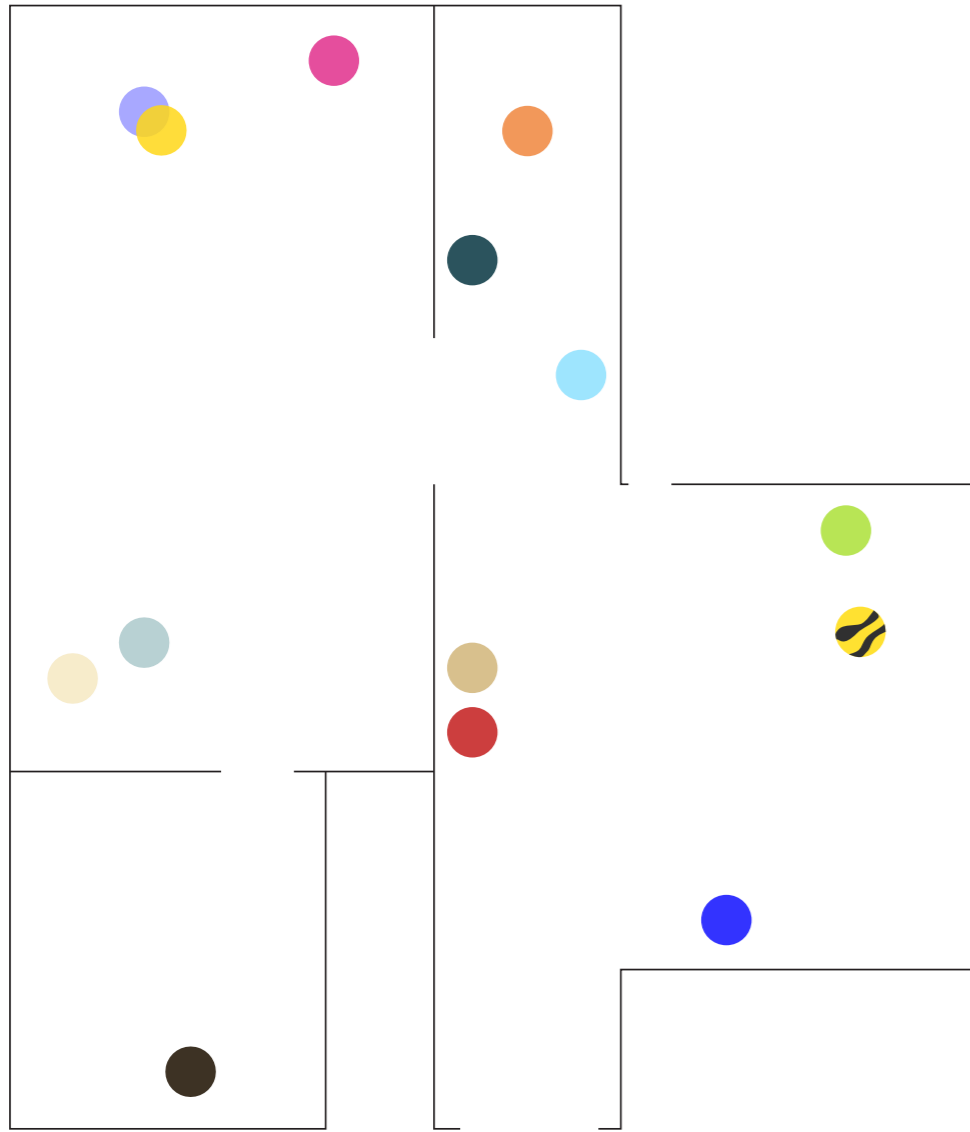






Curator: Alberta Vengrytė/Exhibition architect: Ieva Cicėnaitė/Graphic design: Gasparas Zondovas





 Tilted Fever (diptych)(oil paint on canvas)
130x60, 2021


 Dimorphos (oil paint on canvas)
150x150, 2022


 untitled (oil paint on canvas)
30x24, 2023


 Vertebra B (styrofoam, plaster, acrylic paint)
50x50x50, 2023


 Green Interlude (oil paint on canvas)
150x150, 2021


 Shrapnel #9ee5fe (oil paint on canvas)
135x50x12, 2023


 Shrapnel #2b535d (oil paint on canvas)
100x66x7, 2023


 Shrapnel #a47442 (oil paint on canvas)
176x50x7, 2023


 Bone Ray (oil paint on canvas)
180x160, 2023

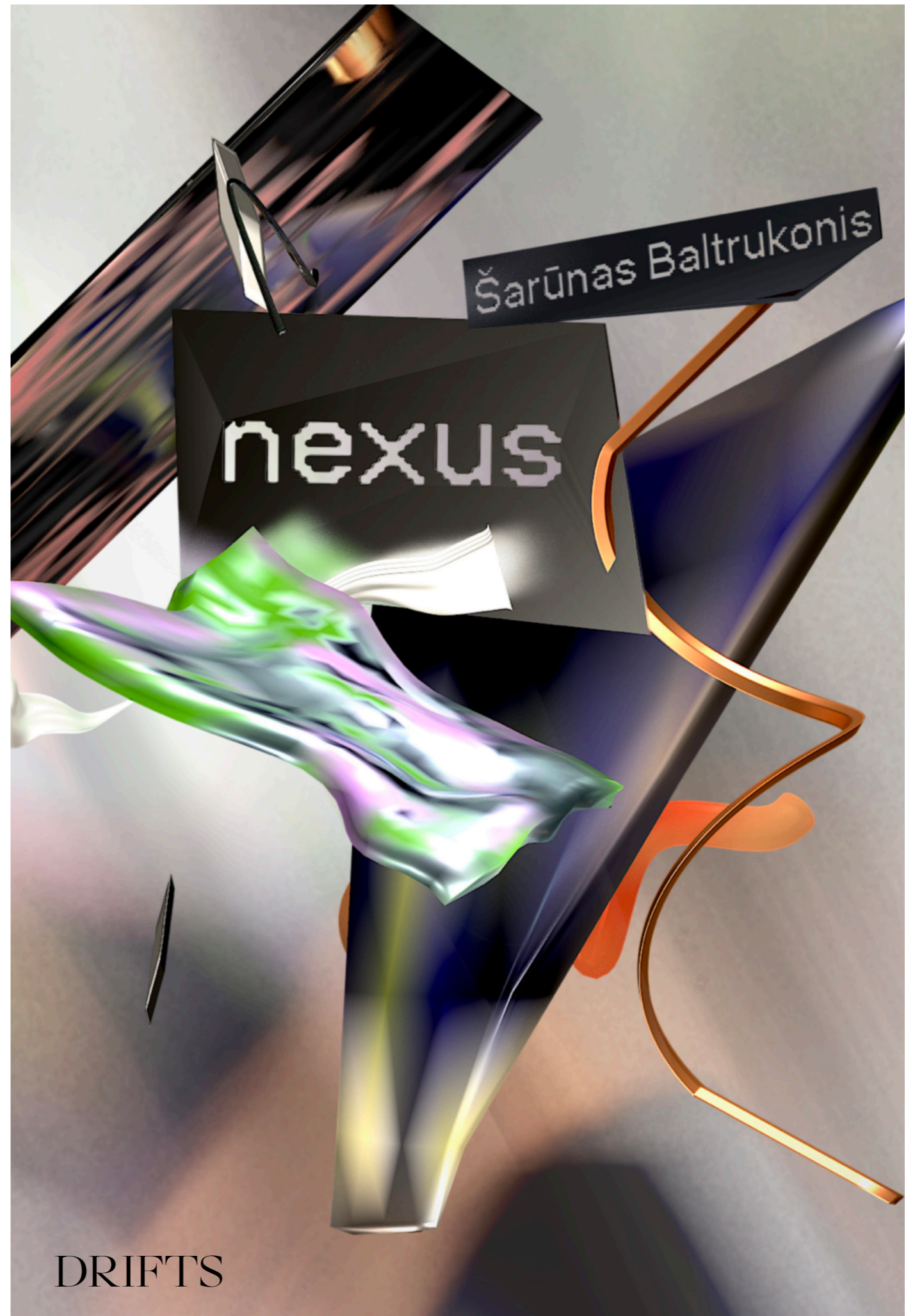
 Vertebra IX (oil paint on canvas)
150x150, 2023

 Vertebra VIII (oil paint on canvas)
150x150, 2023

 Sarcophagus (oil paint on canvas)
150x150, 2023

 White Sarcophagus (oil paint, MDF)
122x100x11, 2023

 Amulet (oil paint on canvas)
180x160, 2023



NEXUS

Thursday, September 7, 6:30 PM the first personal exhibition of the young generation painter Šarūnas Baltrukonis “Nexus” opens at the “Drifts” gallery (T. Vrublevskio st. 6–2, Vilnius). It presents the artists’ paintings and objects created in recent years, which creatively reflect our changed relationship with technology and the technological. The change in this relationship is also the problem of the experience of the real as an objective visual reality, which forms the dialectic of reality–virtuality spread on both sides of the screen. The title of the exhibition was inspired by the questions of interconnectedness and overlapping of different spaces of social cognition (reality, digitality, virtuality) in contemporary artistic creation. “Nexus” is a reference to causal–aesthetic connections between ideas and bodies functioning in those different spaces. In the modernist tradition, the body served to contain and limit the self, the integrity of which was ensured by the continuity of the mind within this body. However, back in 1997 cultural theorist Jon Stratton noticed that “the idea that the self not only functions separately from the body, but is not limited or defined by the mind’s ‘belonging’ to the body is increasingly being accepted”. Nowadays, with the establishment of modern technologies as culturally dominant, opportunities have opened up to manipulate essential socio–epistemic concepts like the self, body, space, time, memory, liveness, virtuality, nowness, documentality, etc., more freely than ever before...

This intensifying circulation of experience is extremely relevant in the canvases created by Šarūnas Baltrukonis, where the spaces of the real and the virtual and the bodies acting in them come together. However, these spaces are abstracted when only certain fragments of them become recognizable – wedges of the reality of virtuality, often characterized by urban and/or cybernetic aesthetics.

The motifs in Baltrukonis’ canvases, having lost their natural “realism” or “digitality”, enter into a qualitatively new relationship that can be understood through mutual interaction. It is the play of two–dimensional and three–dimensional planes here that represents the chiaroscuro of classical painting, which deforms the unity of the elements belonging to the picture in terms of space and time. The surfaces of the works become a specific membrane, structuring the arrangement of motifs in the picture and creating their continuous interaction on both sides of the boundaries of the spaces of the virtual and the real. In the paintings of Baltrukonis, we see clear hints of naturalness, parts of bodies of vital origin, as if they have given up the possibility of ageing, disintegrating or decaying and are floating in virtual, high–resolution landscapes. This is an opportunity to look through the eyes of an archaeologist at the genesis of technical and organic individuals as a continuous process of aesthetic individuation. As bodies belonging to different ontological spaces are acting in the works, fragments of natural motifs acquire a photographic quality, while other elements that create the overall composition of the picture, being clearly inorganic in nature, fragment the solid horizon of it and seem to adapt to the hints of naturalness, yet [!] fragment the solid horizon of the picture, thus creating the uncanny atmosphere that arises from the impression of these two different realms.

In this way, natural objects are abstracted and the non–vital environment surrounding them is made concrete, turning Baltrukonis’s painting into an aesthetic paradox that enables the viewer to reflect on the concepts of the self detached from the body and the “virtual realism”. The artist conveys the intimacy of the digital image with the imagery arising from the realm of virtuality: sharp, strict lines, high contrast, smoothness of the surfaces of the motifs, their screeniness, and their “clean” colours.

The artist also experiments by deforming the canvas itself, cutting off part of the support

or choosing non–standard exposure angles, which allow the digital image to expand on both sides of the two–dimensional space of the picture, simulating its jamming in the virtual matrix (i.e. in the diptych *Tilted Fever*, 2021). In other cases, new functions of the bodies of the painting are enabled by conceptual compositional solutions: the artist positions unexpected logical assemblages in which we can recognize objects of organic origin in the centre of the painting, thus turning them into certain constellations of “islands” of physicality that levitate in an unnamed digital environment (i.e. in the work *Sarcophagus*, 2023).

In the paintings *Shrapnel #9ee5fe* and *Shrapnel #2b535d* (2023), the dramatic collision of different socio–epistemic environments is expressed by manipulating different angles of the painting’s surfaces and the dynamism of the strokes covering them. Like galaxies receding from each other, whose light spectrum shift is explained by the temporal distance from the observer – the deformed surfaces of the paintings in these works represent the illusion that the viewer standing in front of the work at any place sees parts of the painting moving away from them with varying intensity, also representing different cognitive level environments: the further they are from reality, the more intensively we perceive them in motion.

In some of the artist’s other canvases, constant tension is created by the relationship between the abstract image and its ideological content: the forms of complex objects encountered in reality are determined by their materiality, the implied tactile effect on the viewer. By combining motifs that are opposite in nature and searching for their aesthetic balance, the artist uses the rough, sharp, smooth or slippery surfaces of the planes as certain media containing different information about the bodies made of them. In this context, we can take into account the professional skills of the creator: perhaps we enjoy the images of Šarūnas Baltrukonis precisely because they – although empirically recognizable – are not the real thing, do we enjoy them because of the skills with which they were created? This pleasure, which comes when looking at the artist’s works, presupposes that we do not become victims of a blind mimetic illusion: we do not stop realizing that the cultural text seen in Baltrukonis’ works is just a “double” of the real, that what causes improvement is the illusionistic visual effect, the artificiality of the artificial [sic].

The artist undertakes an even more radical reduction in creating three–dimensional objects, which in their aesthetic form refer to the motifs of some of the canvases presented in the exhibition. By using synthetic materials not found in nature in the production of these bodies, Baltrukonis manipulates the textural nature of the objects, acting, on the one hand, as a disguise for their (un)reality, on the other hand, as a disguise for their digitality. In these renderings, not only the vital and non–vital properties of visual objects are contrasted, but also the contrast of their volume and surface, which brings *Vertebra VIII* and *Vertebra IX* (2023) even closer to the paradigm of virtuality.

The axis of the exhibition is the multifaceted experience of the overlap of the real, the digital and the virtual. What we perceive as artificial in reality is not necessarily unnatural in digital perception, and vice versa. The carefully thought–out strokes of Šarūnas Baltrukonis’ paintings make the digital image on the canvas cosy and close as if leaving virtual anonymity aside. In the meantime, the viewer’s experience penetrating the inside or outside of the depicted and visible objects, filling them with specific information arising from unique perceptions of reality or virtuality, enables new possibilities of reciprocity.

In all these situations, the exhibition searches for the starting point of (aesthetic) cognition – the Nexus – where a logical connection or a series of connections linking two or more environments enables qualitatively new possibilities of perception.

–Alberta Vengrytė