

# Prix Ars Electronica 2019:

## Golden Nicas for artists from Canada, the USA, and Austria

(Linz, May 22, 2019) The Prix Ars Electronica 2019 received a total of 3,256 submissions from 82 countries. The “Artificial Intelligence & Life Art” category was advertised for the first time and immediately received 840 submissions. The “Computer Animation” category received 835 submissions, while the “Digital Musics & Sound Art” category received 873 submissions. This year, the Austria-wide category u19—CREATE YOUR WORLD focused on “Young Creatives” between 0 and 14 as well as “Young Professionals” between 14 and 19 and recorded 708 submissions. The Golden Nicas of 2019 went to Kalina Bertin, Sandra Rodriguez, Nicolas S. Roy and Fred Casia from Canada, Paul Vanouse from the USA, producer and composer Peter Kutin, and Alex Lazarov from Vienna.

This year, the Golden Nicas will be formally presented on Thursday, September 5, 2019, as part of the grand opening event of the Ars Electronica Festival. A selection of the Prix Ars Electronica's best works will, in line with tradition, be presented in the CyberArts Show at the OK ÖÖ Kulturquartier and in the context of the Prix Forums the winners will discuss their artistic perspectives and projects.

## Computer Animation

### Golden Nica

### Manic VR

Kalina Bertin, Sandra Rodriguez, Nicolas S. Roy, Fred Casia (all CA)

<https://vimeo.com/273215708>

*“(...) we applauded the work’s ambition to use expanded animation technology to seek understanding of a debilitating condition.” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

“Manic VR” deals with bipolar disorder, a mental illness characterized by manic and depressive mood states. Kalina Bertin has taken the illness experienced by her siblings Felicia and François as an opportunity to give an insight into a world consisting of different realities and states, of hallucinations as well as beautiful but also frightening fantasies, in the form of a documentary film and the virtual reality project “Manic VR.” The Canadian filmmaker and her team merge images, music, and the haunting voices of Felicia and François, who have been using their sister's mailbox as their personal diary for 3 years, into a captivating and coherent narrative.

In “Manic VR,” Kalina Bertin, Sandra Rodriguez, Nicolas S. Roy and Fred Casia want to help engender more empathy for people with bipolar disorder. They will receive the Golden Nica 2019 in the Computer Animation category.

#### Award of Distinction

### Strings

Ruini Shi (CN)

<https://vimeo.com/218539975>

*“(...) enamoured with the highly poetic treatment of this story of lost love and the loneliness of social media. (...) also found the idea of a lost world of forgotten games to be moving and thought provoking.” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

“Strings” is an animation in which everything revolves around a virtual affair in a computer game with retro character. The cleverly constructed storyline contains many references to chat messaging, programming languages, and computer games. “Strings” was created by Ruini Shi, an interaction designer whose animations question new technologies and related phenomena.

#### Award of Distinction

### Undershoot: sensitive data, Cristiano

Cindy Coutant (FR)

<https://vimeo.com/334298440>

<http://cindycoutant.net>

*“(...) a tribute to lost emotional connection, intimacy, and materiality.” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

Cindy Coutant is an artist. And she admires Cristiano Ronaldo. In order to establish a personal relationship with her idol, she created “Undershoot: sensitive data, Cristiano,” an installation reminiscent of “Tamagotchi.” However, instead of focusing on a little creature, the focus is on the footballer. “Undershoot: sensitive data, Cristiano” explores the deeply human need to feel connected with all his/her senses to a real—or virtual—person.

# Digital Musics

Golden Nica

## TORSO #1

Peter Kutin (AT)

<https://kutinkindlinger.com/torso/>

*“(…) highly confrontational in its corporeality, offering an intense and original experience—a persuasive example of contemporary sound art that delves into the still quite unexplored field of psychoacoustics.” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

“TORSO #1” is a sound sculpture that is visually reminiscent of a “Klopotec,” a windmill-like scarecrow. Like the wings of a windmill, four 100V loudspeakers rotate and generate sound signals plus feedback in the room. Static microphones simultaneously transmit the movement of the sculpture via a quadraphonic PA system. The sound movements can be perceived both horizontally and vertically, creating a completely unorthodox listening experience. All sounds were specially designed for this unique system and maximize its psychoacoustic effect.

Award of Distinction

## Muted Situation #22: Muted Tchaikovsky's 5th

Samson Young (HK)

<https://www.thismusicisfalse.com/muted-tchaikovsky/>

*“Young does not send a message but raises questions on which we start to reflect while listening to this unusual, beautiful performance of classical music.” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

As part of the ongoing project “Muted Situation #22: Muted Tchaikovsky's 5th 2018,” Samson Young invited the Flora Symphony Orchestra Cologne to play Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony. The special thing about it was that the orchestra was asked to play as quietly as possible. By removing the musical foreground, completely different, mostly unnoticed sounds become audible: the focused breathing of the musicians, the turning of the pages, or the clicking noises when playing the keyboard instruments.

Award of Distinction

## Voices from AI in Experimental Improvisation

Tomomi Adachi (JP), Andreas Dzialocha (DE), Marcello Lussana (IT)

<https://soundcloud.com/tomomibot>

<https://github.com/adzialocha/tomomibot>

*“(...) shows how interactive technology and AI can push the boundaries of a style—here a singer—by challenging the musician with music material that is strictly generated from his own productions.” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

The project “Voices from AI in Experimental Improvisation” by Tomomi Adachi, Andreas Dzialocha, and Marcello Lussana concerns itself with the use of artificial intelligence in the context of experimental music and improvisation. The project has a research and a performance component. Using artificial neural networks, they developed a performance AI called “Tomomibot,” which learns from musical improvisations how to interact live with a human voice improviser.

## Artificial Intelligence & Life Art

Golden Nica

### Labor

Paul Vanouse (US)

<http://www.paulvanouse.com/labor.html>

<https://vimeo.com/320605747>

*(...) elegantly combines reflections about the automation of labor and the obsession with optimization in the name of capital, current challenges posed by today’s microbiome research to the notion of human individuality (...) (from the Statement of the Jury)*

What does work actually smell like? “Labor” is a dynamic, self-regulating art installation that mimics the scent of people experiencing stress. In this case, however, no people are involved in the odor formation itself—it takes place exclusively through the multiplication of bacteria in three glass bioreactors. Each bioreactor incubates a unique species of human skin bacteria responsible for the primary scent of sweating bodies: staphylococcus epidermidis, corynebacterium xerosis, and propionibacterium avidum. When these bacteria metabolize simple sugars and fats, they produce odors associated with human effort, stress, and anxiety. Their scents combine in a central chamber in which an icon of exploitation—a white T-shirt—permeated by spreading odors is hanging.

The three custom-made bioreactors are monitored by a Raspberry-Pi-based automation system that includes agitators, biosensors, pumps, heaters, and valves. The installation also includes several “sweat stain prints,” where freshly sweated shirts are dusted with charcoal and pressed at high pressure between the paper, giving the paper surface an embossed sweat pattern.

Award of Distinction

## Confronting Vegetal Otherness

Skotopoiesis, Phytoteratology, Strange Encounters

Špela Petrič (SI)

<https://www.spelapetric.org/>

*“Petrič poetically stages human-plant kinship and co-performativity from the molecular to the ecological realm.” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

Špela Petrič's three-part series “Confronting Vegetal Otherness” is an examination of various forms of exchange between humans and plants.

The performance “Scotopoiesis” revolves around a biosemiotic process of intercognition between the artist and a field of cress. The artist stands for 20 hours in front of the field; her shadow contributing to the fading of the cress's color. The long duration of the performance forces the artist to experience a kind of vegetative sense of time.

“Strange Encounters: Metaphysics, Algae, and Carcinoma,” by contrast, uses biotechnology to overcome the differences between us humans and plants. Here, the artist looks at cell biology from a scientific perspective—the individual cell is understood as a biotechnical worker. Špela Petrič stages an in-vitro encounter between two different cells: One comes from chlorella, a free-living unicellular photosynthetic alga; the other is a human cancer cell. In at least one case, the performative experiment led to hybridity, because the cancer cells seemed to absorb the cells of the algae.

“Phytoteratology” is a molecular performance in which the artist creates plant embryos in artificial wombs that are formed from her urine by hormones.

Award of Distinction

## VFRAME: Visual Forensics and Metadata Extraction

Adam Harvey (US)

<https://vframe.io/research/synthetic-datasets/>

*"(...) combines art-as-activism, open-source and DIY/DIWO philosophies, community, and citizen science to subvert what was initially developed as surveillance technologies and deploy them for the greater good." (from the Statement of the Jury)*

"VFRAME" is a research project that investigates how computer vision can be used in human rights research. The project started in 2017 and showed how object recognition can be used to locate illegal ammunition in the Syrian conflict. In 2018, "VFRAME," in collaboration with the Syrian Archive ([syrianarchive.org](http://syrianarchive.org)), developed a visual search engine for processing video data from combat zones. Since such videos are usually recorded under extreme conditions and are therefore only low resolution recordings, synthetic data modelling techniques were developed in 2019. The synthetic training data consists of 3D-modelled photorealistic images based on a series of real, verifiable images. Using a few images of a specific illegal cluster munition, textured 3D models can be created and then used in different 3D environments. The still images created in this way can be used as image training data.

## u19—CREATE YOUR WORLD

Young Professionals 14 to 19—Golden Nica

Dschungel

Alex Lazarov (LZRV)

[www.alexlazarov.at](http://www.alexlazarov.at)

*"The visual language, the life worlds, and the aesthetics (...) convey an authentic insight into his generation's attitude to life." (from the Statement of the Jury)*

"DSCHUNGEL" is a 5-episode web series showing 24 hours of life of a group of teenagers. DSCHUNGEL cannot be classified in any particular genre, and there are no limits to the stylistic influences —the spectrum ranges from dream sequences with choral sounds to found-footage thrillers to the coming-of-age films of the 80s. The project is a portrait of the internet generation and at the same time a declaration of love to youth itself. In his web series, Alex Lazarov links his world of thoughts with his environment. His film project stands for artistic experimentation and also aims to capture a certain moment in the life of a young filmmaker, to document perspectives

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and views that are guaranteed to change as he grows up. For "Dschungel" Alex Lazarov is receiving the Golden Nica in the category u19—CREATE YOUR WORLD.

## Young Professionals—Award of Distinction

### Gift of Nature

Students of the HLW for Communication and Media Design of the Kreuzschwestern, Linz

*"(...) shows that it's important to look twice and question what's superficially presented as sustainable." (from the Statement of the Jury)*

Whereas in 1950 only 1.5 million tons of plastic were produced, today it is 300 million tons per year. And there's an upward trend. At the same time, recycling rates are alarmingly low, since in the USA, for example, only 9 percent of all plastic is recycled. The way the resulting plastic waste pollutes the oceans and the creatures that live in them is disturbing. In "Gift of Nature," Philip Bacher and Isabel Beckerle take a critical look at the subject of packaging. Using a self-designed label for organic products, they advertise a range of pasta, dried fruit, and snacks. The emphasis is on sustainable and organic production in Austria. Only on closer inspection does the discrepancy between this "organic" promise and the disproportionate use of plastic in packaging become apparent.

## Young Professionals—Award of Distinction

### Rake – minimize your Information

Tessa Aichelburg, Luis Hofmeister, Lukas Kaufmann, Paul Schreiber

*"(...) reflects on the almost unmanageable flood of information that is presented to us every day and questions the actual relevance of the information defined as relevant by opaque algorithms." (from the Statement of the Jury)*

"Rake - minimize your Information" wants to question our media consumption and is directed towards the flood of unfiltered information that is constantly pouring in via social media and news, clouding our view of the news that is really relevant. An algorithm ranks the news provided by different media agencies according to their relevance for the average reader. The most unimportant news stories are printed out by a printer and then cut into strips by a shredder. The mountain of shredded paper is constantly growing and symbolizes the reading we can save ourselves from having to do.

Young Creatives 0 to 14—u 14 Grand Prize

## Digitaler Mordversuch

Matteo Gärtner, Philipp Giselbrecht, Rafael Gmeiner, Johanna Hofer, Iannis Kadgien, Martin Kohler, Daria Madlener, Stella Reinecke, Yannic Schwärzler, Peter Stumvoll

*“(...) an easy-to-understand and exciting story.” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

Surveillance by large corporations is the subject of the short film “Digitaler Mordversuch.” The script was written by ten students, who are also responsible for the set, shooting, and editing and who also perform as actors. The clip was produced using Windows Movie Maker and was shot mainly in the school.

Young Creatives 0 to 14—u12 Grand Prize

## Dungeon of Math

Simon Heppner

<https://github.com/spheppner/dungeonRunner>

*“A tribute to the computer game classic “Rogue”. (from the Statement of the Jury)*

Simon Heppner has come up with a motivational aid for mathematics. He has programmed a game in which the player has to get through a labyrinth, fight monsters, find treasure, solve math problems, and at the end find the exit.

Young Creatives 0 to 14—u10 Grand Prize

## get\_bullied!

Mina Sophie Hackl

*“(...) a cheeky, fresh look at the subject of bullying (...).” (from the Statement of the Jury)*

Mina Sophie Hackl was bullied at school. She has used her experiences in a short film to encourage children to help each other in such situations. Using "gacha life," she created characters and backgrounds on a smartphone, took screenshots, and transformed them into an animation via iMovie.



Netidee SPECIAL PRIZE 2019

## Tweakr – Drop your file, improve your work

Antonia Beck, Tobias Gruber, Clemens Makoschitz, Tobias Micko,  
Sebastian Schreibmaier

[www.tweakr.io](http://www.tweakr.io)

*"(...) is thus one of those works that many people have been waited for and whose meaning literally jumps right out at you after a few seconds." (from the Statement of the Jury)*

"Tweakr – Drop your file, improve your work" is an online platform to facilitate and accelerate the collaboration between graphic artists, designers, and their clients: In it, graphic designs are sent to customers, who can enter their requests for changes in real time in freely selectable places in the design. Since December 2018, four of the five team members have been living together in an apartment in Vienna with their own offices in order to concentrate even more intensively on the development of "Tweakr" in addition to preparing for the Matura high school diploma exam. "Tweakr" has been online in a public beta since April 30, 2019.