

Press Release

Earthbound – In Dialogue with Nature

03.09.-13.11.2022

Opening: Fr, 02.09.2022, 7 pm

Press Tour: Fr, 02.09.2022, 11 am

Special Opening Hours during the Kunsttage Basel: Sat/Sun, 03./04.09., 10 am – 6 pm



Mélodie Mousset, Edo Fouilloux, *The Jellyfish*, 2020. Screenshot from VR. Courtesy of the artist

The exhibition presents works by internationally renowned artists that reflect on and draw attention to urgent environmental issues with an emphasis on the complex relationship between human activity and the ecosystem. *Earthbound – In Dialogue with Nature* proposes solutions and alternative models for a more sustainable coexistence with our environment.

Almost every day, we are confronted with drastic images of extreme weather phenomena such as floods, hurricanes and forest fires caused by extreme droughts. Among the more severe environmental issues requiring urgent attention is the accumulation of plastic waste in the oceans, an alarming loss of biodiversity and the mass extinction of species. Global warming is a largely man-made condition, whereby humans are imposing a significant influential force over the biological, geological and atmospheric processes of the Earth.

The exhibition spotlights Artists that implement media, technologies and technoscientific methods in their works. Through a creative use of digital media and new technologies – artificial intelligence, virtual reality, interactive and immersive installations, multimedia sculptures and video installations - the audience is invited to engage in critical dialogue, challenging the narrative which positions humankind at the heart of creation. We are encouraged to surrender egocentric perspectives we have towards the planet and rediscover our relationship with nature.

Several exhibited works navigate an interdisciplinary approach, exploring collaborations between artists and scientists from a variety of scientific fields like geology, meteorology and oceanography. The exhibiting artists do not position technology as a guarantee for a «better» future, with the

assumption that a purely technology solution can save the planet. Instead, they employ technology as a tool for enlightening the otherwise invisible ecological processes and thereby aim to contribute to a healthier coexistence with our environment. Hence the title of the exhibition: *Earthbound*. We only have one Earth and urgently need to find paths to a more balanced coexistence – escaping to other planets is not an option.

The exhibition was created upon invitation from Esch2022 – European Capital of Culture, located in the south of Luxembourg. It is housed within the Möllerei, the premises of the former raw materials warehouse in Esch Belval, where it is on display from June 4th till August 14th 2022. An expanded version of the exhibition will be shown in Basel, presenting several **new perspectives**: shown for the first time are recent works by James Bridle and Robertina Sebjanič as well as new productions by Ursula Endlicher and Dominique & Fabian Koch. As part of the exhibition, HEK is also presenting the interdisciplinary design research project «MITWELTEN. Medienökologische Infrastrukturen für Biodiversität» by the Academy of Art and Design FHNW.

Accompanying the Esch2022 – European Capital of Culture exhibition is a comprehensive **catalogue** featuring the works as well as academic contributions on the themes of sustainability, nature and diversity. In autumn, a magazine produced in cooperation with the Institute of Art Gender Nature at the Academy of Art and Design FHNW will be published under the title ***Coding Care –Towards a Technology for Nature***, featuring a compilation of theoretical explorations of the meaningful use of technologies for a better understanding of our ecosystem.

Artists: Donatien Aubert (FR), melanie bonajo (NL), Tega Brain (AU), James Bridle (GB), Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukacs (NL), Erik Bünger (DE), Maria Castellanos & Alberto Valverde (ES), Ursula Endlicher (US), Gilberto Esparza (MX), Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg (GB), Marcus Maeder (CH), Mélodie Mousset & Eduardo Fouilloux (CH), Sabrina Ratté (FR), Scenocosme - Grégory Lasserre & Anaïs met den Ancxt (FR), Robertina Sebjanič (SI), Rasa Smite & Raitis Smits (LT), Sissel Marie Tonn & Jonathan Reus (DK)

Curators: Sabine Himmelsbach und Boris Magrini

The exhibition at HEK is generously supported by the Ernst & Olga Gubler-Hablützel-Stiftung, the Corymbo Foundation, RAPP AG, the Fondation Didier et Martine Primat, the Fondation Odonata and the Sulger Foundation.

HASHTAGS #hek.basel #earthbound

PRESS MATERIAL is available at hek.ch/en/press or [here](#).

All print products in this exhibition with the exception of the F4 posters were printed on Blue Angel certified and 100% recycled paper with bio- and solvent-free inks.

Selection of the exhibited works



Tega Brain, *Deep Swamp*, 2018

Multi-media installation, Installation view Möllerei, 2022, Photo: Franz Wamhof

The installation *Deep Swamp* addresses the problem of systemic approaches to optimising natural resources through the use of artificial intelligence. Three glass tanks house semi-flooded environments occupied by swamp lifeforms that are monitored by cameras. Three artificial intelligence programmes observe each of the environments in real-time and alter their conditions by modifying light, water flow, fog, and nutrients. In this work, Tega Brain emphasises how artificial intelligence is subject to manipulation and can provide different results depending on objectives. At the same time, the artist does not deny the benefits of digital technologies when they are used in a non-reductionist way to address ecological problems and to develop a more comprehensive view of the planet and its living forms.



María Castellanos & Alberto Valverde, *Beyond Human Perception*, 2020

Multi-media installation with plants and sensors, Installation view Möllerei, 2022, Photo: Franz Wamhof

Beyond Human Perception explores the «secret language of plants» and allows us a glimpse at how we might enter into communication with them. The installation looks at the reactions of human beings and plants to the stimuli of live music. Using EEG technology, human brain activity is measured and compared to electrical oscillations in plants, which is measured with special sensors developed by the artists. The two data sets are compared and made visible on two synchronised videos. Through this direct comparison, María Castellanos and Alberto Valverde bring humans closer to the plant world and provide an understanding of how similarly both react to their common environment.



Ursula Endlicher, *Input Field reversal #2*, 2022

Netbased installation with Augmented Reality App, Photo: Simulation

The project links interior- with exterior space, the digital with the «natural». Ursula Endlicher projects a digital gaze on HEK's immediate environment. The work translates HEK's surroundings into a digital «browser-based» environment in which physical nature can be observed and manipulated. Selected trees within the Freilager area provide a «prototype» from which digital plants are rendered whose behaviour (similar to biological plants) changes according to real-time weather data, being completely reliant on the audience's digital gardening skills. At the same time, the trees on site become an interface via AR app: The images of the «coded nature» of the digital plant variations can be accessed through tags on a selection of trees (of biological nature) in the area.



Gilberto Esparza, *KORALLYSIS*, 2019-ongoing

Kinetic multi-media installation, single-channel video projection, Installation view Möllerei, 2022, Photo: Franz Wamhof

The installation *KORALLYSIS* by Gilberto Esparza involves kinetic systems developed to be embedded in coral colonies, forming a symbiotic relationship with them. The project's initial experiments have already been placed as artistic interventions underwater at various locations in the Mexican Caribbean. Its aim is to raise awareness of, and actively counteract, coral reef destruction caused by marine pollution and climate change. Modular ceramic structures, which function like prostheses, are integrated into the damaged coral reefs and as the ocean's currents cause their kinetic structures to generate energy, a new process of reef colonisation is triggered. This attracts natural organisms such as plankton, algae, and barnacle larvae, which accelerates the growth of corals. Here, man-made constructions implanted into the dying reef enable its revitalisation. The creative and cooperative development process of *KORALLYSIS* involves art students, engineers, biologists, physicists, and civil associations.



Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, *The Substitute*, 2019

Video installation, Photo: Screen shot

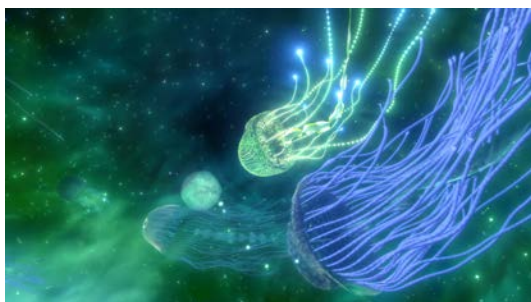
The Substitute explores the striking paradox of our preoccupation with creating new life forms while neglecting those that already exist. The work brings the virtually extinct northern white rhinoceros back to life digitally, thanks to advances in artificial intelligence. A life-size projection shows the artificial rhino finding its bearings in a virtual space. It becomes more «real» as it grows accustomed to its new digital environment, evolving from a pixelated distortion to a lifelike rendering, pointing to the ways that artificial intelligence learns from its environment. Behaviours and sounds stem from recordings of the rare sightings of the rhino. Ginsberg's video installation looks at our trust in biotechnology to preserve or return extinct species. It also questions whether humanity would be able to protect a resurrected rhinoceros, considering our previous destruction of an entire species. Or is this artificial rhino a substitute for the real thing?



Robertina Šebjanič, *Co_Sonic 1884 km²*, 2021-2022

Audio-visual installation, Photo: Screen shot

The audio-visual installation *Co_Sonic 1884 km²* by Robertina Šebjanič immerses the viewer in the Ljubljanica River by adopting the point of view of the animals that inhabit it. Although the river has been given seven different names over the years, because it is made up of a collection of partially subterranean rivers that were once considered separate, it is a single body of water, perceived and experienced differently by humans and animals. By filming and recording the sounds of the river and the cohabitation of the different species, the artist sets out to offer a non-human point of view, while testifying to the impact on biodiversity caused by human activities related to the exploitation of the river. The sounds and images of the river are also manipulated by means of artificial intelligence, to create an audio-visual experience that aims to solicit the spectator's empathy towards an ecosystem and its endangered inhabitants.



Mélodie Mousset & Eduardo Fouilloux, *The Jellyfish*, 2020

VR experience, Photo: Screen shot

The virtual reality experience *The Jellyfish* created by Mélodie Mousset and Eduardo Fouilloux invites viewers to immerse themselves in an underwater world and interact with luminous jellyfish. Sea creatures swim around the spectators and are awakened if they look at them or make sounds with their voices. Jellyfish will respond to a viewer's singing with their own sounds and colourful animations. If they continue to sing, more jellyfish will gather to create a polyphonic chorus. The work is powered by a synthesiser, developed by the artists. Through harmonious interaction and synesthetic exchange between visitors and virtual beings, the artists have created a sense of connection between species in a poetic and playful way.



Rasa Smite & Raitis Smits, *Atmospheric Forest*, 2020

VR installation, Photo: Screen shot

The virtual reality installation *Atmospheric Forest* allows visitors to enter a forest – digitised through 3D scanning – and experience how changes in climate influence the emissions of trees, which is a complex and often imperceptible phenomenon. A forest in the Swiss Alps affected by severe drought has been monitored by scientists for several years. The scientific data gathered by this research serves as the basis for Rasa Smite and Raitis Smits's vivid visualisation and soundtrack. Although technological research can often seem inaccessible, Smite and Smits succeed in giving palpable form to invisible processes, allowing us to understand how climate-related changes in the atmosphere affect the forest ecosystem.



**Sissel Marie Tonn & Jonathan Reus,
The Intimate Earthquake Archive, 2016-
heute**

Interactive multi-media installation, Photo:
Stella Dekker

The Intimate Earthquake Archive allows us, via waistcoats equipped with transducers, to experience man-made earthquakes caused by gas drilling in the Dutch province of Groningen over the last 34 years. Tonn employs data from numerous archives, including the digital database of the Netherlands Meteorological Institute, where all seismic activity is registered and archived. Visitors wearing the specifically designed waistcoats receive information from these records by standing between a series of radio-transmitting cores. Each transmits the record of one of the 12 strongest man-made earthquakes, translating archival data into sound vibrations through direct manipulation.

PRESS MATERIAL is available at hek.ch/en/press or [here](#).

Information:

HEK (House of Electronic Arts)
Freilager-Platz 9, 4142 Münchenstein/Basel

Opening hours: Wed-Sun, 12:00-18:00

Admission: 9 / 6 CHF (reduced), Wed-Fri 12:00-13:00 Happy Hour (free admission to the exhibition)

Public guided tours: Every Sunday at 15:00 in German

For more information: www.hek.ch

Instagram: @hek.basel

Twitter: @HeK_Basel

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About HEK (House of Electronic Arts)

HEK (House of Electronic Arts) in Basel is Switzerland's national competence centre for all art forms that employ or reflect on new technologies and media. The interdisciplinary approach of HEK offers a broad public with insight into art production from various genres at the conjunction between art, media, and technology. In a diverse program of exhibitions, smaller festival formats, performances and concerts, HEK is dedicated to taking a closer look at current social issues and questions as well as technological and aesthetic developments. In addition to organising exhibitions and events, HEK is concerned with the methodology of collecting and the preservation of digital art.