The Loving Objects with Filip Kostic

NCO 131   2024-10-10   ~ by Em Seely-Katz

(CONNECTION)   (FUTURE)   (TECHNOLOGY)   (ARTS)   (SCIENCE)

One of technology's ostensible selling points is that it doesn't have to deal with the woes of a form limited by the bounds of its flesh, but that's also the source of its worst PR—the lack of vulnerability in the "body" of a machine can make humans feel, though they might never speak it aloud, like inferior specimens, creating an intrinsic sense of antagonism. This ire manifests in ways as cartoonish as when we used to kick our stalled-out, hot, humming processors in the 90s (somehow that always fixed them!), but it also caches perhaps counterproductive fear toward even the most generative aspects of technological progress. Multimedia artist Filip Kostic counters this friction with a unique sense of tenderness toward the machines and programs he creates: in his sculpture " Bed PC ", monitors surround a bed's pillows like a psychic shield, and his homemade computer's operating system itself is the protagonist of the software he developed into a game of sorts, "
 Running at Frame Rate ." The latter was especially interesting to me, so I pressed Filip on this personification

Em Seely-Katz: One of the ways I could bear to look at a screen for 14 hours a day when I did web dev long ago was to personify the little quirks of computers, you know all those sayings in the dev community: "the computer is stupid/funny/etc." You put a fine point on it by casting your computer as the protagonist of a game— do you feel the need to personify the computer?

Filip Kostic: It's funny, because I built this computer forever ago. In fact, I do attempt to claim that this is the same computer I started building when I was 12 years old, but this version right now is a sculpture, an art object I live with. I built it for myself and to create meaning for others, so I have given it a body of sorts—it is a corporeal being amongst other corporeal beings, it's not just a computer on my desk.

Filip Kostic

I don't think I actually personify my computer—I give it traits it doesn't have in a tender, loving way, but it would be like a little sibling of mine—

E: Well, that's personifying! A sibling is a person!

F: For sure, but it's a sibling not in a humanistic kind of way, not like a person. I just have love for it, an understanding toward it. I have one spinning disc drive in my computer, an eight terabyte old-school backup drive, and it is considerably slower than my other drive (which is basically soldered onto the motherboard). When I'm transferring files to the slower drive, I'm… understanding toward it. I don't expect it to go faster, I let it take its time.

I know it's working really hard. I'm not looking at this part of my computer as if it's an actual body, but I'm understanding and forgiving...

Bed PC(2020), Bed PC 2(2022), Bed PC(Twin) (2022)

I'm not trying to say that my computer is a being with a consciousness, or anything...

E: I don't think there's any way to justify the tenderness that we can feel toward non-living objects. I saw that the latest piece on your website is a relief sculpture in a kind of Ancient Greek style—do you know the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea?

F: No, can you tell me?

E: It's essentially about Pygmalion, a sculptor, who falls deeply in love with a marble statue he carves, Galatea, and then eventually Aphrodite brings her to life.

I'm sure there's some horrible ending, but I think it's interesting, the idea of **harboring genuine love for an object, or even the patience and appreciation you mentioned feeling—I don't know how to separate that from personification!**

F: I guess in a definitive sense it is personification, but I think the thing I struggle with when personifying technology specifically, are the comparisons of algorithmic systems to the human brain.

Assembly of the First Computer (At a Sleepover) (2024) hydrocal, 31cm x 30cm

I think that's quite harmful and not useful. I have no interest in saying my computer has any way of deciding anything,

I just have an appreciation and love for it as a piece of hardware that has the capacity to do some things but also limitations

I'm interested in playing with, which is what the "Running at Frame Rate" piece really is, the desire not to give a body to the computer but to recognize it as a thing doing things.

E: It's a new kind of affection! We don't have to make it analogous to anything. It doesn't have to be anthropomorphic or zoomorphic—everyone always tries to compare computers to humans or pets, but I think that having an emotional relationship with tech not predicated upon our relationships with people or pets could be really generative. That potential has a big presence in your art.

F: Thanks. I'm not sure what to call it, because there's a word for people who fall in love with objects, like in a romantic sense—I have a *platonic* relationship with computers...


Zetetic Method (2018) HD Video, 4:38 looping, Installed at the ArtCenter Windtunnel

Gallery

E: Don't worry, we won't publish a piece calling you a computer fucker.

F: It's dope for people who can feel that way! To respond to your new sort of affection, I agree, it's very familial.

If there's a fire in my studio, I'm only taking one thing with me: my computer. The rest of my shit, all my work, can burn, I don't care, but I'm taking my computer.
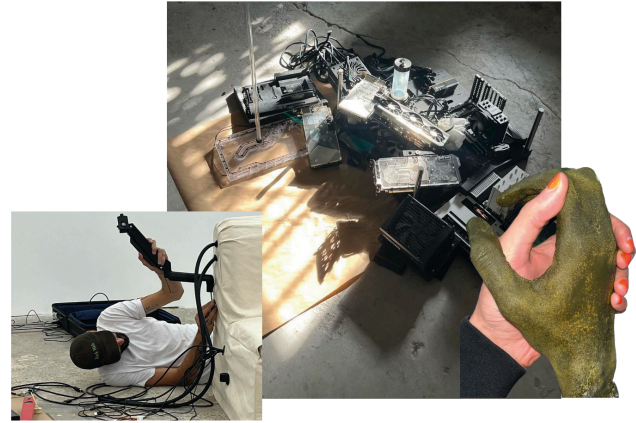
E: Maybe it's talismanic. I feel like objects like this went through a period of existing less readily, but maybe they used to—going back to Ancient Greece, the Aegis, Athena's shield carved with Medusa's face, this active object that is brimming with presence. You can feel very strongly about it, but it's still fundamentally not alive.

F: A good analogue is how people who are really into cars will pat the hood, like "you did good today." An appreciation for this thing that *does* things.

E: It exists somewhere between talisman and tool. Such presence. What role does presence play in your work?

F: I like that question quite a bit, because I just started reading this new Claire Bishop book, *Disordered Attention*, and she writes specifically about this idea of presence with artwork, the ways of being with the work particular to this moment, with cell phones and other technology mediating our experience. Dispersed presence.

'Personal Computers' available at ARTBOOK at Hauser &

Wirth in LA

A lot of my work, especially stuff that's livestreamed, makes me think about presence—I'm thinking about me, in my room, being broadcast as a forced presence—I *must* be there, and if not, I lose an audience, so the audience is present as well, in a funny way. They're both with me and not. I'm trying to play more with that in my future work.

All images courtesy of Filip Kostic