

Ars Electronica and Volkswagen present a new exhibition:

# Like a Second Nature

(Berlin / Linz, June 6, 2013) "Like a Second Nature," the new exhibition opening today, Thursday, June 6, 2013 at Automobil Forum Unter den Linden, is the fourth collaborative project that Ars Electronica Linz and Volkswagen AG have staged at the Berlin venue. Amidst high-tech's increasingly pervasive presence in our environment and even in ourselves, this show scrutinizes the boundary between what is natural and what is artificial. "Like a Second Nature" is comprised of 14 interactive works by artists from Australia, Brazil, Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Japan and the USA. It runs until July 28, 2013. Admission is free of charge.

## Like a Second Nature

There are no longer very many aspects of our lives in which technical devices or processes do not play a significant role. In just about everything we do, we employ modern technology, are enveloped and even permeated by it. At ever shorter intervals, this ongoing technological development institutes a new set of facts & circumstances, and has long since established itself as one of the prime determinants of our social, scientific, economic and political reality. We are constantly creating new tools, new materials and new media. In going about this, we usually take as our model that very same nature we are endeavoring to comprehend, control and ultimately upgrade. But even if it's mostly just a means to an end, this process of investigating flora and fauna also yields incidental benefits, opening up new findings and insights into life on The Blue Planet. And scientists aren't the only ones at work weaving this web of development; now, artists as well seek and discover cognitive and emotional approaches and interpretations to thereby satisfy humankind's longing to not entirely lose contact with our origins.

## Unconventional Configurations and New Types of Artists

Each of 14 works of art uniquely manifests various approaches and associations. This show illustrates the wide array of roles artists assume, of themes their concepts and configurations encompass, of unconventional ways they choose to relate their narratives. What also becomes evident over the course of this encounter is a new type of artist, one characterized by a high level of substantive competence—which is to say artistic, scientific and sociopolitical capacities—and, with respect to art's role, one who keeps the big picture in mind. This applies to Agnes Meyer-Brandis and her ironic take on science and how scientists see themselves, as well as to Willem van Weeghel and his playful dealings with perception and self-perception. Observations of nature served Yasuhiro Suzuki, Akira Nakayasu and Alistair McClymont as sources of inspiration for their aesthetically demanding, highly expressive works having to do with robotic plants, blinking leaves and artificially generated tornados. The Brazilian duo Cantoni/Crescenti, on the other hand, sets up an elaborate configuration of light

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patterns, shadows and reflections as a means of shifting the installation visitors themselves and their reactions and observations into the focal point of attention.

#### Fourth Collaborative Exhibition by Volkswagen AG and Ars Electronica Linz

This fourth exhibition staged jointly by Volkswagen Automobil Forum Unter den Linden and Ars Electronica Linz scrutinizes the determinative elements in this process' past, present and future, those factors that have enabled us to become cognizant of what is natural and artificial in everyday life, to experience those two and differentiate between them. Interactive works, perspectives and positions selected from the Prix Ars Electronica's media art network underscore the tremendous relevance of investigating this issue while simultaneously shedding light on its multifarious effects on everyday life.

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Like a Second Nature: <http://export.aec.at/berlin2013/en/>

Automobil Forum Unter den Linden: <http://www.volkswagenag.com/content/afb/content/de/homepage.html>

Ars Electronica Linz: <http://www.aec.at/news/en/>

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## Like a Second Nature – Artists and Works

Rejane Cantoni, Leonardo Crescenti (both BR): Wall (2012)

“Wall” is a kinetic sculpture that reacts to the human beings who behold it. It’s composed of 30 vertically arrayed aluminum panels that rotate 180° in a linear sequence. The movement commences when an installation visitor moves past one end of the wall, and continues in a chain reaction like falling dominoes. Passers-by experience a series of optical phenomena, reflections and distortions that alter the beholders’ perception of space. This sort of interaction with installation visitors endows the wall with a kind of personality. The specialty of this duo of Brazilian artists is coming up with audiovisual and haptic interfaces that make for a natural mode of exploring virtual, remote (off-site) and hybrid environments.

[www.cantoni-crescenti.com.br](http://www.cantoni-crescenti.com.br)

Willem van Weeghel (NL): Dynamic Structure 29117 (2007-2010)

The graphic motif in “dynamic structure 29117” is in constant motion. It consists of 32 black lines rotating independently of one another on a white background. Clusters of four rays pivot around eight different points. Each four-ray configuration moves differently; the rays sometime overlap like the hands of a clock. The motion is smooth, and can be either clockwise or counterclockwise. A control system unseen by installation visitors coordinates the rays’ positions and constantly creates new forms. The structures fluctuate between chaos and order. A cycle never repeats.

[www.willemvanweeghel.nl](http://www.willemvanweeghel.nl)

Yasuhiro Suzuki (JP): Blinking Leaves (2003)

This sculpture is sturdily rooted in the exhibition space like a massive tree trunk, but hundreds of tiny paper leaves are what make its imposing presence truly unfold. The white leaves are blown upwards inside the trunk to briefly conjure up an imaginary tree with resplendent foliage in its crown. The leaves are imprinted with an open eye on one side and a closed eye on the other, so they seem to be winking at installation visitors during their tumbling descent to the floor. It’s as if they were inviting visitors to restock the tree, since the leaves can be gathered and fed back into the sculpture to trigger another fast-forward change of seasons.

[www.mabataki.com](http://www.mabataki.com)

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#### Akira Nakayasu (JP): plant (2010)

“plant” is an interactive installation that Akira Nakayasu (JP) was inspired to create by the sight of wind-blown grass. The robotic plant features 169 artificial leaves set in motion by control elements. The actuators are made of a special alloy that endows them with shape memory. Each leaf thus reacts independently to motion—for instance, a hand approaching it—by gently wafting in the virtual wind.

[www.nakayasu.com](http://www.nakayasu.com)

#### Takahiro Matsuo (JP): Phantasm (2006)

“Phantasm” is an interactive projection by Takahiro Matsuo (JP) that engenders extraordinary settings for relaxation and dreaming. Visitors enter the world of “Phantasm” with a glowing ball of light in hand. Charming butterflies react to the light, fly towards it and pursue the illumination. If a visitor shields the ball with his/her hands, the butterflies disappear and visitors return to the real world. This LED-studded ball of light is thus the interface that enables installation visitors to interact with the virtual world of “Phantasm.” The fluttering about of the butterflies and the accompanying background music react to changes in the position of the ball and the intensity of the light it emits. The changes are registered by a sensor camera mounted on the space’s ceiling.

[www.monoscape.jp](http://www.monoscape.jp)

#### Alistair McClymont (UK): The Limitations of Logic and the Absence of Absolute Certainty (2008)

Human beings have been enthralled by natural phenomena since time immemorial. Alistair McClymont constructed a model of one in order to better understand it. Thus, he literally tore a tornado out of its natural surroundings, thereby reducing the phenomenon to its essential form and then using technological aids to bring it back to life. Nevertheless, there’s still that certain something—in the mockup just like in the original—that remains essentially incomprehensible to us, something upon which we humans can exert no influence.

[www.alistairmcclymont.com](http://www.alistairmcclymont.com)

#### MASATO SEKINE (JP): Ene-geometrix (2007)

Peltier modules arrayed in a grid warm or cool the liquid in Japanese artist Masato Sekine’s “Ene-geometrix.” Installation visitors can use a tracking ball to influence these temperature changes. As soon as temperature equilibrium between the fluid and the environment is achieved, a stable linear pattern is visible. When the temperatures of the fluid and its environment diverge, currents cause the geometric pattern to break down. Masato Sekine’s installation illustrates the interrelationship between humankind and nature when the encounter of two magnitudes—artificially controlled heat

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energy on one hand, and natural self-organization on the other—at a shared location produces dynamic patterns.

[www.sekines.net](http://www.sekines.net)

#### Ivan Henriques (BR): Prototype for a New Bio-Machine (2012)

Is it possible for plants to have recourse to high-tech just like we human beings like to do? Brazilian artist Ivan Henriques' interactive "Biomachine" (PNBM) explores new channels of communication among human beings, living organisms and machines. To do so, he has transformed a tropical plant into a sensor. When an installation visitor touches the leaves of this Homalomena, a flowering plant of the Araceae (Arum) family, the plant registers this stimulus and transmits an electrical signal to an attached machine that proceeds to go into motion. The creation of this prototype will be followed up by additional research to come up with autonomous symbiotic bio-machines in which plants and mechanical devices literally merge into a single unit.

[www.ivanhenriques.com](http://www.ivanhenriques.com)

#### Matthew Gardiner (AUS): Oribotics (2012)

Matthew Gardiner investigates aesthetic, biomechanical and morphological connections among nature, origami and robotics. The configuration of his patterns of folds—particularly the precise array of V-shaped valleys and  $\Lambda$ -shaped ridges—determines the mechanical design of his creations. In these structures that are the outcome of "nature's origami," thousands of folds occur in a few microseconds, and even a single folding error can have a devastating effect on an organism's viability. Accordingly, the latest "Oribotics" generation features a polyester fabric membrane that can withstand millions of interaction sequences with hardly any wear and tear. Each Oribot is equipped with a proximity switch that registers any object in its immediate surroundings. If an installation visitor's hand, for instance, approaches, the Oribot opens its flower-like structure, an operation in which 1,050 folds are in motion. All macro-interactions are network- & software-controlled. Each micro-interaction is forwarded to every other Oribot in the installation and thereby triggers more than 50,000 folds.

[www.oribotics.net](http://www.oribotics.net)

#### Keiko Takahashi (JP): Meter Crawler (2008-2013)

The retractable tape measure that Japanese artist Keiko Takahashi uses in this work seems no different than one any handyman has in his toolbox, but a simple technical enhancement endows this model with a life of its own. "Meter Crawler" has an immediately recognizable resemblance to the physical appearance and leisurely locomotion of a creature with which we're all familiar: the snail. And

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indeed, the retractable tape measure really does inch along the floor, a table or any surface just like a snail: “Meter Crawler” extends its graduated band about five centimeters and digs the metal flange on the end into the ground to pull its housing forward. This example illustrates how we humans, by bringing a bit of imagination and creativity to bear, can identify astounding similarities between nature and technology.

[www.th.jec.ac.jp/~keiko](http://www.th.jec.ac.jp/~keiko)

#### David Bowen (US): tele-present wind (2010)

Is it possible to take the sensation of a gust of wind or slight breeze blowing outdoors and transpose it into a windowless room? How about from one spot on Earth to another? American artist David Bowen’s installation does just that. First, a dried plant is set up outdoors and an accelerometer is attached to it to record the motion of the stalk swaying in the breeze. The data generated thereby are transmitted to another 42 dried plants set up in the installation space—or at any other spot on Earth, for that matter. Each of these plants, in turn, is equipped with a mechanical element that precisely replicates the effects of the wind conditions as originally measured. Thus, the indoor plants are synchronized in real time to the movement of the plant outdoors.

[www.dwbowen.com](http://www.dwbowen.com)

#### Agnes Meyer-Brandis (DE): Earth-Core-Laboratory and Elf-Scan (2003-2004)

With the development of her “Earth-Core-Laboratory and Elf-Scan,” Agnes Meyer-Brandis has come up with an investigative apparatus to get to the bottom of one of our planet’s secrets—the elves hiding in its depths. Her “research” is based on the assumption that there exist magnificent micro-worlds that go unnoticed by most people or are intentionally concealed from our view. In order to nevertheless enable people to behold these worlds—for instance, spectacular coral reefs that, the artist maintains, exist almost everywhere and not just at the bottom of the sea—Agnes Meyer-Brandis has developed her own exploration equipment: the earth-core-laboratory and the elf-scan.

[www.ffur.de](http://www.ffur.de)

#### Daniel Warnke (DE) & deople network e.V.: Window Farms (2012)

Having a garden of one’s own is the dream of many city dwellers. Now, “Window Farms” can make this dream come true—at least on a small scale. Using affordable hydroponics equipment set up vertically on an apartment window and simple materials like plastic bottles and small lengths of tubing makes it easy and convenient to grow plants. Daniel Warnke joined deople network e.V. and hooked up with an interdisciplinary crew working collaboratively in the spirit of design thinking to

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solve current and future problems. And this ultimately led him to build his first window farm. The idea originated in New York City and is essentially based on mutual support and open exchange among these urban sodbusters. The inputs: experience and knowledge; the outputs: vegetables and fruits grown on one's own windowsill.

[www.deople.org](http://www.deople.org)

#### Iori Tomita (JP):New World Transparent Specimens (2012)

For his "New World Transparent Specimens," Japanese artist Iori Tomita turned sea creatures into strangely fantastic specimens. As a student, he learned the technique of producing specimens for purposes of scientific analysis. The creatures' muscle tissue is made translucent by dissolving its natural proteins; thus, it takes laboratory techniques developed by scientists to reveal the precise forms created by nature. The body parts are then stained, whereby the harder and softer tissues (such as cartilage) are treated with different colors. Depending on the size of the organism, it can take up to six months to create a specimen. The way Iori Tomita works is an example of the interplay of art and science. Employing what is actually a method of scientific analysis, he creates bizarre sculptures that resist pigeonholing either as a work of art or as a scientific project.

[www.shinsekai-th.com](http://www.shinsekai-th.com)

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