

## “3Drifts”

### Serafín Álvarez, Lawrence Lek, The Chinese Room

Opening Reception: 17:00 - 20:00, 9 July 2017

10 July - 7 August, 2017 \*Open 12:00-19:00 on Sat. Sun. Mon.

Curated by Asakusa and Federica Buzzi with Support by HIGURE 15-17 cas and Active Gaming Media

ASAKUSA is delighted to announce the exhibition “3Drifts” presenting three interactive works realised with video game software by artists Serafín Álvarez, Lawrence Lek and the game development studio The Chinese Room. Using virtual space as a stage for social, political and ethical critique, these works explore the narrative potential of speculative architectures and landscapes devoid of human presence.

In his article *Utopian Realism* (2014), media theorist McKenzie Wark describes games as “the atopia of the ‘neo-liberal’ subject”. Wark argues that games are the critique of existing neo-liberalism in the sense that they are the too-real form of a less-than-real world. The critical work of games as utopia (or atopia) shows that the world is not as real as it claims to be. Not only games represent our own times in disguise, but they also have an influence on the present, creating a feedback loop between fiction and reality. The threat engendered by the collision between physical and virtual worlds is evoked by the blue surfaces in this exhibition, referencing the Blue Screen of Death - an error message displayed on Microsoft Windows computers when the operating system crashes.

**Serafín Álvarez's** research looks into the symbolic meaning of transitional spaces such as airports and hallways, and explores the trope of the journey into the unknown. *Maze Walkthrough* (2014) is an interactive virtual maze built by assembling 3D reproductions of science-fiction-films' corridors, drawn from the artist's ongoing archive "Case Study: Sci-Fi Corridor" (2013-). These generally overlooked passing architectures are the backdrops for iconic climactic scenes in the films. The intertextual operation presented in this work does not only recall notable settings, but reworks the conventions of the 'thriller corridor scene' genre in a never ending parodic suspense.

**Lawrence Lek's** *Unreal Estate (The Royal Academy is Yours)* (2015) uses video game software to imagine a future in which the Royal Academy of Arts in London - one the nation's most revered institution - has been sold to a Chinese billionaire as a luxury private mansion. A first-person perspective tour through their new abode is accompanied by a voiceover – translated from the Russian edition of high-society Tatler magazine into Mandarin and subtitled in English. This multilingual narration comments on the complex relationship between ethnic identity, wealth, aspirational culture and the role that these play on property development in the UK.

The independent video game *Dear Esther* (2012) by **The Chinese Room** is a first-person game about love, loss, guilt and redemption, driven by narrative and immersion rather than traditional gaming mechanics. The player is to explore an unidentified island in the Hebrides: walking around triggers randomised narration fragments of a troubled man who reads a series of letters to his deceased wife. Integrating musical, literary and aesthetic experiences in the gaming space, this work recounts the narrator's sorrow and acceptance process through a metaphorical journey into this psychological landscape.

By stripping video games' mechanics to the acts of walking and seeing, these 'walking simulators' encourage a contemplative mindset over guided directness. Resonating with Situationist's psychogeographic approach, the playable works featured in “3Drifts” invite endless wanderings in their fictitious environments. The exhibition seeks to unleash the imaginative potential of digital realms, at time when the hierarchy and difference between fiction and reality seem on the verge of breaking down.

How can virtual space be used to imagine future scenarios? What are the chances to solve real-world and theoretical conflicts in the digital arena? How might speculative architectures shape or inform narratives of the present? What impact do the specificities of this medium have on our spatial imagination?

“3 Drifts” is curated by Asakusa and Federica Buzzi, Asakusa's resident curator 2017, with generous support by HIGURE 17-15 cas and Active Gaming Media.

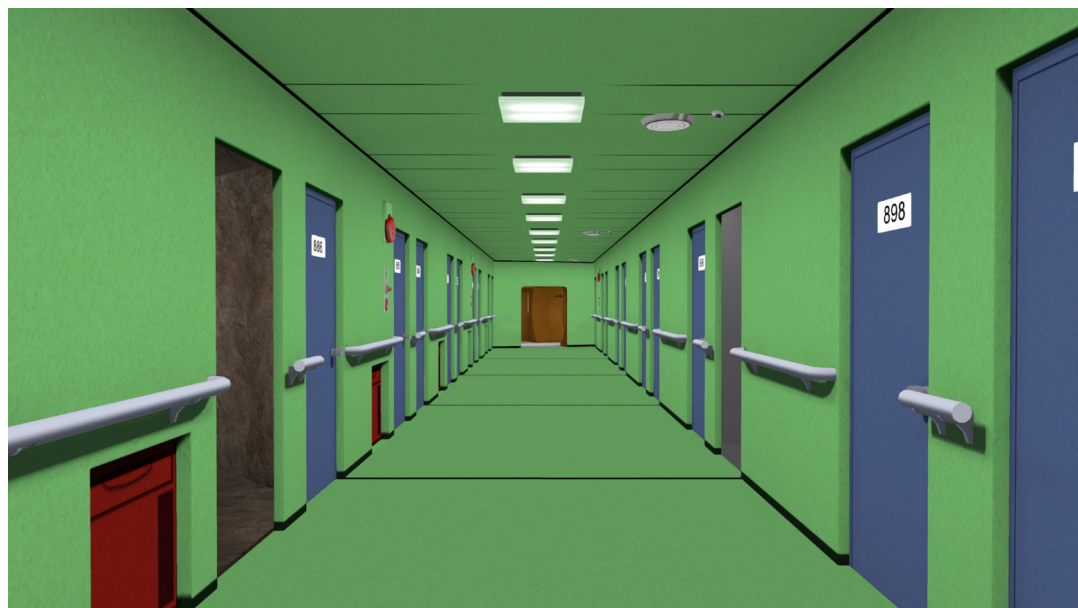


The former home of the Royal Academy of Arts is now yours.

Lawrence Lek, *Unreal Estate (The Royal Academy is Yours)* (2015), still from video. Courtesy the artist.



The Chinese Room, *Dear Esther* (2012), still from video game. Courtesy the artists.



Serafín Álvarez, *Maze Walkthrough* (2014), still from real time 3D game. Courtesy the artist.

## Related Event:

### "Videogames: Architectures of Ironic Computation"

Asakusa Laboratory #8

16:30 - 18:00, Sunday 30 July, 2017

At Asakusa | 1-6-16 Nishi-Asakusa, Taito, Tokyo

Guest: Luke Pearson, Lecturer in Architecture at The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

\*The talk will be delivered in English only.

**Luke Caspar Pearson** is an academic, designer and writer based in London where he is a Lecturer in Architecture at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. He is a founder of the research practice You+Pea and the co-founder and editor of the international conference and publication Drawing Futures. Luke's work interrogates the boundaries of architecture, representation and technology and his current research explores the relationship between videogame spaces and architectural design practice which forms the basis of his PhD studies. His research has been featured in publications such as Architect's Sketchbooks, Architectural Research Quarterly, Offramp, Interstices, The RIBA Journal and CLOG: Sci-Fi.

## Artists:

**Serafín Álvarez's** (1985, León, Spain) work focuses on popular media depictions of subjective experiences mediated by technological and scientific developments. His most recent projects develop heterogeneous approaches to various aspects of science fiction, especially how concepts associated with otherness and the journey into the unknown are represented in contemporary audiovisual media such as cinema and video games. He has shown his work in CA2M (Móstoles), CAC (Vilnius), Junefirst Gallery (Berlin), MACBA (Barcelona), MUSAC (León), La Panera (Lleida) and Trafó (Budapest) amongst others.

**Lawrence Lek** (1982, Frankfurt, Germany) is a London-based artist working with computer gaming technology: he creates speculative worlds and site-specific simulations using gaming software, video, installation and performance. Often based on real places, his digital environments reflect the impact of the virtual on our perception of reality. His work has been featured in recent exhibitions at Tramway, as part of Glasgow International 2016; Seoul Museum of Art, as part of Seoul Mediacity Biennial 2016, KW Institut, Berlin, Germany; Cubitt Gallery, London; Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge and the Delfina Foundation, London. He is recipient of the Jerwood/FVU Awards 2016, the Tenderflix/Tenderpixel Artist Video Award and the 2015 Dazed Emerging Artist Award.

Originally released in 2012, Dear Esther by the Brighton based game development studio **The Chinese Room** has quickly gained critical acclaim for abandoning traditional

gameplay in favour of atmosphere and rich storytelling, proving videogames are capable of the same musical, narrative and artistic expression as film, literature and classical music. In October 2016, Dear Esther was performed with live orchestra and electronics at the Milton Court Concert Hall at the Barbican Centre.

## Curators:

**Federica Buzzi** is a curator and writer, her current research integrates architecture with contemporary art to interrupt mono-disciplinary discourse and advance the understanding of these fields towards their relationship with general culture. Trained in architecture at the Polytechnic University of Milan, she continued her studies with the Curating Contemporary Art MA at the Royal College of Art where she graduated in 2016. Her areas of interest encompass urbanism, spatial theory and gender studies. In 2017, Buzzi was invited to stay in Tokyo as a resident curator at Asakusa.

**Asakusa** is a 40-square-meter exhibition venue for contemporary art programmes committed to advancing curatorial collaborations and practices. Since its inauguration in October 2015, the gallery has worked with Mikhail Karikis, Yoshua Okon, Thomas Hirschhorn, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Yoko Ono, Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, amongst others. The space promotes interdisciplinary collaboration through "Asakusa Laboratory", a series of partly online-based symposiums, and is currently preparing for the first edition of "Asakusa Journal".

## Exhibition Facts:

Title: "3 Drifts"

Artists: Serafín Álvarez, Lawrence Lek, The Chinese Room

Dates: 10 July - 7 August, 2017

Venue: Asakusa at 1-6-16 Nishi-Asakusa, Taito, Tokyo

Opening hours: Sat. Sun. Mon. 12:00 - 19:00

Curated by Asakusa and Federica Buzzi with support by HIGURE 15-17 cas and Active Gaming Media.

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## Special Thanks:



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