

A Virtual Rose

STINE DEJA // PROFILE OF THE ARTIST

By Stephanie Cristello



A rose passes from the hands of a gardener, gloved fingers covered in earth, before it is snipped, bathed in acid, its guard petals removed, thorns stripped, and placed into a refrigerated chamber known as the ‘cold chain.’ There, the flower lies dormant—the optimum temperature for a red rose is just 1 degree Celsius above freezing—before being transported in the same wintry box, soon to be thawed and displayed at your corner market. Later, you would throw the long stem of this flower at the feet of a figure skater, whose diamond-starred skirt flutters above the mass of red as it touches the light blue cloudiness of the ice.



A series of rose petals fall like snowflakes, fluttering across a black background of indeterminable depth, swaths of crimson billowing in space by an unknown source of wind. If you could extend your hand into the darkness, you might feel the hydrated surface of its skin-like sheets against your palm. Yet, suddenly you see that as they pool upon the ground, the petals do not belong to the real flower you originally perceived. They are merely red silk. The rose is a replica. —————You cannot pick this rose; it exists only in digital space.

The two descriptions of a rose enacted above establishes a kind of foundation for Danish artist Stine Deja’s work, which examines how closeness is affected by connectivity. This dual-experience of the red flower—both as a ubiquitous industry object, alongside its use as a reified symbol of romance—is just one of the registers Deja uses to observe examines the impact our increasingly digital lifestyle has on intimacy. The comparison between these registers of ‘rose,’ as a hybrid object, was drawn from the artist’s work *Self Service* (2017), which consists of a monitor that plays a video piece of petals floating amid the rendering of a metal shopping cart. As a sculpture, the screen of the film itself is placed within the actual device of a cart inside the gallery space. The bottom of its caged structure is filled with silk petals, some permeating through, scattered upon the concrete floor. While notably different in terms of tactility and levels of sentimentality, the only real difference between the story of the rose and its proxy is a matter of temperature. —————

—————This is a recurrent theme in Deja’s work. Through installations in physical space that take form through digital means, Deja articulates themes of wellness, human interaction, communication, and the limits between our technological and embodied selves. The artist’s critique of these systems is achieved through works that relate to the human body as a warm-blooded vessel, in contrast to the cold, sterile aesthetic of digital space. Take, for example *Thermal Womb* (2019), a sculpture of figure suspended upside down that recalls the practice of cryopreservation. The structure is indeed a replica of the mechanism used by companies such as Alcor, which prepares bodies before they are submerged in liquid nitrogen—figures indefinitely frozen, waiting for technology to catch up and revive them. The film component of the work reveals a pair of bright blue eyes, whose only animation is to blink, adding a time-based layer to the otherwise static nature of the piece. —————

—————A similar aesthetic is used in Deja’s collaborative exhibition of works with artist Marie Munk, entitled *Synthetic Seduction* (2018), which incorporates seating forms that resemble bodily organs from which viewers

can watch films such as *Foreigner* (2018) and *The Intimacy Package* (2018). In the case of *Foreigner*, the video work features an android singing “I Want to Know What Love Is” to himself in a vanity mirror, a song by the band of the same name of the work. In this sense, the ‘foreigner’—an other—appears as a newborn learning to experience emotion. The installation of these films and sculptures are immersed within an environment of sterile blue curtains that surround the gallery space, reminiscent of those one might find in a clinic. We can imagine the feeling of our clothes suddenly transforming into the dry touch of a hospital gown, accompanied with the absence of safety that results from having an open-backed garment. —————

—————While the aesthetic use of virtual reality, avatars, and artificial intelligence is present throughout Deja’s work, the technological platforms she uses are not as futuristic as they appear. Instead, the artist uses technology to underscore how humans more often transfer the same systems of history and behavior we have learned onto these new platforms. In the promotional image of *4K Zen Hat* (2018), a woman wears a VR headset against the backdrop of a bright blue sky. —————On this, one could write a similar comparison to the rose—from the cerulean hue of a curtain, to the color of a cloudless atmosphere, to the rendering a perfect day simulated by a headset.

TITLE PAGE:
Stine Deja, *Self Service*, 2017. Video, 1 minute and 5 seconds. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and ANNKA KULTYS GALLERY, London.

FOLLOWING SPREAD:
Stine Deja and Marie Munk. Installation view, *Synthetic Seduction* (2019), ANNKA KULTYS GALLERY, London. Courtesy of the artists.

PAGE 58–59:
Stine Deja, *4K Zen Hat*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and ANNKA KULTYS GALLERY, London.

PAGE 60–61:
Stine Deja, *Thermal Womb*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and ANNKA KULTYS GALLERY, London.





