

In the empty gallery space, *RealTime UnReal* is on stand-by. We are faced first with an ordinary rectangular screen showing the projected image of another screen – a kind of *mise en abyme*. The image is steady. But the minute the system of *RealTime UnReal* senses our presence and movements, it starts reacting. As we step towards the screen, this frontal movement enlarges the image, giving us the feeling that we're entering an architectural space. The direction we take and our rhythm and speed alter the projected image. Certain actions provoke a mirror effect, offering new perspectives on the virtual spaces.

Digital culture has changed our relationship to the world and brought new modes of image perception that have profoundly transformed the representation of space. This phenomenon will no doubt have as decisive an impact on our relation to reality as the invention of linear perspective during the Renaissance. In recent decades digital technologies have engendered various forms of image “hybridization” and transformation: already, our gaze moves quite comfortably between reality and virtuality. According to Kora Van den Bulcke and Thomas Soetens, “what we experience in virtual space changes our perception and our experience of reality.”

As its title indicates, *RealTime UnReal* plays on ideas of the real and the unreal. In this case, real time is the time it takes for the computer to process the information captured by the system that detects a presence in the interaction zone. Representations of the hybrid spaces created by WU appear instantly on the screen. We are entirely absorbed into the time of the projection. Movement around the screen becomes navigation through the hybrid space that is projected upon it. With all the possibilities offered by slowing, backing up, stopping, enlarging and reshaping, each position in the interaction zone generates new images. 3D glasses subtly heighten the impression of relief and give the image added reality, taking us into so-called “augmented reality.”

Kora Van den Bulcke and Thomas Soetens also exploit the mirror effect to enhance illusion by inscribing our presence within these hybrid spaces. At a certain point we are in front of the screen and simultaneously onscreen in three other spaces.

Throughout history artists have made use of the mirror to draw the viewer's gaze to a world outside the artwork, to create the picture-within-a-picture effect of the *mise en abyme*, and to enhance the illusion of depth. From the earliest paintings featuring convex mirrors – *The Arnolfini Portrait* by Van Eyck (1434) and *The Moneylender and His Wife* by Quentin Metsys (1514), for example – to Vélazquez's famous *Las Meninas* (1656), up to the recent explorations of Dan Graham, Gerhard Richter and Pascal Grandmaison, artists with widely varying approaches and concerns have used the mirror to probe the nature of the image and its relationship to reality. Optically speaking, the image we see in the mirror is virtual – the real image is what surrounds it. In *RealTime UnReal*, Kora Van den Bulcke and Thomas Soetens have succeeded in making “the mirror reflect reality.” As they put it, “virtuality is outside the mirror.”

Our presence in these spaces, some aspects of which we do not control, remains enigmatic. The metamorphoses and mirrorings, the constant movement and the shattering of the forms concentrate the attention, forcing us to focus on a particular detail or vanishing point and propelling us more deeply into the heart of the experience itself. But just when we feel we're getting a sense of *RealTime Unreal*'s hybrid space, it collapses. The perspectivist composition of the forms reaches breaking point, the architecture falls apart, all is once again appearance and we are driven towards a more abstract experience. The result is kind of vertigo.

The work of Kora Van den Bulcke and Thomas Soetens offers a subtle reflection on media culture, on fundamental questions concerning the conception and representation of space, and on the threshold between reality and appearance in art.

LOUISE SIMARD, Head of Multimedia Events



RealTime Unreal, 2011

Two stereoscopic projections on a double-sided silver screen, circular polarized filters and 3-D glasses, stereoscopic cameras, infrared movement tracking system, customized Quake III game engine, 4 Barco RLM-W6 projectors, Stewart Filmscreen Silver 5D screen

Workspace Unlimited is a collective composed of Kora Van den Bulcke (born Ghent, Belgium, 1972, lives in Montréal) and Thomas Soetens (born Ghent, Belgium, 1972, lives in Montréal), respectively architect and visual artist. **Kora Van den Bulcke** is a graduate of the Université de Montréal's school of architecture. Between 1996 and 2000, working in Belgium, the Netherlands and Canada, she undertook a number of projects combining architecture and new technology that were exhibited in museums and architectural institutions such as the Architecture Foundation (London) and The Lighthouse (Glasgow). Her vision of architecture is not limited to the design of physical spaces but also includes the creation of virtual hybrid space – environments that coexist within the global culture of the Web. **Thomas Soetens** holds an MFA from the École Supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc in Brussels. From 1992 to 2000 he practised as a painter, exhibiting his work regularly in Belgium, where he was represented by the Lege Ruimte gallery. In 2001 he and Kora Van den Bulcke co-founded the collective Workspace Unlimited, a creative laboratory dedicated to the research and production of projects in which art, architecture and digital technology combine to create hybrid spaces.

Workspace Unlimited is frequently invited to give lectures and to execute works to mark the inauguration of new buildings. *RealTime UnReal*, funded by support from the Rockefeller Foundation, was commissioned for last January's re-opening of the Museum of the Moving Image in New York. The collective's other principal projects include:

They Watch, commissioned by EMPAC, New York (2009)
Hybrid Space and the Panoramic Screen, commissioned by EMPAC for the opening of EMPAC, New York (2008)
Spac [E]scape #3, commissioned by V2 for the DEAF, Rotterdam (2007)
Spac [E]scape #2, commissioned by Carl Goodman for the opening of the Centro d'arte LABoral, Gijón (2006)
Spac [E]scape #1, commissioned by STUK, Leuven (2006)
Implant, commissioned by Vooruit, Ghent (2005)
Devmap, commissioned by V2 for the DEAF, Rotterdam (2004)
Extension, commissioned by the SAT for the opening of the SAT, Montréal (2003)
Eternal 60 Seconds and Diplomatic Arena, presented at the Rotterdam International Film Festival (2003)

For each of its projects, Workspace Unlimited employs experts drawn from an international team of artists, architects and software programmers. In creating *RealTime UnReal*, Kora Van den Bulcke and Thomas Soetens worked with programmers Matthew McChesney and Patrick Bergeron, and were assisted by Éric Adler and Lawrence St-Onge.

Support for *RealTime UnReal* has been provided by BARCO, the Flemish authorities, the Flemish Ministry of Culture, IBBT (Interdisciplinary Institute for Broadband Technology) and Stewart Filmscreen.

For more information: www.workspace-unlimited.org