Daniel Sannwald and Beauty_GAN, *Kylie Jenner,* 2019. Courtesy of the artist

Virtual Beauty

08.06.—18.08.2024

Opening: Friday, 07.06.2024

11:00:	Press tour with the artist and curator
19:00:	Opening
21:00:	Performance

Reception during Art Basel and screening of THE 5TH VH AWARDS, performance and party: Tuesday, 11.06.2024, starting 7pm.

Today, technology allows us to be more self-aware and calculated in the way we present ourselves publicly than ever before. A new generation now comes of age who have never lived in a world where the idea of digital self-staging has not been a facet of their everyday lives. Questions of beauty are inherent to the proliferation of portable devices and screens on which people look at themselves and share these curated identities with the world.

From social media filters and dating apps to artificial intelligence to biometrics, the exhibition *Virtual Beauty* examines the impact of the latest digital technologies on the definition of beauty and how they radically transform our notions of gender, sexuality, race, and identity. Wandering between the virtual and physical, the artists presented in this exhibition question what beauty is today, inviting us to reconsider the very definition of human identity in the post-internet era.

Featured artists:
Ines Alpha, Angelfire, Arvida Byström, GERIKO in collaboration with Juno Calypso, Filip Ćustić, Harriet Davey, Anan Fries & Malu Peeters, Maria Guta, Frederik Heyman, Andrew Thomas Huang & James Merry, Hyphen-Labs, Keiken, Bunny Kinney, Lil Miquela, Aleksander Nærbø, ORLAN, Daniel Sannwald & Beauty_GAN, Simon Senn, Michael Wallinger, Ben Cullen Williams & Isamaya Ffrench.

Curators:
Gonzalo Herrero Delicado, Bunny Kinney, Mathilde Friis and Marlene Wenger

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From social media filters and artificial intelligence to biometrics and dating apps, the works by over 20 emerging and established artists presented in *Virtual Beauty* question how different technologies are shaping new canons of beauty today, raising questions around gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and identity.

The exhibition delves into the concept of virtual beauty, extending beyond the digital realm to explore its impact on physical bodies. It features a range of artworks, including **ORLAN's** pre-social media performance *Omniprésence* (1993), in which the artist live-streamed her facial aesthetic surgery to challenge Western beauty ideals, and **Filip Ćustić's** interactive sculptural piece *Pi(x)el* (2022) showcases a casted female torso equipped with touchscreens at significant identity-defining points, projecting diverse body parts to allow visitors to decide how the body looks while challenging conventional beauty norms.

Artists **Michael Wallinger**, **Daniel Sannwald**, and **Ben Cullen William**s showcase works that use machine learning and generative software to create distorted portraits, including influencer Kylie Jenner, raising questions about artificial intelligence's perception of beauty. On the other hand, artists collective **Keiken** and **Ines Alpha's** interactive installations delve into the concept of 'virtual makeup', a phenomenon popularized on social media, enabling individuals to alter their faces using augmented reality filters. Their works speculate on the possibility of transitioning into digital hybrids and constructing alternative identities beyond human boundaries.

Additional works by **Bunny Kinney**, **Juno Calypso** and **Geriko**, transport visitors to futuristic beauty salons, while **Hyphen-Labs'** award-winning afrofuturistic virtual reality salon for *NeuroSpeculative AfroFeminism* (2017), offers an immersive critical approach to the lack of multidimensional representations of black women in technology.

The exhibition also explores the proliferation of alternative virtual identities in digital spaces through avatars, with works by **Harriet Davey**, **Lil Miquela**, and **Angelfire**, among others. *Virtual Beauty* concludes with **Frederik Heyman's** *Virtual Embalming* (2018), prompting reflection on how individuals wish to be remembered in the virtual realm after death, through three examples of virtual avatars and shrines.

On the opening night of the exhibition on June 7, **Simon Senn** will perform his piece *B Arielle F*, where the artist talks about his uncanny experience of purchasing the digital copy of a female body online, then embarking on a quest to meet the woman whose body he bought.

The exhibition design for *Virtual Beauty* was created in cooperation with the ICDP Masterstudio Design/Studio Scenography of the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland FHNW together with Prof. Andreas Wenger, Marcial Koch, Adelina Malekova, Jimena Martel Bidegain, Connor Muething, Renê Salazar David.

Geriko and Juno Calypso, *The Salon*, 2018. Produced by COMPULSORY / Kadri Mahmoud. Courtesy of the artists

Angelfire, *Seeded Glory,* 2021. Courtesy of the artist

Biographies of the curatorial team

Gonzalo Herrero Delicado is a London-based curator, educator, and architect. He works as Project Curator at Serpentine and as Associate Lecturer at Central Saint Martins and the Royal College of Art. He is also a PhD candidate at RMIT University researching curatorial practices for digital environments. Before that, he was the Director of the Ecocity World Summit 2023 at the Barbican Centre in London and a Design Fellow at the University of Cambridge. From 2016 to 2021, he was the Curator of the Architecture Programme at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

Bunny Kinney is a British-Canadian filmmaker, creative director, and consultant. At present, he is the editorial director of Dazed Media Group and the creative director of Nowness, leading teams in London, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. In 2018, he launched the print magazine and platform project Dazed Beauty, which centres on Generation Z. A graduate of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, where he received an MA in Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, Kinney's work explores key themes of youth identity, gender, and sexuality, with a particular focus on China and the Far East. He is currently working on his first feature film. He lives and works in London.

Mathilde Friis is a visual anthropologist and PhD researcher at Northumbria University, focusing on topics on sexuality, gender, visual, and digital culture. Her current research focuses on the artistic and creative practices of contemporary sex workers, exploring the intersections of identity, representation, and agency within this community. From 2019 to 2022, she worked at Gagosian in London, most recently in the public art department, where she researched, supported, and coordinated large-scale and immersive art installations worldwide. She holds an MA in Social Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh and an MA in Arts and Cultural Management from King's College London. She lives and works in London.

Marlene Wenger is Curator and Head of Programme at the HEK since October 2023. She studied art history in Bern and Berlin and was assistant curator for contemporary art at the Museum of Fine Arts Bern. In her doctoral project, she investigated exhibition concepts of post-digital artistic practices in physical and virtual spaces. Marlene is interested in how digital technologies influence the production, perception, and dissemination of contemporary art in the 21st century.

Federic Heyman, *Q is for Climate,* 2023

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

Opening times:
Wed & Fri, 12 noon-6 pm
Thur, 12 noon-8 pm
Sat & Sun, 12 noon-5 pm

Admission: 12 / 8 Swiss francs (concessions),
Happy hour: Wed-Sun, 12 noon-1 pm, free admission to the exhibition
Guided tour through the exhibition: every Sunday at 3 pm

Special Opening times during Art Basel, 10.06.-16.06.2024
Mon-Sun, 10 am - 8 pm

Program druing Art Basel:
HEK @ Liste Art Fair Basel, Messe Basel, Riehenring 113, 4058 Basel: 10.06.-16.06.2024,
THE 5TH VH AWARD by VH AWARD of Hyundai Motor Group, Platform HEK: 10.06.-16.06.2024
Reception während der Art Basel, Tuesday, 11.06.2024, 7 pm until late

Further information: **www.hek.ch**

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About HEK (House of Electronic Arts)
Located in Basel, HEK is Switzerland's national competence center for all forms of art expressing themselves
through, and addressing, new technologies and media. HEK's interdisciplinary approach provides a wide audience
with insights into art produced in differing genres that is involved in discourses relating to art, media, and techno-
logy. In a diverse program of exhibitions, small festivals, performances, and concerts, HEK's program dedicates itself
to current social issues and concerns as well as technological and aesthetic developments. In addition to event and
exhibition activities, HEK is also deeply involved in methodologies of collecting and the conservation of digital art.

HEK is supported by the **Christoph Merian Stiftung**, the **cantons Basel Stadt** and
Basel Landschaft, as well as the **Swiss Federal Office for Culture**.

Instagram: @hek_basel   **Discord:**   **X:**   **Newsletter:**