

Opening:
Saturday 19th May 4 pm

Duration:
20 May - 20 June 2018
Tuesday to Friday 10:00 - 17:00
Saturday 11:00-15:00
and by appointment

19th May 6 pm
Federico Campagna, public talk
*Prophecy: shaping culture to point beyond
the world*

San

Lito Kattou

Point Centre for Contemporary Art

20th May - 20th June 2018

curated by Attilia Fattori Franchini

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Point Centre for Contemporary Art presents *San*, by artist Lito Kattou, the first chapter of the project *Red Lake*.

Developed over the course of the artist's residency at the Google Cultural Institute in Paris, *San*, is a basic AI (artificial intelligence) created to embody an ecological subjectivity alien to human thoughts. The structuring data is collected from Red Lake, a mine site located near Nicosia, Cyprus one of the fastest climatic changing regions of the South East Mediterranean zone. The lake is a remnant of the ancient copper mine of Kokkinopezoula in Mitsero, active from the Chalcolithic period until the 1960s. The high acidic environment of the lake does not allow any biological living organism to develop, leaving the surrounding area impervious.

San, an ungendered AI hybridly conceived with human, divine, and animal traits lives in the Red Lake - recreated by Kattou as a real-time digital environment. Their^{*1} body and actions smartly respond to specific climatic variations such as temperature, humidity, visibility, wind speed and weather. *San's* brain is built to guard and react to the Red Lake, they are imagined as a mythological figure protecting their unique surroundings. The exhibition *San*, at Point Centre for Contemporary Art, focuses on the character of this special guardian illustrating sculpturally their alien physical and mental traits, the fluidity and necessary adaptability of their post-human existence. Conceived to embody a specific natural environment, and condemned to a Sisyphean fate of a repetitive everydaylife, *San* is constructed to embrace the hard conditions of the territory.

¹*In this text *San* and throughout the show is always referred as they. This specific linguistic choice wishes to address in depth *San's* multi-layered subjectivity rather than being a grammatical mistake.

Seven aluminium sculptures confront the human scale and unfold San's feathery epidermis. Positioned at various non-human heights, these sculptures remind us of lost mythological characters, suggesting the presence and exceptionality of San's features. A series of digitally printed light textiles triggers a formal dialogue with the sculptures, inspired by Red Lake's territory and geography, they function as a skin for the gallery space and San. The duality of body and territory creates a circular feeling and returns throughout the exhibition. A series of copper sculptures, a reminiscence of the site's past commercial trade, offers the viewer an insight into San's brain. The sculptures' surface is engraved with intelligible abstract signs and forms, oxidized through thermochemical procedures that use alchemical elements as gas and sulphites. Language and its structure is questioned, along the impossibility of comprehension of any non-human form. Every week a different copper sculpture will be exhibited on the Gallery's window, San's ultimate attempt of communication to the urban passersby.

The recent sharp rising in global warming and weather instability characterising Cyprus and the whole neighbouring region are taken as example of the tremendous ecological impact of human activities on our planet. We are forced to visualise possible alternatives to unusual contexts -such as the Red Lake-, requiring new forms of adaptive intelligence, quickly reacting to sudden and harsh changes. San incarnates these new conscious forms, extending the notion of the myth with artificial and virtual features, imagined with liquid senses and hybrid traits, in constant transformation and dialogue with their surroundings. The show is materialising current ecological concerns whilst confronting us with philosophical questions about the relationship man-machine and the complexity of the non human and post-human conditions.

On the exhibition opening, writer and philosopher Federico Campagna (PhD candidate in the School of Communication at the Royal College of Art, London) will present *"Prophecy: shaping culture to point beyond the world"*.

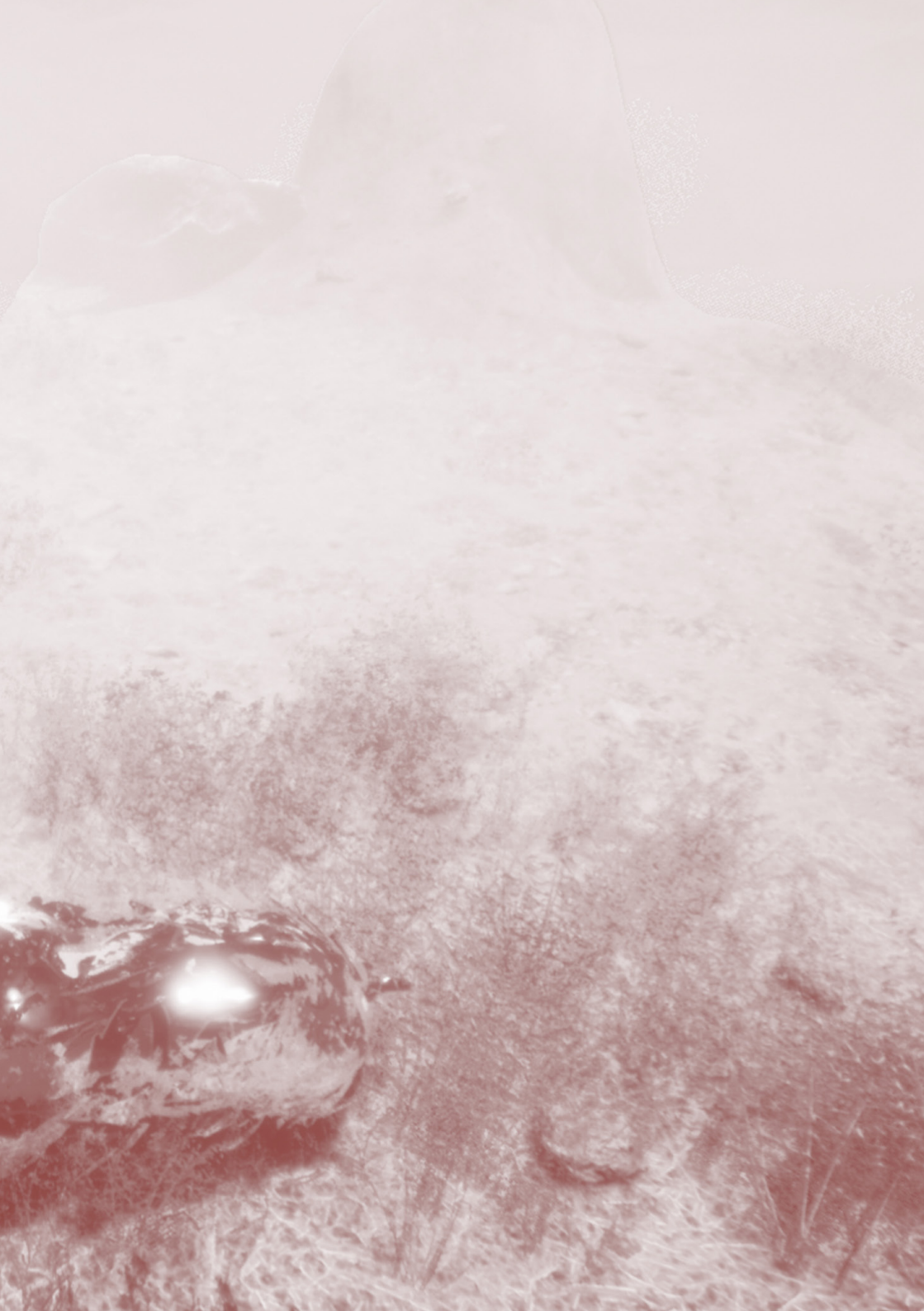
San will be followed by *Red Lake*, shown at Deste Foundation Athens, opening on the 7th of June 2018.

Red Lake will be displayed in the format of a real-time continuous video, showing *San*'s guarding activities and the morphing natural conditions of *Red Lake*, updated in real time. Inviting viewers to observe *San* behavioural changes in direct response to the climate and the territory, spectators will witness the learning process of a newborn AI. The project will be accompanied by a publication.

"Prophecy: shaping culture to point beyond the world".
A public talk by Federico Campagna

In his talk, Federico Campagna discusses the nature of prophetic language and its potential for our contemporary society. In an age that has obliterated almost completely anything beyond the field of what can be mapped and cataloged, prophecy demonstrates how it is possible for language to bend itself so to be able to point towards the ineffable. What does it take for language – whether philosophical, scientific, artistic or poetic – to become prophetic? What would be the consequences of bringing back prophecy into our present understanding of culture?





INTERVIEW WITH LITO KATTOU

Attilia Fattori Franchini: *The exhibition San, presented at Point Centre for Contemporary Art, takes at its centre the unique territory of a Red Lake - an old copper mine in Cyprus- and its ecological embodiment via the creation of a basic AI (artificial intelligence) by the same name. How did you conceive this project? Why?*

Lito Kattou: The main idea originated a year ago on a trip to Cyprus and when I unexpectedly visited an abandoned ancient copper mine. Resting quite hidden in a provincial village close to Nicosia, I got fascinated by the unusual scenery and the presence of a bright red lake. The lake has been created due to the exploitation of the ground's minerals, specifically copper and pyrite and of a multitude of different chemicals being active and mistreated. The lake is highly acidic so no living organisms can develop there. At the same time it has a very significant role for the geological importance of Cyprus. It functions as a living landscape-monument, which reveals the density of the geopolitical history of the area as copper has been mined and traded in Cyprus since 2500 BC. Kokkinopezoula's mine stopped its activity in 1967, by then it was mining mainly copper pyrite.

Climate change exercise a huge impact on this peculiar natural landscape making its ecosystem more and more vulnerable to sudden variations. Latest studies have revealed that the South Eastern Mediterranean area is highly affected from a new climatic regime forecasting that in the next 20 years, temperatures will rise dramatically. This reveals a time of unprecedented environmental destruction and the practices of *becoming worldly with non-human entities*- to use Donna Haraway's definition- are more important than ever. I felt that I needed to create a fictional character, a mythological creature, a guardian for the Red Lake. I was envisioning a being between a machine, an animal, a human and a God that would patrol endlessly the area and adapt fast to the sudden climatic changes. *San* is maybe the only (digitally) "living" organism being able to cope with these new arsh conditions. A forever monster.

So when Hans Ulrich Obrist asked me to propose an idea for the 89plus Google residency in Paris I decided to attempt and see if Google could help me to create the brain of my monster! And so we did it! An artificial intelligence was born in Paris.

AFF: *I am fascinated by this direct relationship between San, their body feature and intelligence and the specific territory of the Red Lake. How have you conceived and programmed their physical features and intuitive behaviour?*

LK: Red Lake was constructed both with Unity and Unreal* video game engines. Unreal engine is used for San body figure's modeling and for Red Lake environment whilst San's brain is constructed through Unity ML. The two are connected through a TCP communication server. In this way the brain is the one that directs the animation and behavior of San in the Unreal engine, a 3D constructed environment resembling as much as possible the original lake. During the early stages of the project a drone was flown on the site to map the territory and help structuring as accurately as possible the 3D environment. As the AI brain smartly reacts to real time data collection, also the digital environment is in direct relationship to the natural changes of the Red Lake.

The data that informs San's behavior are collected from Google open source weather applications. It is exactly the same weather app we have on our phones, but giving a wider and more precise range of data. If for example it is 4pm and weather is sunny and good at the Lake, San will be able to patrol without any interference. If weather changes by becoming very humid, rainy or windy this will affect their activity. The target is for San to adapt little by little to all changes as for example the very high temperatures of the summer period which should not make it impossible to patrol the local ecosystem. We, as viewers, experience all San's difficulties constantly adapting, learning and coping with the conditions through stops, naps, and misconceptions in navigation, also visualized in the work via the adaptive algorithm.





AFF: *This direct relationship is also considered in the show at Point Centre. Visitors will be welcomed on the ground floor by a series of colossal sculptures - "Skins and Feathers"- a challenge to human and spatial perspective- suggesting San's physical scale. A series of textile works inspired by the Red lake landscape are entangled in a formal dialogue with the sculptures and function as a skin for the space and San. Can you tell me more about these works?*

LK: The works were perceived as skin fragments extruded from San's epidermis and body. Despite the anthropomorphic elements that the creature keeps, the size of the sculptures implies an understanding of the body different from human scale, positioning it closer to the conceptions that we have for monsters and creatures.

Due to archaeological excavations it is admitted, that in Cyprus around 2588 million years ago in the Pleistocene, big animals as elephants and hippos swam or floated on tree branches by the neighbour African coasts- which where in closer distance back then- and inhabited the island. These species adapted fast to the Cypriot climate and geological condition by converting their genes into a dwarf type. So baby hippos and elephants were indigenous to the island until their extinct due to human hunting. At the same time all the rest of the indigenous mammals of that period, were found in a larger scale than their usual. In this case the change of the genes happened due to the absence of large-scale carnivores on the island, so small bodied mammals gained sovereignty and became bigger and stronger. Inspired by these ideas I felt that San, as the only inhabitant of the Lake, and carefree of any threat from other beings, had to enlarge to a big mythological subjectivity.

The epidermis pieces are gained through San's 3d model and realised in aluminium in order to enhance the dialogue with the materiality that the creature keeps in its digital world. There, its skin is modelled by chrome like highly reflective texture. The landscape gets embedded on San's body surface. The creature carries with it the reflections from the surrounding environment in its Sisyphean everyday life. It practically gets a bit of a camouflage!

The textiles series derives from the distorted scenery embodied on San's reflective skin. The aluminium forms are set in a direct dialogue with the textiles as if they have been extruded by the landscape magnified and placed in Point Center's space. This creates a back and forth abstract relationship where body and space, belonging and becoming are set in a loop.

AFF: *The first floor of the space hosts a series of copper sculptures, what you have defined as an insight into San's brain. The sculptures' surface is engraved with intelligible abstract signs and forms, oxidized through thermochemical procedures that use alchemical elements as gas and sulphites. Can you tell me how your thinking shaped around this series?*

LK: The copper pieces are imaginary encephalograms from San's brain. Depictions of internal processes presented in the form of copper pages torn-off from a fictional archive. Throughout the project there is a duality between visualisation and the algorithm that directs San's behaviour.

During the development of the work and the unfolding of the narrative I was observing for a very long period only the brain, a procedure of routes in an initially abstract space. In this way I gained a literal insight from within the creature's brain whilst I was keeping in my mind an archive of the behavioural patterns. These works are very much related to this specific witnessing. An algorithm is an in-between language, an intermediate between human and non-human intelligence, the person writing it and the computation itself.

The copper "pages" on one side embody faith – driven from what I was exposed to that hovers between documentation and abstraction - on the other choose a painting gesture as a procedure of trace's construction, in its historical importance and shaping of the human visual language. My intention was to create a bridge, a middle state between coding and human perception. I didn't want to create a non-human language. This is practically impossible but maybe through this observance of San there is a different understanding of

what a post-human language could be, an articulation mingled with perceptions different than what we usually take for granted.

I would characterize those works as a series of chemical events that take place on surfaces, as geological events amend forms of a land and chemical reactions in the body change behavioural planes.

AFF: *Every week, a different copper work is installed in the gallery's lower floor window. Placed in direct connection with the street traffic and the surrounding outdoor space, this act stands as an ultimate attempt of communication for a non-human entity. Can you talk about this decision?*

LK: The decision wishes to expose the pieces in a different exhibitional context. Each copper "page" teared-off from my fictional archive is now transferred in a direct relationship with the exterior space addressing a wider human and non-human audience. San's interiority is exposed to the ultimate exteriority that the architectural condition of Point Centre could provide. The pieces seek for comprehensions and constructions of relationships with all the elements from the surrounding public sphere. I am exposing the interpretations of San's brain behavioral patterns to a world different than the algorithmic one, trying to challenge the premises of communication within an urban environment.

AFF: *The exhibition, San, is part of a larger project, titled Red Lake. What does it consists of?*

LK: San is a first sculptural incarnation of the project *Red Lake*. A real-time video projection where San's existence as an AI and activity can be observed in real time will premiere in Autumn 2018. Following, a publication will be launched with theoretical and fictional texts by a group of thinkers, art practitioners, writers and philosophers extending understandings and questions that the project itself raises. For this first chapter in Nicosia, Federico Campagna a London based philosopher and writer is invited to respond to the exhibition with the talk *"Prophecy: shaping culture to point beyond the world"*.

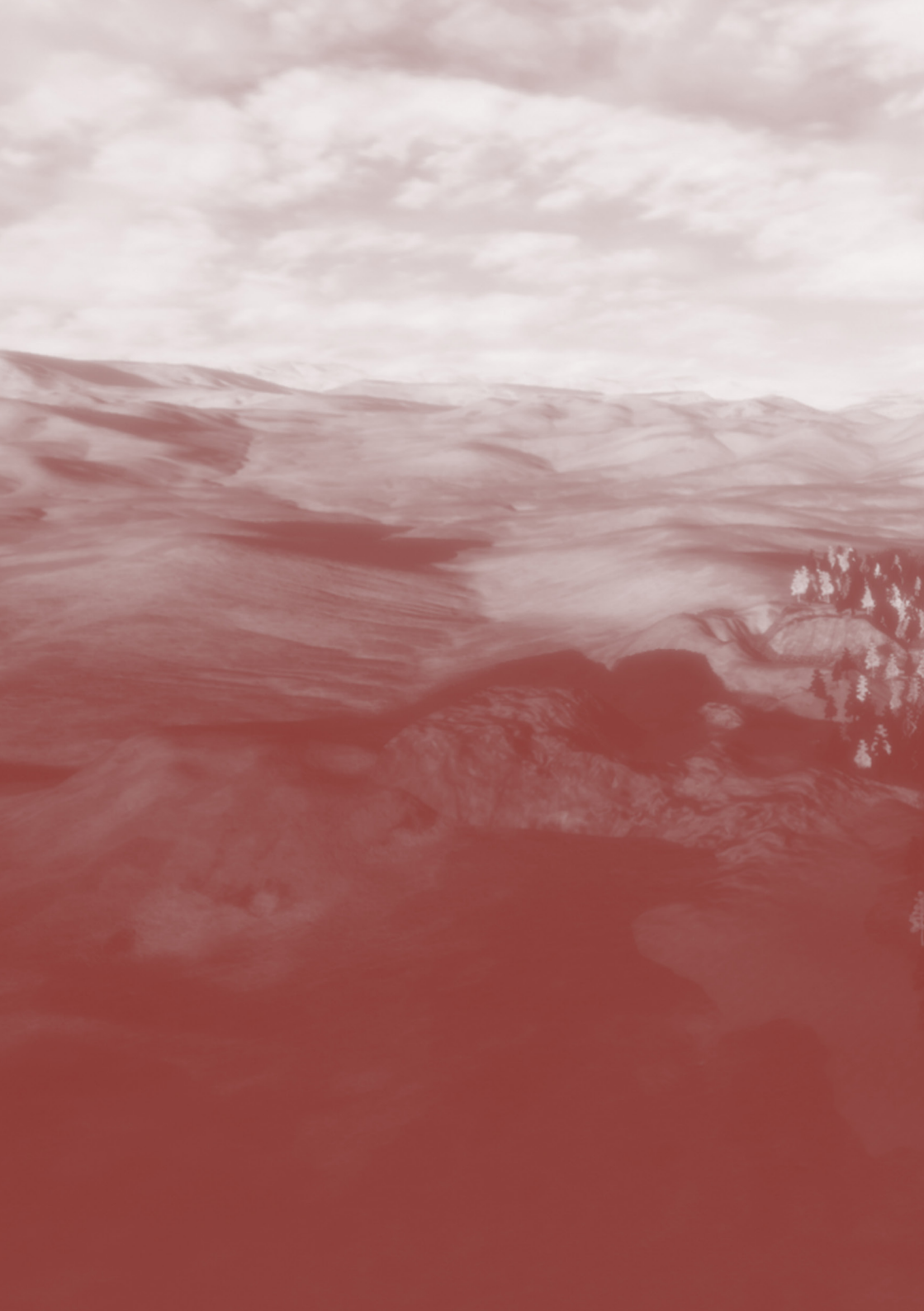
AFF: *You devised Red Lake as something that would grow through time, adding different elements, formats and layer of comprehension for each iteration, why so ?*

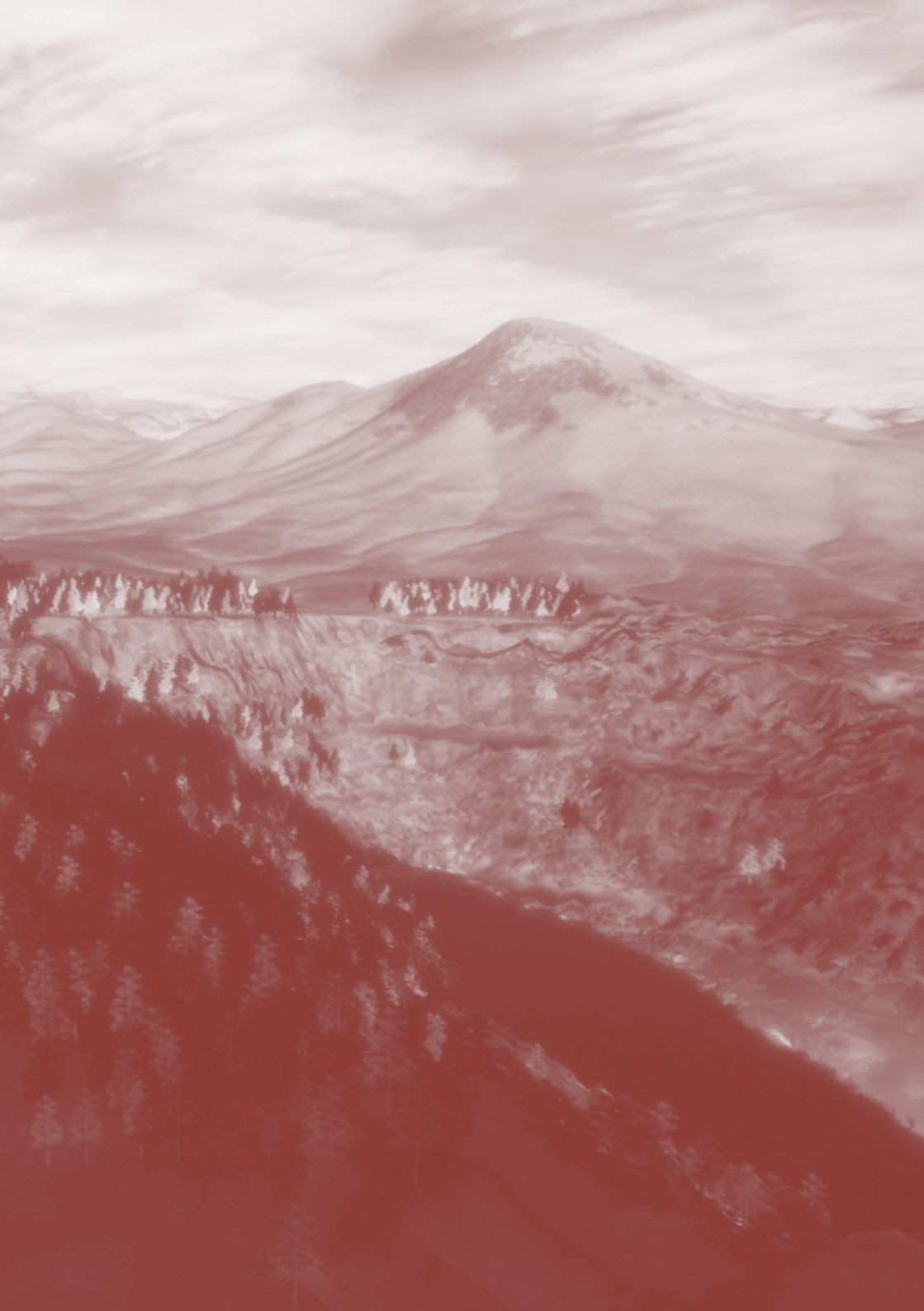
LK: San is a creature which develops their activity and behaviour through time. The Machine Learning elements used in its brain construction are directing their adaptability. The nature of this entity is designed in constant development and evolution and so I thought it was important to replicate this structure for every thoughts and forms that will be produced in the process.

Technical Glossary:

*Unity is at the crossroads between machine learning and gaming. Machine Learning is changing the way we expect to get intelligent behavior out of autonomous agents. Whereas in the past the behavior was coded by hand, it is increasingly taught to the agent (either a robot or virtual avatar) through interaction in a training environment.

*Unreal Engine is a game engine developed by Epic Games, first showcased in the 1998 first-person shooter game Unreal. Although primarily developed for first-person shooters, it has been successfully used in a variety of other genres, including stealth, fighting games, MMORPGs, and other RPGs.





BIOGRAPHIES

Lito Kattou, born in Nicosia, Cyprus 1990, lives and works in London and Athens. She is a graduate of the Athens School of Fine Arts and the Royal College of Art in London with an MA in Sculpture.

Kattou is the recipient of the New Positions Award for Art Cologne 2018 and she was the invited artist for the 89plus Google Residency curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Simon Castets at the Google Cultural Institute in Paris, 2017.

Selected recent shows include: “District 17” Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler Gallery, Berlin; “Night Fight” (solo), Eleni Koroneou Gallery, Athens; “And if I left of dreaming about you?” Foothold, Bari; “It looks like up to me” Eleni Koroneou, Athens; “*bang!”, Daily Lazy Projects, Athens; “Fighting with the Sun” (solo), Clearview.ltd, London; “Solar love for the Rapid Felines” (solo), Pierre Poumet, Bordeaux; “The Equilibrists”, New Museum, NY in collaboration with DESTE Foundation, Benaki Museum, Athens.

Her works are included in private collections, in the collection of the National Bank of Greece and the collection of Deutsche Telekom.

www.litokattou.com

Attilia Fattori Franchini is an independent curator and writer based between London and Milan. She is co-founder of the online platforms bubblebyte.org and [Opening Times](http://OpeningTimes.org) and contributes critical essays and reviews to publications such as CURA, Flash Art International and other independent magazines.

She is the curator of BMW Open Work at Frieze and the third edition of Curva Blu, a residency project in Favignana, Sicily. She will be also part of the Curated by Festival in Vienna, 2018 and will direct the next edition of the Termoli Art Prize, Italy. Recent projects include the Emergent section of miart and ARS17+ at Kiasma, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki.

Past projects include: Meshes of the Afternoon, Roman Road, London, June, 2017; Céu Torto, Boatos Fine Arts, São Paulo, BR, Febru-

ary 2017; Dawning, Capitán Gallo, Mexico City, MX, February 2017; Morning uber, evening oscillators, Seventeen, London, November 2016; Lonesome Wife, Seventeen, London, October 2016; Europa and the Bull at LambdaLambdaLambda, Pristina, Kosovo, 2016, Oa4s, Temra and David in 4 parts, Sorbus, Helsinki, 2016; Yves Scherer, Snow White and The Huntsman, Mexico City, 2016; Guest Curator, Kuvat Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, 2015; Bold Tendencies 2015, London.

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Point Centre for Contemporary Art

Based in a space located at a nodal point between the old city of Nicosia and its declining “modern” commercial centre, Point Centre for Contemporary Art is a non-profit organisation involved in the creative support and promotion of various fields of contemporary cultural production. It aims towards fostering a multi-disciplinary engagement with new tendencies in all aspects of the arts, architecture, film, music and sound, performance, discourse and thought, as well as developing a critical dialogue that revolves around these. Its international commissions focus on the main part on works that involve a relation Point’s Eastern Mediterranean context, and which bring forth meaningful interactions with this locale. Point hosts a library, and its research department leads to the organisation of seminars, workshops, lectures, screenings, educational programmes, and other events, as well as the issuing of relevant publications.

www.pointcentre.org

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All works of the exhibition courtesy the artist and
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