

Basel, 10.08.2017

Dear ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends and colleagues,

In 2018, the HeK, House of Electronic Arts Basel, will continue to be among the recipients of a subsidy from the Federal Office of Culture (BAK). We are pleased to be recognized as an institution of national significance. Unfortunately, the honor comes with a bitter pill: The HeK must cope with a 40% reduction in the subsidy. This will dramatically effect the institution's financial situation, requiring us to greatly reduce programming and impacting our standing in unforeseeable ways. We are working intensively to find ways to deal constructively with this difficult financial situation.

Since we have received many words of congratulation on our continued BAK support, we wanted to explain the downside – the impact that this decision will have over the next five years.

The HeK's focus on media arts makes it a unique institution in Switzerland. Within a few years – the museum was founded in 2011 and moved into its own space in 2011 – the HeK has become an internationally recognized institution, winning accolades for its thematic exhibitions focusing on central questions of our information age; its presentation of works by outstanding artists; and its establishment of a unique collection focusing on net-based and software-based art.

The founding of the HeK in 2011 went hand-in-hand with a federal funding commitment through the BAK. But the HeK received the initial funding after a transitional period in 2014, the year of our move to the new building on Freilager-Platz. It was only then that the house had the necessary infrastructure available to advance its development of a collection of digital art. Today, only a few years later, this collection contains 62 works. The collection's focus is on software- and network-based art. The HeK is one of the few institutions worldwide to have developed an expertise in the preservation of this innovative art form for future enjoyment.

The collection was a key criterion for the experts' evaluation of subsidy applications. Of course, with 62 works the HeK collection is not comparable to those of other museums; but neither is there an international institution with more such works in its collection. These works represent an important aspect of Switzerland's digital artistic heritage, a heritage that HeK endeavors to preserve. But unfortunately, the costs of building a collection of digital media art lie less in their acquisition than in their preservation. On one hand, the HeK is obliged by the federal subsidies to build up and maintain a collection. On the other hand, there is now insufficient means of meeting the rising cost of preserving the digital heritage entrusted to us. From the outset, the HeK has sought international partnerships in our area of focus, since solutions often have to be invented for the conservation of such works. Now, the funding is no longer available for the pursuit of such partnerships and innovative solutions.

Presentation, another central criterion for BAK funding, also is of great importance in our work. We have developed new, unique exhibition formats and concepts aimed at involving the public as participants. We hope to maintain our wide range of intermediary programs.

The HeK is Switzerland's only museum to deal with the impacts of digitalization on society from the perspective of art – a theme that the Federal Ministry of Culture considers of great importance. In its exhibitions and events, the HeK reflects critically on how the information age impacts our daily lives, and appeals particularly to younger museumgoers, who visit us in higher numbers compared to other museums. Technical developments such as Virtual Reality have been dealt with in major exhibitions and made accessible to a broad public, just as have sociopolitical issues, for example in an exhibition on "Fake News." In the few years since its founding, the HeK can point to increasing visitor numbers and a disproportionate media resonance for an institutions of this size.

We will now need your support for the coming years, to ensure the future of the HeK and its collection of Swiss Media Art, and to enable us to keep pace with the times and the radical changes of the digital age from the critical perspective of contemporary art. Visit us, write to us – support us with your interest. We will keep you informed about our future plans and about concrete ways in which you can continue to help us.

Thank you!

Sabine Himmelsbach and the HeK Team