No danger of spinning in circles

Interview: Sara Weigelt, ti&m

Interview // Sara Weigelt, Editor of ti&m special, in conversation with art@work #011 artist Jan-Hendrik Pelz, about his «Painting by numbers» project, which he will be working on with ti&m over the course of this year.

in order of appearance

Wyatt   PETER FONDA
Billy   DENNIS HOPPER
Jesus   ANTONIO MENDOZA

Jan-Hendrik Pelz: Favorites. (Chrissy Angliker, Easy Rider, Time: 89:06), oil on canvas
For his «Favorites» series, Jan-Hendrik Pelz asked 66 artists to name their favorite film and give an arbitrary series of numbers to act as a time code. Later he stopped the films at the corresponding times and transformed the resulting unforeseeable images into oil paintings.

ti&m: Jan, the title of this year's ti&m special is «Total digitalization – the networking of things.» What relationship do you have with digitalization and the Internet of Things?
Jan-Hendrik Pelz: I have a very personal relationship with digitalization. Looking back, I think I've actually grown into the digital age. I am part of the generation that was born analog and grew up digital: sent my first email in primary school, had my first ICQ chat in the eighth grade, then posted childhood photos on Facebook – though I don't do the latter any more. As with all fundamental social changes, I think you can make arguments for and against digitalization. If it's handled well and is integrated properly, there are more pluses than minuses; but this requires both sides – people and technology – to adapt to each other. It's clear that once humans transform a technology, they are ultimately themselves transformed by it. If we want to avoid the process taking on a life

About
Jan-Hendrik Pelz
Freelance Artist

Jan-Hendrik Pelz currently lives in Stuttgart. He studied video and conceptual art at the Basel Academy of Art and Design and painting with Christian Jankowski at the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design. He has exhibited his conceptual work, in which he frequently combines painting with a variety of media, at Jungkunst 10 in Winterthur and the Videonale Parcours at the Bonn Museum of Modern Art.
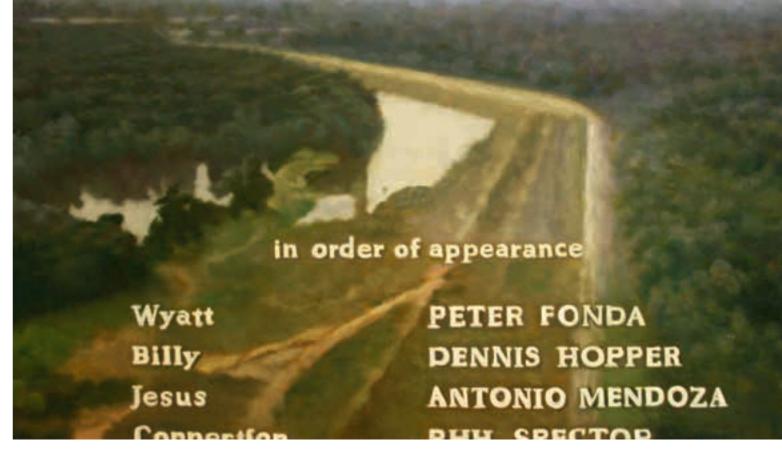
of its own in the worst sense, we need to be cautious and develop systems that can adapt to us and support us. Human beings should always be the focal point. However, I actually take a very positive view of digitalization.

Innovation and creativity come up a lot in this issue. What is your own creative process like?
I am a conceptual painter. This means that the artistic idea is paramount for me, and ultimately finds its outlet in painting, often mingled with text or other media. The idea provides the framework, and this in turn affects how I approach the subject. I'm always looking for ways to leave behind traditional approaches to image creation, and to develop and apply new or alternative methods. For the «Favorites» series that I produced between 2013 and 2015, I asked 66 artists to tell me their favorite film and give an arbitrary series of numbers as a time code. Then I stopped the films at the relevant point and converted the resulting unforeseeable stills into paintings. This resulted in 66 oil paintings based on the collaboration between me and the other artists who had named their films and guided me towards the images. The final composition was determined at random by the spontaneous identification of the time code numbers.

What do you have planned for art@work #011?
For the «Painting by Numbers» series that I'm putting together for art@work, I'd like to ask the employees what the most important book is to them as far as their work is concerned. Predeter-

mined page and sentence numbers that are identical for all participants will identify a sentence to act as the starting point and subject of my painting. This experiment is designed to make the written word visible and transform it into the medium of painting. I find it very exciting to focus on books – which, like

> *«The challenge is to convince as many employees as possible about the project and get them to take part in something new.»*

paintings, store data and information – as a subject in the context of digitalization and to transfer their codes to a third medium. The starting point here is data, in this case letters and numbers, whose form is changed just as happens with digitalization, and which then enter a new state.

In the context of art@work, you will be working closely with our employees. Do you foresee any challenges?
I very much like working in teams. Crossing the boundaries into another area is always inspiring and productive. Artists who only

concern themselves with the field of artistic endeavor generally find it difficult to recognize new stimuli and risk spinning in circles. Ultimately this is the case for every area of work, and the reason why art@work will most likely be a win-win. The challenge is to convince as many employees as possible about the project and get them to take part in something new. In the end, this will benefit everyone.

What are you most looking forward to in the project?
The moment of conversion from language to image. That is a very exciting moment, both for me and for the participants. Which sentence will be picked out, how will it be transformed into a painting, and what will happen in the process of transformation? I'd very much like to integrate employees into this process, if they are so inclined. That way they can give me ideas, and make suggestions about how the sentence could be depicted, or how things or people in the sentence might look. Is there a chance a particular character might suddenly even start to look like the corresponding employee?

Just one more question, a very different one: why did you become an artist and not a computer scientist?
As an artist I have the freedom to work experimentally, and I can change direction if I need to. So tomorrow I could work with woodlice or comet trajectory calculations, whatever I feel like. Whether the woodlouse project would actually work is another matter (laughs).