

Habitats: Semiotics of Hope(less)

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Signs are all around us: they suggest, indicate, direct, hint and frequently demand obedience. On the other hand, when language has become the subject of policing in the everyday environment, the signs can provide an actual distance from the object they address and therefore allow to express the prohibited. In the context of the concurrent 'permacrisis' of politics, economy, culture and environment, the signification surprisingly offers the possibility of expression.

The exhibition comprised eight compact acryl drawings of Maria Alexeeva (b. 1959, Leningrad) — each depicting a negated object in Russian or English. Reminiscent of the aesthetics of a flash card from the classroom or personality test exercise, the works evoke unclear signification and elusive meanings. When the protest in her own 'habitat' of St Petersburg leads to arrest and imprisonment, even veiled and surreal messages are perceived as radical.

In their simplicity and subtlety, there is an urgent inquiry: what does it mean to communicate one's authentic ethics in the world of post-truth, deep fakes and AI generators? Is the technological complexity, which continues to increase the distance between the "black box" mechanics and its resulting communicate, capable of providing us with answers that are relevant to the question? When you are silenced from the expression of the protest, what do you turn to?

When we aspire to outsource to the intelligent machine (without ourselves grasping even faintly the operation of human consciousness and intelligence) more 'management' of our affairs, including education, surveillance, warfare and 'creativity,' there is a lot at stake. Our humanity ascribes fluid meanings to things in an intricate, ungraspable conversation with complex socio-political contexts. But if the machine tells you that a flower is not a flower, will you trust your eyes or the algorithm? How would you legitimise the alignment of the signifier and the signified? Suppose the news channel presents real suffering as deep fake or political scaremongering, while you cannot access unmediated verifications.

These complex questions start from the mundane and progress into causing anxious headaches and complexities. But we cannot afford to abandon them.

Maria Alexeeva is a Russian media artist whose work challenges the boundaries between the digital and physical worlds. Alexeeva explores how we perceive and interact with the world around us through her innovative use of technology. Her practice encompasses a range of media, including interactive installations, virtual and augmented reality experiences, video art, soundscapes, and drawing. Alexeeva often works with code, using programming languages to create dynamic, generative systems that respond to input from the audience or the environment. She frequently explores themes such as memory, identity, and perception, using technology to create immersive, multisensory experiences that challenge our assumptions about the nature of reality. She invented the medium of "lifeboxes" — a miniature installation encompassing a symbolic and often surreal technological arrangement, defamiliarising the known and the normative.

Text by Denis Maksimov-Gupta