

This exhibition surveys the work of German filmmaker and writer Hito Steyerl, focusing particularly on the artist's production from 2004 onwards. Over this period Steyerl's films, essays and lectures have uniquely articulated the contemporary status of images, and of image politics. Central to her work is the notion that global communication technologies – and the attendant mediation of the world through circulating images – have had a dramatic impact on conceptions of governmentality, culture, economics and subjectivity itself.

Hito Steyerl presents eight existing works and one new commission within an exhibition design conceived by the artist and her team. The exhibition spans both Artists Space venues and also encompasses a program of talks and screenings, and an online aggregation of Steyerl's writing.

Steyerl studied documentary filmmaking, and her essay films of the 1990s address issues of migration, multiculturalism and globalization in the aftermath of the formation of the European Union. Her films *November* (2004) and *Lovely Andrea* (2007) mark a move towards the extrapolation of the essay form as an open-ended means of speculation. They locate representations of herself and her friend Andrea Wolf as object lessons in the politics played out within the translation and migration of image documents. Steyerl's prolific filmmaking and writing has since occupied a highly discursive position between the fields of art, philosophy and politics, constituting a deep exploration of late capitalism's social, cultural and financial imaginaries. Her films and lectures have increasingly addressed the presentational context of art, while her writing has circulated widely through publication in both academic and art journals, often online.

The exhibition begins at Artists Space Exhibitions with *Red Alert* (2007), an installation that succinctly collapses many of the concerns active in Steyerl's work. Three vertically-oriented monitors each show the same solid red shade. The monochrome three-screen film provides a humorous "new-media" take on Alexander Rodchenko's triptych of paintings *Pure Colours: Red, Yellow and Blue* (1921), an artwork that has been interpreted as both the "end of art" and the "essence of art." Also referencing the terror alert system introduced by Homeland Security in the wake of 9/11, *Red Alert* signifies, in Steyerl's words, "the end of politics as such (end of history, advent of liberal democracy) and at the same time an era of 'pure feeling' that is heavily policed."

These "politics of the monochrome" are carried further into the scenography of the exhibition. The films *Guards* (2012) and *In Free Fall* (2010) are located in labyrinthine "black-box" spaces that take the viewer from the claustrophobia of a padded corridor, to first-class airline luxury; whereas *Liquidity Inc.* (2014) is installed in a space bathed in aquatic blue light. As with the majority of Steyerl's films, these works extend from research conducted through interviews and the

accumulation of found visual material, and move between forensic documentary and dream-like montage. *Guards*, produced at the Art Institute of Chicago, centers on conversations with museum security staff with previous military or law enforcement careers. Their descriptions of tactics and strategy point to the museum as a site of militarization and privatization, and to their contradictory position between visibility and invisibility within a space of pure affect and sensation. In *Free Fall* takes as a central motif an aircraft graveyard in the Californian desert, and builds around the biographies of objects and materials held there a web of connections between economic crash, the volatility of the moving-image industry, and the spectacularization of crisis. Steyerl's most recent film, *Liquidity Inc.*, treats as dual subjects the figure of Jacob Wood, a former investment banker turned MMA fighter, and water, in all its mutable physical and metaphorical states.

The exhibition continues at Artists Space Books & Talks, with *November* and *Lovely Andrea* shown consecutively in the basement space. Steyerl's teenage friend Andrea Wolf, who became a martyr of the Kurdish liberation movement when killed in Çatak, Turkey in 1998, serves as a driving force underlying both works. Steyerl develops a reflexive investigative approach in these two films, in which she documents her journeys in tracing the circulation of particular images and strands of information. This approach positions her own body and subjectivity, alongside that of Wolf, between primary documents and allegorical sites – at which complex flows of desire, control and capital intersect.

Such an approach is also evident in documentation of three lectures exhibited on the ground floor. In recent years Steyerl's practices as filmmaker and writer have intersected in these events, which begin as public lectures given by the artist and then find a second form in their documentation and presentation both online and in exhibitions. They are distinctive in placing Steyerl center stage – as investigative voice, as image “body,” as subject and object – and catalyze theoretical speculation with their use of visual and linguistic cues. *I Dreamed a Dream* (2013), *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* (2013) and *Duty-Free Art* (2015) depart from experiences the artist recounts, that blur the lines between fact and fiction. Particularly present in these lectures are Steyerl's visits to Kurdistan and to the site of Andrea Wolf's murder, which have brought Steyerl in contact with the current humanitarian crisis in the region, stemming from military actions in Syria.

*Duty-Free Art* is a new lecture, presented for the first time at the opening of this exhibition. It builds a thread of connections between leaked emails from Syrian government accounts, and the growing phenomenon of the “freeport” – storage facilities where millions of dollars of artworks are held without incurring taxes. As concentrated sites of the dialectics apparent in Steyerl's films and writing, her lectures articulate the notion of the artist as performing image, as producer and as

circulator. Steyerl has coined the term “circulationism” in order to describe a state that is “not about the art of making an image, but about post-producing, launching, and accelerating it.”

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