



## “Silvia Ruzanka speaks with Gabriela Vainsencher”

*This year the New Media Artspace presents two solo exhibitions by Gabriela Vainsencher and Silvia Ruzanka. Each addresses process from an expanded perspective, extending from artistic and psychoanalytical processes to botanical and computational processes. In conjunction with Ruzanka’s exhibition, Vainsencher interviews Ruzanka as the second part of a two-way dialogue between the artists on their works in relation to these and more ideas.*

**Gabriela Vainsencher:** With the easy availability of digital tools that create rich, hi-res environments, you still choose to create work that is so low-res, it looks ancient in web-time. Can you talk about this choice?

**Silvia Ruzanka:** One of the things that has always stayed in my mind is the extreme distance between the art that was on Atari game cartridge boxes and the visuals of the game itself. Because the technology forced a minimalist aesthetic. As videogame technology approaches closer to that realistic representation, we do lose poetic potential of those minimalist visuals. For example, physically-based rendering, or PBR, creates a certain representation that is considered realistic and high-fidelity, and therefore true. Though it’s the default in tools like Unreal Engine, this kind of rendering defines only one kind of aesthetic, which helps uphold specific ideologies. The fact that this is built in to a lot of the programs that we use makes it easy to replicate without questioning.

I return to types of imagery that are personal entryways to experiences of wonder. For me, one of these is a nostalgia for a time defined by the newness of technology. I think about returning to that state, that feeling that the technology was a material that I could engage with in a conversation, rather than just something that produces or replicates my desires; and of a kind of open horizon of possibility. It was also a time when the interface and the underlying code were closer together, with less distance from the material nature of the technology; but also with material constraints that inspired creative problem-solving.

**GV:** Can you explain the correlations between the visual and audio elements? tones=landscape/background, noise=subject/movement?

**SR:** We forget about technology until it breaks, or fails to act as intended. We forget about the hard drive until we hear the sound of its mechanical failure – the “click of death” – and then we remember how much the digital realm is dependent on physical material. As I was recording these sounds, I was thinking of it as a soundwalk through the material structure of the technology. There is some correlation with some of the imagery and the sounds, both entering as kinds of interruptions. I think of both the audio and visual elements as creating atmosphere, more than about specific representational connections.

**GV:** There is a stark contrast between static and dynamic elements in the video, and between tone vs. noise in the audio. Are the dynamic elements apparitions, miracles, or just once in an eon chance events?

**SR:** I like “apparitions”! Apparitions are slippages, reminders that the world as we know it is not necessarily categorizable. The static and dynamic is a reminder that we are in oscillation between both a thing and a process, both defined and undefinable, in a fixed form in the now but also in a constant state of becoming. It’s one of the reasons I’m drawn to plants. We think of plants as being static, fixed in place, but they are constantly in motion, just on a different time scale. Noise is a reminder that meaning is a slippery concept, that it seems concrete but it’s diffused.

**GV:** The images suggest some form of digital life: either seeing life as mechanistic and computational or imagining life created in silico as opposed to in vivo. How do you conceptualize the relationship between life and computation/information?

**SR:** There's a long history of ways of trying to understand life in mechanistic terms: modeling computers on human thought, or thinking of the human mind as a computer. But what if we could go in a third direction? What form could computation take if we began with a completely different kind of life-form and a radically different kind of thought? This led me to plants and to plant-thinking, which opens up very different notions of what information is, how information is processed, how intelligence is structured, how meaning is made. In the drive towards general AI, we are trying to replicate human intelligence. But what if, instead of making everything about shaping the world to work within our language, we were to work within the language of computation, or the language of other non-human entities? I think it would have to begin by listening to other ways of being.

**GV:** Both the visual and audio seem to be based on synthesizing a world from very simple materials. Can you talk about your relation to the building blocks of sound and video and their symbolic power in the worlds you build?

**SR:** I'm interested in how these elements of plant life and of electronic and computational elements might begin to merge, interconnect, break down and re-form. Donna Haraway's idea of compost is inspiring to me: a process of mixture (of materials, ideas, relations), that requires maintenance and care, that incorporates both decay and life. What would a digital compost be? Can we consider the idea of compost as a way of writing and maintaining code or digital systems? For me, the visual and audio elements may take on symbolic meanings, but they are also about glitch, about representation and language decaying and reforming.