

Pizza Boy

Shinji Murakami

Curated by Catinca Tabacaru

16 December 2023 — 31 January 2024

Still, there are limits when trying to draw a body. I really want it to work properly, so I need to animate it, but I can only create three patterns at the time... I need to make the movements clearer. – Shigeru Miyamoto about Super Mario Bros.

Atelier 35 in collaboration with Catinca Tabacaru is thrilled to present the first Bucharest solo exhibition of New York-based Japanese artist Shinji Murakami opening at Atelier 35 on December 16th, 18:00-22:00.

When the American video game industry crashed in 1983, it marked the beginning of a Golden Age for Japanese game consoles like Nintendo and Sega. Legendary video games – Super Mario Bros., Donkey Kong and The Legend of Zelda, were only a small portion of what was created during this period.

Growing up in Osaka in the 1980s, profoundly influenced Murakami's artistic practice and developed an almost obsessive fascination with the 8-bit aesthetics of early video games. With a limited number of sprites (2D icon variations integrated into larger scenes), colors, and a restricted two-dimensional expression, these initial video games allowed the player to fill in the digital space; as opposed to their contemporary hyperrealist counterparts. Limitations fostered creativity.

In this new solo show, Murakami uses AR technology to open a portal into the cultural phenomenon of the 1980s gaming experience. He harnesses nostalgia, adopting the raw 8-bit aesthetic of Atari 2600, the first home video game console to gain worldwide popularity in 1977, and creating his own video game in 2022: Pizza Boy. Visitors to the exhibition will have the opportunity to play Murakami's video game, a visual wonderland of skyscrapers, pizza slices, pretzels and taxi cabs. Entering the antiquated virtual landscape, players download into the bicycle-riding avatar delivering pizza on the streets of New York City. Three lives, game over, restart.

Inside Atelier 35s infamous Bucharest Old Town space, Murakami's new series of paintings operate as AR markers through which viewers can access his vibrant virtual world on their smartphones; while LED panels emulate sprite sheets drawings of the limited action commands inside Pizza Boy: Direction, Moving, Invincible, and Spin.

The beholder turns into the player. The video game becomes the medium. And the space transports us back to a time when the digital world was as expansive as our imagination could travel.