



ZABLUDOWICZ
COLLECTION

Invites

00 ZHANG
11 MAY–
25 JUNE 2023

Julia Greenway: You have been building on the exhibited body of work for the past few years: can you explain how this narrative developed?

00 Zhang: The *Prototype* series is a world-building practice that consists of a sequencing of works that I have brought together to tell a larger story. Their evolution is realised across the installation through sculptural works *Prototype 0029 Apparatus*, *Prototype 0028 Embryo*, *Prototype 0026 The Mother* and the interactive gaming work titled *The Overture of Prototype Series*. With my practice, I aim to build imaginary worlds that envelop and engage viewers. These worlds are digital, the interactive nature of gaming allows the environments to feel realistic and believable, as if you could live inside them.

I often think about the following statement: to understand something, you must experience it from within, and to understand a place, you must live there. I travelled from the other side of the world to live here, and I am consistently working to integrate myself into British culture and language. When I first moved to London, everything was exciting and new, but I still held my friends and communities close by staying connected to them online through gaming and digital spaces. Living these two lives – one in the digital realm with my chosen community, and another in the physical world, which can feel somewhat foreign – brings a certain comfort. This is the reality of contemporary life, especially for my generation. We are less attached to borders, cultural identities, gender and religion. Our lives are more fluid, and we can create our own virtual spaces to come together. The relationships we have with each other drive this connectivity and instil in me the power of collective imagination.

JG: You also bring your community into your work as collaborators. Can you describe how you include others within your practice?

00Z: I could not make my work without the support of collaborators and friends. I feel like very few digital artists can. The musician Yeule does all the audio for my gaming pieces. Ruiqi Li does my graphic design work: she designed the player guide as well as providing input and feedback on the general look and feel of the digital environments. I am also fortunate to have my friend Xiaoting Tan as a source of technical support. Her extensive knowledge and skills in interactive design have been invaluable in helping me overcome technical challenges as I continue to explore new methods of execution in my practice. I am incredibly grateful to have such generous, skilled and supportive people around me who believe in my work.

JG: With this exhibition, your pieces translate across virtual and sculptural entities. Why were specific installation considerations important to the experience of your work?

00Z: For the gallery setting, I aimed to create a blank, liminal space that serves as a portal into the work. The floor is transformed into a pristine white surface, while the fixtures and fittings are covered in white vinyl, leaving only the windows untouched. The result is a void-like space much like an undeveloped game environment or 'plane' – a term from game theory referring to a unique level.

The installation features two interactive digital works and four sculptural pieces constructed from laser-cut aluminium, 3D-printed materials, and robotic and computer technologies. For me, the virtual and physical works are the same entity: they all have the same digital starting point and serve as assets in my overarching story.

JG: Can you describe the interactive work *The Overture of Prototype Series* by walking us through each of the environments that visitors encounter?

00Z: It is a playable video game and you enter the work from desolate East London. It is an overcast, rainy setting; it feels bleak, as London often can in the winter months. The environment is familiar, with its skyscrapers, construction barriers, locked-up bikes and Tube signs, but there is a subtle sense of strangeness. The advertisements are fictionalised, the streets are devoid of human presence and unfamiliar celestial shapes hover overhead. It is my hope that this accessible entry into the game will help viewers begin to understand that not everything they see – in their daily life, but also in my work – is as it first seems. This London setting serves as a transitional portal from the physical world to an ethereal one.

JG: Once the players have navigated the East London landscape, the viewer is then teleported through an abandoned Tube tunnel into an especially surreal space. Can you describe this environment?

00Z: This plane is where all the *Prototype* assets appear. Every *Prototype* begins as a 3D-rendered asset or symbol that appears repeatedly as a motif in my work. To create a cohesive world for these works, I developed a second level called *The Zone*. I imagine this utopian world to be constructed of human consciousness. A metaphysical realm, it features an oversized moon and ice sheets scattered across water and overhead, creating an otherworldly infrastructure. Led by a mechanical cat-like creature, players are transported by a lift to meet two angel-like gatekeepers who grant them permission to explore the world freely. However, their exploration triggers the central mother, *Abstract General Entity* – a giant eye programmed with AI tracking that follows players' every move and pulls them out of this world and into the next.

JG: You describe this experience of transitioning between levels as being 'magnetically absorbed' into the pupil of this giant eyeball, and the player then finds themselves within a control room. Can you describe the third and final stage of the *The Overture of Prototype Series*?

00Z: The game's final environment takes place in a control room called *The Centre Console*. It resembles a matrix, defying space and time: the outcome is completely abstract and intangible. The visual information the player perceives is generative. It is programmed by AI software using the theories of quantum physics. As the player moves their first-person view, visual structures form in front of them; from every perspective the space continuously morphs and reshapes itself. The central

motif of this matrix is a machine called *Fluoxetine*, which is the newest addition to the *Prototype* series. Once the player enters the machine, they experience a real-time live stream of the gallery space.

JG: This decision to reflect your players' actions feels like quite a deliberate, strong-willed choice. It seems that it wouldn't be possible to have reached here without the creation of the *Fluoxetine* machine. Can you describe the origin of this gaming asset in more detail?

00Z: Fluoxetine is an antidepressant, sold under the Prozac brand name. I have struggled with my mental health, but after I fully committed myself to my art practice and immersed myself in the process of making and visualising all the ideas I had in my head, my symptoms dissipated. I am happy every day making my work and allowing my imagination to flourish, and I want to share that experience with my audience. That is where the name comes from, but this work is also about surveillance and our interactions with machines and non-human entities. In the gaming space, *Fluoxetine* is an imaginary devise that could connect to the brain and muscle nerves of its user, creating an authentic virtual experience. The machine would read the body's cues so acutely that the user can live in virtual space without ever suspecting it. This machine appears in the final level of the control room, where visitors see themselves reflected through the live-stream technology, and they become fully integrated with the machine. This intervention is a metaphor for the ways I navigate the world and willingly merged myself with my technological practice.

JG: In some ways, this exhibition – particularly *The Overture of Prototype Series* – reads like a self-portrait conveyed through the medium of gaming. Each level takes the viewer through various stages of your personal lived experience, from the East London setting in level one, to the consciousness-expanding world of level two, and finally to the generative image control room in level three. It seems as if you are inviting your viewers to explore the various levels of your life through your work. Is this fair to say?

00Z: Yes – my work is deeply personal and meaningful to me, and it's based on my own experiences. I don't expect my viewers to understand all the nuances and personal elements that we've discussed here, but I agree that my lived experience is what drives this work. It has shaped not only my creative process, but also how the artwork is received and engaged with by audiences. My goal is to create art experiences that I personally want to see in the world that bring a sense of curiosity and joy to viewers.

The Overture of Prototype Series, 2023. Digital collage.
Courtesy the artist.

Artist Presentation: Sunday 18 June, 3pm. 00 Zhang is joined by her collaborators to provide a virtual tour of her interactive work. Please check website for further details.

00 Zhang (b. 1996, Zhejiang, China) completed the Design for Performance & Interaction MArch course at the University College London in 2021 and a BA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martin in 2020. Recent solo exhibitions include *Shattered Heliocentric Orbit*, Broadway Gallery, Nottingham (2022). Select group exhibitions include *The Production of Post-Truth*, Ugly Duck, London (2022); *Kissaten/Tea Room*, University College London, London (2022); *Escape before the Heat Death of the Universe: the Digital "Peach Blossom Paradise"* and *Virtual Hedonism*, Thetis S.p.A., Venice (2022). 00 Zhang has participated in brand collaborations with Nike, Dior, Balenciaga and Shanghai Fashion Week.

Zabludowicz Collection Invites is dedicated to solo presentations by UK-based artists who do not currently have representation by a UK commercial gallery.

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Opening times
Thursday–Sunday, 12–6pm
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FREE ENTRY

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