FONDAZIONE PRADA AND GTA EXHIBITIONS, ETH ZURICH PRESENTS "STURM&DRANG" FROM 7 APRIL 2021

Milan, 1 April 2021 – The project "Sturm&Drang", curated by Luigi Alberto Cippini (Armature Globale), Fredi Fischli and Niels Olsen (gta exhibitions, ETH Zurich), explores Computer-generated imagery (CGI) practices, experiences, and environments. Originated from a collaboration between Fondazione Prada and gta exhibitions at the ETH Zurich Department of Architecture, "Sturm&Drang" consists of a series of online conversations from 7 April 2021 and an exhibition project in the spaces of Osservatorio Fondazione Prada in Milan from 16 September 2021 to 17 January 2022 and later at gta exhibitions, ETH Zurich.

CGI is the creation of still or animated visual content with imaging software. It is used to produce pictures and videos for many purposes including film special effects, video games, online chat rooms but also warfare, medicine, engineering or architectural design, visual art, advertising, television shows, as well as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) applications. Strengthened by the pandemic, CGI is also gaining a growing presence in everyday life through social media.

The project title plays on words of Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress), the German cultural and literary movement of the late 18th century. It refers to the double nature of CGI that, thanks to its capacity of creating both hyper-realistic and fantastic images, is able to perfectly reproduce atmospheric effects like storms which, by deceiving the viewer's perception, manage to emotionally involve us.

The first phase of the project is the online university course "Sturm&Drang Studio" for 185 students at ETH Zurich, taught by tutors Luigi Alberto Cippini, Fredi Fischli and Niels Olsen. Launched on 22 February 2021, the course "History of Art and Architecture: Exhibiting Architecture," introduces methods of exhibition making as an architectural practice. Conceived as a collaborative platform for analysis and production, "Sturm&Drang Studio" is the result of an exchange of expertise between an educational institution such as ETH Zurich and a cultural centre such as Fondazione Prada.

"Sturm&Drang Studio" has a duration of 3 months and combines lectures and workshops addressed only to the students enrolled in the course and public conversations accessible from 7 April 2021 through the YouTube channel of Fondazione Prada. The public meetings will feature international guests from different fields of culture and digital production, including the Vice President of Research of The Walt Disney Studios and the director of Disney Research|Studios Markus Gross; the French studio Artefactory Lab specialized in the visualization of architecture and urban and landscape projects; the French artists Sybil Montet and Sara Sadik; the Swiss artist Emanuel Rossetti, the New York based artist Meriem Bennani, among others.

The main goal of the course is to allow students to immerse themselves in the dynamics of the digital industry, by imitating its components and workflows and moving away from the didactic approach of a usual university course, with the aim of addressing a critical analysis of the infrastructure of the digital industry. At the heart of "Sturm&Drang Studio" are the following questions: How is CGI content made? How is physical reality used to test virtuality? Who are the programmers, part of an anonymous visual content production class? What is the new culture that feeds the continuous production of images?

The course includes modeling and rendering workshops to experiment with the potential and limits of digital architecture and engineering, creating visual content that will feed into subsequent chapters of "Sturm&Drang" project. Students also have the opportunity to visit the Disney Research Laboratory at ETH Zurich, which develops innovative technological solutions for many of Pixar's films. Practical exercises are guided by an experimental theoretical approach that goes beyond the established critical and academic model. Digital modeling and rendering skills are currently developed through hands-on practice and real-life peer-to-peer or virtual comparison, consulting video tutorials, FAQs and community blogs of programmers. To date, the only available literature on the subject is represented by software manuals distributed by production companies, while the exercises are accompanied by the use of an oral transmission of skills made available by uploaders in the form of online video tutorials. "Sturm&Drang Studio" aims to explore these gaps in the dissemination of knowledge that affects an increasingly large community of users, with the intention to create an anthology of reference, starting from the transcript of tutorials and analyzing vocabulary and structure. In addition to these transcriptions, the bibliography of "Sturm&Drang Studio" includes key texts of contemporary cultural criticism, emblematic novels of eighteenth-century and classics of nineteenth-century romantic literature, with the aim of reasoning on a broad spectrum on the mechanisms of emotional involvement of the user.

The next phase of the project will take shape in the exhibition "Sturm&Drang", on view at Osservatorio Fondazione Prada in Milan from 16 September 2021 to 17 January 2022 and and later at gta exhibitions, ETH Zurich. A reflection on the real and virtual infrastructure of the CGI industry will be the focus of this second chapter. This exhibition does not focus on the final product —the completed image— or artworks adopting these techniques, it rather reveals the production methods behind this powerful image economy. The exhibition will present some environments conceived by the studio Armature Globale as ready-made of CGI culture and production: from the literary origins of virtual culture, to the workspaces of the anonymous anti-authorial production class that animates this industry, from the material reality used to test software that makes the boundaries between gaming and warfare hybrid, to the critical decomposition of the popular visual content that accompanies user training.

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