

Mensch Maschine: Return to Earth

Curatorial text

Written by Clara Hermann, Director of the JUNGE AKADEMIE of the Academy of Arts, Helen Turner, Co-Director and Chief Curator of E-WERK Luckenwalde, and Katharina Worf, Senior Curator at E-WERK Luckenwalde.

The Mensch Maschine programme a partnership between E-WERK Luckenwalde, JUNGE AKADEMIE of Akademie der Künste and the E.ON Foundation.

The exhibition Mensch Maschine: Return to Earth opens on 19 September at E-WERK, Rudolf-Breitscheid-Str. 73, 14943 Luckenwalde.

It is time to return to Earth. For billions of years, our Earth has systematically sustained life, pulsing with the technologies of ecologies that sustain hummingbirds, weeping willows, three-hearted octopuses, mycelial networks, and bioluminescence. But now, Earth is aching under the weight of extraction and neglect, unleashed across mere centuries of accelerating industry. It is time to return to Earth.

Our addiction to innovation, progress, and efficiency—to the techno-utopian promise of endless expansion—has depleted the planet's life support systems. To return to Earth is to re-centre the Earth's living systems as the foundation of our intelligence, rather than merely the ground to be mined for human ambition.

The exhibition *Mensch Maschine: Return to Earth* seeks to reactivate the climate conversation through dissonant material, symbolic, and cosmological encounters across different times, speculations, and origin stories. Eight artists and artist duos explore the cracks between worlds to meet our entangled planet: from automated, techno-animal wars to the intelligences of community, from ancestral wisdoms to ecological technologies. The exhibition redirects technologies of violence toward artistic expression, resisting singular hegemonic narratives while embracing multiple poetics of image-making and story-telling, from hybrid creatures to scattered landscapes.

Through active forms of retreat and resistance, can we begin to gather radical positions, tones that move toward symbiotic systems, where ecology and technology are approached as interwoven, living communities rather than separate disciplines? The question is not how to hope, but how to come together in shared intellectual joy, sitting with complexity while embracing empathy and play.

Artistic Positions

E-WERK Luckenwalde, JUNGE AKADEMIE Akademie der Künste and E.ON Foundation are pleased to present the group exhibition of Mensch Maschine fellows 2024–2025 at E-WERK featuring **Assem Hendawi, Emerson Culurgioni & Viktor Brim, hn. Iyonga & Safiya Yon, Kira Xonorika, Maithu Bui, Rae Hsu and Sonya Isupova**. Together, they will also present *Mensch Maschine Musik* on 19 September at Stadtbad Live Luckenwalde featuring Bendik Giske, Discovery Zone and Nazanin Noori.

Mensch Maschine: Return to Earth presents eight artists and artist duos who have developed projects responding to the complex relationships between human and machine, animal, plant, and planet amid climate emergency and advancing digital technologies like artificial

intelligence. The programme's fellows bring together diverse cultural and geographical contexts, aesthetics, and knowledge systems. At a time when the world approaches ecological tipping points, global wars, and ongoing threats to democracy, Mensch Maschine opens a pluriversal and speculative space for envisioning alternative approaches from within the arts.

Artists may not change the world—a burden too often, and unfairly, placed upon them—but they can offer new imaginaries, ancient wisdoms, ruptures, constellations, and experiences that help us navigate the tangled relationships between human, machine, animal, plant, and planet.

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