***Press release***

***My Boyfriend Came Back From The War*. Online since 1996**

Anniversary exhibition of Olia Lialina’s iconic Web narrative

Twenty years ago, in 1996, Russian artist Olia Lialina created *My Boyfriend Came Back From The War* (*MBCBFTW*). Using the story of a veteran’s girlfriend who has mixed feelings when he returns, the interactive Web narrative quickly became an iconic work that inspired many artists to create their own interpretations of it.

In the exhibition at MU thirteen interpretations will be shown, and two new commissioned works will be presented as homages to MBCBFTW, a tribute to a medium and a new approach to keeping history alive.

With a background in film and journalism, in the early days of the Web Olia Lialina (now artist and professor at Merz Akademie in Stuttgart) was interested in translating cinematic aesthetics into the Web. Her first net artwork, which she initially referred to as a net film, *MBCBFTW* was foremost an experiment with the browser (Netscape 3), and in particular the use of HTML frames. Starting with the phrase ‘My boyfriend came back from the war, after dinner they left us alone’, by clicking on different hyperlinks the story unfolds into an ambivalent dialogue with the browser. With each click of the mouse a new and proportionally smaller frame opens, revealing simple black-and-white images or fragments of text, to the point where the screen turns into a mosaic of empty black frames. Similarly, and emphasising the difficulty of communication, the conversation between the two protagonists never leads anywhere.

Whilst the story doesn’t lead anywhere, the work itself became an inspiration for many artists. Lialina collected all the interpretations that had been made of *MBCBFTW* for her *Last Real Net Art Museum* project – with the intention to provoke museums who in the late 1990s and early 2000s started making their own online net art exhibitions and collections. Currently there are 27 different versions, covering a period of twenty years of net art. Presenting a mix of known and (still) unknown artists, the collection also illustrates the development of the World Wide Web as a medium. From HTML frames to Flash, Web comics, games, blogs, animated gifs (or Internet banners), Twitter and VR, the different types of media reflect the historical development of the Web. Although some works have been lost due to incompatibility issues or simply because no one saved them, for the exhibition in MU major efforts have been made to capture and re-create the original experience and aesthetics of the artworks. Using state-of-the-art emulation techniques as well as old equipment, the exhibition is also an interesting experiment in the preservation of contemporary art practices.

One of the first interpretations was made by the renowned Dutch/Belgium duo JODI, who turned *MBCBFTW* into an abstract and confusing game. They used the aesthetic and architecture of the first person shooter-game *Castle Wolfenstein*, and by replacing the elements of the game with the texts and images from *MBCBFTW* they juxtapose Lialina’s reflection on HTML frames, and communication and war with elements from the popular commercial game. A more personal statement was made by Chilean artist Ignacio Nieto who, using the same frame structure, made a tribute in 2005 for Chilean soldiers who froze to death while on a routine training mission in the Andes near Antuco. American artist Guthrie Lonergan made a more ironic – and at first not even official *MBCBFTW* interpretation: the interactive work *Burgers*. Due to its similar structure it was renamed *My Burger Came Back From The War*, and became part of the collection.

MU gives out two new commissions: Foundland (Lauren Alexander and Ghalia Elsrakbi) takes the narrative content of Lialina’s work as primary starting point. Foundland extends the idea of an estranged conversation caused by the complexity of conflict, to a split-screen chat between a mother and her radicalised son, who has left the Western world to join a Jihadi fighting force. Over a lengthy period, their strained and clumsy conversation is captured across many media platforms. For the second commission Constant Dullaart is buying up domain names, from war.yoga and war.cheap to war.loan, Dullaart shows us the walking routes from various cities in Europe to the Caliphate.

Emphasising the versatility of art on the Web, MU opens the exhibition on 19 February, in cooperation with House of Electronic Arts (HeK) in Basel, which has opened the same show on 20 January. Both exhibitions end on 20 March.

As part of the anniversary, HeK has published a catalogue with descriptions of all the iterations and key essays on the development of Web culture. With contributions by Michael Connor, curator and artistic director of Rhizome in New York; Joanne McNeil, freelance curator and author; Russian Internet theorist Roman Leibov; and the American science fiction author Bruce Sterling.

Participating artists: Inbal Shirin Anlen, Freya Birren (Jennifer Walshe), Vadim Epstein, Dragan Espenschied, JODI, Olia Lialina, Abe Linkoln, Guthrie Lonergan, Armin Medosch, Ignacio Nieto, Anna Russett, Tale of Tales a.k.a. *Entropy8Zuper!*, Mark Wirblich, and two new commissioned works by Constant Dullaart and Foundland.