

Nick Ervinck

A Cabinet of a Curious Mind

My artistic practice has revolved around creative and innovative uses for computer technology and gaming since I first started making art. For me, this is about breathing new life into sculpture and its relationship with architecture. While my current works are physically elaborated, they always arise from a digital way of thinking; this makes the MOUSEION research project—investigating virtual spaces that alter this relationship—a natural evolution in my work.

I am very aware that the experience of space is a cultural and historical construct; that “reality” is inevitably a product of imagination and lived realities, of ways of looking and feeling. My virtual portal into “reality” is, therefore, utterly personal. I have always experienced museums as magical encapsulations of the duality of life: full of cultural enchantment and disenchantment, wondrous innovation and centuries of epistemological heritage. I wanted to create similar tensions in my MOUSEION, and to this end juxtaposed my work with that of other artists, including Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth - two sculptors who have been of particular fascination to me in recent years.

In 2019, I created *NHIECNKREYRMVOIONRCEK*: a cabinet composed of over 700 objects. A homage to and a dialogue with Henry Moore, it includes 300 monographs on the sculptor as well as objects that were a lifelong inspiration to him and to me. This collaboration with the Henry Moore Foundation resulted in the publication of a monograph, *NHIECNKREYRMVOIONRCEK* (Hannibal Publishers). My version of a MOUSEION—an intoxicating, spiritual space, a cabinet of a curious mind—is an extension of that project.

From the outset, I didn't want to confine myself to one discipline but instead, in line with the Bauhaus philosophy, to blur the lines between visual arts, new media, architecture, design, dance, furniture, books, African art, minerals, geology, archaeology, ancient civilisation, toys, and so on. My MOUSEION is a place of cross-fertilisations, with hand-fabricated drawings as a sort of rhizome linking together all the works. This includes objects that were once considered to be of great significance but that are now hidden away in museum basements and archives. They deserve to come up for air: if the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we need to listen to and understand each other, to understand our own lives as well as life itself, and that means taking a long steady look at the past.

Finally, upon entering the MOUSEION, we need to learn how to look “through the looking glass” into other dimensions of looking and feeling; imagine we are Alice in Wonderland sucked into the holes in things; and remember our unique human capacity for making infinite connections between everything we see and experience.

Blurred Boundaries – convergence of real and virtual spaces

During the pandemic, we were all confined at home behind our screens as physical encounters were kept to a minimum. The digital sphere suddenly became our most important window to the world, to families and friends, as we tried to stay in touch with loved ones while our movements were constrained. Our new normal, with continuing periods of quarantine, is of a new space that is interior, intimate, and yet mediated by endless Zoom meetings and conference calls. This kind of blurred space requires a high degree of emotional intelligence and navigational skill. This has led to many new cultural formats being revisited and further developed. Net art, which emerged in the 1990s, experienced a revival and rightly so: the digital space has been newly occupied with artistic works and exhibitions. Even before the pandemic we had been living in a state of hyper-connectivity, where the separation between off- and online worlds had become obsolete. [The concept of] “blurred boundaries” takes into account these shifts, that reflect the impact of information and communication technologies on our human condition and on our lives.

Sabine Himmelsbach and DooEun Choi, for the media art project Hybrid by Nature, commissioned by the Goethe-Institut in East Asia, 2021.

(Ervinck)

Over the course of the past year, and most intensively during the various lockdowns of 2021, we worked on a virtual museum that covers more than 25,000m². The intention was to make up for the absence of venue-based culture in some way, but it was also born out of my own need as an artist to

reconnect with an audience after such a long time. The hope is that, despite its immateriality as space, the MOUSEION will still offer an exciting and immersive experience.