



View of "Eva Marisaldi,"
2017–18. Photo:
Francesco Ribuffo.

them in the form of the drawings we saw here, at once impersonal and enigmatic.

Another work, *Gli spostati* (The Displaced), which unfolded completely on the floor, consisted of a series of sculptures. Their abstract forms seemed weighty, but they were in fact made of cardboard and papier-mâché. They were all painted white, but nonetheless created an encumbrance with their bizarre shapes, acting as a visual counterweight to all the other elements. Though composed of many different components, with various narrative ideas and interpretive possibilities scattered through it, the exhibition felt completely unified—a single polyphonic matrix with many implications.

—Giorgio Verzotti

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

COIMBRA, PORTUGAL

Marianne Mueller

CENTRO DE ARTES VISUAIS

Photography has the peculiar capacity to show how things feel, thanks to peculiarly photographic ways of distorting the way things look. That, I guess, is what Garry Winogrand was talking about when he spoke of wanting to see “what things look like photographed.” Marianne Mueller seems to rephrase this idea: “Photography because the pictures I see don’t exist.” The camera’s cyclopean eye creates appearances that deviate from those supplied by natural binocular vision, and through those differences photography creates metaphors we recognize as “true.” That’s what Mueller does with her photographs, and when she weaves them into an installation, as she did with her exhibition “False Ground,” the Zurich-based artist gives photography’s emotionally resonant transmutation of the real a further twist, showing reality itself as a three-dimensional but deceptive image.

At Centro de Artes Visuais, Mueller articulated her images in two groups, each evoking a different perspective on the idea suggested by the title: that we stand on false ground. About head-high along one long wall she pinned up a line of forty-seven C-prints on metallic paper, most dating from 2007 or 2008, though some were taken as early as 1995, others as recently as 2013. All of them presented as their subjects human legs or feet. Whether standing, walking, or sitting, the (usually only implicit) figures remain awkward, teetering, unstable. Not surprisingly, the pictures were mostly shot from extreme angles—the camera at head level aiming at someone’s feet—leaving the viewer feeling just

as unbalanced as the subjects were implied to be. Leaning against the wall facing these images was a sequence of found mirrors ranging from about knee- to waist-high; what one saw reflected in them was mostly one’s own or other visitors’ legs, but again, at a disorienting angle thanks to the mirrors’ slant from floor to wall.

Eleven more recent photographs, framed mostly as triptychs, hung at conventional height in a sequence of small open rooms on the other side of the wall of mirrors; void of human presence, they took as their subjects architectural elements, mainly stairs, floors, and columns. In every case, these bits of buildings, whose role is nothing other than to keep the construction standing or establish a firm footing for the people who use it, were framed in such a way as to seem isolated or displaced; in one way or another, they seemed to suggest that their own apparent steadfastness and solidity must be illusory. They are part of an architecture for dreamers, one that will dissolve as soon as you turn away.

Although it is evidently deeply rooted in Mueller’s ongoing work, this vertiginous meditation on the “false ground” on which we might always be standing might also have been a response to the CAV itself—



Marianne Mueller,
Mirrors, 2017.
mirrors. Installation
view. Photo:
Marianne Mueller.

after all, its floor really is false in a way, since it is made of removable panels to allow access to the archeological site it conceals: The building dates to the sixteenth century and for centuries housed the court of the Inquisition. Mueller had one of the panels removed and the aperture covered with glass. But it’s not only the underground persistence of the past that challenges the stability of the present. Almost as a footnote to the exhibition, Mueller evoked the impossible idea of the gallery as an unwallled passageway continuous with the street, for instance by scattering around it bottles of mineral water and stray lemons, as though passersby had abandoned them along the way. More unreal, somehow, than the pictures that surrounded them, they illustrated reality’s shortfall.

—Barry Schwabsky

RIGA, LATVIA

Viktor Timofeev

KIM? CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE

Viktor Timofeev’s solo exhibition “Stairway to Melon” drew the viewer into the complex system of its own obscure inner logic. The Latvian-born, New York-based artist divided the gallery into two

distinct spaces: He left the entry area blank white and transformed the rest into a sort of waiting room whose olive-green wallpaper was hung with paintings; on the carpeted floor, several folding chairs had been pushed to the walls or arranged in a circle. The scene looked like a stage set, but two monitors turned away from the viewer to face the back of the space encouraged visitors to enter the stage to see what was on the screen. And there was a further twist: When watching the video, the viewer could be observed from behind by other visitors sitting on the chairs pushed to the wall.



Viktor Timofeev, *Four Characters in Search of a Random Exit*, 2017, two-channel digital video, color, sound, indefinite duration.

This inverted logic of observer and observed, subject and object, was replicated in the two-channel video itself, whose title, *Four Characters in Search of a Random Exit* (all works 2017), obviously alludes to Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). The video is in fact a programmed, noninteractive, self-playing game whose "user" becomes an immobile viewer of the frustrating Sisyphean efforts of four humanoid characters, all identical in appearance, dealing with obstacles in their separate realities. No clear logic determines the actions of the virtual characters—why one of them keeps seeing a maze of walls ahead, or another keeps chasing smaller versions of itself. Yet their repetitive movements and ritual-like actions seem choreographed. Without being able to intervene in the hermetic self-generative game, the viewer might begin to feel some empathy for these absurd artificial creatures. One screen presents all of this from an objective, outside perspective—giving us a sort of God's-eye view. The other shows what the protagonists see and experience, which is not visible and simply doesn't exist from the external point of view. Distinct realities occupy the same space, just as they do in the exhibition room itself.

Video games are typically based on reductive input-response and reward schemes, which they share with most approaches to artificial intelligence. In a fictional research paper, "DipMind Labs," a few copies of which had been left as if casually on some of the chairs, Timofeev parodies actual research on AI conducted by Google's DeepMind Lab. He proposes "to study how autonomous artificial agents may tackle complex problems in large, dynamic, partially observed, visually diverse, logically ambiguous and periodically chaotic worlds" and offers an understanding of consciousness as an unpredictable, irrational, forgetful, embodied entity. Instead of a method of learning, Timofeev proposes *unlearning*. In place of rule-following zombies, he proposes dancers.

The theme of the relationship of consciousness to the body was further developed in the four grisaille paintings on view, whose imagery evoked the five senses. Like the exhibition as a whole, each was titled

Stairway to Melon, after the name of one of the levels of a game DeepMind Lab designed to test the capacities of artificial intelligences by pitting them against each other. The paintings depict mazelike spaces, familiar and alien, mathematically rigid and irrational at the same time. Those spaces are collisions of objective and subjective realities, thought and body, infinite possibilities of digital worlds and physical limits of the real. They are spaces for *unlearning* our established and rigid notions of consciousness, allowing us to dip our minds into irrationality, uncertainty, and ambiguity.

—Neringa Černiauskaitė

MEXICO CITY

Sol Pipkin

MACHETE

The sculptures in Sol Pipkin's exhibition "*Maleza sin pies ni cabeza*" (Weeds Without Heads or Tails) were ephemeral works that contained unseen moments of decay, incorporating materials such as dirt, seeds, and leaves. At the same time, many of the objects seemed familiar, since they were made to mimic items sold by street vendors or at neighborhood markets. They subsist as memories both personal and public, reminding us of the fragility that comes from earthquakes and heartbreak.

Pipkin created most of the work for this show while on a residency at the Museo Experimental El Eco in Mexico City during and after the earthquake of 2017, one of the worst natural disasters in the city's modern history. While wounds were still fresh for many, Pipkin transformed the Machete gallery into a place of refuge. You could take a breather on one of many pigment-stained pillows or stretch out on a mat. Pipkin mined the iconography and materials of Mexico's indigenous cultures to establish something as much like a sacred place as possible. Tapping into the colors and materials of the city's street life, the artist seemed to have created personal meeting points between pre-Columbian artifacts and Mesoamerican ideas of communal experience.

While several of these works were installed on the gallery's white walls, some were hung from the ceiling or placed on the floor, meant to be stepped on and around. The sculptures worked with and against functionality. Abstract but resembling furniture and vessels, they played

View of "Sol Pipkin," 2017–18. Photo: Diego Berruecos.



ARTFORUM

FEBRUARY 2018

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

HOWARDENA PINDELL

FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER

CHRISTINA RAMBERG

A WOMAN OF INORDINATE STRENGTH

