

Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ars Electronica present:

State of the ART(ist)

(Linz, 23.8.2022) The war in Ukraine is having devastating consequences. People are losing their lives, their relatives and friends, their houses and apartments. Generations are being robbed of their future, and the cultural identity of an entire society is being threatened or even extinguished. A platform like Ars Electronica must take such dramatic events as an occasion to devote itself to the “theater of war art” and to ask what the “state of the ART(ist)” is – not only in Ukraine but worldwide. “It’s strange that art is so often labeled as a specialty interest, but artists are always among the first to be targeted by authoritarian forces and warring parties,” says Martin Honzik, Chief Curatorial Officer at Ars Electronica and Managing Director of Ars Electronica Festival/Prix/Export. “If art were sociopolitically irrelevant, the intense pressure being put on it in many places would seem exaggerated beyond measure.” “Art also thrives on the freedom to question everything. That is precisely what is essential in a free, democratic society, and that is why it is also indispensable that art is protected and supported. Constricted, it suffocates and only a faint flicker of the blazing fire remains. Whoever attacks art attacks freedom,” emphasizes Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg.

Open Call: 357 submissions from 40 countries

“We are officially linked with the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs in our efforts to promote digital humanism,” says Martin Honzik, referring to the “Ars Electronica Award for Digital Humanity,” which will be presented for the first time in 2021. “Therefore, it also made sense to cooperate in the ‘State of the ART(ist)’ program and to carry out an international Open Call for artists who are threatened, persecuted and suppressed because of the political dimension of their works.”

The submission phase began on May 30 and ended on June 30, 2022. 357 projects from 40 countries were submitted to Ars Electronica during these four weeks. “We didn’t expect this many submissions,” says Christl Baur, Head of Ars Electronica Festival, addressing the difficulty of setting parameters for the initiative. “The people our Open Call is addressed to are sometimes confronted with very stressful life circumstances and have little time or energy to participate. In addition, artists are often only able to submit their projects in a roundabout way because their online activities are monitored and restricted. For us, on the other hand, it was very difficult to reach the artists at all and to draw their attention to our Open Call, since (western) social media platforms are often banned in their home countries.”

With queries, please contact

Christopher Sonnleitner
Tel: +43.732.7272-38
christopher.sonnleitner@aec.at
www.aec.at/press

Top-class jury reviews submissions and curates virtual exhibition

Björn Geldhof, artistic director of PinchukArtCentre in Kyiv, Ukraine, Boris Magrini, curator at HEK in Basel, Switzerland, and Marita Muukkonen, co-founder and co-director of the Finland-based “Artists at Risk” formed a distinguished international jury that was tasked with reviewing the submissions and selecting eleven works that will now be presented as part of a virtual art show.

...and that’s State of the ART(ist)

Hip-hop music to honor the Syrian memory – Resisting dictatorship, sectarianism and war through music in Syria / Amir Almuarri (SY).

Almir Almuarri was still very young when the uprisings began in his hometown of Idlib. To cope with his war experiences and the loss of family members and friends, and above all to avoid losing hope, he began to write songs. Songs that would give a voice to the inhabitants of a besieged city – men and women who had become the pawns of geopolitical players, desperately defending themselves against bombs and attacks from different sides and armies. Almir Almuarri’s songs are mainly about Syrian youth and their life in the war zone, about despair and hope. Another important aspect is new technologies, and here especially digital platforms, which allow besieged, imprisoned people to contact the outside world and show their presence. The Syrian hip-hop artist’s most famous track is called “On All Fronts.” Almir Amuarri wants to honor Syrian memory. He wants to draw attention to the countless imprisoned and disappeared and all those who have sacrificed so much for freedom, justice and dignity.

Clanking, Hammering, Dispute and Gurgling / Andriy Rachinskiy (UA), Daniil Revkovskiy (UA)

This video is part of the exhibition “Tailings Dam,” which is shown in the fictional “Museum of Human Civilization” created after the extinction of mankind. The museum looks back from the future at the slag deposits of Kryvyi Rih, one of the most important Ukrainian centers of iron ore mining and steel smelting. The work is a reflection on natural resources, environmental degradation, humanity and its future, and the diverse traces that human activity can leave on the Earth.

I Will Close the Sky So You Could Breathe / Daria Pugachova (UA)

Daria Pugachova lived in Kiev until she fled from the advancing Russian troops to Sofia in Bulgaria. As part of a Radar Sofia residency, she is developing a performance here in which she lies naked on the floor and asks the audience to weave a protective net over her body. The performance “I Will Close the Sky So You Could Breathe” represents the hope of Ukrainians to find protection from the Russian missiles coming down on them from the sky. By weaving a safety net together, Daria Pugachova wants to express that we can have peace the moment we

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christopher.sonnleitner@aec.at
www.aec.at/press

people unite. The performance “I Will Close the Sky So You Could Breathe” was first performed in June 2022 at the Brotherly Mound Monument in Sofia, a now controversial monument to the Soviet Army.

Yellow Line / DE NE DE (UA)

The initiative “DE NE DE” advocates for the recognition of Ukrainian cultural heritage from the Soviet era. Soviet art and architecture have always been stigmatized in Ukraine and considered insignificant historical artifacts of a bygone era. Moreover, since 2015, “decommunization laws” have been in force in Ukraine, condemning totalitarian ideologies — ideologies that are also inextricably linked to Soviet-era works of art, which were and are therefore also condemned and often destroyed. The project “Yellow Line” documents the architectural and monumental art heritage of the Donbass of the 20th century. It is the heritage and history of many cities of Ukraine, which today are occupied by the Russian army or largely destroyed.

similar image / fantastic little splash (UA)

Technologies are always perceived as the antithesis of nature. “fantastic little splash” have a different opinion. Their essay film “Similar Image” revolves around the realization that technology and nature are not opposed to each other, but that technology can be understood as a continuation of nature, that both can coexist and are part of an all-encompassing reality.

D-Normal/V-Essay, online video zine, issues 1-4 (2020-2022) / Floating Projects Collective (HK), Linda CH Lai (HK).

In response to “social distancing” during the pandemic, D-Normal/V-Essay (DnVe) sought to create a virtual togetherness by reinventing the video essay. It was intended to reflect current living conditions in Hong Kong and provide a common platform for artists and non-artists. After several calls, over 200 submissions were received worldwide, of which a total of 90 were published as part of four issues of an online video zine between December 2020 and April 2022. The works portray survival, testifying to very personal existential crises and the longing for what was lost.

Donate / Ivan Svitlychnyi (UA)

Our collective consciousness is becoming more and more aware that there are no local epidemics, no local wars, and no local environmental destruction, but that every event has a retroactive effect on everything and everyone else. This, in turn, means that a fundamental awareness of the ecological consequences of one’s own actions must also become a fundamental principle of the art business. With “Donate” Ivan Svitlychnyi therefore transforms viewers into active participants whose donations make an art object possible in the first place: First, the “donors” look for ways to save electricity in their everyday lives; then they enter on a

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website which device (with how much power) they have not used and for how long. This information, in turn, is used to calculate how much electricity is available to operate Ivan Svitlychnyi's light installation — and for the “donor” to experience it.

VR Collider / Oksana Chepelyk (UA)

“VR Collider is about time, public space, and history. You find yourself in the virtual world of Mozilla Hubs on platforms flying high above planet Earth, capturing and decoding the vibrations of time and space and creating a visual narrative that is about political flashpoints. “VR Collider” explores iconic places and events of the 20th and 21st centuries that have changed the course of history.

The Big Wild Field Draft / Oleksandr Burlaka (UA)

The rise of heavy industry in southeastern Ukraine began in the 1870s, when Welsh businessman John Hughes built the first plants for coal, iron and rail production. Before that, the areas north of the Black and Azov Seas were known as the “Wild Fields” and were crisscrossed by important trade and war routes. The first map of them was commissioned by the Tsar of Muscovy, the infamous Ivan the Terrible, in the middle of the 16th century, but it was lost. In the “Book of the Big Drawing” made later, there is a description of this first map, just as there are reference points of paths that still exist today and have been used since 2014 by the Russian invaders. “The Big Wild Field Draft” is a film that traces the routes through the steppe north of the Sea of Azov, following the indications in the “Book of the Big Drawing.”

Shukhliada exposition environment / SVITER art group (UA), Ivan Svitlychnyi (UA)

Shukhliada exposition environment is a web platform for independent curators and artists. The idea was born in 2013, when Liera Polianskova, Max Robotov and Ivan Svitlychnyi were banned from the building in Kharkiv where they were doing their artistic work. In order to create a space that could exist regardless of political or financial restrictions, they imitated their online platform and created their first virtual exhibition, White Triptych, in 2017.

Peacock Generation / Karl Ingar Røys (NO) & Peacock Generation (MM)

Thangyat performances are among the oldest forms of protest song culture in Myanmar. They are performed by a lead singer and a choir responding to him. According to government regulations, these chants must not contain any criticism that could “damage” the dignity of the Union of the Republic of Myanmar and the government or even lead to the breakdown of national unity and solidarity. Thangyat performances have been and continue to be widespread in the student movement in Myanmar, which is once again at the forefront of the current uprising against the

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www.aec.at/press

junta. “Peacock Generation” is a collective of singers who have been repeatedly arrested for their thangyat performances, or have had to leave the country altogether and go into exile.

State of the ART(ist) — a virtual show within the framework of Ars Electronica 2022

“Welcome to Planet B — Another life is possible! But how?” is the motto of this year’s Ars Electronica Festival. With the typical Ars Electronica bridge-building between art, technology and society, the festival (taking place from September 7-11) will sketch out what our life on Planet B might look like and ask what “Plan B” we might have decided on and implemented on the way there? Art prepares the breeding ground on which the diverse and colorful realms of Planet B are made to grow and blossom. A central contribution will be the virtual show “State of the ART(ist),” which shows what an essential role art plays for the (further) development of a society based on freedom and self-determination — as well as demonstrating how that very artistic freedom is unfortunately not allowed in many parts of our world today. “It seems fitting to make this exhibition the central online contribution to this year’s Ars Electronica,” says Martin Honzik. “On the one hand, because many artists can’t even physically realize their projects where they live and work, let alone present them. On the other hand, because many of them want or need to remain anonymous in order to avoid arrest or worse. And last but not least, the internet opens up the possibility of giving these very artists a global voice and global attention.”

Many of the artists will also be coming to Linz for the Ars Electronica Festival. Festival visitors will have the opportunity to get to know them and their artworks on-site in Kepler’s Gardens. In addition, talks with the artists and jurors will be streamed live on the Ars Electronica Channel on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Statement of the jury: Boris Magrini (CH), Björn Geldhof (UA), Marita Muukkonen (FI)






“The jury reflected on what it means to be an artist at risk and considered this situation as one of the main criteria for the selection of works. There are clearly very different situations and contexts. The State of the ART(ist) call was motivated by the desire to stand in solidarity with Ukrainian artists, but it was extended to all silenced and threatened artists worldwide. Currently, being at risk in Ukraine means life-threatening danger due to the war, but it is not a situation of persecution, violation of artistic freedom, or political repression, as is the case in other countries for dissident artists / artists at risk. This is why we adopted different criteria for different situations and countries. A second important criterion concerns the work of the artists; we prioritized works that strengthen democratic values, human rights including environmental rights, and are close to activist methods. Collaborative approaches similar to tactical media and strategies of resistance were also favored. As few such works were submitted, we have included works that are more traditional, such as video essays and installations, but include a critical

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discourse. The jury recognized the urgent need to stand in solidarity with Ukraine and its artists in the time of brutal Russian invasion. Also, the majority of the submissions were from artists from Ukraine. The jury wished to have had more submissions from persecuted and silenced artists from around the globe, who are often more difficult to reach. Among the selected artists, there are a few collectives and artists from Burma, Hong Kong and Syria, who fit the criteria described above and demonstrate a variety of resistance strategies. These just give a tiny glimpse of ongoing persecution and violations of artistic freedom, as well as forced displacement of artists worldwide. We want to express the deepest respect for all artists who risk their lives to stand up for artistic freedom, basic human rights, totalitarian governments, and continue to create art in the middle of the war, and other unimaginable hardships.

The jury recognized the urgent need to support Ukraine and its artists.”

State of the ART(is): <https://ars.electronica.art/stateoftheartist/en/>
Ars Electronica Festival 2022: <https://ars.electronica.art/planetb/en/>
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