

# Kunsthhaus Graz

## Press

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## Hito Steyerl Animal Spirits

Kunsthhaus Graz, Space01, Lendkai 1, 8020 Graz  
Opening: 21.09.2022, 8 pm  
Duration: 22.09.2022-08.01.2023  
Curated by Katrin Bucher Trantow  
Information: +43 316 8017-9200, www.kunsthhausgraz.at

In the framework of steirischer herbst '22

**What is a garden, a habitat, a sphere, a cave? Which spirits live there and how do they show themselves? In a direct dialogue with the Kunsthhaus Graz, renowned German artist and essayistic documentary filmmaker Hito Steyerl is creating an installation in the dark dome of Space01 that grows and interlocks on digital as well as analogue levels.**

In reference to Malevich's Black Square stands a large square made of solar panels on the roof of the Iron Building. In the domed room of the Kunsthhaus, it's energy feeds the interactive multiple projection. Here, a ramified network of contested life in the information age unfolds.

Hito Steyerl fills Space01 with animal spirits. We meet them through cave paintings, menacing wolves and drooping plants under artificial light. The multiple projection tracks movement, humidity and oxygen in the space. A constantly changing animation follows a cloud of light on its way through a cave. Both analogue and digital, the images of Animal Spirits are intertwined. They draw us between fiction and documentation into a utopian narrative where space, time and progress, but also economic and ecological representation no longer have clear categories. "Animal Spirits" is a term British economist John Maynard Keynes coined in 1936 to describe the influence of human emotions on markets. Fear and greed interact to create a sphere of irrationality. The pseudo-naturalist idea of the "survival of the fittest" controls human ideas of society and exchange.' (Steyerl)

"Animal Spirits" is also the title of the narrative film at the center of the installation. Based on the theses of John Maynard Keynes, the parable of the wolf is the starting point for a struggle between the shepherd Nel - a YouTuber, cheese maker and resistance fighter - and a film production company that exploits and abuses "his land and his Sheperds School" without any interest in their reality or future. Keynes (played by German actor Mark Waschke) elaborates on the term, as he is seen standing against the backdrop of Berlin's Olympia Stadium. The film interlaces historical film footage with animation, motion graphics and documentary interviews, conducted by Steyerl with shepherds in the Asturias region, Spain, and a group of fellow artists. It touches on topics of post-pandemic conditions of cultural production, the popularity of

cryptocurrencies and NFTworks, and possibilities for (farming and fermentation inspired) systems of decentralization and autonomy.

What grows in glass spheres and on shiny screens under the large bubble of the Kunsthaus and in artificial light requires care in both digital and physical space. Energy is supplied by the Black Square from the roof, which, as in Kasimir Malevich's work (1913), symbolizes a victory over the sun. The energy cells power not only the plant light, but also the silhouettes of our fears, which become visible as animals. The predator is interchangeable, but the concern for one's own survival remains present even in our highly technological, capitalist world. For Hito Steyerl, the monochrome form of the black square also refers to the general crisis of representation, in the form of the image but also in politics - the silent message of the black square as a zero point, is visible far beyond the city.

“We depend on the climate, the sun, the clouds, (...), that's the law of nature.” Nel, in *Animal Spirits*.

Within Steyerl's living setting, structures that have long been closely intertwined in everyday life become an astonishing accumulation of a larger whole, nourishing and consuming each other.

In a maelstrom of pulsating images, digital rhythms, and sounds, Steyerl has the audience speculate on the relations between language and aesthetic form, between technological structures, biological life, and power-preserving systems.

**Hito Steyerl** was born in Munich in 1966, lives and works in Berlin. Steyerl is one of the most important media artists and profound analysts of a digital, image-driven world. She studied documentary film directing at the Japan Institute of Moving Image and later at the University of Film and Television in Munich. She went on to study philosophy at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where she completed her doctorate. She is Professor of Experimental Film and Video at the Berlin University of the Arts and co-founded the Research Center for Proxy Politics there. For the past 20 years, her work has been exhibited in art contexts and widely received internationally.

Hito Steyerl's works are factual, informed and aesthetically polished, sometimes humorous and (therefore) irritating analyses of our high-tech society. As a profound expert on digital space, against the backdrop of the climate crisis, the pandemic, the digital revolution, neoliberalism and the associated shift in the meanings of work, power, control and distribution she develops multiple, partially interactive narratives that identify the image as a site where the world is perceived. The artist thereby follows “reality expanded by technology,” engaging both critically and subversively with ecological systems and their ties to global flows of capital and goods, to migration and the question of participation in existing power structures.

Playing with the manipulative power of the visual, she thereby deals out institutional critique that extends far beyond the museum.

In addition to her work as a film artist, Steyerl is also an author and performer. Together with Mark Waschke, she staged the play *Ich spiele, also bin ich! Ein digitaler Bauernkrieg*. A selection of her essays is collected in four books: *Die Farbe der Wahrheit* (2008), *The Wretched of the Screen* (2012), *Beyond Representation / Jenseits der Repräsentation* (2016), *Duty Free Art – Art in the Age of Planetary Civil Wars / Kunst im Zeitalter des globalen Bürgerkriegs* (2017/2018).

Press images and installation views: [www.museum-joanneum.at/presse/en/hitosteyerl](http://www.museum-joanneum.at/presse/en/hitosteyerl)