



PRESS RELEASE

Artist: REBECCA ALLEN

Title: ZELDA presents: Rebecca Allen

Venue: ARCADE | LONDON

Dates: 15.10 - 14.11.2020

Arcade, in collaboration with ZELDA, is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in a commercial gallery by the pioneering American artist Rebecca Allen.

Rebecca Allen is an artist inspired by the aesthetics of motion, the study of human perception and behaviour, and the potential of advanced technologies. Her early interest in utilising the computer as an artistic tool led to her pioneering art involving human motion simulation, artificial life algorithms and other generative techniques for art creation. Throughout her career, now spanning nearly four decades, Allen has moved fluidly between artist studio and research lab, using technological research to inform her art. Her artwork has taken the form of virtual and augmented reality art installations, experimental video and large-scale performances, bringing together the worlds of fine art, performing arts, pop culture and technology research. Allen has collaborated with artists such as Kraftwerk, Mark Mothersbaugh (Devo), John Paul Jones (Led Zeppelin), Peter Gabriel, Carter Burwell, Twyla Tharp, Joffrey Ballet, La Fura dels Baus and Nam June Paik.

The Bush Soul (1997-1999) is a series of artworks exploring the relationship between artificial life-forms and human presence in virtual worlds. This project represents the evolution of her work from experimentation in simulating human motion in animation and graphic representations of the human body in the 1980s, resulting in groundbreaking works such as the music video *Musique Non-Stop* (1986) for Kraftwerk and *The Catherine Wheel* (1982) with choreographer Twyla Tharp, to the new possibilities of generative art-making in an area of A.I. called artificial life to simulate natural motion of all kinds of human and non-human forms, personalities and group behaviours. Having already collaborated with Craig Reynolds (the inventor of Boids, an artificial life system that simulates the flocking behaviour of birds) on the work *BEHAVE* (1987) with music by Peter Gabriel, which examines the role of behaviour in communication, *The Bush Soul* was an opportunity to build something more complex, experimental and interactive.

The works are created using Emergence, a 3D game engine and an artificial life software system for the creation of interactive artworks that she designed and built with students in computer science and design at UCLA. As has been the case throughout her career, Allen situated herself in a research environment in order to access the equipment and software to make art. She is often responsible for conceiving of and building the required tools, seeking also to influence the development of these new technologies as an artist. Emergence is one of these tools created before the ubiquity of Unreal and Unity game engines in the development of CGI and virtual worlds.

Allen drew on her experience in the video games industry having worked for Virgin Games in 1993 as a 3D Visionary and Creative Director to consult on what was an industry-wide transition from 2D to 3D games, as well as her knowledge of interfaces and interaction developed through her previous research in CGI, animation, machine vision and early forms of motion capture at the Computer Graphics Lab at the New York Institute of Technology and the Architecture Machine Group at MIT in the 1970s and 1980s.

The resulting work is an interactive video game artwork that leads with notions of animism, non-verbal and non-visual forms of communication and open-ended exploration, with sound created by Mark Mothersbaugh from Devo, another example of a practice of collaboration with other artists and practitioners across disciplines. To experience *The Bush Soul* is to visit a living artificial world populated with abstract life-forms in which you explore as a 'travelling consciousness' moving between these different creatures, taking on their 'soul' in order to offer different perspectives and experiences of the world. As with much of Allen's work, you are reminded of your own presence in the virtual space through a sensorial connection to the body provided by a force feedback joystick that gives you vibrations and movements indicating the powerful energy of special places and characters through your sense of touch. There is no objective or goal, you can wander around the world freely, but every twenty minutes, a full day in this world, a ritual takes place at dusk in which all the creatures congregate around the energy spirit when your soul will fly out of your control to this location, reminding you once again that there are always rules and parameters in the development of any form of system.

The Observer (1999-2019) and *landscape / enter / life* (1999-2020) mark a return to the Emergence system to create new contemplative artworks akin to moving paintings that form a narrative through the same synthetic, unfamiliar world as *The Bush Soul*. The viewer's experience draws attention to the abstracted nature of the natural landscape which is designed in opposition to our obsession with the hyperreality in most CGI and game environments, and to the abstracted life-forms with their own rules of behaviour. In these works the viewer becomes an observer to this closed artificial world and the life that inhabits it, and unlike *The Bush Soul*, is unable to influence or change its pattern of events.

The Bush Soul, *The Observer* and *landscape / enter / life* are ground-breaking works that encapsulate Allen's creative interrogations into human motion, consciousness and interaction through the use of simulation, artificial life and generative techniques that have been core to her work since the 1980s. They also tell us so much more about her pioneering approach to art-making, in which she has consistently moved between artist studio and research lab. Her use of early stage technological research to inform her art, in turn uses that art practice to influence the development of technologies. As we transition towards an increasingly virtualised art world, and the infrastructure of video games continues to have a demonstrable impact on the production and distribution of art, it is vital to recognise and acknowledge the work of artists like Allen who have been experimenting, innovating and questioning for decades.

Text by Kay Watson, Arts Technologies Curator at Serpentine Galleries for ZELDA Presents: Rebecca Allen (October 2020)

In September 2020, The Serpentine released the interview: *Rebecca Allen on Kraftwerk, Video Games, and Artificial Life* by Kay Watson, Serpentine Galleries Art Technologies Curator.

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