

Sat, 09.09.2017–Sun, 18.03.2018

## Datumsoria: The Return of the Real

ZKM\_Atrium 1+2

Press Conference: Thur, 07.09.2017, 11.00 am

Opening of Exhibition: Fri, 08.09.2017, 19.00 pm

The neologism “Datumsoria” conjugates “datum” and “sensoria,” denoting a new perceptual space immanent to the information age. The exhibition *Datumsoria: The Return of the Real* conceived by Chinese-American curator ZHANG Ga is a cooperation project between the Chronus Art Center in Shanghai, the ZKM | Karlsruhe, the Nam June Paik Art Center in Seoul as well as the CAFA Art Museum in Peking, and brings together ten highly extraordinary and space-consuming works. *Datumsoria* opens entirely new perspectives on the logic of the Real in the age of the digital revolution. A reality is created which is based on the omnipresent instructions in the form of codes and in which the rules of work and leisure, politics and economy as well as artistic imagination and cultural sensitivity have changed on the whole. The participating artists include Ralf Baecker, Laurent Grasso, George Legrady, LIU Xiaodong, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Carsten Nicolai, Nam June Paik, YAN Lei, WANG Yuyang and ZHANG Peili.

*Datumsoria: The Return of the Real* is a greatly expanded version of the eponymous exhibition which was previously shown at the Chronus Art Center in Shanghai (Sept. 18, 2016–Dec. 12, 2016). The exhibition is the outcome of the research program “Art&Tech@,” conceived and curated by ZHANG Ga. ZHANG Ga is an internationally recognized curator and advisor for media art. He is Distinguished Professor and Director of the Center for Art and Technology at the prestigious China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing. Furthermore, he is the artistic director of the Chronus Art Center in Shanghai since 2015. Previously, he was among others, professor of media art at Tsinghua University in Beijing as well as associate professor at the School of Art, Media and Technology at Parsons New School for Design in New York. Zhang Ga has published numerous publications, among others for MIT Press, and was a member of juries in the field of media art (among others Jury Prix Ars Electronica).

### Press Information

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Regina Hock  
Pressereferentin  
Tel: 0721 / 8100 – 1821

E-Mail: [presse@zkm.de](mailto:presse@zkm.de)  
[www.zkm.de/presse](http://www.zkm.de/presse)

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## Represented artists and their works

**Laurent Grasso**, the winner of the *Prix Marcel Duchamp* (2015), will be presenting the 3.5-meter-high sculpture ***Solar Wind*** at the ZKM. It is patterned on his impressive light installation *Solar Wind* in the 13<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement of Paris. In Paris, Grasso projects processes in space such as solar storms, supernova explosions or meteorite showers on 30-meter-high cement silos on the outskirts of Paris. For this installation Laurent Grasso worked with the National Centre for Space Studies (CNES) art and science laboratory, which helped him identify the scientific data to create an algorithm that responds in real time to a variety of solar data – radiation, magnetic fields, even meteorite phenomena – and translate them into colors and light. With *Solar Wind*, these solar activities are reproduced and materialized live as luminance and chrominance changes by means of LED technology. They merge with the reflections on the geometrically shaped surface of the sculpture of translucent tinted glass to form mesmerizing color gradients.

For his work entitled ***RÊVERIE Reset***, Chinese artist **YAN Lei**, who was among others represented at the documenta 12, mounted 80 large and small screens run by five computers on a huge, slowly revolving, cylindrical structure. Each device is networked to a system programmed to constantly snatch images from a user-generated picture pool: visitors can take pictures and upload them to the database through a QR code on site. When *RÊVERIE Reset* notices a new photograph it immediately refreshes the system and displays only that one image on all screens on the rotating structure. Following *RÊVERIE Reset* eliminates each image by averaging its color and making it monochromatic. The system's cognitive computation system analyzes the picture and expresses its content as text, as if perceived by a human mind. The result is a flat, single-color image with an overlay text which, based on the machine's understanding of it, narrates what the content of the image was prior to its destruction. With his installation, YAN Lei scrutinizes the meaning behind the act of representation and refers to the dispensability of the painted picture.

For ***Weight of Insomnia*** the Chinese artist **LIU Xiaodong** has developed an automated system, which uses streaming data and computer vision algorithms to paint a canvas continually for the entire duration of an exhibition. The presentation at ZKM involves cameras installed in three locations, one overlooking the iconic Brandenburg Gate in Berlin; the other monitoring the car body construction in BMW's Dingolfing factory; and the third one tracking an anonymous roundabout in Karlsruhe to stream live data into the exhibition space. All three cameras send their data to the exhibition room.

Three large canvases (each 2.5 x 3 meters) are mounted on crude

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construction scaffolds. A robotically controlled paintbrush translates the discrete incoming datum captured by the video cameras into contours of automobiles, silhouettes of trees, outlines of traffic flow, and shadows of human figures. The tradition of live painting arrests a fleeting second to fix a bygone moment for contemplation on its significance, what LIU Xiaodong's canvases depict are a multiplicity of moments that are forever fluctuating. In this continuous process the real as sites of geographic locality has to first become the unreal of binary data packets in order to reinvent the real as a network of trails. LIU Xiaodong's works have been shown in the course of numerous solo and group exhibitions, for instance at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence (2016).

With his audiovisual installation **unitape**, **Carsten Nicolai** examines image codings and notation systems on the basis of the principle of binary coded information in punched cards of the early computer age. *unitape* derives its intuition from the artist's study of the history of the city of Chemnitz, once one of the most important centers of the German textile industry. Inspired by the invention of the mechanical loom by Joseph-Marie Jacquard (1752–1834), which enabled the rapid production of complex patterned fabrics using the principle of automated control through punch cards. Nicolai's work *unitape* - with the dimensions 3.80 x 18.30 meters - creates flawless images and sounds which demonstrate extraordinary, mathematically pure precision. Mirrors on both sides of the projection surface stretch the image space even further into an endless expanse and depth, and thus enable a complete sensual immersion. These endless permutations, which are reminiscent of the scanning of codes, are echoed in generative sounds – with Nicolai, the repetition creates difference. Nicolai moves in the realm of electronic music with his highly reductionist sound experiments under the pseudonym Alva Noto. Nicolai recently presented the sound installation *white circle* for the ZKM\_Sound Dome (March 2016) within the scope of GLOBALE DIGITALE and to celebrate the birthday of raster-noton, the record label he founded together with Olaf Bender and Frank Bretschneider. Nicolai's audiovisual work has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions around the world like for instance at the Singapore Biennale or the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

American-Canadian artist **George Legrady**, who was born in Hungary, will be presenting the multimedia work **Voice of Sisyphus** within the scope of the exhibition. Since the 1970s he has dealt with the medium of photography, which he started to combine with digital technologies starting in the middle of the 1980s. In *Voice of Sisyphus*, a single photograph is realized as a continuous audiovisual composition. The projection of a photograph of a formal ball evening from an undetermined past is dynamically transformed in real time. This

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transformation process creates sounds. The sound runs randomly or in variously vectored sequential patterns with the pixels and matrices which analyze the image. The algorithm performs frequency filtering, masking, and scanning and a variety of other treatments of the image. Rippling through a gamut of soundscape, sometimes echoing a Scriabinean shriek, at other moments penetrating the waveforms to arrive at a polyphony that simultaneously counterpoints picture regions, including faces, clusters of people, windows, glasses, lines, mirrors, plants, decorations, etc. within the image. It is the computational rigor that creates picture sound and sound picture all at once.

A synthetic landscape based on data supplied in real time is generated in the installation *Mirage* by German artist **Ralph Baecker**. This landscape interprets and illustrates the constant minimal changes in the earth's magnetic field. An autonomously operating learning algorithm registers the magnetic field's data and generates variations of the previously analyzed signal. For this purpose, Baecker built a projector that uses the principles of optics and neuronal network research. The signals are translated into a two-dimensional matrix that physically transforms a thin mirror sheet by 48 muscle wire actuators. The mirror sheet changes the shape of its surface analog to the system's hallucination. Due to the constant signal fluctuations, the projection resembles a landscape that is perambulated.

For the work entitled *Landscape with Spherical Architecture*, Chinese artist **ZHANG Peili**, who is regarded as "father of video art" in China, installs 36 screens on which motionless landscape images can be seen as soon as the viewers approach them within a radius of three meters. They can activate the images horizontally or vertically. While the spherical architecture remains static in the background, the foreground scenes shift slightly in progression. Outside the radius of three meters, the screens switch off and the images disappear. When the viewers stride alongside the 36 screens, the images alternately appear and disappear again, as in the rapid succession of a motion animation. Position and movement as variables determine the multiplicity of the scenery either as static imagery or as a mobile object in passing. Here a twofold twist takes place: the subject's perception alternates about the object's true identity while the object reveals its multiple presences only when accessed by a particular mode of approach.

Mexican-Canadian media artist **Rafael Lozano-Hemmer** is well-known for his interactive installations which take place in the urban, public sphere as well as in the gallery space and use a wide range of new media and technologies (including sensors, biometric scanners, surveillance cameras, tracking systems and microphones). The installation entitled *Please Empty Your Pockets, Subsculpture 12*

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from the ZKM collection, consists of a computer-controlled scanner and a conveyor. Anyone who places a small object on the conveyor takes part in the development of a new interactive artwork. The structure of the installation is reminiscent of a baggage scanner at an airport, with the only difference being that the participation of civilians occurs voluntarily. At the other end of the conveyor, a scanned image of the object appears together with images which were scanned beforehand as well as images from a database storing 600,000 objects scanned since the existence of the installation. Supported by augmented reality technology, the installation combines real objects with their traces, and thereby functions as a collective memory of the consumed objects.

**Quarterly** is a work from **WANG Yuyang#**. "WANG Yuyang#" is a series of works conceived and generated by a software suite designed by WANG Yuyang. "WANG Yuyang#" (WYY#) and WANG Yuyang (WYY) are an interoperable unit. Like the artist in the flesh, WYY# works with source materials, in this case, three databases. The Raw Database (RD) is the key component; it is comprised of numerous 3D models, texts of historic and literary import, and visual forms that reference art history by style and formal significance. In addition, RD is also a repository of algorithms as part of the foundational resource of the reasoning power of WYY#. Then there are the Process Database (PD) and the Outcome Database (OD). To start off, WYY# signs up for an email account and establishes its presence on social networks. WYY# first browses information that it has culled from such online sources, including feeds from social media and from the Raw Database, evaluating its gatherings and conducting its preliminary ideation. It completes the process by depositing the results in the Process Database. WYY# then performs a close reading of the materials garnered from the initial selection, sorting them into various data types from which it generates concepts that then get converted into ASCII code. Next, WYY# queries the Raw Database to look for visual forms that make sense of these concepts. Several nuanced deliberations by WYY# follow to ensure that the material properties — be they sculptural or painterly elements, compositions, textures, tonal properties, hues, plasticities, brush strokes or whatever — of each distinctive object approximate the initial description of the work. The processed individual units are then assembled in the Output Database to comply with the semantic interpretation of the ASCII code. Finally, WYY# assigns a title to the assemblage and outputs it as an artwork, which WYY fabricates into concrete existence.

In 1974, **Nam June Paik** had a vision of the Internet – the "Electronic Superhighway" as a way of connecting people around the globe and fostering interaction among them. He took up this idea again in the 1990s while the Internet was being developed, as his installation

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**Internet Dream** shows. Its 52 monitors, fed by three different image sources, perform a visual choreography that exerts a hypnotic force. In rapid cuts, a dynamic visual montage takes shape as inextricable patterns of colors, people and objects flicker past. The central part of the video wall is made up of four rectangular surfaces, each of which is composed of nine monitors and set at a 90-degree angle. They play back the image from the first source. This rhythmically illuminated core is surrounded by 16 additional monitors: five larger ones flanking it to the left and the right, and six of the same size framing it from above. These monitors alternately show one of the other two video images. Internationally, Paik is regarded as a pioneer of visual and media art. In 1965, he became the world's first artist to work with the new medium of video, the artistic potential of which he explored in the years that followed. On the whole, his multifaceted work, which encompasses video sculptures, installations, performances, videotapes and TV productions, is marked by a unique confluence of Eastern thought, the Western avant-garde, technological innovation, visual art and music. Paik's work has been honored with numerous awards and presented at exhibitions around the world. The Nam June Paik Center opened in Seoul in 2008.

### Supporting program to the exhibition

Sat, 09.09.2017, 2:30 pm – 5 pm

#### Artist Talks

ZKM\_Lecture hall

Free admission

Curator **ZHANG Ga** in conversation with **Ralf Baecker, Laurent Grasso, George Legrady, LIU Xiaodong, YAN Lei, WANG Yuyang and ZHANG Peili.**

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