



*table of contents * arts listings * about / contact



Kurt Hentschläger's FEED.X. Photo by Bruno Klomfar

arts

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Elektra celebrates art at the intersection of humanity and technology.

by Nora Rosenthal

Highlights of the digital art festival's 20th anniversary edition.

The Elektra International Digital Arts Festival, this year coinciding with the International Digital Art Biennial, has a truly vast line-up in its 20th year.

There is “**Repeat**,” a world premiere by Louis-Philippe Demers (who holds a Ph.D. in “robotic performances”) featuring four dancers and exoskeletons, various immersive video works at the Satosphere (the vast domed cinema inside the Société des arts technologiques) and multiple performances and exhibitions questioning our relation to the body and the technologies around us.

A digital festival undergoes more profound and rapid changes than a festival in nearly any other artistic medium, and Alain Thibault, Elektra’s artistic director, suggested that future artists may soon enough drop the modifier digital from their work, such is tech’s ubiquity in our lives. Thibault spoke about the trend towards an “integration of [the] human and technology” at Elektra, and since this integration is already so culturally embedded, the digital artists presenting seem able to relax a little about their own digitalness and talk about other, broader cultural phenomena.

At the launch, Nien Tzu Weng was performing Peter van Haaften and Michael Montanaro’s “**Spiel**,” in which Weng approaches onlookers and invites them, through gesture, to speak into her earpiece. The earpiece in turn amplifies and modulates what you’ve said into Weng’s mouth as she lightly dances to her onlooker/speaker’s warped communication. The effect was disarming, made all the more so by a gathered crowd whose general vibe suggested that approximately 60 per cent of the audience might be animatedly discussing the philosopher **Andy Clark** at any one time.

“**FEED.X.**,” the immersive installation work by the artist Kurt Hentschläger and Elektra’s headlining show, was experiencing some technical stroboscope and smoke-machine related difficulties during the press screening, but even from the somewhat

abortive preview it's easy to see why people rave about the work and yet seem unable to describe it. FEED.X begins with approximately 20 minutes of expressionistic video work (the excerpt we saw was of a rippling mass of balletic bodies filtered through an effect I imagine might be labelled Boschian Blur on the next Adobe update). Then, the room fills with a truly vast quantity of smoke, and you are bombarded with strobes until your brain, desperate to create patterns and meaning, graces you with a powerfully hallucinatory result. FEED.X seems like just the thing to induce your next asthmatic Tinder date to clutch at your clothes in a mixture of anaerobic apprehension and more cerebral acid-flashback-type anxiety while envisioning their final spiritual upheaval at the hands of a raging house fire. Definitely my idea of a party.

I'm also particularly interested in the free exhibit **Project H.E.A.R.T** at Perte de Signal., a collaboration between artists Erin Gee and Alex M. Lee that they term "combat therapy." In the project, participants are asked to "summon their enthusiasm," not in some vague cheerleading sense but physically, using a device that measures "skin conductance [and] increased heartbeat" among other physical manifestations of zeal. Your fervour (or presumably your lack thereof) then causes a "holographic pop star to sing to her team of soldiers, inspiring them to continue fighting their enemies and their own lack of confidence in times of global economic instability." This strikes me as both bizarre and thoughtfully fun, and I hope to sweatily encourage holographic bloodshed through song sometime later this week.

Also note the nice timing between the Elektra Festival itself and its open call for proposals. The deadline for **submissions** is June 20, meaning all you digitally minded artists out there have just enough time to research Elektra's curatorial angle in person before submitting your own projects. Moreover, if you're looking for inspiration, **Anteism Books** is hosting an exhibit both of artworks and texts that examine the intersection of art and emerging technologies.

The Elektra Festival promises both to be deeply nerdy and just as hip: a meeting of minds and a big smoky party. Enjoy! ■

Elektra is happening at the Société des arts technologiques (1201 St-Laurent) and Usine C (1345 Lalonde) through June 16, with some exhibits lasting longer and **additional venues** spread across town. \$6.95-\$8.69 for Repeat; \$20-\$25 for FEED.X; \$15-\$20 for nightly Immersive experiences; certain events free. More details **here**.

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Arts editor

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