

Prix Ars Electronica 2020:

Golden Nicas for Hong Kong Protest Movement and Artists in Los Angeles, Vienna and Graz

(Linz, 15/6/2020) 2020 marks a turning point in the 33-year history of the Prix Ars Electronica: for the first time since 1987, the international jury meetings were purely virtual; a movement of anonymous citizens received a Golden Nica for the first time in honor of its innovations and creative digital activism; and every other Golden Nica was awarded without exception to women—another first.

The Golden Nica in the category “Digital Communities” goes to the Hong Kong protest movement. In the category “Interactive Art +” the Golden Nica is awarded to artist Lauren Lee McCarthy, who lives and works in Los Angeles. The top prize in the category “Computer Animation” goes to artist Miwa Matreyek, also of Los Angeles, while VALIE EXPORT is honored with a Golden Nica for lifetime achievement in art and feminism as a “Visionary Pioneer of Feminist Media Art.” The Golden Nica for the category “u19 – create your world” was won by Lisa Rass, Franziska Gallé, Jona Lingitz and Anna Fachbach, all of them pupils at the HTBLVA-Graz Ortweinschule.

The Prix Ars Electronica 2020 brought together a total of 3,209 submissions from 90 different countries. With 1,236 works, the category “Interactive Art +” received the most submissions, followed by “Computer Animation” with 930 submissions and “Digital Communities” with 373 submissions. The category “u19 – create your world” which is open to “Young Creatives” (all under age 14) and “Young Professionals” (between 14 and 19) throughout Austria, received 670 submissions.

Members of the renowned Prix Ars Electronica jury this year were: Peter Burr (US), Birgitta Hosea (SW/UK), Mathilde Lavenne (FR), Erick Oh (KR/US) and Mimi Son (KR) (category “Computer Animation”), DooEun Choi (KR/US), Sabine Himmelsbach (DE/CH), Vladan Joler (RS), Haytham Nawar (EG) and Stefan Tiefengraber (AT) (category “Interactive Art +”), Thomas Gegenhuber (AT/DE), Chiaki Hayashi (JP), Dietmar Offenhuber (AT/US), Irimi Papadimitriou (GR/UK) and Farah Salka (LB) (category “Digital Communities”), and Sirikit Amann (AT), Gerald Hartwig (AT), Conny Lee (AT), Karl Markovics (AT) and Irene Posch (AT) (category “u19 – create your world”).

Prix Ars Electronica: <https://ars.electronica.art/prix/en/>

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Digital Communities:

Golden Nica of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

Be Water by Hong Kongers / Dedicated to the Hong Kong protesters by Eric Siu & Joel Kwong

“This year, the Golden Nica went for the first time to an anonymous group: the citizens of Hong Kong who organized the pro-democracy protests of 2019. [...] The modes of collective action in Hong Kong are, in many ways, exemplary for the notion of a digital community, but with important qualifications. The demonstrators did not organize around a particular technology but used digital media as one of many means to organize, communicate, document, and evade surveillance.” (excerpt from jury statement)

Be without shape, without form, ready to adapt yourself to any situation – that is the meaning of “Be Water!” Martial arts icon Bruce Lee made this idea famous and in 2019 the Hong Kong protest movement made it its own. An extradition law passed in Beijing had triggered a broad public outcry, now considered a best practice example of digital activism in the fight for basic democratic rights.

Formerly a British colony, Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997. The latter in turn committed itself to the constitutional principle of "one country, two systems," which gave Hong Kong its own political system and legal, economic and financial framework, including trade relations with other countries.

In the summer of 2019, Beijing intended to pass a law that would make it possible in future to extradite Hong Kong citizens under certain circumstances. The people of Hong Kong rose up against this plan, fearing that Beijing could simply equate "criminal" with "dissenting political opinions" and would soon begin prosecuting and extraditing inconvenient people. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets, setting off weeks of protest and civil disobedience that made headlines around the world. The fact that the bill was finally withdrawn in September 2019 did not diminish the force of the protest. Instead, people continue to demand reforms and a comprehensive investigation of alleged police brutality.

Digital technologies played, or still play, a key role in this protest movement. A “digital community” quickly formed to support the demonstrators on the front line, organize crowdsourcing campaigns and online petitions, use social media for fact-checking and reporting, live-stream various events, put websites online, record forums, develop apps, and more. In spite of – or perhaps because of – these countless activities, the protest movement has managed without central leadership so far. Platforms such as LIHKG (a local lo fi version of Reddit where users can

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communicate and vote on contributions) or AirDrop are used to agree on plans or exchange messages.

The “Hong Kongers” have certainly set new standards for digital activism. We wish to learn the lessons of this and, building on them, initiate a much-needed dialogue on how digital culture shapes our practice of civic responsibility now and will continue to do so in the future. The “Hong Kongers” and their “Be Water” philosophy are hereby awarded the Golden Nica of the Prix Ars Electronica.

Digital Communities: Awards of Distinction of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

Algorithmic Justice League (AJL)

<https://www.ajlunited.org>

“(...) stood out in this year’s selection as an organization that carries out urgent research and action (...) investigating algorithmic bias, injustice, and the non-neutrality of Artificial Intelligence systems.” (excerpt from the jury statement)

The organization “Algorithmic Justice League” (AJL) unites art and research to illuminate the social effects and dangers unleashed by artificial intelligence systems. Using artistic means, texts, TED Talks or films, the group aims to heighten public awareness of the effects and use of AI. It plans to commission research and advise decision-makers from regulatory authorities and industry with regard to AI standards and development processes.

Habaq Movement

www.facebook.com/habaqmovement

“(...) wins our vote through its aligned combo of politics and action, all geared towards survival alternatives for local communities.” (excerpt from the jury statement)

The current economic and social crisis in Lebanon underlines the importance of youth initiatives with a futuristic and targeted vision when seeking solutions. This is where the “Habaq Movement”, an agricultural cooperative in Lebanon whose members are of different nationalities, races, or religions, comes in. The movement aims to reclaim fallow agricultural land throughout the country and grow food, establish work teams, and offer alternative solutions for local communities. It also provides training and links agricultural initiatives between the local and refugee populations. The mobilization and lobbying work “Habaq” undertakes uses social media to connect

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farmers with young social initiatives and thus enables the further development of agriculture in Lebanon.

Interactive Art+

Golden Nica of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

SOMEONE / Lauren Lee McCarthy (US)

<https://lauren-mccarthy.com/SOMEONE>

(...) questions the role of the human in the age of intelligent machines by examining communication media and re-imagining them. (excerpt from the jury statement)

“SOMEONE” is an interactive installation that uses our Smart Homes as a starting point to examine how intimacy and the private sphere are in tension with comfort and independence and to investigate the role of human work in an automated future.

Visitors to a gallery find themselves in a command headquarters with four computer stations, which looks like a combination of a call center and a coworking space. Each computer has a view into the apartment of a person voluntarily participating in the project. Each of these apartments is equipped with specially designed smart devices.

The gallery visitors are now invited to take on the role of a human version of Amazon’s Alexa. They repeatedly hear the smart home residents calling for “SOMEONE“ and asking “SOMEONE” to turn the light on or off, play music or put water on for tea. For their part, the “human Alexas” can see, hear and supervise their clients at all times and control their household devices from a distance.

In “SOMEONE” Lauren Lee McCarthy examines how much comfort we must be promised in order to willingly surrender our private sphere and control over our lives and homes. And she asks how it must feel when the space where we were first socialized and cared for is taken over by AI systems. What does it mean when we outsource our identity formation to virtual assistants whose values are programmed by a small, homogenous group of developers?

“SOMEONE” does not make any judgements, but rather creates a space where everyone can and should form their own opinion. For her installation, Lauren Lee McCarthy is awarded the Golden Nica of the Prix Ars Electronica in the category “Interactive Art +”.

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Interactive Art + Awards of Distinction of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

Google Maps Hacks / Simon Weckert (GER)

<http://www.simonweckert.com/googlemapshacks.html>

“(...) great example of the contemporary situationist practice combining performance, social activism, obfuscation, and hacking.” (excerpt from the jury statement)

Take 99 second-hand smartphones, activate Google Maps' route planning function, and slowly pull them along a street in a handcart. Google Maps interprets this as a traffic jam and switches the road marking in the app from green (no traffic) to red (traffic jam). This virtual traffic jam has an effect in the real world, as Google Maps directs cars to a different route so that they don't get stuck in traffic. Simon Weckert shows how navigation systems or apps like Airbnb or Tinder influence our perception of the world and how we react to them.

Shadow Stalker / Lynn Hershman Leeson (US)

<https://www.lynnhershman.com/project/shadow-stalker/>

“(...) convinced by the conceptual strength of the work, the highly political topic, and the awareness it raises for surveillance issues and racial profiling. The jury also recognizes the formal quality of the work” (excerpt from the jury statement)

Specially designed algorithms and data-mining systems are always classifying people according to categories such as ethnicity, sex, or wealth. In “Shadow Stalker,” Lynn Hershman Leeson offers a demonstration of these tactics. Her interactive installation makes algorithms, data mining, live performances and projections of our “digital shadow” visible and uncovers hidden surveillance systems that have long been part and parcel of police investigations. The audience learns how each kind of software works and learns the limitations that are silently imposed on us. In the installation, participants stand inside a red square and enter their email address into an iPad. A surveillance camera captures the shadow of the participant and begins projecting personal data into it that are available on the Internet. In a frightening way, it shows how transparent we have already become. Lynn Hershman Leeson criticizes the current form of law enforcement, which encourages racial profiling and employs the error-prone logic of AI systems to target non-white or lower-income people with supposed criminal tendencies.

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Computer Animation

Golden Nica of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

Infinitely Yours / Miwa Matreyek (US)

<http://www.semihemisphere.com/#/infinitelyyours>

“Infinitely Yours” finds a curious glow at the heart of environmental calamity, offering no simple answers. This salient work lingers in the imagination as both a banner for action and a recipe for magic. (excerpt from the jury statement)

Floods and droughts, forest fires, resource exploitation and pollution – in “Infinitely Yours,” Miwa Matreyek combines animation and theater into a kaleidoscopic interpretation of the now everyday headlines about the ecological demands of the anthropocene. The piece consists of a canvas, layered projected animations, and the artist’s silhouette, which symbolizes both the individual person and humanity as a whole. The shadow figure repeatedly finds itself in other, always dystopian scenarios, in which human-made disturbances not only affect the environment, but also the body of the artist—that is to say, of humanity itself. The shadow figure drowns in a sea of plastic waste or suffocates from smog in the skyline of a metropolis.

In a haunting and disturbing way, “Infinitely Yours” explores our everyday complicity in the destruction we engage in for the sake of our way of life. With her live performance at the intersection of technology and craft, the fantastic and the physical, Miwa Matreyek has developed a form of storytelling that feels uncanny and visceral. By creating symbolic images with high emotional intensity, she urges us to grapple with the ecological effects of our (in)actions. For “Infinitely Yours,” this director, designer, animator and performance artist living and working in Los Angeles is awarded the Golden Nica in the category “Computer Animation.”

Computer Animation

Awards of Distinction of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

Average Happiness / Maja Gehrig (CH)

<https://vimeo.com/387405842>

“(…) co-opts the visual language of Capitalism, re-animating data graphics of charts and graphs into abstract landscapes.” (excerpt from the jury statement)

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In a PowerPoint presentation, statistical diagrams break free from the corset of their coordinates, and a sensual journey into the world of statistics begins. Pie charts melt; arrow charts twist; scatter charts, bar charts, and stock market graphs come together in a collective climax.

Bab Sebta / Randa Maroufi (MA/FR)

<https://vimeo.com/361075796>

„(...) Composed exclusively of fixed shots, the film excels in the art of collage. By associating the artist's memory and that of the workers who reproduced their gestures, the film succeeds in creating a collective work that reveals the excesses of our consumer society.“ (excerpt from the jury statement)

The film consists of a series of reconstructed situations based on observations at the border to Ceuta, a Spanish enclave on Moroccan soil. Ceuta is a setting for intensive trade in goods of all kinds, which are sold there cheaply by countless people. Randa Maroufi's film can be seen as an artistic experiment that questions the limits of performance. Reminiscent of Lars von Trier's **Dogville**, all elements of the scene are reduced so that all attention is focused on the performances. The protagonists are people who actually worked on the border of Ceuta and who were asked to play themselves, using their own bags and work clothes. The film seeks to point out the tension that exists on the border between Europe and Africa.

Visionary Pioneers of Feminist Media Art

Golden Nica of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

VALIE EXPORT (AT)

<https://www.valieexport.at/>

She stands for a consistent feminist-political stance and its like-minded counterpart in (media) art; she has created a trend-setting connection between performance, public space, and media representation; she has participated in major exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale (1980) and documenta (1977, 2007); she has taught at renowned institutions such as the Art Institute in San Francisco, the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee/USA, the Berlin University of the Arts, and the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. She is one of the most important and successful international pioneers of feminist media art. VALIE EXPORT.

Waltraud Lehner was born in Linz in 1940. She attended the local school of arts and crafts, before going to Vienna and graduating from HBLVA für TextilIndustrie in 1964.

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From 1967 on, she used the name VALIE EXPORT as an artistic concept and logo and made a name for herself within a short time. Based on the understanding that media art in particular is always also work on and with socio-political reality, VALIE EXPORT has made a contribution to the positioning of the genre within the spectrum of contemporary art that is still valid today. For her impressive life's work, the filmmaker, media artist, and performance artist will be awarded a Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica as a "Visionary Pioneer of Feminist Media Art."

During Ars Electronica 2020, VALIE EXPORT will have her own program focus. A special lecture is planned as part of the Prix Ars Electronica Forum in the Upper Austrian Kulturquartier, Crossing Europe will show its own "Tribute VALIE EXPORT" film program, and guided tours and lectures will be offered in the archives of the VALIE EXPORT Center Linz, located in the Tabakfabrik. The exhibition VALIE EXPORT. COLLECTION CARE at the Francisco Carolinum in the Upper Austrian Landesmuseum will be on display during the festival.

u19 – create your world / Young Professionals Golden Nica of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020 Samen / Lisa Rass, Franziska Gallé, Jona Lingitz, Anna Fachbach, HTBLVA-Graz Ortweinschule (AT)

"In the form of a puppet cartoon, the phenomenon of 'puberty' is described with all its enigmatic facets—with its unpredictability, disturbances, and fascination. The creators have dispensed with spoken language and developed their own, absolutely compelling visual language, through which they create a complementary world: an allegory, a pictorial narrative that describes something that language is unable to express, because the content to be described refuses to be expressed by logical disciplines. [...] Even in terms of craftsmanship, 'Samen' (Seed) is a work of art. The few effects are well placed. The sparse and precise sound level compellingly dispenses with music and speech alike. The colors, lighting, and montage are masterful." (excerpt from the jury statement)

"SAMEN" is a four-minute experimental film dedicated to the theme of becoming an adult. The film was created as the final work of the fourth year group at the HTBLVA-Graz Ortwein School. Because there were no strict guidelines, Lisa Rass, Franziska Gallé, Jona Lingitz, and Anna Fachbach were able to give free rein to their creativity—and opted for the stop-motion technique and a subject that affects them: becoming an adult.

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Together they developed a story, built various sets, and created all the characters needed for their film. The latter consisted, for example, of wire frames that were covered with self-stitched clothing made of fabric remnants or covered with plasticine and then shaped. The piece was filmed frame by frame and edited in the Dragon Frame program. All lighting effects were created exclusively with Dedolight and aids such as small flashlights or desk lamps; various noises and atmospheric sounds were used as sound effects. The making of “Samen” took a whole year—a worthwhile effort: For their short film, Lisa Rass, Franziska Gallé, Jona Lingitz, and Anna Fachbach are receiving the Golden Nica of the 2020 Prix Ars Electronica in the category “u19 - create your world.”

u19 – create your world / Young Professionals Awards of Distinction of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

In Reactio Veritas / MOLEKÜL Kollektiv (AT)

(...) It is not just the adapted algorithms that reveal a new, redesigned world here; it is rather the overriding idea of the emotional mirror that is captivating. (excerpt from the jury statement)

“In Reactio Veritas” focuses on the themes of conflict and confrontation and places two participants in a conflict situation that has been determined in advance. During the subsequent conflict resolution process, electrodes are used to measure both participants’ brainwaves, and based on this, an algorithm generates a unique, aesthetic image of the situation.

Robdilo‘clock / Benjamin Aster (AT)

“(...) Benjamin Aster has achieved something great: his own unmistakable expression of the indescribable.” (excerpt from jury statement)

In a short film, Benjamin Aster demonstrates the workings of „Robdilo'clock“, a robot planned, built, and programmed by Aster himself that displays the time in a unique way. Using a gripper arm, individual objects are picked up and positioned so that they show the time digitally. It is thus a robot clock that digitally displays the time via an analog mechanisms with motors. Hence the name “ROBot - DIgital - anaLOG - CLOCK.”

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Young Creatives

u14 Main Award of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

The Truth Part 2 / Creative Media Design students from NMS Lehen (AT)

<https://goldextra.com/the-truth-part-2>

*"(...) takes us on an exciting journey and challenges our brain cells on the way."
(excerpt from jury statement)*

„The Truth Part 2“ is a multi-layered mixed-reality game that shows the abysses of modern cities in an exciting and humorous way and distinguishes itself with a series of puzzles and augmented reality elements. „The Truth Part 2“ was created in a one-year process with the students, who researched their neighborhoods, designed the game and rules system, came up with the intricate adventure story, and created the photo, video, and audio material.

Young Creatives

u12 Main Award of the Prix Ars Electronica 2020

Lury / Laurin Steinhuber, Amelie Steinhuber, Niklas Steinhuber (AT)

"... demonstrates an eye for cinematic imagery." (excerpt from the jury statement)

The principal actor, Lury, is an angler who is no longer interested in fishing and is thinking about his professional future. When he hears a knock at his door and finds a demon standing outside, nothing will ever be the same again. For the short film, puppets with a skeleton made of metal plates, ball joints, and wires were custom-made and a carport was transformed into a studio with its own green screen.

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MIC special price 2020

CareLine / Simon Krist, Matthias Janitsch,
Gabriel Neuberger, HTL Rennweg (AT)

<https://sites.google.com/view/carelineautonom>

<https://www.instagram.com/careline.autonom/?hl=de>

"(...) shows how innovative approaches and technical solutions can make lasting improvements to job quality in care institutions. (excerpt from the jury statement)

„CareLine“ shows how innovative approaches and technical solutions can make lasting improvements to the quality of life of people in care facilities. The focus is on developing a self-driving serving trolley for nursing and care facilities, which should make work easier for staff at the push of a button. The trolley follows a line on the floor and drives itself from the kitchen to the dining room. Potential collisions on the routes are detected using laser sensors and prevented in time. By automating the delivery process, more time is left for patient care and support.

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