

Art and resistance

State of the ART(ist) 2024 – winners presented

(Linz/Vienna, July 22, 2024) In a world full of conflicts and crises, where climate change is challenging societies around the world, humanity is more important than ever. The more it comes under pressure from authoritarian regimes that disregard human rights or from governments and companies that ruthlessly exploit nature, the more people suffer and lose their livelihoods, health or even their lives.

"Freedom of art and freedom of expression are fundamental components of every free and pluralistic society. However, their realization cannot be taken for granted everywhere in the world. With the joint project 'State of the ART(ist)', we are offering a stage to artists who often work under difficult conditions. We have made it our goal to strengthen freedom of expression, to make these creative voices heard and to carry their messages from Linz out into the world," says Alexander Schallenberg, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Austria.

"Especially in the global super election year 2024, artists are setting an example for more humanity, democracy, peace and environmental protection. The State of the ART(ist) initiative aims to make a contribution to this by supporting artists who see themselves exposed to political, social or ecological threats and take a stand against them," says Gerfried Stocker, Artistic Director of Ars Electronica.

State of the ART(ist) was launched in 2022 by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ars Electronica in response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

<https://ars.electronica.art/stateoftheartist/en/>

311 submissions from 46 countries

Between April 15 and May 20, 2024, artists had the opportunity to submit their works. A total of 311 submissions were received from 46 countries. An international jury of experts reviewed all projects and awarded two Main Prizes, each worth 3,000 euros, as well as eight Honorary Mentions, each worth 750 euros.

In 2024, the jury was made up of Kamy Ramachandran (IN), Oyindamola (Fakeye) Faithful (UK), Marita Muukkonen (FI) and Ivor Stodolsky (DE/FI), Simon Mraz (AT) and Christl Baur (DE). The implementation of the Open Call was supported by a network of advisors consisting of international artists and curators.

For the first time, in addition to the State of the ART(ist) Award supported by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, entrants had the chance to win an additional prize: the Europe-wide and EU co-financed Digital Deal initiative presented the Digital Deal Award, which is endowed with 2,000 euros and honors artistic exploration of new technologies and their impact on democracy and freedom of expression.

Prizes for artists from Ukraine, Sudan and India

Nina Bulgakova (UA), Anastasiia Mostova (UA) and Kateryna Zhuravlova (UA) are awarded the "State of the ART(ist) – Main Prize" for *Fertility Performance*. The dance performance explores the ritual connections between femininity, eternal earth and fertility, focusing on individual life stories.

Said Ahmed Mohamed Alhassan (SD) receives the "State of the ART(ist) – Main Prize" for his installation *Haawriya*, which uses visual and auditory elements to trace the civil protest for freedom, peace and justice during the Sudanese revolution (2019).

The Digital Deal Award 2024 goes to Rafiul Alom Rahman (IN), Rachita Sai Barak (IN) and Maniza Khalid (IN) for *The Queer Muslim Project*. The platform connects a community of more than 70,000 people and makes the underrepresented voices of the Muslim LGBTQIA+ community heard.

Virtual art gallery and Ars Electronica Festival

All award-winning works can now be experienced in a virtual art gallery:

<https://www.spatial.io/s/State-of-the-ARTist-2024-649ff2152e4f7d91d9598424?share=172859706868939401>

A selection of the projects will be presented on site in Linz as part of the Ars Electronica Festival 2024. In addition, invited artists and jury members will come together in a panel to discuss their positions and perspectives in front of an audience.

State of the ART(ist) 2024 – 2 Main Prizes

Fertility Performance

Nina Bulgakova (UA), Anastasiia Mostova (UA), Kateryna Zhuravlova (UA)

"[...] The Fertility Performance was created just two months before the Full-scale Invasion of Russia into the artists country began. Today the female members of the dance company live in Finland, while their founder remained in Ukraine. By awarding this project with the Main prize the jury manifests an unbroken solidarity towards Ukrainian artists suffering from the brutal war going on in their home country and being split apart as an artist collective." – Jury Statement

Three women, three large stones on ropes and a stage: *Fertility Performance* asks questions first and foremost: Where and why do they drag their stones? What must a woman go through to give birth? What tests does the goddess face on the path to creating something? Passion and obsession, sisterhood, inner struggles, humility and disobedience are staged – all without a grandiose scenery, but with dance and few requisites. The starting point is the cycle of life: *"The old must die, because only death can give birth to life. A stalk of wheat dries under the scorching rays of the July sun, its grain sprouts through the warm, soft earth ... and the dance begins."* (Excerpt from the dance company's statement)

Fertility Performance is based on the exploration of the interplay between the essence of femininity and the eternal Earth, delving into the very core of the concept of fertility and the ritualistic nature of this profound interaction. Each dancer carries her own stone, shaped by the individual life story and representing unique and dynamically evolving relationships. The long rope on which the heavy load hangs symbolizes her past, accumulated experiences and knowledge. The stone is also intended to express the complex dynamics with men and the feminine role in the "sacred process of creating new life" and in cultivating fertile soil.

The performance, with all its symbolic details, was created by Ukrainians whose history is rooted in the cultivation of the soil and reflects a deep reverence for fertility – especially in times of scarcity.

For *Fertility Performance*, Nina Bulgakova (UA), Anastasiia Mostova (UA) and Kateryna Zhuravlova (UA) are awarded the "State of the ART(ist) – Main Prize".

https://youtu.be/xviyDGp9mwo?si=UWuV05iutEk9_N5V

<http://www.ethnocontemporaryballet.art/>

https://www.instagram.com/ethno_contemporary_ballet/?igsh=ZTFjeDg5dXgxcGs5

<https://www.facebook.com/ethno.contemporary.ballet>

Credits

Fertility Performance was staged by choreographers Nina Bulgakova and Vadym Yesaulenko (Ethno Contemporary Ballet) in Kharkiv (UA) in 2022.

Duration: 65 min, without intermission / Stage Directors and Choreographers: Vadim Yesaulenko and Nina Bulgakova / Artists: Anastasiia Mostova, Nina Bulgakova, Kateryna Zhuravlova / Musical Accompaniment: Dakha Brakha (UA), Laboratorium Pieśni (PL)

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Haawriya / (حورية + حاوية) حورية

Said Ahmed Mohamed Alhassan (SD)

“The word “haawriya” in Arabic means both “freedom” and “container”. Standing for freedom, the nonviolent protesters of the Sudanese Revolution overthrew Omar al-Bashir in 2019, and then faced the repressive military. Likewise carved into memory is the image of the shipping container, with hundreds of dead inside, believed to be victims of the brutal 'Sit-in Massacre'. Ali’s art is a form of resistance, ranging from participatory works such as this, to powerful murals and mosaics.” – Jury Statement

Haawriya is an installation that deals with cultural resistance in Sudan, where non-violent protests in 2019 first led to the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir and then to a military offensive that left a large number of civilians dead.

At the center of Said Ahmed Mohamed Alhassan's work is a freight container painted with colors and symbols, which is equipped with hidden loudspeakers all around, from which the sounds of civilian protest can be heard. In Sudan, containers like this one are historically charged: It was used as a mortuary where hundreds of unidentified dead bodies were stuffed. It was used to block bridges to prevent non-violent protesters from gathering at different places, restraining their freedom of movement and expression.

Said Ahmed Mohamed Alhassan stages the container as a symbol that no longer stands for the storage and transportation of goods, but for the blockade of the civil protest movement and the destruction of the dream of freedom, peace and justice.

Said Ahmed Mohamed Alhassan is awarded the "State of the ART(ist) – Main Prize" for *Haawriya*.

https://youtu.be/up_1zaOoe8E
https://www.instagram.com/saidahmed_artist/
<https://www.facebook.com/said.sean.5>

Credits

Project supported by Goethe-Institut, Khartoum and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. Installed and displayed at Al Malaz Exhibition NEXT LEVEL within the ART MEETS CULTURAL POLICIES project at Omdurman Cultural Center 2022.

Digital Deal Award 2024

The Queer Muslim Project

Rafiul Alom Rahman (IN), Rachita Sai Barak (IN), Maniza Khalid (IN)

"The Queer Muslim Project (TQMP) serves as a leading force in Asia's LGBTQIA+ community, connecting over 70,000 individuals globally via digital and cultural platforms. It empowers underrepresented voices by challenging harmful stereotypes and increasing visibility for queer and diverse identities. TQMP not only confronts but also subverts oppressive usage of technology to safeguard freedom of expression. The Digital Deal Award recognizes TQMP's pioneering use of digital storytelling to drive social change, bolster civil society resilience, and shift perceptions of marginalized communities. The jury acknowledges TQMP's role in reshaping the digital landscape, advocating for human rights, and advancing cultural diplomacy through innovative digital media practices." – Jury Statement

The Queer Muslim Project promotes the representation of storytellers from the LGBTQIA+ community. The platform provides tools, resources and networks to make queer and Muslim voices heard through art, culture and digital media. Their viewpoints and perspectives are intended to help raise social awareness and challenge negative stereotypes and norms. The project's programs include "Language is a Queer Thing", an international poetry forum supported by the British Council, and the "QueerFrames Screenwriting Lab", which is funded by Netflix.

The Queer Muslim Project by Rafiul Alom Rahman, Rachita Sai Barak and Maniza Khalid is honored with the Digital Deal Award 2024 for its inclusive approach and ongoing commitment to human rights.

<https://tqmp.in>
<https://www.instagram.com/thequeermuslimproject/>
<https://www.facebook.com/thequeermuslimproject>
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-queer-muslim-project/>

Credits

Founder and Director: Rafiul Alom Rahman / Communications Lead: Rachita Sai Barak / Program Lead: Maniza Khalid. This award is presented in the context of the European Digital Deal project co-funded by the European Union's Creative Europe programme under grant agreement No. 1011100036.

State of the ART(ist) 2024 – Honorary Mentions

A Woman's Odyssey

Leila Samari (IR), Maryam Sehhat (IR)

"A Woman's Odyssey portrays the journey of a woman facing the harshest conditions, transforming herself to survive and nurture life. The jury was profoundly moved by the symbolic narrative and the powerful imagery of this handmade analogue animation. The goldfish, a symbol of life, embodies resilience as it carries a human embryo, embraced by the woman. This journey of struggle and rebirth resonates with the artists' own experiences of being forced to leave Iran and their ongoing fight for freedom and expression in exile." – Jury Statement

A Woman's Odyssey is an inner journey, one that confronts the outside world and finds a way out of suffering. The focus is on suffering and paradoxes such as death and life, darkness and light, bad and good things and the process that makes you who you are.

Leila Samari and Maryam Sehhat created a symbolic narrative about a woman's struggles and her journey to freedom; she dies many times and is reborn in a new form. The video project is a combination of poetry, visual and symbolic elements, showing that we should unite with nature while respecting it.

A Woman's Odyssey contains influences from ancient Iranian culture: this can be seen, for example, in the connection between human and animal in the creation of the main character. The initial version of *A Woman's Odyssey* was written years ago as a poem. However, the personal experience of migration and the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement in Iran later had a significant influence on the work in its current form.

The story shows how war, discrimination and oppression in a dictatorial regime wear people down and force them to change in order to survive.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KU4nvEk9z0g>

Credits

Leila Samari: Story, Storyboard, Characters, Backgrounds

Maryam Sehhat: Animation, Sound, Edit

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Heating Season

Vasya Dmytryk (UA)

“Inspired by a creative community at an Odesa shipyard, Heating Season explores the intersection of organic and mechanical solidarities, and the semantic connections between industrial systems and the natural environment. The repetitive ‘tracing’ of the rusted nails, recovered from the artist’s studio as “traceogram,” demonstrates the gradient of the gestures of the found objects’ movement. As the nails make their way across the paper, programmed social behaviors start to appear, referencing Madeleine Akrish’s ideal laboratory observation, which describes “sociality” in terms of “scripts or situations” for creating connections between human or non-human actors.” – Jury Statement

Ukrainian artist Vasya Dmytryk uses nails from the ashes of his stove as material evidence of the winter of 2022-2023 to search for meaningful relationships between industrial systems (such as mechanics and technology) and the natural environment.

Using a "Tracegraph" he developed, a system of movable magnets, he sets the nails in motion and draws them across interchangeable sheets of paper. What remains are not only visible mechanical traces of friction and incompletely burnt material, but also traces of human actions and social behavior.

The kinetic installation reconstructs Madeleine Akrich's concept of ideal laboratory observation, which proposes to describe sociality in the form of scripts or situations that represent connections between human and non-human actors. The concept of such a script is comparable to programming languages in which words and codes represent actions.

Inspired by sociological and anthropological methods, the installation shows only the factors of change and their stage results. As Bruno Latour asked: Do things act on the same level as people?

<https://www.vasyadmytryk.com/>
<https://www.instagram.com/vasyadmytryk/>

Credits

Project Curator: Cyrill Lipatov / Technical Curator: Roman Klymenko, Coszhey Lab. The project was created under the program of the European Union EU4Culture and Goethe-Institut Ukraine. Program's applicators: NGO Museum For Change, Odesa; NGO Asortymentna Kimnata; Ivano-Frankivsk.

Immersive Sky Experience

Paribartana Mohanty (IN)

“Bringing into conversation the visual poetics of the sky, machine learning technology and community agency amidst the increasingly precarious lives of coastal inhabitants, Mohanty shifts away from the singular envelope narrative of the sky. His commendable attempt to elaborate the subjectivity and wisdom of the ever-changing skies using collective community efforts in algorithmic archiving and the local language of Odia, reignites trust in its ability to foretell addressing climate disasters.” – Jury Statement

Immersive Sky Experience is a public and interactive platform that uses AI and machine learning to artistically visualize climate change in micro-geographic areas in the coastal state of Odisha. Visitors to the web-based application access a digital and aesthetic view of the sky that includes a variety of voices and experiences.

The interface is fed by photos, videos, recordings and reports from volunteers that provide a unique perspective on the language and culture of the people of Odisha. Ground measurement data is also used. A special algorithm analyzes the images, recognizes patterns, extracts data and assembles the elements into a unique mosaic.

Paribartana Mohanty, himself from the Puri district, launched the *Immersive Sky Experience* to give communities in Odisha threatened by climate change the opportunity to communicate their environmental stories and experiences. Tropical cyclones, tsunamis and land erosion are increasingly affecting the communities. *Immersive Sky Experience* is the artistic response to these climatic uncertainties and risks.

The project collects, archives and examines data – in particular photos of environmental disasters – in order to document climate developments and make them personally tangible using artistic means. The Website is currently under construction and is constantly being expanded.

<http://www.immersiveskyexperience.com>

Credits

Conception and Creation: Paribartana Mohanty / Text and Translation: Paribartana Mohanty and Gita Nandan Ballabha Das / Research Assistance: Jyoti Ranjan Sahoo, Gita Nandan Ballabha Das, Satyabadi Biswal / Technical Assistance: Jyoti Ranjan Nayak (Sigma Analytics and Computing Pvt Ltd, Odisha) / Finance and mentorship supported by Sharjah Art Foundation Production Program 2023 and Prince Claus Mentorship Award for Cultural & Artistic Responses to Environmental Change 2022-23.

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Nanna Langa

Indu Antony (IN)

“Sharing their deepest stories of violence, oftentimes domestic, the act of collective sewing of multiple narratives creates a larger-than-life skirt, Nanna Langa. Capturing the poignancy of the lives of structurally marginalized women who gather at Namma Katte, a safe space that allows for a resting female body in India’s hostile public spaces, this provocative work invites you within its space, to encounter the sheer resilience of women, and the transformative potential of shared experiences.” – Jury Statement

Nanna Langa ("my skirt" in Kannada; spoken in southern India) is a transformative art installation consisting of an approximately seven-meter-long skirt "interwoven" with the intimate stories of women from Namma Katte, a leisure center in Bengaluru, India. The project captures the essence of 547 lives – or unique journeys – that together create a multi-layered tapestry of strength, vulnerability and collective empowerment. Each stitch of the skirt represents a narrative contributed by the women of Namma Katte, an inclusive space that fosters solidarity, celebrates diversity and resonates with personal experiences.

Nanna Langa gives space to individual stories that are not often told and when they are, they go unheard. The power of storytelling is understood as a possible key to interpersonal connection and healing: If the audience engages with the skirt, the material, a kaleidoscope of emotions and insights opens up. This brings to light the rich tapestry that makes up womanhood and community.

<https://www.induantony.com/>
<https://www.instagram.com/nammakatte/>
<https://www.facebook.com/indu.antony>

Credits

Indu Antony in collaboration with the women of Namma Katte. This project is supported by Wellcome Trust, London and Museum of Art and Photography, Bengaluru.

Poisonous Meadow

Saddam Jumaily (IQ)

“Jumaily’s powerful and playful exhibition is a critique of fundamentalist religion’s role in distorting societies and destroying lives in the Middle East. “Many do not dare to criticise religious power” he writes, which “in reality is a poisonous meadow.” Jumaily experienced this poison on his own skin, with murders in his close circle. This work’s “détournement” of a ruinous clergy, which relies on “holy petrol”, violence, and the cruel repression of freedom, has elicited furious threats on Iraqi TV.” – Jury Statement

The exhibition Poisonous Meadow shows the consequences of extreme authority emanating from religious male leaders. Saddam Jumaily illustrates the increasing politicization and abuse of religion in Middle Eastern societies – in Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran. In an ironic way, the exhibition opens up a space of experience to make the moral decay at the core of religious thought tangible. The artist's paintings show how religion can destroy lives and distort societies by restricting the freedom of women in particular and disregarding their human rights.

Jumaily observes a negative social tendency in the Middle East – burdened by political religion and characterized by the oppression of women. His paintings are an expression of both critical reflection and fearless audacity.

<https://skr.fi/>

Credits

All artworks by Saddam Jumaily / Grant from The Finnish Cultural Foundation, Finland.

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Swimming Lesson

Vardit Goldner (IL)

“Vardit Goldner’s Swimming Lesson mockumentary style video, depicts the artist teaching young Bedouin girls to swim in a “waterless pool,” capturing the peculiarities of facilitating where there is little or no access to the resource. Through an element of humour Goldner highlights the severe lack of accessible swimming pools for Bedouins in the Negev region of Israel, insufficient swimming lessons and subsequent high frequency of drownings. Additionally, the piece addresses broader themes of discrimination and foresees a future where global warming and drought may lead to severe water shortages, exacerbating the issue.” – Jury Statement

Swimming Lesson is a video installation and mockumentary film at the same time and shows how Bedouin girls are taught to swim in an empty “pool”. Vardit Goldner's story draws attention to the fact that the approximately 200,000 Bedouins in Israel's Negev region are denied access to swimming pools – and therefore to swimming lessons. It was only in 2017 that the first – and so far only – swimming pool was opened in the Bedouin town of Rahat. The video work addresses this form of religious discrimination and its far-reaching consequences – for example, the fact that the risk of drowning in the sea for Bedouins and their children is massively higher. At the same time, it draws attention to future challenges such as water shortage as a result of global warming and periods of drought.

<https://www.instagram.com/varditgoldner/>

Credits

Artistic Adviser: Einat Weizman / Scriptwriters: Vardit Goldner, Hadar Aviel / Arabic and Hebrew Subtitles: Fatin Abu Ghosh / English Subtitles: Tal Haran / Filming: Violetta Datskovsky / Filming Assistant: Adi Sav Sound / Recording: Keren Or Menahem / Actresses: Vardit Goldner, Zohar Shitrit, Fatma Abu Madegam, Arakib Abu Madegam, Saeda Abu Madegam, Hadel Abu Madegam, Aseel Abu Madegam, Njood Abu Madegam, Alia Abu Madegam, Hakma Abu Madegam, Marem Abu Madegam, Najwa Abu Madegam, Sabah Abu Madegam, Astabrak Abu Madegam, Sojood Abu Madegam

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The Days Before The Silent Spring 寂靜春天來臨前

Lai Lai Natalie Lo (HK)

“With her multi-channel video installation The Days before Silent Spring artist Lai Lai Natalie Lo allows us to learn about a diverse group of activists and farmers working together under the name “Sangwoodgoon”, practicing farming as a way of artistic expression, and living a deeper sense of personal relationship with the land they are working with. In their work the artists-farmers negotiate a new balance between humans and nature respecting the dignity of both. The work represents an approach relevant not only as a contribution to the topic of this year’s Ars Electronica Festival edition, but also stand in the core of interest of both Ars Electronica and the Austrian Foreign Culture policy.” – Jury Statement

The Days Before The Silent Spring is a multi-channel video installation in which different perspectives come together to form a narrative. It is a homage to the decades-long journey of the farming collective Sangwoodgoon and a reflection on the multitude of connected worlds and many life-forms germinated by the practice of farming. The artist Lai Lai Natalie Lo, herself part of Sangwoodgoon, also uses her work to address the struggles of farmers in Hong Kong in the 2010s and 2020s.

The idea of an impending "silent spring" was coined by the American marine biologist Rachel Carson († 1964), who warned of a crisis in biodiversity over 60 years ago. Today, we are struggling with the consequences of decades of environmental destruction. But while farmland in many places may seem old and feeble; the bacteria, species and communities it harbors seem trivial, their symbiosis could usher in a promising new era.

Lai Lai Natalie Lo not only documents crops, flora and fauna, but also focuses on farmers like herself. Their very different experiences and problems, their demands and hopes reflect the tough nature of interpersonal negotiations, but at the same time strengthen the feeling of togetherness.

<https://www.lolailai.com/>
<https://www.instagram.com/sqlai/>
<https://www.facebook.com/getup.nat>
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lai-lai-natalie-lo-b1221518/>

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The Red Macadam

li li k.s.a (MM)

“The Red Macadam draws attention to the ongoing struggles and the heavy toll exacted on those opposing oppression in the context of Myanmar’s turmoil. The installation’s sensitive use of technology to memorialize fallen protesters creates an emotionally charged sensory experience linking distant events and global awareness. Li Li K.S.A’s journey from Yangon protests to Paris exile, his personal experiences during the military coup and ongoing commitment to supporting fellow persecuted artists by establishing an artist shelter at the China-Myanmar border underscore the critical role of art in cultural diplomacy and the defense of freedom of expression.” – Jury Statement

li li k.s.a has designed an installation that invites you to walk barefoot along a path of 3,000 broken stones – all of different sizes and bound together by the color red. Each stone symbolizes an individual who died tragically during the protests in Myanmar from 2021 to 2023. As visitors walk along the path, a motion sensor detects their steps, calls up a collection of data with the names of the people who were killed and makes them perceptible. Sometimes the vibrations of the devices can be felt, sometimes the names are whispered, sometimes read out loud. Various sound colors intensify the emotional and sensual experience of this installation.

“Every day feels like a walk with this weight pressing down. It is a new beginning in a strange land, a culture unfamiliar yet somehow comforting. Despite the distance, I hold on to the threads that connect me to my loved ones back home. They are a lifeline, a constant reminder of the fight that continues, even from afar. This is the story of an exile, an artist forever bound to their cause. It is a tale of resilience, of carrying the burden of truth while searching for a new place to belong to.” (li li k.s.a on the personal experience of exile)

<https://aa-e.org/artiste/li-li-k-s-a/>

https://www.instagram.com/li_li_ksa/

<https://www.facebook.com/sengli.hpaudut>

Credits

aa-e (l’atelier des artistes en exil), PAUSE (PROGRAMME D’AIDE À L’ACCUEIL EN URGENCE DES SCIENTIFIQUES EN EXIL), HEAR (Haute école des arts du Rhin Mulhouse – Strasbourg)

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