

Press Kit

May 2024

**(A)I Tell You,  
You Tell Me  
Three Encounters for  
Humans/Machines**

New Exhibition  
**(A)I Tell You, You Tell Me.  
Three Encounters for Humans/Machines**  
May 4 to November 24, 2024

Exhibition duration  
4.5.-24.11.24

Location  
Atrium 1+2, Ground Floor

Press contact  
Anne Thomé  
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76135 Karlsruhe

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Baden-Württemberg  
MINISTERIUM FÜR WISSENSCHAFT,  
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In cooperation with

Deutsches Museum   
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## Press release

ZKM will open the first exhibition under the direction of the new scientific-artistic director Alistair Hudson on May 3, 2024. *(A)I Tell You, You Tell Me. Three Encounters for Humans/Machines* focuses on the ambivalent attitude of many people towards artificial intelligence. With expansive works by Anne Duk Hee Jordan (Berlin), robotlab (Karlsruhe), and the ZKM Hertzlab, the exhibition and accompanying program invite visitors to interactively explore their own attitude to the relationship between humans and machines. As part of the opening, we will present the audiovisual performance *WIRED* by the transdisciplinary artist Portrait XO.

### Complex Interaction between Humans and Machines

Artificial intelligence and digitality are major topics of our time, which we as individuals often react to with skepticism and prejudice. The exhibition *(A)I Tell You, You Tell Me. Three Encounters for Humans/Machines* fits into the current discourse on AI and offers the opportunity to enter into dialog and exchange with algorithmic systems. The exhibition is designed as an interactive field of action in which we can explore our relationship to technology, dissolve existing prejudices, and reflect on our own ego and the supposed technological other.

To this end, three expansive works have been commissioned to occupy the first floor of Atrium 1+2: *AEIOU (2024)* by the Karlsruhe-based artist group robotlab; *Electrify Me, Baby (2024)* by Berlin artist Anne Duk Hee Jordan; and *Flatware, Hardware, Software, Wetware (2024)* by Hertzlab, an intervention from ZKM's own artistic research department.

"We cannot possibly have all the answers to the questions that AI raises," says Alistair Hudson, scientific-artistic director of ZKM and initiator of the exhibition. "But through creating space for active participation and experiment, we can learn together how to live in a world with machines and their growing intelligences."

The exhibition is funded by the "Kultur Digital" program of the Federal Cultural Foundation as part of the *intelligent.museum* project in cooperation with the Deutsches Museum Nürnberg, and supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

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### Accompanying Program

The educational program accompanying the exhibition, entitled *How much of AI is in us?*, includes workshops, expert talks, film screenings, performative interventions, and guided tours. It starts on Saturday, May 4, 2024, with an Activation Day and free admission from 11 am to 6 pm.

### Curatorial Team

Alistair Hudson (concept), Clara Runge (curator), Philipp Ziegler (curator)

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## Artworks and biographies of the artists

### robotlab, *AEIOU*, 2024

The work addresses the apparently bizarre realities arising from the synergies of robots and artificial intelligence (AI). Two industrial robots write machine-generated texts on long conveyor belts, and invite us to participate in this self-reflexive dialogue between two technical entities. The controlled, executing machine of the 20th century has apparently evolved into a 21st century, self-controlling, self-thinking, and self-operating machine that adopts human behavior through using AI. Instead of executing linear, process-optimized work sequences on the assembly line, here the machines write about their own changing identity in a cyclical process, thus initiating a collective process of reflection on the role of the machine in society.

*AEIOU* is a further development of the work *manifest* realized by robotlab in 2008, in which a robot wrote manifestos that the machine generated autonomously. To do this, it selected terms from the fields of art, philosophy, and technology from its fixed internal information pools and randomly associated them with one another within the framework of sentences.

The work exhibited here builds on this: The robots select from quotes written about them in the robot theories of recent decades, transform these into their own statements, and use machine learning to form their own assessment of the generated sentences. We can participate in this learning process by submitting our own evaluations of the generated texts. The work illustrates the mutual influence and close entanglements between humans and machines.

### robotlab (Matthias Gommel, Martina Haitz, Jan Zappe)

At the center of *robotlab's* activities is the work with industrial robots in public space. Founded in Karlsruhe in 2000, the group of artists explores complex aspects of human-machine relationships in experiments, performances, and installations.

The specific movement characteristics of the robots and the computer-based control system make it possible to present digital codes in a variety of ways in real space. *robotlab* enables these machines, which are otherwise situated in an industrial environment, to penetrate various areas such as music, dance, and science within the context of art. The serially produced industrial robots stand as representatives of a possible robot culture in which machines co-determine our living environment.

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## Anne Duk Hee Jordan, *Electrify Me, Baby*, 2024

The artist Anne Duk Hee Jordan uses nature and biological phenomena as metaphors to engage in an often ironic dialogue with art, science, technology, society, and identity. In her works, she creates hybrid worlds that defy binary thinking and, with a more-than-human perspective, counter anthropocentrism (the belief that humans are the most important entities on the planet).

With her multi-sensory installation *Electrify Me, Baby* (2024), she creates a holistic cosmos, situated between natural and technical phenomena. In four chapters the artist takes us through the different layers and the atmosphere of the Earth. In the installation, we encounter various elements also depicted on video, so that digital and analog realities merge. The so-called *critters*, small low-tech robots, cross our path, driving around seemingly aimlessly and without any purpose. The artist counters the efficiency of today's technologies with her concept of "artificial stupidity," which allows for mistakes and nonproductivity and aims to readjust our relationship to our planet. In a humorous way, the installation invites us to reflect on our own existence in a world in which all beings are inextricably linked.

This new installation is framed by a selection of older works that demonstrate the artist's way of thinking and working as well as her diverse visual imagery that shows us the power of biological/natural intelligence. Jordan's works make us aware that we cannot view discourses about our relationship with new technologies in isolation from the larger overall context of our planet, and that mutual learning from one another is both possible and absolutely necessary.

### Anne Duk Hee Jordan

Transience and transformation are the central themes in the work of Anne Duk Hee Jordan. Through movement and performance, Jordan gives materiality another dimension – she builds motorized sculptures and creates edible landscapes. Her sculptures are intended to draw the viewer into the present and open a dialogue between natural phenomena, philosophy, and art. Her work is like an interactive fantasy that plays with the knowledge and theories about the world and our souls. In the absence of concrete knowledge, fantasy runs riot. Jordan opens doors to a universe where she humorously and romantically creates machines that juxtapose robotic consciousness with organic cyclic decay and life. She asks questions about "agency" and encourages a change of perspective. In doing so, she shifts the focus away from humans to the entire ecology.

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The Korean-born artist lives and works in Berlin. Since 2023, Anne Duk Hee Jordan has held the professorship for Digital Media Art at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG).

## ZKM Hertzlab, *Flatware, Hardware, Software, Wetware*, 2024

The project *Flatware, Hardware, Software, Wetware* (2024) is an AI-based intervention by the Hertzlab, the artistic research department of ZKM, realized jointly by Yasha Jain, Bernd Lintermann, Tina Lorenz, and Dan Wilcox. The interactive installation uses the so-called “AI-based wall labels” for artworks in a modified form, which were developed as part of the *intelligent.museum* research project at ZKM. Through the use of artificial intelligence, the wall labels present constantly changing and individual interpretations of classic art “flatware” (i.e., works of art that generally hang on the wall) from the ZKM collection. RFID chips (RFID: Radio Frequency Identification), programmed by each visitor, are the keys that open access to the installation and the artworks. Only when we, the human “wetware,”<sup>1</sup> activate the digital wall labels with the chip does the AI generate a new text.

Descriptions of artworks in museums are often regarded as binding and objective truth due to our trust in the institution. The AI-based wall labels want to question this trust in texts and the associated interpretative sovereignty of cultural institutions because, as always, the truth in art lies in the eyes of the beholder. If synthetic text creation shatters our expectations of truth, if people can no longer be assumed to be authors, this will change our relationship to medialized communication in the future.

### ZKM Hertzlab

As a platform for artistic research and development, the Hertzlab is the future-oriented department at ZKM. Here, artistic and technical means are used to reflect on social developments and speculative futurology is conducted across media and genres. The Hertzlab conducts its own artistic research projects, regular events, and a human-in-residence program to invite other perspectives and make them visible. In overarching thematic areas, the Hertzlab addresses the questions of what awaits us in 100 years, how we will get there, and how we can shape this process in a way that is oriented towards the common good. Since January 2024, the Hertzlab has been headed by Tina Lorenz.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “wetware” is derived from the computer-related concepts of hardware or software. In the context of this installation and in the wider tech industry, “wetware” is understood as a synonym for people.

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### Participating artists of the ZKM Hertzlab:

**Yasha Jain**, a media artist from India, works as an artistic software developer and researcher. Her projects blend creativity with technology, often featuring interactive elements in a playful approach. She creates AI based interactive media and has showcased her projects in the context of *intelligent.museum* and the *BioMedia* exhibition. For the last four years she has been working at ZKM. She is an active live coder and a classical musician.

**Bernd Lintermann** is a media artist and researcher at the ZKM Hertzlab working with generative systems and immersive spaces. His works are exhibited internationally and include interactive installations, projection environments, and stage works. He has published numerous scientific papers. His software Xfrog was nominated for a Scientific Achievement Award by the Academy of Motion Pictures in 2015. From 2005 to 2011 he was Director of the ZKM | Institute for Visual Media, from 2006 to 2015 Professor at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG), and from 2012 to 2023 Adjunct Professor at the School of Creative Media at City University, Hong Kong.

**Tina Lorenz** came of age in the Chaos Computer Club but went on to study theater studies and American literary history in Vienna and Munich. They were a lecturer for theater history at the Academy for Performing Arts Bavaria, later dramaturge at the Landestheater Oberpfalz and finally consultant for digital communication at the Staatstheater Nürnberg, before founding and leading the Digital Theatre department at the State Theatre of Augsburg from 2020 to 2023. Tina Lorenz is a founding member of the hackspaces metalab Vienna and Binary Kitchen Regensburg; since January 2024, they head the Hertzlab, the department of artistic research and development at ZKM.

**Dan Wilcox** is an artist, engineer, musician, and performer, who combines live music performances with experimental electronics and software. With these new means of expression, he explores themes from science fiction, space travel, and similar. His father was an aerospace engineer and Wilcox grew up in Huntsville, Alabama, known as "Rocket City" in the USA. He operates at the interface of media technology, art, and experimental music. Dan Wilcox lives in Karlsruhe and is a part-time artist and researcher at ZKM Hertzlab.

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## Portrait XO, *WIRE*, 2022 (performance as part of the opening)

The starting point for the audiovisual album *WIRE* are vocal recordings by artist Portrait XO, which musician, hacker and machine learning expert CJ Carr fed into his custom AI SampleRNN model to train the AI. The result was ten hours of generated vocals that oscillated between being completely different and similar. This material in turn served Portrait XO as the basis for her composition process. By extracting fragments of the AI-generated audio data, she creates "neural vocal duets".

Portrait XO's album, which is not only audible but also visually perceptible, exemplifies the diverse possibilities and relationships that can arise from encounters between human and technical entities. The use of AI brings forth new, creative methods and perspectives.

### Portrait XO

Portrait XO is an independent researcher and transdisciplinary artist who was awarded the jazzki Award by ELBJAZZ, the first German human-AI jazz prize, in 2023. She has been known for years for her work on sonic innovation with AI audio pioneers Dadabots. Portrait XO explores computational creativity, human-machine collaboration as well as new formats and applications for forward-thinking art and sound. Her first research-based audiovisual AI album *WIRE* was released on December 9, 2022 as the first of its kind on *Chain to Vinyl* on the music polygon marketplace *twelve x twelve*.

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## About the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe

Founded in 1989, the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe stands worldwide for an open concept of art in the digital age. Here, art collecting and archive research are linked with artistic research on the electronic arts. Through these interdisciplinary connections, ZKM not only presents milestones of 20th and 21st century media art, but also contributes to its further development.

Whether exhibitions, symposia, publications, concert programs, or digital formats – ZKM is the platform for the discourses of art and technology in exchanges with society, science, business, and politics. Our mission is to investigate and better understand the effects of the media and digital world on us humans.

### Address

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### Opening Hours

Wednesday – Friday 10 am – 6 pm  
Saturday – Sunday 11 am – 6 pm  
Monday – Tuesday closed

### Do you have a question? Please do not hesitate to contact us:

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### Press briefing and press tour

We cordially invite you to a press briefing and tour of the exhibition:  
Fri May 3, 2024 / 11 am / Atrium 1+2

Please register in advance: Anne Thomé (presse@zkm.de)

### Opening:

Fri May 3, 2024 / 7 pm / Foyer / Atrium 1+2

### Activation Day:

Sat May 4 / 11 am – 6 pm / Atrium 1+2

Guided tours, workshops and artist talks on the exhibition

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