

Vulnerability in the Age of Media Art

CYFEST 15

The topic of this special issue of *Leonardo* journal for CYFEST 15 is Vulnerability. We invited an international team of artists, scientists, curators, and scholars to examine the diverse perspectives on vulnerability, encompassing the fragility of ecosystems, the vulnerability of memory, the (anti)fragility of human and nonhuman bodies, and the complexities of biological, social, and cyber spaces.

This publication accompanies the CYLAND MediaArt-Lab's 15th international CYFEST festival of media art. Since its inception in 2007, CYFEST has primarily aimed to examine the dialogue between various visual languages and technology cultures and thus explore a way of communing with both art professionals and scientific communities. CYFEST unites artists, curators, educators, engineers, programmers, and media activists from all over the world and creates an inclusive platform for the mapping, mediation, and documentation of new media art on different regional and international levels. CYFEST is one of the world's few nomadic cultural events. CYFEST 15: Vulnerability is a series of traveling exhibitions hosted worldwide: It took place in Yerevan, Armenia, and Miami, USA, in 2023 and Venice, Italy, and New York in 2024.

In conceiving the exhibition, curators Elena Gubanova and Silvia Burini positioned inherent vulnerability as a universal human condition, a truth starkly revealed by recent global events that have shattered the illusion of perpetual well-being. Paradoxically, this very vulnerability forms the bedrock of self-awareness and dignity; it becomes a source of strength, fostering empathy and ethical responsibility. Building on Nassim Nicholas Taleb's notion of antifragility, the curators suggest that while fragility leads to destruction, embracing risk and experiencing setbacks can ultimately make us stronger. In this evolving landscape where the notion of vulnerability takes on new dimensions in the bio-cyber age, the curators allude that art uniquely holds the capacity to confront universal issues. It offers compassion, hope, and the potential to inspire antifragile foundations for a different future, recognizing that this apparent fragility can be our most resilient strength.

Leonardo and CYLAND both foster and guide dialogues on art, science, and technology, in addition to supporting freedom of expression and an open exchange of ideas. In this issue, authors explore diverse perspectives on vulnerability and examine our evolving relationship with the world, from the preservation of aging media art to the dynamic equilibrium within natural and technological realms. These articles offer a wide range of cultural, scientific, ethical,

philosophical, and aesthetic perspectives. How can artists adapt technology to their own artistic languages and visions as new technologies rapidly develop? How can artists challenge the established definitions of what art is and what it can be, as well as shape the discourse on contemporary art, gaming, and human interaction? What is the future of simulation technologies in art? What is the role of generative AI in constructing and visualizing personal and collective memories? How can technical limitations be interpreted as metaphors for the inherent unreliability of memory? How can generative AI and fragmentation of knowledge via AI be utilized as artistic tools to reimagine and reinterpret past environments? How might vulnerability in Venice—a city that embodies a precarious, vulnerable position—remain an inspiration for vibrant culture and contemporary arts and design? How can art and collaborative projects be used as a tool to engage the public in scientific conservation efforts? How does art examine the relationship between traditional cultural concepts and contemporary technological realities, exploring the intersection of technology and human experience? How do digital tools mediate our understanding of human experience? How do algorithmic processes contribute to the creation of artworks that express emotion? What is the relationship between computational analysis and the resulting emotional impact? Through the prism of hybrid forms and texts, the authors push the boundaries of art, science, and technology, challenging both medium and content. They embrace volatility as a source of information and an opportunity for the creative process.

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