

HITO STEYERL

Der Menschheit ist die Kugel bei einem Ohr hinein und beim anderen herausgeflogen [Humanity Had the Bullet Go In Through One Ear and Out Through the Other]

1

MAK – Press and PR
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Press Release
Vienna, 24.6.2025

Press Conference
Tuesday, 24.6.2025, 10 am

Hito Steyerl represents a central position in contemporary art with her critical exploration of political conflicts and social processes and developments, and of how these interrelate with technological advances and AI. Under the title *Der Menschheit ist die Kugel bei einem Ohr hinein und beim anderen herausgeflogen [Humanity Had the Bullet Go In Through One Ear and Out Through the Other]*, a quotation from Karl Kraus, the MAK presents the Berlin-based artist, filmmaker, and author's first solo exhibition in Vienna. In the MAK, Hito Steyerl (* 1966) is showing two multimedia installations: *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2016) and *Mechanical Kurds* (2025), that from different perspectives narrate tales of war and crisis in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq.

In *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2016) Steyerl uses outsized illuminated letters to represent the five most commonly used English words in song titles of the 2010s, according to *Billboard* magazine—words that also impart a sense of global crisis. As animated typeface, they light up at several places in the module-like installation, which is reminiscent of an athletic training circuit built to resemble a military obstacle course.

Two videos are embedded in this setting: the eponymous *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* documents laboratory tests with robots trained to save people in disaster zones. The sequences also show the scientists kicking the robots to make them work more efficiently. *Robots Today* takes us to the streets of the Kurdish center Diyarbakır in southeastern Turkish Anatolia. In 2015/16 the city was the site of street fighting that was met with violence and destruction. Steyerl creates a narrative that connects this resistance to the city's cultural heritage and the ingenuity of Ismail al-Jazari, a 12th century engineer who created automata and is considered the father of robotics.

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For years Hito Steyerl's works have dealt with the effects of this conflict on Kurdish lands and with the war in Syria—as does also her new video installation *Mechanical Kurds* (2025). In this work she alludes to a historical chess automaton, built in the 18th century by Viennese courtier Wolfgang von Kempelen and presented to Empress Maria Theresia as a “Turk.” This novel piece of technology functioned by means of a dwarf who was secreted inside it. Philosopher and art theoretician Walter Benjamin mentions the chess automation in his *On the Concept of History*. He calls it “a puppet in Turkish dress”: a system of mirrors creates the illusion of an automaton, but in reality the aforementioned dwarf guides the puppet's hand.

Steyerl develops the story of the chess automaton further: in the dwarf is hidden a Kurdish woman, and the game of chess is transformed into a war situation located in a landscape created by aerial photographs taken by drones and representing the chessboard-like streets and buildings of the refugee camps in the lands of the Kurdish regional administration in northern Iraq. For the work, Hito Steyerl interviewed twelve refugees from Iraq, who were commissioned by international firms to process military camera footage for AI models. The refugees were not informed of the background to their work.

Hito Steyerl's many-faceted, tightly meshed oeuvre alternates continually between reality and fiction. Militarization and its networking with civil society is a recurring theme of her artistic praxis. The title of the MAK exhibition, *Der Menschheit ist die Kugel bei einem Ohr hinein und beim anderen herausgeflogen* [*Humanity Had the Bullet Go In Through One Ear and Out Through the Other*], a quotation from *Nachts* [At Night] (1918) by the Viennese satirist, cultural critic, and observer of the contemporary political scene, Karl Kraus, is also a commentary on the global political situation and at the same time an allusion to Steyerl's lecture *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* at the 2013 Istanbul Biennale—where by tracing the origin of a bullet she drew attention to the way that war, industry, economy, architecture, art, and museums are inextricably linked.

Hito Steyerl

Hito Steyerl is a film-maker and author who lives in Berlin and teaches in Munich. Among other distinctions she has received the Erich Fromm and Käthe Kollwitz Awards.

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](https://mak.at/en/press).

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Press Conference

Tuesday, 24.6.2025, 10 am

Opening

Tuesday, 24.6.2025, 7 pm

Free admission to the exhibition opening

Artist Talk

Artist Hito Steyerl in conversation with curator Bärbel Vischer

Tuesday, 24.6.2025, 6 pm

MAK Columned Main Hall

3

Exhibition Location

MAK Contemporary

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates

25.6.2025–12.4.2026

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Curator

Bärbel Vischer, Curator, MAK Contemporary Art Collection

MAK Admission

€ 16.50/15.50*; reduced € 13.50/12.50*; every Tuesday 6–9 pm:
admission € 8/7.50*

Admission free for children and teens under 19

* Online ticket price

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