

ART PAPERS

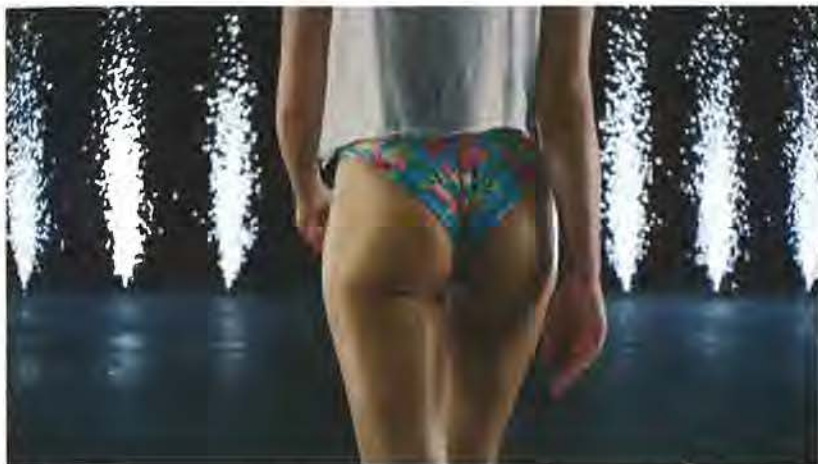


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:mentalKLINIK: 83% Satisfaction Guaranteed

Louise Alexander Gallery, Porto Cervo, Italy

"Are You Happy Enough"—without a question mark—flashed in two-tone neon at the entrance of the Louise Alexander Gallery in Porto Cervo, Italy, this summer. This stylish space overlooks a leafy piazza, which itself overlooks a vast expanse of shimmering sea. An idyllic, traditional Italian setting, in which gallerists Frédéric and Aysel Arnal present provocative contemporary artworks, the space (as well as its exhibitions) is infused with the thrill of where the maverick cuts into the established. Turkish artist duo :mentalKLINIK's *83% Satisfaction Guaranteed* [June 25–July 26, 2015] was no exception, and the gallery's dream-like atmosphere threatened to mask the irony of the work—at first.

The audience that gathered for the exhibition opening, for instance, was a mix of locals, international super-yachtists, press, collectors, and friends, all of whom stood vertiginously upon *Candy Crash* (2015), a wall-to-wall site-specific carpet printed with so much candy that to look down at it brought on nausea. Farther inside was *BitterSweat* (2015), a film shot with a high-resolution military camera at 1,500 frames per second that the show's artists, known individually as Yasemin Baydar and Biral Demir, suggest evokes the unconscious via subliminal messaging; to the naked eye it shows a girl, with a very inviting rear end, walking away, toward a row of explosive spouts of water. Yet libidinous celebration is not to be delivered: *BitterSweat* plays on an endless, unattainable loop, revealing a teasing oeuvre in its luxury setting. Are we not, in our contemporary state, filled with desire that can never be satisfied, even on the coast of Sardinia?

On the walls surrounding *BitterSweat* were works from *PROFILE* (2014), a series of portraits painted in words on solar-film mirrors. Portrayed are "Luke" and "Emma," fictional Internet users described with essentializing epithets such as Elover, Evangelist, and Swallower but literally reflecting the viewer as in a selfie. These portraits mingled with works from another series, *Airless* (2015), consisting of sculptural renditions of deflated cartoon character balloons, cast in electroformed copper.

A sound piece boomed from below visitors' feet, replicating ringtones, email inbox alerts, and chat and text notifications. Suitably titled *FOMO* (2014), these audial prompts, typically exciting, made for an anxious setting. This assault of stimulation—the reflective surfaces, invitingly glowy body parts, sugar-coated Disneyfications, and #FOMO invigorators of the works on view—was then added to with the "spumante" we were served as part of a participatory installation: Italian sparkling wine infused with Pop Rocks, those notoriously carbonated candies. This cocktail sealed the exhibition's irony, exposed the full ill of the human condition, and unleashed the excruciating gap between desire and fulfillment that technology, our unstoppable Pop Rock progress, only intensifies.

:mentalKLINIK did not leave us lurking in the underworld entirely without means of redemption. Downstairs at Louise Alexander, quietly to the right of *AreYouHappyEnough* (2015), the neon at the entrance, was *WOO-000* (2014), an installation featuring two robotic heads facing each other, performing a series of movements that could be called intimate, even loving. Created in our likeness, these simulated humans seemed enviably naïve. Their kissing won't lead to being liked or unliked, followed or unfollowed; it can be meaningful and savored because even though they are our own technological creations, they still seem impermeable to the human world of adrenalized surveillance and psychedelic Google porn that created them.

This robotic liaison offered respite from the show's many painful forms of sensual burnout: intractably devoted and way more than 83% satisfied, the lovers made one wonder, "What am I missing?" It may be the gravity and integrity that digital existence has apparently eroded. This art zone has made us feel hung over. We just want to close the blinds on that turbulent portal where the human body, mind, and soul are so yearning and so vulnerable. This is :mentalKLINIK's metaphysical frontier: a place where people have exhausted their

vices, and this deflated state has collapsed into sensual torture. Extended into technological advancement, can it metamorphose longings, shyness, disappointment, and shame into healing?

Scientists are researching the means to create emotional capacity in androids to more greatly fulfill humans; many androids are already equipped with facial recognition tools that allow them to be experienced as empathetic. In July 2015, the first close-up photos of Pluto were taken and sent back to us—by Ralph, a camera-cum-cosmic artist robot. Around the same time that Ralph was snapping Pluto, a robot that was being assembled by a 21-year-old Volkswagen factory worker near Kassel, Germany, mistook its assembler for a machinery part. It gripped and pressed this young man up against a metal plate, crushed his chest, and killed him. Prosecutors struggled over whether to prosecute, and if so, whom. At this new gateway, where :mentalKLINIK likes to work, posthumanist ethical questions stare loudly from the shadows, alongside nano-carbon-based self-replicating machines that may choose—without human consent—to play hero or anti-hero.

Some artist-theorists (Hito Steyerl, Jalal Toufic) are romancing the idea that humans are parasites of technology, solicited by technology's intelligence to generate, like, store, and share its hyper data production. Others (Jon Rafman, Daniel Keller) deal with digital experience as a tangible extension of human (un)consciousness, a hyperconnected, overloaded, violent short-message entertainment, in which technology is manipulated to express its creators' troubled, but sometimes romantic, even sublime, realities. The psychology of gratification enabled by the Internet and its vessels is the place between theories, where the body has to respond to the pace and enormity of technologically engendered change. :mentalKLINIK takes us to that place and keeps us there, and it is littered with glitter and empty champagne bottles—leftovers of a digi-party that either never happened, or happened too hard, too fast, and too often.

83% Satisfaction Guaranteed builds on :mentalKLINIK's previous shows and works, such as *Thank You for Your Cooperation*, *That's Fucking Awesome*, and *Moët*—projects in which remnants of happiness, excess, glamour, and the promise of pleasure go too far in their delivered and undelivered vows, and become gruesome. As a cumulative oeuvre, theirs takes a stand on the transformational potential of sensual ruin. Our mysterious relationship with technology camouflages the doorways between image and object, information and material, and the energies that bind our bodies with our souls. Our techno-zeitgeist is forlorn, "lost in our senses, anxious to feel, and depressive about our state of being," according to the artists, who elaborated on this existential sensation while they vertiginously looked on, and everyone sipped the last of the spiked, augmented-reality spumante.

—Cala Hagel

ABOVE: :mentalKLINIK, *BitterSweat*, 2015, silent, double video installation on 65" LED Samsung TVs on 24 hours loop, edition of 3 [courtesy of Louise Alexander Gallery]