

PRESS RELEASE

GROUP EXHIBITION – ALGORITHMIC LIFESTYLE

31 August – 13 October 2018

Artists: Lauren Huret, Marc Lee, Olia Lialina, Jonas Lund, Shawn Maximo, !Mediengruppe Bitnik & Low Jack, Milena Milosavljevic, Owen Mundy, Sebastian Schmieg, UBERMORGEN

Curated by Nina Roehrs

We click, we like, we share. In today's attention economy, Likes are the new currency. Internet giants constantly compete for our attention through advertisements, register our every move, hope for a second of our time. At long last, the power lies in the hands of the people – grassroots democracy in the World Wide Web where everybody gets to voice their opinion. But looks are deceiving. And when we share the latest picture of our cat on social media, we are continually producing data to be mined by algorithms for our providers, always under surveillance and always targeted by even more likeable content. We live in a world full of pleasing distractions, surrounded by like-minded peers and without interference of reality – an “algorithmic lifestyle”.

In light of the inexorable permeation of contemporary society by the Internet, Roehrs & Boetsch is pleased to announce the group exhibition ‘ALGORITHMIC LIFESTYLE’. The show displays works by ten artists and artist duos, seven of whom are presented at the gallery for the first time. The exhibition explores different aspects of our digitalized lifestyles by taking a close look at the networks we belong to. The selected artists themselves are part of the digital world – often working with algorithms – while studying the Internet and revealing the mechanisms of the web economy. Above all, ‘Algorithmic Lifestyle’ aims to critically engage the viewer, to give a starting point for discussion and alternative options concerning our current role as ignorant users in this networked society.

For further information, please contact Patricia Lenz ([gallery@roehrsboetsch.com](mailto:gallery@roehrsboetsch.com)) at the gallery.

**Lauren Huret**

Born 1984 in Paris, France, lives and works in Geneva, Switzerland

Lauren Huret's interests range from tech-mysticism and brain hacking to complex human feelings. Astonished by the manner in which language and ideas spread into minds and become singular concepts of reality, she explores these modes of dissemination by looking into contemporary narratives that often seem like science fiction such as artificial intelligence, global corporations or neurosciences.

In the work **'manila stories\_chasing ghosts on social media'** conceived especially for this exhibition, Huret looks at the "story" format on Instagram and the immediacy of sharing your life with your audience as if owning your own TV station. During the course of the exhibition the artist shares videos of her everyday life as an artist in Geneva and her recent research on content moderation in Manila in the form of Instagram Stories. With every new video added, the short narrative is established further and displayed on screen, reminiscent of live TV. However, instead of posting these videos on her Instagram account, Huret transmits them directly to a screen in the gallery, therefore short-circuiting her social media feed and disrupting the principle of free labour on which social media companies are built.

The shared images in **'manila stories\_chasing ghosts on social media'** mainly consist of collages made from Huret's own photographs and augmented with text, gifs and effects taken from the Instagram application. Above all, the videos take a closer look at how social media companies deal with issues of censorship, "offensive" content and outsourced underpaid labour, referred to as "Potemkin AI" – work that is purported to be powered by sophisticated software, when in reality it is performed by humans.

**Marc Lee**

Born 1976 in Knutwil, Switzerland, lives and works in Eglisau, Switzerland

Marc Lee is a Swiss media artist who creates network-oriented interactive art projects by experimenting with information and communication technologies to investigate political and social aspects of contemporary online culture. Lee takes a particularly close look at the mechanisms of posting, sharing and liking on social media platforms and their relation to political activities such as campaigns.

The work **'Political Campaigns – Battle of Opinion on Social Media'** is based on Lee's earlier project **'TV-Bot'**, for which he programmed a Bot to generate an automatic TV show in real time based on the latest Twitter, Instagram and YouTube posts. This new version again generates a TV show, this time focusing on political campaigns. Recently, we have witnessed the inordinate role that social media channels play in fighting out and manipulating electoral campaigns worldwide. What counts today are how many "likes" and "retweets" a post gets – they flicker across the screen in Lee's work, illustrating a politician's current "market value". For several years now, Lee has been grappling with the ways in which social network platforms reflect political debates. For **'Political Campaigns'** Lee chooses the format of an interactive, net-based TV show – which sometimes produces surprising results and confronts us with current opinions that exist well outside our personal "filter bubbles".

### **Olia Lialina**

Born 1971 in Moscow, Russia, lives and works in Stuttgart, Germany

Olia Lialina is among the best-known participants in the 1990s net.art scene – an early-days, network-based art pioneer. Her early work had a great impact on recognizing the Internet as a medium for artistic expression and storytelling. This century, her continuous and close attention to Internet architecture, “net.language” and vernacular web – in both artistic and publishing projects – has made her an important voice in contemporary art and new media theory.

‘**Trajectory ivk**’ is about Blingee.com, a web platform that was founded in 2006 as an online animated GIF creator aimed at young people looking to personalize their imagery for social networks such as MySpace which allows people who don’t have Photoshop, After Effects and other pro tools to create animated collages. Users can create so-called Blingees by adding blinking stamps to their images, share their creations and also upload their own stamps. With their animated bling, glitter and sparkle, Blingees constitute a strong visual marker for what Lialina calls the “vernacular web” and “digital folklore”. While it is frowned upon as bad taste for its amateur effects, it continues to maintain a large community, so much so that it even averted an imminent shut down in 2014. Blingee, as a network that encourages user creativity and individualistic expression, can be understood as the continuation of early web aesthetics, a counter-culture to the perfect surfaces, flawless designs and polished appearances of today’s Internet.

‘Trajectory ivk’ is a tribute to one particular Blingee user, Irina Vladimirovna Kuleshova (ivk), the author of many backgrounds, stamps and frames that have spread all over Blingee and beyond. With the help of artist and machine-learning expert Mike Tyka, Lialina has created a never ending journey through ivk’s creations.

### **Jonas Lund**

Born 1984 in Sweden, lives and works in Berlin, Germany and Amsterdam, Netherlands

Jonas Lund is a Swedish artist who creates paintings, sculptures, photography, websites and performances that critically reflect on contemporary networked systems and power structures of control. His artistic practice involves creating systems and setting up parameters that oftentimes require engagement from the viewer. This results in game-like artworks where tasks are executed according to algorithms or rules, but with a strong factor of coincidence. Through his works, Lund investigates the latest issues generated by the increasing digitalisation of contemporary society such as authorship, participation and authority. At the same time, he questions the mechanisms of the art world and challenges the production process, authoritative power and art market practices.

The idea of a critical mass describes the minimum size or amount of something required to start or maintain a venture. For example, the amount of people needed to leave Facebook at the same time for their advertisers to not wanting to buy ads anymore, thus ending the reign of Facebook as the de facto leader of the social media landscape. In the digital paintings from ‘**Critical Mass**’, Lund explores the false promises of agency within the contemporary social media networks that are tricking users into believing their slogans: “This Will Confirm Your Beliefs”, “This Will Make You 10% Happier”, “We Respond To Your

Signals". Indeed, social media companies register our every move, respond to our signals and answer by displaying advertisements and content tailored to our taste. They try to please us, make us happy and confirm our beliefs. By exhibiting these ambiguous slogans with landscape backdrops on canvas reminiscent of advertisements, Lund further highlights the complex relationship between social media, data mining and user agency – the critical mass.

### **Shawn Maximo**

Born 1975 in Toronto, Canada, lives and works in New York City, USA

With his degree in Architecture and Engineering, Shawn Maximo produces theatrical sets, sculpture, wallpaper, furniture, interactive exhibition design, architectural renderings and stock imagery, which all pose "what if" scenarios of familiar yet incongruous scenes.

In his series "Neighboring Interests" he often combines two different normative spatial ideas to create new lifestyle scenarios. Far from only trying to disturb, Maximo's unexpected juxtapositions attempt to reveal our underlying behavioural assumptions by breaking them down. By transporting the viewer into possible scenarios the artist invites us to think about the future in new terms and actively shape it.

The work '**Open Doors**' in this exhibition highlights current trends within contemporary labour conditions and illustrates where they could lead us in future. In this work installed as a large mural, Maximo imagines a workspace for a possible ransomware start-up company. The language of design and architecture is employed here to represent an economy with the image of independence, entrepreneurship and financial stability. In this environment geared towards harnessing creativity and innovation, the boundaries between work and private life are intentionally blurred; work promises to be fun. Yet behind this facade lies an immense pressure to keep up with demands, where a frenetic pace and aggressive deadlines are implemented with increasing supervision and control. The omnipresent Green in architecture and furniture serves here as a sort of Panopticon in the workspace, exerting subtle pressure to ensure continuous productivity. Maximo's work thus considers the relationship between labour and the architectural structures that enable and facilitate capital production. It is an imagined world, a gloomy utopia that illustrates the changing conditions of a working culture, one which encapsulates the dreams of a young generation of programmers in the start-up scene.

### **!Mediengruppe Bitnik & Low Jack**

Carmen Weisskopf, born 1976 in Basel, Switzerland, Domagoj Smoljo, born 1979 on Island Vis, Croatia, both live and work in Berlin, Germany

Low Jack / Philippe Hallais, born 1985 in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, lives and works in Paris, France

!Mediengruppe Bitnik (read - the not mediengruppe bitnik) is a contemporary artist group working on and with the Internet. Their practice expands from the digital to affect physical spaces, often intentionally applying loss of control to challenge established structures and mechanisms. !Mediengruppe Bitnik's works formulate fundamental questions concerning

contemporary issues. The duo gained international recognition with works such as 'Delivery for Mr. Assange', where they sent a parcel to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy. The parcel contained a camera, which broadcast its journey through the postal system live on the Internet. They describe this work as a SYSTEM\_TEST and a Live Mail Art Piece.

For this exhibition, !Mediengruppe Bitnik & Low Jack show the video installation '**Alexiety**'. Intelligent Personal Assistants like Alexa, Google Home and Siri are the brains of the smart home ecosystem. They operate, monitor and control smart home appliances while keeping secret the algorithms and rule-sets that determine how they operate. Intelligent Personal Devices are voice controlled, thus dissolving the machinic presence of the computer while placing its functionalities at the user's disposal. It's like living inside the machine, while at the same time having no agency over the composition and structure of one's environment.

What are the relationships we are forming with these IPA devices? What happens when IoT devices are hacked to form rogue bot-networks? Is my capacity to act enhanced or diminished when relying on these semi-autonomous devices?

Together with French musician Low Jack, !Mediengruppe Bitnik has been exploring ways of engaging with Alexa and similar "Intelligent" Personal Assistants through music. The electronic music artist experiments with the re-appropriation of sonic clichés, media folklore and the multiplicity of musical languages associated with dance subcultures. In '**Alexiety**', a set of three songs attempts to capture the feelings we develop toward Intelligent Personal Assistants: the carefree love that embraces Alexa before data privacy and surveillance issues outweigh the benefits; the alienation and decoupling / uncoupling from the allure of remote control and instant gratification; the anxiety and discomfort around Alexa and other Intelligent Personal Assistants that is '**Alexiety**'.

The EP is best streamed on the radio for the enjoyment of smart homes everywhere. Play it loud, so your neighbour's devices can hear it.

## **Milena Milosavljevic**

Born 1986 in Novi Pazar, Serbia, lives and works in Düsseldorf, Germany

The topics of social behaviour, groups and contemporary communication are Milena Milosavljevic's key focus and fascination. In recent years, owing to advancing digitalisation and online networking, the importance of groups and their dynamics in virtual communities such as social media has steadily increased. In her latest works Milosavljevic examines how a crowd responds to political and social content and how the people within this crowd communicate by looking closely at social media trends and contemporary communication.

The work "**Top 5**" consists of two individual text pieces embroidered on cotton and presented in plexiglass boxes. Both texts are composed of five Twitter posts each, one made up of the most popular posts by number of retweets, while the other is determined by the most rapidly removed tweets. The design of the letters is reminiscent of digital displays, meaning the works retain their connection to their digital origin even in such an analogue and crafted form. In this work, Milosavljevic examines the mechanisms of crowds on social media platforms such as Twitter. Individual opinions get reposted and thus distributed through the crowd. At the same time, they also form the crowd. However, in the second

part of the work the artist calls to attention to the fact that this crowd is not completely unregulated. Rather, some tweets get removed very quickly. By showcasing the five most rapidly removed tweets, Milosavljevic reminds us that crowds can be manipulated, and certain people or institutions wield disproportionate power.

### **Owen Mundy**

Born 1975 in Bedford, Indiana, USA, lives and works in Davidson, North Carolina, USA

Owen Mundy is an artist, designer and programmer based in North Carolina. His research investigates public space, information privacy and big data. He had a ten-year career in web and app development and also teaches a range of subjects for both the study and production of data visualization, Internet art, interface design, game design and physical computing.

Mundy's recent works include mobile and web-based apps and visualizations like 'illuminus.io', a research-based personality and risk analysis tool which appears in the Peabody-awarded web documentary 'Do Not Track'; the online viral big data visualization, '**I Know Where Your Cat Lives**', which maps seven million images tagged with #cat using the locations in the metadata users unknowingly uploaded to social media; and 'Give Me My Data', a tool that helps users export their data back out of Facebook.

'I Know Where Your Cat Lives' is a data visualization which locates seven million public images of cats on a world map based on the coordinates users have unknowingly uploaded in their metadata. The cat photos were accessed via publicly available APIs provided by popular photo sharing websites and then run through various clustering algorithms using a supercomputer in order to represent the enormity of the data source.

This project explores two uses of the Internet: one that promotes sharing for the sociable and humorous appreciation of domesticated felines, and one in which the status quo of personal data usage is exploited by start-ups and international mega-corporations, who are riding the wave of decreased privacy for all. By using the popularity of cat pictures on the Internet, Mundy cleverly reminds us of this double-edged sword. After all, it could just as well be the interior of our homes or our kids displayed in this work.

### **Sebastian Schmieg**

Born 1983 in Tübingen, Germany, lives and works in Berlin, Germany

Sebastian Schmieg examines the ways networked technologies shape online and offline realities. In a society increasingly permeated by the Internet, Schmieg traces new, hybrid structures that blur the boundaries between human and software, individual and crowd, labour and leisure. In particular, his practice reflects on humans as software extensions and on machine vision as global infrastructure. At the centre of Schmieg's works are playful interventions into found systems that explore hidden – and often absurd – aspects behind the glossy interfaces of our networked society. Schmieg works in a wide range of media such as video, website, installation, artist book, custom software and lecture performance.

**'I Will Say Whatever You Want In Front Of A Pizza'** is a speculative Prezi that explores digital labour, the amalgamation of humans and software, and the possibility of interventions inside algorithmic systems. It is narrated from the perspective of a cloud worker. While technology is often described as an extension of our bodies, the Prezi video explores a reversed relationship: digital workers as software extensions. Not only have the ubiquitous network and the computerization of everything blurred the lines between bots and people; but supposedly autonomous programs are actually sometimes humans that have to act as if they were software offering their services on respective platforms. This development has made it very easy for anyone to hire, program and retire humans as part of any workflow: bodies and minds that can be plugged in, rewired, and discarded as one sees fit.

**UBERMORGEN feat. Alessandro Ludovico vs. Paolo Cirio**

lizvlx, born 1973 in Linz, Austria, Hans Bernhard, born 1971 in New Haven, USA

Both live and work in Vienna, Austria, and Basel, Switzerland

UBERMORGEN's research-based practice is driven by a desire to satisfy their own curiosity, without the constraints of a defined political agenda or preconceived beliefs. Their open-ended investigations focus on the concept of corporate and governmental authority, power structures, and institutional and individual responsibility. The material they source and sample is eventually used to infiltrate or hack the net and mass media; even a press release becomes a "Media-Hack", an opportunity to let loose a contentious issue into the world. Once in circulation, it is manipulated and moulded by different agents, constantly evolving and adapting to this journey, becoming installations, videos, websites, actions, pixel paintings and photographs, often involving unaware audiences in the process.

The artists' strategies and actions are reminiscent of 1960s and 1970s conceptual practices, systems and action art, but anchored in present socio-political matters and adapted to the contemporary context through the use of everyday technology. The data and questions that are the seeds of their projects mutate and expand to create multi-layered and flexible narratives that explore what it means to exist at or beyond the margins of today's societies and systems. Their work deals with current issues such as international rights, piracy, e-commerce, torture, democracy and global communication.

In **'GWEI – Google Will Eat Itself'**, UBERMORGEN created a system of economic auto-cannibalism in which they placed Google text advertisements on a network of hidden websites established by the artists. Each time a visitor clicks on the ads on their websites, UBERMORGEN receives a micropayment and Google retains the same amount of money plus a certain percentage for their services. The money made from traffic and clicks on these advertisements is then automatically invested in Google's shares and held in the common ownership trust "Google To The People (GTTP)". As a result, Google will increasingly be owned by the community of the GTTP paid for with money earned from Google itself. With this art project UBERMORGEN subverts the power of Google by disrupting its main revenue generator. For this exhibition, 'GWEI' is presented in the form of a project documentation focusing on the company's power and the system of text ads placed on websites.