

Opening Times

Viktoria Draganova: What was the reason to launch Opening Times?

We all came from different backgrounds (commercial, artistic and curatorial) but we all shared an engagement with art presented online and its circulation. We felt in London and more broadly in UK there was a lack of direct investment (financial, research, artistic) on digital practices, so we wanted to expand a discourse and direct possibility for artists to experiment with it outside the commercial sector. We have all different skills and approaches to the field, which makes our collaboration always exciting. Our mission focuses on research and experimentation, finding new ways of thinking about the digital field and its developments, addressing it in a broader artistic and critical conversation.

In London, there is a number of initiatives that are dedicated to presenting artist's work in an online environment. Tell me more about the context. And why London? Because of its global culture? Is London in this sense kind of avant-garde?

One of the most exciting programmes is the one curated by Ben Vickers for Serpentine Galleries. The programme is presented on their online platform and commissions artists to produce work that highlights the online space as a parallel artistic platform, following the format of their exhibition programme but also challenging the way the institution relates to its audience and the way an artwork can function. A few other independent initiatives which we admire are Desktop Residency and Cosmo's Carl, just to name a few, but there are and have been many more.

We are not sure if it can be correct to talk about avant-garde in relationship to London and its relationship with the digital. The lack of institutions fully dedicated to contextualising, exhibiting and researching (for example the New Museum in New York) or the tremendous high costs of living in the Capital have definitely created a slower environment for a discourse and a less prolific place to foster digital practices as compared to New York or Berlin. But at the same time, this is all relative. If we compare London to Milan or Madrid, it is definitely a better context for the emergence and support

of certain practices.

What are the main difficulties/challenges you encounter with your project when you think of possibilities to present, facilitate and support artistic practices online?

Being an online only organisation has pros and cons. We think one of the biggest challenges is to direct your activities to different audiences and seeing the evolution of your relationship with these audiences. By being online you benefit of ubiquity, global reach and timeless opening hours (Opening Times is open all the time) but also misses the possibility of random encounters, education and the organic collaborations that come with a physical space.

What has been done wrong by institutions that try to catch up with that trend (can we talk of a trend)?

We are not sure we can talk of a trend, not yet anyway. Institutions are showing increased curiosity as to what it might mean to develop their space digitally and have their presence expand beyond a social media profile. Few though (notable exceptions mentioned above) have yet to explore how they might use their digital space as an equal platform to their physical one for the production, consumption and dissemination of artwork.

London counts to the "centers" of the art world with its very strong art scene as well as big market share. But can you help me to take an intrinsic perspective and see the center/periphery within London? I am thinking of South London, West-End & East-End art scenes, but also of the gentrification debate. Where do you see your place?

London contemporary art is a constantly shifting ecosystem with multiple facets existing beside, symbiotically and independent of each other. We feel free to move across these different areas because of the fact we are digital (which is a component that is permeating more and more areas of contemporary art) and that we are a public organisation (therefore bypassing the system of gallery politics and potential conflicts of interest).



Opening Times - Digital Art Commissions is a not-for-profit, digital art commissioning body and platform for artworks whose primary means of encounter is online. Opening Times commissions new digital and online artwork, research into digital and online art practice, online residencies, a guest-edited reading resource, website take-overs and a screening programme. Opening Times is supported by the Arts Council of England. Team: Rhys Coren, Paul Flannery, Attilia Fattori Franchini, David Hoyland and Tim Stee.

www.otdat.org

This conversation has been published online on www.swimmingpoolprojects.org on occasion of **us**, an exhibition in collaboration with I: project space (Beijing), Jenifer Nails (Frankfurt), LambdaLambdaLambda (Pristina), Life Sport (Athens), Linda (Sofia), Opening Times (London), Peach (Rotterdam), and The Green Parrot (Barcelona) at SWIMMING POOL from 7 November to 15 November 2015. Organised by Viktoria Draganova. With the financial support of Stolichna Programa „Kultura“ and Austrian Embassy Sofia as well as with the generous support of all invited art spaces.

SWIMMING POOL

Tsar Osvoboditel 10, fl. 5
Sofia 1000 Bulgaria
contact@swimmingpoolprojects.org
www.swimmingpoolprojects.org

SWIMMING POOL is a space for art in Sofia. It hosts artistic and curatorial projects as well as readings, screenings and performances. Its premises are located on a rooftop in the city center of Sofia. Built in 1939, they consist of inner spaces as well as a terrace with a swimming pool situated in the middle. Director of Swimming Pool is Viktoria Draganova.

Credits: © Opening Times and
SWIMMING POOL Sofia, 2015