

The exhibition “Telerobotic Painting” at the Galerie Lukas Feichtner in Vienna of 2021 shows artworks of the artist Niki Passath not only as end-products, but the creation process of them has been included in the show. While the artist performs diverse results are being created. Through a remote-controlled interface, which takes live commands via artist how to move, kind of graphical paintings directed by the artist emerge. Here not only themes, composition and style can be observed, but also the articulation of the gesture during the creation and the movement of the remote-controlled self-created robotic objects.

Niki Passath, an Austrian artist, born in Graz, studied at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna in the class of professor Peter Weibel. He currently teaches and researches here.

Algorithmic thinking and applying this in art, dealing with issues such as the relationship between human and machine, the questions like if there are emotions between those both, or if there is trust, symbiosis and co-existence between them are present in many of his artworks. Furthermore, Niki Passath deals in his artworks with music, dance, entertainment, or artificial intelligence and diverse actual developments in the science at all transporting these into visual or time-based aspects of the artwork.

On the one side the observer meets roboters that looks as sympathic creatures with big eyes, equipped with brushes that stand over wheels for moving quickly around and paint as in the series work “Painting Traces”. Some of them, in their large size as for instance robots created for the workshop on 2017 reminds visually of cybernetic sculptures of Edward Ihnatowicz (Senster 1970). They can also produce creative works, while the robot “Volker” (2006), which looks like a creature with octopus arms, hugs the artist or objects. Furthermore, some of them are programmed to come around you, even maybe follow you like robots of the serie ZOE of 2010. The last one, although presenting spiders, elegant sized legs and white and black colors make them sympathic even for visitors with arachnophobia. A robotic arm created for the serie “Thinking like a machine” of 2016 hangs on the wall and draws or drips color in a programmed way into the canvas. In its concept it recalls Stelarc’s “Third Hand” (1980) on viewer’s mind, which was used in many performances worldwide until 1998 and is one of the best examples seen as body-extensions (Marshall McLuhan). Stelarc’s “Third Hand” imitates the movements of artists hand being attached on it, while the wall robot of Passath is being used as a semiautonomous

tool for creation. Compare to the intelligent robotic sculptures “Autopoiesis” (2000) of Ken Rinaldo where the sculptures react elegant to the movements and noise of the visitors, Passaths’ robot shows elegant movements based on the “duties” assigned via artist. If it is not moving as “wished”, the arm is being live corrected, and the artist decide by himself when the creation process stops, and the artwork is finished.

Remote controlled emerge artworks whereby repeated arcuate lines reminds sometimes in their compositions on the light sculptures of Brigitte Kowanz, while some other lines move around as if they were free strings of a violincello searching their own way on the space. Compositions, colors, their different line-strengths and hatchings looks often visually like architectural plans. Being placed on the floor seems like a part of the floorplan is being designed. Traces made by the robots, which mix the colors live are more times overwritten, the new story begins where the other one ends. Their narrativity achieved a culmination on the series “Made In Quarantine” of 2020 where the complexity of overwritten shapes and lines has been developed further. In general, on the one hand the thickness of the rack-wheel creates a rough impression, deep traces, while the thin lines on their sides create connections between the shapes.

Telerobotic paintings of Niki Passath can be understood as presentation of traces of a culture, of our era, interconnected with the technology where the technology is obsolete, but its traces exist still after as witness of its time. “Telerobotic Painting” shows that the medium of painting can be the message of the creative medium of programmed robot.

Dr. phil. Penesta Dika, Curator