PIERRE HUYGHE

PIERRE HUYGHE

3 OCT 2018 – 10 FEB 2019

Pierre Huyghe is one of the world's leading artists. He creates porous and contingent environments, complex systems in which biotic and abiotic, real and symbolic agents evolve. Although Huyghe intentionally alters the sites in which he works, events and growth are often encouraged to occur without his control. The exhibition is therefore changed irrevocably and unpredictably over the course of the time in which it exists.

For his exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, Huyghe began with a speculative situation and selected a set of elementary components for its construction. These components are building blocks for young animals, children and intelligent machines to mentally play with, and communicate only using their minds. Huyghe gave these components to be imagined by a subject. The person's brain activity was captured as they imagined the elements they were prompted to think of. These thoughts, or 'mental images' have been reconstructed by a deep neural network.

This series of mental images, here in process of formation, are now presented on large LED screens distributed throughout the gallery and are endlessly modified by external conditions: light, temperature and humidity levels, the presence of insects, and the gaze of visitors.

The instability of the images displayed on the screens is matched by the exhibition's inability to resolve itself as existing in the present or the past, even as it evolves towards a future version of itself. A community of flies living in the central gallery create patterns on the domed ceiling as they hatch, grow and learn to fly; areas of the gallery walls have been sanded down, and the dust from the paint of previous exhibitions laying on the floor is tracked across the floor as visitors enter and depart.

Together, these elements make up an ecosystem that loops together human, animal and technological players. The movement of the flies and the presence of visitors detected by sensors affect the conditions of the exhibition, and modify the presentation of the mental images. Just like the dust that may leave the gallery with them, the presence of visitors within the gallery may affect what becomes visible after they leave.
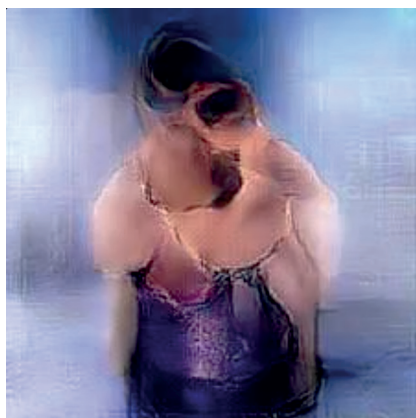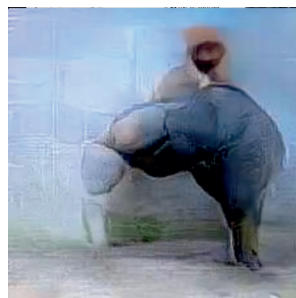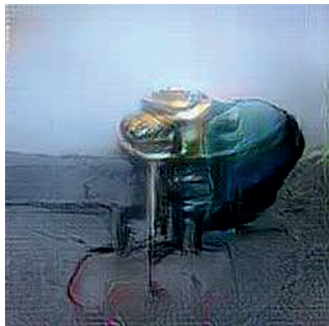
INTRODUCTION
TO THE EXHIBITION

'You set conditions, but you cannot define the outcome, how a given entity will interact with another... there is a set of elements, the way they collide, confront and respond to each other is unpredictable... I don't want to exhibit something to someone, but rather the reverse: to exhibit someone to something.'
– Pierre Huyghe

The agents within the Serpentine gallery space are included precisely because they make up a network of human, animal and technological players. In this scenario, visitors cannot be simply observers, separate from the artwork, nor can they perform the responsibility of 'completing' it conceptually. Instead, Huyghe proposes a situation that consists of a set of interdependences. The visitor may step into this world, or it can exist on its own, but in both instances the ecology of the exhibition does not depend upon the presence of the visitor to sustain itself, nor on the artist's control. For his exhibition at the Serpentine, Huyghe thought of a project that would only exist in the mind of a subject and the result of that imagination would be exhibited, without having to decide on the outcome or means of artistic expression.

Huyghe began with a speculative situation and selected a set of elementary components for its construction. Addressing this situation to young animals, children and intelligent machines, these mental components are building blocks for them to play with and communicate only using their minds.

To start this project, Huyghe gave these components to be imagined by a subject, whose brain activity was captured as the person imagines these elements they have been prompted to think of. These thoughts, or 'mental images' have been reconstructed by a deep neural network. The images seen by the visitors are thoughts that have been intercepted while en route between human and machine. They are then modified by the conditions in which they find themselves exhibited.

Without 'knowing' the original situation, both the AI, and subsequently the exhibition visitor, is caught in a reciprocal game of guesswork and process of recognition. Each attempt to understand the image is interrupted and succeeded by a new image and a new potential interpretation of it.

At the Serpentine, five large LED walls present these enigmatic, chimeric images in the process of formation, flickering and occasionally pausing, but never quite resolving into something familiar. Meanwhile, a community of flies is born, grows and dies within the gallery space. Like the flies, visitors exist and then cease to exist within the exhibition, as they enter and exit the gallery, and the movements of both inflect what becomes visible on the LED screens. These biological agents are housed within an exhibition space in which some of the walls have been sanded back, from white paint laid down in 2018, to layers of paint laid down several years previously, with the dust from this sanding left on the floor.

In the dome in the central space, warm light of the incubator attracts the flies as they make involuntary patterns on the surface of the ceiling, constellations that resemble a living planetarium. Flies and visitors may be more or less attracted to the different kinds of light, drawn towards or repelled by sounds (originating in recordings of brain waves) and scents (selected from within the categories of human, animal or machine) radiating from around the screens. As they do so, they close the feedback loop that has an effect on the images.

The porous conditions within the space relate not only to the bleed-through of light, sound, smell, and bodies from one room to another, but also to the movement of the images on the LED screens between biological and technological agents.

Even time, in this space, has become porous. The sanded-back walls are shallow archaeological digs, revealing layers of past conditions that were only visible for a short period of time, and even now will only be seen again for the duration of this exhibition. The short life span of each fly suggests that returning visitor will never see the same configuration twice. The millions of images presented on the LED screens scroll and pause in a pattern that can never reoccur, because it has been produced by the specific and unpredictable conditions in the space at that precise moment in time.

Patterns made by the flies, the images, or the dust on the floor may appear familiar, but this pareidolia - the tendency to find meaning in randomness - reminds us of the human mind's way of processing, organising, and constructing images. In the broadest sense, the relationships within Huyghe's ecologies occur between a location and its inhabitants, some of which may be human. The experience, as humans coexisting within this exhibition alongside insects and artificial intelligence, of trying repeatedly to make sense of the images presented here, is a reminder that the way we interpret the world is specific only to us.

PROGRAMMES & EVENTS

PIERRE HUYGHE IN CONVERSATION WITH HANS ULRICH OBRIST

3 October, 6:30pm, doors open from 6pm
CHUCS Serpentine
West Carriage Drive
London W2 2AR

Pierre Huyghe discusses his Serpentine exhibition with Hans Ulrich Obrist. This talk is presented in collaboration with Artsy.

Tickets:
£10/8, available to purchase at the Serpentine Galleries and via ticketweb.co.uk

SATURDAY TALKS

Free talks take place at 3pm on selected Saturdays to explore the exhibitions in greater depth. BSL interpretation is available on request for all our Saturday Talks. For more information visit: Serpentinegalleries.org/visit/bsl-tours

8 December 2018, 3pm:
Natalia Grabowska, Assistant Curator

19 January 2019, 3pm:
Rebecca Lewin, Curator

MOBILE TOURS

sgtours.org

Discover mobile tours of the Serpentine's autumn exhibitions by visiting sgtours.org on your smartphone. Serpentine Mobile Tours offer visitors an interactive gallery experience by providing access to additional content, artist interviews, audio guides and curator tours. Supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

SATURDAYS LIVE

Over selected Saturdays, scientists respond to Pierre Huyghe's exhibition through the prism of their research.

For further programmes accompanying the exhibition, including film screenings, symposia and workshops, please check our website.