

250 HOT! METAPHOTO: EMANUEL ROSSETTI BETWEEN NODES

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“The function of technical images is to liberate their receivers by magic from the necessity of thinking conceptually, at the same time replacing historical consciousness with a second-order magical consciousness and replacing the ability to think conceptually with a second-order imagination. This is what we mean when we say that technical images displace texts.”

Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 1983

It is far past time, perhaps, for photography (the art of the technical image) to admit the theoretical transformation of the image. In the so-called digital revolution there has been a rapid leveling of the relation between image and text, so much so that even Flusser, whose vision of the technical image dovetails so effortlessly with the technological, should no longer entirely apply. Flusser tied photography to memory and to history, observing the art's black and white struggle to deliver the 20th-century real. The magic of the photographic image is only the more sinister after the end of history. Artist Emanuel Rossetti has cracked open the rendered image in a vice between its oldest and newest possibilities, as if in an explicit effort to picture the first-order imagination of photography via its new intertextuality.

Rossetti's earliest untitled works of 2009, large inkjet prints of rendered donuts (the torus) in dramatically rendered 3D, force a simple abstraction into our reality perception with nakedly obvious technique. “A rendering is a photograph of a photograph,” he argues. And today even the retro gesture of analog photography is a sort of

rendering. In 2018's *Stairs* series, a single lens manages to introduce the street-work of Eugène Atget to the studio stages of Julia Margaret Cameron. From a distance, these intentionally doubled keyhole fisheyes taken in the neighborhood of the exhibition space Sundogs, in Paris, distort into Leibnizian monads intent on dominating the current visual field as if with a will of their own.

Rossetti's work gives the sense that the triumph of the simulacrum has left the photograph inhabiting a rabbit's hole of still unexplored dimensions. Looking at the scope of his work so far we note the artist only presents images in concert with a larger installation. More than photographing anything, Rossetti explicitly builds stages in which to contain the resonant fictions of an image's magical activism.

A state of total collaboration distinguished Rossetti's first exhibitions. With Tobias Madison, Stefan Tcherepnin, and others, part-time gallerist Rossetti (who photographed works and events as part of the job) found himself participating in all directions at once, improvising between various notes. In exhibits created from within, like the dynamic and inter-generic *Drip Event* of 2013 at The Power Station in Dallas, Texas, the artists found themselves making sculpture, writing music, performing, programming sound, altering space from all directions simultaneously, while rigorously fixed to the arrow of time. Ever since, Rossetti has conceived each exhibition as a durational stage on which the infinite at any moment might come into play—between nodes.

Rossetti foregrounded this concern with the stage in *Double Slit Vomitory*, at Svetlana, New York in

Staged Stair I, 2019, installation view, Staged Stairs, Pina, Vienna, 2019 Photo: Maximilian Anelli-Monti Courtesy: the artist and Pina, Vienna





2017. Accompanying highly artificial lightbox photos, he built both an introduction to and departure from an actual stage, intervening in two separate passages between rooms.

The Romans added the vomitory, that passage to and from the arena, to the architecture of the classical theater. No accident here that the ideal stage this real stage introduces is absent exactly when it comes into focus. There is also always a central void in Rossetti's work, whether it's the donut hole or the interior of a bell.

In conversation, Rossetti points to a Keiji Haino concert he attended in 2015 as seminal to his own understanding of a possible artistic practice. In a concert already legendary among fans, the multi-instrumentalist Haino built a 42-minute tragic opera and symphony out of voice, mic and loop station alone. Without instrument, or conventional structure, the improvised work appears full of all the generosity of art, out of the very concentration of its limit. Rossetti means to introduce art to that quantum energy astrophysicists picture boiling in empty space.

2014's *Delay Dust* at Kunsthalle Bern presented its own alternate-light introduction to the world at hand. An all-red *Vomitory* left smaller pieces in a state of constant suspense with only few other works to be seen. Bells were set to play in intermittent patterns among rooms, fragmenting the galleries into durational zones depending for coherence on non-predictable patterns of transformational intervention. Two years later, *International Bells* at Karma International in Zurich crossed into caves and catacombs of Vernean science fiction. Such active environmentalism was in tune with the complications made visible, and eternally unknown in the un-imagined, super-reflective *Nontransitive Dice*, rendered in C-print on the walls. Carefully playing a non zero-sum game, the artist insists only possible worlds seeps magically into this one.

The technical image, since the so-called "Pictures Generation," tends to come also as a piece of the real of its own—ironically altered, mimed, reproduced or quoted by the artist. For Rossetti that outside "real of its own" no longer exists beyond the image field. Just as each work approaches the status of monad in perfect singularity, it discovers a complicating trend, an unfolding of pun or "nontransitive" problem in other dimensions. In fact, like in a Philip K. Dick story, the giving entirely over to the machine discovers a fictional transhumanism.

The void inside image forces a durational loop with the real-time viewer, implicating an ideal existence immediately beyond this spacetime with the real.

I first saw Rossetti's work in a rare open display of its humor. In 2017's exhibition at Jan Kaps, Cologne, *Hurdy Gurdy*, a picture valorizing a cheese grinder from within conveyed a fictional transhumanism on the scale of Walter De Maria. After this reversal of the Duchampian paradigm, came real objects: a privileged modernist tea kettle and a pair of mysteriously programmed bells. Through a curtain, these gave way to a cinematic all-red installation. Such shifts were importantly backwards, unpredictable wrong, yet entirely in tune.

Preparing an exhibition at Jan Kaps, Mexico City, in 2018 Rossetti collected a number of good luck charms on sale in the street markets of the DF. These became a series of photograms. Each of these light bath portraits reveals only the lost presence of the object. By the relativity of their scalar high-low depth, the trifles scale into enormous, yet somehow fragile humanist totems against the pictured void. It is not so easy for fictions to survive the immolation of bodies.

Into the stream of the durational real the images have now joined, Rossetti has installed an absurdist digital surveillance system, as if to distract and lead any totalizers astray.



Dry Run, 2017, installation view, Double Slit Vomitory, Svetlana, New York, 2017
Photo: Joerg Lohse Courtesy: the artist and Svetlana, New York (pp. 252-253)

Ubu, 2017, installation view, Hypnic Jerk, Jan Kaps, Cologne, 2017
Photo: Diana Pfammatter Courtesy: the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne