

Curatorial Text: Time After Time

Curators: Jaro Varga & Zuzana Jakalová

Opening: 24 November, 7 p.m.

Exhibition duration: 24 November 2016 – 8 January 2017

Artists: Manon de Boer, Kara Rooney, Ben Landau, Cristina David, Martin Vongrej, Marie Lukáčová & Jakub Roček, Viktor Frešo, Rona Stern, Khalifa Ababacar Dieng, András Cséfalvay, Caroline Kryzecki, Jaro Kyša, collaboration: Jonathan Ravasz

Text Contributors: Sarah Jones, Yonatan Raz-Portugali, Roswitha Schuller, Jaro Varga, Christina Gigliotti, Zuzana Jakalová

DEVICE. ALL men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 1

The human sense of sight might commonly be named the first of traditional senses, as they are; Sight – Hearing – Taste – Smell – Touch; and not just Aristotle, but Wikipedia too lists it in first place. The quality of sight is in the ability to picture all other senses, this is expressed clearly in allegoric portrayals alongside Western art history. To fructify a sense in terms of gathering insight through using it, we have to create tools through which we can extend the human body and its perception of the world. The Optical – to pick the lens as one example, is a key artifact in human culture. Modes of visual orientation in the world are, however, much older – archaic, basically following the rhythm of light and shadow, sun, moon, and stars. The design of the optical artifact comes with the art of engineering – the starting point of a modern age. The optical device serves also as an expression of Weltbild (world view), a physical fact that counterstrikes on the religious hegemony, much like the Copernican Revolution, a paradigmatic shift that described the known world as part of a rotating heliocentric model with the sun in its center. The world as known before, up to the 15th century, completely shifted on its axis.

Optical devices are designed primarily to observe and manifest the outer, the cosmos; perhaps in the sense of the micro- cosmos (the magnifier, the microscope), or the larger cosmos – the celestial (the telescope – the telescopium) and even the human scale cosmos, which is calibrated as landscape and environment and measured by several optical apparatuses towards our contemporary gadgets. All these devices have stylized our convention of shaping a view – the rectangular format of the artist's easel as well as the LCD screen. Typically, the image of the outer world is defined within in a rectangular, horizontally oriented frame. In the 2000s, application software enabled users of such apparatuses, and the imagery emerging out of them, to operate another rotation.

PIVOT. ... “Right there, holding the internet in your hands.” Steve Jobs introduces Original iPad - Apple Special Event, 2010

The Apple iPad, introduced to the market in 2010, exemplified the so-called “pivot-function”, or page orientation, on a consumer ready device. Steve Jobs used the mythology of Gutenberg's printing revolution in claiming the iPad as “holding the internet in your hands” (which equates to Weltwissen, encyclopedic knowledge). Tablets like the iPad or even Computer Screens (as the recently introduced Microsoft Surface Studio) enable the so-called user-oriented screen that follows the rotation of the whole apparatus, flipping from landscape

to portrait mode. The programmatic structure behind it arranges rasterized tables vertically or horizontally to align to a turning point, the Pivot point. The Pivot point is the center point of any rotational system, whereas the axis is stable. Pivot Software, to pick one provider among others, enables a display to rotate from landscape to portrait, based on the use of the so-called pivot table, a data summarization tool in data processing. The Pivot table visually dynamizes data without changing its original data. For the layout of the CRT monitor or the more common LCD monitor, the sensation of the Pivot function is this new gained access to portrait mode, that has, by its development, been uncommon for computer screens (though there are examples for portrait displays also in the mid-1980s).

The Vertical World of Business. Our eyes have been trained to scan things vertically much more efficiently than horizontally. Most everything published today, regardless of the medium, is done in portrait mode. Whether it's your morning newspaper, your favorite magazine, printed daily reports, email messages, or even the daily news bulletins in your web browser – they are all in portrait mode. The reason? It's more efficient for reading, comprehending, and remembering. Can you imagine The Wall Street Journal in landscape orientation? Enough said.

Pivot® Display Software Business Case for Usability of Portrait Orientation August 2002

EPOCH. *Greek ἐποχή epokhē “fixed point of time, from epekhein stop, take up a position, from epi upon, near to + ekhein stay, be in a certain state”* Oxford English Dictionary

The above mentioned elements of image structure relating to the output that devices or gadgets give to their users will now follow with a short interlude on the idea of shifting, not in the mode of image, but in the mode of time. Orientation in time, for a historian, is explained by certain markers, as the term epoch means a stop or breakpoint. In the pre-modern era, the understanding of time was a periodic one that repeated itself in various, cultural or ecologically stimulated cycles. The idea of a progressive time - shifting from the time-circle towards a time-vector, or timeline – went alongside with the structural conventions in other cultural fields. The age of enlightenment presented basic questions of orientation for the human individual such as orientation in time and orientation in space, connected to the development of single sciences and technical applications towards a more elaborated automation. The Epoch of Baroque still knows a more holistic Weltbild, not driven by conflicting concepts of Dualism or Positivism. The transcendent philosophy of Baroque originated the Monade-model of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, an explanatory system of thought describing the so-called Monade as the basic element of reality, impartible, unfading, to be created or destroyed by God only (The Monadology, 1712-1714). According to this thought, the whole world was designed by the aggregation of Monades. The modern view, in contrast, is particular, recognized and designed by human intelligence, spread out in various systems of categorization and driven by a permanent process. The visual world is categorized in genres, picturing the world is finding its standards.

MONADOLOGY. A monad has “no window through which something can enter or leave” (Leibniz, *Monadology*, §7, 1714), it is an enclosed model kit to create the world. The monads seem to be a more abstract model of the idea of the demiurge, reaching back to European antiquity. This was a religious theological and philosophical approach to a making-god, acting as a craftsmen, who creates our surrounding cosmos by a solid plan and basic material. Switching this idea to a contemporary conception, we can experience the use of our digital units, like the pixel as an example, as this basic material that creates at least a view of the world according to a programmatic structure behind it. Contemporary devices such as tablets, smartphones or TV-screens are enclosed technical artifacts, displaying the world through LCD technology. The Liquid Crystal Display “uses the light-modulating properties of liquid crystals. Liquid crystals do not emit light directly.[1] LCDs are available to display arbitrary images (as in a general-purpose computer display) or fixed images with low information content, which can be displayed or hidden, such as preset words, digits, and 7-segment displays, as in a digital clock. They use the same basic technology, except that arbitrary

images are made up of a large number of small pixels, while other displays have larger elements.” (Wikipedia, 2016). Leibnitz explains, “*each portion of matter can be conceived as a garden full of plants, or like a pond full of fish. But each branch of a plant, each organ of an animal, each drop of its bodily fluids is also a similar garden or a similar pond*” (1714, §67).

FORM. Speaking of the epoch as a breakpoint, the after-baroque (*Postbaroque*), which involves the era of enlightenment, leading to the era of the 19th century and further to Western modernism, stopped with the formless and the flipping. Even further, man’s control of his environment strengthened with the ongoing industrialization and secular expansion of industries, goods and modes of operation. European forms and formats were exported, colonialization led to exotic images of parts of the “unknown” world, while genre traditions vice versa were repeated in different parts of the world at the same time. The visual artists of the United States of America primarily painted portraits and landscapes in a style based on English painting. In 18th and 19th century Japan, (Edo period, *Edo jidai*) the genre paintings of *ukiyo-e* that showcased everyday scenes of leisure and work were also popular.

ORIENTATION. Formatting images gives orientation to the viewer or user. Various formats are incorporated, marked and specified for several media applications as conventional printing technologies (the Din-formats), office applications (US-Letter), image files (image ratio and resolution), moving image such as film (35mm, 6mm), Digital Film (4K, High Definition), Screening formats (Super-Panavision, 16:9, 4:3), animated gifs, and so on. Another aspect is coding the image when it appears as digital data that can be moved and transported virtually.

These media are not common knowledge nor common property, they are ready-made by hardware and software companies, digital service providers or content providers (platforms). Formatting makes content transferable and accessible between networks and applications, but at the same time can exclude it therefrom. As the relatively constant medium of architecture shows the power relations or conventions of an epoch, new-media formats give an expression of power and dominance in contemporary habits.

In our perception of the digital created image, similar to historic picture conventions, we tend to classify certain image modes as “normal”, or common. This is how page orientation is described on the Wikipedia platform: “*Page orientation is the way in which a rectangular page is oriented for normal viewing. The two most common types of orientation are portrait and landscape. The specific word definition comes from the fact that a close-up portrait of a person's face and upper body is more fitting for a canvas or photo where the height of the display area is greater than the width, and is more common for the pages of books. Landscape originally described artistic outdoor scenes where a wide view area is needed, but the upper part of the painting would be mostly sky and is therefore omitted. Page orientation is also used to describe the dimensions of a video display.*” (Wikipedia, 2016).

This idea of a “normal” viewing relates to historic models of normative viewing which are deduced from the apparatuses and media used to display views of the world, as the camera-obscura, framing the landscape for the painter who attempts to replicate it with the help of the apparatus. Different media, such as painting, therefore lead to distinct norms, not only by the devices used, but also due to social conventions of their times that are expressed in the manner of the making.

GENRE. A prototypical Genre picture is an image as measured by the human figure. It might display a landscape or a portrait, in both modes of expression it will show the environment of the human figure scaled to a comfortable dimension. The figures showcased, either individually or collectively cannot be identified clearly in the genre painting; distinguishing it from the portrait painting. These conversation pieces, or; using the antiquated term of Sittenbild (“picture of manners”, genre scene or petit genre), depict everyday scenery, groups of common people, people interacting, craftsmen, occupational groups; a portrayal of habits and customs of the people of their time in their scenic environment. Therefore, the transition

of landscape to portrait painting is fluent. The human scaled landscape is filled with human beings and human action.

At a point where landscape gets out of this human scale, when it enlarges, it becomes sublime, grand, and dominant to the human figure. When the image of nature is shrinking, showcasing its micro-cosmology, we tend to perceive it as scientific imagery, replacing the visual arts image. The 19th century English art critic and social thinker John Ruskin proclaimed his idea of picturing landscape and the human figure within it, in a strict and conservative convention:

Nature has set aside her sublime bits for us to feel and think in; she has pointed out her productive bits for us to sleep and eat in; and, if we sleep and eat amongst the sublimity, we are brutal; if we poetize amongst the cultivation, we are absurd. There are the time and place for each state of existence, and we should not jumble that which Nature has separated.

John Ruskin – The Poetry of Architecture; or The Architecture of the Nations of Europe considered in its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character, Paragraph 248, 1837-38

Depicting landscape means, according to 19th century contemporaries such as Ruskin, to display social convention and manner within that scenery.

MANNER. Genre motifs are also popular in forms of applied and decorative arts, beginning with the 18th century Rococo style onwards to the 19th century. Here, figures and groups of figures serve as decoration on porcelain (Limoges), textiles, and wallpapers. It is not by coincidence that artifacts serving table culture at the same time reflected cultural habits through their layout. With the rise of the bourgeoisie came the development of their distinct habits and gestures, in conversation, in interaction and representation of social life – a so-to-speak *tableau de mœurs*. It was about the development of conventions, not only in society's beholding of its contemporary environment, its shaping and formatting the environmental framework; but above all, the setting up of the rules of the game that massively changed now that preceding social norms of the former leading class had become obsolete. In the same way of breaking free from the ancient regime, the new class in the countryside styled their gardens as an expression of emotion, but also intellectual awareness, and the salons of the cities adapted to that *manner*. It is the idea in the application of the pivot function that landscape becomes portrait. It is the way of describing the format itself as an expression of the sociological imagery. Picture orientation acts as a manner, and therefore used media, might their appearance be physical, virtual or digital, display these manners.

The Expected One (Die Erwartete, 1860) is an oil painting by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, one of the most compelling artists of Austrian *Biedermeierzeit* (period of Biedermeier). In the vertically organized canvas, the featured landscape frames only the portrait scene and gives it direction, a prototypical human-scaled landscape. A landscape, typically idealized in the style of the time, mostly in pastel colors, more agricultural in its design and dressed up picturesquely, is flipped to portrait mode. It shows a pair of figures – a young male holding a primrose and watching a girl that is walking up the road whilst paying no attention to him. The anecdote on the side can be found in the gesture of the young woman who is holding a small prayer book and a rosary, and seems to be completely immersed in her way. With a contemporary reading we are reminded of the gesture of holding a smartphone, again fading out from the physical reality around us. This is exactly the suggested reading employed in an internet meme (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) that went viral in Austria, Waldmüller's home country. Iconographic gestures, as they are an expression of *zeitgeist*, in that way seem to be re-appealing to their respective audiences.

SHARING. “Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.” — John Milton, *Areopagitica*, 1644.

Starting with Aristotle's description of the basic human desire to *know* as a human action, using his senses, this essay should conclude with a contemporary idea of expressing and sharing knowledge from one to another. While Aristotle gives a basic ontological conception on our view of the world, we have seen several turning points and shift to a contemporary conception of the world and the formats it is pictured with. One epoch-making idea for certain is the vision of a liberal society, the freedom of expression and sharing as depicted in the marketplace of ideas, a metaphor founded in John Milton's *Areopagitica*. Sharing ideas, content and knowledge as a principal of liberal thinking leads up to an economic model of free markets and liberated communication platforms; this is what also makes the formatted standard image accessible to a wide audience not bounded by religion or nation, but again oriented on some conventions of interaction. Manner and its mode of expression –its conventions– is a basic communication system, a medium that helps to navigate and orientate its user in his environment and beyond. Manners, and related gestures and speech, are the medium to express the social – status, idea, and feeling. It is the *marketplace of ideas*. It puts the filter of perceivability on personal inwardness, to express to the outer, like the Emoticon expressing a more complex state of mind as the facial expression of the Smiley. In its liberty (this medium of the social asks for feedback, it wants to be liked and shared. In this regard the formless, the sensational, the infinite has been formatted, *user-orientated* and spread through the world *in your hands*).

Roswitha Schuller, November 2016

Translation for Figure 1: "F.G. Waldmüller proves that people were staring at screens even in 1850."

Translation for Figure 2: "Today in Neue Pinakothek: Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller already painted the first Pokémon gamer in 1860."

THANKS to Christina Gigliotti for editing.

The part of the exhibition is a special project *Pivot* by Markus Hanakam and Roswitha Schuller at Kostka Gallery.

Open daily 1 – 8 pm and according to the evening program. Voluntary admission fee.

Contact and more information:

Šárka Maroušková → PR Manager

+420 723 706 249

sarka.marouskova@meetfactory.cz

MeetFactory is supported in 2016 by a grant from the City of Prague amounting to 10.000.000 CZK.