

HIGH
REALITY Å+
Niko Princen



One of the most provocative claims in cognitive scientist Donald Hoffman's *The Case Against Reality* (2019) is that our senses do not reveal an objective reality. "The problem is not that our perceptions are wrong about this or that detail. It's that the very language of objects in space and time is simply the wrong language to describe objective reality." Zoom out from the myopia of scrutinizing what's directly in front of your primate face. Many birds, for example, navigate using the Earth's magnetic field, sensing vast magnetic arcs from the poles and finding their way across the sky as if following a massive grid. Catfish have chemoreceptive systems with more than fifteen times the number of taste buds humans have, distributed over their bodies so they can "taste" their environment. Reality — as distinct from objective reality, or the "there" when no one is there — is an interface to the world afforded by the sensorium.

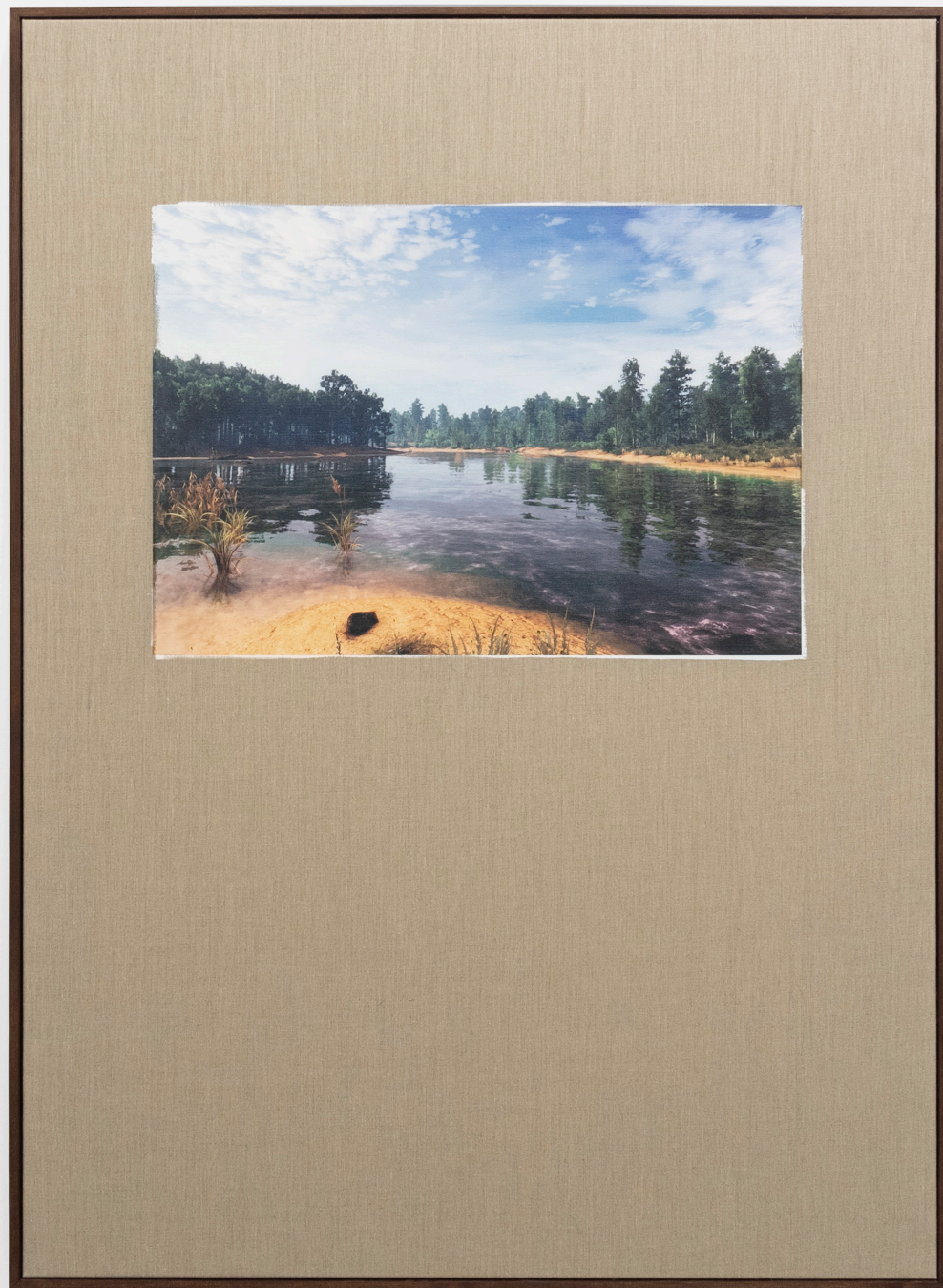
Niko Princen's *High Reality*, his first solo exhibition at Åplus, is a close study of the sensible world that has emerged with open world role-playing video games. Developed for this exhibition, Princen's works place game worlds within a Western art-historical continuum, tracing representational techniques from Dutch landscape painting to photography. Since the summer of 2025 Princen has spent hundreds of hours playing a number of games with vast landscapes: *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (2018), *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (2018), *Kingdom Come: Deliverance II* (2025), *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018), *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2: Heart of Chornobyl* (2024), and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015). Embodying various avatars, Princen wanders their photo-realistic spaces, interacting with preprogrammed characters along the way, wandering their digital expanses. These games produce a striking verisimilitude: distant landscapes are often softened or blurred by algorithmic atmosphere, while ambient sounds—leaves rustling, waves on the shore, birdsong, and footfalls—transport the player beyond the screen.

The works in *High Reality* are screenshots—photographs—of landscapes Princen encountered in his journeys. Printed on the top half of vertical linen canvases, they read like views through a window or a door one might step through. Like real-world photographs, Princen's images are unique shots taken from singular encounters within a game's temporal parameters and shaped by the agency of his avatar. A number of Princen's photos feature windmills. Evoking the landscapes of The Hague School, the game world mills suggest an evolution in definition of the productive landscape. In the Netherlands, windmills were used primarily for land management—pumping water to drain land, keep it dry, and enable settlement. With industrialization, mills were also used to process materials: sawmills built ships, grain mills produced food and trade goods, oil mills pressed seeds, and paper mills supported one of the Netherlands' most lucrative Golden Age industries. Dutch mills thus produced both the physical land and the means to live from it. In contrast, the mills in *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2*, *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, and *The Witcher 3* perform none of these tasks. They stand almost in defiance of conventional definitions of production and instead produce a sense of familiarity with an archetypal past—a feeling that history has taken place. They're monuments to the amorphous opening between the physical and digital worlds we've constructed for ourselves to inhabit.

Princen's work has often explored this space. *Walking Around Building* (2011) is a walk taken on Google street view; *Front Window* (2012) is a collection of screen grabs of his friend's rooms as seen through Skype; *Portraits* (2014-ongoing) are a series of crimson red photos taken by pressing his finger on the camera lens of a smart phone camera of friends and strangers; *My Space* (2017-2020) are photorealistic computer rendered images of his mother's and father's homes in Amsterdam, emptied out after their passing. For Princen, reality as perceived is always an interface to deeper truths. The world is physical and digital and both are interfaces to questions about not how we see, but why. Between 2012 and 2015, Princen exhibited an installation where a lit candle was broadcast live over a video chat application. A sub-woofer was placed next to the candle so when someone watching the broadcast blew into their microphones, the pressure from the speakers would blow out the candle. In 2015, visitors in Dallas blew out a candle in Amsterdam. It's a demonstration of the near frictionless path taken by cause and effect as it moves between physical and digital spaces. The works in *High Reality* furthers this claim, suggesting the way we move around the world is not only a series a decisions—a game—but scripted by narratives, myths, histories, and traditions, some only half remembered, that make up the interface, our senses, to the world.

Carson Chan





Result May Vary #9 (HR/W3), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 168 x 120 cm
 66 1/8 x 47 1/4 in

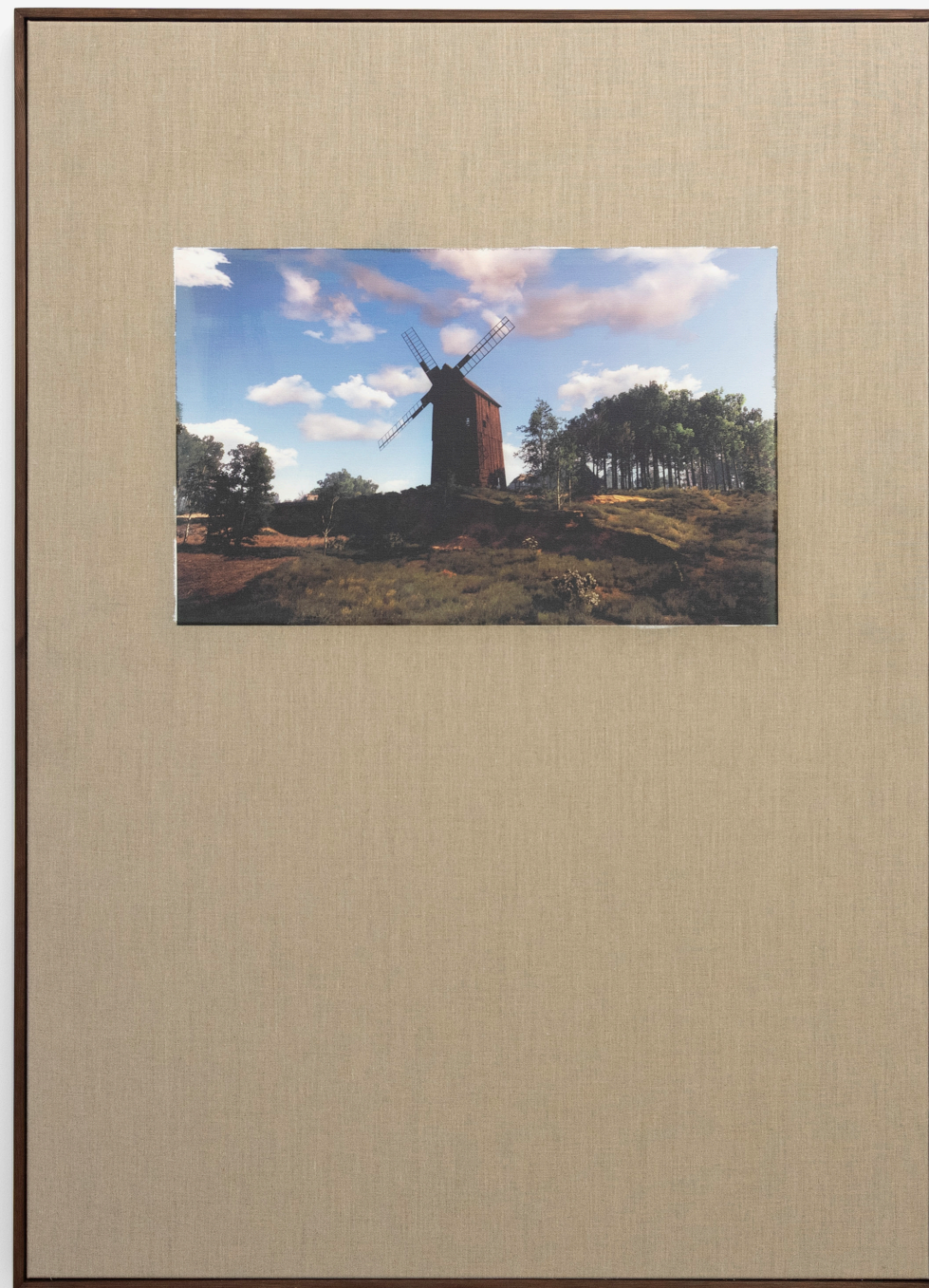


Result May Vary #11 (HR/KCD), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 168 x 120 cm
 66 1/8 x 47 1/4 in

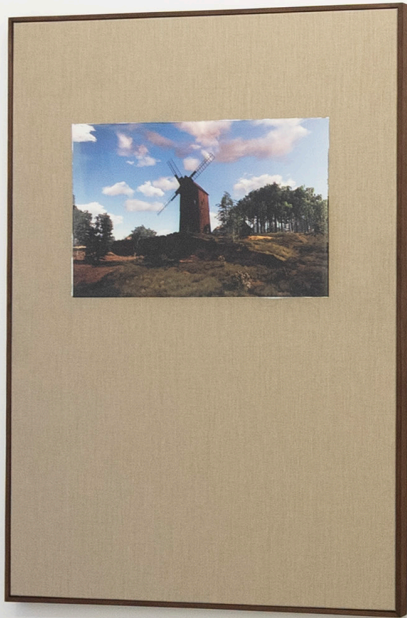




Result May Vary #6 (HR/RDR2), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 168 x 120 cm
 66 1/8 x 47 1/4 in



Result May Vary #10 (HR/W3), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 168 x 120 cm
 66 1/8 x 47 1/4 in





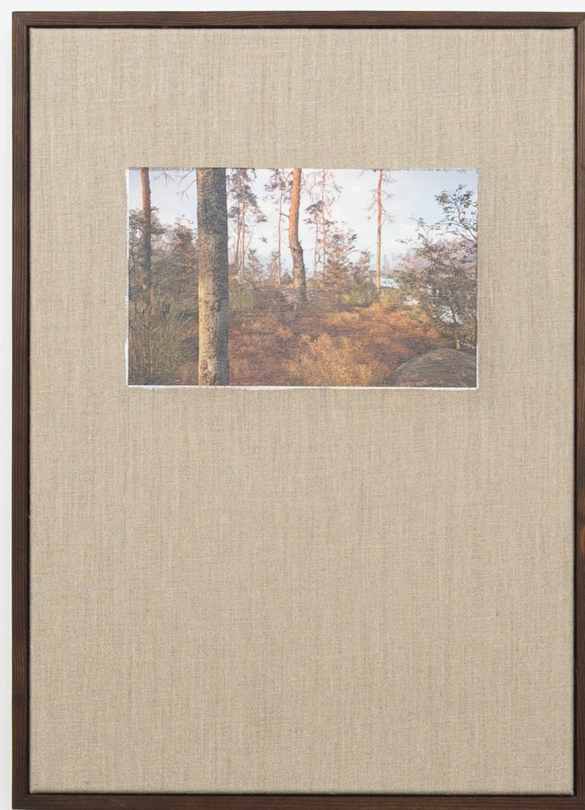
Result May Vary #8 (HR/KCD2), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 168 x 120 cm
 66 1/8 x 47 1/4 in



Result May Vary #2 (HR/ACO), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 168 x 120 cm
 66 1/8 x 47 1/4 in









Result May Vary #7 (HR/KCD2), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 70 x 50 cm
 27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in



Result May Vary #3 (HR/ST2), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 70 x 50 cm
 27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in



Result May Vary #4 (HR/ST2), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 70 x 50 cm
 27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in



Result May Vary #5 (HR/RDR2), 2025
 UV-print & primer on canvas
 70 x 50 cm
 27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in



Result May Vary #1 (HR/ACO), 2025
UV-print & primer on canvas
70 x 50 cm
27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in

Niko Princen

*1979, Netherlands
lives and works in Berlin

studied art at Hogeschool van de Kunsten Utrecht and at the The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Exhibitions (solo)

2022
Portraits, U124, Berlin

2015
Embedness, The Composing Rooms, online
A Responsive Candle Light Event, Flat, Amsterdam

2012
IN THE EVENT OF FIRE, Headquarters, Zürich

Exhibitions (selected)

2022
Jahresgaben BKV curated by Fatima Hellberg and Gregor Quack, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn
/home curated by Sakrowski, panke.gallery, Berlin

2020
stickt.t.me curated by Zentrum für Netzkunst, panke.gallery, Berlin
2020 DO NOT LINK curated by Dirk Paesmans and Bob Bicknell-Knight, www.upstream.gallery

2019
der zyklus: formenverwandler curated by Sam Hart and Harm van den Dorpel, Full Node, Berlin

2017
Evolutionary Urge 24H (digital / virtual) curated by Ursula Ströbele and Andreas Greiner, Navel, Los Angeles
Exstrange curated by Gaia Tedone, online

2015
Aurora, Dallas, Texas, USA
On YouTube, Kunsthaus Langenthal, Switzerland
Offline Art: Are you still there?, part of ‚Hamster – Hipster – Handy.‘ at Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt
11th Athens Digital Arts Festival, Athens
Home Work, Open Forum, Berlin

2014
CURRENTS, CURTAINS, CODE, Triennale d’art du Valais, Fully, Switzerland
Art Hack Day: Afterglow, Transmediale, Berlin

2013
Driving Fast Nowhere curated by Martin Kohout, Polansky Gallery, Prague
Come All Ye Faithful, Florian Christopher, Zürich
Edge Effect, online
Art Hack Day Berlin ‚Going Dark‘, LEAP, Berlin
local.#non.access concept by Florian Kuhlmann, km temporaer, Berlin
NOTES ON FORM, 032c WORKSHOP, Berlin
Another Fluxconcert in Amsterdam (Googleism) curated by Constant Dullaart and Koen Nutters, NASA, Amsterdam
DVD Dead Drop ‚BEST OF‘ compiled by Ole Fach & Kim Asendorf, Museum of the Moving Image, New York
201111111111s, project by Mirak Jamal and Nine Yamamoto-Masson, TWS, Tokyo

2012
Screenshot: Berlin curated by Anna Mikkola and Mike Ruiz, Import Projects, Berlin
reflecting on networks curated by Elisa R. Linn and Lennart Wolff, km temporaer, Berlin
201111111111s, project by Mirak Jamal and Nine Yamamoto-Masson, LEAP, Berlin
Hier beginnt die Welt curated by Raffael Dörig, Kunsthaus Langenthal, Switzerland
Not by default - Post Internet Art aus Berlin, [DAM], Berlin
DVD Dead Drop ‚HOT‘ compiled by Aram Bartholl, Museum of the Moving Image, New York
Nail Care project by Yves Scherer, curated by Claudia Rech, Times Bar, Berlin
A Material World curated by Carson Chan, PSM Gallery, Berlin

2011
Prosume This, BEKO, Berlin
Non-Stop Infinity, Future Gallery, Berlin & Peer 2 Space, München
SPEED SHOW: Your Browser is my Kingdom by Today and Tomorrow, or@nien net, Berlin
Metrospective 1.0, PROGRAM, Berlin

2010
STATE
DIY Augemented Reality exhibition, Moma, New York

2006
Project Definition, Club 11, Amsterdam

Texts & Interviews

Digitale Kunst/Projekt des Monats - Vlinder by Raffael Dörig, Kunstbulletin (DE). 8-7-2015
La Valais à l'heure triennale by Samuel Schellenberg, Le Courier (FR). 21-06-2014
I Can't make it, Art Papers. March/April 2014
Post Tumblr Aesthetic by Valentina Fois, 1883 Magazin. 2014
Interview at Internet Yami-Ichi Berlin by Golem.de. 2014
Charting The Infinite Waters Of The Internet, One Family Photo At A Time by Nadja Sayej, The Creators Project. 24-2-2014
Bringing physicality to the internet of things by Susanna Davies-Crook, sleek magazine. 8-8-2013
Ist dein Gesicht vor ihm sicher? Vergängliche Netzkunst by Martin Dunkelman, Arte Creative (EN + DE). 7-8-2013
Pagine zittite by Roberto Marone, Doppiozero (IT). 6-2-2011

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