



Press release
April 2025

Foto Arsenal Wien and Kunsthalle Wien present
VIENNA DIGITAL CULTURES
Model Collapse
5–18 May 2025

Vienna Digital Cultures: announcing festival programme and participants

Vienna Digital Cultures is a new festival jointly organized by Foto Arsenal Wien and Kunsthalle Wien that takes place between 5–18 May. It consolidates both institutions' commitment to exploring how new technologies impact culture, via a two-week programme of art, performance and discourse. Curated by Nadim Samman, the theme for the 2025 edition is 'Model Collapse'.

Launching with online artwork commissions by Joey Holder and Most Dismal Swamp at www.viennadigitalcultures.at, the festival continues at Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz with an exhibition and events hosted at Angewandte Interdisciplinary Lab, Haus der Republik (Wiener Festwochen) – Funkhaus, PRST.club and REAKTOR.

In machine learning, 'model collapse' is a key term that refers to problems that can arise during the training of large language models, including a loss of diversity and originality in generated outputs, excessive repetition, and amplified bias. But 'model collapse' is also an apt metaphor for the state of current affairs. From politics to ecology, many established systems are in disarray, and as the term 'post-truth' suggests, intellectual governance is no exception. Digital change is a key driver of this upheaval. With artificial intelligence rolling out across society, its impact upon these crises grows ever more significant. In 2025 Vienna Digital Cultures explores 'model collapse' in all its senses, inviting artists and thinkers to reflect on the disorientation and instability that characterize this moment in history.

The festival's physical exhibition takes place at Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz and features five international artists known for probing the intersection of politics and digital culture. The exhibition opens with Eva & Franco Mattes video *But I love Human* (2025), a montage of various TikTok live streamers performing as Non-Player Characters (NPCs) – a strange doorway into how algorithms are sculpting human subjectivity today. It is followed by Joey Holder's installation *The Woosphere* (2025), an immersive fever dream that foregrounds the proliferation of non-human beings in our collective imagination. The work extends the artist's digital commission on the festival website. Kate Crawford & Vladan Joler's S+T+ARTS Prize-winning *Calculating Empires* (2024) is a twenty-four meter long diagram charting the relationship between technology and power over the last half-millennium. Its mapping of how engineering subjects human bodies (and desires) to control is

complemented by Arvida Byström's video and sculptural investigation of deepfake porn and digital sexual futures. The latter also serves as a preamble to her offsite performance at Haus der Republik (Wiener Festwochen) – Funkhaus (*A Cybernetic Dollhouse*) in collaboration with an AI-powered sex-doll named Harmony. In a related vein, Mathias Gramoso explores the contemporary narcissus complex in *Perpetual Echo* (2024), documenting a 24-hour performance in which the artist stares at himself through his phone screen. Suffusing the space with coloured light, Troika's installation casts the assembled works in the hues of the RGB filter, an optical regime associated with machine vision.

In the public area around Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz, an Augmented Reality (AR) installation by Vienna-based artists Belma Bešlić-Gál, Catherine Spet and Markus Wintersberger is presented under the title *//ONTOLOGICAL_GLITCH://* – in collaboration with Kultur 1. While probing weird overlaps between digital and physical experience, these works stage AI as an evolving, posthuman intelligence that transcends human perception. Does the AI still react to visitors, or has it entered an autonomous, self-sustaining process that no longer acknowledges our presence? On 16 May ROTOR/Michael Fischer provides a sonic survey of digital terrain with sound performances by Vienna-based musicians Misonica and Rent.

Two evenings at REAKTOR (10 & 11 May) showcase artist videos that explore generative AI in both form and content, shining cinematic light on some of the darker corners of our latent reality. Premieres include the screening of *The Bastard Fields* (2025) by Most Dismal Swamp, a hallucinatory trip through the cultural and machinic unconscious – following its debut on the festival's online platform; Emmanuel van der Auwera's *Saturn* (2025) dives into the online conspiracy theory of 'crisis actors', and its real-world impact on aftermath of the tragic Sandy Hook school shooting. Additionally, Silvia dal Dosso presents the newest chapter in her online slop roundup, *The Future Is Finally Weird AF* (2025), while Troika's *Drill Baby Drill* (2025) explores wish fulfilment in AI-powered landscape design. Beyond these premieres, the programme includes further works by S()fia Braga, Andrea Khôra Jonas Lund, Inès Sieulle, Ala Roushan & Charles Stankieveh und Clemens von Wedemeyer. Each night at the theatre is opened by an artist lecture-performance: Lil Internet's *:::FEEL THE FUTURE:::* (10 May), and a new production by Malpractice (11 May).

The festival's programme of talks begins with a keynote by Kate Crawford – author of the international bestseller *Atlas of AI* – at Angewandte Interdisciplinary Lab (5 May). It is titled *Model Collapse: The Cascading Failures of Algorithms, Ecosystems, and Economies*. Further speakers known for their contributions to discourse around machine learning, culture and politics speak throughout the festival. They include Caroline Busta, Paul Feigelfeld, Matteo Pasquinelli, Ala Roushan, Elke Schwarz, Klaus Speidel, Felix Stalder and more – including an afternoon of conversation co-curated with Spike Magazine (18 May). Further artist talks, guided tours and workshops run throughout.

Counter-balancing the festival's interest in the darker side of digital – leading electronic musicians supply catharsis and re-embodiment during two club nights. The first weekend sees the city's best sound system (PRST.club) play host to techno heavyweights Etapp Kyle and Phase Fatale, as well as Vienna's own DJ Terror and Antonia XM (10 May). For the second Saturday (17 May) Vienna Digital Cultures curates the opening party of Wiener Festwochen | Haus der Republik – Funkhaus, lifting the mood – in line with their theme of 'Love' – through a house programme supplied by Anthea (Partisan) and Amanda Mussi, with support from Vienna's Malounadou.

Model Collapse is generously supported by Autotelic Foundation www.autotelic-foundation.org, a key partner of the 2025 Vienna Digital Cultures festival.

Quotes

Veronica Kaup-Hasler, Executive City Councillor for Cultural Affairs and Science

"AI-supported technology is rapidly taking hold all over the world and has triggered a major transformation. This not only presents society with enormous challenges, but also shows how urgently spaces are needed to critically reflect on digital technologies," says Vienna's City Councillor for Culture Veronica Kaup-Hasler. "It was therefore very important to the City of Vienna to strengthen media art, which has always been concerned with its opportunities and risks, and to offer it a permanent platform. I am delighted that Vienna Digital Cultures, as an urban media art festival, is now dedicated to these socio-politically explosive questions and upheavals. With a view to continuity, synergies in terms of content and existing expertise, we docked the festival to the institutional structures of Kunsthalle Wien and Foto Arsenal Wien last year."

Michelle Cotton, Artistic Director Kunsthalle Wien & Felix Hoffmann, Artistic Director Foto Arsenal Wien

"The impact of technology upon our society, our political systems, the economy, environment and humanity as a whole has been a key topic for artists since the industrial revolution. The current exhibitions Radical Software: Women Art & Computing 1960-1991 at Kunsthalle Wien and Simon Lehner: Clean Thoughts. Clean Images at Foto Arsenal Wien respectively can be seen to differently underscore the significance of digital change to contemporary art discourse and our image world. We are delighted to have the opportunity to bring so many influential artists and thinkers to the city and to provide a platform for commissioning new works, critical reflection and exchange. Under the skillful articulation of Nadim Samman, 'Model Collapse' promises to be an impactful, resonant and inspiring festival to inaugurate Vienna Digital Cultures, the city's new festival for art in the digital sphere."

Nadim Samman, Curator Vienna Digital Cultures 2025

"Generative AI is not merely reshaping the cultural landscape; it is destabilizing the very ground on which we stand. As machine learning seeps deeper into the fabric of society, the contours of human imagination are being violently redefined. The world is growing strange, slippery, and unsettling. This festival examines how artists, thinkers, and visionaries are navigating this brave new world—grappling with the radical implications of AI's reach across everything from politics to ecology, and challenging our most fundamental assumptions about the future. The questions it raises are not just about what is possible, but about what it means to be human in an age where reality is increasingly authored by machines."

Notes to Editors

Vienna Digital Cultures

5–18 May 2025

Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz

Press conference: 5 May 2025, 10am

Opening reception: 5 May 2025, 7pm

Participants

Anthea (Partisan), Antonia XM, Arvida Byström, Belma Bešlić-Gál, S()fia Braga, Caroline Busta, Arthur Chopin, Kate Crawford, Silvia Dal Dosso, DJ Terror, Paul Feigelfeld, Mathias Gramoso, Joey Holder, Inou Ki Endo, Vladan Joler, Andrea Khôra, Chiara Kristler, Etapp Kyle, Klimentina Li, Lil Internet, Jonas Lund, Malounadou, Mara Never, Eva & Franco Mattes, Misonica, Most Dismal Swamp, Amanda Mussi, Matteo Pasquinelli, Phase Fatale, Marcin Ratajczyk, Rent, ROTOR / Michael Fischer, Ala Roushan, Ruth Schnell, Elke Schwarz, Inès Sieulle, Catherine Spet, Klaus Speidel, Charles Stankieveh, Felix Stalder, Troika, Emmanuel van der Auwera, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Markus Wintersberger, and more.

Venues

Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz, Angewandte Interdisciplinary Lab, Haus der Republik (Wiener Festwochen) – Funkhaus, PRST.club, REAKTOR

Ticketing

VDC Festival pass € 25 / VDC Day pass € 5

Online tickets via: <https://kupfticket.com/events/vdc-2025-model-collapse>

All events are free with a valid Kunsthalle Wien annual pass. The annual pass is available for purchase at the Kunsthalle Wien Museumsquartier (€29 / €19 reduced).

Press images for download and further information

<https://kunsthallewien.at/en/exhibition/vienna-digital-cultures/presse/>

The installation views of the exhibition *Model Collapse* will be available from 5 May 2025 at the same link.

All information and dates for the event program can be found online at:

www.viennadigitalcultures.at and www.kunsthallewien.at

@viennadigitalcultures

#VDC #ViennaDigitalCultures

About FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

Foto Arsenal Wien is Austria's new center for photographic images and lens-based media. Initiated by the city of Vienna in fall 2022, the institution presents and explains contemporary photography in all its forms and uses. Foto Arsenal Wien also organizes the platform Foto Wien – Austria's largest, biennial festival of photography – and, in a collaboration with the Kunsthalle Wien, the annual festival Vienna Digital Cultures.

About Kunsthalle Wien

Kunsthalle Wien is the City of Vienna's primary institution for contemporary art. At its locations in the Museumsquartier and on Karlsplatz, it presents an annual programme of exhibitions alongside public and educational programming that seeks to engage diverse publics. The institution provides a platform for artists, commissions new works and partners with individuals and institutions, both local and international, to develop exhibitions and publications based on original research. Kunsthalle Wien is committed to providing an inclusive space for exchange and debate and furthering the discourse on contemporary art in all its forms.

Foto Arsenal Wien and Kunsthalle Wien, together with KÖR – Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Wien and Atelierhaus Wien, are part of Stadt Wien Kunst GmbH, which is financed by the Magistratsabteilung Kultur der Stadt Wien (MA 7).

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