

Marie Lechner

Olga Kisseleva : TUTOR

Olga Kisseleva finished her Fine Arts degree in Saint Petersburg when perestroika was in full swing, and decided to devote her time to photography and new technology instead of starting a career as an official painter. She was convinced from that point on that the most comprehensible language for the audience at large was associated with the screen. At the beginning of the 1990s she travelled to New York and California, where she worked in various laboratories specialising in digital technology research and development. Kisseleva participated in the first stirrings of Silicon Valley, collaborating as a graphic designer and artistic director, before giving herself over in full to her artistic work through which she explores the impacts of the digital world on our lives.

That is how her latest project, Landstream, came into being. It was first presented at the CAPC Museum in Bordeaux, and was shown at the San Jose MoMA during ZeroOne Festival of digital art. Landstream visualises the flows produced by communication technologies, invisible signals that inform us and run through us, most of the time without our knowledge. A programme analyses the flows that cross a space, data that are transformed into visual information and generate a new kind of abstract landscape. Landstream makes us perceive the electromagnetic pollution caused by the proliferation of microwaves around us (mobile phones, WiFi, bluetooth, etc.).

Within DISONANCIAS project, Olga Kisseleva once more hones in on the mobile phone - the contemporary prosthesis that accompanies us on all our journeys - collaborating with the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. The project consists of accompanying people who suffer from cognitive disability, via the information they receive on their mobiles (IT tutor), both during the working day and during their daily activities. The initiative stems from the Leia Scientific Foundation in Vitoria, which has developed a series of tutors, which can be consulted via the telephone screen, in order to help this collective to carry out their jobs or daily tasks, step by step. Kisseleva is participating in the development of a Distributed Support System for people with intellectual disability, in which the knowledge necessary for performing a task is shared out between the disabled person, a work trainer and an intelligent support system. Users can solicit information by reading 2D codes, via the mobile phone, that indicate to the system what information it must supply the phone, as well as the identity of the user making the request.

In her previous works, the Russian artist delved deeply into the growing importance of these tools and the way they have influenced our behaviour and our relationships with others, sounding out a warning about technological dependence in her Passerelle's labyrinthine solo exhibition, Instruments Flying Rules, in Brest, in 2004. As the result of a job commissioned by the Louvre Museum, concerning the way in which young people perceive exhibited work, Kisseleva discovered that most do not even look La Joconde directly in the eyes, but focus on her via the screen of their mobile phones, before moving on and perhaps looking at the digital photo at home. The artist establishes this by means of a series of photographs in which she suggests that the younger generations only access pieces of work by manipulating them, or when they are already integrated within a game or film or suchlike.

This technological dependency is what gave life to another project, with the ironic title of World Wide VIP. To form part of this planetary elite, one must possess three indispensable accessories: a three-band telephone, a credit card and a passport (quite soon a chip will prove sufficient), small electronic objects through which we are always connected to the world and that can open any door for us. The problems start when one of these items is not at hand. That is when we feel panic, become vulnerable, sense that something important is missing on the day we forget our mobile or the code for our credit card. Within her collaboration with Leia and Guggenheim Museum, the photographs, made by Kisseleva, of disabled people using the Tutor in their job or daily tasks, is also a way of raising the public's awareness, through a mirror effect, regarding their own situation of dependency, in the degree to which they lose their reflexes and depend increasingly on electronic apparatuses.