

Louisa Clement

omissions

June 11 - August 15, 2020



Exhibition view, Louisa Clement, 2020

E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Sandmann" (1816), Ridley Scott's "Bladerunner" (1982), and Spike Jonze's "HER" (2013) are just a few examples from film and literature that fascinatingly reflect on the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence (AI), thereby formulating questions that, more than ever, we need to ask in our dealings with artificial intelligence: What makes us human? What is the relationship between human and machine? What does it mean when these boundaries blur and people ultimately even feel desire for machines? And what will win in the end: "[...] the conquest of man or the victory of humanity [...]."¹

With this last question, Jana Baumann ends her text on Louisa Clement's exhibition *Remote Control* in the publication of the same name. The exhibition was shown in the Sprengel Museum Hanover and in the Ludwig Forum for International Art Aachen 2019-2020. "Louisa Clement's work relentlessly seeks to confront the question of human existence in the digital age"², the art historian notes there.

¹ Baumann, Jana, *Mixed Reality. Louisa Clements reflexive Grenzgänge*, in: Gronert, Stefan/Beitin, Andreas (eds.), *Louisa Clement: Remote Control*, exh. cat., Sprengel Museum Hanover, 30 Jan. 2019 - 10 June 2019, Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst Aachen, 27 Sept. 2019 - 26 Jan. 2020, Berlin 2019, p. 127-130, here p. 130.

² *ibid.*

Louisa Clement now continues this confrontation under the title *omissions*:

The series *inside*, recorded with a SmartPhone, suggests a camera panning through the interior of a human-seeming body. Anthropomorphic yellow curves, the exterior walls of an organ, or a patina, frayed and shot through with veins, give the viewer a presentiment of something uncanny and yet beautiful. That this is the interior life of shop window mannequins, which the artist already called “avatars” in another series, is not initially obvious to the viewers.



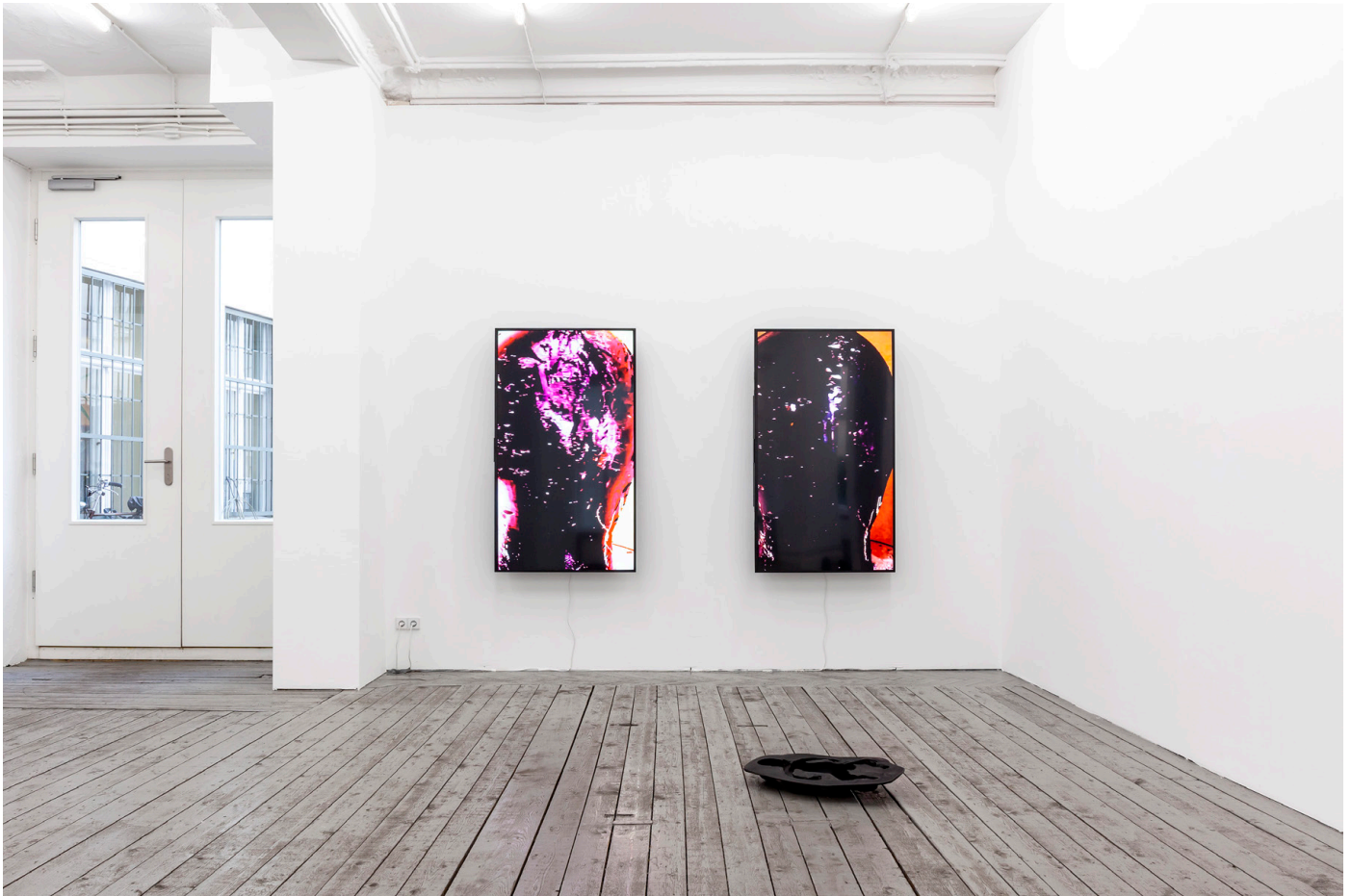
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If one looks up the word “avatar” in the German dictionary, the meanings listed there are: a) a graphic depiction [...] as the embodiment of the user in cyberspace; b) a virtual artificial figure in cyberspace. Clement’s avatars manifest themselves in the exhibition space in human form, but as empty husks and bodies with no identity. The absence of corporeality confronts us with another central question in Clement’s work: In the digital era, what remains to define a human being and human identity? Where does the human end, and where does artificiality begin?

Coming from painting and photography, Louisa Clement uses primarily photography as an artistic medium. The artist works with the camera on her SmartPhone. This is a technique shaped by spontaneity and everyday aesthetics. Here, her works display a great sensitivity for composition and coloration. The idea of a photographic reality, which has accompanied the various discourses about photography from the technology’s beginnings, dissolves in her works. Instead, the question of reality and fiction has become increasingly complicated. Reality takes place online as well as offline. Traditional processes of finding orientation and truth are supplemented by the digital reproducibility of images and by their circulation. Clement’s work shows that the photographic picture, its function, and the way it is to be read must be investigated anew again and again against the background of the digital era.

Clement's most recent series, *mould*, manifests itself in the exhibition space as a logical consequence and drastic extension of these initial questions. Sex robots cast in bronze lie and stand, encountering us staunchly and shamelessly. These days, they are mass produced, can be ordered with a few mouse clicks, and, if desired, can be custom-made to match individual proclivities. The dummies, with a body of a silicon-like material and outfitted with artificial intelligence, respond to their users, note the users' preferences, and promise the ultimate pleasure.

The original casting molds – the negative forms – are reversed into positive constructions and then cast. The absence of the dummies' physical bodies produces empty husks, castings that become dead matter – a form of human resistance between the total economization, disempowerment, and objectification of the body.



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“We propose that the development of sex robots will further reduce human empathy that can only be developed by an experience of mutual relationship.” – writes the British professor Kathleen Richardson in her “Campaign Against Sex Robots”.³ For Richardson, sex robots are a political issue: Because mostly female sex robots are sold mostly to male consumers, they contribute to the further objectification of women. One could even go as far as to say that the objectification of ideal-typical femaleness is manifested in sex robots once and for all. At the same time, there are also voices that see positive aspects in the dummies or in the idea of a relationship between the human being and the android machine: such a relationship could ameliorate loneliness and, at least temporarily, occupy emotional empty spaces and close emotional wounds.

But perhaps it is also the encounter with the uncanny Other that frightens us. It triggers uncertainty: What does it mean to desire a machine and to love a virtual companion? Can the closeness of

³ <https://campaignagainstsexrobots.org>

artificial intelligence be as intense as that of another person? Can dummies and/or androids help us feel and live out our emotions? What is clear is that this debate seems futuristic, but has long since arrived in the present.

*Text by Marie Gerbaulet
Translation by Mitch Cohen*



Louisa Clement, inside 4, 2020, inkjet print, 70 x 90 cm