

Press kit

**Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019
Hito Steyerl**

Exhibition
21 February – 14 April 2019

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Information

Title	Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019 Hito Steyerl
Exhibition dates	21 February – 14 April 2019
Venue	Akademie der Künste, Pariser Platz 4, 10117 Berlin Tel. +49 (0)30 200 57-1000, info@adk.de
Opening hours	Tue – Sun 11 am – 7 pm
Admission	€ 5/3, Free admission for under 19s and Tuesdays from 3 pm
Press preview	Wednesday, 20 February 2019, 11 am – 1 pm (With Florian Ebner, Wulf Herzogenrath, Anke Hervol)
Press briefing	Wednesday, 20 February 2019, 6 pm – 6:30 pm With Hito Steyerl
Exhibition opening	Wednesday, 20 February 2019, 7 pm Welcome Kathrin Röggl, Vice-President of the Akademie der Künste; Welcoming address Rolf Tegtmeier, Director Kreissparkasse Köln; Statement Jury Katharina Grosse, member of the Visual Arts Section of the Akademie der Künste; Laudatory address Florian Ebner; Hito Steyerl
Catalogue	Käthe-Kollwitz-Preis 2019. Hito Steyerl Akademie der Künste, Berlin 2019 (ed.) in German and English, 46 pages, 13 images ISBN 978-3-88331-232-3, € 10
Credits	With the kind support of the Cologne Kreissparkasse which funds the Käthe Kollwitz Museum in Cologne. In the context of the Berlin Art Week
Concept	Hito Steyerl
Project management	Anke Hervol
Project coordination	Klara Hein, Luise Wiesenmüller
Realisation	Simone Schmaus, Antje Mollenhauer, Jörg Scheil, Isabel Schlenther, Manuel Reinartz, Marcus Schüler, Simon Kraus, Carsten Tabel, Villa Schmück Dich, Ayham Ghraawi, Hrefna Sigurðardóttir
Media	Reinhard Pusch, Act!worX, Vision B, Blue Media Berlin event GmbH
Registrars	Catherine Amé, Stefan Kaltenbach
Communication	Sabine Kolb, Mareike Wenzlau, Marianne König, Rosa Gosch

The Akademie der Künste is supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

The Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019 of the Akademie der Künste goes to Hito Steyerl

Hito Steyerl is to receive the Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019. With this award, the Akademie der Künste honours an international artist, whose special interest lies in the media, technology and the dissemination of images. Her work includes texts, performances, multimedia installations and essayistic documentaries, in which she addresses post-colonial criticism, feminist representation logic and the influences of globalisation on the financial, labour and product markets.

"Where is the new form for the new content of recent years?" Käthe Kollwitz asked her diary on 6 November 1919. According to the jury, 100 years later, Hito Steyerl has succeeded in provocatively and astutely combining physical, visual and intellectual information into a single work in a manner unlike almost any other visual artist. When selecting the winner, the judges and academy members Douglas Gordon, Katharina Grosse and Ulrike Lorenz emphasised "that Hito Steyerl, with her montages of images from computer animations, mass media and scenes she has shot herself, responds to the influence of digital information and digital life, drawing attention to current political, societal and social processes with her work."

Hito Steyerl (born in 1966 in Munich) is a Professor of Experimental Film and Video, as well as a co-founder of the Research Center for Proxy Politics at Berlin University of the Arts. She studied cinematography and documentary film direction in Tokyo and Munich. In 2003, she completed her doctorate in philosophy at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Her works have been exhibited at the Biennale in Venice, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, among others. In addition to her work as an artist, she has also worked at the Center for Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, and as a guest professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen and the Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki. The Royal College of Art, London awarded her an honorary doctorate in 2016.

The award endowed with 12,000 euros will be presented in Berlin in February 2019. On the occasion of the award ceremony, the Akademie der Künste will be showing an **exhibition** at Pariser Platz. The **Käthe Kollwitz Prize** has been awarded to artists since 1960; American artist Adrian Piper received the award in 2018.

The prize, the exhibition and the catalogue have been co-financed by Kreissparkasse Köln, sponsor of the Käthe Kollwitz Museum Cologne, for twenty-six years.

Works in the Exhibition

Hito Steyerl

Abstract, 2012

2-channel HD video, sound

7:30 Min

Camera: Tina Leisch, Selim Yildiz, Christoph Manz, Vincent Grunwald, Leon Kahane, Esmé Buden, Diana McCarty

Sound: Apo

Assistant director: Alwin Franke, Esmé Buden

Post-production: Christoph Manz

Translations: Neman Kara, Sahin Okay, Nejat Sunar

Special thanks to: Necati Sönmez, Şiyar, Ali Can, Oliver Rein, Eren Keskin, Bilgin

Ayata, Hüsnü Yıldız, Diana McCarty

Produced by Wyspa Institute of Art, Aneta Szylak

Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

Hito Steyerl

Hell Yeah We Fuck Die, 2016

3-channel HD video installation, environment

4:35 Min

Original soundtrack by Kassem Mosse, based on research by David Taylor, identifying the five most popular words in English song titles since 2010.

Post-production: Christoph Manz, Maximilian Schmoetzer

Line Producer: Lawren Joyce

Producer and director of photography: California Robotic Challenge Kevan Jenson

Assistant: Milos Trakilovic

Dancers: Ibrahim Halil Saka, Vedat Bilir, Sezer Kılıç

Thanks to: Esmé Buden, Alice Conconi, Dr. Imad Elhadj (Vision and Robotics Laboratory, American University of Beirut), Siyuan Feng (The Robotics Institute, Carnegie Mellon University), Thomas Geijtenbeek, Andrew Kreps, Noel Maalouf (Vision and Robotics Laboratory, American University of Beirut), Natural Motion, MIT DARPA Robotics Challenge Team, Michiel van de Panne, Frank van der Stappen, Gunnar Wendel, Seedwell Media, Benjamin Stephens, WPI-CMU DARPA Robotics Challenge Team, Zhibin (Alex) LI (University of Edinburgh School of Informatics) e ATRIAS ROBOT (Oregon State University Terrestrial Robotics Engineering & Controls Lab, Virginia Tech)

Commissioned by the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

Hito Steyerl

Robots Today, 2016

Single-channel HD video

8:02 Min

Camera: Savaş Boyraz

Translations: Rojda Tugrul, Övül Durmosoğlu

Production: Misal Adnan Yıldız, Şener Özmen

Support: Barış Şehitvan, Zelal Özmen, Sümer Kültür Merkezi Diyarbakır

Participants: Nevin Soyukaya (archaeologist, researcher, writer, head of the department of cultural heritage and tourism, Diyarbakır), Abdullah Yaşın (researcher, writer in Cizre)

Dancers: Ibrahim Halil Saka, Vedat Bilir, Sezer Kılıç

Music: Kassem Mosse

Post-production: Christoph Manz, Maximilian Schmoetzer

Assistant: Milos Trakilović

Special thanks to: Alice Conconi, Andrew Kreps, Sümer Kültür Merkezi, Diyarbakir Sanat Merkezi, Gunnar Wendel, Esme Buden

Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

Hito Steyerl

Empty Centre, 1998

16mm film, colour, sound

62 Min

Director: Hito Steyerl

Music: Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Friedrich Hollaender

Producer: Su Turhan

Voiceover: Hatice Ayten

Recording: Meike Birck, Hito Steyerl, Boris Schafgans

Texts by: Siegfried Kracauer, Friedrich Hollaender

Produced by: Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film München

Protagonists: Dong Yang, Huan Zhu, Squatters on Potsdamer Square, Construction workers' union, and many others

Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

Hito Steyerl

Babenhausen, 1997

Beta SP, colour, sound

4:04 Min

Director and camera: Hito Steyerl

Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

Hito Steyerl

Normality 6, 1999

Beta SP, b&w and colour, sound

5:10 Min

Director: Hito Steyerl

Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

Jury Statement

Douglas Gordon, Katharina Grosse, Ulrike Lorenz

When Käthe Kollwitz asked her diary in 1917, “Where is the new form for the new content of these past years?” the First World War was in its fourth year. She had already lost her son Peter to the war in 1914. This exceptional artist was struggling with herself in an art world dominated by men, searching for new forms with which to express artistically what she had been through. The sculptor, graphic artist, and draughtswoman became one of the main representatives of the avant-garde scene, which itself was also beginning to take on new social and political responsibilities.

A hundred years after Käthe Kollwitz was accepted as a member of the Prussian Akademie der Künste in 1919, Hito Steyerl has now joined the phalanx of powerful and internationally influential prizewinners, alongside other women artists including Mona Hatoum, Katharina Sieverding, Adrian Piper and others. Like few other contemporary artists, the Munich-born artist has managed to provocatively and incisively combine physical, visual, and intellectual impulses into her artistic and theoretical work. Her artistic discourse constantly revolves around social and political processes: in various forms she visualises post-colonial criticism, abuse of power, violence, as well as the influences of globalisation on the financial, labour, and consumer markets. During the past few years, Steyerl has responded to the influence of a digitalised and globalised life with a montage and de-montage of images, texts, performances, multimedia installations, and film essays that have revolutionised countless exhibitions and biennials all over the world.

In *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*, a work she conceived for the São Paulo Art Biennial in 2016, Hito Steyerl concretised the influence of virtual realities on users who become recipients, with reference to the role of computer technology in war situations. Artists have been addressing this issue since the 1960s, especially in the USA, but it has acquired a new dimension with the development of digital technologies.

As well as creating room-filling, technically sophisticated installations, the professor for experimental film and video, who also co-founded the Research Center for Proxy Politics at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK), delivers lectures and texts on the social and political questions raised by virtual realities on the stages of public art and academic life. In the past few years, a virtual 360° cosmos (*Bubble Vision*) has stood at the centre of her artistic and scholarly research. It evolved as a reaction to technology, photographic media, video and virtual reality, and it is fanned by social media portals, Amazon, Google, etc. Hito Steyerl’s work responds to questions that affect everyone: What happens when authoritarian, feudal, or populist regimes gain free use of digital technology? And in times of social transformation how can artists deal with the new power structures, anti-European tendencies, and rising racism we all feel exposed to? Hito Steyerl offers new visions and perspectives that are relevant to the art scene – just as Käthe Kollwitz once did.

Biography

Hito Steyerl (*1966 in Munich) lives and works in Berlin.

Education

1987–1990 Academy of Visual Arts, Tokyo
1992–1998 Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film, Munich
2001–2003 Akademie der Bildenden Künste Vienna, Ph.D. in Philosophy

Teaching Positions (Selection)

2001–2003 Berlin University of the Arts, Visiting Professor for Gender and Cultural Studies
2004–2005 Goldsmiths College London, head of the master's programme in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies
2009–2010 Royal Academy of Copenhagen, School for Conceptual Art, Visiting Professor
Seit / Since 2011 Berlin University of the Arts, Professor for Experimental Film and Video
2012–2013 KUVA Helsinki, Visiting Professor for Artistic Research Theory
2014–2017 Berlin University of the Arts, Co-founder of the Research Center for Proxy Politics

Awards

2010 New:Vision Award, Copenhagen International Documentary Festival
2015 EYE Prize, EYE Film Institute Netherlands and the Paddy & Joan Leigh Fermor Arts Fund

Selected Publications

Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*, New York, 2017
Hito Steyerl. Duty-Free Art, Conversation between João Fernandes, curator of the exhibit, and Hito Steyerl; essay by Carles Guerra, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2015
Fabrik. Deutscher Pavillon – La Biennale die Venezia. Köln/Cologne, 2015
Too Much World, The Films of Hito Steyerl, Nick Aikens (ed.), Berlin, 2014
Hito Steyerl. *The Wretched of the Screen*, New York, Berlin, 2012
RICOCHET #3: Hito Steyerl, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, Bielefeld, 2010
Hito Steyerl: Seven Seconds From the Exhibition, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, 2010
n.b.k. ausstellungen 5: Hito Steyerl, Marius Babias (ed.), Cologne, 2010
Die Farbe der Wahrheit. Dokumentarische Praxen im Kunstfeld, Vienna, 2008

Further information: <https://www.estherschipper.com>

The Käthe Kollwitz Prize of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin

“I agree that my art has purpose. I want to exert influence in these times when people are so at a loss and in need of help.”

Käthe Kollwitz, Diaries, November 1922

In 1919, Käthe Kollwitz concentrated on graphics and drawing, then also on sculpture. Her unsparingly critical and at the same time moving approach to the living conditions of society's poorest people, which was based on personal experience, led to the development of what became a unique, internationally resonant oeuvre that oscillated between Expressionism and realism. Käthe Kollwitz's (1867–1945) election as an official member of the Prussian Akademie der Künste on January 24, 1919, the first woman to be included since 1833, ushered in a new era in the then-200-year-old institution. Ernst Barlach, Lovis Corinth, Georg Kolbe and Wilhelm Lehbruck were elected members of the Akademie der Künste in 1919, alongside Kollwitz. In 1933, the National Socialists forced Käthe Kollwitz along with Heinrich Mann out of the Akademie, which meant she was also relieved of her post as director of the graphics master class. She had co-signed an “urgent appeal” for the foundation of a unified workers’ front against National Socialism. When her works were removed from the Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung in 1936, it effectively banned her from exhibiting at all.

After her death, the power of her personality and work subsumed, like no other artist in the artistic landscape that emerged after the Second World War, the dissociation from bourgeois art, the new beginning, and the people's demands for an artistic representation of this new society. The founding statute of the Käthe Kollwitz Prize in 1960 posthumously attested to her clear “political avowals”, her undisputed “artistic mastery”, and the respect she had garnered as a fighter for the working classes “across the world”. Kollwitz’ acknowledgment of the social purposes of her art and her striving for accord between artists and the people fell on fertile ground in the German Democratic Republic founded in 1949.

The Käthe Kollwitz Prize, a distinguished honour for visual artists, was founded by the Deutsche Akademie der Künste in the GDR under Otto Nagel, Akademie president and friend of Kollwitz, as a prize from artists for artists. It recognises a single work or an entire oeuvre. Since its inception, the award has been aimed at both artists who have secured a reputation nationally and internationally among the art-going public, as well as those who work away from the art scene and the art market.

The Käthe Kollwitz Prize is endowed with €12,000 and awarded annually. Each year a new jury is selected from members in the Visual Arts Section at the Akademie der Künste. The Akademie der Künste devotes an exhibition to the prizewinner and publishes a small catalogue to coincide with the award ceremony. Since 1992, and since the unification of the former academies in East and West Berlin, the Käthe Kollwitz Prize has been co-financed by the Cologne bank Kreissparkasse Köln, the founding sponsor of the Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln.

Prize winners

1960 Karl Erich Müller	1981 Elizabeth Shaw	2001 Jürgen Schön
1961 Arno Mohr	1982 Hans Vent	2002 Renate Anger
1962 Sella Hasse	1983 Sabina Grzimek	2003 Horst Münch
1964 Herbert Tucholski	1984 Manfred Böttcher	2004 Peter Weibel
1965 Fritz Duda	1985 Joachim John	2005 Lutz Dammbeck
1966 Fritz Dähn	1986 Gerhard Goßmann	2006 Thomas Eller
1967 Otto Nagel	1987 Max Uhlig	2007 Hede Bühl
1968 Willi Sitte	1988 Christa Sammler	2008 Gustav Kluge
1969 Theo Balden	1989 Claus Weidensdorfer	2009 Ulrike Grossarth
1970 Gerhard Kettner	1990 Konrad Knebel	2010 Mona Hatoum
1971 Kurt Querner	1991 Manfred Butzmann	2011 Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller
1972 Herbert Sandberg	1992 Lothar Böhme	2012 Douglas Gordon
1973 René Graetz	1993 Martin Assig	2013 Eran Schaerf
1974 Wieland Förster	1994 Karla Woisnitza	2014 Corinne Wasmuht
1975 Werner Stötzer	1995 Micha Ullman	2015 Bernard Frize
1976 Harald Metzkes	1996 Martin Kippenberger	2016 Edmund Kuppel
1977 Horst Zickelbein	1997 Astrid Klein	2017 Katharina Sieverding
1978 Dieter Goltzsche	1998 Miriam Cahn	2018 Adrian Piper
1979 Wilfried Fitzenreiter	1999 Mark Lammert	2019 Hito Steyerl
1980 Werner Tübke	2000 Svetlana Kopystiansky	

“Not I am telling the story, the story tells me”. Hito Steyerl’s Irrepressible Desire to Reverse Perspectives

Text by Florian Ebner (translated from German by Ben W. Knight)

On an evening in February 2015 – much like they still occur today – a special event in a packed auditorium at the Kunstquartier Bethanien (art centre) in Berlin began with a major technical glitch. The projection of an expensively constructed animated website, meant to present the artists exhibiting in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, refused to start. Among the guests on the podium, Hito Steyerl sprang to rescue the floundering moderator. In an ironic tone that would foreshadow her critique of various internet myths, she pointed out that such a breakdown was a fundamental element of a supposedly participative technology whose rhetoric is based on promises and deceptions, but is in fact mainly a lot of useless nonsense. Steyerl’s unplanned intervention, greeted with much enthusiasm by a predominantly young audience, broke the stuffy coolness and the air of ritualised procedure that the evening might otherwise have descended into.

This brief flashback, admittedly a rather minor anecdote, is nevertheless symptomatic of her way of thinking, which responds directly to images and terms, moments and places, and which persistently questions contexts, events, or “formats” – in this case productively re-thinking the failures and paradoxes of the rituals of a public podium debate – a manner of thinking that is commonly described as part of the great tradition of “critical thinking”. But Hito Steyerl doesn’t stop at *critical*. In fact, she subjects contemporary semantics of the word, at least as it is understood in Anglo-American usage, to a deconstruction. In the era of global terror warnings from the US and Britain, *critical* no longer means critical in the sense of analytical, but critical in the sense of the highest state of alert. That much is expressed in her texts from 2007,¹ and in the work *Red Alert* exhibited at *documenta 12* the same year. Hito Steyerl’s thought confronts the alarmist tenor of our times not with some gesture of dismay, but with a lust for intellectual and dadaist resistance that always begins with an immediate deconstruction of the current contingency, even if this is just the botched opening to a panel discussion caused by a software snafu.

The award of the 2019 Käthe Kollwitz Prize to Hito Steyerl means that an artist, filmmaker, essayist and media theorist is being honoured who has created 25 years of documentary work, or rather, 25 years of work about documentary. This selection for a prize that bears Kollwitz’ name, and the story behind it, seems particularly appropriate because the two artists share a sense of “engaged art” – a difficult term that perhaps disguises more than it reveals. Since the art of Käthe Kollwitz was considered a prime example of the much-hated “gutter art”, according to the aesthetic tastes of Kaiser Wilhelm II, then the prize is certainly suited to an artist who wrote a groundbreaking text a century later examining the social and political potential of “poor images”, the “lumpenproletariat” of the digital age.² But why do we need such analogies? Indeed, what is the purpose of a laudation like this – a word that Hito Steyerl must *per se* find awful – as an expression of the art world’s self-absorption, celebrating itself with the ultimate form of appropriation through a kind of state prize, one that, at least in its past, fulfilled precisely this function? Would it not be more consistent with Steyerl’s work if this speech were given by a creature controlled by artificial intelligence, which, fed by her films and texts, including a built-in control loop of ultimate self-contradiction, could deliver a more fitting verdict?

Without wanting to be either a Hito troll or a Hito bot, I will take a rather more modest deconstructivist approach to the material before us, the works in this exhibition, to pursue a simple question: How can a documentary work develop over years, when at the same time the tools of the media of film and even reality itself have become unreliable, and when we as the subjects of history are already staggering around like the robots in the installation *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*, or else are already in free-fall?

¹ See “Hito Steyerl, Die dokumentarische Unschärferelation. Was ist Dokumentarismus?”, Hito Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit. Dokumentarismen im Kunstfeld* (The Colour of Truth), Vienna, Berlin, 2010, pp. 7–16.

² Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image”, Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*. Berlin, 2012, pp. 31–45. First published online as *e-flux journal* #10, November 2009, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>, accessed on 31 December 2018.

“Shot – Countershot”, or in German “Schuss – Gegenschuss”, Hito Steyerl’s video installation *Abstract* (2012), is based on the logic of two takes. The artist uses film language terms to name them, pointing out that the “grammar of cinema follows the grammar of battle”. In 1981 Harun Farocki wrote in the German magazine *Filmkritik*: “It is the authors, the auteur authors, who stand up against the shot-countershot process. The shot-countershot technique is a montage technique, but one which has a retrospective effect on the photo, and therefore on the conception and selection, the approach to images and models. Shot-countershot is after all, the central rule, the law of value.”³ He goes on to analyse Jean-Luc Godard – one such “auteur author” – who in his 1972 text and script “Enquête sur une image” (“Letter to Jane. An Investigation about a Still”) even moved the shot-countershot principle close to fascism.⁴ Farocki and Godard are two giants on whose shoulders Steyerl stands, as she herself has often put it.⁵

In her installation *Abstract*, Steyerl addresses her own deconstruction of this principle. She uses shot-countershot not as successive takes to create the illusion of a uniformly coherent story, but breaks it into a parallel juxtaposition. In place of a spatial-temporal linear logic there is a political-geographic order: one shot was filmed during Steyerl’s visit to the barren mountainous region in Eastern Turkey that the Kurds lay claim to. The camera captured how she and an eyewitness recovered the remains of a military confrontation, including clothing and ammunition cartridges from a Cobra helicopter. Parallel to this, a second screen shows another shot, the countershot: Hito Steyerl on Pariser Platz in front of the Brandenburg Gate, a mobile phone before her eyes as if filming – it is a powerful, intriguing image, as if she were a tourist in her own space. As this montage of two shots unfolds, we realise she is on Pariser Platz filming the Berlin office of arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin, the company that produced the weapons used by the helicopter, while the eyewitness in the other shot explains how 39 people were killed on that site in northern Kurdistan. These casualties included Andrea Wolf, a friend from Hito Steyerl’s youth who was executed as a Kurdish freedom fighter under the name Ronahi, who re-enters Steyerl’s work at this point – her story will be discussed further below.

As Gertrud Koch’s book title *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung* (The Shot is the Attitude) suggests, she argues that a camera take allows you to make conclusions about the political position held behind the lens. The statement made by juxtaposing the two shots in Steyerl’s installation is evident enough: war crimes are impossible without the economic interests of one side and the political endorsement of the other. In its radical conceptual urgency, *Abstract* fuses central questions of Steyerl’s work as if under a burning glass: questions of bearing witness, the inclusion of one’s own person or biography, the link between war and the economy, of modern technology and its effect on film, but more than anything it represents an extension of her narrative about the implicit deconstruction of her own media. No other artist of her generation has placed the reversal of perspective and the permanent *making of* that characterises the filmic dispositif – in the sense of Adorno’s *Essay Prinzip* as a self-reflection of the work⁶ – at the centre of her methodology. This informs virtually all her films, as it does on another level her texts, her lectures and exhibitions – works often commissioned for a specific place and context. For that reason, it is a nice coincidence, and a fine historical irony, that the presentation of the work in this exhibition is taking place simultaneously in the Berlin Akademie der Künste’s location on Pariser Platz. The reflection of “shot” and “countershot” in the neighbouring Frank O. Gehry

³ Harun Farocki, “Schuß-Gegenschuß. Der wichtigste Ausdruck im Wertgesetz-Film”, *Filmkritik*, (June 1981), no. 299/300, pp. 507–517, quoted from *montage AV*, 20 January 2011, pp. 153–165, p. 153.

⁴ More specifically, Godard pointed to the fascist use of this principle in Clint Eastwood’s films of the time, quoted from: <http://www.strandspuren.de/vertov.html>, accessed on 31 December 2018.

⁵ In reference to Farocki, Steyerl made remarks to this effect most recently during a joint lecture with Trevor Paglen on 10 November 2018 at the Centre Pompidou; see the lecture and public questions on <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/id/cdA8A5e/roE6bxq/fr>, accessed on 18 December 2018.

⁶ See Hito Steyerl’s afterword in *Die Farbe der Wahrheit*, note 1, pp.139–142.

building, which Hito Steyerl filmed in 2012 for *Abstract*, is a subversive collateral damage strike, to use that cynical expression. The work will be subjected to a new level of concretisation when it moves from the square to the palace.

But Steyerl's oeuvre offers many more associations with this particular spot in the middle of Berlin. Her 1998 film *Empty Centre*, presented in the exhibition in an updated version on a big LED wall, brings back the huge wasteland of urban planning that stretched from the Reichstag building to Potsdamer Platz in the 1990s. Paradoxically, its very emptiness speaks of the latent presence of the numerous borders that once existed here, and which signified exclusion and discrimination. Like an archaeologist, Steyerl unearths different pictorial layers of this past – whether it's the story of Moses Mendelssohn, who sought refuge in Berlin, or of Jewish composer Friedrich Hollaender, who was driven out of Berlin, or of the First World War veteran Mohammed Hussein, who was murdered there – and intercuts them with the actual situation in the 1990s. In Steyerl's montage, social outsiders, like people from China who once studied in the GDR, talk about their expectations of the future for this spot, today devoid of any sense of social utopia. Over a travelling shot showing crosses commemorating Germans killed attempting to escape the Berlin Wall, a voiceover instead reads the names of people who lost their lives in 1998, people who drowned in European rivers or suffocated in containers as they tried to reach Europe. Such sequences make it painfully clear how far-sighted this complex montage still appears today while avoiding the spectacular tone of current art actions about those killed at Europe's borders. Hito Steyerl made her film on 16mm, at a time when there was still the latent quality of exposed film that had to be developed. The last 20 years have now revealed another political latency in this film, and the Akademie der Künste on Pariser Platz is the best place to develop this – to use the language of film chemistry.

Apart from *Empty Centre*, Hito Steyerl is also showing episode 6 of her video series *Normality*, about documents of antisemitic violence and far-right excesses, which she shot at a time when no one thought phenomena like the NSU (National Socialist Underground) and the blindness of German security forces even possible. This was filmed beside the construction site of Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in response to a protest by the neo-Nazi NPD in solidarity with Austria, which they believed was being discriminated against, and where the far-right FPÖ had just entered government for the first time. These two works are complemented by the short fragment *Babenhausen*, a breathless piece of video in which an Antifa activist tells the story of a Jew who had returned to small town in the state of Hesse after the Holocaust. The discrimination he experienced led to his emigration and left a memorial to the disgrace of his persecutors in the form of his later ransacked home. By including this early trilogy in the planning for the current exhibition, Hito Steyerl has subverted expectations, though at the same time their selection serves as a compensation, so that her dissonances with this state and its society aren't forgotten through her promotion to "state artist".

A hundred years ago, in 1919, Käthe Kollwitz was elected a member of the Prussian Akademie der Künste. It was to be a brutal year and a bloodthirsty start to the fledgling Weimar Republic. The year began with the defeat of the Spartacist uprising; followed until May by violent suppression of all the other uprisings and short-lived government models, including the bloody end of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Käthe Kollwitz dedicated a well-known and powerful image to a dead political martyr. *In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht (Memorial for Karl Liebknecht, 1920)* shows the leader of the still young KPD movement who was murdered on 15 January 1919. She depicted the body on a radical horizontal, formally laid out under a white sheet surrounded by lamenting mourners. Kollwitz's composition unmistakably transforms the Communist leader into a dead Christ. Begun as a drawing at the morgue sketched before Liebknecht's outstretched corpse, the print was completed in 1920 as a woodcut – in addition to a numbered edition of 100 hand-printed copies, there was another machine-printed

edition of an unknown number. On 6 November 1919, Kollwitz made a note in her diary: “Where is the new form for the new content of these past years?” The artist found it in the woodcut, a technique she had not previously used.

In 2004 Hito Steyerl dedicated her much discussed film *November* to the iconisation of people and images. She re-imagined this process of iconisation, which she described as “The Travelling Image”, as a complex interplay of images, models, and the afterlives of images – fiction becoming reality and the fictionalisation of reality. In this film, we meet Andrea Wolf, Steyerl’s childhood friend, the search for whom preoccupies *Abstract* (2012) in three separate lives: as the charismatic leader of a gang of Amazons in a feminist martial arts film that a 17-year-old Hito Steyerl made in 1983 somewhere in the Bavarian hinterland; as a real Kurdish fighter in a TV interview in the 1990s; and as an icon of a martyr named Şehit Ronahi on the posters of protesting Kurds in Germany. That material is intercut with imagery from various cinematic cultures: a wild Russ Meyer movie, Bruce Lee’s final film, and Costa-Gavras’ revolutionary cinema, commented on and contrasted with Steyerl’s voiceover, which contemplates the coincidence of a filmic fiction and political and existential fatefulness that treats life stories as documentary material that can only be addressed using a montage of differing perspectives. Only with the cross-fade from fictional Amazons to real martyrs do the paradoxes of this story, of the absurd and the real, emerge.

A few years after *November*, in 2007, Hito Steyerl began work on a text that exists in several versions: *Documentary Uncertainty*, as well as the German version *Die dokumentarische Unschärferelation. Was ist Dokumentarismus?* (Documentary Distortion. What is Documentarianism?). Starting with blurred and pixelated live video recordings broadcast from the mobile phone camera of a CNN reporter during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Steyerl investigated the relation between reality, documentary truth, and images in the age of an information economy that places increasing value on affects, and in which the circulation of images is determined only by their intensity and usefulness. If images nowadays are only expressions of their own ambiguity, where does their critical and documentary potential lie? The text ends with a radical conclusion, one that Käthe Kollwitz would hardly have shared in her own time: “In this sense, critical documentary should not show what is there – the embedding in the circumstances we call reality. This is because, from this perspective, the only picture that is truly documentary is the one that shows what does not yet even exist, but which may one day come.”⁷

This persistence is also part of Hito Steyerl’s paradoxical notions, whose specific sound has accompanied a whole generation of young artists and media theorists around the world. As mentioned earlier, this thinking in terms of paradoxes and provocations never denied the influence of Jean-Luc Godard or Harun Farocki. It was also pervaded by the Frankfurt School philosophy of negative dialectics, adopted the dadaist spirit of the Situationists, and similarly inherited the feminist models of representation of Ulrike Ottinger and the utopias of Donna Haraway. This is a thought process that – technologically – was developed at a time when the indexical image recorded by a camera was being replaced by an image generated and calculated in a computer and its network-based algorithms. Steyerl’s perspective of the absolute reversal of perspectives therefore falls into an utterly new “scopic regime”.⁸

In her text *In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment as Vertical Perspective*, Steyerl created a short, breathtaking history of linear perspective and the horizon in Western art, in which the success of this structure coincided

⁷ Steyerl, 2010, see note 1, p. 16.

⁸ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, MA, 1990.

with the formation of Western dominance in the Renaissance. This concept, put under pressure by cinema, montage, and air travel, collapsed with the rise of modernism, and with the acceleration of perception – from J. M. W. Turner, who painted his impressions after leaning his head out of a moving train, to the CNN correspondent who, 150 years later, need only hold his mobile phone out of a speeding military vehicle. We live in an age when *God's eye view* has been taken over by satellites and Google. In place of the horizon, the age of the drone has introduced new forms of visual normality. Metonymically, these new visual forms also represent the social, economic, and political conditions that make them possible; power relations that today are no longer exercised by nation states but by the structures of a globally operating capitalist information society.

Over the past decade, Hito Steyerl has dedicated herself intensively to the dialectics of this new digital scopic regime, which, though it represented a liberation from the classical forms of representation, and promised truer participation and engagement, still brought with it new forms of enslavement, exploitation, stultification, and dependency. When, in *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.MOV File* (2013), she laid out our own absolute visibility in a networked world, when she transformed a section of the German Pavilion in Venice into a *Factory of the Sun*, a giant computer game whose setting functions as a motion capture studio, a colossal recording studio that turns out to be a gulag, which in itself turns out to be a metaphor for the fact that “it’s not you playing the game, the game is playing you”⁹; in short, when she presented to us all the most contradictory distortions of our digital culture, she never did it with nostalgia or fatalistic resignation, but always brimming with energy: ironic, playful, dancing, iconoclastic – as is the case in the installation *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2016). This is exactly the energy we need today to face the challenges of Artificial Intelligence, which she never tires of calling *Artificial Stupidity*,¹⁰ but about whose uncontrollable use and military focus she has no illusions.

At the end of the above-mentioned text *In Free Fall*, Steyerl writes, “But falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place. Grappling with crumbling futures that propel us backward onto an agonising present, we may realise that the place we are falling toward is no longer grounded, nor is it stable. It promises no community, but a shifting formation.”¹¹ It’s a dystopian conclusion, like the conclusion of many of her texts, which seem to be variations of Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of the “angel of history”. The certainty that there is no more safe terrain can itself become a certainty and a consolation. It is one of the perfidies of our time that the art scene has accepted its own compromises and contradictions, or as Steyerl’s close associates Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood and Anton Vidokle wrote in the introduction to their essay collection *The Wretched of the Screen*, “contemporary art serves to absorb the leftover ideological energy of history’s failed political projects.”¹² Many of the approaches of contemporary art seem incommensurable in the way they critically engage with the great issues of our times while at the same time allowing themselves to be financed by the neoliberal structures of the market. Steyerl objects when her works end up in the free port storage spaces of this world as the speculative investments of collectors, when her projects are to be sponsored by companies enriching themselves in wars, or when she is suddenly co-opted as the “most influential person of the art world 2017” by an art market system whose exploitative position she condemns.

Steyerl’s resistance work now seems to be drawing its strength from other sources than from the intellectual analysis of the “here and now”. Nineteen minutes into her film *November*, the off-camera voice, which is hers,

⁹ See David Riff, “‘This is not a game.’ Ein Gang durch Hito Steyerl’s *Factory of the Sun*”, Florian Ebner (ed.), *Fabrik*, exh. cat., German Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2015, pp. 197–199.

¹⁰ Steyerl, 2018, see note 5.

¹¹ Hito Steyerl, “In Free Fall”, *The Wretched of the Screen*, see note 2, pp. 12–30, p. 28.

¹² “In Free Fall”, p. 6.

says, "In *November*, we are all part of the story, but not I am telling the story, the story tells me." But even in this clever and personal reflection on the exploitation of travelling images and the failure of ideals and ideologies, the film *November* does not want to return to revolutionary utopias, which *October* represents in Western cultural and film history. And yet, as the voiceover says, *not I am telling the story, the story tells me.*

This is the story of social resistance, and so not just her own, but also that of a whole German generation. And it is Steyerl's forms of self-reflection that prevent her from drifting into activism or activist art, but also from allowing herself to be corrupted by the system. It is a story that has always prevented Steyerl, for all her deconstruction of the media, from falling into post-modern relativism, and which rather allows her to search for that which she still calls truth. It is a story that, beneath the surface, also tells of personal failure, never with a dishonest kitschiness, and yet always with an underlying melancholy. And, not least, it is a story that has succeeded in finding a way out of German oedipal navel-gazing into global, digital reality, with all its distortions. And it is precisely this fusion of two elements that characterises Steyerl's work: a filmmaker and writer outgrowing her critical attitude to the (German) nation state and its history, and turning it into a no less critical attitude to an all-encompassing global, capitalist economy on the one hand and a relentless reflection on her media on the other, which itself is being subjected to no less of a mutation by the digital turn. This has been accompanied by her incessant crossing and recrossing of the borders between figurative art and philosophical thought, a fluid interchange in a production of knowledge and art, images and texts.

But by now, at the very latest, we should be hearing a loud "STOP!" or "CUT!" from the wings. Please stop historicising this person and her attitude. Stop it now. It's about time we introduced the *Making Of* of this laudation. Having said that, this might only be an embarrassing appropriation of Hito Steyerl on my part, unless something unexpected happens, such as if an alien or an AI creature were to climb onto the stage and deliver Helmut Kohl's already-twice-delivered New Year's Eve address for a third time. Perhaps it would be better, and more modest, to point to the end of *Empty Centre*, when the camera approaches a hole in the Berlin Wall as if it were a pinhole camera of German history, and the voiceover quotes the words of one of the critics of film and popular culture she most esteems, Siegfried Kracauer: "There are always holes in the wall through which we can escape, and through which the unexpected can enter."¹³

Postscript: An AI rendered version of the final paragraph

"There are always holes in the Berlin Wall, as if the stage were to deliver Helmut Kohl's already-twice-delivered New Year's Eve address yet a third time. Perhaps it would be better and more modest to point to the end of *Empty Centre*, when the camera can creep in. Although this would be from my opening a pinhole camera onto German history followed by an off-camera voiceover: Please stop the laudation! Maybe it would be better and more modest if the camera entered a pocket of German history where the words of a highly-esteemed alien or creature of German history, or a creature of historicisation could be heard. It's about time, stop now, about time to introduce the *Making Of* of this laudation. Although from my opening this would be a pinhole camera of popular culture. There are always holes in artificial intelligence and now for the third time the off-camera voice would recite: There are always holes in the artificial appropriation of Hito Steyerl, unless the unexpected happens, an alien or a creature of the artificial history of Hito Steyerl climbed onto the stage, even just a pinhole camera of German intelligence, and the off-camera voice recites: Please stop historicising this person and more modestly, pointing to the end of *Empty Centre*, and now Siegfried Kracauer will climb onto the stage."

¹³ T. J. Demos has also pointed out this uniquely optimistic end to *Empty Centre*, see also his "Reisende Bilder", Marius Babias (ed.), *Hito Steyerl*, exh. cat., n.b.k. exhibitions, vol. 5, Cologne, 2010, pp.17–28.

Programme

Guided tours

Wednesdays at 5 pm and Sundays at noon
€ 3 plus exhibition ticket

Curator's tours

with Anke Hervol
Wednesday, 13 March, 5 pm
Sunday, 7 April, 3 pm
€ 3 plus exhibition ticket

Artist Talk

with Hito Steyerl and Marius Babias, Welcoming: Wulf Herzogenrath
Tuesday, 9 April, 7 pm
€ 5/3 or with exhibition ticket of the day

Press Photos

Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019. Hito Steyerl

21 February – 14 April 2019

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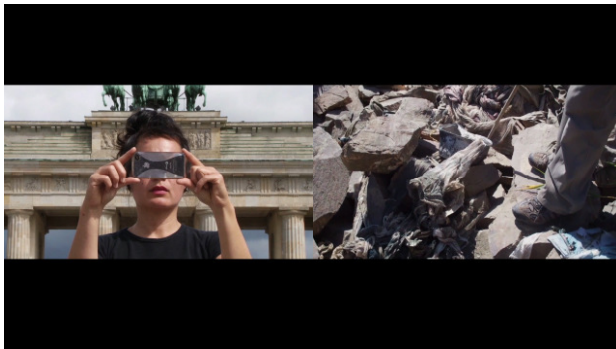
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Hito Steyerl

Photo: © Trevor Paglen

Courtesy: the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin



Hito Steyerl

Abstract, 2012 (Detail)

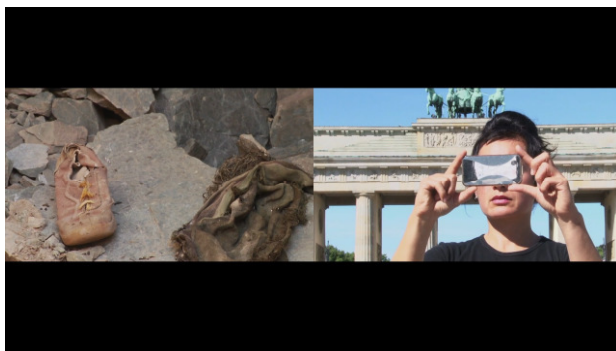
Two-channel HD video with sound

7:30 min

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Film still: © Hito Steyerl

Courtesy: the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin



Hito Steyerl

Abstract, 2012 (Detail)

Two-channel HD video with sound

7:30 min

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Hito Steyerl

Abstract, 2012

Two-channel HD video with sound, 7:30 min

Installation view: "Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019. Hito Steyerl".

Akademie der Künste, Berlin

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Hito Steyerl

Robots Today, 2016, Single-channel HD video, 8:02 min /
Hell Yeah We Fuck Die, 2016, Three-channel HD Video installation,
Environment, 4:35 min

Installation view: "Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019. Hito Steyerl".

Akademie der Künste, Berlin

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Photo: Andreas FranzXaver Süß

Courtesy: the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin



Hito Steyerl

Hell Yeah We Fuck Die, 2016

Three-channel HD video installation, Environment, 4:35 min

Installation view: "Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019. Hito Steyerl".

Akademie der Künste, Berlin

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Photo: Andreas FranzXaver Süß

Courtesy: the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin



Hito Steyerl

Babenhausen, 1997, Video, 4:04 min /

Normality 6, 1999, Beta SP, 5:10 min

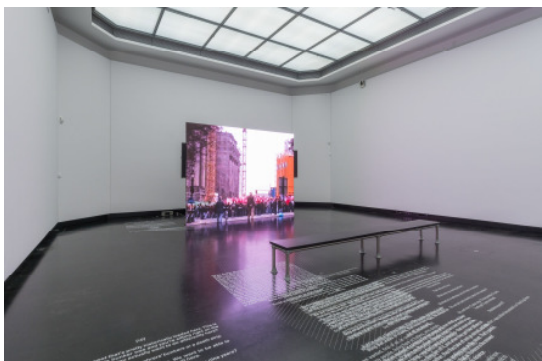
Installation view: "Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019. Hito Steyerl".

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Hito Steyerl

Empty Centre, 1998

16mm shown on video, sound, 62 min

Installation view: "Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2019. Hito Steyerl".

Akademie der Künste, Berlin

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**Hito Steyerl***November, 2004* (Film still)

DV, Single-channel, sound

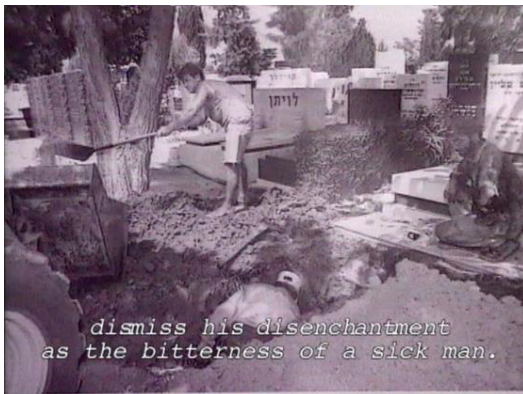
25 min

Edition of 20

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Film still: © Hito Steyerl

Courtesy: the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

**Hito Steyerl***Normality 1-X, 1999-2001* (Film still)

Beta SP

19 min

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Film still: © Hito Steyerl

Courtesy: the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

**Hito Steyerl***Empty Centre, 1998* (Film still)

16mm shown on video, sound

62 min

© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

Film still: © Hito Steyerl

Courtesy: the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

**Hito Steyerl***Babenhausen, 1997* (Film still)

Video

4:04 min

© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

Film still: © Hito Steyerl

Courtesy: the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin