

HITO STEYERL

THE TOWER

LONDON ELY HOUSE

16 Jun 2020 - 25 Jul 2020



The gallery has taken careful measures to ensure the safety of all visitors and staff in accordance with governmental guidelines. It is with great pleasure that we now invite visitors to experience the displays first hand.

Steyerl's immersive installation *The Tower* (2015) focuses on the making of the video game *Skyscraper: Stairway to Chaos* by the Ukrainian company Ace3D, based on Saddam Hussein's unrealised plans to reconstruct the Tower of Babel in Babylon, the ancient capital that he began rebuilding in the 1980s. Part of an origin myth explaining the development of different languages, the Tower of Babel has come to symbolise the hubris of humans aspiring to godliness and the chaos resulting from an inability to communicate. As the game developer describes in voiceover, the *Skyscraper* is a contemporary analogue to the Tower that connects to other dimensions, much as Steyerl's film merges the virtual with reality. Precariously situated in a conflict zone, which he describes as a '1 km ride by tank' from the Russian border, the developer explains how he has become part of a global network of technology firms, remotely contracted by European companies who outsource labour to cheaper economies, drawing attention to the physical labour underpinning digital culture.

As Zachary Small observes in his review of her Park Avenue Armory show, 'An oracle of our end times, Steyerl is a crucial voice in a chorus of critics seeking to untangle the problems of contemporary culture. Meandering through the artist's milieu of dystopias ... one gets the sense that she is weaving together a 21st-century global tapestry.' The installation for *The Tower* is adapted for each environment, but includes a red felt platform with futuristic red chairs, immersing the viewer in an alternate space that feels removed from reality.