

Christopher Kulendran Thomas (in collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann), Ground Zero

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Anaïs Castro

**SCHINKEL PAVILLON
BERLIN
SEPTEMBER 11 –
DECEMBER 15, 2019**

The video alternates between documentation of the artist's family narrative and the booming economy of Sri Lanka, which recently saw tourism soar. The work tells of the painful migration of the artist's parents, who were forced to flee their place of origin. Tamil Eelam, a country that no longer exist, was a Neo-Marxist state that Sri Lankan forces wiped out in the summer of 2009 after having been self-governed for nearly 30 years. The video also introduces the artist's uncle, a revered family hero who founded the Centre for Human Rights, a site that the artist sets out to visit in the film. Kulendran Thomas—who is an avid collector of Sri Lankan contemporary art—subsequently questions the rising number of white-cube galleries and the development of a contemporary art biennial in the capital of Colombo. The viewer



Christopher Kulendran Thomas, *Ground Zero*, 2019. Installation view. Photo: Andrea Rossetti.

A large transparent screen sections the rotunda of the Schinkel Pavillon and encases, in a glass-like vitrine, a series of paintings and sculptures by two prominent artists from Sri Lanka: Upali Ananda and Kingsley Gunatilake. The main function of this partition, however, is to act as a projection wall for Christopher Kulendran Thomas's video *Being Human*. The viewer is propelled through a rhythmic sequence of images from various sources such as stock photographs, filmed footage, landscape shots, and so on. With smooth transitions, this filmic hypertext transports the viewer across physical and virtual spaces, moving between reality and fiction, between documentary, simulation and personal history. The editing strategy prompts reflection on our complex relationship to various layers of reality that coexist in today's aggregate society.

is led to consider the role of contemporary art within this culturally conflicted context as a strategic tool to project an image of democratic values to the rest of the world. This is emphasized by the digitally simulated cameo of art-world superstar Oscar Murillo who ponders the role of contemporary art, theoretically upholding the ideals of equality and pleading for the oppressed and disenfranchised, while still bolstering an unregulated market that benefits a powerful global economic elite.

Another virtually simulated figure participates in the video narration: American pop star Taylor Swift weighs in on the geopolitical situation of Sri Lanka while providing critical observations about the impact of

technology's acceleration on human consciousness. As humans, we are linked not by the basic appeal of our shared humanity—not even in the face of the grave menace of mass extinction, but rather by what our existence represents within international economic trade relations—at least this is the message that both the simulated superstars attempt to present. At a given point, virtual Taylor Swift suggests: “maybe simulating simulated behaviour is the only way we have of being for real.” The artist used a neural network that he trained to scrape the internet for images of Swift and Murillo and reassemble them into the recognizable visages that were animated for the film. The result is uncanny. Yet, this technology is omnipresent in our life, it is in every app that applies a filter to your face, it is the tool that unlocks your smartphone. At a certain point in the film “Murillo” returns to European philosophy, specifically Kantian ethics and the idea of a “universal human subject” distinct from nature as the basis for the concept of Human Rights Law. With Facebook algorithms, machine-learning and artificial intelligence gaining exponential influence on our societies, the video posits two unresolved concerns: human rights and the very category of “being” human. By weaving raw and simulated footage into a seamless cinematic assembly, Kulendran Thomas makes evident that this is a deeply entangled and increasingly difficult problem to resolve. But the piece raises important questions and explores speculative proposals to replace the tightly-bound territories of nations-states by way of using distributed networks. In this sense, Thomas's thought experiment is to imagine what a self-governed state would be like if conceived of as a distributed network rather than a bounded territory.

At various strategic moments in the film, the paintings and sculptures of Ananda and Gunatilake are made visible by an interruption in the video's images. This is a tour de force tactic that complicates the critical discourse within the video, making its machinist gambit an evident contrast to the physical tangibility of the objects confined behind the screen. This effectively redirects the viewers to focus on the space they inhabit in the gallery: it is a strategic tool to posit them in relation to those objects and momentarily disconnect them from the flow of images that barricaded these objects from their vision in the first place. This is where the strength of the piece is manifest, in using technology to assert a well-rounded critique of society while highlighting its problematic posture and omnipresence in human consciousness. But before providing an answer, or a way out of this two-fold puzzle, the video loops and the viewers are thrown back to where they started.

Anaïs Castro is a curator and writer based in Toronto and New York. Over the years, she has curated a number of exhibitions in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and China. She is one of the founding members of the curatorial collective The Department of Love and an editorial member of *Daily Lazy*. Her articles are published regularly in *esse art + opinions*, *ESPACE art actuel* and *this is tomorrow*.

Bertrand Lamarche, *Ellipse*

Marie Siguier

GALERIE JÉRÔME POGGI

PARIS

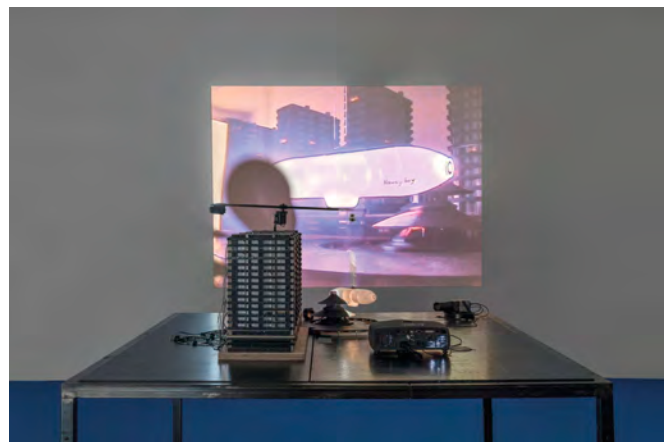
30 NOVEMBRE 2019 –

11 JANVIER 2020

Le délabrement de la tour constituait un modèle du monde vers lequel les entraînait l'avenir : un paysage au-delà de la technologie, où chaque chose tombait en ruine, ou bien de façon plus ambiguë, participait à des combinaisons inattendues et pourtant plus riches de sens. Laing réfléchit sur ce point – parfois, il lui semblait difficile de ne pas croire qu'ils vivaient dans un futur qui était déjà arrivé et avait épuisé ses possibilités.

J. G. Ballard¹

Pour sa troisième exposition personnelle à la galerie Jérôme Poggi, Bertrand Lamarche explore la face cachée de nos agglomérations urbaines tentaculaires à partir du panorama de la ville de Nancy, marquée depuis les Trente Glorieuses par un urbanisme de barres et de tours, ces impasses verticales qui constituent la pierre angulaire du modernisme architectural. Déployant un ensemble de collages, de dispositifs mécaniques, de maquettes et de films, il échafaude une uchronie mélancolique d'après le modèle d'une ville existante dans laquelle convergent ses intérêts pour le langage cinématographique, les



phénomènes météorologiques, les distorsions spatio-temporelles, les basculements d'échelles et l'architecture des grands ensembles. Dans ce paysage métallisé, hallucinant de bitume et de béton, l'évolution historique de la ville devient un objet narratif, laissant place à une constellation de réalités parallèles dans lesquelles les repères spatio-temporels se distordent et se confondent.

Depuis une trentaine d'années, les alentours de la gare ferroviaire de Nancy et ses gigantesques tours d'habitation héritées de l'après-guerre sont devenus les fondations de la cité spectrale fantasmée par l'artiste. Dégageant une atmosphère de *no man's land*, vaguement envahissante, *The Model* (2019), dont la première occurrence date de 1993, est une œuvre hybride suspendue entre dispositif processuel et maquette à