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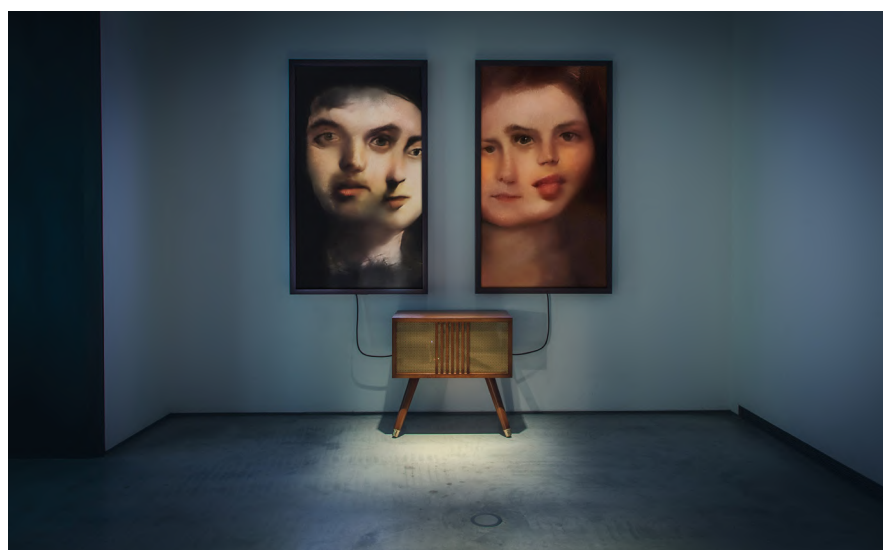
>>//////////////////////////////////**--
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//    FEAR AND FASCINATION      //
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When the first steam-powered passenger service made its inaugural journey on the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825, the train was preceded by a man on horseback carrying a flag which read *Periculum privatum utilitas publica* ("The private danger is the public good"). There were genuine fears that people could die from asphyxiation travelling at the dizzying speed of up to 20mph. Despite these fears, there were those willing to take the risk.

-----> The story illustrates our complex relationship with new technologies: we develop them, fear them and are fascinated by them. In the arts, this relationship is ever-present, whether in the Renaissance genius of Leonardo da Vinci, the Futurist Manifesto or the work of video art pioneer, Nam June Paik. <----

Today's concerns focus on robotics, biotechnologies and artificial intelligence, many people identifying with Tesla CEO Elon Musk's admission that, "AI scares the hell out of me." Intrepid artists, however, are using AI to open up new routes. In real time, Mario Klingemann's *Memories of Passersby I* produces a constant stream of never-repeating portraits, while *Appropriate Response* forces reflection on language and meaning. Egor Kraft, in his series *Content Aware Studies*, merges the aesthetics of classical antiquity with computer-generated elements to raise questions about history, authorship and our symbiosis with technology.



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Mario Klingemann

Memories of Passersby I, 2018. Composition of multiple GANs, two 4K screens, custom handmade chestnut wood console, which hosts AI brain and additional hardware.

226 x 196 x 55 cm

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Sergio Mora and Ryan Heshka take a more colourful approach, capturing fears of a robot invasion or atomic meltdown in posters and giant-sized comics that recall 1950s aesthetics and Cold War paranoia.

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//  HOMO LUDENS  //
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-----> In Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), the German philosopher makes a direct link between humanity and play: "Man plays only when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being and is only fully a human being when he is playing." This idea was taken up, among others, by the Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga; in his groundbreaking work of 1938, *Homo Ludens*, he asserts that, "Play is free, is in fact freedom." <---

*/ In the arts, many had already reached the same conclusion. The Dada movement understood play as a fundamental expression of humanity, embracing improvisation, exploration and chance. Fluxus later continued in this vein and a spirit of play pervades much of the artwork created by Nam June Paik; his pieces not only expanded the art world's vision by incorporating television, video and digital tools, but also humanised technology through playfulness and invention. *Antenna Buddha* is one such example, a humorously insightful reflection on the impact of television. /*

---> Nik Ramage's works, *Brick* and *Fingers*, recall automata or surrealist objects and are infused with a dark sense of humour, while Johan Deckmann's fake self-help publications bring inventive word-play to found objects. Visual wit serves a philosophical end in Tony Matelli's *Head*, in which a hyper realist banana calls into question our relationship with classical sculpture. <---

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//  WE ARE LANDSCAPES  //
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"Unless there are hills and valleys in your heart as expansive as immeasurable waves, it will not be easy to depict landscape." T'ang Hou's writings from the early 14th century reflect the Taoist view that all of nature forms one organic whole. Humans are landscapes and vice versa.

Chinese artist Yang Yongliang brings contemporary tools to the ancient art of landscape painting, creating video installations and digitally manipulated photo collages such as *Taigu Descendants*. Faithful to the tradition of Shan

shui (literally, "mountain-water" painting) Yongliang's works depict expansive natural scenes. Closer inspection, however, reveals a hybrid universe of skyscrapers, cranes and electricity cables, demanding reflection on the relationship between humans and the natural world.

<---- In this crossover space where human and landscape merge, Can Pekdemir's work is particularly poignant. Branch-like forms come together in organic figures which recall ancient Green Man images yet pulsate with a digital heart. And in Dustin Yellin's *Psychogeography* sculptures, visual scraps of popular culture make up floating human forms.



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-----> Yang Yongliang //
Taigu Descendants, 2016
UV print on paper
50 x 532 cm

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The human brain is wired to recognise faces. We even see them where they don't exist, infusing random objects, cloud formations or car designs with false humanity through the phenomenon known as pareidolia.

-----> So when faces are not as we expect, the effect is immediately disquieting. Cubist portraits, Expressionist forms or Francis Bacon's figurative disfigurements all serve as examples. In Tomoo Gokita's creations, faces are conspicuously absent, scratched away, obscured by masks or hidden behind white veils of paint. In *Strange Ritual*, characters reminiscent of 1960s film noir are practically faceless, the dramatic effect of their photo-call moment heightened by the stark contrast of velvety black against pristine white. <----

-----> "I take things and make them look like other things so that people will never see them the same again," says Willie Cole, who describes himself not as an artist but as a "perceptual engineer." In his ingenious pieces, everyday objects such as shoes, hairdryers or plastic bottles take on completely new lives. <-----

/ Nina Saunders, meanwhile, obliges viewers not only to rethink objects themselves but our entire surroundings. Her elegantly melting chairs throw us off balance, creating the impression that we are standing on unsettled ground. /

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-----> As technology develops, the distinction between human and machine is increasingly blurred. Robotics, artificial intelligence, biochemical engineering and nanotechnology are just some of the disciplines casting doubt on our received understanding of what constitutes "nature". Like mercury, humans are now post-transition elements; we inhabit a liquid border where nothing is certain. <----

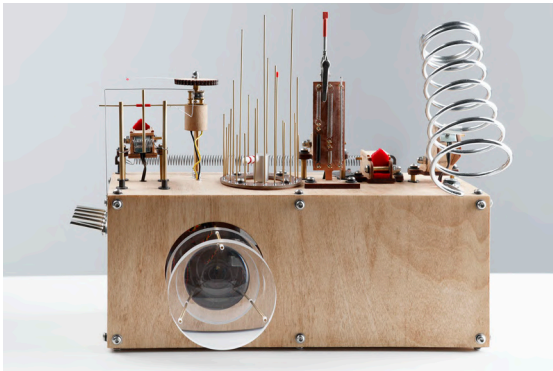
/ In the visual arts, this molten terrain gives rise to all manner of hybrids. Neo Rauch's Der Hirt is a shepherd dog with a human face, a recurring feature in his work. It stands tall, almost defiant, a guide and protector in daunting times. Half Human - Half Machine Portraits Series by Sholim comprises 12 composite portraits in which facial features have been replaced by mechanical or natural elements, while Izumi Kato's sculptures seem to portray beings from a nebulous space beyond earthly experience. /

/*----- For many artists and philosophers, this meeting point between organic and inorganic is articulated by the crystal. Arthur Schopenhauer was fascinated by the momentary life force behind crystallisation and Paul Klee even described himself as a crystal. In the work of David Altmejd, crystals are key. As the artist explains, "Instead of rotting, the characters in my work are crystallising. This makes the narrative of the pieces move towards life rather than death." -----*/

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Without the invention of the portable paint tube, Impressionism might never have emerged. Made of resilient tin and with a screw top, this radical improvement on pig-bladder containers enabled painters to step beyond their

studios and take inspiration from the outside world. Almost 200 years later, technological developments continue to serve as both incentive and means for artistic exploration, with computer animation, artificial intelligence and digital interface tools shaping new forms of expression. */



<-----** Koka Nikoladze
Beat Machine 7, 2020
 Mixed media
 22 x 22 x 28 cm

/ Artists such as SMACK or COOL 3D WORLD purposely venture into aesthetic territories unthinkable before the development of computer generated imagery, embracing figurative visuals that range from the uncanny to the humorously monstrous. Nikita Diakur uses dynamics simulations in Cinema 4D to create short films that skilfully incorporate chance and visual accident. "The challenge is to keep the balance between being in control and letting go," explains the artist. /



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 Nikita Diakur
Fest, 2018
 Single-channel video
 Computer simulated
 puppetery 02:55 minutes
 Courtesy of the Artist

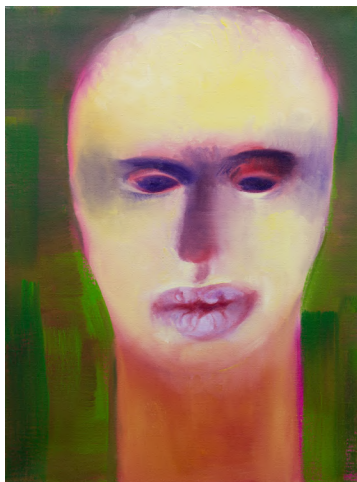
<Text Language=art> This challenge is also faced by Lars Dietrich, who branched into electronics as a means to push beyond what he could achieve as a saxophonist. His robots *Lucy* and *8 Legions* were conceived as fellow musicians, while *Lily* is a modernised music box. Similarly, Koka Nikoladze's *Beat Machines* are electromechanical musical instruments made of everyday objects, generative works that produce new combinations every time they are turned on. </Text>

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//  SCULPTORS OF OUR BRAINS  //
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-----> "Any man could, if he were so inclined, be the sculptor of his own brain." Santiago Ramón y Cajal, the father of neuroscience, already recognised in the early 1900s that human brains could change, even in adulthood. This is now known as neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to form new connections or pathways and to change how its circuits are wired. It is what makes us adaptable, resilient and creative as humans. <-----



<--- Miriam Cahn
Im Fernsehen gesehen (Visto en TV), 2011
 Oil on canvas
 70 x 52 cm

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A fine example of neuroplasticity in action is the Spanish artist, **Euru/Zush**. Over a 50-year career, he has adopted different identities (Alberto Porta, Zush and Euru), created a parallel universe named Eurgu Mental State, complete with its own alphabet, passport, flag and currencies, and amassed a body of work which encompasses painting, drawing, digital technologies and interactive pieces. Notions of the body are central, with eyes, organs, physical and mental connections as recurring themes.

In **Cassie McQuater's Black Room - Chun Li** artwork doubles as narrative adventure and therapeutic space. Combining reimagined video game sprites, arcade game aesthetics and meditation technique, this piece explores insomnia and different states of consciousness.

//////// These artists, like all of those featured in **STILL HUMAN**, pertain to a dizzying present day where technology pushes forward new forms of expression and reality escapes definition. Sculptors of their own brains, each one of them responds with energy, imagination and intent. //////////

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1- Tony Matelli, *Head (Banana)*, 2- Antonio Crespo Foix, *Tetrápodo*, 3- Izumi Kato, *Untitled*, 4- SMACK, *Egonaut*, 5- SMACK, *Big Dada*, 6- Cool 3D World, *The Couple*, 7- David Altmejd, *Untitled*, 8- Egor Kraft, *Content Aware Studies: CAS_08 Hellenistic Ruler*, 9- Can Pekdemir, *Fur III: Variations II*. Courtesy of the Artist, 10- Neo Rauch, *Der Hirt*, 11- Willie Cole, *Ashley Bickerton*, 12- Wong Ping, *The Screen Shaver*. Courtesy of the Artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong / Shanghai; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles, 13- Sergio Mora, *Big Bang Pop*, 14- Francisco Esnayra, *Secuencia Samsara*.



15- Neo Rauch, *Gold*, 16- Evru/Zush, *Kalina Dafic*. Courtesy of Galería Senda, 17- Christian Rex van Minnen, *Self-Portrait as Catherine Opie's Back with Mongolian Feigned Flight*, 18- Lusesita, *El abrazo*, 19- Ryan Mosley, *Empress Butterfly*, 20- Cassie McQuater, *Black Room - Chun Li*. Courtesy of the Artist's Studio and TRANSFER Gallery, 21- Nam June Paik, *Antenna Buddha*, 22- Nik Ramage, *Brick*, 23- Sergio Mora, *The Book of Love*, 24- Sholim, *Half Human-Half Machine Portraits series: Manchine*. Courtesy of the Artist, 25- Nina Saunders, *Greta*, 26- Ryan Heshka, *Venus Envy*, 27- David Lewandowski, *time for sushi*, 28- Johan Deckmann, *Worries*, 29- Juan Díaz-Faes, *La batalla de Crolla*.

/ CHANGEABLE, ADAPTABLE, AI-AIDED HUMANS
PLAYFUL, FEARFUL, FASCINATED HUMANS
MORPHING HUMANS
CRYSTAL HUMANS
HALF HUMANS
NEW HUMANS

STILL HUMAN_

ALEX HUG
ANTONIO CRESPO
FOIX
CAN PEKDEMIR
CASSIE
MCQUATER
CHRISTIAN REX
VAN MINNEN
COOL 3D WORLD
DAEWON YANG
DAN LAM
DAVID ALTMEDJ
DAVID JIEN
DAVID
LEWANDOWSKI
DUSTIN YELLIN
EGOR KRAFT
EL ROTO
EVRU/ZUSH
FAIG AHMED
FLAN
FRANCISCO
ESNAYRA
IZUMI KATO
JOHAN
DECKMANN
JUAN BÄRJOLA
JUAN DIAZ-FAES
KOKA NIKOLADZE
LARS DIETRICH
LUIZ PHILIPPE
CARNEIRO
LUSEITA

MARIO
KLINGEMANN
MIRIAM CAHN
NAM JUNE PAIK
NEO RAUCH
NICOLAS LAMAS
NIK RAMAGE
NIKITA DIAKUR
NINA SAUNDERS
OLEG DOU
RYAN MOSLEY
RYAN HESHKA
SERGIO MORA
SHOLIM
SMACK
TOMOO GOKITA
TONY MATELLI
WILLIE COLE
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