



## LIKE RIDING A BIKE. LIKE PARKING A CAR.

### PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

## MARINA DE HAAS

BY HANNA SCHRAFFENBERGER

*"Hi Marina. Nice to meet you!  
I have heard a lot about you."*

I usually avoid this kind of phrases. Judging from my experience, telling people that you have heard a lot about them makes them feel uncomfortable. But this time I say it. After all, it's no secret that Marina and the AR Lab in The Hague share a history which dates back much longer than her current residency at the AR Lab. At the lab, she is known as one of the first students who overcame the initial resistance of the fine arts program and started working with AR. With

support of the lab, she has realized the AR artworks *Out of the blue* and *Drops of white* in the course of her study. In 2008 she graduated with an AR installation that shows her 3d animated portfolio. Then, having worked with AR for three years, she decided to take a break from technology and returned to photography, drawing and painting. Now, after yet another three years, she is back in the mixed reality world. Convinced by her concepts for future works, the AR Lab has invited her as an Artist in Residence. That is what I have heard about her, and made me want to meet her for an artist-portrait. Knowing quite



a lot about her past, I am interested in what she is currently working on, in the context of her residency. When she starts talking, it becomes clear that she has never really stopped thinking about AR. There's a handwritten notebook full of concepts and sketches for future works. Right now, she is working on animations of two animals. Once she is done animating, she'll use AR technology to place the animals – an insect and a dove – in the hands of the audience.

***“I usually start out with my own photographs and a certain space I want to augment.”***

*“They will hold a little funeral monument in the shape of a tile in their hands. Using AR technol-*

*ogy, the audience will then see a dying dove or dying crane fly with a missing foot.”*

Marina tells me her current piece is about impermanence and mortality, but also about the fact that death can be the beginning of something new. Likewise, the piece is not only about death but also intended as an introduction and beginning for a forthcoming work. The AR Lab makes this beginning possible through financial support but also provides technical assistance and serves as a place for mutual inspiration and exchange. Despite her long break from the digital arts, the young artist feels confident about working with AR again:

*“It's a bit like biking, once you've learned it, you never unlearn it. It's the same with me and AR, of course I had to practice a bit, but I still have the feel for it. I think working with AR is just a part of me.”*

After having paused for three years, Marina is positively surprised about how AR technology has emerged in the meantime:

*“AR is out there, it's alive, it's growing and finally, it can be markerless. I don't like the use of markers. They are not part of my art and people see them, when they don't wear AR glasses. I am also glad that so many people know AR from their mobile phones or at least have heard about it before. Essentially, I don't want the audience to wonder about the technology, I want them to look at the pictures and animations I create. The more people are used to the technology the more they will focus on the content. I am really happy and excited how AR has evolved in the last years!”*

I ask, how working with brush and paint differs from working with AR, but there seems to be surprisingly little difference.

*“The main difference is that with AR I am working with a pen-tablet, a computer and a screen. I control the software, but if I work with a brush I have the same kind of control over it. In the past, I used to think that there was a difference, but now I think of the computer as just another medium to work with. There is no real difference between working with a brush and working with a computer. My love for technology is similar to my love for paint.”*

Marina discovered her love for technology at a young age:

*“When I was a child I found a book with code and so I programmed some games. That was fun, I just understood it. It's the same with creating AR works now. My way of thinking perfectly matches with how AR works. It feels completely natural to me.”*

Nevertheless, working with technology also has its downside:

*“The most annoying thing about working with AR is that you are always facing technical limitations and there is so much that can go wrong. No matter how well you do it, there is always the risk that something won't work. I hope for technology to get more stable in the future.”*

When realizing her artistic augmentations, Marina sticks to an established workflow:

*“I usually start out with my own photographs and a certain space I want to augment. Preferably I measure the dimensions of the space, and then I work with that*



room in my head. I have it in my inner vision and I think in pictures. There is a photo register in my head which I can access. It's a bit like parking a car. I can park a car in a very small space extremely well. I can feel the car around me and I can feel the space I want to put it in. It's the same with the art I create. Once I have clear idea of the artwork I want to create, I use Cinema4D software to make 3d models. Then I use BuildAR to place my 3d models in the real space. If everything goes well, things happen that you could not have imagined."

A result of this process is, for example, the AR installation *Out of the blue* which was shown at Today's Art festival in The Hague in 2007:

*"The idea behind 'Out of the blue' came from a photograph I took in an elevator. I took the picture so that the lights in the elevator looked like white ellipses on a black background. I took this basic elliptical shape as a basis for working in a very big space. I was very curious if I could use such a simple shape and still convince the audience that it really existed in the space. And it worked – people tried to touch it with their hands and were very surprised when that wasn't possible."*

The fact that people believe in the existence of her virtual objects is also important for Marina's personal understanding of AR:

*"For me, Augmented Reality means using digital images to create something which is not real. However, by giving meaning to it, it becomes real and people realize that it might as well exist."*

I wonder whether there is a specific place or space she'd like to augment in the future and Marina has quite some places in mind. They have one thing in common: they are all known museums that show modern art.

*"I would love to create works for the big museums such as the TATE Modern or MoMa. In the Netherlands, I'd love to augment spaces at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam or Boijmans museum in Rotterdam. That's my world. Going to a museum means a lot to me. Of course, one can place AR artworks everywhere, also in public spaces. But it is important to me that people who experience my work have actively chosen to go somewhere to see art. I don't want them to just see it by accident at a bus stop or in a park."*

Rather than placing her virtual models in a specific physical space, her current work follows a different approach. This time, Marina will place the animated dying animals in the hands of the audiences. The artist has some ideas about how to design this physical contact with the digital animals.

*"In order for my piece to work, the viewer needs to feel like he is holding something in his hand. Ideally, he will feel the weight of*



*the animal. The funeral monuments will therefore have a certain weight."*

It is still open where and when we will be able to experience the piece:

*"My residency lasts 10 weeks. But of course that's not enough time to finish. In the past, a piece was finished when the time to work on it was up. Now, a piece is finished when it feels complete. It's something I decide myself, I want to have control over it. I don't want any more restrictions. I avoid deadlines."*

Coming from a fine arts background, Marina has a tip for art students who want to follow in her footsteps and are curious about working with AR:

*"I know it can be difficult to combine technology with art, but it is worth the effort. Open yourself up to for art in all its possibilities, including AR. AR is a chance to take a step in a direction of which you have no idea where you'll find yourself. You have to be open for it and look beyond the technology. AR is special – I couldn't live without it anymore..."* ■