

Cécile B. Evans

(Cleveland, United States, 1983)

Through video-installations, sculptures, lecture-performances and online projects, Cécile B. Evans's artistic practice observes the impact of digital technologies on human subjectivity. Her research focuses in particular on the scale of values attributed to the emotions and on contemporary relationships as shaped through mechanisms imposed from above.

In her video works, the artist stages a complex series of stories populated by imaginary figures, more or less human or humanised, entrusted with the task of steering the conversation around to various topics. The simultaneity of the visual stimuli, the strange identity of the protagonists and the interweaving of their discussions make it hard to follow the development of the narrative in a linear sense. The outcome is a dense flow of music, film, archive images, digital rendering and dialogues extracted from internet chatrooms and forums. Before one of Evans's works, the viewer is immersed in a virtual cacophony that even invades the physical space of the gallery or museum, thanks to the presence of installational components based on the video images. This network of references transfers to the field of art the potential offered by the hyperlink or hypertext, the link that leads from one page of contents to another, following a potentially infinite online pathway.

The protagonist of a 2014 video titled *Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen* is a man called Phil, a computer-graphics animation figure modelled on the face of actor Philip Seymour Hoffman, talking to other characters about their common condition as digital entities. That same year, *Agnes* first came about: a spambot created to interact with users of the website of the Serpentine Galleries in London through a reciprocal emotional exchange which in the meantime allows it to gather information about them. In *What the Heart Wants* (2016), we come across Phil and Agnes again, in the company of other characters from a vast array of different backgrounds, including a human cell, a memory that managed to survive the man who generated it; a workers' collective represented by bodiless ears. However, Hyper – the narrative voice – reigns over all: a female entity that embodies the limitless power of the companies that take possessions of our personal data in order to govern our interactions. The visual fragmentation achieved in this video, intensified by the intervention of characters who arrive from previous works, makes it impossible to fully follow the flow of the story, driving us instead to concentrate more on Evans's creative process. Also for this reason, prior to its opening at the Berlin Biennale in 2016, the work was presented in a slightly different form which, on the basis of the title *Working on What the Heart Wants*, publically declared its unfinished form, one in a state of ongoing evolution.

RA