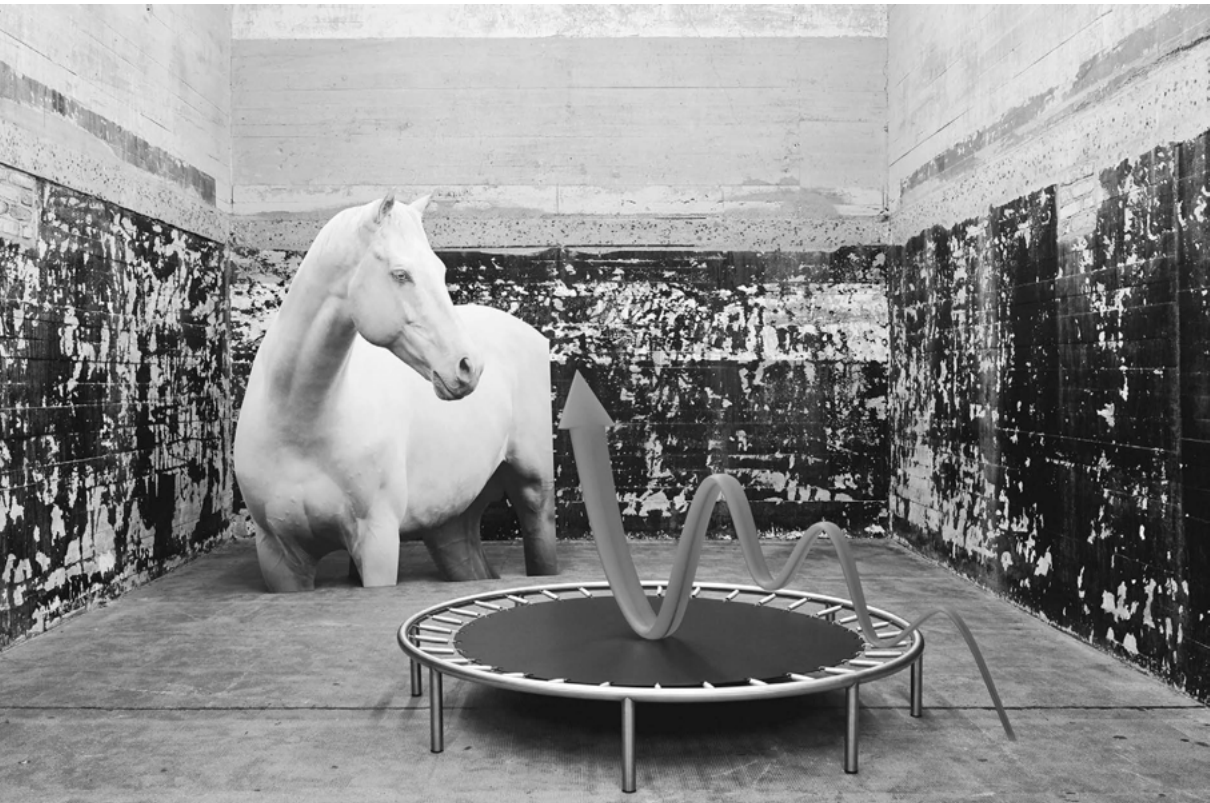


Katja Novitskova

Patterns of Activation





Installation art entered art history and its vocabulary in the 20th century. But arrangements of aesthetically charged elements that can be understood as installations go back beyond our species (from altar designs in temples to decorated bower bird nests). These arrangements can often be recognised to be assemblages—entanglements of several separate elements that make up a novel whole, a whole that is more complex than simply a sum of its parts.

In the context of art, a combination of objects from daily life can transform into a unique installation with its own internal visual language and symbolic structures.

I use this basic idea of installation art and conflate it with my approach to art as the making of attention-activating patterns. In order to do this I have added elements to the *Approximation* series works that would

expand them into multi-element installations, starting with only two: the animal and the economical growth arrow. The corporate arrow symbol, found in generic stock image databases, plays on a long history of meanings within our visual cultures: from shooting arrows, to snake and dragon representations and mathematical vectors, these forms came to signal dynamic change. The economical growth potential of attention is literally materialised in heavy and thick polyurethane resin, contrasting the flat photographic sculptures of wildlife, and almost appearing more alive than them. The combination with animal form is somewhat uncanny and creates an assemblage that again manages to percolate across a whole series of works.

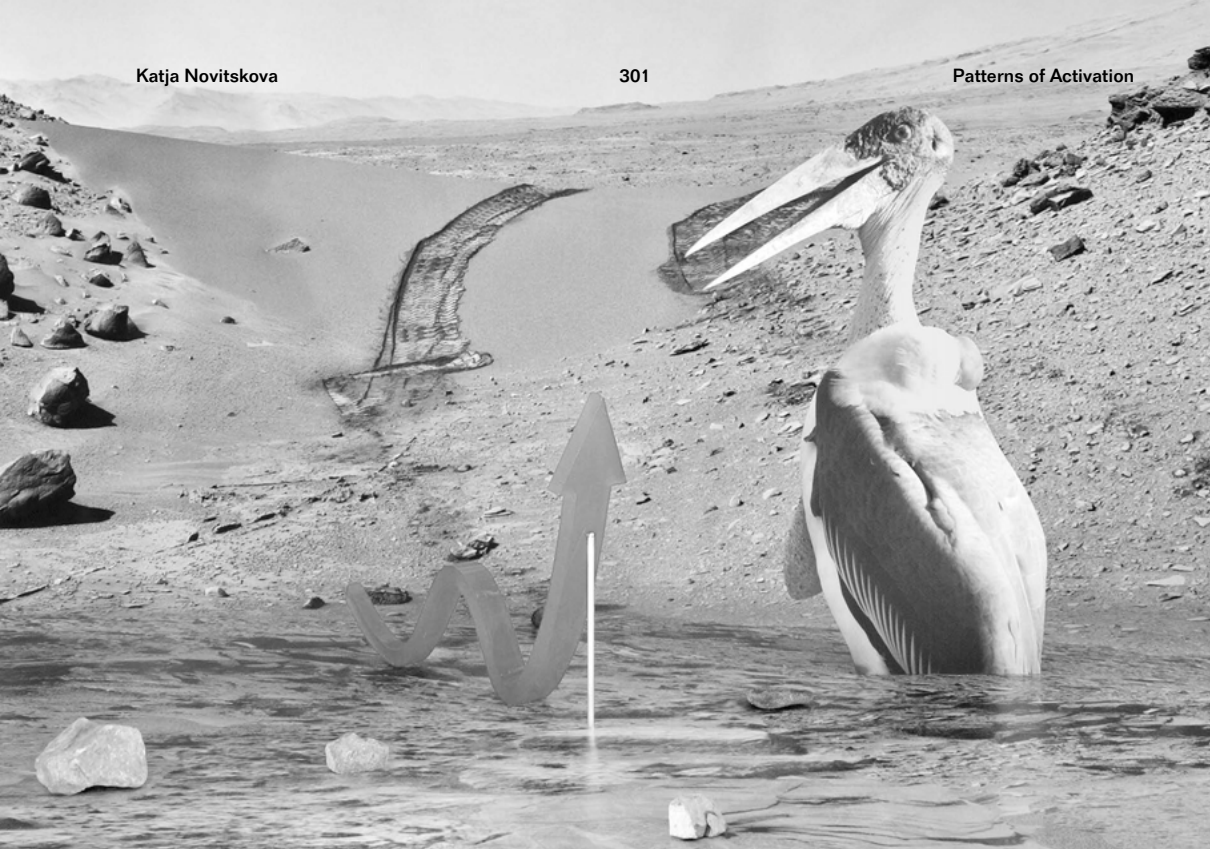
Attention-activating visual patterns can be contrasted by noise, a lack of a pattern

or an obscured pattern. Apophenia is a psychological tendency to see patterns and meaning where there might be none: in stock exchange, in religiously charged objects or images taken on Mars.

In *Pattern of Activation (on Mars)*, I set up a scene in a basement of the gallery space that consisted of a backdrop print with an image of the Martian surface taken by a robotic rover, a large sculpture of a red arrow, some stones and a photographic cutout sculpture of a marabou bird. I placed a cheap camera in front of the installation and streamed the live feed from it onto a TV screen in the gallery space. The work was initially inspired by the conspiracy theory that Stanley Kubrick filmed the Moon landing in a film studio somewhere in Hollywood.

The rover missions to Mars of the last decade or so (called Spirit, Opportunity and Curiosity) have captured and sent millions of high resolution images to Earth. Since no human being has ever been on the planet, these constructed photographs taken by robots are the only way for us to 'see' what it is like on the surface. This has become an ultimate domain for both professional and amateur apophenia: scientists are misrecognising patterns of possible signs of life or water, while conspiracy theorists are misidentifying boulders as pieces of broken buildings of ancient Martian civilisations. Mixing both of these outlooks I approximated the form of a future robotic rover to look like an ancient bird. And the arrows that are often used in the analysis of photographs from Mars become actual features of the landscape. As seen on the TV screen, all the elements of the installation blend together into a low-resolution but convincingly real footage.

The ability to 'see' patterns has now also been introduced to complex algorithms and so-called AIs of different kinds. And now once again, the questions of attention arise in interesting ways. When works of art become data patterns for an AI to 'learn' or identify, what kind of elements would it be paying its own attention to, and how; what elements would it be learning through and what forms would its apophenia take? Since I've found out about deep learning algorithms I've begun to make art works that are intentionally targeting not only human eyes but also those new potential ones of world-seeing algorithms. I began using images of animals that are not viral in any way but come from certain important data sets, graphs of temperature changes in the age of climate change and other obscure patterns. Would they see these assemblages differently compared to something like a 20th century minimalist sculpture? Would they be able to recognise a change in this art-making approach from the one that was only meant for a specifically human perception? The logic of symbolic and visual pattern making may have to be shifting constantly in response to these other forms of consciousness. Even if the artificial intelligence technologies will never advance to a 'general AI' understanding, these questions offer a way to expand the understanding of art outside of narrow categories of sociopolitical history, culture and geography (a person who has never encountered installation art in a museum might also be unable to recognise the signal from noise in art assemblages). These are not science-fictional questions but rather rhetorical ones, aimed at analysing what art is and could be tomorrow.







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