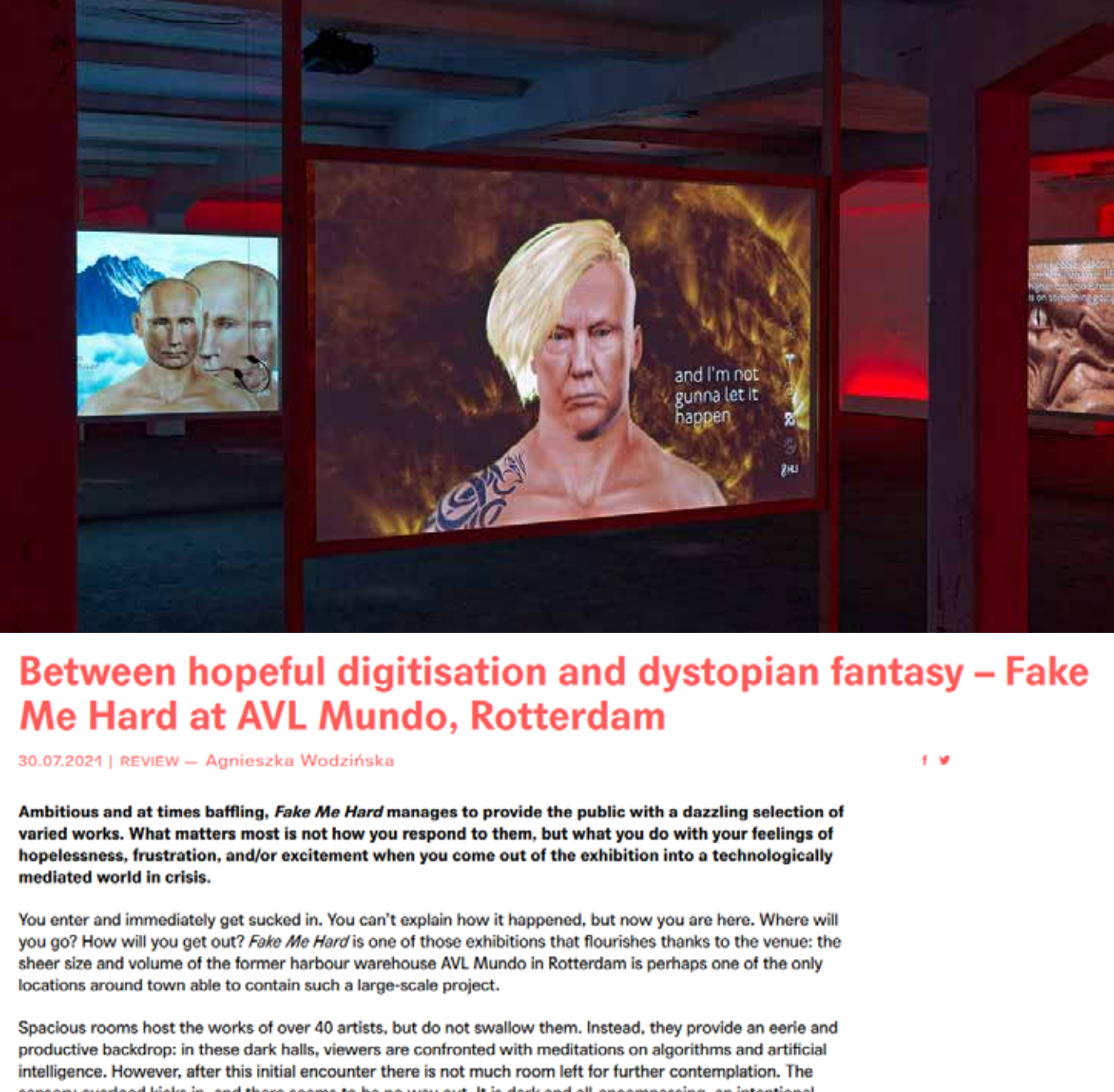


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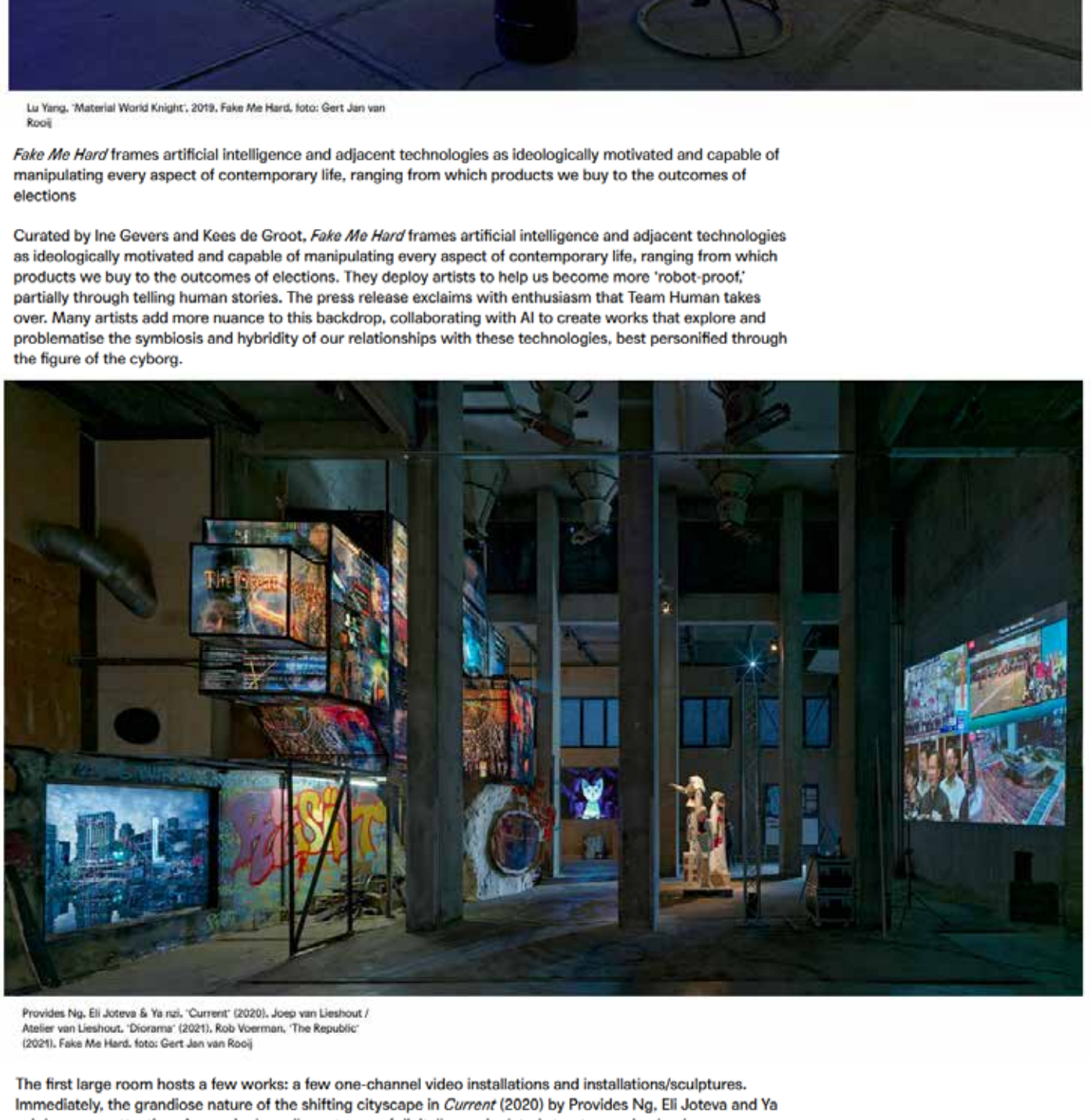
Between hopeful digitisation and dystopian fantasy – Fake Me Hard at AVL Mundo, Rotterdam

30.07.2024 | REVIEW — Agnieszka Wodźnińska

Ambitious and at times baffling, *Fake Me Hard* manages to provide the public with a dazzling selection of varied works. What matters most is not how you respond to them, but what you do with your feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and/or excitement when you come out of the exhibition into a technologically mediated world in crisis.

You enter and immediately get sucked in. You can't explain how it happened, but now you are here. Where will you go? How will you get out? *Fake Me Hard* is one of those exhibitions that flourishes thanks to the venue: the sheer size and volume of the former harbour warehouse AVL Mundo in Rotterdam is perhaps one of the only locations around town able to contain such a large-scale project.

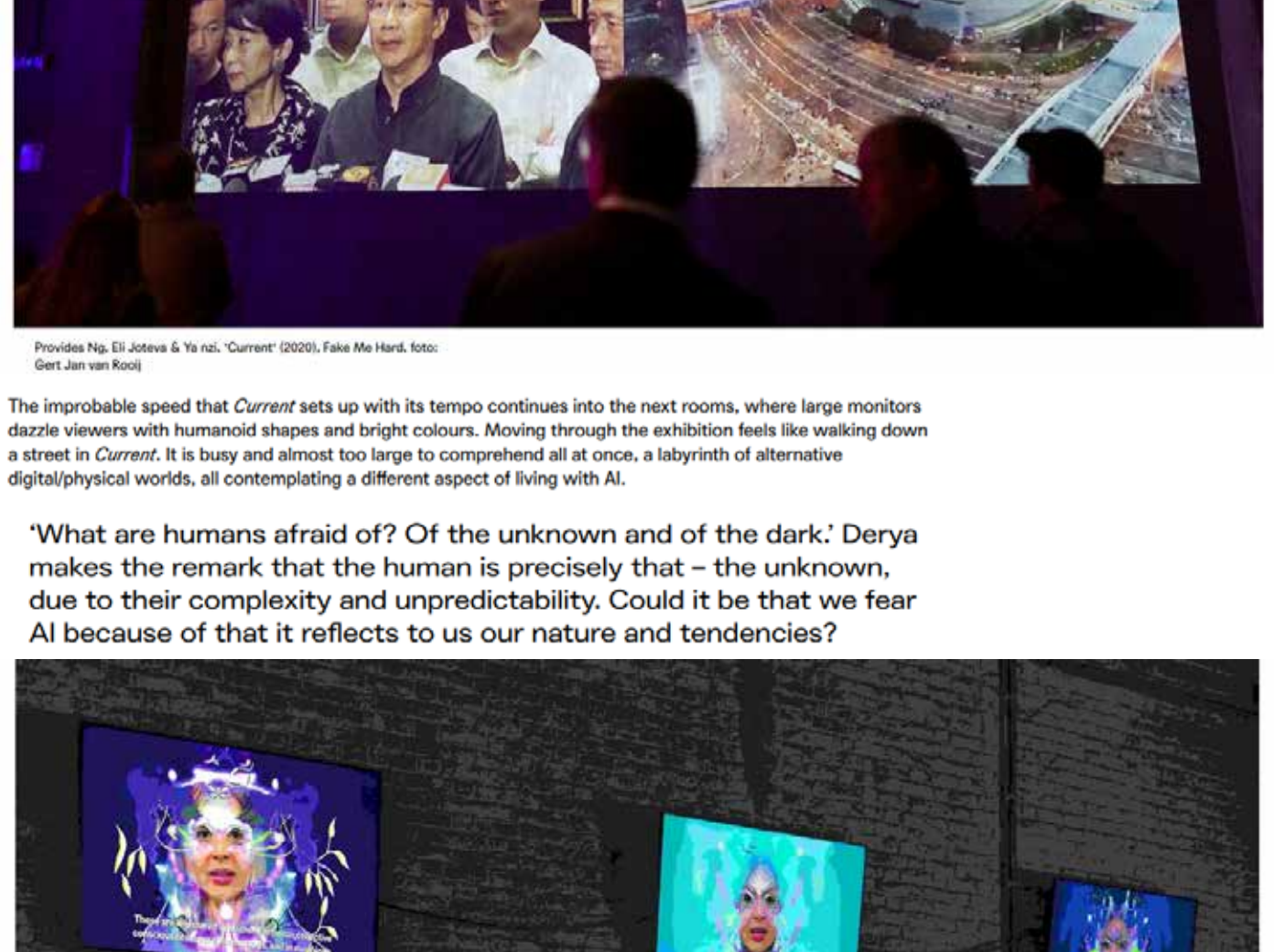
Spacious rooms host the works of over 40 artists, but do not swallow them. Instead, they provide an eerie and productive backdrop: in these dark halls, viewers are confronted with meditations on algorithms and artificial intelligence. However, after this initial encounter there is not much room left for further contemplation. The sensory overload kicks in, and there seems to be no way out. It is dark and all-encompassing, an intentional allegory to the effects of technology that construct contemporary and future realities.



Lu Yang, 'Material World Knight', 2019, *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

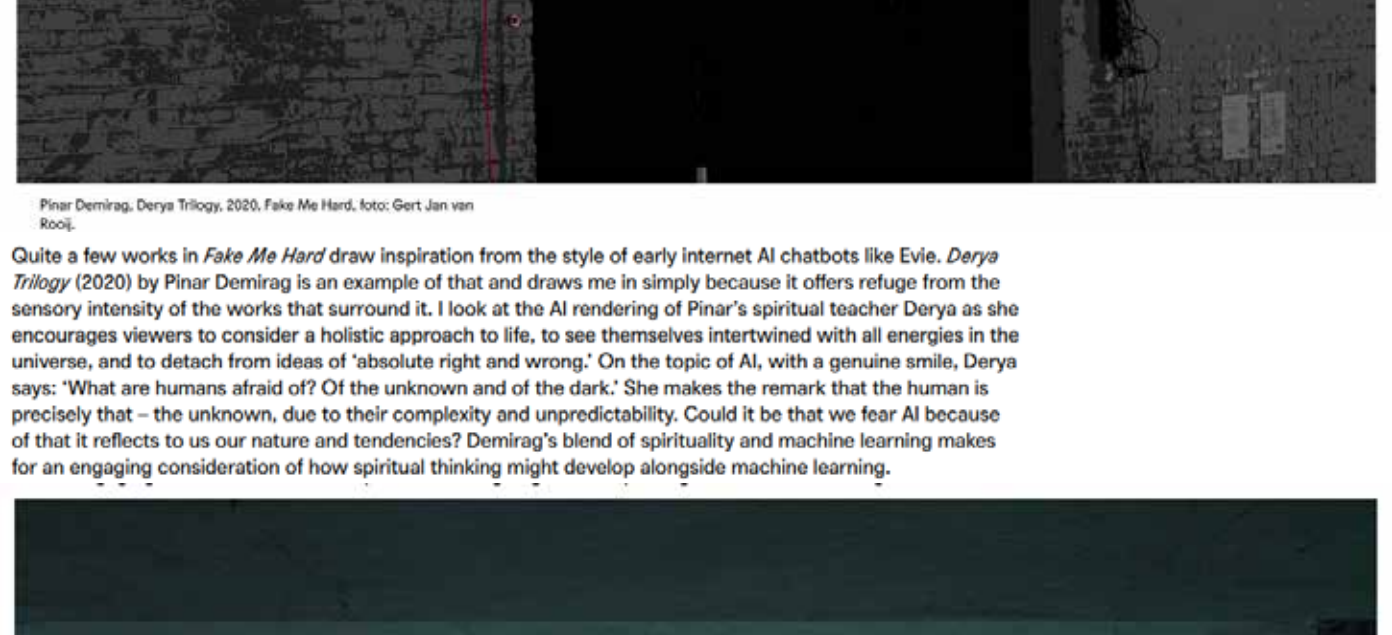
Fake Me Hard frames artificial intelligence and adjacent technologies as ideologically motivated and capable of manipulating every aspect of contemporary life, ranging from which products we buy to the outcomes of elections

Curated by Ine Gevers and Kees de Groot, *Fake Me Hard* frames artificial intelligence and adjacent technologies as ideologically motivated and capable of manipulating every aspect of contemporary life, ranging from which products we buy to the outcomes of elections. They deploy artists to help us become more 'robot-proof', partially through telling human stories. The press release exclaims with enthusiasm that Team Human takes over. Many artists add more nuance to this backdrop, collaborating with AI to create works that explore and problematise the symbiosis and hybridity of our relationships with these technologies, best personified through the figure of the cyborg.



Provides Ng, Eli Jotava & Ya nai, 'Current' (2020), Joep van Lieshout / Atelier van Lieshout, 'Diorama' (2021), Rob Voerman, 'The Republic' (2021), *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

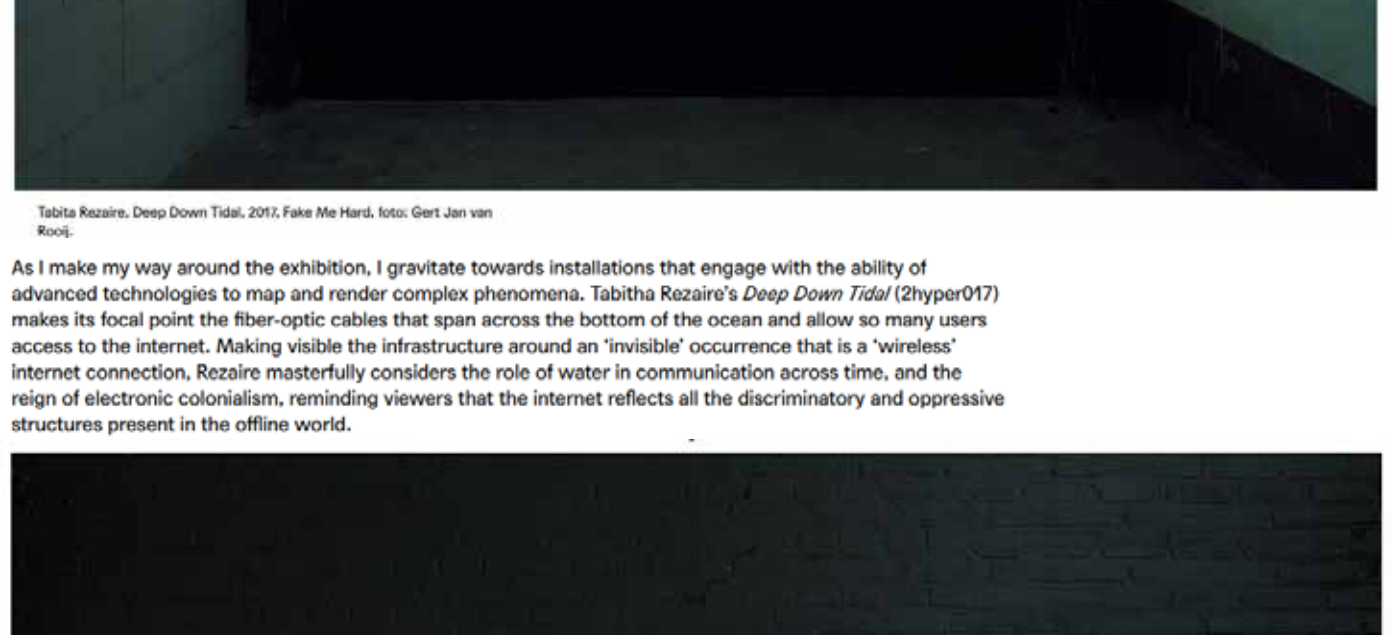
The first large room hosts a few works: a few one-channel video installations and installations/sculptures. Immediately, the grandiose nature of the shifting cityscape in *Current* (2020) by Provides Ng, Eli Jotava and Ya nai draws my attention. A seemingly endless stream of digitally manipulated streets, moving landscapes, uncanny half-rendered figures, and social media videos flows through the work, a reminder that we have no choice but to encounter and process huge doses of information online all the time. The popularisation of live streaming only exacerbates our already split attention. Behind the blaring and booming sounds of the work sits an awareness that we must remain vigilant to keep up with the speed of machine learning. If we fail, we will unknowingly consume entire narratives that are pulled from a silver of reality and then shaped, manipulated, and digitized, saved on clouds and software in multiple, often contradictory versions.



Provides Ng, Eli Jotava & Ya nai, 'Current' (2020), *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

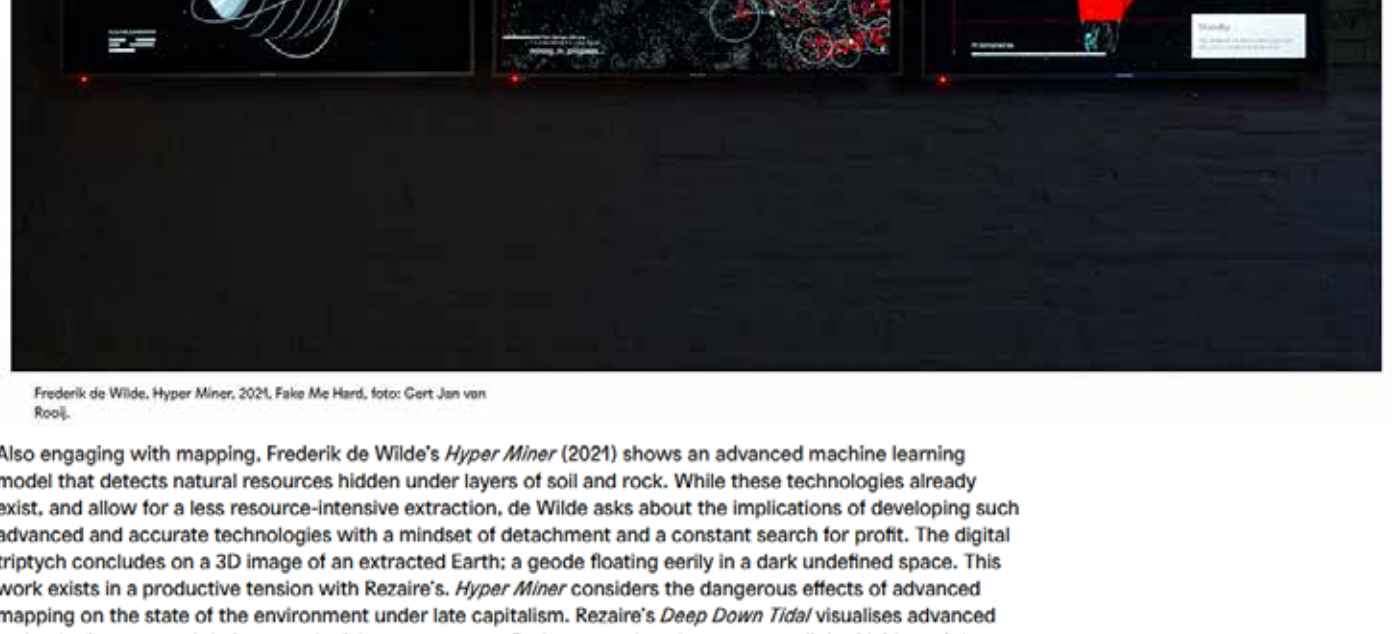
The lightning speed that *Current* sets up with its tempo continues into the next rooms, where large monitors dazzle viewers with humanoid shapes and bright colours. Moving through the exhibition feels like walking down a street in *Current*. It is busy and almost too large to comprehend all at once, a labyrinth of alternative digital/physical worlds, all contemplating a different aspect of living with AI.

'What are humans afraid of? Of the unknown and of the dark.' Derya makes the remark that the human is precisely that – the unknown, due to their complexity and unpredictability. Could it be that we fear AI because of that it reflects to us our nature and tendencies? Derya's blend of spirituality and machine learning makes for an engaging consideration of how spiritual thinking might develop alongside machine learning.



Pinar Derya, 'Trilogy', 2020, *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

Quite a few works in *Fake Me Hard* draw inspiration from the style of early Internet AI chatbots like Evlie. *Derya Trilogy* (2020) by Pinar Derya is an example of that and draws me in simply because it offers refuge from the sensory intensity of the works that surround it. I look at the AI rendering of Pinar's spiritual teacher Derya as she encourages viewers to consider a holistic approach to life, to see themselves intertwined with all energies in the universe, and to detach from ideas of 'absolute right and wrong'. On the topic of AI, with a genuine smile, Derya says: 'What are humans afraid of? Of the unknown and of the dark.' She makes the remark that the human is precisely that – the unknown, due to their complexity and unpredictability. Could it be that we fear AI because of that it reflects to us our nature and tendencies? Derya's blend of spirituality and machine learning makes for an engaging consideration of how spiritual thinking might develop alongside machine learning.



Tabitha Rezaire, 'Deep Down Tidal', 2019, *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

As I make my way around the exhibition, I gravitate towards installations that engage with the ability of advanced technologies to map and render complex phenomena. Tabitha Rezaire's *Deep Down Tidal* (2019) makes its focal point the fiber-optic cables that span across the bottom of the ocean and allow so many users access to the internet. Making visible the infrastructure around an 'invisible' occurrence that is a 'wireless' internet connection, Rezaire masterfully considers the role of water in communication across time, and the reign of electronic colonialism, reminding viewers that the internet reflects all the discriminatory and oppressive structures present in the offline world.



Frederik de Wilde, 'Hyper Miner', 2021, *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

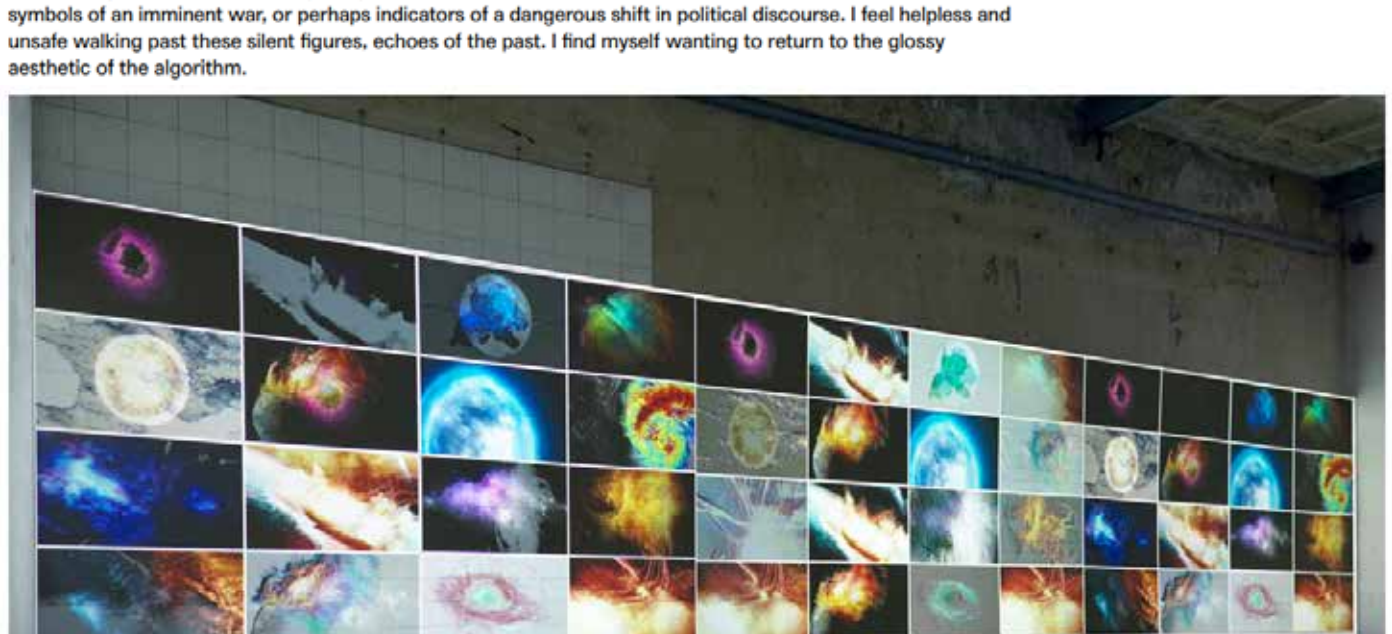
Also engaging with mapping, Frederik de Wilde's *Hyper Miner* (2021) presents an advanced machine learning model that detects natural resources hidden under layers of soil and rock. While these technologies already exist, and allow for a less resource-intensive extraction, de Wilde asks about the implications of developing such advanced and accurate technologies with a mindset of detachment and a constant search for profit. The digital triptych concludes on a 3D image of an extracted Earth: a globe floating eerily in a dark undefined space. This work exists in a productive tension with Rezaire's. *Hyper Miner* considers the dangerous effects of advanced mapping on the state of the environment under late capitalism. Rezaire's *Deep Down Tidal* visualises advanced technologies to reveal their neo-colonial consequences. Both approaches deserve a spotlight. Neither of them offers a simple solution, but they do highlight the collective responsibility of staying informed about the crises caused and accelerated by tech-capitalism. Technology is never neutral, especially not in the hands of the rich and powerful.



Jelle de Graaf, Bettie Meich & Sjoerd Bot, '2019 & 2021, and Joris Briljes & Daan Jubbens, 'Phylotaxia' (2017), *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

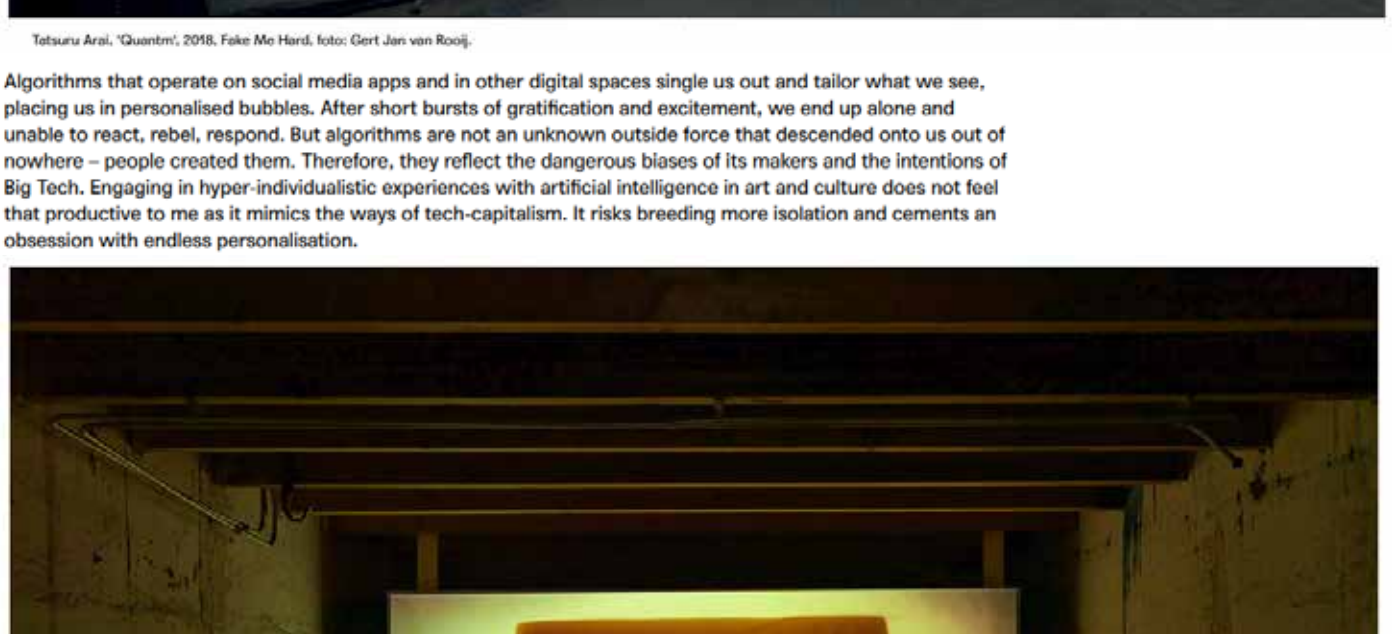
Is it sad to speculate by the labyrinthian space of AVL Mundo, I stumble upon works that range from jovial and puzzling to speculative and downright dystopian. It feels like I am the one discovering this content. Like swiping through a social media application – I know it all existed before I saw it, but somehow, I am made to believe I am the first one to see it. What holds the works together is the curiosity the artists show around the role of intelligence can play not in large future-oriented narratives about the fate of humanity, but in the processes of artmaking and meaning-making.

Even though Joep van Lieshout is the founder of AVL Mundo and uses the space for developing his work, his installation *Diorama* (2021) is fractions of the venue does not quite align with the rest of the exhibition. Confounding viewers with a dreary array of modified and mannequins, it carries with it symbols of an imminent war, or perhaps indicators of a dangerous shift in political discourse. I feel helpless and unsafe walking past these silent figures, echoes of the past. I find myself wanting to return to the glossy aesthetic of the algorithm.

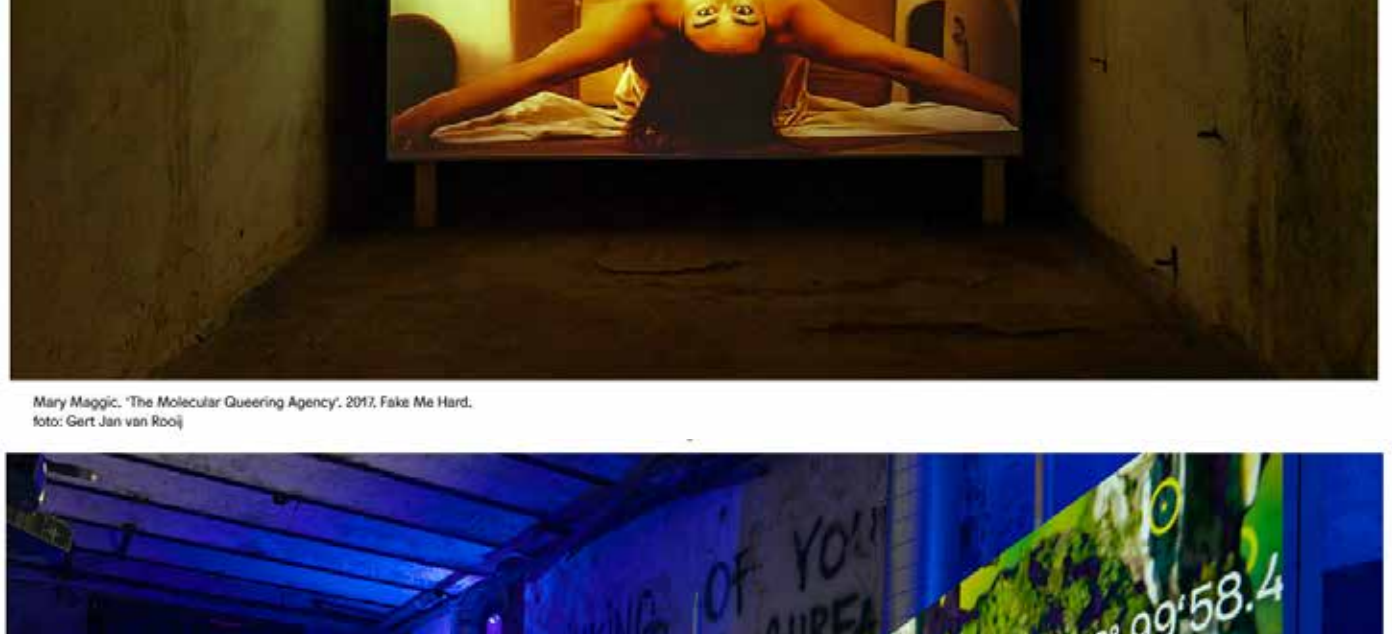


Tatsuaki Arai, 'Quarant', 2021, *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

Algorithms that operate on social media apps and in other digital spaces single us out and tailor what we see, placing us in personalised bubbles. After short bursts of gratification and excitement, we end up alone and unable to react, rebel, respond. But algorithms are not an unknown outside force that descended on us out of nowhere – people created them. Therefore, they reflect the dangerous biases of its makers and the intentions of Big Tech. Engaging in hyper-individualistic experiences with artificial intelligence in art and culture does not feel that productive to me as it mimics the ways of tech-capitalism. It risks breeding more isolation and cements an obsession with endless personalisation.

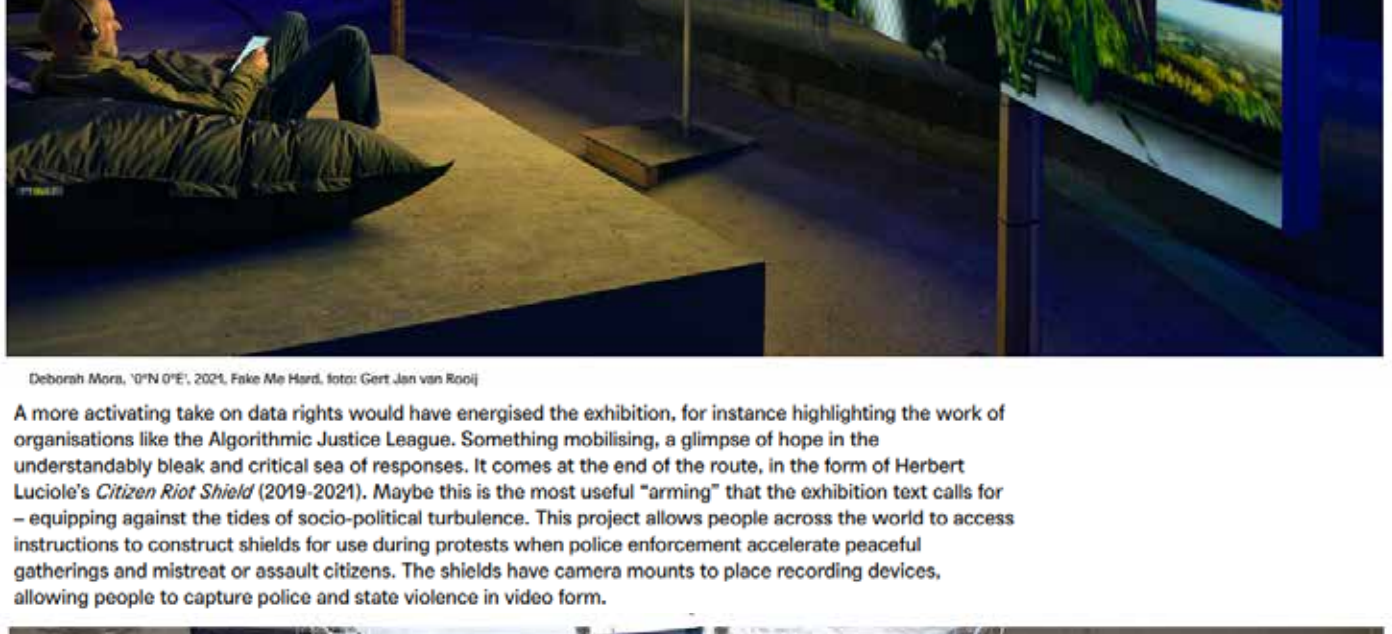


Mary Maggic, 'The Molecular Queering Agency', 2021, *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij



Deborah Morris, '107N 0°E', 2021, *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

A more activating take on data rights would have emerged the exhibition, for instance highlighting the work of organisations like the Algorithmic Justice League. Something mobilising, a glimpse of hope in the understanding bleak and critical sea of responses. It comes at the end of the route, in the form of Herbert Lucio's *Citizen Riot Shield* (2019-2021). Maybe this is the most useful 'arming' that the exhibition text calls for – equipping against the tides of socio-political turbulence. This project allows people across the world to access instructions to construct shields for use during protests when police enforcement accelerate peaceful gatherings and mistreat or assault citizens. The shields have camera mounts to place recording devices, allowing people to capture police and state violence in video form.



Herbert Lucio, 'Citizen Riot Shield', 2019-2021, *Fake Me Hard*, foto: Gert Jan van Rooij

Is it sad to admit that such a device may be useful? Perhaps, but I hope that past temporary feelings of sadness and defeat we can find the courage and energy to mobilize and keep the collective interest in mind. We all face unpredictable tides of technological development while they manifest in different ways across the world, often aiming to divide communities and split attention. One strategy does not fit all. But if we develop awareness of the dangers and possibilities of evolving digital spaces – and re-activate a pervasive sense of togetherness despite the flaws of online living – we can arrive at a sense of hope in a time of crisis.

Fake Me Hard is on view until the 15th of August

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