

Vojtěch Luksch: Still Life with Message Box

curators: Jozef Mrva ml., Barbora Trnková

text: Barbora Trnková, curator G99

In his curatorial text for Vojtěch Luksch's exhibition *Still Life with Message Box*, Jozef Mrva notes the aspect of nostalgia present in Luksch's paintings. When I digress and recall my own childhood experiences with computer games, I realize that they are connected with visits to relatives, where some male members of the family hugged me a little too close and a little too long. I experienced a similar feeling of unfreedom, against which there was no recourse, when playing video games, where, in the shoes of male characters, I could not achieve my goal except in a prescribed way, most often through pragmatized violence. It quickly became apparent that playing to one's own strengths and setting one's own goals inevitably leads to defeat. Playing is about figuring out early on how the developers wanted me to make decisions. The game's choice gameplay, which moreover has to be taken seriously in order to play the game, is quite funny, but the inevitability of respecting a prescribed narrative still deters me from playing to this day.

Video game theorists Jon Bailes, Andrew Baerg and Matt Garite also note this illusion of choice in games, where games only seemingly provide the freedom to achieve game goals in their own way. The game instructs us to think only in terms of what is convenient and worthwhile, and this extreme form of individualized instrumentalism becomes natural and corresponds to our consumerist freedom to choose from a pre-determined menu at the point of purchase, with the understanding that there is no real alternative. (Jon Bailes, *Ideology and the Virtual City*, pp. 20, 21)

The other problem was that playable female characters were almost non-existent at the time, and when one appeared in *Age of Empires*, I cloned her through unauthorized coding. I created an invincible army of Joans of Arc, which I let ride through the green landscape, because conquering didn't make sense to me and there was nothing else the game offered. The issue of gender stereotypes in video games has been the focus of media critic Anita Sarkeesian for decades, particularly with her eloquent series *Tropes vs Women in Video Games*.

But I'll return to the exhibition with a trip to Scotland. When we emerged from the museum in Edinburgh, where we had spent long hours looking at the vast canvases of Baroque landscape paintings, we were surprised that we suddenly couldn't see the way leaves layer and refract light in the details of the treetops in the park outside the museum any differently than the way Baroque painters interpreted it with their brushes. It was a strange effect that came to mind when I looked at Luksch's painterly interventions in the embroidery. I imagine him playing for hours in his grandmother's living room, and when he looks away from the monitor frame and gazes at the framed embroideries on the walls, he sees them as situations from video games. But what is going on in this seemingly unintelligible combination of original embroideries of peaceful landscapes and action scenes from video games that we see in Vojtěch Luksch's paintings? My daughter crochets while watching someone play *Minecraft* on the monitor. It's as if the tension of the game is being released in a repetitive manual activity. These two activities are connected by the fact that they can both be considered forms of escape. While landscapes touching with peace and harmony allow us to look away from the stress and violence of the world of our grandparents' generation, some of whom still experienced war, violent video games perhaps allow us to look away from the world of this generation, which is actively running away from violence for obvious reasons.