

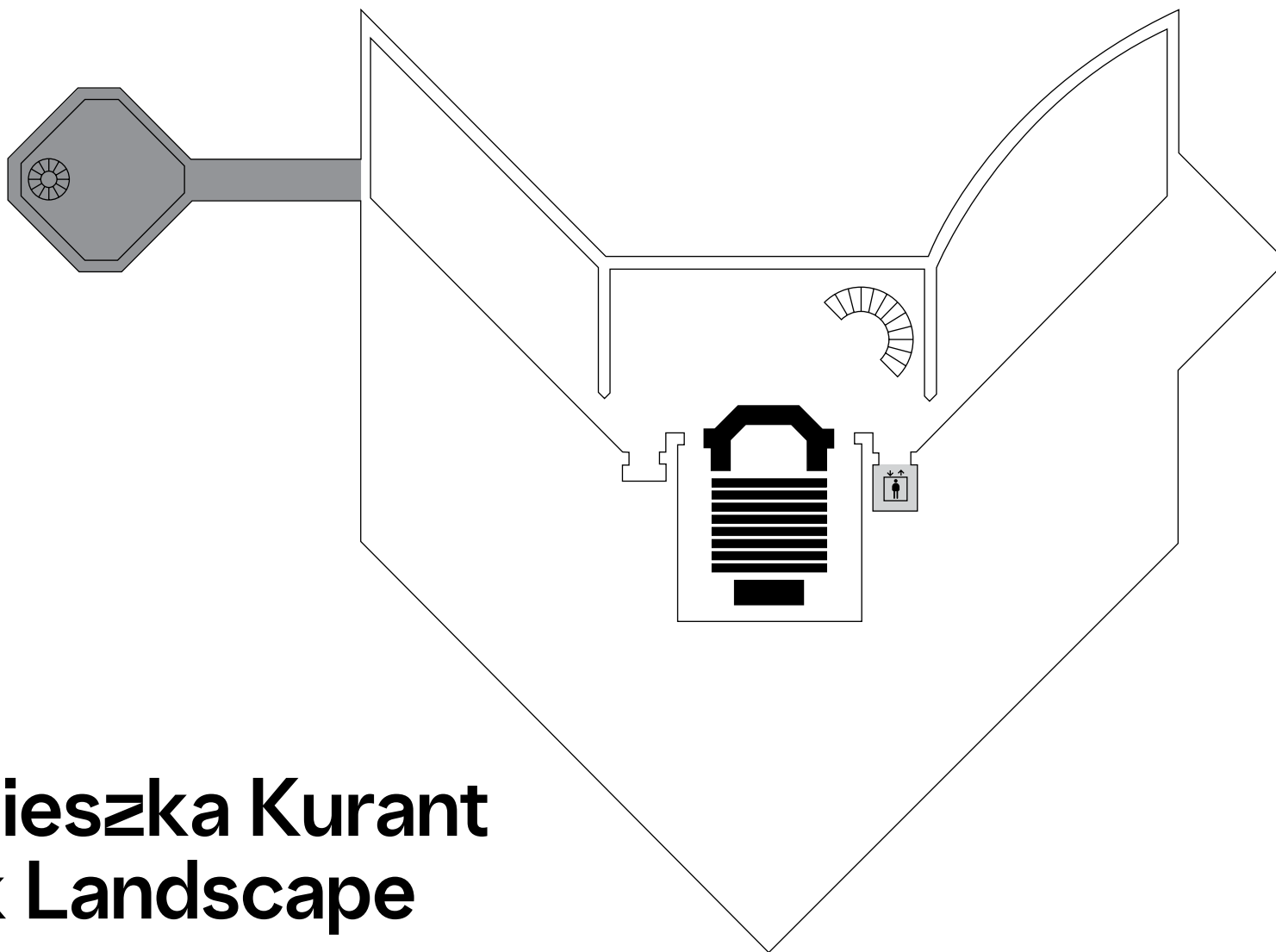
Agnieszka Kurant

Risk Landscape



07.06.2024 — 05.01.2025

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Curator

Sarah Beaumont

Production

David Celli, Paula Fernandes, Jordan Gerber, Richard Goedert,
Matthias Heitbrink, Clara Kremer, Lourindo Soares

This exhibition is organised with the support of the Kunstverein Hannover
and the Polish Institute Brussels.

Level 0 and -1
Henry J. and Erna D. Leir Pavilion



The exhibition

Through her experimental and conceptual work, Agnieszka Kurant (b. 1978, Łódź, Poland) examines contemporary phenomena such as collective, non-human and artificial intelligence and exploitations under digital capitalism. Following her invitation to occupy the Henry J. and Erna D. Leir Pavilion, the artist presents *Risk Landscape*. Comprising new commissions alongside recent works, the exhibition is inspired by new technologies that attempt to predict, simulate and monetise possible futures.

Built around the notion of 'futuraity', understood as the ability to project oneself into the future while taking a present situation into account – the exhibition reflects a contemporary conception of the future as a speculative object. Risk prediction is a way of quantifying the unknown. Drawing inspiration from technologies used in various fields (climatology, finance, insurance, gambling), Kurant examines the way they can influence the future. Conversely, the artist also highlights the impossibility of accurately forecasting the future of living things, climate, economy and society.

Some of the works shown here are the result of unpredictable and uncomputable processes, such as the construction of the uniquely-shaped, complex habitats of termites; chemical reactions of metal salts; transformations of liquid crystals and programmable matter or the evolution of irrational social phenomena. Other works were developed employing data analysis, artificial intelligence, simulations and statistical models – strategies used in the contexts of digital economies and catastrophe modelling.

Risk Landscape embodies a concept dear to the artist, who sees the future of creation and intelligence as the products of 'a multitude of agents: a polyphony involving humans, minerals, microorganisms, viruses and algorithms.' Her works are often made in close collaboration with scientists, researchers, computer programmers and engineers. They are hybrid objects that oscillate between the biological, the mineral and the digital, the natural and the artificial, the real and the virtual, the living and the non-living. By creating intrinsically unstable works, the artist paves the way to alternative futures and narratives.

Corridor

Future (Invention) (2024) is a site-specific installation spreading along the glass corridor leading to the luminous Henry J. and Erna D. Leir Pavilion. Through a constellation of the word 'future' translated into fourteen languages, Kurant explores the diversity of spatial representations of futurity in various cultures. The speakers of the represented languages – including Aymara, Maori, Darija, Malagasy and Yupno – conceive the future as coming from behind, above or below and not as being in front of us, as Western worldviews do. The installation suggests that the perception of time is a cultural construction and invites to consider the future from other perspectives. The work draws on the exhibition *America Invention* by Lothar Baumgarten, presented at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1993, which questioned how dominant cultures shape historical narratives.

Pavilion – Level 0

The works shown on the ground floor of the pavilion investigate the impact of collective intelligence – a phenomenon emerging from interactions of millions of humans and non-humans, from molecules to microbes and animals – on the evolution of life, climate, geology and economy. **Chemical Garden (2021–ongoing)** evolves throughout the duration of the exhibition, with unpredictable, unstable plant-like crystalline structures emerging from a mixture of inorganic chemicals: salts of metals (copper, cobalt, manganese, chrome, nickel, iron) used as components in computers.

Blending micro and macro scales, **Nonorganic Life 1 and 2 (2023)** paintings are based on the growth and electro-forming of vivid crystals of salts of the same metals. Kurant used this chemical reaction to paint on top of anodised aluminum

surfaces, on which macrophotography of *Chemical Garden* has previously been printed. These works evoke the industrial extraction linked to digital economies, modifying and threatening ecosystems. Paradoxically, modern research shows that chemical gardens in hydrothermal vents on the seafloor are a plausible path for the origin of life on Earth. At the crossroads of the digital, the biological and the mineral, *Chemical Garden* and *Nonorganic Life* investigate how organic and inorganic substances in the world are continually reorganised into various unstable forms.

The sculpture series **A.A.I. (System's Negative) (2016)** consists of casts of the interiors of termite mounds, obtained by pouring hot zinc into abandoned termite habitats in the Namibian savannah. Each unique habitat, the result of the collective intelligence of a given insect colony, once again demonstrates the unpredictability of nature. 'A.A.I.' references the concept of 'artificial artificial intelligence' – a term introduced by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos to describe the Mechanical Turk service, which pays human workers to carry out micro-tasks online, which computers are currently unable to do. Operating collectively around the clock from all continents, the workers simulate the performance of an algorithm as 'ghosts in the machine'.

The digital-biological-geological assemblage **Alien Internet (2023)** is composed of ferrofluid. Invented by NASA in 1963, this black inorganic substance contains nanoparticles reacting to magnetic fields. Kurant used it to model a perpetually evolving cybernetic organism, whose shape changes in response to the behaviour and communication of millions of animals captured by digital technologies around the world. The work draws on the phenomenon of the Wood Wide Web – the interconnectivity between trees, which use complex networks of fungi and roots

to communicate and share information about their environment. It also refers to a project known as the 'Animal Internet', the planetary-scale surveillance of wildlife ecosystems with digital technologies. Eventually, the animals become involuntary workers of the digital economy as they help scientists predict natural disasters and pandemics.

Echoing this piece is **Evolutions (2014)**, inspired by the research of mathematician Nils Barricelli who developed the first forms of artificial life. His work has opened the path for computational biology – a branch of biology that uses computer tools to study living organisms. Starting in the 1950s, Barricelli developed algorithmic organisms that evolved in a digital environment, documenting their 'growth' using punched cards. Kurant combined three images drawn from Barricelli's archives in a lenticular print. With this type of print, the image visually changes depending on the viewer's relative position to it.

Nearby, another series of works explores forms of late capitalism based on current economic realities. **Sentimentite (2022)** is a new mineral that Kurant created from objects used as informal or official currencies throughout human civilisation. Among other things, shells, bones, cigarettes, washing powder, animal teeth, lithium batteries, books and electronic waste have been reduced to microparticles and then pulverised and moulded. The shapes of one hundred fragments of *Sentimentite*, one of which is presented at Mudam, were generated from online conversations around key moments in our recent history such as the Arab Spring (2010–12), Fukushima disaster (2011), Black Lives Matter (2013–ongoing), the death of David Bowie (2016), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–22) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022–ongoing). A 'mineral currency' of sorts, this work speculates on the

future of capital, represented by the sum of physical objects and digital footprints that each person produces.

'Today,' Kurant says, 'our contemporary global economy is based on conversions of crowd dynamics and social energy into information and capital. Tweets, shares and likes are the new oil and gas.' The painting **Conversions (2023)** physically reacts to the changes in society. The composition and colour of the liquid crystals that make up its painted surface are constantly evolving in response to data, collected with artificial intelligence. The algorithms analysed the social media activity of members of protest movements around the globe, who express ideas and emotions about changing the world and the future. Millions of people cause changes in the appearance of this artwork.

Post-Fordite (2024) is also derived from human activity and capitalist production. The Fordite – or Detroit agate – is a recently discovered natural-artificial geological formation, which emerged through the accumulation and fossilisation of thousands of layers of paint in now-defunct car factories, including Ford Motor Company. These pieces of stratified paint now circulate via former factory workers and are sought after for the production of jewellery and decorative objects. Thus, this remnant of an economic model that profoundly changed the organisation of work throughout the twentieth century has found a way to subsist in the present. Kurant combines fragments of Fordite derived from several factories around the globe into a single hybrid form.

Air Rights 7 (2021) takes the form of a levitating meteorite in a precarious and fragile position. Resting on empty space, the work references an economic phenomenon that emerged in New York and other major cities that consists in selling the space above a property. With its

unearthly shape, the sculpture evokes the expansion of this real estate speculation into outer space.

The series ***Risk Landscape (2024)*** borrows its title from financial risk management strategies. This practice simulates near and far future scenarios of measurable and unmeasurable threats such as natural disasters, geopolitical conflicts, financial crisis or terrorism. Working with data scientists and catastrophe modelling specialists, Kurant employed artificial intelligence to develop the forms of three holograms. They present simulations of financial, political and climate events predicted to arise in specific locations around the world: Mudam Luxembourg, Gaza strip in Palestine and Lviv, in Ukraine.

Pavilion – Level -1

On the lower level of the pavilion, ***Lottocracy (2024)*** is a lotto machine revealing a series of risks and statistics, such as the probability of being struck by lightning, the odds of an artist not earning any income from their art or the possibility of winning the Mega Millions lottery jackpot. The work draws its title from a radical concept in political economy and governance, proposing that parliamentary elections should be replaced by selection by lottery. Picking up new balls for the audience at regular intervals, the work playfully reflects on how some risks and chances are as democratic as it gets, while other ones are unevenly distributed.

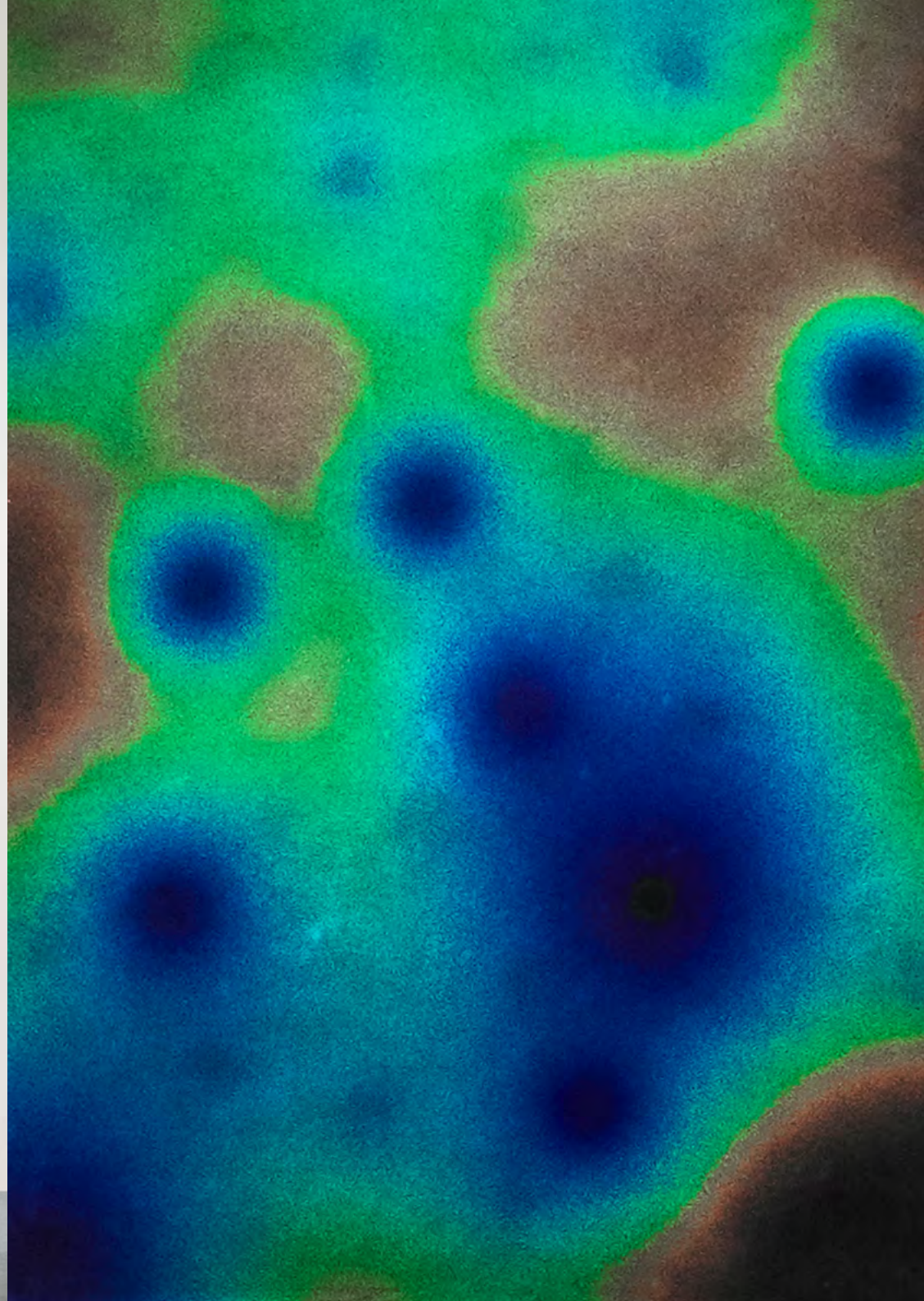
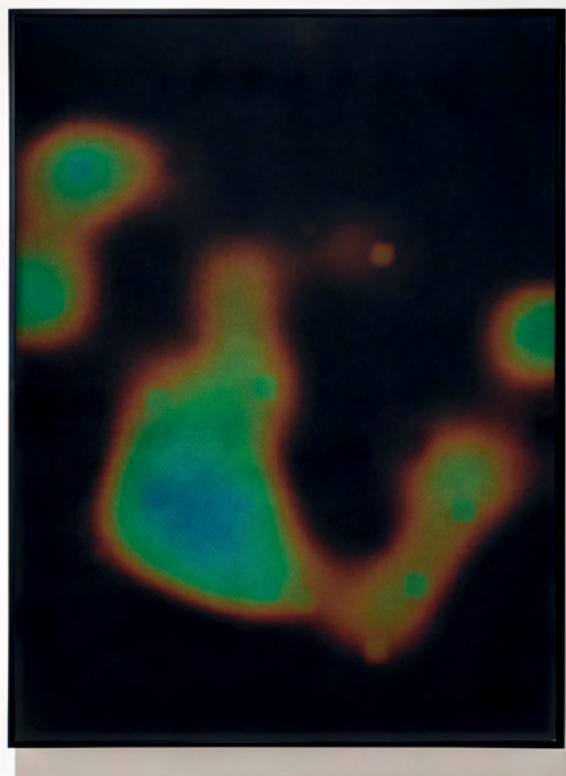
Presented in dialogue with this work, the geographical maps ***Risk Management (2020)*** and ***Quasi-Objects (2024)*** show the extent to which human history is made up of uncertainties and moments of convergence around common interests. ***Risk Management*** is a map representing 1000 years of unexplained collective phenomena observed around the world: the 1518 epidemic in Strasbourg during which 400 people began dancing compulsively for several days;

10,000 Japanese children falling ill after watching an episode of Pokémon in 1997; and a mass hysteria event that occurred in an Afghan school in 2009. It also includes unusual sightings (UFOs, demonic creatures, a perfect blue sphere in the sky) and conspiracy theories of all kinds. The scientific methodology employed by the artist contrasts with the irrational nature of the data collected. How can one in fact predict the emergence and propagation of a rumour, a revolution or an urban legend?

Using the same principle, ***Quasi-Objects*** illustrates one of humankind's common pleasures: games. The work takes its title from a concept by philosopher Michel Serres, who saw certain objects, such as soccer balls or money, as relational tools. Games are the product of collective intelligence: they have no single creator and evolve over time and with those who play them. By approaching human history from the perspective of games, the work suggests an alternative future far removed from the typical rules that govern society.

Concluding the exhibition, ***Future Anterior (2007)*** is composed of eight pages corresponding to a *New York Times* issue from September 2020. It includes news predicted by a professional clairvoyant when the work was created, in 2007, for which the artist enlisted regular contributors and ghostwriters. Here we learn, among other things, that the European Union has collapsed, that there is a revolt against the Chinese government and that only 2% of the Amazon rainforest remains. While some of this information has remained fictional four years after the paper's supposed publication date, others have proven to be prophetic. The content is printed with thermochromic pigments appearing and disappearing according to the temperature.









2020 The New York Times

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2022

Forest Dwindles to Less Than 2% Americans Brace Themselves for Possible Cloud Moth Attack

By AMANDA GRAY

TERRO

Intelligence
Attack Before
Scandal

The artist

Agnieszka Kurant (b. 1978, Łódź, Poland) has presented solo exhibitions at the Kunsthall Gent (2023), Gent; Kunstverein Hannover, Hanover (2023); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2022) and at the Sculpture Center, New York (2013). Her work was also exhibited at the Sydney Biennial (2024); Gropius Bau (2024), Berlin; Centre Pompidou, Paris (2023); Louisiana Museum, Denmark (2023); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2021); SFMOMA (2021); Kunsthalle Wien (2020), Vienna; Whitechapel Art Gallery (2020), London; Istanbul Biennial (2019); Triennale Milano (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2014); Witte de With (2011), Rotterdam and Performa Biennial, New York (2009). Agnieszka Kurant is the recipient of the 2020 LACMA A+T Award and the 2019 Frontier Art Prize. In 2021–22 she realised a permanent commission for the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge and in 2015 a commission for the façade of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. In 2010 she co-authored the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture (with Aleksandra Wasilkowska). Kurant was an artist in residence at the Berggruen Institute, Los Angeles (2019–21), a visiting artist at MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology, Boston (2017–20) and held a fellowship at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C. (2018). Her monograph, *Collective Intelligence*, co-edited by Stefanie Hessler and Jenny Jaskey was published in 2024 by Sternberg Press/MIT Press. Agnieszka Kurant lives and works in New York.

Public programme

Mudam Akademie Talk

05.06.2024 | 19:00 – 20:00 | EN

The analog and digital in contemporary art
with artist Agnieszka Kurant

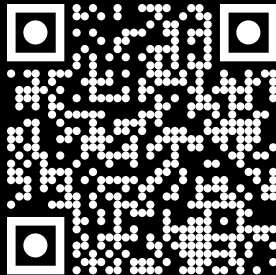
Curator tour

24.07.2024 | 18:00 – 19:00 | FR

With Sarah Beaumont

Lunchtime at Mudam

30.08.2024 | 12:30 – 13:30



Full programme on
mudam.com

Pascal Aubert, Sarah Beaumont,
Joyce Becker, Sandra Biwer,
Geoffroy Braibant, David Celli,
Alice Champion, Diane Durinck,
Zuzana Fabianova, Clarisse Fahrtnmann,
Marie-Noëlle Farcy, Sylvie Fasbinder,
Paula Fernandes, Clara Froumenty,
Christophe Gallois, Jordan Gerber,
Richard Goedert, Matthias Heitbrink,
Christine Henry, Juliette Hesse,
Olivier Hoffmann, Camille d'Huart,
Clara Jeanneau, Julie Jephos,
Germain Kerschen, Yousra Khalis,
Clara Kremer, Deborah Lambolez,
Laurence Le Gal, Vanessa Lecomte,
Nathalie Lesure, Carine Lilliu,
Ioanna Madenoglu, Frédéric Maraud,
Tawfik Matine El Din, António Mendes,
Laura Mescolini, Mélanie Meyer,
Clément Minighetti, Barbara Neiseler,
Florence Ostende, Carlotta Pierleoni,
Markus Pilgram, Inès Planchenault,
Clémentine Proby, Boris Reiland,
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Bettina Steinbrügge, Joel Valabrega,
Vere Van Gool, Sam Wirtz, Ana Wiscour

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Courtesy of Castello di Rivoli and Kunstverein Hannover, 2021–23
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Photo: Krzysztof Smaga
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Coproduction Mudam Luxembourg and Kunstverein Hannover
Photo: Mathias Völzke | Courtesy of Kunstverein Hannover
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Photo: Jean Vong

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Acknowledgements

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