H3K

House of Electronic Arts Basel

Swiss Media Art
knowbotiq
Alan Bogana
Félicien Goguey

Pax Art Awards 2019

27.05.–02.08.20

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10 Félicien Goguey
BlocBalloon, 2020

So-called IMSI catchers have been used in Switzerland since 2014 to determine the identity of mobile phone users. An IMSI is the 15-digit code of the SIM card that identifies every mobile phone owner. The catcher simulates a mobile phone cell into which all active mobile phones within a radius of 300 meters automatically log in and transmit their International Subscriber Identity (IMSI) to the authorities. Similar to his earlier work *Masquerade*, Goguey's new installation, the large inflatable unit of *BlocBalloon* is a disruption system. Participants in public protests or demonstrations might carry the inflatable object with them in order to connect to their mobiles to this phone cell instead of a nearby radio antenna. Their phones would be limited to only communicating with each other, however, their conversations would be guarded from online surveillance and their identity concealed from IMSI catchers. Again, Goguey draws on a technology rooted in an ideology of counter-surveillance to protect the identities of citizens from control as they use their power to voice their views in public demonstrations.

11 Félicien Goguey
Masquerade, 2015-2019

In his work, Félicien Goguey frequently looks critically at mass surveillance and investigates ways to outwit surveillance systems. He draws our attention to the hidden activities of those who collect personal data. Private and public security systems use black boxes that filter our communications; the detection of words considered suspicious triggers further observation. With the aid of microcomputers Goguey has created small hardware systems called *masqs*, programmed to generate triggering messages and send them to other *masqs* as soon as they are connected to the Internet, hence alerting and interfering with private and governmental online surveillance services. For presentation in the exhibition space, the *masqs* are connected to a closed system and can only communicate with each other. Their activities and messages are printed on paper at the centre of the room rendering them visible to the public. If a large number of these *masqs* were actually connected to the Internet, the surveillance systems would be overwhelmed: no longer able to follow warnings they would be neutralized.

12 Félicien Goguey
900 MHz, 2020

Mobile communication devices require a network, which, although invisible and seemingly abstract, can actually be spatially located. In Switzerland for example, the Federal Office of Communications provides a technical infrastructure of coverage throughout the whole country, to which all mobile devices send radio signals in the form of electromagnetic waves to antennae in their proximity. Goguey's visually appealing video installation *900 MHz* reveals the electromagnetic waves that penetrate the seemingly empty spaces surrounding us. The title refers to the frequency band the artist's Defined-Radio software can intercept: a frequency reserved for major mobile phone network providers. Goguey uses his software to scan the area for IMSI – the unique number used to identify a mobile phone subscriber – allowing deduction of their country of origin and mobile phone operator. Goguey's work translates these electromagnetic waves into a video installation, revealing a previously hidden dimension of the surroundings. While many essential phenomena of the digital age elude our perception, *900 MHz* opens data transfer to sensual access. Depending on place and time, the activity that Goguey reads out varies greatly. The presentation in the HeK focuses on data collected in the Basel region.

Félicien Goguey (*1992) is a French artist and designer, he lives and works in Geneva. He is currently researching for his PhD at the Digital Humanities Laboratory of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), while also working as a teaching assistant in the department of MA Media Design at the Haute école d'art et de design (HEAD) in Geneva. Goguey's works have been presented at festivals and in museums such as Resonate Festival in Belgrade, Vector Festival in Toronto, Mapping Festival in Geneva, Mirage Festival in Lyon, at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai and the Musée des arts et métiers in Paris.

1 knowbotiq
Amazonian Flesh – how to hang in trees during strike?, 2018-2019

Knowbotiq's visually impressive installations intertwine stories of postcolonial violence, algo–rithmic governmentality and techno-ecology. *Amazonian Flesh* is an immersive environment consisting of a network of cables, a sound system with micro-speakers, tablets and digital artefacts. The work initiates collective inactivity, creating intimate listening situations where virtual bots, usually responsible for the automation of work in global companies, motivate viewers to abandon wage labour forever in a final strike. The visual animations include documentary footage of strikes at Amazon, posts on YouTube by employees and an interview with Jeff Bezos, Amazon's CEO. The ironic title calls the Amazonian rainforest to mind, but of course also refers to the multinational corporation which has become iconic of the neoliberal economy in the age of online business and is regularly criticized for its unfair working conditions.

2 knowbotiq
thulhu thu thu, before the sun harms you, 2019-2020

knowbotiq's long-term project about Scotland's Flow Country draws attention to a large area in the Highlands where the soil has been destroyed by centuries of cultivation, extraction, exploitation and profit accumulation, which is now being "re-natured" in the context of climate change. knowbotiq invited artists, musicians, researchers and political activists to share their local and translocal explorations of the area. The artist duo drew the threads of their work together in a sensual and imaginary way with a performative sculpture of braided raffia fibres, where collective bodies are connected in their exploration of molecular processes and different temporalities of the Highland landscape. The exhibition presents sound sticks with which invocations of the moor were performed. The audience can listen to the mostly spoken rituals of participating artists via their own mobile phones. To do this, please scan the code on the wall!

3 knowbotiq
Swiss Psychotropic Gold _ molecular refinery, 2020

This video installation, premiering in the exhibition, extends the artists' research into the origin, refinery and circulation of gold. While earlier work focused on the socio-political realities and environmental impact of gold mining, refining and trading, highlighting Switzerland's important role in this industry, the new work focuses on the erotic qualities assigned to gold and the violence the greed for its possession can trigger. knowbotiq also examines the material's alleged psychotropic potential, which according to alchemical tradition can purify one's guilt. The artists have published a comprehensive book on the subject of psychotropic gold refining, in which their critical exploration is supplemented with contributions by artists, theorists and researchers. The book is available in the HeK book shop.

knowbotiq are Yvonne Wilhelm (*1962) and Christian Hübler (*1962). In their longstanding activity as artists – initially in collaboration with Alexander Tuchacek as knowbotic research – the duo has been formative in the development of the Swiss media art community. Their work has been presented at the art Biennials of Venice, Moscow, Seoul, Hongkong, Shenzen and Rotterdam, at the New Museum in New York, Witte de With in Rotterdam, MOCA Taipeh, Kunsthalle St. Gallen, Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg, Skuc Gallery in Ljubljana, NAMOC in Beijing, Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Hamburger Kunstverein, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Oslo and Museum Ludwig in Cologne. Yvonne Wilhelm and Christian Hübler are professors at University of the Arts Zurich (ZHdK) in the Master of Fine Arts study programme.

4 Alan Bogana
Polarizing Times, 2020

The images of laser beams in the collage *Polarizing Times* were collected by the artist from various sources, including science fiction movies or the documentation of recent protests in Hong Kong where laser pointers were used. Aligned to form a collective and straight beam, the images create a visual map of laser technology, while examining the iconography of laser light. The work reflects on laser light's real and imaginary applications, from highly utopian fantasies to the very real confrontational and oppressive circumstances of its use.

5 Alan Bogana
Billions and trillions of sun rays can't be wrong, 2009

In the summer of 1566, a curious celestial occurrence took place in Basel, inevitably explained either as divine or extra-terrestrial. A local pamphlet was published at the time, illustrating the remarkable sighting. In the creation of his work, Bogana superimposed a reproduction of the historical print on orange plastic foil, which he then exposed to UV light for several weeks. The artist's process employed here aptly connects the content of the image with its origin, building a bridge between surprising and sometimes destructive forces of physical phenomena such as ultraviolet light and the mysteries of unexplained celestial apparitions as well as their different interpretations.

6 Alan Bogana
Journeys of Light – Basel 01.01.2050 00:00 N 47° 33' 30.21" E 7° 34' 23.77", 2020

The versatility of light as a natural phenomenon and our relationship to unknown or invisible realities form the essentials themes of Alan Bogana's works. In his new installation *Journeys of Light*, the artist uses and dissects a beam of laser light to depict the night sky above Basel in the year 2050. The twinkling of stars is imitated by the unique properties of laser light. In this work, Bogana ingeniously combines various scientific fields, including modern laser projection technology and astronomical research. The work is a reflection on light pollution and our relationship to the night sky, and serves as a counterpart to the print *Billions and trillions of sun rays can't be wrong*, which depicts a celestial phenomenon observed in the sky above Basel in 1566, also on display in the exhibition.

7 Alan Bogana
The Riddle of the Pudelsphinx, 2015

In recent years, Bogana has intensively studied the technique of holography and created a series of holograms representing a variety of minerals, of which *The Riddle of the Poodle Sphinx* is one of the earliest. The work depicts a zoomorphic mineral of quartz, pyrite and calcite that resembles a poodle. The title also alludes to the posing of a riddle by the sphinx, through which Bogana draws our attention to how the illusion of holography can challenge and transform our understanding of reality.

8 Alan Bogana
Sensible Spectrum VR, 2017-2020

In the interactive work *Sensible Spectrum VR*, viewers are invited to sit in a swivel chair and experience the virtual reality of a 360° video. Once immersed in their fictional environment, a small projector attached to the VR headset simultaneously traces the viewer's movements in the projection of a video onto the surrounding walls. Visible to viewers on the outside, the exterior film is synchronized to create a dialogue between the viewer immersed in virtual reality and their surroundings. The virtual environment is a loose reconstruction of the cloud chamber experiment, which renders the invisible erratic particles (cosmic rays and earth radiation) that constantly hit us visible. Bogana's installation explores the tension between the perception of phenomena from different perspectives. The dissociation between the interior and exterior perspectives offers scope for reflection on our perception of various realities and the role of technology in relating them to us.

9 Alan Bogana
Ionize ionize !, 2020

Bogana's new film *Ionize ionize !* was shot in a scintillation detector factory in Utrecht, where instruments that can determine the energy type and intensity of ionizing radiation are manufactured. Documenting the factory's production processes, Bogana's vivid and fascinating film explores the unique properties of the translucent crystals used by medical and scientific research institutions in X-ray detectors. The film is subtitled with speculative and utopian reflections on life's ontological state, as it oscillates between light, energy and matter. They provocatively conclude: "We are symbiotic with technology, and we must evolve with it."

Alan Bogana (*1979), initially from Ticino, lives and works in Geneva. He studied at Zurich's Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK) and at the Haute école d'art et de design (HEAD) in Geneva. His works have been presented at institutions such as MINES-ParisTech in Paris, Kunsthaus Langenthal, Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva, Smena Art Center in Kazan, Festival ISEA 2014 in Dubai, Fotomuseum Winterthur, CC Contemporary Copenhagen and the Fri-Art-Center in Freiburg.
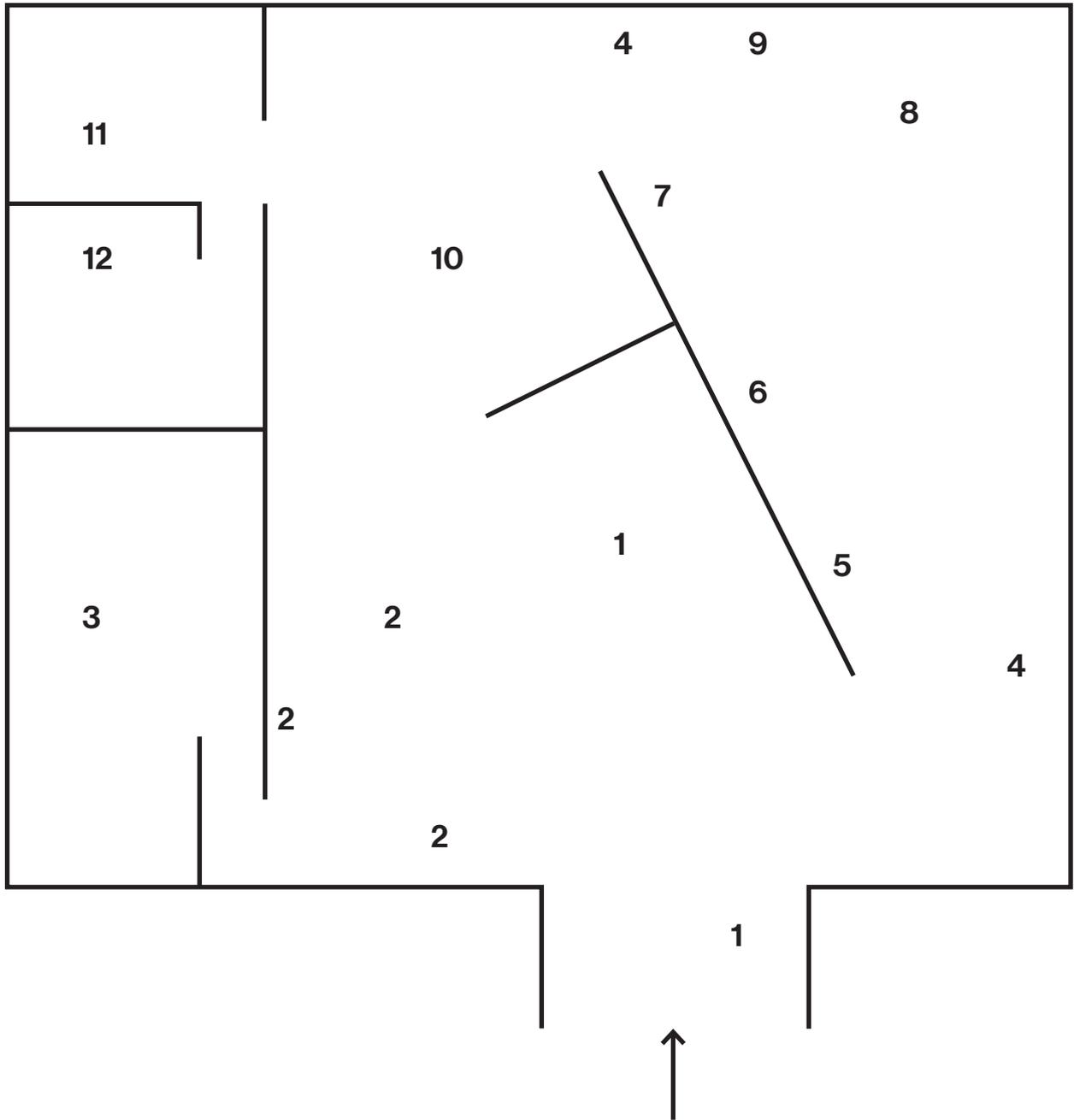
knowbotiq, Alan Bogana, Félicien Goguey
Swiss Media Art - Pax Art Awards 2019

The exhibition *Swiss Media Art: knowbotiq, Alan Bogana, Félicien Goguey* presents works by the winners of the Pax Art Awards 2019. These Swiss artists reflect on number of cutting-edge topics, bringing to light pressing issues and debatable developments related to technological innovations and their impact on our society. The artist duo knowbotiq explores postcolonial fabulations, Félicien Goguey takes a critical look at mobile phone networks and surveillance systems and Alan Bogana's poetic and conceptual installations question our perception of light. In three parallel solo shows, the exhibition puts the spotlight on each of the award winners. The exhibition should not be regarded as a group show: the three artists are presented in three different situations with the exhibition space. Nevertheless, all three positions presented here are highly relevant to artistic production in Switzerland. While knowbotiq are internationally acclaimed pioneers in media art, Alan Bogana and Félicien Goguey demonstrate how the works brought forward by a younger generation of artists that introduce their own aesthetics and personal concerns to current discourses are no less exciting.

The Pax Art Awards, founded as a collaboration between the Art Foundation Pax and HeK, honours, promotes and supports pioneering digital art and media-specific practices by Swiss artists. The Pax Art Awards were first presented during Art Basel in 2018. They are awarded to Swiss artists who employ the technologies of digital media and/or reflect on their effects on society. Half of the prize money goes to the acquisition of one of the artist's works for the collection of the Art Foundation Pax, while the other half provides support to recipients in the development and production of new work, which is then shown at the Pax Art Awards exhibition at HeK in the following year.

The Art Foundation Pax is an independent foundation for the promotion of digital and media-based art in Switzerland and is financially supported by Pax.

Curator: Boris Magrini

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