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House of Electronic Arts Basel

The exhibition unREAL is a coproduction realized in partnership with the Chronus Art Center in Shanghai. After the presentation at HeK, it will travel to Shanghai from November 12, 2017 to January 28, 2018.

Curators: Sabine Himmelsbach and Zhang Ga

Artists: aaajiao, AES+F, LaTurbo Avedon, Ralf Baecker, Daniel Canogar, Cod.Act, Heather Dewey-Hagborg, Kerstin Ergenzinger, Claudia Hart, Pe Lang, Rollin Leonard, Rosa Menkman, Lorna Mills, Harvey Moon, Carsten Nicolai, Eva Papamargariti, Zahra Poonawala, Sabrina Ratté, Fito Segrera, Rick Silva & Nicolas Sassoon, Phillip David Stearns, Daniel Temkin, Wang Yuyang

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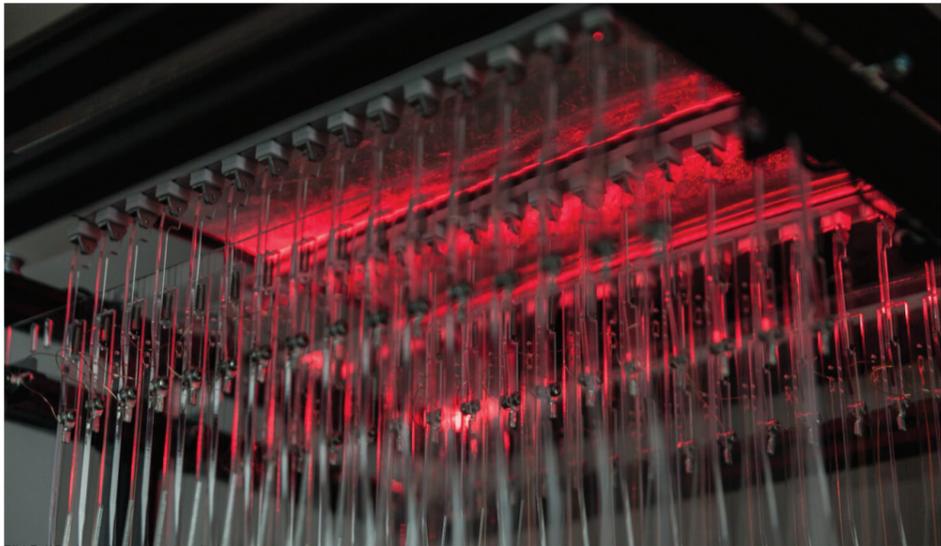
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The Algorithmic Present

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08.06.2017 - 20.08.2017
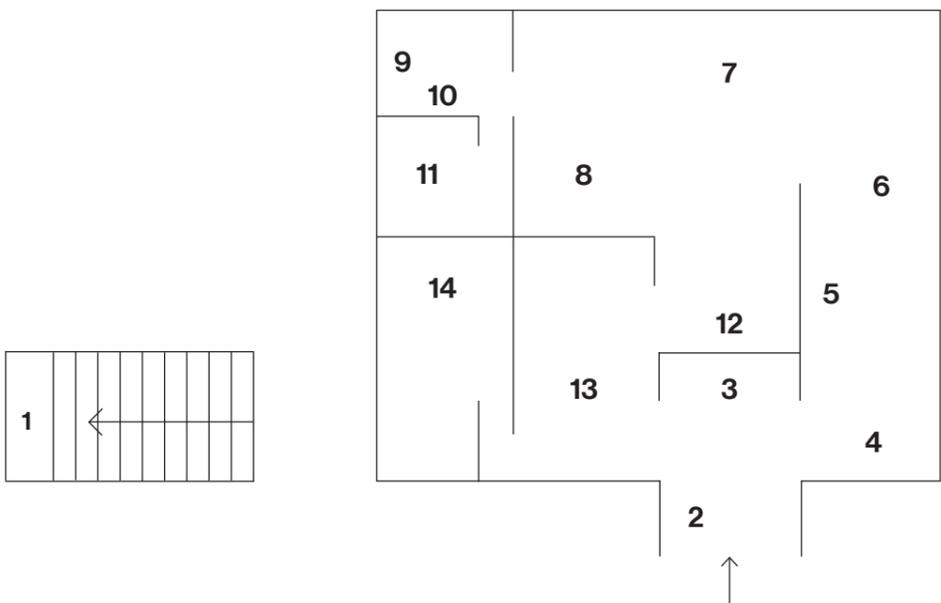
With the advent of mass consumption of the Internet and the ubiquitous deployment of digital devices, a technologically constructed time-space has largely reshaped our concept of temporality and spatiality, work and play, politics and economics. Reality thus takes on a new level of complication that resists any easy categorization and signification. unREAL is an exhibition that attempts to confront the digital present through the very means of technological intervention both as critical examination as well as alternative prospects. The twenty-four works in the exhibition by international artists underscore the often-hidden materiality of bits and bytes, bringing to the fore the algorithmic processes that constitute our digital present.

1 **Daniel Canogar**
Ripple, 2014
In his generative video, *Ripple*, Spanish artist Daniel Canogar confronts us with the continual stream of information in our digital world. Whenever a new video is uploaded to the online news platform of CNN (about every 10 minutes), it appears on the upper edge of the screen as abstract stripes of color that dissolve as they move slowly downward. Global news reports shape the work, which is constantly mutating, never repeating. Canogar uses abstraction as a means to capture and depict the incessant flow of electronic news as a social fabric, with a texture comparable to that of woven material.

2 **Heather Dewey-Hagborg**
Stranger Visions, 2012—2013
For her installation *Stranger Visions*, American artist Heather Dewey-Hagborg created portraits based on genetic material that she collected in public places and analyzed in a biology lab. Traces unwittingly left behind, like discarded chewing gum, provide the starting point for forensic DNA phenotyping. Her work shows – in a remarkable way – how a human face can be reconstructed on the basis of only a few traces of DNA. Dewey-Hagborg hints at the threatening potential of biological surveillance, which is used today in many ways.

3 **Pe Lang**
modular | nº 1, 2017
Swiss artist Pe Lang creates elegant kinetic sculptures that translate and play with the laws of physics. *modular | no 1* is an installation consisting of multiple grids of tightened, horizontal silicone wires, on which several O-rings are mounted. The wires are rotated by a mechanism and, as a consequence, the rings move along the axis of the wire. The particular interaction between the wires and the rings, their shape, material and electrostatic charges, causes the rings to move in a specific direction. When two rings collide, they change their respective directions while giving the optical illusion that they have crossed each other's.

4 **Zahra Poonawala**
The Fool's Ballad, 2016
The Fool's Ballad is an interactive sound installation in which a ceramic loudspeaker mounted on a turning device emits the words of a song performed by a soprano. The loudspeaker follows the movement of the spectator, rotating and adjusting its position and musical response as if it behaves according to a dialogue with the human viewer. With this work, the Swiss artist Zahra Poonawala further explores her research into the relations between sound and space, while allowing the visitor to experience sound as if it is a volume that one could traverse and physically interact with.

5 **Daniel Canogar**
Small Data, 2014—2016
Spanish artist Daniel Canogar dedicates his *Small Data* series to old electronic devices like hard drives, scanners, Gameboys or DVDs that have become part of our everyday digital life. Projections on these devices seem to breathe new life into them, transmitting personal and collective memories of their use and functionality. In his works, Canogar focuses on remembrance and cultural memory in an age in which we transfer these functions to our fragile electronic devices. With the loss of these devices, related memories are also forever gone.

6 **Kerstin Ergenzinger**
Wanderer-Spacetime Poetry, 2017
In this installation by the German artist Kerstin Ergenzinger, created in collaboration with Daniel Canty and Thom Laepple, small thermo-printers move like "wanderers" along paper strips stretched across the space, and in so doing dynamically create a drawing over the course of the exhibition. Through her technical modification and programming, the artist allows us to see the technical devices as mechanical beings that seem to act autonomously. Ergenzinger's works deal with questions about perception and the relation of bodies to their environment. In *Wanderer* she takes on this theme using a simple shift: No longer does the paper itself move in the accustomed manner through a press roller; instead, the thermal printer moves along the paper strips themselves.

7 **Wang Yuyang**
Plato's Polyhedron, 2017
Plato spoke of a dodecahedron with an esoteric ambiguity: "the god used [it] for arranging the constellations on the whole heaven." Chinese artist Wang Yuyang's *Plato's Polyhedron* perhaps aspires to achieve endless permutations of a thing or the infinity of the whole universe rather literally. Through the computer-controlled mechanism of tensile force, the cube, made of twelve LED light tubes continuously changes its form. It extends or retracts, warps or eases, imperceptibly persistent and yet unforeseeably determinate. Change is the only unchangeable axiom in this animated cubic being with a life-like agency leaping forward.

8 **Carsten Nicolai**
reflex, 2004
German artist and musician Carsten Nicolai creates installations that explore the intersection between art, science and music. The work *reflex* is a polyhedral sculpture in which the spectator is invited to enter. On each face of the sculpture, composed by a stretched polyester material, are mounted high-pitched piezo loudspeakers which emit a filtered white noise from a computer source. The sound thus generated inside the sculpture produces the illusion that another entity is inhabiting the polyhedron. As in many of his works, the artist stimulates human perception and often plays with synesthetic phenomena.

9 **aaajiao**, *Limited Landscape, Unlimited Floating*, 2015
In *Limited Landscape, Unlimited Floating*, a cross section of landscape hovers in the air. The 3D-printed shape is one definitive instantiation resulting from a pixel-matrix algorithm. With a slight push, the 3D-printed landscape begins to rotate. The maglev-equipped object can thus float indefinitely.

10 **aaajiao**, *Obj.4*, 2016
Obj. 4 occupies an entirely digital existence. A crystal mineral created in the screen shines with a purely computationally engendered light which is otherwise unattainable in the physical world. With the two works, Chinese artist aaajiao invites us to a universe that is at once familiarly alien and strangely intimate, in which the real can be unreal and truth is unsettlingly ambivalent.

11 **Cod.Act**, *πTon/2*, 2017
πTon/2 is a sound installation formed by a long rubber hose driven by a motor with the appearances of a mechanical snake. The organic-like form produces sound by virtue of its own structure and materials, while twisting, jolting and slamming against the surrounding walls that confines it. The sound is then electronically amplified and, when the installation is presented as a performance, it is retransmitted by devices carried by human performers interacting with it. Cod.Act is a collective of Swiss artists André and Michel Décosterd who explore the possibilities to combine sound experimentation and visual research.

12 **Fito Segrera**
1 & N chairs, 2017
In Columbian artist Fito Segrera's piece a motorized camera photographs an image of a chair in situ. The image is analyzed by an online cognitive engine. It then translates the picture into a textual description for display on one screen; the text also serves as a query to search online for images that match the description. The resulting image is displayed on the paired screen. Each time, the camera dynamically sees the chair from a slightly different angle and returns a differentiated interpretation of the object, sometimes seemingly whimsically. If the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth problematized semantic integrity in his seminal work *One and Three Chairs* à la post-structuralism in the 1960s, today, computational perception and cognition render the Kosuthian innuendo with six degrees more complexity.

13 **Ralf Baecker**
Mirage, 2014
In his installation *Mirage*, the German artist Ralf Baecker generates a synthesized landscape based on data provided in real time; he interprets and makes visible the constant, tiny changes in the earth's magnetic field. An autonomous learning algorithm registers the magnetic field data and generates variations of the signal just analyzed. Baecker has constructed a projector for his installation that uses the principles of optics and neural network research. The constantly shifting signal yields a projection that resembles a landscape that can be traversed.

14 **TRANSFER Download**
The installation works of the exhibition are supplemented by the project TRANSFER Download, which was conceived as an immersive environment. A dozen works of art from virtual reality and algorithmically generated video pieces to web-based works are presented in a video installation. The program for this installation was designed by TRANSFER Gallery in New York and adapted for the exhibition at the HeK.