

POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote

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Figure 1: POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote I and II(left and right).

ABSTRACT

POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote I and II are two AI-generated video works accompanied by two sound pieces. The StyleGAN 2-created visuals were composed of location-based datasets, more precisely, from Flickr photos of Lanzarote – a tourists’ Mecca of Canary Islands. One video intends to represent a touristic, and the other, a local view of the place. The project draws attention to the influence of the tourist gaze on the landscape and identity formation of the Lanzarote island in Spain. Heavily dominated by the imaginative geographies that have been constantly reproduced by

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C&C '22, June 20–23, 2022, Venice, Italy

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ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-9327-0/22/06.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3527927.3531191>

the visitors, create a conflict between desired touristic rituals, which one is preprogrammed to reproduce when arrived at the destination, and the reality. Better said in the words of an expert on tourist photography Jonas Larsen “[...] circulating images overpower reality: ‘reality’ becomes touristic, an item for visual consumption.” [3]

CCS CONCEPTS

• Applied computing → Media arts; • Computing methodologies → Artificial intelligence.

KEYWORDS

AI art, artificial intelligence, critical tourism, StyleGAN, Generative Adversarial Networks, Latent space

ACM Reference Format:

Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet Sola . 2022. POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote. In *Creativity and Cognition (C&C '22), June 20–23, 2022, Venice, Italy*. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 3 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3527927.3531191>

1 ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

According to a sociologist John Urry, term tourist gaze explains imaginative geographies of tourist landscapes, where images overpower the nature of seeing. [5, 6] In a similar vein Theopisti Stylianou-Lamber asks in her article: are tourist with cameras reproducing or producing? [4] To cite Larsen: “[...] people travel in order to see and photograph what they have already consumed in image form: thus, mobile reproductions are far more important than the sight itself that, in turn, is reduced to nothing but (another) picture.” [3, p 249]

As Jonas Larsen states: “tourism and photography are modern twins.” [3] Adding AI as another modernity into the equation, it synthesizes from seen unseen. In AI art, the dataset has a crucial value: it dictates the aesthetics and the concept. So when it comes to this project’s dataset creation process, we downloaded all circulating reality of imaginative geographies of Lanzarote from Flickr (where license allowed), dividing them into two: landscapes and tourism. Then, after carefully preparing each pool of images, we applied the AI algorithm StyleGan2, which generated the new images (Figure 1,2,3). Hence, the art project consists of two videos representing a journey of critical tourism through the latent space of AI-generated images using StyleGan2. Later the images are composed into latent interpolations that take a form of smoothly progressive videos. The two videos are random walks in the latent space of the Stylegan2 trained models, creating a cinematic synthetic space. The audiovisual piece shows an animated image through the melted liquid trip of learning acquired from the dataset composed of static images. The video flows from point to point, generating new views and meaning spaces through the latent space’s movement. The audio was created after the video was generated in response to the visual material to complete the art piece.

The first video work, POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote I, is accompanied by a sound work by Adrian Rodd. Adrian is a local sound artist from Lanzarote, whose idea was to add a social-critical direction to the work. The second video work, POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote II, is accompanied by a sound work by Taavi Varm (MIISUTRON). Taavi intended to introduce mystery and soundscapes to the synthetic imagescapes of the project.

The new deep learning artificial intelligence age transforms the work of art and creates a new art-making process. In his book “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin anticipated the unprecedented impact of technological advances on the work of art. Benjamin argues that technology has fundamentally altered the way art is experienced. [2] The new artificial intelligence is the latest technology that hugely impacts cultural production and provides creative minds with novel tools.

2 ABOUT THE ARTWORK

POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote I, II (2020)

- two AI-generated video works (I) 00:18:37, (II) 00:18:40

More about artwork:

- <http://var-mar.info/postcard-landscapes-from-lanzarote/>

Preview:



Figure 2: POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote II, 2020, Varvara & Mar, still from AI-generated video, Varvara & Mar.



Figure 3: POSTcard Landscapes from Lanzarote II, 2020, Varvara & Mar, still from AI-generated video, Varvara & Mar.

- Landscapes from Lanzarote I (sound by Adrian Rodd) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mv17NTUtyk&feature=youtu.be>

- Landscapes from Lanzarote II (sound by MIISUTRON)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXGNaBpInuI&feature=youtu.be>

Visual portfolio:

- <http://var-mar.info/>

3 ARTISTS STATEMENT

Technology is the core element of our art practice: conceptually and as a tool. However, our interest goes beyond checking out new cool technology; we aim to reflect critically and conceptually on where this technological development leads us. In our artistic practice, we ask the following question: how do our lives, perception, way of communication, being together, and environment around us change along with the development of technology? When it comes to artificial intelligence, it seems that AI is the ultimate solution and the most significant concern nowadays. Today, when it is spoken about the third wave of AI and quantum computing, the dream is very close to coming true - reaching the human level of intelligence. However, what kind of consequences could bring these technological achievements? Our research interest here is to provoke discussion and provide case studies for creative and meaningful AI technology use. The aim is to understand and relate artistically to the cultural phenomenon behind the vast amount of data that society with technological applications produces daily. Quoting Jean Baudrillard, “We live in a world where there is more and more information and less and less meaning.” [1] Thus, it is vital to make meaning and contextualize all the data wilderness that surrounds us, also from an artist’s perspective. How can the cultural sector provoke discussion about AI and our dependencies on high tech? How to relate to new photography, image, literature, and sound? All these new high-tech concepts and phenomena need to be engaged with, not only theoretically, but also through practice, which gives a much richer and profound understanding of the processes behind.

4 ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Varvara & Mar is an artist duo formed by Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet in 2009. Artists have exhibited their art pieces in several international shows, such as at MAD in New York, FACT in Liverpool, Santa Monica in Barcelona, Barbican and V&A Museum in London, Ars Electronica museum Linz, ZKM in Karlsruhe, etc. Varvara (born in Tartu, Estonia) holds the position of Assistant Professor in Computational Media and Arts at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (GZ). She has a Ph.D. in art from the Estonian Academy of Arts, and a master’s degree in digital media from ISNM in Germany and a bachelor’s degree in IT from Estonian IT College. Mar (born in Barcelona) has two degrees: in art and design from ESDI in Barcelona and computer game development from University Central Lancashire in the UK. He has a master’s degree from Interface Cultures at the University of Art and Design Linz. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate and CUDAN Open Lab research fellow at Tallinn University, focusing on AI and interactive art.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The artwork was commissioned by Veintinueve Trece festival in Lanzarote. MSC is supported as a CUDAN research fellow and ERA Chair for Cultural Data Analytics, funded through the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Grant No.810961).

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