

## Jenna Sutela

Kunsthall Trondheim, Norway

In an interview with *The Paris Review* in 1981, the Colombian novelist and journalist Gabriel García Márquez claimed that one false fact in a newspaper article can prejudice the entire piece, whereas in fiction one single fact legitimates the whole story. García Márquez concludes: 'A novelist can do everything he wants as long as he makes people believe in it.' Can the same dichotomy be applied to art and science? Berlin-based artist Jenna Sutela's first institutional exhibition at Kunsthall Trondheim indicates that perhaps it could be. 'NO NO NSE NSE' combines scientific research with fictional elements to create puzzling audio-visual narratives.

Installed on both levels of the exhibition space, the show centres around the sculptures 'I Magma' (2019), a series of heads atop white square pillars that resemble museum displays of classical busts. However, these sculptures don't depict the faces of dead philosophers or artists; rather, they are blown-glass portraits of Sutela. Each is filled with different coloured goo-bubbles that move in unpredictable trajectories registered by small cameras. Eight monochromatic photograms show the same head in profile. The titles of the photograms – such as *No central creatures are fixed, I is a derivate* and *They saw the ear-world* – call to mind randomly generated haikus.

The exploration of language recurs in many of Sutela's works. However, the artist isn't as interested in human communication systems as those of microorganisms, bacteria, machines and Martians. In the video *Nam-Gut (the microbial breakdown of language)* (2017), violet and yellow bacteria move randomly between floating letters on a microscope. The yeast bacteria disintegrate and reconnect, creating new phonemes according to an algorithm that Sutela applied. Elsewhere, the audio-visual work, *nimiia cétii* (2018) is based on machine-learning registers. Inspired by the 19th-century Swiss medium Hélène Smith, known for her automatic writing, Sutela recorded excerpts of Smith's alleged communication with Martians and paired them with images of digitally created mountain landscapes and *Bacillus subtilis* bacteria under a microscope. According to a 2006 study at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, the latter could survive on Mars.

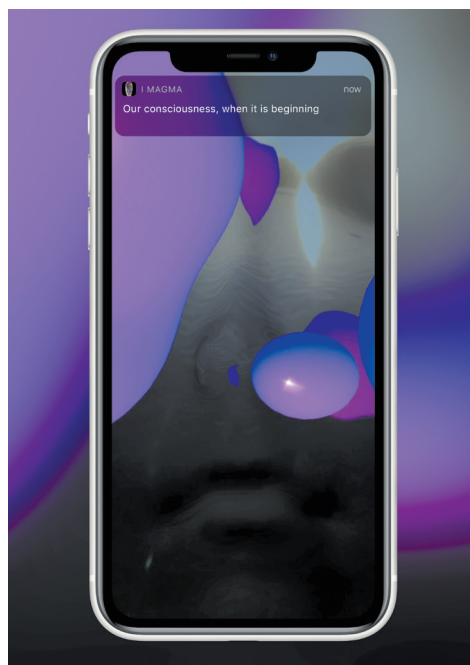
While some of Sutela's works might be grounded in real technological developments and scientific research, she also includes surrealistic components – like Smith's communication with Martians. Unlike García Márquez's dichotomy, Sutela doesn't distinguish in her practice between fantasy

and fact, making it hard to grasp what she's aiming for. While Sutela is often described as an artist who is critical of technology, she has also created a work for an app which requires the most recent smartphones in order to be fully experienced (*I Magma App*, 2019). Perhaps this was intended as a capitalist critique but I find it hard to read it like that.

In other works, Sutela shows us that even things which might seem revolting can be beautiful: *Minakata Mandala* (2017) and *From Hierarchy to Holarchy* (2015), two Plexiglas plates hanging on strings and lit like sacred objects, feature agar, oats and the single-celled slime *Physarum polycephalum*. By incorporating an ancient organism like slime mould, Sutela draws attention to the advanced intelligence of some of the smallest species, showing that our familiar knowledge systems might have to be reconsidered. Perhaps that's the way art and science can work together: by questioning our present.

—Zofia Cielatkowska

Jenna Sutela, *I Magma App*, 2019, mobile app



## Sara Deraedt

Etablissement d'en face, Brussels, Belgium

Sara Deraedt's show at Etablissement d'en face in Brussels (her first presentation in the city where she lives and works) opens with an obstacle: directly behind the entrance of the storefront space, the artist has installed a secondary glass partition, *Wall* (2020), alongside a poster for the show. The otherwise empty main space is visible, but accessible only through the basement via one of two staircases. If this intervention evokes American artist Dan Graham's notion of works being activated by the viewer's presence, it does so by nodding to the history of this artist-run space: *Wall's* placement is based on the position of an earlier partition, built for the inaugural exhibition following the gallery's relocation to its current site in 2012.

To date, Deraedt's work has appeared to centre on photography. For her recurring, untitled 2010 series, presented at the Art Institute of Chicago last year, she photographed vacuum cleaners in boutique shops and department stores, turning generic consumer items into curiously anthropomorphic objects that literally suck up the dust of our capitalist reality. Yet, Deraedt's practice also extends beyond photography to encompass installation, through which she seeks to investigate the fabric of our world and forms of historical or spatial layering. In Chicago, for example, she modified the architecture of the exhibition space by changing the entrance, integrating an artificial vestibule which formally mirrored other museum passageways splitting the large gallery in two.

In Brussels, it's a more direct architectural intervention: to see the show in its entirety, visitors need to enter Etablissement d'en face's small office or a separate staircase in the cellar. In both the office and the cellar hangs a series of four photorealistic pencil drawings, 'Avenue E. Ducpetiaux 106 – Saint Gilles' (2019), depicting the façade of the infamous Saint-Gilles prison, located on the edge of an upmarket district in Brussels. Based on photographs Deraedt took during walks around this area, the drawings are installed behind glass, squeezed between the space's infrastructural details: radiators, gas pipes and the office space.

The castle-like prison of Saint-Gilles, constructed in 1830, has regularly been accused – most recently in 2016 by the human rights commissioner for the Council of Europe, Nils Muižnieks – of violating human rights due to overcrowding, inadequate sanitary facilities and poor prisoner treatment. It serves as an appropriate symbol of Brussels's own local dysfunctions, which are often overshadowed by the city's hosting of large