

TIMIȘOARA



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Baptiste Debombourg, *Untitled*, 2021, windshields, wood, dimensions variable. From: "Chronicles of the Future Superheroes."

"Chronicles of the Future Superheroes"

KUNSTHALLE BEGA

The starting point for the group exhibition "Chronicles of the Future Superheroes" is *Danielle: Chronicles of a Superheroine*, a 2019 novel by American inventor Ray Kurzweil that follows a young woman's efforts to use technology to solve global problems. The exhibition, which includes seventeen works by twelve artists and collectives and features accompanying performances and workshops, raises questions about how to face the pressing challenges of contemporary society, among them global warming, migration, and a changing economic order, as well as more intimate issues such as emotional transformation and interpersonal exchange.

Though the exhibition's unifying themes are society, knowledge, and progress—and, consequently, technology—it is important to stress that the show, organized by Anca Verona Mihulet, refuses to succumb to a naive fascination with technology or the technological age. Moreover, the dialogues among individual artworks in different mediums, traditional and "new," renounce the utilitarian and practical aspects of those mediums, assigning them new semantic value. In addressing how technology controls and shapes the scope of human action, "Chronicles of the Future Superheroes" keeps in mind Marshall McLuhan's idea that the message of any medium or technology always has to do with the change it brings to human affairs. As a result, the exhibition touches on, but mostly goes beyond, the postanthropocentric discourse that has overwhelmed so many exhibitions in recent years. Consider, for example, the Ninth Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art in 2016, the 2020 Taiwan Biennial, and, in 2021, the Thirty-Fourth Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts. Encountered while in earshot of Fabio Lattanzi Antinori's interactive sound sculpture *Dataflags*, 2014, Larisa Sitar's large and heavy traditionally cast concrete bas-relief *Study (II) for Aeternum*, 2021, reads as a comment on power's varied forms. The direct confrontation between the relief's materiality and the immateriality of sound and movement in Antinori's work urges the viewer to reflect on mechanisms of control. Meanwhile, Hyunjin Bek's *K-meat Restaurant's Restaurateur*, 2018–21, an installation with performative intervention, re-creates visual sensations from South Korea with locally sourced Romanian objects, such as a table, a mirror, chairs, and plants. If this work embodies the artist's private contemplation of his changing personal environment, Lawrence Lek's dystopian feature film *AIDOL*, 2019, a computer-generated tale of a fading superstar, deals with the anxieties and fixations of the public, from the rise of AI and the dictates of celebrity to the hegemony of global brands and tech giants.

The exhibition features a number of new commissions, which thoughtfully complement the existing works. One outstanding example is the interdisciplinary project *Metakitchen*, 2021, by the Bucharest-based group Stardust Architects. Consisting of a round wooden construction that displays experiments with gastronomy, textiles, carpentry, ceramics, and natural building materials and that serves as the stage for a series of workshops during the course of the exhibition, the work addresses questions of community, participation, and social exchange through the recovery of crafts. Baptiste Debombourg's installation *Untitled*, 2021, a wooden structure covered with broken windshields that the artist found in Timișoara, suggests a more psychological and reflective approach, evoking the collapse of social norms spurred by acts of violence.

"Chronicles of the Future Superheroes" shows that the impact of technology on society is neither linear nor static, but multidimensional and dynamic. Mihulet's curatorial approach very precisely conveys that the idea of medium as such has shifted, its dislocation testifying to the fact that art is often able to perceive the effects of new technologies even before they register on society at large. The exhibition, in turn, encourages viewers to stay one step ahead of the upheavals our world is already undergoing and to anticipate their social and cultural implications.