

The Electric Comma

26 November 2017 — 31 March 2018

V-A-C Foundation, Palazzo delle Zattere, Dorsoduro 1401, Venice. Open Thursday through Tuesday, from 10am to 6pm; closed on Wednesday; Friday 10am to 8pm. Vaporetto Stops: San Basilio or Zattere.

Opening Reception:
Saturday 25 November, at 5pm

For all further information on The Electric Comma and V-A-C Foundation:
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A group exhibition produced by V-A-C and developed in dialogue with KADIST, combining the V-A-C and KADIST collections.

Erick Beltrán, Alighiero Boetti, Mircea Cantor, Nicolás Consuegra, Anthony Discenza, Shannon Ebner, Valentin Fetisov, Piero Golia, Wade Guyton, Jacqueline Humphries, Daniel Keller, Daria Martin, Pedro Neves Marques, Jonathan Monk, Trevor Paglen, Bridget Riley, Andrey Shental, Fabien Giraud & Raphaël Siboni, Dayanita Singh, Cheyney Thompson, Urban Fauna Lab.

Taking its title from Shannon Ebner's installation *The Electric Comma*, the exhibition focuses on shifts in language, perception and understanding in the age of artificial intelligence. Through varied practices and from different backgrounds, participating artists deal with the negotiations between the conscious mind and today's pervasive learning machine, imagining pathways of exchange between human and nonhuman, ranging from the poetic and intuitive to the algorithmical and analytical.

A number of works in *The Electric Comma* look at ways in which we communicate with information technologies and the ecological impact they may have, paralleling cryptographic and biological systems, revealing or imagining living infrastructures for artificial life. Andrey Shental's video installation *Descent into the Fungal* features fungal mycelium networks that enable connected plants to communicate in addition to transmitting nutrients and energy, looking at how certain life forms benefit from this network of connections while others fall prey to it. Today, a growing super-organism of algorithms and databases increasingly filters how we perceive, learn, communicate and remember. Sprawling around the globe like a fabric of mycelium, our current digital infrastructure bears more resemblance to living systems than outdated analogue technologies.

Misting Miner, a vapour sculpture by Alexey Buldakov from the Russian collective Urban Fauna Lab, visualises the invisible phenomenon of mining crypto currency. The excess heat produced by the computer as it performs this process is a latent and untapped source of energy that can be redirected and used in many ways. Based on the Drunken Walk algorithm mycelium – a chance-based mathematical system used in financial theory to predict stock prices – Cheyney Thompson's *Stochastic Process Paintings* employ a formula to determine a particular three-dimensional colour system, while Wade Guyton's black monochrome paintings generated by inkjet printers on a readymade computer format foreground the paradox of the preprogrammed error as the machine's own "creativity".

These days the distinction between artificial and human intelligence is becoming less and less clear cut, increasingly appearing to be a mere construct of our perception. In Pedro Neves Marques's short film *The Pudic Relationship between Machine and Plant*, the lines between synthetic and organic life are further blurred. A robotic arm grazes the leaves of a mimosa pudica plant, a hypersensitive species that instinctively closes its leaves in response to the cold touch of the machine.

As the majority of our collective histories, memories and imaginations are being digitised, the effects of this on the human condition and on our planet as a whole remain underestimated. Encountering Dayanita Singh's *File Room* is like glimpsing a frozen, forgotten world of paper. An archive of archives, this series of photographs depicts seemingly infinite stacks of records and memories stored within India. An elegy to the disappearing paper trail, *File Room* is a stark reminder of today's sea change in humanity's relationship to memory. The way stories are told, records are kept and histories are constructed no longer follows the same trajectory as before.

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With this paradigm shift in mind, a facet of the exhibition examines cognition and the way humans interpret the world around them – an area of knowledge that we still don't fully understand. Suggesting the impossibility of finding a stable definition Jonathan Monk's neon parenthesis *Something Contained, Removed*, greets viewers. The construction and interpretation of language is key in understanding how our minds work, how we perceive and communicate with an increasingly connected and automated world. In the thirteen-line poem that forms the basis of Shannon Ebner's series *The Electric Comma*, written language is transformed in abstract and more intensely visual form. By turning unfinished poetry into image, Ebner's process exposes the nonlinear, often erratic way in which we experience language.

In a time where complex technologies with human-like capabilities are developed at an accelerating pace, *The Electric Comma* questions just how far the relationship between man and machine goes, and whether it is one of symbiosis, parasitism or something else. With its feral computational power, is the learning machine capable of being a poet or an artist? Can the machine harness the space of intuition, metaphor or poetry, and ultimately become aware of itself?

The Electric Comma has been curated by Katerina Chuchalina, V-A-C Foundation and Pete Belkin, KADIST.

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About V-A-C

Founded in Moscow in 2009 by Leonid Mikhelson and under the Directorship of Teresa Iarocci Mavica, V-A-C is dedicated to the development and international presentation of Russian contemporary culture – across a multitude of forms and within the framework of a joint exhibition, educational, and publishing programme. V-A-C Foundation considers artistic production as central to its activity and essential for understanding contemporary cultural processes and stimulating new answers to its challenges. The opportunities V-A-C Foundation provides, to engage with and interrogate international cultural practices, aim to expand the platform for homegrown talent and encourage an independent artistic language. As a key speaker for contemporary Russia, V-A-C Foundation establishes new cross-cultural dialogues and incites an exchange of ideas through new collaborations and alternative settings for bringing different artistic practices together within a single vision for arts and culture.

V-A-C Collection is a constantly developing body of works including sculptures, paintings and photographs from leading, internationally recognised artists such as Francis Bacon, Alighiero Boetti, Liz Deschenes, Natalia Goncharova, Wade Guyton, Wassily Kandinsky, Lucy McKenzie, Amedeo Modigliani, Sigmar Polke to Mike Nelson, James Richards, Gerhard Richter, Bridget Riley, Egon Schiele, Dayanita Singh and Christopher Wool.

PALAZZO DELLE ZATTERE is V-A-C's Venetian headquarters, launched in spring 2017. The new centre for exhibitions, events and residencies is situated on Zattere, overlooking the Canale della Giudecca. Originally dating back to the mid 1800s, the building's interior was renovated at different times from the 1950s to the 1990s. The entire space covers 2000 sq metres over four levels, half of which is exhibition space. There is a reception area as well as event rooms, offices and studio apartments for visiting artists and curators. The external garden, restaurant and bookshop will open in May 2018.

www.v-a-c.ru

About KADIST

KADIST is a non-profit organisation that believes the arts make a fundamental contribution to a progressive society. Its programs actively encourage the engagement of artists, often represented in its collection, with the important issues of today. KADIST's collections and productions reflect the global scope of contemporary art, and its programs develop collaborations with artists, curators and many art organisations around the world. Local programs in KADIST's hubs of Paris and San Francisco include exhibitions, public events, residencies and educational initiatives: complemented by an online reach to an international audience, they aim at creating vibrant conversations about contemporary art and ideas.

www.kadist.org

Developed in dialogue with

KADIST