

ALIENE PLANET

A conference often resembles a ritual. Certain visible signs—a lectern, a microphone, a particular posture, gestures performed with conviction—create and reinforce hierarchies. Repeated over time, these gestures become naturalized, absorbed into our habits until they appear unquestionable. Proof of this: no one would think to challenge the authority of the person standing at the podium, even if that person were, quite literally, a clown. As soon as they step forward, silence settles. We remain bound by conditioned reflexes that require us to sit still, stay quiet, and accept the authority of scholars, experts, and even puppet clowns.

“ALIENE PLANET” is an experiment in disarming the absurdity of authoritarian frameworks used to transmit knowledge. For their exhibition at Tunnel Tunnel in Lausanne, Mélody Lu presents a video-lecture of the same name and steps into the role of an impassive, almost bureaucratic lecturer. Over the course of ten minutes, they deliver what they call “an experiment related to ghosts” to their captive audience. The material they navigate is encyclopedic: in order to touch on feelings of finitude and incommunicability, Mélody Lu takes risky leaps across historical periods, conceptual registers, and narrative modes. The markers of academic seriousness are all there—every source is carefully cited—yet their accumulation only sharpens the work’s gently subversive tone.

We drift from medieval illuminations to an episode of South Park, from the pages of Vinciane Despret or Franco “Bifo” Berardi to the pixelated landscapes of 3D virtual universe, as if navigating the hyperlinked pages of a pre-AI web. Glitches appear from time to time—inevitable, since humans still inhabit the machine. While dismantling the codes of knowledge-sharing through absurdity, Mélody Lu also attempts to re-subjectivize the conference-performance. This genre has its own art-historical genealogy, one that leaves little room for error or vulnerability¹. Here, however, the impulse is different: the work is firmly anchored in our media-saturated present, a world overflowing with TEDx talks, TikTok talking-head videos, and Twitch streams.

Fully aware of systems and their determinations, the artist steps sideways—away from the codified rituals of the art world and from the automated churn of slop content—opening a space where fallibility becomes a mode of resistance. Their approach recalls the surf-club ecosystem of the late 2000s², maintaining a conceptual affinity with Henry Jenkins’s “text poachers” or Joanna Walsh’s notion of “amateur creativity.”³

The installation “ALIENE PLANET” emerges at the intersection of several contexts. The video originates from the artist’s final thesis, completed at ÉCAL/École cantonale d’art de Lausanne in 2025, while the clown puppet belongs to a set of three sculptures—Chien, clown, oiso, reunix—created for performance-readings that, here, remain absent (2025).

At Tunnel Tunnel, the scenography places the viewer’s body inside a spatial simulation. As willing captives, we take our seats on benches reminiscent of a fairground ride. The semiotic navigation that follows has something of space tourism about it, and the attention we invest—our last scarce resource—becomes the fuel for a series of subjective journeys.

In their engagement with a present haunted by specters, Mélody Lu draws on the work of Grafton Tanner, from whom they borrow the title of their video. Across several books—including *The Hours Have Lost Their Clock: The Politics of Nostalgia* (2021)⁴ and *Foreverism: When the World Becomes an Endless Day* (2024)—Tanner describes a form of nostalgia for a recent present in which multiple temporalities intertwine to generate the new. It is as if no sincere act of creation could occur without reappropriating the residues of the past—revived, rehashed, spoken, performed, even invoked⁵—always at our own risk.

Ingrid Luquet-Gad

(translated by Céline Burnand)

¹ The canonical genre is often attributed to Jean-Yves Jouannais or Éric Duyckaerts. In recent years, artist-researcher Anne Creissels has undertaken a feminist rewriting of this history, which they also perform.

² See Paul Slocum’s *Catalog of Internet Artist Clubs* at sites.rhizome.org/surfclubs/

³ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers. Television fans and participatory culture*, 1992; Joanna Walsh, *Amateurs! How Users Built Internet Culture and Why It Matters*, 2025.

⁴ “ALIEN PLANET” is the title of one of the chapters in the book.

⁵ The video mentions the October 25, 2006 episode of South Park, “Hell on Earth,” in which we learn that **catoptromancy** refers to the use of mirrors to summon spirits.

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