How to Visualize Time?

The artists in 'Time Forward!' at the V-A-C Foundation in Venice speculate on what the future might bring
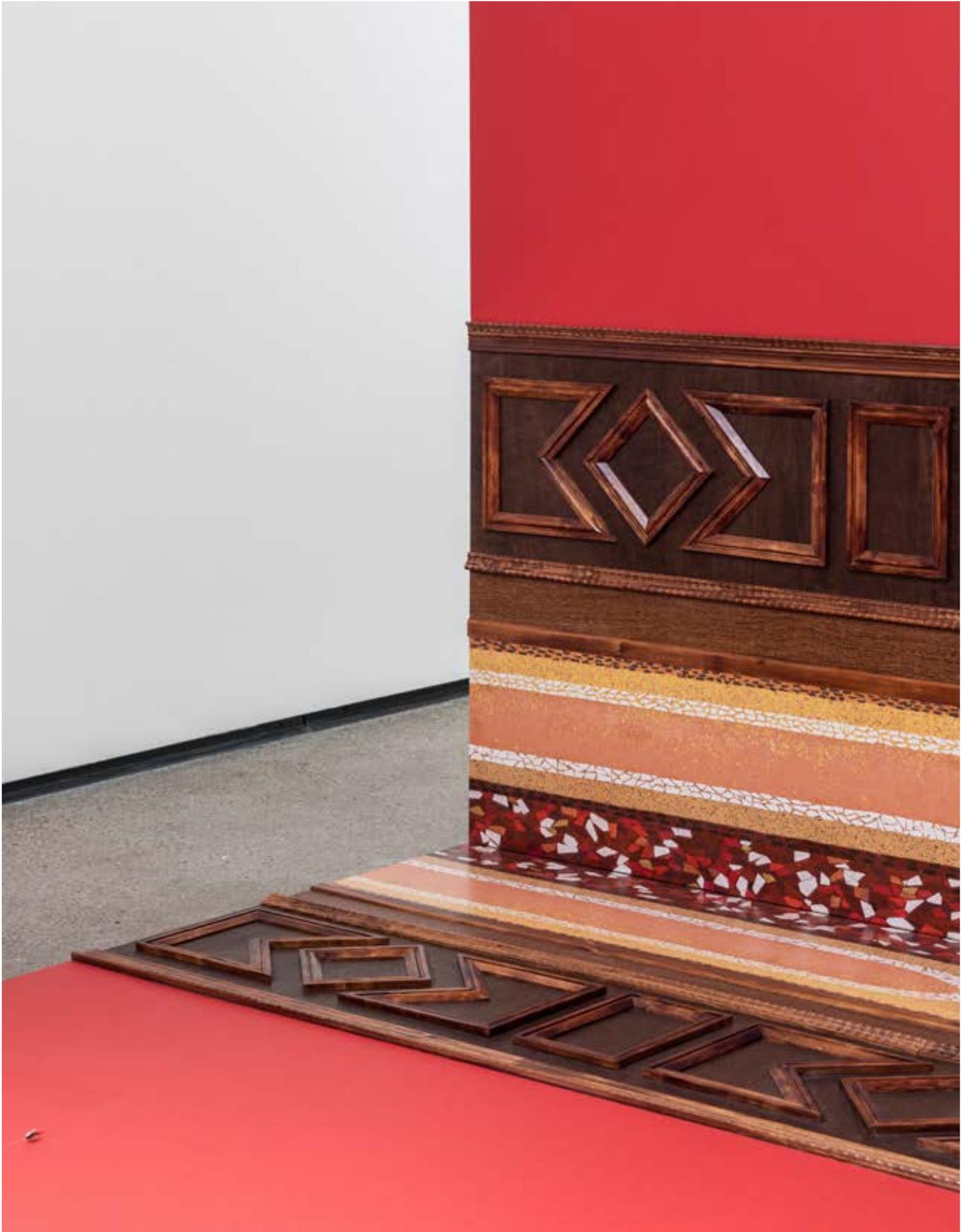
During the opening days of the Venice Biennale, the Riva delle Zattere where the V-A-C Foundation can be found, was taken over by 'The New Circus Event': a frenetic act of contortionists, stuntmen, knitters, performers, body painters, comedians and influencers, whose (often surreal) clickbaiting skills had been sourced online by the Italian artist collective Alterazioni Video. A bulldozer scooped up water from the lagoon only to discharge it, like a mechanical Sisyphus, mimicking the endless shovelling of information that humans pursue with Stakhanovite dedication. Referencing the Soviet working-class hero Alexey Stakhanov seems appropriate, as the circus was celebrating the vernissage of 'Time, Forward!', a group exhibition of 13 new commissions, curated by Omar Kholeif and Maria Kramar, that is titled after a 1932 Russian Social Realist novel by Valentin Kataev. Its plot revolves around an epic attempt to beat time, made by an engineer and his group of metallurgic workers, striving to break the record for mixing concrete. Kataev's book is so speed-obsessed, that it opens with the second chapter.

Trevor Paglen, *From Apple to Kleptomaniac (Pictures and Words)*, 2019. Courtesy: V-A-C Foundation, Venice; photograph: Delfino Sisto Legnani e Marco Cappelletti

The exhibition opens with a double foreword. Walid Raad's installation *Foreword to the Arabic Edition_I* and *Foreword to the Arabic Edition_II* (unless otherwise stated, all works 2019) comprises two sculptures of museum walls, joined at a right angle and mirroring each other. Even the flies on the wall are carefully duplicated. In the exhibition's guide, the artist explains: 'Each fish requires its own fly; each artwork its own lure; each hang, its own noose!' Raad's abstract reflection on the structure, mission and ideology of future art institutions calls into question the V-A-C foundation itself, whose new venue, designed by Renzo Piano, will open in Moscow in 2020 in the former GES-2 power station.

Walid Raad, *Foreword to the Arabic Edition _ II*, 2019. Courtesy: V-A-C Foundation, Venice; photograph: Delfino Sisto Legnani e Marco Cappelletti

There is a strong presence of Russian artists who focus on technology as

a dystopian instrument of social control. On the first floor, the five-channel sound installation *Then a Kiss Is Not a Kiss* by Kirill Savchenkov, links fragments of wires and computer components with tales of forced 'rehabilitation' for non-conforming behaviours. Valentin Fetisov delves into consumer surveillance and user-experience design with the installation *Call to Action* (2018-19), that invites viewers to confront the Pavlovian stimulus-response theory by giving themselves an electric shock. *Zero City* (2018-19) by Yekaterinburg-based group Where Dogs Run assembles a series of functioning empty elevator shafts, to demonstrate how a signal is transferred and multiplied across a system, even when it has no content.

James Richards, *To Live and Think Like Pigs*, 2019. Single-channel video. Courtesy: V-A-C Foundation, Venice; photograph: Delfino Sisto Legnani e Marco Cappelletti

Like speculative fiction, art has a tendency to turn the present into future archaeology. *With Beyond the Wave Epoch*, Haroon Mirza projects the CERN collider forward 2000 years; its colossal round structure has

become as mysterious as a prehistoric stone circle. The thousands of photographs glued to the walls of a small room that comprise Trevor Paglen's *From Apple to Kleptomaniac (Pictures and Words)* reconstruct the visual pattern of how AI reads and 'judges' images. The climate crisis surfaces in Rosa Barba's 35mm sci-fi film *Aggregate States of Matter*, as well as in Daria Irincheeva's installation *Anthropocene Markers* (2016-19), in which ceramic tiles are printed with aerial views of natural sites macroscopically modified by human activity. Scientists have set in 2035 the point of no return for reducing the Earth's temperature. Collective time ticks fast, while personal time gets digitally mined. James Richards' video *To Live and Think Like Pigs* is a frantic carousel of animated medical kits, carnival death dances and found footage. The work aptly pays homage to an eponymous French novel by Gilles Châtelet (published in 1998 and re-translated by MIT Press in 2018), that prophesized the advent of a 'neurolivestock' who would 'enjoy an existence more comfortable than serfs or millworkers, but (...) not easily escape their destiny as (...) a matter counted in atoms of distress, stripped of all powers of negotiation, renting out their mental space, brain by brain.' Dread, forward!

'[Time Forward!](#)' *runs until 20 Oct 2019 at V-A-C Zattere, Venice.*

Main image: Valentin Fetisov, Call to Action*, 2018–2019. Interactive mixed media installation. Courtesy: V-A-C Foundation, Venice; photograph: Delfino Sisto Legnani e Marco Cappelletti*