Catarina Carneiro de Sousa aka CapCat Ragu is a Portuguese artist born in 1975 at Oporto, Portugal, with a background on Painting and Art Studies. In 1999 she was a founding member of the association Caldeira 213, an artistic coalition that self-managed a non-profit art space in Oporto, Portugal, which between 2000 and 2002 exhibited the most cutting edge projects by young emerging artists. Catarina was also in the feminist and artistic collective ZOiNA from 1999 to 2002, working on gender issues in collaboration with Carla Cruz, Isabel Carvalho and Ana Medeira. She has participated in several collective exhibitions since 1997 and has been exhibiting individually since 2005.

Since 2007 she is a professor at Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico de Viseu in Portugal teaching Visual Arts in several courses including the course of Artes Plásticas e Multimédia. She has devoted her artistic activity to the Metaverse since 2008, when she became a virtual photographer working individually and collaboratively in the Second Life virtual environment, holding several solo exhibitions and collaborating with artists from different fields and nationalities.

More recently she has dedicated herself to the development of avatars and the conception of virtual environments. Together with Sameiro Oliveira Martins aka Meilo Minotaur she is the builder of the Second Life Sim Delicatessen, that held projects like “de Maria, de Mariana, de Madalena” developed for the fifth edition of the Real Life exhibition “All My Independent Women” in 2010 and “Petrified” in 2011. She continues to explore the metaphorical nature of the art language and the problematization of gender, but she is also interested in the possibility of a new kind of shared creativity opened by new media art.

1. How do you position new media in your work?

I work with new media in two different ways: exploring virtual reality platforms, as Second Life, and constructing image digitally mixing
different processes like photography, digital painting and some 3D technology. It wasn’t always like that, though. My background is in painting (traditional painting) and art studies, I had no formal education on digital media. Until 2008 my work as an artist consisted mostly of drawings and installations. I started using Second Life just for fun. Actually my mother, Sameiro Oliveira Martins aka Meilo Minotaur, pushed me into it. She was already there for a few months when I started. The first thing we were interested in was the avatar but at first it was just like playing dolls... Things began to change when we started building and taking snapshots.

My first art project was something like a road trip, I called it “Route7”, it was a journey in Second Life without the usual teleports. I picked a protected route in the Gaeta continent and just travelled on foot through Gaeta’s Sims. I made a photographic journal on Flickr documenting the whole thing. After that I became more and more interested in virtual photography on Second Life and started exhibiting my work. Meanwhile Meilo was more interested in building and started working her own land. Then we started working together by building several projects at Delicatessen Sim and creating avatars for distribution. Although we still do individual work, we are collaborating in many projects and it is impossible for me now to talk about my work without referring hers.

2. How are artists across the globe exploiting new media platforms?

In the most amazing and different ways. Some just for dissemination, but others integrate the platforms in the way they work. I’m especially interested in how virtual reality and social networks are reconstructing the creative process.

Various artists used our virtual environment to create their own works in various different media like virtual photography, machinima, storytelling, etc.. This is very important to me because I don’t see myself as the beginning and end of my work, I am just among several people that participate in a new creative flux, beyond the concepts of author and of work of art. For example the blog Indagatricis made a story “The forest keeper” inspired in our Sim and avatars. Maro Chiesa aka Nur Moo, from Italy, made incredible virtual photographs of our Sim and the wonderful machinima “You are petrified”, and so did Heidi Dahlsveen aka Frigg Ragu aka Mimesis Monday, from Norway, with “Memory me”. In the Flickr group SL Delicatessen we try to collect all the photographs taken by other residents from all over the world, to track how the work is flowing in other directions and meanings.

I also did several virtual photography projects with other creations as a starting point, like “Epifania”, where I used the avatar apparel by alpha.tribe, designs by Elif Ayiter aka Alpha Auer, from Turkey, or in “The exercise of passion” where a narrative was built from the poses made by Heidi Dahlsveen aka Frigg Ragu aka Mimesis Monday.

What interests me the most in new media platforms is this concept of shared creativity.

3. Can you expand on your goals with the Second Life Sim Delicatessen? What were you seeking to convey with that particular project?

Delicatessen was, at first, a landscape Sim built mainly by Meilo, and the headquarters of PhotoDelicatessen (a brief commercial project of mine), but in 2010 we were invited to participate in the 5th edition of All My Independent Women, an artistic project initiated by Carla Cruz in 2005, a collective exhibition that has become more of a platform to discuss feminist/gender issues in Portugal. The theme for the 5th edition was the 1972 book “New Portuguese Letters” by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, a milestone for feminist thinking in Portugal, but also an
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