

ON SHOW
COMPUTER GRRRLS

PERIOD
20 JUL – 6 OCT 2019

OPENING
SATURDAY 20 JULY
FROM 20.00

VISITING ADDRESS
TORENALLEE 40-06
5617 BD EINDHOVEN

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Editor's note
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PRESS RELEASE

COMPUTER GRRRLS

When the self-learning algorithms that Amazon uses to scan CVs systematically scores men higher than women, as transpired last year, you know it is high time for more women to work in the technological industry. Perhaps radical measures are the answer, like the decision by Eindhoven University of Technology to accept only women's job applications in the coming 18 months. But whether it will change much in the perception of the field, remains to be seen. This will certainly happen, though, in the exhibition *Computer Grrrls*, on show in MU from Saturday, 20 July to Sunday, 6 October.

22 international artists, makers, hackers and researchers are reshaping the alliance between women and machines using an array of tools: 3D printing, YouTube tutorials, virtual reality, video installations, algorithms, promotional videos and more. Their works broach a broad series of topics: electronic colonialism, minorities' place on the Internet, the sexist bias of algorithms, the dangers of white men having complete control over artificial intelligence, and digital surveillance. They offer ideas for changing our outlook and making a difference.

Actually, the gender ratio hasn't always been this unbalanced in computer science: before the machine took over, all calculations were performed by human computers—most of them women. They crunched astronomical data, calculated ballistic trajectories for the army and broke Nazi codes. Starting in the 1940s, the first electronic computers were largely operated and

About MU

MU is an explorative presentation platform that operates in a rich international network of creatives who define the liminal space between 'what art is and what art can be'. MU initiates, produces and presents rather new works, and surrounds it with an extensive and interdisciplinary secondary program targeted to a broad and rather young audience. MU prioritises introduction to, understanding of, elaboration on, and experiencing hands-on creation, of art. MU is curious for talent, and challenges talents to be curious. MU provides a platform for artistic research, and development of artists and designers, and helps them to profile themselves internationally.

MU is located in a former Philips factory at Strijp-S in Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

Computer Grrrls is produced by HMKV, Dortmund, and La Gaîté Lyrique, Paris and is curated by Inke Arns (HMKV) and Marie Lechner (La Gaîté Lyrique). It takes place in partnership with MU artspace, Eindhoven. The exhibition is dedicated to Nathalie Magnan (1956-2016).

MU

HMKV
Hardware MedienKunstVerein

La Gaîté Lyrique

programmed by women. The pioneering work of the “Bletchley girls”, “ENIAC girls” and “Rocket girls” has only recently been recognised; at the time, the designers of the machines received all the credit. And in the following decades, computer technology became a near-exclusive male domain.

The title of the *Computer Grrrls* exhibition was inspired by an article in the April 1967 issue of women's magazine *Cosmopolitan*, which lauded computing as a particularly promising new career path for women. Ironically, the article was published just as the proportion of men in the field was starting to increase. This trend was cemented by the advent of personal computers in the 1980s—the epitome of a “boys’ toy”—and the coinciding emergence of the “nerd” and “hacker” archetypes. In the simultaneously hilarious and caustic video **A total Jizzfest** Jennifer Chan ‘honours’ the men who dominate the tech industry: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Larry Page, Sergey Brin, Mark Zuckerberg...

In the exhibition, this history is being illustrated by a timeline that covers an entire wall. From the 18th century to the present, it follows the development of the computer, the role women played in the process, and the most important related social and cultural phenomena. Some of them also appear in the *Cyber/technofeminist cross-reader* developed by Manetta Berends to search and cross-reference a collection of technofeminist manifestos from 1912 to 2019. Meanwhile, Lauren Moffat invites us to travel back in time with *The Unbinding*, which she composed of fragments of archival material.

Several other works also allude to historic events, like *Breaking the Internet* by Lauren Huret, that connects the destruction of weaving machines by the Luddites in the early 19th century with a post of Kim Kardashian on Instagram who wanted to overburden the internet by posting photos of her naked body in 2014. In *Le fantôme de l'opératrice*, Caroline Martel uses old industrial and advertising films to evoke the lost world of the female switchboard operators who were connecting people. Aleksandra Domanović's *VUKOSAVA* refers to the world's first five-fingered artificial hand, invented in Belgrade in 1963, which also plays a role in the first smart home horror movie *Demon Seed* from 1977 and today is echoing in new forms of domestic violence in intelligent homes in the USA. *Robotron*, a tech opera in YouTube videos by Nadja Buttendorf, is loosely inspired on her family history in which the East-German state-owned enterprise (VEB) Kombinat Robotron plays an important part.

Polly Returns and *Neo Surreal* are Jenny Odell's response to a computer animation (*Polly Gone*) and advertisements in BYTE magazines from the 1980s, in which she recognises the more sinister aspects of technology that are directly confronting us today. The encoded sexism of image recognition software, for example, exposed by Erica Scourti's *Body Scan*, or the biased algorithms of 3D modelling software based on the CAESAR database of anthropometric standards that Simone C. Niquille explores in *The fragility of life*.

Over time, the internet, once a free haven where everyone was equal, has changed beyond recognition. Louise Drulhe's *Critical Atlas of Internet* charts this intangible terrain and connects different projections to social-political themes. Somewhere on these maps you might find the hidden exploitation, enabled by online marketplaces for micro-services, that Elisa

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Giardina Papa reveals in *Technologies of Care*. To Tabita Rezaire, the internet is an instrument of Western cultural imperialism that she opposes in *Premium Connect* with different forms of connectedness that do not rely on exploitation, exclusion and profit.

This is exactly what Mary Maggic is aiming at with her *Housewives Making Drugs*: to help transgenders become independent from doctors, insurances and the pharmaceutical industry by demonstrating a DIY method to harvest oestrogen from urine. Dasha Ilina's work is also largely DIY-inspired: her *Center for Technological Pain* offers low-tech solutions to solve health problems caused by extensive computer use, including effective self-defence tactics against technology. Definitely old-school is Dasha Hewitt demonstrating the inner workings of the very first drum machine, from the buttons and dials to the tubes and amplifiers, in *A Side Man 5000 Adventure*.

With *Howto*, a tutorial for 3D texts made by Elisabeth Caravella, we enter the realm of the supernatural—this whimsical programme is haunted by a ghost that progressively frustrates its functionality. But this is nothing compared to the malicious jinns Ya'jooj en Ma'jooj, re-figurations of mythical creatures from the Middle-East staged by Morehshin Allahyari in *She Who Sees the Unknown*. When they break lose, the end of the world is near—an Apocalypse that seems to have already happened in *SURVIVOR (F)*, a series of drawings by Suzanne Treister. The survivor could be human, but she might just as well be an artificial super intelligence.

Whatever occurred in Treister's work doesn't seem disastrous: love, telepathy and the sublime are omnipresent. In this regard, it is akin to *NeuroSpeculative AfroFeminism* by Hyphen-Labs, a virtual reality experience in a futuristic hair salon for women of colour that has been transformed into a place where your brain is optimised and connected to all the knowledge and experience of the 'synaptic lineage'. A similar perfection of the brain is achieved in Lu Yang's *Delusional Mandala*, where Yang's alter-ego Uterus Man is subjected to neuro-chirurgical treatment and reaches a state of enlightenment. Eventually, he dies—the inevitable end of an eventful journey.

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THE COMPUTER GRRRLS ARE:

MOREHSHIN ALLAHYARI
MANETTA BERENDS
NADJA BUTTENDORF
ELISABETH CARAVELLA
JENNIFER CHAN
ALEKSANDRA DOMANOVIĆ
LOUISE DRULHE
DARSHA HEWITT
LAUREN HURET
HYPHEN-LABS
DASHA ILINA
MARY MAGGIC
CAROLINE MARTEL
LAUREN MOFFATT
SIMONE C. NIQUILLE
JENNY ODELL
ELISA GIARDINA PAPA
TABITA REZAIRE
ERICA SCOURTI
SUZANNE TREISTER
LU YANG



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