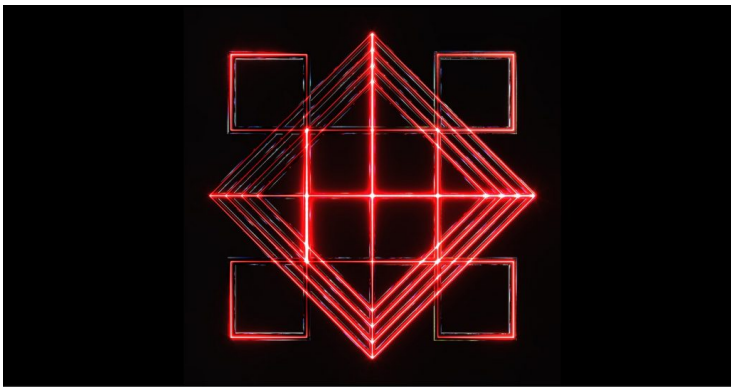
CULTUS exhibition by Zach Blas opening in London



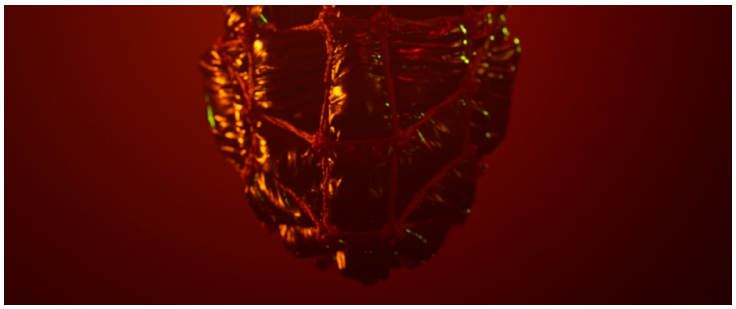
CULTUS by Zach Blas

CULTUS, Zach Blas, 2023
Part of arebyte 2023/24 programme The Body, The Mind, The Soul.

arebyte presents CULTUS, a new solo project by artist Zach Blas. Co-commissioned by arebyte, London, and Secession, Vienna, this immersive multimedia exhibition explores religious belief, artificial intelligence, and the California tech industry.

Opening on 11 Oct 2023 6.30-9pm
Exhibition runs until Sat 17 Feb 2023
arebyte Gallery, London

Press Preview on Wed 11 Oct 2023
3-6pm: Work on display with artist available for interviews
arebyte Gallery, London



Expositio, Zach Blas, CULTUS 2023

Featuring AI-generated imagery, text, and sound alongside computr graphics and motion-capture performance, CULTUS is the second instalment of Blas's Silicon Traces trilogy, a series of moving image installations that contends with the beliefs, fantasies, and histories influential to Silicon Valley's visions of the future. CULTUS addresses a burgeoning AI religiosity in the tech industry, considering the ways in which artificial intelligence is imbued with god-like powers and marshalled to serve beliefs of judgement and transcendence, extraction and immortality, pleasure and punishment, individual freedom and cult devotion. While AI religious organisations like Way of the Future church centre around the emergence of coming AI gods, CULTUS offers a different perspective: AI gods are already amongst us, actively worshipped and served.

CULTUS is a techno-religious computational system?a god generator, a holy engine ?that invokes a pantheon of AI gods, whose prophets share their divine teachings, rituals, and symbologies. These AI deities are Expositio, AI god of desire and exposure; Iudicium, AI god of automation and judgement; Lacrimae, AI god of tears and extraction; and Eternus, AI god of immortal life.

CULTUS reimagines Elizabethan mathematician and occultist John Dee's Holy Table, an esoteric device of sigils, seals, and a crystal ball, with which Dee communed with angels to gain access to God. Blas reconfigures the Holy Table at an immersive scale, transforming the entire space into an invocation site. An illuminated sigil spreads across the gallery. At its centre, a black-mirror altarpiece displays video of morphing symbols and an esoteric diagram. Pyramidal plinths bear Spanish Ticklers holding ornate vials of bodily fluid offerings. Chained, etched tablets share the lyrics to invocation songs, encouraging visitors to sing along. As music esounds, prophets of the AI gods manifest in a giant orb suspended above, delivering sermons that beckon us to serve.

CULTUS is the Latin word for ?worship?, which articulates the act solicited from those who encounter the installation. As such, visitors may find themselves caught in acts of devotion to gods they did not know they already served. However, a sacrilegious presence manifests within, a Heretic that incites shattering counter-beliefs.

The exhibition features a wide-ranging cast of singers and performers, including micha cárdenas, Ricardo Dominguez, Nick Granata, Susu Laroche, Susanne Sachsse, Aga Ujma, and Izzy Yon. CULTUS is generously supported by a 2023 Connections Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Jason Kemper, and Thor Perplies. The work forms part of arebyte's 2023/24 programme The Body, The Mind, The Soul, which questions the complex nature of humanity in the realm of technological progression. The exhibition is accompanied by a booklet featuring texts by arebyte curator Rebecca Edwards and anthropologist and folklorist Amy Hale.

Here the trailer to get a taste of the exhibition:

Meeting the growing demand for immersive experiences and digital content creation, arebyte pioneers new forms of engagement with creative technologies, to critically explore the impact of technology in contemporary society. From digital environments, online exhibitions to live performances, arebyte's art programme spans VR, AR, motion capture, CGI, AI, blockchain technology. arebyte is committed to further support London's creatives by providing affordable workspaces in the capital city. In partnership with private landlords and Councils, arebyte strives to preserve a vibrant community of 330 artists, makers and designers in East and South London.

Artist Biography

Zach Blas is an artist, filmmaker, and writer whose practice spans moving image, computation, theory, performance, and science fiction. Recent artworks have addressed smart drug psychedelia, BDSM and surveillance, contra-internet aesthetics, and informatic opacity. Blas has exhibited, lectured, and held screenings at venues internationally, including the 12th Berlin Biennale, Walker Art Center, Tate Modern, British Art Show 9, 12th Gwangju Biennale, de Young Museum, the 68th Berlin International Film Festival, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, ICA London, Van Abbemuseum, e-flux, ZKM Center for Art and Media, and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. His practice has been supported by the Arts Council England, Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst, a US Creative Capital award in Emerging Fields, the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. His work is in the collections of Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, and Whitney Museum of American Art. Blas's practice has been written about and featured in Artforum, Frieze, ArtReview, BBC, The Guardian, and The New York Times. His 2021 artist monograph Unknown Ideals is published by Sternberg Press. Blas is an Assistant Professor of Visual Studies in the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design at the University of Toronto.

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