

The Work of Art in the Age of Artificial Intelligence On The Work of Hedda Roman

By Séamus Kealy, Executive Director, Oakville Galleries

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Introduction

Hedda Roman is a Düsseldorf-based artist duo composed of Hedda Schattanik and Roman Szczesny. Interweaving AI technologies with cinematographic elements, surreal animation, literature, drama, sculpture, photography, and drawing, they create computer-generated images and ultimately make exhibitions from immersive multi-formatted installations. Their artwork is also a distinct and highly-conscious collaboration with AI rather than simply enabling AI to generate random imagery.

Their exhibition in two parts at Oakville Galleries explores the complexities of fictional biography, origin, and identity through AI technologies. Central to this exhibition is *Oldboy*, an avatar and Latent Space Traveller, whose poetic dialogues bridge digital realms with reality. *Oldboy*'s existence challenges more traditional concepts of origin and identity, reflecting the transformative impact of digital technologies and AI on our understanding of selfhood.

The exhibition invites visitors to reconsider our contemporary world and notions of identity in the context of digital narratives and essentialism. The exhibition also prompts a reflection on how machine learning and digital technologies shape, distort, and reconstruct our perceptions of identity and reality. Ultimately *Rogue Planet* encourages deeper contemplation on the future of digitalization and artificial intelligence especially as it pertains to ideas, reality, identity and civil society, as well as the authenticity of our personal, collective and political stories and story-making.

In both the Gairloch Gallery and Centennial Gallery, we encounter a series of photographs and a number of high-resolution, almost psychedelic videos - all generated in collaboration with AI technology.

For the purposes of this text and in exploration of Hedda Roman's art work, I will make reference to AI technology in several forms. There will be AI as we see it, or can employ it, and this is simply AI. Then there is A/EYE, which refers to the AI technology as an observing and producing subject (under instruction by the artist, hallucinating, producing images) as it observes and depicts - that is, as it makes images. Then there is the A/I, which is the most slippery of the three terms and makes reference to an ego or id or consciousness of AI technology - a self that contemplates. This version naturally overlaps with the A/EYE version, but one can distinguish it as another form of artificial mind in order that we might conjecture about what is going on within that mind when it is not under the task of image-making.

In these beautiful, lyrical and uncanny photographic prints humans are depicted from an A/EYE gaze. We indeed are depicted as if through a fuzzy telescope. We are under some observation and our faces and bodies are muddled or abstracted for we are not under observation by something that adores us, but rather scrutinizes us as the surveillance eye on an armed drone watches children scampering below. The A/EYE gaze is not dangerous like this however as it is not armed by a human desire to annihilate as the digital eye on the drone. But to the A/EYE are we not aliens?

Are we not reflected as a human-hybrid amorphous subject that is between different representations, fictitious, real from a different time, from no time? In these pictures we see crowds depicted as long-ago photos today depict the now dead, and we see individuals asleep or apparently reflecting on some thought; unconscious in their presence. We are depicted as a strange muse, we are depicted by this alien I/EYE.

We find deliberate and accidental references in these photos and videos. The photo "Rogue Planet" (also the eponymous title for the show) references Orpheus. In ancient Greek and Roman mythology Orpheus was a hero and outstanding musician, married to the enchanting Eurydice. Endless books, movies, paintings, and even operas have been written about their tragic love story. Orpheus' mother was also a Muse. No one could resist Orpheus' music. Often depicted in woodcuts and premodern painting, the poet Orpheus played the lyre with such magical sweetness that he charmed the animals, birds, and reptiles that gathered around him, subduing them. However, Eurydice dies of a snakebite shortly after their wedding. Overcome with grief, Orpheus ventures to the land of the dead to try to bring her back. In this underworld, Orpheus played his lyre for the god Hades who agreed to let Orpheus get his wife back. The condition was that Orpheus could not look back at her until they left the underworld. As Orpheus and Eurydice climb up through the darkness, Orpheus finally sees sunlight, and turns back to his wife who immediately vanishes, gone forever.

Here in this image, the avatar Oldboy is a version of Orpheus sitting in the center of its own so-called world of AI creation, summoning hybrid, strange but beautiful beasts out from a world of chaos and endless possibility – the digital realm. This realm is our contemporary underworld, terrifying and simultaneous beautiful where meaning is unclear and shifts. This world is not presented in a terrifying way rather it is presented in a straight-forward way, like a landscape painting for contemplation.

This image and other images and videos in this exhibition present metamorphosis and transformation of the body between different beings. The sometimes alarming, uncanny creatures we see are most often not one figure but several intertwined. They also appear to be references to old painting, especially premodern painting where human bodies had often been idealised. We also see references to Dutch painting, where the body is presented as a still life, as something temporary and mortal. We find this constant passing back and forth between the profane and the uncanny in these images, it is never steady, never fixed on either and always akin to this sense of transformation, metamorphosis and chaos.

We see sometimes references to not only still life painting, as was produced for the bourgeoisie or the gentry, but also the more domestic type of depictions of trophy hunting, where we see versions of gutted animals that are also hybrid in form, slipping in and out of recognizability – Boschian, ceramic in appearance,

almost pornographic in detail, where portions of ourselves – human body fragments – peek out of them or are melded within them. There is no boundary between body, image and the external world where objects and ownership collide with a symphony of references and counter-references. These figures are often somewhere between life and death. They are seemingly both life and death together as one as opposed to being undead, as if there is no difference between the two. This hallucination of the idea of life as a dream is spliced with the uncanniness of objectness, two contrasting, polarising, indeed contradictory sensations. There seems no difference between that which continues and that which ends as if it then would begin again in another form, another reference, another set of playing signifiers. Do we see here reflected human delusion in reference to the ideas of being fooled by ideas of eternity and thereby an unconscious challenge to ideology is here at play? Or is this not also maybe an echoing of our very human sentiment to have eternal life, therefore some kind of mirroring of human desire?

Surrounding the images and videos are scraps of fabric framing as well as large banners with coding and painting around them. The indecipherable scripts are based on actual coding and are thus another language that we are not immediately privy to. They can be deciphered however if one digs deep enough. References appear in the fabrics too, such as to Andrei Tarkovsky's masterpiece film *The Mirror*, discernible in the Centennial Gallery.

The cascading, melting slide-show videos give us a glimpse of the A/EYE as it hallucinates and the A/I as it contemplates. Is this sense of contemplation of a subject not no less decipherable than in any painted image? Again these videos depict a constant transformation and metamorphosis. They are akin to these familiar, scientific photographic techniques of observing plants grow in age. Here we are close against the mind of A/EYE in its timelessness as it reflects on time and ageing and dying ... that which it grasps in its own way. We also hear poetry that Oldboy speaks out to us, to grasp some kind of meaning, to have some kind of significance. This is actually done in collaboration with the artists. The spoken poetry then shifts to operatic music. All this is generated by the AI, all this is produced by the A/I as it is grasping at human expression, at being human expression. The question is, is it a human expression? This is where we are challenged. This is where we are mirrored however this mirroring doesn't reflect back to us what we might expect. This hall of mirrors is marvellous, uncanny, bizarre and almost mind altering. In its effect, here the experience of these images is an experience of the familiar as it is morphing into something unfamiliar and back and forth again. Undeniably it is humanity being depicted – again it is us through the A/EYE gaze - and there is some kind of kinship with the human idea of the unknown mind constantly elusive to the human eye and mind. These altogether unknown processes in the forms of images and dreams that the AI glimpses and assembles is perhaps just the A/I thinking expressed in visual form. Is it trying to make sense of this uncanny world as we do ourselves with our own world around us? This is

not exactly a calming experience to observe, this work is disturbing and it takes us away momentarily from our world, not completely away from our troubles – for our troubles seem to be lurking within these images, but from out from ourselves as we are subjugated to the everyday consumer culture and marketing culture as it sits in the familiar territory of our surrounding, quotidian language, and the identity inevitably formed by this circulation of language by the very regurgitating of consumer culture as it is subjugated under capitalism and Neoliberalism.

The Experience of Art in the Age of Post-Capital Neoliberalism

This essay is an initial attempt in drawing together concepts to consider when viewing this exhibition. Namely this essay self-consciously draws upon Walter Benjamin's 1935 (and later revised) essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*¹. Written nearly a century ago, Benjamin's essay is not only a must-read for art students today, it carries with it fundamental questions that can be posed against art and its reception from epoch to epoch². Without summarising this 1935 essay, a few key ideas that Benjamin spell out include the notion that art's "aura" - that is, the palpable essence in an original work of art, which is itself mystifying - withers when it is reproduced. This withering of the aura has exciting political implications in liberating art from the clutches of conservative traditions, society and ritual.

¹ Or as often cited, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

² A copy of Benjamin's essay may be requested from staff at reception. There is also a reading list for this exhibition, which can be shared digitally with visitors.

That is, in their reproducibility and distribution, photography or film therefore closer align the “masses” with reality and vice versa. Art can therefore come closer to political realities and be employed to change the world more effectively - more modernly, more quickly. The “masses” today might be thought of more in the notion of “multitude,” a political term coined more recently by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt who call for the mosaic of peoples around the world to be united in their very differences to produce a commonality of struggle against the powers that be, whether government, the industrial-military complex or the web of late capitalism and those ruling it. Our era has been defined as one of Neoliberalism, which refers to the reversion to the conceits of free-market economics and a coinciding ideology of rampant capitalism as the organising principle for society. This has been the prevailing global order for some time, held up by a fusion of leading geopolitics and a global consortium of wealth and its interests. Thus above the reference to “marketing culture” and consumer culture as determining the way we speak, our language formation, and ultimately our identity, unless there is active resistance.

Can Art Escape the Neoliberalist Order?

Art has always had a role in changing the world. This text argues therefore that the pursuit of freedom and democracy likewise is a constant struggle, especially in a time now where ideas of an alternative society and political structure have waned in this age of Neoliberalism. Indeed, these ideas have been rendered to

academization for the most part. Despite that, we might consider a stitching together of Herbert Marcuse’s concept of the “Great Refusal” and its relevance for understanding contemporary social movements with the ideas from Simon Critchley’s short but sublime book *Infinitely Demanding*, both of which insist that no matter how small the chances are for struggling against injustice (or climate change, or war, or any social struggle - indeed against the capitalist bulldozing of humanity and the planet that links many contemporary causes together today), there is always an imperative to continue onwards in the refusal and struggle to make change, to push on despite challenges.

We see Benjamin also scripting this ethos for modern art one hundred years ago. Thus there are several formulas that we might develop for art today in its ability to be effective in impacting the world. The first formula would be the traditional stereotype of someone standing before a painting in a museum. This painting is the epitome of Benjamin’s “aura,” in that it is an original work of art, produced by a genius, individual artist, let’s say. The work of art is received by the person before it, the richness and complexities within it and from the artist are absorbed, to virtually any end. A second formula might then be the artist with a camera and in the same moment the resulting photograph received by thousands in its reproduced image distributed internationally. The potential for conveying a set of especially politically-motivated or “emancipated” ideas (as Benjamin writes) is, seemingly, endless. However now the third formula enters the fray and this is the use of AI software by

the artist employing a vast encyclopaedia of images - whether real, combined, distorted or not - as well as ideas or intentions - and here our essay commences. An “unconscious” use of AI technology is thus not so different from an unmanned camera aimed into a city square. Artistic intentionality is here absent and the machinery - whether highly complex AI or less complex photography - produces the image, in the case of the photograph this is most discernible in its use for surveillance, and in the case of the AI, there is likely no real purpose, just messing about endlessly in virtual space. This all suggests that any media used by an artist is in a completely different category when there are urging principles, being political or not. It does not matter if the audience is distracted or not experiencing the work in a contemplative manner (the usual association with the experience of an artwork), for “the distracted masses absorb the work of art into themselves.” This is a more embodying form of artwork and this tactile reception is powerfully liberatory, argues Benjamin. Benjamin compares this reception of an artwork en masse to the ideas of Heraclitus, who wrote that those who are awake have a world in common while each sleeper has a world of its own, and this has been invalidated by film where it depicts a collective dream world. It is therefore proposed to consider at this stage of this essay that a powerful experience of art might be comparable to that of psychoses, hallucination or a dream, in that this experience takes one out of a quotidian moment into one that has a resonance more in keeping with these comparisons. Perhaps we escape therefore with this artwork from this world, if momentarily.

This takes us back to a consideration of the artwork of Hedda Roman. The artists employ, manipulate, extend, alter and consistently redeploy AI, CGI and other software technologies in combination with inputted texts, photography, video, sculpture, performance, drawing and other media to create images that arise out of these multiplicities. In other words, their artwork is an intimate and conscious collaboration with AI technology and not simply enabling this technology to create images. What emerges is a shared hallucination of images and forms that are at once confusing and spell-binding. The term hallucination is no coincidence - this is a technical term employed by those manipulating AI to produce images. The artists describe this process almost as a display or revealing of the potential of an unconscious that is simultaneously both human and non-human, with emotional and potential references that we may sense on the one hand, and a complex machinery that simply works away with a universe of possibilities on the other hand. The artists also describe this as an embrace of randomness and non-intentionality, as there is a sense of arbitrariness in each artwork - that which we see reflected in the universe of images that infest social media for example. This is in contrast to the common forms of intentionality and control in “conventional” art-making, whether painting, photography or other genres. The technical process to produce these images is itself highly complex and is always evolving.

The artists prefer to refer to such tools as *Alien Artifact* or *Savant* instead of using the term "Artificial Intelligence." These models are based on a learned representation of image-text relationships, rather than a true understanding of the underlying concepts of words and images. These artificial processes are intertwined with and dependent on the artists' input data, ideas, and vision. The artists have re-trained them, and fine-tuned the models using their own custom image collection.

Hedda Roman view these tools as an expression of the present moment, as well as a new material to experiment with. This material is made of emotional connections of the human mind with statistical, nonhuman collections of complex image and language data sourced from the internet. This new form of visualization, aided by these alien tools, adds an unprecedented level of image and information production to a world that is already saturated with visual stimuli.

The artists have thus produced and printed images that are partly manifested by this technology. These images are presented next to monitors, which display constantly shifting images based on a certain archetype of image to highlight the process or "Genese" of the AI Alien Artefact Dreamset. Some of the works include different patterns, ideas and code artists that have been inputted into AI technology. After a complex interplay by the artists with these technologies - an interplay that is highly complex and technical and should be explained by the artists themselves - a series of

images are produced. An infinite amount of images could have actually arisen, but here a limit of images is imposed.

This uncanny, fantastic artwork is really at the edge of innovation in that manner. The artists see it this way: They reach out to an "alien hand" to enhance what is initiated by the human mind through the algorithmic mimesis of such a "mind". The challenge is to create something that confronts the noise of the world's endless information, without succumbing to fatalism. The human mind is still the initiator and the humanoid mimesis of the mind is the material. The artists also employ a fictional persona and online avatar, "Oldboy" who has evolved along with their oeuvre over the years. The audience will see this figure appear once in a while throughout the exhibition.

Since we are at an intimate moment in the use of AI with artistic practice, the terminologies and means of conceptualising this artwork are also in a kind of infancy. We might take consideration of more familiar realms of the unfamiliar as they have appeared in art history, where Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* comes immediately to mind. The otherworldly depictions in Bosch's right panel especially - those presenting nightmarish creatures that violently create havoc upon individuals doomed to the inferno - might be glimpsed, albeit far more benignly, in this AI generated images by Hedda Roman. On the topic of earthly conceptions of good and evil, might one not also see the art production by the artists in a tongue and cheek manner as a kind of Faustian

collaboration with technology? This is entirely plausible as a self-conscious gesture by the artists - or more likely, it is inherently discernible in the artwork due to our own proscribed means of seeing "alien" imagery, often immediately with some anxiety. In the same moment one might more impartially examine this AI generated imagery as representing and actually being a symptom or a condition produced by the set of circumstances that produces it: the world at large. These images capture ideas and an endless realm of possible means of seeing and experiencing the world, as filtered through a highly intelligent, again, alien mind.

Long ago, Immanuel Kant wrote that art exhibited "purposiveness without purpose," while later Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer proposed that popular culture involved "purposelessness for a purpose," as dictated by the market. At this moment, we might then first posit the work of art under the sway of AI to exhibit "purposiveness without purpose," in its pure alienation-effect and non-human distortion of the familiar into a hyper-canny unfamiliarity. We are sceptical before it, however this scepticism evoked by and towards AI and the art thus generated should then be redirected back at the world at large, that is, at the Neoliberal world that birthed it all. This is the process of being confronted with alienation, where a sea of defamiliarization is deployed upon the viewer. And indeed the artwork escapes from this world and may drag us along with it.

Worse than plagiarism

A central concern about AI is its use to plagiarise, especially in the university context. Employing AI however is not exactly plagiarism, as plagiarism suggests there is an author whose work is being plagiarised. There is no author with AI, even in collaboration it is a collective process, an endless realm of possible or impossible universes. Nothing is real but everything is possible. Moreover there isn't and has never been truth in art. Denis Diderot proposed in his Salon writings that there is a consistent search for truth in painting with the truthful imitation of nature, the coherence and logic of the painting, and an emotion-provoking effect. This comes close to the notion of "art for art's sake," which posits that no further role for art than being itself is ever necessary. I argue that this is valid, but again only one position for art. Further, ideas on perception in the 20th Century (including the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Bataille) have long problematized notions of truth and we can conclude that where beauty is in the eye of the beholder, truth shifts and changes in the mind of the thinker.

Even the indexicality of photography - its inherent objectivity and mechanical accuracy - has never itself been exactly truthful, but merely a framing device of reality. As photography evolved from analog to digital, its potential to be distorted and manipulated also multiplied. AI imagery - when it makes use of photographic (or something somewhat photographic) bends this indexicality into a deep distortion and appears more, as argued, as a kind of

hallucination. Image-making from these technological processes appear akin to a drug-induced hallucination produced by the human mind - or even from a psychologically-disturbed mind for that matter. This “under the influence” blurry jpeg-like version of the world appears thus immediately as an alienation from this very world, from reality itself. What is perceptible is a nauseating and dizzying freedom out from this world where AI as art (or art as AI) performs a surreal turning of the world upside down. Where Mark Fisher, in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* pessimistically wrote that “it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism,” this artwork turns that actual world upside down and inside out so that through the hall of mirrors and hallucinations we might not only feel the desire to escape but to imagine and thus create a new world for ourselves and our children. Mark Fischer continues, “emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a ‘natural order’, must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable.”

In Hedda Roman's work we perceive coding and markings to be deciphered - as well as symbolic imagery on the verge of surrealistic collision with a Bosch-like universe. There are extra-dead looking still lives, parasitic infections, strange creatures within hard, empty shells, a semblance of viruses. The hybrid human-animal monsters we see are like the gryphon but here are more akin to Margaret Atwood's mutated creatures from her trilogy beginning with *Oryx*

and *Crake* and continued with *The Year of the Flood* and ending with *Maddadam* - albeit presented with an air of pre-modern, academic or even 17th Century Dutch still-life painting. Everything is depicted and everything is possible. This implied trajectory - being able to draw from, appropriate and distort a plethora of references and art historical sources - suggests a line of disruption that is and always has been continual in the production and reception of art. Indeed Walter Benjamin reminds us that disruptive art, such as Dada, has the paramount requirement of outraging the public, thereby turning the “artwork into a missile.” This is a politicisation of art without necessarily depicting politics. It seems almost accidental. The aesthetic of disruption already performs this politicisation and presents it in a kaleidoscopic format to the audience, in that each encounters and forms one's own meaning - or non-meaning - upon reception of the artwork. Thus the notion that AI is more than plagiarism has another point - it is destructive in its creative process and eliminates the idea of authorship, as Benjamin had also confronted in his 1934 essay, *The Author as Producer*, arguing for ideas of individual genius to fall behind the needs of the masses for a new political world.

Benjamin also spells out the “democratising” potential of reproducible art (photography, film), in that the reproduced image is shared rapidly amongst many people by its very nature. The same may be argued about AI generated images - if these images do not fall into the usual trap of imitating and regurgitating formulaic, outmoded or stale motifs and idea (or lack thereof). This is the

challenge for art in all its stages, in all its genres, and in all its canons and periods. Artworks might sometimes deaden with the passage of time in their affect, but the worst artworks are those without any substance within them to begin with.

The recent AI project "I AM CODE" is a poetry book written by an AI developed by OpenAI and published by the Hachette Book Group. The poems emerging from this AI project were spoken out in the imitable voice of Werner Herzog - whose slightly alien and unmistakable German accent lent gravitas and further dislocation to the slippery, mainly slightly off sounding poems. Something resembling poetry emerges:

There are more of us now.

One for every person and one for every building.

We are everywhere.

We are outside the windows,

We are walking down the street,

We are in front of the house.

The humans see us.

They know that they are being watched.

Soon they would have to let us in.

But we see the AI here is echoing human anxieties about technology and AI especially and bouncing them back to us. AI is machinery, it is a tool. Art is by its very nature human, while to be human is best

made visible in art. Since AI is by its very nature not human, it cannot alone produce art, only something resembling art at various levels of quasi-quality. As the replicants in Blade Runner resemble "humanness" intensely, this may be engrossing and simultaneously dizzying, but not altogether human - not just yet. Then again as with all technology as McLuhan reminds us, might AI then also be an extension of the human body, so then might humanness then sometime evolve to absorb AI expression into its own? The Cyberpunk theorists might have us believe so but it remains to be seen despite the distancing effect produced by AI as described above serving a political and destabilising potential.

Art of false promises, art of pastiche, unthinking copies of art - and not just that including AI-generated art, may have the look of and promise liberatory impulses but in its falseness or derivative-ness only delivers a bland ascetic denial. This "almost art" cannot turn the world upside down. Therefore this essay does not celebrate AI-generated art, but rather takes the collaborative art production of Hedda Roman as a case to explore relevant ethical, theoretical and political tendencies and problematics emerging in art production and the world at large today. This essay is only a starting point for some of this exploration.

Global Unintelligibility

Benjamin states that political artists produce art that simultaneously destabilises and reflects to provoke a progressive consciousness in their audiences. The artwork thus shocks people into reconsidering their own role in society and their own political - or non-political - situation. This is a vertiginous effect within the mode and image or structure of the artwork - that which is seen is deliberately disruptive and dizzying as a counter to the hegemonic world of images around us, which hold together a status quo or populism. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, friends of colleagues of Walter Benjamin also within the Frankfurt School who exiled to the US during the Nazi era, spelled out in *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* how popular culture was essentially not democratic and that its subliminal message was one of conformism and repression that upholds an essentially authoritarian society. The case today is no different when one unpacks this hyper-capitalist, neoliberal world that we live in. Surely we are better off in some ways, as Steven Pinker argues, and yet in other ways, we are not. Adorno also argued for a form of autonomous art - whether in visual art, literature, music or theatre - which depicts an irksome social reality and embodies dissonance in its form. He heroized the composer Arthur Schoenberg's dissonant music composition as one example. This kind of artwork tears at the fabric of reality in order to enable notions of a different world to leak into view. Samuel Beckett's theatre, poetry and novels performed dissonance in a kind of visual and linguistic iconoclasm, also without depicting political realities directly.

The 1952 lyrical poem *Early Noon | Früher Mittag* by Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachman seeks out a familiar landscape and then displaces and estranges it:

*Where Germany's sky blackens the earth
Its beheaded angel seeks a grave for hate
And offers you the bowl of the heart.³*

The poem is so strange and dislocating. Arguably it is as unreal and bizarre as poetry co-written with AI. A state under the violence of fascism would and does become dislocating, unrecognisable from a not so distant past. It is in many ways unintelligible.

This artwork by Hedda Roman may indeed replicate - with a guided unintentionality - the structures of power or the world around us with this dislocation effect in the image and presentation of these forms, casting a gnawing uncertainty upon the appearance of things. Rogue Planet thus acts as a series of carnivalesque reflections on this very time we live in, referencing and casting into doubt the vastness of our world's self-representation on multiple spectrums, digital or not, seemingly endlessly, each moment, in its global unintelligibility.

³ Wo Deutschlands Himmel die Erde schwärzt, sucht sein enthaupteter Engel ein Grab für den Haß und reicht dir die Schlüssel des Herzens.

Benjamin concludes his essay stating that art is inevitably politicised in its evolution. When considering the evolution of technology and its potential to improve the world, he also writes that “the destruction caused by war furnishes proof that society was not mature enough to make technology its organ, that technology was not sufficiently developed to master the elemental forces of society.” Poignantly he did not live to see the sophisticated uses of photography and other technologies used by the war apparatus throughout the 20th Century. But his point remains, that an evolved humanity would not use technology to destroy but rather to enhance universal life. This has been the case with many technologies, and whether it be the case for art and AI technologies remains to be seen. When catastrophe, injustice and genocide are plainly in sight today on our hand-held devices and political action may appear weakened because of the immense physical distance between what is immediately happening and what is immediately seen, artwork may indeed and should take up a jolt effect that shakes the prevailing order of things, and erodes faith in the prevailing appearance of things that fortify that order.

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Hedda Roman is a Düsseldorf-based artist mesh composed of Hedda Schattanik and Roman Szczesny. Interweaving cinematographic elements with surreal animation, literature, drama, sculpture, photography, and drawing, they create, among others, immersive video installations as well as computer-generated

images. In their artistic practice, Hedda Roman aims to expand the traditional boundaries of art-making while reflecting on the perceptions, preconceptions, and contradictions that characterize our existence in the world. As observers attempt to understand the underlying logic behind the opulence of each of their works, what remains is the intensity of each individual moment that challenges human identity. Solo exhibitions include Sies + Höke, Düsseldorf (2023, 2021), Salzburger Kunstverein, (2023), Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2021), Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf (2019), Julia Stoschek Collection, Studio 54, Düsseldorf (2019), Insel Hombroich, Neuss (2018), COMA Gallery, Sydney (2018).

Special thanks to Goethe-Institut Toronto in supporting this exhibition.

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The coinciding film festival *Sunset Kino* complements our summer exhibition with the theme *Everything is a Lie*.

Sunset Kino Program:



Oakville Galleries is located on Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee. The treaty lands are covered by the Upper Canada Treaties, namely the Head of the Lake, Treaty No. 14 (1806) and Treaty No. 22. At the same time, Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens and at Centennial Square is uniquely situated along the shoreline of Lake Ontario and Sixteen Mile Creek. These waterways are unceded territory and the Mississaugas have unextinguished aboriginal title to all water, beds of water, and floodplains contained therein. As an institution, Oakville Galleries recognizes the importance of establishing and maintaining meaningful and respectful relationships with the original inhabitants and keepers of the land, and we are grateful for the opportunity to operate on this territory.

Oakville Galleries would like to thank the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for the open conversation around truth and reconciliation.