Press Release

Artistic
Intelligence

Sougwen Chung, Sofia Crespo,
Harun Farocki, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven,
Mario Klingemann, Helen Knowles,
Matthew Plummer-Fernandez,
Anna Ridler, Arcangelo Sassolino,
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04.05.–
30.06.2019

kunst
verein
hannover

Press Release

»Artistic Intelligence«

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May 4–June 30, 2019

Opening: May 3, 8pm, including the performance *Drawing Operations* by Sougwen Chung, a human and machine collaborative duet
Lecture: June 5, 7pm
What you Need to Know About Artificial Intelligence, by Dr. Jürgen Rink (*c't Magazine*)
Artist Talk: June 12, 7pm
Artistic practice with AI and algorithms, by Mario Klingemann
Lecture: June 19, 7pm
Intelligence and Intelligence Dummies, by Oswald Wiener (writer, cyberneticist, language theorist)

"Artificial intelligence" has become a keyword for technical progress and vague threat scenarios alike. Artistic engagement with this topic began in the early 1970s and the latest technological advances in this field have opened up not only exciting new subject areas for art, but also new ways of producing art in the first place. Now the Kunstverein Hannover exhibition **Artistic Intelligence** is exploring the extent to which artists avail artificial intelligence in their artistic practice. While artificial neural networks known as GANs (Generative Adversarial Neural Networks) and algorithmic processes that enable "machine learning" have long been established in industry and business and have come to dominate everyday human life, the advantages and conveniences associated with such processes are counterbalanced by forms of censorship and surveillance. The exhibition brings together eleven positions that have, in the cases of the works of Harun Farocki and Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven long questioned technologies and the use of machines in a larger sence. The supposed autonomous behavior of machines and omnipresence of artificial intelligence are made visible in works by Sougwen Chung, Arcangelo Sassolino, Miao Ying, and Julia Zabowska, while access to large data pools as a prerequisite for computer-generated learning methods leads to amazing image output in contributions by Sofia Crespo, Mario Klingemann, and Anna Ridler. Matthew Plummer-Fernandez's work looks at the far-reaching consequences of censorship and surveillance, while Helen Knowles examines future issues that may arise with the legal classification and moral handling of artificial intelligence.

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Kunstverein Hannover's *Artistic Intelligence* continues a line of inquiry from previous exhibitions that highlighted the influence of digital change on artists and their work: While the 2015 exhibition *Digital Conditions* brought together key artistic positions dealing with digitalization including Pierre Huyghe, Lorna Mills, Jon Rafman, Avery Singer and Hito Steyerl and others, *Digital Archives* in 2016 focused on artists exploring new forms of surveillance and control in their works. Its participating artists included amongst others Ingo Günther, Mediengruppe Bitnik, Ryoji Ikeda and Trevor Paglen.

Mario Klingemann—a so-called leading AI artist with three works in the exhibition—will discuss artistic practice with algorithms and artificial neural networks in a comprehensive program accompanying the *Artistic Intelligence* exhibition. What will our future look like given the new technical possibilities that artificial intelligence is promising? **Jürgen Rink**, physicist and editor-in-chief of *c't Magazin,* will explore this question in his lecture at the Kunstverein. **Oswald Wiener**, one of the foremost pioneers in the field of AI, will give a philosophical artistic lecture about the concept of the idea of "Intelligence and Intelligence Dummies."

The **LINK conference of the Stiftung Niedersachsen** will also be held on May 15 and 16, running parallel to the events at the Kunstverein. Over two days, renowned scientists, artists and authors will explore the topic of "Artificial Intelligence in Art and Culture." During the conference the accompanying **catalogue will be released by the Kunstverein Hannover**.

Furthermore, an **AI-themed film** series was developed in conjunction with the neighbored cinema (Kommunales Kino), which is located like the Kunstverein in the building of the Künstlerhaus showing related films from a period of time ranging from *Metropolis* (1927) to *Hi, A.I.* (2019).

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Excerpts from the catalogue »Artistic Intelligence – Digital Archives – Digital Conditions« (2019), Kunstverein Hannover

Digital Turn at Kunstverein Hannover

by Kathleen Rahn

Every guest entering Hanover Central Railway Station is greeted with a sign that reads "Messestadt Hannover" (Trade Fair City Hanover). With the industrial fair and CeBIT, a computer fair opened and attended by heads of state and leading economic experts the fair draws the eyes of the world to the capital of Lower Saxony and its showcase highlights the world of technological innovations. CeBIT has meanwhile become history, and in 2019, the "HANNOVER MESSE," best known as the industrial trade fair, will feature "topics such as efficient energy utilization and autonomous production processes, but also (...) challenges with regard to interfaces, protocols and security," as the "increasing importance of artificial intelligence" is currently the focus of countless articles and conferences.[1]

In 2014, we began to ask ourselves how artists might respond to the new possibilities and technologies that are rapidly dominating and rationalizing both industry and our everyday lives. We visited artists and asked them about the advantages of computer-based working methods, such as using CNC milling to extract an object from various materials, or how it looks when the 3D printer "models" the sculpture. We have observed the growing importance of computer-based object conception and how it facilitates or even changes the process. These are only technical questions, of course, but they play a crucial role, as do the starting points for the production process, since it is only through the materialization of an idea that a work of art becomes a thing that can be experienced both physically and intellectually (regardless of the dimensionalities it assumes).

How can one make use of technical possibilities that are constantly evolving themselves? What effects do changed production methods have on presentation in space, and how is physical spatial perception altered in the first place, given the rapid rise of digital media use? Ever since a computer uttered the words, "Hello, world" during the initiation of the World Wide Web in 1989 and its growing popularity since, we have to ask ourselves today how we perceive this analogue space that offers so many possible windows for slipping into virtual space. And finally, of course, we must reflect on how this changes the exhibition space and its perception, as the "Instagramability" and "selfie-quality" of exhibitions is becoming more and more important as well. Katja Novitskova was one of the first artists to be subsumed under the buzzword "Post-Internet" and we visited her in preparation for the "Digital Conditions" (2015) show. Later, at her artist talk at the Kunstverein Hannover, she explained that the White Cube was particularly well-suited to transferring computer-generated objects and installations into real space, as they could be transposed virtually

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[1] https://www.hannovermesse.de/de/news/top-themen/integrated-industry/index-2.xhtml (status April 4, 2019)

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one-to-one. She brought this approach to a head in her cut-outs and large-format prints of sampled landscapes and strange animal figures in the exhibition space to such an extent that at the 2016 Berlin Biennale curated by the New York collective DIS, her artwork "Expansion Curves (fire worship, purple horns)" could only be experienced through the lens of a smartphone: it was through this lens that the work, which was placed in front of the windows, merged with Berlin's Schlossplatz behind it.

Looking back on the experiences accumulated with what is now the third exhibition on the digital changein art at the Kunstverein Hannover, there is only one thing that can be said: the experiment with technology, its possibilities and opportunities leads to works that are artistically valuable beyond the medium and – instead of talking about painting, drawing or sculpture – encourage us to explore what the work does with us and, above all, how it stands in its time. Daring to deal with the present in a timely manner is a comprehensive experiment to which we invite you, entirely in keeping with the concept of the "Kunstverein als Labor" (art association as a laboratory) commonly practiced in the 1990s. The Kunstverein can still be this laboratory today, and we would like to take a courageous look at our own present. Ultimately, only the future will show us what remains of these approaches and, as in art history, what will endure.

These three exhibitions could not have been created without the ever-ambitious work of our small team at the Kunstverein Hannover, as well as the volunteer contributors of our board and advisory board. Many thanks to Ute Stuffer and Sergey Harutoonian in particular for their intensive research and for the fact that we were able to develop very special and extensive supporting programs for not one, but each of the three exhibitions – programs that make an important contribution to our broader perspective on the topics.

Our thanks go to the partnerships that supported and put so much trust in us: the City of Hanover for its institutional support, the Ministry of Science and Culture for its annual project funding and the NORD/LB cultural foundation and Stiftung Niedersachsen for supporting our exhibitions on digital change. We would also like to thank the project partners who have worked alongside us in a cooperative capacity, such as Deutsche Messe; Dr. Jürgen Rink, editor-in-chief of the computer magazine c't in Hanover for his versatile input; Kino im Künstlerhaus, the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media and the Hanover University of Applied Sciences and Arts and Schauspiel Hannover for the many cross-connecting activities. We are indebted to the VGH Foundation, Sparkasse Hannover and, last but not least, the Friends of the Kunstverein and the Kunstverein Foundation for ensuring that these exhibitions could be communicated across generations. Our special thanks go to the speakers for all their contributions and to all visitors who continue to embrace our enthusiasm for the art of our own time.

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"Sorry Dave, I'm afraid I can't do that."

By Sergey Harutoonian

This famous quote from the computer HAL in Stanley Kubrick's film "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968) aptly summed up mankind's deep-seated fears of superior artificial intelligence half a century ago. HAL is no longer satisfied with his role as a space station's executive computer and develops a will of his own, with the result that he disobeys the instructions given by his master, the astronaut Dave - thus a reversal of power takes place: the creation turns on its creator. This, however, does not necessarily occur out of maliciousness but with the certainty of being able to assess the situation better than a human, even if it means killing them as a consequence.

In 1968, Kubrick's film's fantastic, futuristic plot was belittled or met with incomprehension among many of the audience. An artificial being with its own free will? Unthinkable.. But HAL already has his successors, if under different names: Siri and Alexa are only two popular examples of simple artificial intelligences supporting us in our daily lives, simplifying them and even correcting us from time to time. Artificial Intelligence has become the keyword and the generic term for both technological progress and a diffuse threat. The rapid development in this field over the last 30 years has not only opened up new attractive subject areas for art but also enabled new artistic media.

It is therefore logical that as a consequence, the Kunstverein Hannover brings these developments into focus with the exhibition "Artistic Intelligence". The preceding exhibitions "**Digital Conditions**" (2015) and "**Digital Archives**" (2016) already took stock artistically of society's digitisation. The present exhibition presents works by eleven international artists dealing with a whole variety of issues concerning artificial intelligence. To begin with, there is **Arcangelo Sassolino** (born 1967) and his work "**Untitled**" (2006/2007): a black hydraulic gripper arm, run by an oil pump, moves clumsily through the exhibition space like an oversized mechanical tarantula. Sassolino misappropriates the gripper arm, originally from the construction industry, by setting it in the White Cube where its lack of function leaves a strangely ambivalent impression: its sheer physical presence makes the steel gripper arm seem formidable and even forbidding yet at the same time pathetic in its helpless attempts at moving through the exhibition space. Even before one encounters the work, it announces itself through the piercing noises it generates through the clawing movements against the stone floor. By seemingly bringing to life a previously lifeless object Sassolino's work unites all of our stereotypical fears about artificially intelligent machines and robots becoming autonomous, without ultimately redeeming them.

Thus the questionable use of artificial intelligence in our everyday lives does not necessarily reveal itself in a clearly visible and audible way but often in a much more subtle and far more effective manner: the works of **Matthew Plummer-Fernandez** (born 1982) focus on the questionable way in which algorithms have pervaded our society. The title of the multi-part work "**Snowden.ppt**" (2017) refers to one of the most famous whistle-blowers of recent times, the American

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Edward Snowden (born 1983). In 2013, Snowden caused one of the greatest scandals at that time by revealing the widespread spying activities of the American National Security Agency (NSA). These were only made possible through the use of algorithms allowing an unprecedented surveillance on a massive scale. The acronym ".ppt" in the work's title refers to the file format used in the Microsoft programme PowerPoint - a reference to the particular file published by Snowden at the time. Plummer-Fernandez transforms the icon-like photo portrait of Snowden through graphic means in order to produce different variations of the same image. In their aesthetic composition, they vaguely remind one of Andy Warhol's famous screen prints of stars and celebrities. The difference in this case though, is that the photography has been subjected to an algorithm (Style Transfer) using the tools of a graphics programme and is based on the design of Snowdon's PowerPoint file. The fully automated process, through its use of technical means and motivic recourse to the person Edward Snowdon, represents a sinister metaphor for the far-reaching methods of surveillance.

The portrait genre is also employed by **Mario Klingemann** (born 1970) in his installation work "**Memories of Passersby I**" (2018). Klingemann's demand for audience participation becomes apparent as the piece consists of two monitors, a wooden chest of drawers and an armchair: the viewer is invited to take a seat in the armchair and observe the steady flow of freshly generated portraits on the two monitors. This never-ending production of original images is made possible by so-called artificial neural networks known as Generative Adversarial Neural Networks (GAN). The name hints at the procedure used by the technology, which at its core deals with two opposite artificial networks. While the first network produces suggestions for portraits, the second network rates these with the aim of starting a process of selection that results in ever newer pictorial inventions. Mario Klingemann's work visualises this steady stream, and the particular way in which it is presented questions, the essence of portrait subject matter in general, whose actual function is to reproduce an individual's personality. Klingemann's work plays with the traditional idea of identity and reinterprets it as an elusive stream of images and faces. The fast pace and interchangeability of our technological society finds its eerie equivalent in "Memories of Passersby I".

The combination of the analogue and digital worlds is central to the use of algorithmic processes as the analogue material provides the basis for the GAN's learning process. **Anna Ridler** (born 1985) resorts to a data pool containing thousands of photos for her work "**Mosaic Virus**". All these show tulips of various colour styles and different states of bloom. The animation on the monitor apparently visualises the blossom's cycle from flower to withered bloom but there is another, completely different, sober interpretation at the bottom of this romantic notion of a modern still life: the progress of the tulips' blossom and their colouration follow the current market rate of the cryptocurrency Bitcoin. The flower "still life" is therefore not so much brought to life by artistic decisions as by purely economic ones. Ridler, with this work, establishes a link with the "tulip mania" in 17th century Netherlands during which the country's stock exchange elevated the trade and speculation in these flowers to an economic sector of its own. Some of the most precious tulip varieties had

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a popular mottled appearance that was caused by an unnatural biological intervention - a virus - and resulted in the massive increase in their value. The name of the virus is "Mosaic".

Today's digital communication via social media has not only become an entertainment industry of its own but rather worryingly a political instrument to publish messages on platforms like Twitter in shortened and polemic ways. The use of these kinds of media channels has its downside, as seen in the misappropriation and takeover of user accounts. **Matthew Plummer-Fernandez's** work "**Every User**" (2014 - ongoing) approaches the platform Twitter with this in mind. In 2014 the artist programmed an autonomous bot whose sole task is to list every Twitter account by ID number and follow it. Twitter's actual use - to initiate individual and lively discussions among users - is thus ignored. Instead the banality of computer-based structures is revealed and it is the idea of archiving that makes the viewer realise that he or she is probably just a number in a vast digital archive.

Society's automation manifests itself especially in the military sector where having processes without the support of artificial intelligence has become unimaginable. **Plummer-Fernandez's** triptych "**The Codification of Leadership**" (2014) uses graphically distorted images showing former US president George W. Bush at the signing of far-reaching legislation: the Patriot Acts, the Homeland Security Acts and Intelligent Reform Acts. These three acts were signed into law by the Bush administration over the course of the fight against terrorism and include, among others, the large-scale surveillance of American citizens in the name of public safety. The scope and complexity involved in the execution of these laws mean that the implementation of these laws is increasingly taken over by algorithms that are more and more beyond the control of humans. Plummer-Fernandez subjected three photographs of George W. Bush to an algorithmic auxiliary function in the graphics programme of Adobe Photoshop to have the alienated images then produced as synthetic paintings. As a result, on the one hand, we see the historic moment of the signing; but on the other, through the distortion of the images' motifs, we witness how these laws have taken on a life of their own.

One of the most subtle ways in which we are paternally controlled by algorithms is seen in an everyday action like texting on a smartphone: the autocorrect function, which by now is used by almost all mobile phones, gives us several potential word suggestions as we type, words that we probably would have considered already. This process was originally intended as a facilitation, to allow us to create texts as fast as possible. **Anna Ridler**, in her work "**No Replacements Found**" (2015) explores which words are not suggested by the algorithm that runs the autocorrection, even though the system ought to recognise them. After it was revealed in 2014 that big technology companies like Apple, Google or Microsoft attempted to ban large amounts of taboo words from their systems, the artist tracked down many of these and blacked them out in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary. This is akin to a transfer of the censorship process from the digital into the analogue world, with the blacking out truly visualising this new, invisible form of censorship and paternalism.

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How shall we deal with these acts of wrongdoing by artificial intelligence? This question is thrown up by **Helen Knowles** (born 1975) in her video installation "**Trial of Superdebthunterbot**" (2016). A 45-minute film depicts a fictitious scenario set in the future in which a debt-collecting bot ("superdebthunterbot") is put on trial. There is a serious charge of manslaughter: due to an error on the bot's part, five people have been killed. In her film, Knowles explores how to handle the ethics concerning artificial intelligence when, as in this case, self-learning systems injure or even kill humans. The film is complemented by authentic-looking court drawings and a jury bench on which the viewer can sit and form their own opinion. For this, two pleas by two practising lawyers (Laurie Elks and Oana Labontu Radu) are provided, which are delivered by them personally in the film.

The theme of identity plays a more and more important role in the digital world. In this context, facial recognition is a common way of matching people to their identities**. Mario Klingemann's** work "**Mistaken Identity**" (2018) deals less with the correct allocation than with the erroneous generation of faces created through the conscious manipulation of artificial neuronal networks (GANs). These graphics glitches can be interpreted as furtive moments of autonomous creativity on behalf of the artificial intelligence.

As part of the programme "Google Arts & Culture Experiment" **Mario Klingemann** created the work "**X Degrees of Separation**" (2018), which uses the existing Google image database as its basis. Users are given the opportunity to choose two works of art, which then are aesthetically combined in the next step. This is achieved by falling back upon artworks and objects that the system considers from a purely aesthetic angle, without either taking art history or chronological factors into account. The result is equally amusing and baffling: the system, taught through machine learning, makes connections between artworks that actually should not exist and in doing that, reveals the limits of artificial intelligence in an impressive manner. Machine-learning therefore can only happen insofar as the knowledge base that it builds upon already is in place. If this is not the case, the results will be incorrect or misleading.

The work "**Myriad (Tulips)**" (2018) by **Anna Ridler** presents 3700 photographs representing the analogue data material required to "train" the algorithm used for the work "Mosaic Virus". The photographs were taken during tulip season and later manually categorised by colour. In the exhibition space, the presentation illustrates the immense amount of data gathered by human hands that is (still) needed by the algorithm to be able to learn.

Julia Żabowska (born 1985) discovered how artificial intelligence is used in an unusual context, which is the technology employed in commercially available rice cookers. These use a simple form of artificial intelligence to suggest individually preferred levels of cooking to the user based on previous experiences**.** Żabowska, in her work "**Water-rice mixture AKA shallow learning**" (2019) has tried to further emphasise that goal with the production of her own improvised rice cooker. A process initiated by a human being and taken up by AI is expressed in the banal act of cooking

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rice and shows how far these processes by now reach into our daily lives without us being aware of it.

The interplay of humans and AI and the resulting interdependencies are the main concerns of Chinese-Canadian artist **Sougwen Chung**. Her 25-minute performance work "**Drawing Operations**" deals with a kind of duet between two robot entities and the artist, with the goal of creating a mutual drawing. The performance is divided into three distinct stages: Mimicry, Memory and Speculation. To begin with, the artist's drawings and actions are recorded on camera and recreated in a projection. This creates the impression that the drawing is simultaneously executed by woman and machine. In the steps that follow, the robot arms start anticipating the artist's graphical decisions and begin simulating forms of human creativity. This is made possible by an artificial neural network that uses an existing image memory allowing it to start making independent speculations about creative forms. The result is a cooperation between artificial intelligence and artist happening in real time.

One of the side effects of the omnipresence of digital media is the increase in algorithmic processes offering us "tailored" recommendations on shopping platforms such as Amazon. Information is constantly transmitted through the use of smartphones, tablets etc., which becomes a form of surveillance in itself. The artist **Miao Ying** (born 1985) uses her work "**landscape.gif**" (2013) to reproduce the omnipresence of the digital world. Seated in a deck chair, the viewer is confronted with various tablets mounted onto corresponding holders, which through their physical presence, make an almost aggressive impression Facebook's "Like Button", known as "Zan" in its Chinese equivalent, is not only printed on the towels but also on the paper balls strewn around the deck chair. One assumes "liking" something is a simple instrument to express one's opinion yet it symbolises much more than mere approval of a product or a thing - it provides cost-free training material for machine learning.

In his film "**Parallel IV**" (2014), one of the pioneers of the artistic engagement with digital change and the rise of artificial intelligence, **Harun Farocki** (1944-2014), presents the simulated human behaviour in modern video games. As in digital field research, Farocki does not use his protagonists for their actual purpose, that is moving the game's storyline forward, but attempts to challenge his human environment by giving unorthodox instructions on how to behave. This results in the expression of aggressive and persistent actions towards other game characters who increasingly adapt to the new situation and respond accordingly in a backlash.

Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven's (born 1951) film "**Maybe This Time I Win**" (1989) presents an early artistic reflection on the theme of AI. In just under 15 minutes, the film juxtaposes keywords from an expose on the scientific representation of AI research with artificial-looking animated faces. These are however modelled on the faces of 15 people suffering from various heart conditions. The colour of each face offers a clue as to the nature of each disease. Van Kerckhoven's film is like a visual examination of two deeply human needs: the wish for survival on the one hand, the desire for (abstract) progress on the other.

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The optimisation of our reality of life and particularly of human labour by means of artificial intelligence have already begun. The question remains whether its future development will continue in linear fashion or if opposing forms will assert themselves, too. This idea is pursued by **Sofia Crespo** (born 1991) in her installation **"{Neurotypical Machine}"** (2019). Its four-part collages consist of writing, pictures and animated forms based on the artificial simulation of human illnesses such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. Crespo uses an algorithm to generate these digital images and thereby creates an artificial version of the aforementioned illnesses. If artificial intelligence becomes more and more human, does that not mean by consequence that human error, illnesses etc. would have to be simulated by AI in order for it to complete its approximation of a human being?

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The exhibition is kindly supported by

Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur

Stiftung Niedersachsen

Freundeskreis Kunstverein Hannover

Der Kunstverein wird vom Kulturbüro der Landeshauptstadt institutionell gefördert

Landeshauptstadt | Hannover | Kulturbüro

das Vermittlungsprogramm wird außerdem gefördert durch

VGH Stiftung

Sparkasse Hannover

NORD/LB kulturstiftung

Stiftung Kunstverein Hannover

Den freien Freitag ermöglicht

meravis Immobiliengruppe

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Die Umsetzung der Performance von Sougwen Chung wurde realisiert mit freundlicher Unterstützung der Botschaft von Kanada, Berlin

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Images

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Sougwen Chung »Drawing Operations«, 2018 / 2019
Drawing Operations (Duet)
Performance at the Kunstverein Hannover, 2019
2 Roboters, wooden framework, projection, 2 beamers, computer
Courtesy the artist
Photo: China Hopson

Sougwen Chung »Drawing Operations«, 2018 / 2019
Drawing Operations (Duet)
Performance at the Kunstverein Hannover, 2019
2 Roboters, wooden framework, projection, 2 beamers, computer
Courtesy the artist
Photo: China Hopson

Sofia Crespo »Neurotypical Machine«, 2019
algorithms
Courtesy the artist

Harun Farocki »Parallele IV«, 2014
Video, color, sound, 11 min. (Loop)
Installationview Kunstverein Hannover, 2019
Photo: Raimund Zakowski
Courtesy Harun Farocki GbR, Berlin

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Mario Klingemann »Memories of Passersby I«, 2018
Composition of multiple GANs
two 4k screens
custom handmade chestnut wood console
Courtesy of Onkaos

Helen Knowles, »Trial of Superdebthunterbot«, 2016
Installation, HD-Video, color, sound
Bench, synthetic leather
5 drawings
45 min
Installation view Kunstverein Hannover, 2019
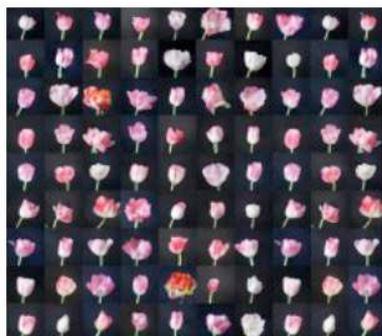Photo: Raimund Zakowski
Courtesy the artist

Matthew Plummer Fernandez »Snowden.ppt«, 2019
Digital print on dibond, styletransfer
70 cm x 55 cm
Courtesy the artist and NOME Gallery, Berlin

Anna Ridler »Mosaic Virus«, 2018
GAN (Generative Adversial Neural Networks)
Courtesy the artist

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»Artistic Intelligence«, 2019
Installation view at Kunstverein Hannover
Foto: Raimund Zakowski

Arcangelo Sassolino »Untitled«, 2006 / 2007
Hydraulic grappler
Photo: Federico Perezzani, Fausto Caliari
Courtesy Galleria Continua and Galerie Rolando Anselmi

Miao Ying »landscape.gif«, 2013
Gif.-files, deck chair, Ipads, Tpad, Shanzhai ipad,
bath towels, crumple paper, door mat
Family Servais Collection
Installation view Galerie Nächst Stephan Schwarzwälder
Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Wien