

# Pierre Huyghe: *Umwelt*

As the boundaries between humans and technology continue to dissolve, what does it look like to share consciousness with other emerging and nonhuman life-forms?

The artist Pierre Huyghe considers this question in *Umwelt*, a work he describes as a “co-production of imagination between human and machine.” Working with researchers at Kyoto University, Huyghe asked a human subject to imagine a set of images—including living organisms, prehistoric tools, machines, and artworks—while an fMRI scanner recorded their brain activity. This data was fed into artificial neural networks trained to reconstruct images based on vast visual databases. Hallucinatory and fragmentary, the resulting stream of mental images evokes the experience of pareidolia—the tendency for the mind to perceive familiar patterns and shapes in random forms—while conjuring a reality very different from our own.

*Umwelt* extends Huyghe’s engagement with art as self-generating, speculative, and unpredictable. The work is activated in real time according to two conditions: the gazes of visitors inhabiting the Garden, which are detected by a sensor, and data collected from virtual simulations of cancer cell mutations. Together, these conditions determine new images and sequences on the screens, drawing metaphorical connections between the limitless proliferation enabled by algorithmic systems and metastatic growth.

*Umwelt* charts the shrinking gap between new forms of artificial intelligence and the human brain. Shaping encounters between humans, machines, and the environment, Huyghe’s work explores new ways to understand consciousness and the changing nature of images in our algorithmic age.

Organized by Stuart Comer, The Lonti Ebers Chief Curator of Media and Performance, with Kelly Filreis, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance, and Elizabeth Wickham, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture.

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