

Crawl Out Through the Fallout
28.10.22 - 18.12.22
EKKM
Marco Laimre
Curatorial position

“Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.”
Philip K. Dick

By now, the expanse of the ocean of digital games has become incomprehensible. Its various aspect can be encountered in all fields of life and its traces found in a variety of forms of culture: from theatre to poetry and history to politics, not to mention our everyday communication or sports. Statistics state that last year, three billion people played video games.

In the project *Crawl Out Through the Fallout* a comprehensive exhibition of works of artist-gamers based in Estonia are brought together and the selected works and the artists display a specific and telling experience in digital gaming, which they are prepared to transfer into images and videos.

The exhibition takes a look at the fragments of the field of digital games without the ambition of presenting the world of gaming in its entirety. In this context, digital games are understood as make-believe non-linear narratives existing in fictional realities but based on real rules and are played through an immersive process focused on ergodic problem solving. These are cultural ludological phenomena-environments, in which people experience loss and win and symbolic death.

I am interested in the question of reality in gaming. At the core of the exhibition stand the expressions of the relationships between realism and reality and the protagonist-player as well as the presence of imaginary material. This means looking at age-old questions, such as who plays, where and how and what happens to reality during gaming.

Since 2018, I have been dedicated to exploring questions in which open world dystopian games and contemporary art entwine, their possible meeting points and analytically looking at their discrepancies. I am currently conducting PhD research on dystopian digital games and contemporary art at the Estonian Academy of Arts and this exhibition is part of the research as well.

The title, *Crawl Out Through the Fallout* is a line in Sheldon Allmann's enthusiastically humorous song recorded in 1960 and the record is meaningfully titled *Folk Songs for the 21st Century*. Of course, the song is also present in the *Fallout* game series. However, I want to clarify that I did not intentionally thematize Russia's recent nuclear threats or the war in Ukraine. Dystopian games – or should I say dystopian narratives – simply often include these types of apocalyptic aspects, be it a potential nuclear war or a biological collapse. Similarly, all kinds of weapons and tactical moves in the exhibition belong to the inseparable instrumentarium and are a generic part of these games and not an attempt to increase the newsworthiness of the exhibition in a populist manner. Sometimes it just happens that our imaginary and virtual worlds coincide with real events or anxieties to an extent.

At EKKM, fps/rpg-type games like *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, *Fallout 4*, *Fallout 76*, *Bioshock*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Amnesia*, *PUBG:BG* are included but the list of games played is longer, of course, their presence is suggested and generalised.

For the exhibition, artist Martin Buschmann was commissioned in the online game *Fallout 76* to portray in-game characters.

Camille Laurelli presents his so-called artist game as an installation, reversing the first-person

gaming experience.

In her documentary video, Keiu Maasik interviews a professional female gamer, touching upon the question of gender equality in the field of professional digital gaming.

Reimo Võsa-Tangsoo's installation makes visible the sense of time in the game *Fallout 4*.

I, too, take part of the exhibition as an artist with two artworks – a video that looks at the life of Nina, the protagonist in *Fallout 76* and the installation *Nothing is Real*, which analyses the relationship between the real and the imaginary.

The exhibition *Crawl Out Through the Fallout* can be viewed in three different difficulty settings. The easiest level being Rooky, in which you can run through the exhibition and just read the titles and names of the artists. The second, medium difficulty level is Master, which requires focusing on the artworks to understand their meaning and motives behind their creation, knowing the history of contemporary art, reading about the artists' previous work and playing digital games. The third and the most difficult level, Nightmare requires – in addition to the all above mentioned – directly addressing the artists or the curator, asking questions and gathering information about the exhibited works – to reveal possible secrets and stories.

Happy gaming!

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