

Ars Electronica Linz co-curates an exhibition at Moscow's Polytechnic Museum

EARTH LAB – Artists as Catalysts

(Linz, June 22, 2016) The Polytechnic Museum in Moscow commissioned Ars Electronica Linz to co-curate the “EARTH LAB – Artists as Catalysts” exhibition, a collection of artistic projects dealing with key issues pertaining to our planet. In it, museum visitors are called upon to act as researchers and travelers on a journey of discovery along a parcours consisting of infographic sequences and experimental arrays, many of them interactive. The exhibition will run from June 22 to September 25, 2016 at the former Red October chocolate factory in Moscow.

EARTH LAB, a laboratory of a somewhat different sort

Actually, a laboratory isn't usually open to the public. It's a site for the production of specialized knowledge. The experiments conducted in it aren't always successful, and the motives and interests behind such trials are tremendously diverse. Nevertheless, all such research activities have one thing in common: their objective is engendering new insights.

We or The Microorganisms: Who's in charge here?

EARTH LAB conceives of Planet Earth itself as a laboratory in which every available square meter is dedicated to research on a broad spectrum of topics. What sort of noise does the Earth make, how does its “heartbeat” sound, and why is it revolving slower and slower? Might artificial leaves counteract the increasing pollution of our air, and could flies be the garbage-busters of the future? And speaking of flies: Why aren't we snacking on insect bars now that nutritional as well as environmental considerations suggest that this is the way to go? And in light of the fact that the number of cells that make up the human body is only a tenth of the number of bacteria in and on it, than is it perhaps the case that microorganisms are what ultimately govern the human species? There are so many questions to answer as we go about advancing our basic understanding of processes at work on the Blue Planet.

Art as Catalyst

Indispensable for such understanding are unconventional new (thought) experiments. And who could be better suited to taking leave of well-trodden paths than artists, who work on concrete solutions to problems but also call the R&D enterprise itself into question and thereby shed light on why we know so much about some things and so very little—or even virtually nothing—about others. The exhibition is being supplemented by a specially developed ancillary program of speeches, performances, screenings and workshops.

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Participating artists: ART SAT (JP), Búi Bj. Aðalsteinsson (IS), Sonja Bäümel (AT), Massoud Hassani (AF/NL), Cornelia Hesse-Honegger (CH), Julian P. Melchiorri (IT/UK), Kono Michinari / Takayuki Hoshi / Yasuaki Kakehi (JP), Ursula Neugebauer (DE), Leo Peschta (AT), Finnbogi Pétursson (IS), Shinseungback Kimyonghun (HK), Marek Straszak (PL), Yulia Glukhova (RUS), Vadim Kolosov (RUS), Dmitry Bulatov, Alexey Chebykin (RUS), ::vtol:: (RUS), Stain (RUS) and presentations by the European Space Agency (ESA) and Ars Electronica Linz (AEC).

EARTH LAB - Artists as Catalysts: <http://export.aec.at/earthlab/en/>
Ars Electronica Export: <http://www.aec.at/international/en/>

An overview of the projects:

Cloud Face / Shinseungback Kimyonghun (KR)

This is a collection of images of clouds that resemble human faces, so it's quite reasonable that facial recognition software comes to the same conclusion and perceives cloud formations as countenances of actual human beings.

Der Zermesser / Leo Peschta (AT)

By changing the lengths of its sides, Der Zermesser takes leave of its perfect symmetry to feel out the space surrounding it. Each of its sides is equipped with its own microcontroller, electrical supply and motors, which enable it to autonomously determine how far to spread out. Information about the position and extension of the individual modules is shared among them, so that the entire body, by shifting its center of gravity, can move about freely in space.

ARS Recollected / Marek Straszak (PL)

In this installation, video mapping meets kinetic objects, and the integrated entity provides an account of the history of Ars Electronica from its inception in 1979 to the present, including animated infographics and a sound installation.

expanded self II / Sonja Bäümel (AT)

Happenstance plays an essential role in Sonja Bäümel's experimental array. In a Petri dish almost as large as a human being, the artist has made imprints in the medium with her own body and thereby introduced bacteria that grow and multiply during the exhibition's run. Although the artist is able to make general prognoses on the basis of prior experiments, each bodily impression in Sonja Bäümel's work is nevertheless an original. The growth of her collected microorganisms can indeed be measured and controlled, but not all of the parameters to which this work is subject are known or controllable.

tour en l'air / Ursula Neugebauer (DE)

This is an imposing installation at the nexus of fashion, art and architecture. Stylized dummies outfitted in floor-length red taffeta dresses are brought to life by computer-

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controlled electric motors. The individual components are of purely mechanical and textile origin; as an ensemble, they do an enchanting dance.

Lapillus Bug / Yasuaki Takehi, Kono Michinari and Takayuki Hoshi (JP)

This bug is a sort of fruit fly, a tiny Styrofoam particle that's made to hover by means of sound waves beyond the range of human hearing. The interaction with installation visitors is via light and motion.

Earth / Finnbogi Pétursson (IS)

The Icelandic artist generates resonance at a frequency of 7.8 Hz in a water-filled basin. The sound is audible as well as visible in the form of waves on the water's surface. The 7.8 Hz frequency corresponds to a physical phenomenon known as the Schumann resonances that describe oscillations of the Earth's electromagnetic field. For Pétursson, this frequency is the heartbeat of our home planet.

Seh-Forschung / Cornelia Hesse-Honegger (CH)

Since 1968, knowledge artist Cornelia Hesse-Honegger has been painting laboratory flies that have mutated as a result of toxic substances and radiation, as well as bugs found in the wild. In the wake of the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, she collected more than 16,000 bugs in the fallout zone surrounding the ruined reactor as well as in the vicinity of other nuclear facilities in Europe and the USA. Her studies show that atomic plants severely pollute the environment.

Mine Kafon / Massoud and Mahmud Hassani (AF/NL)

Massoud and Mahmud Hassani emigrated with their parents to Holland from their native Afghanistan where, as children, they used paper to craft wind-powered objects that could fly above those mine-infested landscapes. This idea was the inspiration for their spherical mine detector equipped with GPS sensors. "Mine Kafon" is studded with landmine-triggering plates about the size of a human foot, and its weight is that of an average human being.

Silk Leaf / Julian Melchiorri (IT/UK)

Inspired by the mechanisms of nature and the phenomena of physics, the artist carries out laboratory experiments to explore the potential of photosynthetic materials. One result is "Silk Leaf," an artifact that consists of organic material—silk protein and chloroplast—that's capable of photosynthesis.

The Fly Factory / Búi Bjarmar Adalsteinsson (IS)

In his "Fly Factory," the artist uses a mixer and a microwave oven to make a tofu-like product from fly maggots (raised by species-appropriate means).

Glimpse of our Blue Planet / European Space Agency (ESA)

Images provided by the ESA are meant to encourage us to consider the world from new perspectives. Exhibition visitors can choose which particular images of our world they zoom in on.

ARTSAT: REPLAY / ARTSAT: Art and Satellite Project (JP)

This installation documents a satellite constructed by Japanese artists and sent into orbit. The goal of this mission that ran for over six months was to transmit the spoken word, music and poetry, to capture and transmit visual data, and to communicate with ground control via a chatterbot program.

Plasticity of Flame / Yulia Glukhova (RUS)

A flame serves as a medium for visualizing sound waves and investigates the potential of sound to control combustible substances from an aesthetic point of view.

Dendrophone / Vadim Kolosov (RUS)

Since human beings are not in a position to understand communication among plants, the artist has given plants a tool with which to express their feelings and intentions. Reference parameters for light, humidity and carbon dioxide are established at the outset and compared to current parameters. The difference between the measured values indicates the plant's mood, which is output via sound and light. A central element of this work is its intention to focus people's attention on environmental problems.

Access point / Dmitry Bulatov, Alexey Chebykin (RUS)

This interactive project brings together optical technologies of the past and augmented reality. It's based on the principle of anamorphosis, which refers to images that are recognizable only from a certain angle or by means of a special mirror or prism system. The central element, which was produced on a 3-D printer according to the principle of anamorphosis, is reflected in a cylinder. It's a model of Tatlin's Tower, a monumental structure that was never built.

Divider / ::vtol:: (RUS)

The central idea of the project lies in an abstract artistic interpretation of the wave-particle duality concept that every physical object may be described mathematically in terms of wave quotations, as well as from a formalist point of view that conceives object as a particle or a particle system. An artwork itself is a complex light and sound object in which directed light lines are divided by rotating mechanical fan repeatedly and sequentially, but not simultaneously – as to create a polyphase source of uncertain events.

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All voices / Stain (RUS)

The key method of interaction with the installation's abstract space is focused attention. Fixing the gaze, concentrating on a unique fragment, one may see deeper and better understand the structure of the world around.

Credits

Curators of the EARTH LAB: Manuela Naveau, Natalia Fuchs
Russian commission co-curator: Alexey Shcherbina
Frame program co-curators: Natalia Fuchs, Alexey Shcherbina
Project manager: Anna Firainer
Technical direction: Klaus Dieterstorfer
Technical support: SilaSveta, Gustavo Valera
Infographics: Stefan Eibelwimmer, Nicolas Naveau
Coordination: Fedor Vladimirov

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