Baricco and J. D. Salinger introduced me to the painful and poetic nostalgia of the average narrative. The works of Edward Hopper, Duane Michals, Matthew Barney blow my mind, but the list is endless.



Berlin bhf, The boy, 2014, Giclee print, Baryt paper, Edition 7, 100x66 cm

**CI:** What art do you most identify with?

**AT:** It's a mixture. I call myself a photographer, but I consider the kind of photography I do fine art. Sometimes it's even difficult for me to tell if I create the scene and take a photograph of it as proof to the existence of those moments that matter, or if I build the scenes to be taken as a photograph.

**CI:** Tell us about your current practice.

**AT:** Starting with a long pre-production period, my artistic method goes very much like in a film production. The pre-production and the set design usually takes more time than the actual shoot, since I only make slight changes on the spot. I carefully plan the details of the concept to create a picturesque and sometimes disturbing aesthetic and filmic perspective. Once I know more about the subject I would like to talk about, I define the characters, search for references, create mood boards, sketches. After finding the right locations, I plan lighting and colors, set design, camera technics, angles, casting. I only use post-production to a certain limit. It's very important to me that my images are not manipulated digitally; they are surreal, yet faithful representation of what's in front of my camera.

My ongoing project, The Woman's Chambers is a good example of how long a project can take for me to build. In this series I started to split images like cinematic editing and add finer artistic to my photographs. I combine the narratives with objects, collages, writing, and moving images.

**CI:** What does your work aim to say?

**AT:** I think the core objective of my practice is to spotlight magical details that otherwise would not be visible. I intend to develop new forms of psychological storytelling, using photography as a tool of mythmaking.

**CI:** \*If you have any current or upcoming exhibition, please don't forget to mention it.

**AT:** My analogue collages series, Budapest A-Zs, that is based on personal stories of my hometown, was invited to Sofia, Bulgaria and Stuttgart, Germany recently. After this traveling exhibition, I'm preparing for two upcoming shows I'm very much looking forward to. A group show in October, in a newly opened art center in Budapest called 'HAB', and a solo show early next year with Einspach Fine Art and Photography gallery that I'm planning to be unconventional to my practice to date.

I have to mention important people I work with and whose support I have been always lucky enough to count with: Bibi Kund (make up, prosthetics), Mark Karolyi (hair), Juli Szlavik, Weizer Kriszta (costume), Frank Rizzo (post-production), Attila Doczi (gaffer, lights), Barna and Szabolcs Princz (SFX), PropClub (props), VisionTeam (lights), Kristof Vaczi Cafe Analog (scan).



Donde el agua me llevo, 2018, Giclee print, baryt paper, Edition 5, 120x80 cm



Distance, 2020, Giclee print, Baryt paper, Edition 5, 100x120 cm

# Interviewed with Matias del Campo

Tectonics of the Latent Space  
Designing with Artificial Intelligence



**FG:** Hello, Mathias. How are you? Could you please introduce yourself to our readers?

**MdC:** My name is Dr. Matias del Campo. I'm an associate professor of architecture at Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan and the director of the AR2IL Laboratory, the Laboratory for Architecture and Artificial Intelligence, which is an interdisciplinary collaboration between architecture, computer science, robotics, and data science. This combination allows us to implement the newest insights into artificial intelligence systems conceived at the

computer science department into our work in the laboratory that explores the possibilities of artificial intelligence for architectural design.

**FG:** You recently published a book about AI; could you share some of the most insightful topics from it with us?

**MdC:** I guess that you are speaking about the Neural Architecture book. Neural architecture design and Artificial Intelligence, which was published last year in 2022. The book oscillates between two specific poles of tension, one being the use of artificial intelligence as a tool of expediency that allows us to inform our architectural designs to a higher degree than we could do previously. AI allows to harness the power of big data and interrogate large data sets for possible insights that we can apply to the design of future architectural entities. What is meant by that is that our discipline has an enormous repository of ideas already in store. It is possible to collect datasets and create neural networks that specifically address pragmatic architectural problems like plan layouts, structural optimization, material consumption, energy consumption of buildings and so on and so forth. This means that there is a whole series of possible ways to use AI as a purely pragmatic tool of expediency or optimization in architecture. But on the other hand, there is this whole universe of possibilities to understand artificial intelligence as more than a tool of expediency - it is also a tool of culture or cultural production. If you use artificial intelligence in a creative way. And I'm not saying here that AI is creative, but rather that the user is using this toolset in a creative fashion. You can discover provocative, interesting, exciting possible aesthetics that can inform the way you think about design in the first place, but also that allows you to apply novel, strange, or different aesthetics, program, and tectonics to your designs, thus creating an interesting provocation for the discipline. In between these two poles is where the book is positioned discussing on the one side the aesthetic problem, the intellectual problems of using artificial intelligence in architecture design. But on the other side, also providing insight into the functionality of certain algorithms and neural networks to provide the reader also with the necessary platform to understand what those things are doing. To that extent the book



was also very much about demystifying what AI can do and what it cannot do. By doing so, the book provides the discipline with a possibility to further push these ideas into the future and hopefully also further inform the discourse around the use of artificial intelligence within architecture.

**FG:** Architecture, like many Applied Arts, is poised to be affected by the earthquake of generative AI, but not quite yet. AI excels at conceptual work currently. But is it a reliable tool for practical design? And if not, how long before we can expect to see one-man band Architecture studios?

**MdC:** I have observed that there is this obsession or fascination currently with generative models like large language models or diffusion models that generate images. Image generators, generally speaking. I think the fascination is there because of two reasons. Number one, it is fairly easy to use. You don't need a degree in computer science to understand how to manipulate it, and work with it. And on the other side, the quality and speed of the results. It is astonishing that you can basically prompt an image generator with a sentence and have a series of four images generated within seconds. That ability is astonishing and profoundly attractive, especially for a discipline that is so visually orientated like architecture. I see why architects became very quickly interested and obsessed with the use of diffusion models and image generators.

I just finished an entire book on that topic called Diffusions in Architecture - Artificial Intelligence and Image Generators, which basically collected the positions of 20 architects and five theorists about the topic of image generation and synthetic imagination. Discussing the possibility of artificial intelligence assistance in the ideation and visualization of concepts. And of course, also the large language models are fascinating because basically it has become possible for architects who might not be that inclined to use language in a particular way to be able to convey ideas and concepts in a higher and better quality than ever, thus allowing them to communicate or express ideas in a way that they could not do before. The same is true also for image generators: people who are maybe not necessarily talented in drawing or painting, but still have an incredible imagination can now use an image generator to visualize their ideas. Of course this is a very superficial way of using generators, because at the end of the day, the point where it becomes really interesting is when it starts to provide you with things that you did not expect, where you're not trying to visualize an idea in your head with these tools, but rather enter a dialogue with the machine, where your creative input will generate something



that is surprising, innovative, provocative, strange, defamiliarized, but at the same time wonderful, stimulating and strangely familiar.

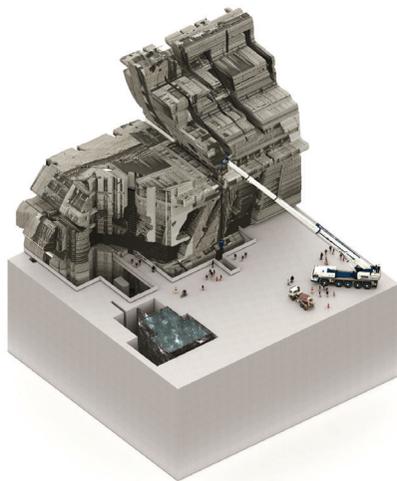
You should also consider that, basically every AI model in existence can only provide you with things that already exist because it's trained on existing data. What we sometimes perceive as a novelty or different or new within the results created by AI systems is the result of us being able to gaze into the latent space. The latent space is the area between existing data points that is so far invisible to us. But the neural networks allow us to gaze into explore this latent space (literally translated latent space means hidden space) and thus allows us to uncover things that we didn't see before. To that extent, NN's work like microscopes or telescopes that enhance our visual field as humans and thus allowing us to discover and see things that we could not see before. Thus, also being able to provide us with an innovation occasionally. The other end of the spectrum of this conversation is, apart from the common AI generators that we are seeing, are the many other highly interesting AI models out there that we can harness and use in architecture for two reasons: One is optimization and the other one is prediction, the two areas in which AI really excels. Both of those terms are applicable to architecture design. Of course, I mean, architecture has been dealing with optimization for at the least the last 200 years, minimum. Now we are reaching a completely different level of information possible within that optimization. By the way, when I speak about optimization, you must be clear that the term optimization is currently undergoing a semantic shift, meaning that it's changing the meaning that we have assigned to it in the past. In the past, in architectural discourse, optimization was primarily preoccupied with understanding how to make optimal use of existing material conditions, for example, or spatial conditions and so on, to achieve a very specific goal. Right? That specific goal would have been how do I create the optimal structure for this building using the minimum amount of material – so that it does not collapse, but still is not overengineered? How do I design an HVAC system in a way that will optimize the energy used to ventilate a building or heat a building? So, there were very particular engineering exercises, engineering goals that we tried to achieve with optimization. Now, optimization using artificial intelligence is changing its meaning. When you're using an image generator for instance, that image generator is also optimizing, but it's not optimizing towards a very specific engineering goal. It's rather optimizing along your line of inquiry, meaning it optimizes towards the best possible representation of the prompt that you gave it. This does not mean necessarily that it's the optimal picture that you have in your mind, for example, or in your imagination.

So, it's not optimizing towards the best picture, but the best way to represent your prompt. These are two different things, and we must be aware of that. It's a fun idea to think that language is changing using artificial intelligence, also the language of engineering and science. Now the other term I used is prediction, which I'm highly excited about. If you take concepts like energy-based models that can predict certain aspects of any form of creative production or even just scientific production, I mean, that is super exciting! I remember Yann LeCun giving an example of energy-based models being able, for example, to restore damaged parts of old movies. These old reels are prone to damage. They can even disintegrate over time. Now imagine you have a movie you want to restore, and there's passages that are missing because of deterioration. Energy based models can basically create a prediction of what is missing in the reels. Other ideas include things like Outpainting and so on, that basically can enhance scenes seamlessly. I've made the argument before that there are certain techniques today, artistic techniques, that I think are suitable to describe the phenomena that we're seeing. The blending options that we see in image generators is quite an interesting way to predict visual outputs; compositing, where reality and artificial elements are seamlessly connected to each other is another technique that is very visible today. And prompting of course - the idea that basically by crafting a prompt you basically inform in very particular ways the artistic imprint on the technology. Keep in mind that any one of those processes is never completely automatized. I mean, people talk a lot about optimization and how our role is diminished in this creative process and so on, which I think is absolute nonsense because there is always a human intervention necessary in those models, right?

You might be able to create a diffusion model that generates its own prompts, but I doubt that the results would be interesting. And this is what differentiates it. Humans do mistakes, humans do typos, humans sometimes don't find the right term to describe what they are thinking. So, all this random chaos, the lack of organization in our minds is basically what I think creates the most interesting creative outputs. When we have this misfiring of our neurons, misconnections in our brain, when there are misreading. All the strange and weird things that our minds do, are really important elements in creative production, misreading for instance is probably one of the most interesting and important things that our mind can do in regards of creating something novel. I have the feeling that artificial intelligence, machine learning, deep learning, however you want to call it, is not that good in it. This collision between the predictive and the optimization qualities of AI and the weird, jumbled pile of neurons that we call our brain, that collision can create interesting things in my opinion.

**FG:** As is often the case with new technology, opinions on AI are polarized. They are enthusiastic professionals like us. And on the other end there are workers who see it as a threat to their jobs. Who is right and who is wrong?

**MdC:** I'm not sure that there is a way to say who is right or wrong on this, but I have to say that this is nothing new in human history. We have seen this many times already, specifically since the industrial Revolution, that every time a new technology comes along, that changes the way we work or think about work, there will be people who are displeased with this development. I might remind you of the origin of the term saboteur. Textile workers in France were throwing their wooden clogs called Sabots into the newly developed automated looms to break the machines. Why? Because they were losing their jobs due to automation, or at least that was the perception that the luddites had. These conflicts triggered by paradigmatic shifts in technology happen repeatedly. It takes time to adapt to a new condition. One of the things that humans can do profoundly well is adaptation to new conditions. That's why our species survived until this day. Humans will also adapt to this condition in one way, shape or form. Oh, I want also to add a second example, specifically an example from the arts: the invention of photography in the 19th century. Suddenly, artists started to say, oh my God, we are losing our jobs because the camera can do what we do (creating realistic representations of our world) much faster and better. However, the interesting occurrence here is that because of that rift, because of that paradigm shift, because of the invention of photography - the arts changed. The arts



reacted by doing something that the camera could not do, which is, for instance, representing emotion in a different way on a canvas than just representing it realistically. Impressionism, Expressionism, Abstraction, Concept Art, Surrealism and so on and so forth, everything that we consider today as being modern art is based on a response to the invention of the photographic camera. So, what I see happening today, for example, is a similar thing. The arts, creative industry and so on will respond to the invention of, or the introduction of, AI with something that will be uniquely human. I cannot tell what it is. If I would know, I probably would have done it already. Maybe somebody more intelligent than I will come up with that. But I have the feeling, a sense that this will happen. Let me go back to the question you had in regard of the one-man band that you asked about Architecture is profoundly a collaborative effort. It will never be a one-man band, and if so, the chances are very high that the architecture that emerges out of it is quite mediocre. Human minds need the clash of visions, the clash of ideas, the discussion, the friction, the struggle of getting a project done properly, the doubt, whether it's good or not, the striving for something that that goes beyond just a pile of material.

Those are things that drive architects. The discussion with construction companies to get it done, the creative thinking around the problem that arises during the planning process of a building, talking to your engineer about the possibility to leave away these two columns that you don't like - all those things make a difference in the final product. It would be very, very unsatisfactory to sit alone there and trying to create whole projects alone, maybe discussing just with an AI. I'm not saying that it's impossible. It might be possible to do that. I just think it's very boring. It might also lead to repetition and just poor imitation - well AI is profoundly good in imitation, right? We know that it's basically a fantastic imitation machine. Lazy architects will just start to imitate the style of other people. We see this already happening all the time in image generators. A profoundly poor way of using this technology. Most of the AI generated images we see on Instagram or TikTok, will go down in history as completely irrelevant. There might be one or the other image that will prevail, but they will be rare and those will be the ones that are really providing something that somehow touches the human condition, provokes the human condition and comments on the human condition.

For example, interesting AI generated art is rare. There's only a handful of artists out there who I would say are contributing in an intelligent, informed, emotional, interesting way to human culture.

**FG:** We are shaped by what we see and read. Do you have any suggestions for individuals who wish to stay academically updated on this subject? Could you share an actual case where you have successfully implemented into your current workflow?

**MdC:** 2022 was a very prolific year in regards of creating literature and academic output that is worth reading to be informed about what is currently happening in the architecture discipline regarding the use of artificial intelligence. There was a whole series of books that came out that year. Stanislas Chaillous's Artificial Intelligence and Architecture - From Research to Practice. Neil Leach's Architecture in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and my own Neural Architecture - Design and Artificial Intelligence. Just to name a couple of examples. There are more basic books, which I will highly recommend to readers if they want to have a better understanding of what AI is and how it operates. Pedro Domingos's, The Master Algorithm is not entirely new. It's a couple of years old now, but it's still a very good starting point to understand the various ideas of AI. There is no such thing as AI as a universal entity. AI is just an umbrella term under which there are a variety of different concepts, ideas, techniques, and algorithms. All of them doing different things in different ways, sometimes communicating with each other. But as such there is no huge universal machine called AI, this is just a myth. Reading books like the ones I mentioned before will help to demystify that condition. If readers would like to be prepared for things to come, I highly recommend learning Python scripting, specifically PyTorch. It will help to wrap your head around and understand how much influence you have as a human on neural networks - the way you prepare a data set, the way you manipulate an algorithm, the way you conceptualize an algorithm to achieve a specific goal. Those are

very, very human things to do, and they are the basis for whatever output you generate at the end. As much as it sounds like AI does everything automatic, it does not.

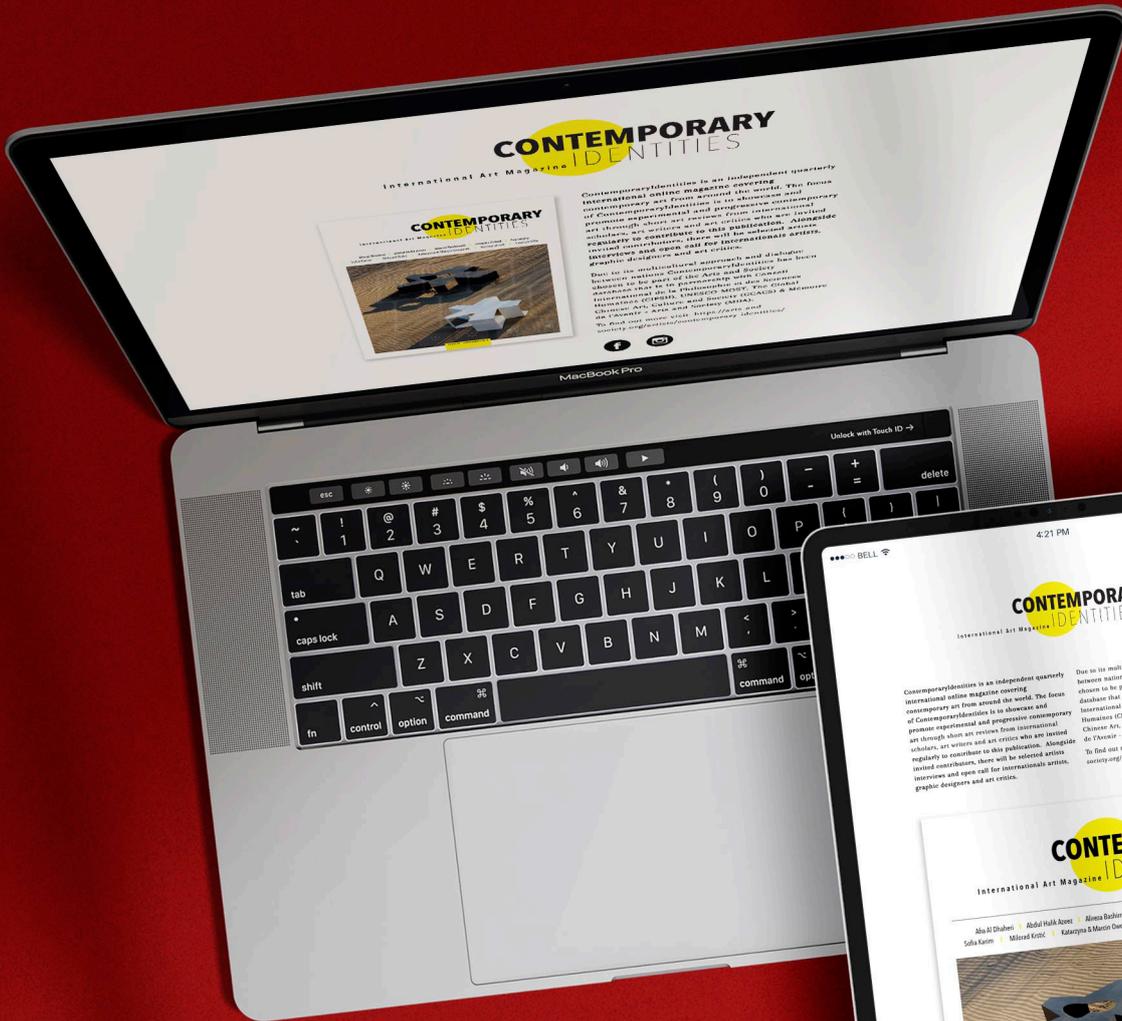
If you want to stay academically updated, I highly recommend browsing the Internet for new academic papers from computer science on use cases from the car industry or new algorithms to create 3D models with AI. These papers are the base source for new insights. Regarding your question for a successful use case, I would like to highlight the Robot Garden, which I designed together with Sandra Maninger and Alexandra Carlson in 2019, using a whole set of different algorithms: style transfer, 2d to 3D style transferring, deep dreaming etc. We used all these different algorithms to create a testing ground for the robotics department of the University of Michigan. They just opened a new building called the Ford Robotics Building. And next to it there is the robot garden, which has a variety of different conditions that it had to fulfill for a successful testing of the robots. It had to have different grounds like gravel, earth, sand, rocks and so on. It had to have steps because they want to test in this facility, the so-called last 100 step problem, which if you look it up in robotics, is a big deal. To organize those different ground conditions on that site, we created a data set of thousands of satellite images of different ground conditions. And then with this as a training basis, we used an early model of style transfer. Then, we used deep dreaming, which was trained on fountains, columns, and steps to hallucinate the steps onto the site. This is probably the first architecture project that was built, that really used AI methodologies through the entirety of the design phase. We had minor human intervention during the design process, but I have to say that after the design process, when it came to implementing all the things in plans and sections and construction documents - those were primarily human made. We didn't have the possibility back then to create a continuous workflow using automation that went from the first generative sketches to a finished construction document. This is probably one of the things we're going to see happening now, very soon.

**FG:** If you were 18 years old and had to decide what to study for your career in 2023, what would you choose?

**MdC:** I'm not sure if I can answer that, to be honest, because it always depends on what you know as an -18year-old, right? I didn't know much with 18 I think, the only thing I knew was that I had this desire to do something that has to do with creation and artistic endeavor, and pushing towards new ideas about our environment, living and culture. Originally, I wanted to study painting, but architecture came along, and I was like "Yes, that's the thing I want to do forever!". I was 14ish or so. Today if would be 18 years, hmm... Well, automation will have an impact on the -18year-olds, that is for certain. I'm sure about that. They must find a career path that operates between the human and the automated world. And there's going to be a variety of jobs that are going to be necessary in the future, from simple jobs like labeling data (which is still going to be necessary), to maintaining machines, maintaining robots, debugging code... Code, that's certainly something that I would absolutely do today. If it would be 18 years old, even if I still would have the desire to do something artistic, I would nonetheless go and learn coding first. This would be the one side: learn coding, learn how to use these tool sets, learn how to manipulate them, learn how to be part of it, actively engage with it if you want to shape it. If you don't engage with it, it's going to shape you more than you shape it.

The other end of the spectrum that I see for an -18year-old would be to reject all of it, divorce yourself from the digital world and start to do bespoke things that are manually made. There's going to be a big desire coming for things that are in a way genuine, real material, real mass, real weight, beautifully crafted objects, objects that are physical and real. There's a reason why, for example, vinyl made this comeback. It's not about the record, the purely pragmatic idea of recording sound. It's because they are size, they have a mass; they are physical objects. You can almost experience the way of how this engraving on plastic is turned into sound by putting a needle on it. This sort of physical experience is something that's going to shape a lot of what we're going to experience in the future, where it is going. On the one side, making you aware of the physicality of your environment, and on the other side allowing for a healthy distance to the frenzy of the digital world.





[www.contemporaryidentities.com](http://www.contemporaryidentities.com)  
[info@contemporaryidentities.com](mailto:info@contemporaryidentities.com)  
[www.facebook.com/ContemporaryIdentities](http://www.facebook.com/ContemporaryIdentities)  
 Instagram: contemporary\_id