

Olena Newkryta — (IMAGE) (COSMOS) (ZERO) (STAR)

Submission (exhibition):

Artist & exhibition title: [Olena Newkryta — \(IMAGE\) \(COSMOS\) \(ZERO\) \(STAR\)](#)

Curated by: Gudrun Ratzinger & Franz Thalmair

Venue: Kunstraum Lakeside, Klagenfurt am Wörthersee, Austria

Date: Opening, April 8, 2025, 6 pm
Exhibition, April 9 – May 23, 2025

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Exhibition views: [Click here to download](#)

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Social media: Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/kunstraumlakeside/>
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- Press release
- Credits/Courtesy for images (download via Dropbox)

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In her exhibition *(IMAGE) (COSMOS) (ZERO) (STAR)*, Olena Newkryta presents a group of works that examine technologies of image generation, interpretation, and data processing in the realm of knowledge production. She sheds light on how deeply the complex fabric of data, structures, and (world) orders is embedded in post- and neo-colonialist power mechanisms. In her critical entwinements of past and present, the artist opens up potentials for alternative forms of knowledge production.

The central audiovisual installation *This Aggregate of Images that is the Universe: Stars* (2025) takes us on a journey through space and time, from the Peruvian Andes to Harvard in Cambridge, from planet Earth to the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds. The scientific mapping and research of these two dwarf galaxies in the southern sky, which are only visible in the southern hemisphere, was initiated by Harvard College at the beginning of the twentieth century. Hundreds of thousands of photographic glass plates, captured at Boyden Observatory in Arequipa, Peru, between 1890 and 1926, were numerically indexed and classified in a Herculean effort by a group of astronomers, the so-called “human computer.” This endeavor marks the beginnings of the automated observation of our planetary system and its interpretation through machine learning processes. At the same time, the exploration of the Magellanic Clouds through collecting photographic images and their numerical analysis is exemplary for the systematic suppression of alternative models of explaining the world, including Indigenous cosmologies.

Newkryta tells this history of appropriating the Magellanic Clouds by the Western scientific establishment and the implicated resources in the form of a non-linear narrative in which multiple voices have a say. On the one hand, we see a group of women who seem to reenact the work of the Harvard astronomers, identifying dots from a projected photograph as stars and circling them; parallel, a smartphone screen displays archive materials from the Harvard College Observatory Archive, which portray the work processes on site both in the Andes as well as in Harvard. The suggestive voice-over, a composition of numerical data and text fragments, entwines the acts of counting and recounting, while invoking different sources of knowledge—from texts by astronomer Henrietta Swan Leavitt and the influential cyberfeminist philosopher and cultural theorist Sadie Plant to traditional Indigenous cosmologies that draw innate links between life cycles and celestial constellations.

The projection screen is an integral element of the installation: the hand-made perforations in the surface are based on a photograph of the Small Magellanic Cloud. The projector light penetrates through the holes and subtly changes along with the film images, physically immersing visitors in the universe. The large window at the Kunstraum entrance is furnished with a perforated foil, this time in the pattern of the Large Magellanic Cloud: the atmosphere in the space transforms as the “starlight” flows in from the outside world.

Presented as sub-chapters on smartphones mounted to tripods, the video essay *This Aggregate of Images that is the Universe: Clouds* (2025) is a techno-philosophical investigation into image data sets which are generally invisible to us yet form the basis of a multitude of technological infrastructures. The videos, whose texts stimulate images in the viewers' minds, tell of the transformations in the human-image relationship, which for a long time was spurred by seduction and desire but has increasingly shifted towards a sense of overload, exploitation, and disorientation.

However today,
after centuries of chasing perfect images,
after centuries of worshipping them,
destroying them,
fighting over them,
kissing them,
and carrying pictures of loved ones in our wallets,
images elude us.
They turn their back on us.

(Excerpt from *This Aggregate of Images that is the Universe: Clouds*)

As in the film installation, Olena Newkryta focuses intensively on working conditions, in particular those of click workers—people, typically in low-wage countries, who train artificial intelligence applications. Not least through the spatial setting of the exhibition, she brings the scientific, abstract description and understanding of the universe, the disembodied facts and figures, back to a human, tangible level: the artist's printed and perforated shirts—presented here as merchandising products—are an ironic comment on the absence of the human body in digital infrastructures.

Olena Newkryta (b. 1990 in Ukraine) lives and works in Vienna.

[www.olenanewkryta.com](http://www olenanewkryta.com)

Image captions & photo credits

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