

EU Commission Awards 2nd STARTS PRIZE

Press conference on May 9

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EU Commission Awards the 2nd STARTS PRIZE

(Linz/Amsterdam/Brussels, May 9, 2017) This year's STARTS PRIZE recipients come from Japan and Switzerland. "I'm Humanity" garnered the Grand Prize for Artistic Exploration for Etsuko Yakushimaru; the Grand Prize for Innovative Collaboration goes to Gramazio Kohler Research at ETH-Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and the Self-Assembly Lab at MIT for their "Rock Print" installation. In addition to their STARTS trophy, the winners in both categories receive €20,000 and can look forward to prominent appearances in Amsterdam, Brussels and Linz. STARTS stands for **S**cience, **T**echnology and **A**rts. The STARTS PRIZE, an initiative of the European Commission, spotlights people and projects making a significant, lasting contribution to Europe's social, ecological and economic future. The aim is to foster innovation for and in Europe. The Waag Society of Amsterdam, Brussels-based BOZAR and Ars Electronica Linz were commissioned to conduct the STARTS PRIZE proceedings. 2,977 entries from 97 countries were submitted for 2017 STARTS PRIZE consideration.

The 2017 Prizewinners

Grand Prize Artistic Exploration:

I'm Humanity / Etsuko Yakushimaru

Grand Prize Innovative Collaboration:

Rock Print / Gramazio Kohler Research, ETH Zurich, & Self-Assembly Lab, MIT

Honorary Mentions:

3arabizi Keyboard / Hadeer Omar

Blink: Humanising Autonomy / Adam Bernstein, Raunaq Bose, Leslie Nooteboom, Maya Pindeus

[IGNIS AER AQUA TERRA] / Yuima Nakazato

Library of Ourselves / BeAnotherLab

Mimus: Coming face-to-face with our companion species / Madeline Gannon

nonvisual-art / Lisa Buttinger

Out of Exile / Nonny de la Peña, Emblematic Group

RIAT / Research Institute for Arts and Technology

Sentient Veil / Philip Beesley

Treelab / Marcus Maeder, Roman Zweifel

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2017 Grand Prize Artistic Exploration

I'm Humanity / Etsuko Yakushimaru

Etsuko Yakushimaru's mission in creating "I'm Humanity" is to ensure that music will endure even in a future without human beings, and that a successor species will be able to (re)discover our music and play it back. Traditionally, music is first composed, then sung or played, and finally copied and replayed—often with variations—by other interpreters. Via radio, LP, cassette, CD or cloud, music is transmitted over space and through time, passed down from generation to generation, disseminated, and incessantly modified and developed further. The relationship between the music and the medium in this process resembles the one between genes and DNA, and that is precisely what inspired Etsuko Yakushimaru to create "I'm Humanity." She first composed a pop song, and then translated it into DNA—that is, into a nucleic acid sequence. This DNA material was input into macro-molecules that are responsible for transmitting genetic information from one generation to the next, and all the macro-molecules were then implanted into the chromosomes of cyanobacteria. Genetically modified in this way, the microorganisms' DNA now carries encoded music, and this information will be inherited by the next generation. If humankind becomes extinct one day and the cyanobacteria survive, a future species will be able to access our music from this code.

2017 Grand Prize Innovative Collaboration

Rock Print / Gramazio Kohler Research, ETH Zurich und Self-Assembly Lab, MIT

"Rock Print" is a monolithic installation that was developed by architects, engineers, material science specialists and physicists at ETH Zurich and MIT, and made its debut at the Chicago Architecture Biennial 2015. The four-meter-high installation consists solely of loose granular material and a 9.1-kilometer-long string. The installation's shape and design are attributable to the physical principle of jamming, whereby a material that, on the molecular level, rather resembles a liquid—in this case, a low-grade granulate—can, when subjected to high pressure, assume a fixed shape. And these researchers have submitted proof that this is feasible in the form of "Rock Print." Just like in 3-D printing, the installation is built up layer by layer. First, a specially programmed robot lays out string in a complex pattern upon which the researchers pour a layer of granular material. And then comes another layer of string, followed by another layer of granulate. The end result is a four-meter-tall sculpture weighing about a ton; in fact, it's the material's own weight that prevents this towering object from collapsing. "Rock Print" points out the potential of 3-D printing for the architecture of the future. It combines resource efficiency, additive construction principles and new design options, and does so in a way that minimizes costs. The researchers' vision goes far beyond fascinating architectural projects; it points the way to a new digital approach to building.

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Honorary Mentions

3arabizi Keyboard / Hadeer Omar

How do you write an SMS in Arabic if the keyboards of all mobile devices make only Latin letters available? The “3arabizi Keyboard” solves this problem by simply associating missing letters with numbers which stand for phonetic symbols that occur only in Arabic—for instance, the number 3 stands for “Ain.” “3arabizi” or “Franco X” has rapidly established itself in Arabic youth culture.

Blink: Humanising Autonomy / Adam Bernstein, Raunaq Bose, Leslie Nooteboom, Maya Pindeus

Autonomous vehicles offer us the chance to redefine the human-machine relationship. “Blink” is a communications device that provides intuitive support to people interacting with machines. When a self-driving car registers a pedestrian in its immediate surroundings, the pedestrian’s silhouette is visualized on the vehicle’s exterior. If the vehicle fails to interpret the person’s intentions, the corresponding silhouette begins to blink and emit a warning signal. The pedestrian can then indicate her/his next move either verbally or via gestures, whereupon the vehicle responds in terms of a color or sound as to whether it has gotten the message. “Blink” is a computer program capable of learning. It can perceive and interpret hundreds of movements and gestures, and is thus up to the task of dealing with the complex situations that constantly arise among the multifarious users of roadway networks.

[IGNIS AER AQUA TERRA] / YUIMA NAKAZATO

Long ago, people believed that combining the four elements—fire, wind, water and earth—would give rise to a new, unknown substance. Yuima Nakazato drew inspiration from this ancient belief and channeled it into his futuristic fashion collection. It won’t be long before clothes will be custom-designed for the person who’ll be wearing them—in the spirit of “each individual, his own design.” It will be possible to modify the function, aesthetics, surface and form of these garments in a matter of seconds, as need be. Moreover, these articles of clothing won’t be sewn together; rather, they’ll consist of thousands of tiny interlocking modules. And this, in turn, will have revolutionary consequences for design, production and distribution.

Library of Ourselves / BeAnotherLab

“Library of Ourselves” is an interdisciplinary and distributed project to create transformative encounters between communities in conflict. To achieve this, the project staff developed “The Machine To Be Another,” a highly adaptable Creative Commons system that bridges cognitive science and virtual reality techniques to create empathy-driven experiences. This allows users to exchange perspectives, bodies and stories, and thereby learn to better

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understand the points of view of their fellow human beings. In this process, “Library of Ourselves” functions as a replicable structure/methodology. The emphasis is on creating content through collaboration with local communities and on the grassroots level, creating audiences in partnership with local artistic and cultural institutions, and generating new insights into the effects of this content in collaboration with international academic partners.

Mimus: Coming face-to-face with our companion species / Madeline Gannon

Mimus is a huge industrial robot that’s interested in everything that surrounds it. In contrast to others of its kind installed in factories, Mimus doesn’t execute preprogrammed sequences of movements; instead, it employs various sensors to check out everyone and everything around it. If someone arouses its interest, it approaches and follows him/her in an effort to get a close-up look. But just as Mimus’ interest in someone is easily piqued, that interest can also vanish no less quickly—when an individual has remained stationary for a spell, Mimus gets bored and seeks another preoccupation. Mimus is an artistic response to the widespread fear that machines will soon be replacing us human beings. Mimus is an example of robots that serve as our companions in everyday life, machines that work with and not against us.

nonvisual-art / Lisa Buttinger

“nonvisual-art” is an image that is simultaneously visible and invisible. Cellophane foils and air bubbles trapped in a layer of adhesive refract light shone onto them artistically. In this way, natural science becomes a tool for graphical depiction. First, a polarizing filter refracts invisible light into visible colors and then forms them into an image. Viewed through 3-D glasses, the image becomes a space. Lisa Buttinger painstakingly constructed this “enchanted world” piece by piece. “nonvisual-art” was created as a design project at HBLA–High School for Artistic Design Linz; Lisa Buttinger gained the necessary theoretical insights in conjunction with her diploma thesis.

Out of Exile / Nonny de la Peña, Emblematic Group

“Out of Exile” is an impressive parable dealing with the hostility that many lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people are subjected to. The clip consists of a computer animation sequence and the original audio track that teenager Daniel Ashley Pierce recorded while revealing to his family that he is a homosexual. “Out of Exile” confronts viewers with the emotionally charged and violent scene that ensued after this coming-out, as well as with the fact that Daniel Ashley Pierce ended up getting thrown out of the house and having to live on the streets. Finally, he and other young people talk about their experiences with homelessness. The fact that, despite it all, they were able to become masters of their own fate and triumph over despair is ultimately a source of hope and the courage to remain true to oneself.

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RIAT Research Institute for Arts and Technology

RIAT—Research Institute for Arts and Technology is an independent research & communications hub in Vienna that serves as a forum for the critical investigation and discussion of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research work. RIAT’s fundamental principle is that technology does not inherently serve a specific purpose; instead, it’s up to communities and societies to develop those norms, aims and visions that unleash technology’s potential. The point of RIAT is to learn to better understand this process and to share the insights gleaned thereby with both experts and the general public. One of the areas on which this research is focused is the formation of artistic strategies that influence the production and development of technology. In pursuit of this mission, RIAT produces numerous activities: a series of exhibitions at Vienna’s Museumsquartier having to do with artistic research, the Journal for Research Cultures, the biennial Open Hardware Europe Summit and the Coded Cultures Festival. Parallel to these events, RIAT hosts Making Artistic Technology, an educational program especially for artists and researchers.

Sentient Veil / Philip Beesley

“Sentient Veil” resembles a highly ramified, crystalline network of thousands of thin threads and struts. Interwoven into this artistically executed, almost textile-like sculpture are countless miniature loudspeakers and hundreds of LEDs. This assemblage is suspended from the ceiling of the historic galleries of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston MA, where its built-in sensors register the slightest movement in the (exhibition) space. When one occurs, the sculpture awakens, lights gleam and glow, and mysterious whispering becomes audible. Philip Beesley’s “Sentient Veil” creates an architectural mise-en-scène for a subtle, almost intimate experience.

Treelab / Marcus Maeder, Roman Zweifel

Marcus Maeder is a sound artist; Roman Zweifel is a biologist. Their shared interest is in eco-physiological processes—in other words, they like listening to trees grow. This is made possible, first of all, by various scientific instruments such as sensors that register ultrasonic noise and dendrometers that document the expansion and contraction of a tree’s trunk. The next step is to convert the measured biological data into sounds and music. The outcomes of this process are bio-acoustics that, for one thing, inspired the two researchers to create artistic installations and, for another, was the point of departure of a new research method. In contrast to graphical representations, acoustic data enable analysts to recognize patterns and structures significantly faster. And this, in turn, convinced ZHdK—Zurich University of the Arts to set up Treelab to provide ideal conditions to listen in on plants and thereby gain new insights into how plants react to environmental influences such as heat waves and droughts.

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APPENDIX

The STARTS PRIZE proceedings are conducted under the aegis of the European Commission by the following organizations:

Ars Electronica

Since 1979, Ars Electronica has been exploring the impacts that digitization and networking are making on our world. In going about this, art, technology and society are never scrutinized as discrete domains; instead, they are viewed as interrelated fields, with particular attention to where they overlap. The focal point of this process of reflection is always occupied by humankind, our interrelationship with an environment permeated by technology, and the question of how we want to configure this relationship in the future. These explorations are carried out in collaboration with artists, scientists, engineers, social activists and entrepreneurs throughout the world. Their annual highpoint is one of the world's largest and most important media art events, the Ars Electronica Festival produced every September in Linz, Austria.

BOZAR

BOZAR Center for Fine Arts is one of Belgium's leading multidisciplinary cultural institutions. Its facilities include exhibition spaces, conference rooms, a cinema, and a concert hall that is the home of the Belgian national orchestra. BOZAR's orientation is national, European and international; it defines itself as an artistic as well as a political platform for new ideas and concepts. Creativity, quality and artistic diversity are the core values of this institution that does not regard art as something distant and abstract but rather—especially in light of its location in such a diverse, international city as Brussels—pursues the goal of making it part of the “culture” of this society. Here, art comes to life, and is presented in a way that is, first and foremost, open.

Waag Society

The Waag Society—an institute of art, science and technology—is a pioneer in the field of digital media. Over the past 22 years, this foundation has developed into an institution of international stature, a platform for artistic research and experimentation, and has become both a catalyst and a breeding ground for cultural and social innovation. The Waag Society focuses on emerging technologies and scientific discoveries, and assigns a central role to art and culture in the design of innovative applications.

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