S+T+ARTS Prize & PANIC: Complex. Absurd. Ominous.

Two Exhibitions at POSTCITY

Press briefing on September 3, 2025 with

Dietmar Prammer, Mayor of the City of Linz and Owner Representative of Ars Electronica
Doris Lang-Mayerhofer, City Councilor for Culture and Chair of Ars Electronica's Supervisory Board
Masha Zolotova, Co-Curator S+T+ARTS Exhibition
Manuela Naveau, Co-Curator Theme Exhibition
Veronika Liebl, Managing Director Ars Electronica Festival
Christl Baur, Head of Ars Electronica Festival
Gerfried Stocker, Artistic Director Ars Electronica

PANIC

yes/no

Festival for Art, Technology & Society

September 3 to 7

Linz, Austria

PANIC – yes/no is the theme of the Ars Electronica Festival 2025, and for good reason. With Donald Trump's second term in office, the post–World War II order seems to have reached its end. Liberal democracies are under pressure, while authoritarian forces and states are gaining influence. At the same time, the global race for Artificial Intelligence is escalating—the question of whether it will improve our lives or usher in our demise divides not only experts but also the general public. The climate crisis is also worsening dramatically: In Antarctica, rising temperatures and slowing ocean currents are accelerating the melting of ice sheets—with potentially grave consequences for sea levels and the global ecosystem. Whether in politics, technology, or ecology, we are confronted everywhere with tipping points that could trigger irreversible consequences.

In the shadow of all these crises, we are increasingly under stress—both as individuals and as societies. Some see our world in transition, others fear its collapse, while still others hope for a new beginning. The mix of emotions is correspondingly diffuse, ranging from panic to hope, from indifference to anger.

PANIC – yes/no is the question posed by this year's Ars Electronica. Here, the role of art in times of profound transformation takes centerstage, as is reflected, above all, in two major exhibitions.

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S+T+ARTS Prize Exhibition

The STARTS Prize Exhibition does not view the uncertainty triggered by crises as a problem we should or even could solve, but rather as a fundamental condition of our world—one we need to learn to understand and shape. From this perspective, uncertainty is not merely a lack of information but a defining characteristic of our systems—from ecosystems to algorithms to quantum technologies.

The exhibition demonstrates how artistic research can help us see more clearly, feel more deeply, think further ahead, and rethink innovation—in the service of a more just and sustainable future. The presented works include the winning projects of the STARTS Prize and the STARTS Prize Africa 2025.

The exhibition is made possible by the European Union as part of the projects STARTS Ec(h)o and STARTS Afropean Intelligence. It features eight artistic-scientific works and is curated by Masha Zolotova (RU) and Veronika Liebl (AT).

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S+T+ARTS Prize Exhibition
4 Projects at a Glance

The EuroStack Project

Francesca Bria (IT/DE), Dirma Janse (NL)

EuroStack is Europe's bold response to one of its most pressing challenges: reclaiming digital sovereignty in a world dominated by non-European tech giants. Initiated by Francesca Bria and a network of European institutions and experts, the project drives the development of digital systems that are fair, secure, and oriented toward the common good.

To see digital infrastructures merely as technical components would be far too narrow. What is at stake is how we, as a society, handle data, how we build trustworthy AI systems, and how we provide digital services while protecting rights and strengthening local economies. *EuroStack* illustrates how Europe can reduce its dependence on foreign technologies by developing strong public tools—such as ethical AI and secure cloud systems. It calls for smart investment, clear regulation, and cross-sector collaboration.

euro-stack.info/

Project Leadership and Coordination: Prof. Francesca Bria | Lead Authors EuroStack Report: Prof. Francesca Bria (Fellow, Mercator Stiftung; Honorary Professor, UCL IIPP), Prof. Paul Timmers (WeltWert®), Dr. Fausto Gernone (UCL IIPP) | Commissioned by: Bertelsmann Stiftung

Supported by: Mercator Stiftung, UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP), CEPS | Infographics and visuals: Dirma Janse | Geographics mapping, cartography: Tim Tensen | Web development: Jose Núñez

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AI War Cloud Database

Sarah Ciston (US)

We use AI systems on a daily basis. We write texts, search for information, and create images, videos, and music with them. Yet, we rarely pause to consider that the very same technologies are also used in entirely different contexts. *AI War Cloud Database* reveals how everyday technologies are deployed for military purposes, for example, in automated decision-making in warfare.

The project catalogs AI systems used in war and demonstrates how companies and governments simultaneously market them commercially, for instance, in retina scanners, chatbots, or digital maps. This raises central questions: Who controls AI? How is it used? And what values guide its development? *AI War Cloud Database* reminds us that it is crucial how we build, manage, and use these systems.

aiwar.cloud/

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The Wild Future Lab

Kairos Futura (KE)

The project explores an alternative vision of the future, transporting Nairobi to the year 2045, a time when nature will have reclaimed large parts of the city's infrastructure. *The Wild Future Lab* explores textiles, machines, and garments, examining how new approaches to production and design can address ecological and cultural challenges. It draws from traditional craft, open-source tools, and natural materials to imagine how we might live with nature—not apart from it.

In the STARTS exhibition, textiles, tools, "wearable futures"—such as water-purifying backpacks or sunglasses with built-in pollution sensors—, as well as interactive stations are presented, inviting visitors to create their own visions of urban futures. Participants engage with local environmental issues, develop new narratives with the "Wild Future Tarot"*,* and take part in "Happy Hour Design Sessions."

thefutureisonearth.org/

Concept and Design: Kairos Futura | Workshop Facilitation: Kairos Futura Team, New Order of Fashion (NL) and Lea Oneko | Project Development: Abdul Rop, Coltrane McDowell, Willy Ng'ang'a, Ajax Axe, Helen Milne | Project Fashion Designers: Mike Mwa, Maureen Shena, Stoneface Bombaa, Ajax Axe, Hisi Studios | Nairobi Photography: Ajax Axe, Adams Rop Locations: Kairos Atelier, University of Nairobi, MacMillan Memorial Library | The Temple Park: Lower Kabete Campus Program | Partners: New Order of Fashion Program | Support: Stimuleringsfonds | Design Research: Abdul Rop, Willy Ng'ang'a, Ajax Axe, Lea Oneko, Coltrane McDowell

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Sensing Quantum

LAS Art Foundation (DE)

Quantum technologies are currently revolutionizing data processing, communication, and our understanding of reality. Yet for most people, they remain difficult to grasp—without education, public discourse, and cultural framing, this knowledge remains reserved for only a few experts. The initiative *Sensing Quantum* counters this by fostering exchange between art, science, and theory, transforming complex quantum principles into powerful experiences.

As part of the Ars Electronica Festival 2025, excerpts from previous collaborations will be presented—including insights into Laure Prouvost's (FR) work *WE FELT A STAR DYING* as well as Kara-Lis Coverdale's (CA) sound piece *Primary Action at a Distance*, created with the Actias synthesizer, which integrates quantum principles. Visitors can also explore learning materials, playful content, and interactive tools that invite everyone to discover the world of quantum physics and quantum computing.

las-art.foundation/explore/sensing-quantum

LAS Art Foundation, Organizer and Conceptual Lead OGR Torino, Co-Commissioner, Laure Prouvost: *WE FELT A STAR DYING* Volkswagen Group, Lead Partner Education, Sensing Quantum Wilhelm und Else-Heraeus Stiftung, Symposium Support QuantumLeaks Foundation / Max Planck Foundation, Research Partner Jülich Forschungszentrum, Scientific Consultant

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More Projects from the S+T+ARTS Prize Exhibition

Coexist
Emergence Delft (NL)

Computational Compost
Marina Otero Verzier (ES)

Large Language Writer
Lucy Li (AT), Leo Mühlfeld (AT), Alan Schiegl (AT)

Sands of Time
Ala Praxis (NG)

Synthetic Memories
Domestic Data Streamers (ES)

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PANIC: Complex. Absurd. Ominous.

The major exhibition on this year's festival theme traces the roots of collective panic and sketches out alternative scenarios. At its center are today's political and technological spectacles, war, social inequality, human rights violations, restrictions on diversity, climate change, artificially manufactured needs, and the drive to control and steer others. The exhibition poses the question if panic might also unleash a productive force—by confronting us with our own vulnerability and turning into a catalyst for change.

The exhibition is made possible by the European Union as part of the European Digital Deal project. It features 37 artistic works and is curated by Manuela Naveau (AT) and Christl Baur (AT/DE).

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PANIC: Complex. Absurd. Ominous.
7 Projects at a Glance

Dynamics of a Dog on a Leash

Takayuki Todo (JP)

Takayuki Todo (JP) presents *Dynamics of Dog on a Leash*, a four-legged robotic dog that charges toward the audience, seemingly on the verge of attack. Symbolically restrained by an "ethical chain," spectators remain just out of reach. The dog thrashes around and struggles against it before finally collapsing, apparently overheated. Even though it is clear that robots cannot feel pain, the line between life and simulation begins to blur, and the machine is perceived as a suffering animal.

This spectacle provokes reflection: In an age of living with robots, will we grow more sensitive—or completely numb? And for how long can power truly be restrained through clear rules and responsibility?

takayukitodo.com/

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10/19

ELON

GIGACITIES COLLECTIVE x Simon Weckert (DE/US)

What happens when technological power exerts control not through force, but through fascination? The interactive installation *ELON* adopts the sleek language of a lifestyle magazine to parody the media spectacle surrounding the "Elon Musk cult," drawing visitors into a world of techno-glamour and future panic.

Here, one encounters a massive, AI-generated double of Elon, while lenticular prints (flip images) shift between the many faces of the Tesla CEO. Sixty-nine copies of the *Elon Magazine* are displayed like sacred relics or luxury goods, accompanied by a hypnotic soundscape and footage from Tesla's Gigafactories in Berlin and Austin. Oscillating between wonder and unease, the work invites reflection on the fine line between admiration and manipulation.

simonweckert.com/
gigacitiescollective.net/gigacities

GIGACITIES COLLECTIVE: Randy Lewis (US), Florian Grundmüller (DE), Craig Campbell (US), Simon Weckert (DE)

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Liminal Ring

Jin Lee (KR)

Liminal Ring explores the human desire to impose order on natural chaos, to master the uncontrollable—and reveals the limits of this endeavor. The installation consists of 384 precisely calibrated fans that generate laminar airflow rings. These shifting, ephemeral forms highlight both the beauty and the futility of human intervention.

Drawing on principles of fluid dynamics and chaos theory, the work underscores the limits of our understanding of complex systems—and the hubris inherent in the idea of fully controlling nature. The artificial, imperfect air rings stand in contrast to the seamless processes of the natural world, inviting reflection on our fragile relationship with the environment.

jinlee.de/

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12/19

Sweet Dreams

Marshmallow Laser Feast (GB)

Sweet Dreams is a satirical installation that shows how food is not just nourishment, but also part of our identity, our desires—and sometimes, an illusion. It reveals how advertising and branding influence us with cheerful images and mascots, while concealing the realities of food production.

The work unfolds in two rooms: The *Heyday Room* presents the "golden age" of the fictional Real Good Chicken Company. Featuring the mascot *Chicky Ricky,* this playful, nostalgic space highlights how such characters earn our trust—while at the same time distancing consumers from the actual food and its production. From there, visitors move into the *Factory Room,* where they themselves take on a "shift" at the plant. Instead of real breaks, they are given just five seconds to scream into a funnel. This absurd yet humorous scene illustrates how both humans and animals become tiny cogs in a vast machine driven by profit and consumption.

marshmallowlaserfeast.com/

A Marshmallow Laser Feast and Factory International Production.
Created by Marshmallow Laser Feast (Robin McNicholas, Ersin Han Ersin, Barnaby Steel).
Written by Simon Wroe.
Made with the support of the BFI Filmmaking Fund.

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Café Kuba

David Shongo (CD)

David Shongo traces the connections between colonial legacies, collective memory, social tensions, and urban reality in the Democratic Republic of Congo. His film project *Café Kuba* is a direct response to the conflict in the country's east—particularly the capture of the cities of Goma and Bukavu by the M23 militia in February 2025—and its consequences for the population and for cultural production.

The film invites viewers to immerse themselves in Kinshasa, a city of millions. Its starting point is *Café Kuba*—a converted coffee cart from Kinshasa's streets, which Shongo has transformed into a recording device to capture the sounds, voices, and social fabric of the city. What emerges is a sensory archive of resistance that understands listening as a political practice—a kind of fugitive cinema that seeks new forms of storytelling in times of uncertainty, censorship, and violence.

instagram.com/david_shongo/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet&igsh=MXNudTZudGIxaDVlMA%3D%3D#

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The Falling City

Noemi Iglesias Barrios (ES)

The Falling City explores how people express their emotions in public spaces—through gestures such as holding hands, hugging, or kissing. Using computer vision, the installation detects these forms of affection and triggers the illumination of hand-blown, drop-shaped glass lamps.

At the Ars Electronica Festival 2025, a camera in the POSTCITY courtyard will track relevant gestures, activating the interactive light sculptures on display. The brightness of the lamps reflects the emotional intensity of the moment. An "Emotional Counter" records the duration of each expression of affection, visualized through illuminated numerical blocks. By doing so, the installation connects technology, craftsmanship, and urban research, inviting reflection on the visibility of emotions in contemporary cities.

noemiglesias.com/

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15/19

World at Stake

Total Refusal (AT)

A golfer fails to strike, a soccer team plays against itself, everything comes to a halt. The audience is present, yet unable to intervene. *World at Stake* places us in a state of complete paralysis, when the game freezes at a decisive moment, the rules blur, and the next move becomes impossible. Designed in the style of sports video games, the film breaks through the logic of winning and losing, probing the uncertain boundary between individual agency and collective passivity.

World at Stake becomes a symbol of a world in suspension, where the outcome is up in the air and the next move is still to come. It makes the feeling of being trapped in a dead-end tangible and conveys that we must urgently act together before the game is over. Afterall, nothing less than the world is at stake—and losing is not an option.

totalrefusal.com/

A film by Susanna Flock, Adrian Jonas Haim, & Jona Kleinlein, presented by Total Refusal.
Sound Design: Bernhard Zorzi
Music: Adrian Jonas Haim
Modding: Nikola Supukovic, Jakob Sam
Voice: Jacob Banigan, Jan-Wieger van den Berg
3D Model: Patrik Tagunoff
Shot in the games: FIFA 23, PGA Tour 2K21, DiRT Rally 2.0

More Projects from the Theme Exhibition

AI Facial Profiling, Levels of Paranoia
Marta Revuelta (ES/CH), Laurent Weingart (CH)

a terrarium
Till Schönwetter (DE)

Bacteria Cloud of Clouds
Natalia Rivera (CO)

CryoScapes
Jiabao Li (CN), Ziyuan Jiang (CN), Kuan-Ju Wu (TW), Yasuaki Kakehi (JP)

Dancing Plague
2girls1comp (CH/IT)

Dat–Astral Chart
Noemi Iglesias Barrios (ES)

Dystopia Land
Etsuko Ichihara (JP), Civic Creative Base Tokyo [CCBT] (JP)

Fluid Anatomy
Ioana Vreme Moser (RO/DE)

Free Universal Cut Kit for Internet Dissidence [F.U.C.K.-ID]
César Escudero Andaluz (ES)

Fugue
Anet Sandra Açıkgöz (TR)

Friends of Fearness
Marwa Abu Raida (PS)

GUSEN CONVOLUTE
Gusen Convolute Working Group (AT)

MycoGravity
Amir Bastan (IR), Noor Stenfert Kroese (NL), Johannes Braumann (AT)

ON AIR
Peter van Haaften (CA), Michael Montanaro (CA), Garnet Willis (CA)

Phonos
Marc Vilanova (ES)

Plant Exposures
Emma Harris (DK)

Quitting Smoking Might Be Easier
Lisa Großkopf (AT)

Ritual Device for Fungal Humus
Santiago Morilla (ES)

Rituals | The Mountain of Advanced Dreams

Mali Weil (IT)

Seedless Fruits

Stefanie Schwarzwimmer (AT)

Спомини [Spomyny]

Sophia Bulgakova (UA)

Synthenesis

Fara Peluso (DE/IT)

Tech Bro Debates Humanity

Sputniko! (JP/GB)

The Echoes of Prometheus

Kika Echeverría (CL), Carlos Sfeir (CL/ES)

The Lost Music of Auschwitz

Tom Cook (GB)

Unspeakable (I'm Ready)

Giulia Essyad (CH)

Void in Resonance

Jerónimo Reyes-Retana (MX)

WHISPERS

Calin Segal (RO)

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18/19

Dietmar Prammer

Mayor of the City of Linz and Owner Representative of Ars Electronica

"Especially in times when we often feel stuck, art can be an enormous source of inspiration—both for us as individuals and for society as a whole. With their diverse approaches, artists encourage us to critically question dominant narratives and dogmas, and they inspire us to explore and break new ground together. This is exactly what the STARTS Exhibition and the theme exhibition at this year's Ars Electronica set out to do."

Doris Lang-Mayerhofer

City Councilor for Culture and Chair of Ars Electronica's Supervisory Board

"Both the STARTS Exhibition and the major theme exhibition in the catacombs of POSTCITY take on the central questions of our time—artistically interpreted by some of the most innovative minds in the international media art scene. Once again, Ars Electronica shows how vital art is as a space for reflection and discussion—as a kind of 'second opinion' for society. Anyone who has already experienced the festival at POSTCITY will surely be back this year. And for those who haven't, this is the moment to seize—because it will be Ars Electronica's last appearance in this spectacular location."

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