**Federico Díaz: Eccentric Gravity**

9 September – 31 October 2015

Prague Castle – Queen Anne's Summer Palace

Mariánské hradby 52/1
Prague 1 – Hradčany

**Press Release**

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**Federico Díaz – New Materiality. Gravitation and Symmetry: Traditions of Antiquity and the Renaissance at the Mathematics House in the Prague Castle’s Royal Gardens.**

The forthcoming exhibition of Czech-Argentinian visual artist Federico Díaz, created especially for display in the Royal Summer Palace of the Prague Castle (the Belvedere) combines the most radical gestures of his artistic career to date as a conqueror of new territories and explorer of new connections between art and its social-scientific context (the *Golden Tear LacrimAu* made for Shanghai, or *Outside Itself* for the Venice Biennale) with his current work (*You Welded the Ornament of the Times*, made for Beijing’s CAFA Museum, and *Consistency*, made for Faena, Buenos Aires). For the first time, the exhibition at the Prague Castle will present the comprehensive project *Eccentric Gravity*, a work charting the notion of place as an intersection of history, spanning the festive ceremonies held at the Belvedere during the reign of Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I, the era when the astronomer Tycho de Brahe used the Belvedere as his observatory and “mathematics house”, and up to Federico Díaz’s own exploration of the “new materiality” on which contemporary society is built, in an effort to define a universal language of communication, liberated from civilizational contexts.

Federico Díaz is often dubbed a “visual activist of Czech-Argentinian origin.” Based in Prague, his place within the contemporary art scene is representative in regard to the forms of movement and exchange inherent to our globalized world. *Eccentric Gravity* at the Royal Summer Palace is the first exhibition of contemporary art to be held in this venue for a considerable time. By opening here, it reawakens the spaces of this historical building, which in the 1990s under President Václav Havel hosted exhibitions by eminent artists such as James Turrell, Joseph Kosuth, Jannis Kounellis and Christian Boltanski. Having once played an important role in the evolution of the Czech contemporary art scene, the Belvedere now reclaims this mission. Federico Díaz’s project is meant to open a new era of exhibitions of contemporary art at the venue. Time, history and art come together in one place through the work of an artist reflecting reality in order to offer analysis of human existence and its position in the virtual world. The exhibition, conceived as *prospective*, reveals the dynamic and complexity of the creative process, revisiting as it does the beginning of Díaz’s own career while simultaneously presenting his vision of the future. Thus the Prague Royal Summer Palace once again assumes the role of a place with a major social mission and the ability to communicate artistic perspectives on contemporary reality.

Jérôme Sans, curator

**Federico Díaz** (\*1971) is a visual activist of Czech-Argentinian origin based in Prague. Since the 1990s, he has used new media in order to reveal the immaterial aspects of the everyday reality of our natural habitat, which are often imperceptible to the human senses. Characteristic of Díaz’s work is the use of the language of algorithmically generated art and systems art, employing increasingly intense channels of direct communication with the viewer and an ability to follow a fundamental creative premise which postulates that art is made without the touch of the human hand. Díaz uses media and technology as a socio-political catalyst for social change.

In recent years, Díaz has elaborated the concept of the “Mass Ornament” as articulated by the German philosopher Siegfried Kracauer in the late 1920s. Díaz analyzes the differences in the movements of people of differing locations, backgrounds and social status, using this concept to propose that the social behaviour and mentality of people are derived from the political context of their origin. Díaz began exploring this idea in his installations *Outside Itself* (2011) and *You Welded an Ornament of the Time* (2014). Another line of thought which is strongly present in his current work is the contemplation of materiality as something that connects human beings to their habitat, and consideration of the possibilities of the transformation of materiality into a new, universal language.

Federico Díaz’s works have been exhibited at the Mori Art Museum Tokyo, the Institute of Contemporary Arts London, the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe (ZKM), Ars Electronica in Linz, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Modern Art MoMA PS1, Art Basel Miami, the Biennial in Florence, the 54th Venice Biennale, and at the CAFA Museum, Beijing. In 2010 Federico Díaz represented the Czech art scene at the World EXPO in Shanghai. In 2007 he was awarded the Lorenzo il Magnifico International Award (Premio Internazionale “Lorenzo il Magnifico“) for digital media at the Florence Biennale

**Jérôme Sans** is a curator, art critic, manager and director of internationally renowned institutions. He has achieved an international reputation for his seeking out and opening of new approaches to contemporary art and the debate around it. In the years 1999 – 2006 he collaborated with Nicolas Bourriaud, the co-founder and one of the directors of the illustrious Palais de Tokyo in Paris, where he presented more than eighty solo exhibitions (Tobias Rehberger, Chen Zhen, Wolfgang Tillmans, Kendell Geers, Candice Breitz, Wang Du, Bruno Peinado, Katharina Grosse and others), a number of group exhibitions and countless other events, concerts and performances. During this period he was also active as a curator at the Institute of Visual Arts in Milwaukee, organizing solo exhibitions of a new generation of artists (Maurizio Cattelan, Pierre Huyghe, Erwin Wurm, Kendell Geers, Philippe Parreno, Barthélémy Toguo, Steve McQueen, Kimsooja, Joachim Koester, Annelies Štrba, Lars Nilsson and others) as their American debut shows. He then relocated to the United Kingdom to become program director of the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead. Between 2008 and 2012, he was director of the pioneering Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing. He also worked as creative director and editor-in-chief of the French magazine on culture L’Officiel Art. As a curator, Jérôme Sans has prepared a large number of major exhibitions around the world, including the Taipei Biennial (2000), the Lyon Biennial (2005), and the White Nights (Nuit Blanche) in Paris (2006).

At present, he is the artistic director of one of Europe’s most important projects for urban development – the Rives de Saône - River Movie in Lyon; he has also been appointed one of the artistic directors of the Grand Paris Express network. He is also the co-founder of Perfect Crossovers Ltd., a consultancy company for cultural projects between China and the rest of the world, based in Beijing. As a writer, he has contributed to many publications on art as well as publishing a number of books, including Au Sujet de / / About Daniel Buren (Flammarion, 1998); Araki (Taschen, 2001); China Talks (Timezone 8, 2009) and China: The New Generation (Skira, 2014). The latter two are collections of interviews with Chinese artists – the most renowned and the upcoming generation respectively. He has also published several pocket-format books of interviews: Bright City: Ma Yansong (2012), Smoke Shadows: Jannis Kounellis (2012), and Kendell Geers: Hand Grenades from My Heart (2012), all brought out by Blue Kingfisher.

**Jen Kratochvil** (\*1986) is an independent curator and critic, presently active at the National Gallery in Prague. Together with the National Gallery’s chief curator Adam Budak and in collaboration with Liam Gillick and Josef Dabernig, he established the new Moving Images Department, a long-term project presenting an international spectrum of film, video and installation reflecting the moving image in the form of exhibitions and accompanying programs. His activities in terms of the Czech art scene include a long-term collaboration with Federico Díaz as well as Hynek Alt and Alexandra Vajd. As an art critic he contributes to periodicals such as Art&Antique and Artalk.

**Eccentric Gravity**

The history of the Royal Summer Palace of the Prague Castle – the Belvedere – dates to the 16th century, the epoch of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I of Habsburg, King of Bohemia, Hungary and Croatia, who had the palace built as a venue for the celebration of his coronation and his vision of a new Europe, unified in peace during his reign. Later the building was used by the astronomer Tycho de Brahe as an observatory and so-called Mathematics House. In the 19th century, at a time of the newly-awakened national revival of the Czech Lands, the Belvedere was dedicated to the ideals of Pan-Slavism and Czech national identity. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, it became an exhibition space with strong connections to the international art scene.

Federica Díaz’s project *Eccentric Gravity* uses the architectural layout of this exceptional structure – the very first Renaissance building constructed north of the Alps – as the basis for contemplation of its wealth of history as well as the realization of his own vision of the future of contemporary society. The ordered, symmetrical structure of the building collides with the seeming randomness of the unifying principle – the catenary curve, a system of homogeneous, perfectly firm and elastic fibre hung in the gravitational field. Antonio Gaudí used the catenary curve for the construction of inverse architectural models of arches. Today, when computer design enables us to imagine and project structures of infinite complexity, Díaz revisits the catenary curve as a tool that remains independent from complicated technology, being derived from pure and basic laws of nature. Using the catenary curve and artificial stone, a synthetic geopolymer, Díaz projects a city of the future.

Not as any concrete city or place, but rather as a template for reflecting upon humanity’s dependence on the laws of nature, of our core essence, which is purely material.

Man, animal, sculpture, architecture or rock formation: all are essentially made up of the same minerals, albeit differently structured, but all are subject to the same gravitational forces. New forms of material communication are generated between the artificial and natural sunlight orchestrated by Díaz, and the creative space of the imaginary architect of our reality. Once again, the Mathematical House becomes a place of study, a research laboratory, a gallery, a space for the dissemination
of ideas – this time not nationalist ideas as in the case of the 19th century Czech national revival, nor multinational ideas as conceived of by Ferdinand I, but rather absolutely universal ideas, independent of any contemporary social context, accentuating the unifying elements of human existence.