

Vadim Fishkin

Russian-born, Slovenian-based artist Vadim Fishkin works in a unique post-conceptual tradition, which is intimately linked to technology and current scientific developments. However, any interest in technology and science is less a direct result of an engagement in these domains themselves than a by-product of what they can tell us about ourselves and such perennial issues as the search for faith and meaning, and the sense of futility known to reward such human enterprises. Indeed, in Fishkin's practice, technology is granted a compact narrative and allegorical power, not to mention an absurd and poignant poetry. Take *Magic Button* (2007/09) for instance. A deadpan allegory of deflation in the spirit of *The Wizard of Oz*, this work consists of a black table and a red button. When the button is pressed, a projected image of a man appears, accompanied by a small fanfare of a light and a rush of soap bubble as a voice says, "There is no magic... just an electronic relay, projection, some light effects...and soap bubbles." Where this work enacts a total disenfranchisement of faith, other works, such as *Another Speedy Day*, function as elaborate memento mori. Presented in the Slovenian pavilion in Venice in 2005, this light installation manages to scientifically and atmospherically compress the changing light of an entire 24 hour day into 2,5 minutes, potentially vouchsafing the viewer with a hyper accelerated sense of their own mortality. And yet if a poetic pessimism harries Fishkin's technological flights of fancy, a certain levity is nevertheless known to quite literally send the artist's work upward. *Hot Air balloon in the Postojna Cave* (2001) is a case in point. Here the artist had a 16 meter-high hot air balloon flown in one of the world's largest caves, filming the process and later presenting it as a stereo (lenticular) image. Reminiscent of the grandiose and visionary absurdity of, say, Werner Herzog, this piece functioned as a lyrically beautiful reflection on human aspiration. Meanwhile, the more recent *Tour en l'air* (2009) operates on a more modest scale. In an elegant nod to Warhol, an ensemble of five silver balloons is guided via small engines through an exhibition space to the soundtrack of a Tchaïkovskian waltz. Thus does this shifting constellation of dirigibles enact a would-be "music of the spheres," investing these objects and the technology that guides them with a specious, fable-like sentience. And although Fishkin embraces the futility of technology, foregrounding the fatuity of the human desires and ambitions that animate it, he does it with a sharp and theatrical humor, ultimately imbuing it with a redemptive lightness.

-- Chris Sharp