

## Forecasting a troubling new species

*By Sif Lindblad*

An industrial bridge over synthetic, black water: Stine Deja's new installation TROUBLED WATERS appears as a metallic 3D update of Monet's painting 'Bridge over a Pond of Water Lilies'. It carries, however, a slightly darker message.

Monet's garden, known for its purity and purple afternoon light, has been replaced by a metallic grid structure with holes carved out for small ponds. Metallic water lilies float on top of synthetic black water, seemingly adjusting to their new, dark habitat. In the background, different voices can be heard merging with the sound of babbling water and bird whistles. Asking all sorts of strange questions, the voices seem anxious yet excited.

The way we perceive and consume nature today differs significantly from the 19th century, when Monet produced his series of water lily paintings and also started to paint the steaming city, famously signifying the rise of a new industrial world. Today, we are experiencing the aftermath of that new world's emergence, most notably in the form of the effects it has wrought on the planet. We are well aware of the fact that humanity is feeding excessively on the resources of other species, not only to ensure our survival, but also in order to satisfy our desire for constant optimization with new inventions and more advanced technology.

On 30 November 2022, OpenAI released the ChatGPT: An AI chatbot that uses natural language processing to create human-like conversational text. According to new research, a basic exchange where a user poses 25-50 questions requires the chatbot to "drink" half a liter of water (used to cool the system's data centers) in order to complete the task. Chatbots, like humans, require enormous amounts of water to run. Water is a recurring motif throughout Deja's work. Water is the one thing that binds all humans together and now, also establishes a shared sense of livelihood between people and a new species: AI.

TROUBLED WATERS is a dystopian, digital, aquatic meditation on humanity's potential future, as it is shaped by evolving AI. The robotic fish that are swimming in the digital dark water can be seen as Deja's commentary on the thirsty AI that we are increasingly - and uncritically - incorporating into our daily lives.

"Hey ChatGPT, can you tell me what is next for the future of technology?" one of the voices asks with a whisper, as if expecting some sort of prophetic revelation in return. There is something incisive but also deeply ambiguous about these questions, which Deja has sourced from real prompts that human users have fed to different chatbots, pointing to the idea that we have lost all sense of independent thought.

"I think, therefore I am." Rene Descartes' famous adage has been used to distinguish human species from other earthly organisms since the 17th century. This quote has arguably played a vital role in establishing the basis by which we have come to understand ourselves as separate from nature and therefore vindicated as we inflict increasing levels of damage to the planet. At the same time, in light of recent technological developments that lead humans to rely on AI to answer both basic and existential questions, Descartes' assertion also opens up a different line of thought: What are we if we leave our freshwater thirsty artificial brain machines to think for us?