

## **Michel Winterberg**

### ***Drifting Futures***

**Sun 10 May - Sun 5 July 2026**

Algorithmic systems have long shaped our daily routine without us even realizing it. They have gradually become the invisible infrastructure of our lives. We regularly navigate a digital thicket whose paths have been programmed by global tech giants, while our sense of a self-determined future drifts further and further from our control.

In his exhibition *Drifting Futures*, media artist Michel Winterberg turns his attention to what lies behind the visible surface of our digital reality. He confronts us with the paradoxical entanglement that leads to a sense of drifting futures: While we use digital technology with blind complacency, we repress its problematic aspects.

Winterberg's works are rooted in New Media Art. They continue two central traditions of 1960s computer art: on the one hand, Winterberg uses the computer as a generative tool for aesthetic image creation. On the other hand, he employs it as a cybernetic agent that investigates complex systems through feedback. In the majority of Winterberg's installations, these two traditions are interwoven and radicalized for the 21st century.

While the pioneers of the 1960s often viewed machines with optimism and sought harmony between humans and computers, Winterberg focuses on the fragility, contradictions exhaustion of these systems.

His artistic approach is deeply rooted in programming, hands-on creation and experimentation. Like the pioneers of computer art, he develops, builds and configures his own devices. In doing so, he refuses to be merely a consumer and retains a certain degree of control over media and technology. He uses his technological knowledge in the spirit of a subversive engineering to expose the logic of digital gadgets and their hidden power structures.

In some installations, Winterberg combines everyday objects, electronic components, and computers into highly complex installations. This "intelligent tinkering" is technically flawless, yet rejects industrial mass production. Through this radical independence, Winterberg leads us away from the fascinated observation of the machine toward a critical analysis of a world that threatens to drift away in its own cycles of data, consumption, and destruction.

## Gallery I

### **1. *Political Jesus*, 2026**

In *Political Jesus*, Michel Winterberg explores the connection between sacred iconography and digital protest culture. The work examines how contemporary social struggles are waged with a moral intensity that was once reserved for religious convictions.

At the center of the work is a small-scale, second-hand bronze wall sculpture. A miniature display, resembling a banner, is set into the outstretched arms of the Christ figure. On it, slogans from the global online community appear in a handwritten style. Through the rapid timing and random sequence of the messages, the work demonstrates the levelling effect of seriality: in the endless digital loop, the depth of content threatens to be lost.

The work critically reflects the phenomenon of "clicktivism," that form of online activism in which complex global crises are reduced to easily consumable slogans. It questions the meaning of solidarity in the age of likes and reposts.

### **2. *Pendel für sieben Monologe*, 2018**

The cybernetic sculpture *Pendulum for Seven Monologues* is based on a continuous exchange of signals. It transforms electromagnetic radiation, which is barely perceptible to humans, into audible sound.

A random generator alternately activates seven electronic devices, including power supplies, a computer fan, and a CRT television. The resulting electromagnetic waves are detected by a radiation sensor on the underside of the motorized pendulum and translated into audible sound signals. These sounds are amplified into the room via two horn speakers.

Here, Winterberg makes the energetic reality of electrosmog directly perceptible. He exposes the supposed silence of digital infrastructure as aggressive noise. While the pioneers of cybernetics were still seeking the ideal of conversation between human and machine, Winterberg's apparatus conducts isolated monologues. Humans become witnesses to a technological soliloquy that increasingly eludes human control.

### **3. *Insect Disguise*, 2021 | 4. *Stranded Topography*, 2021**

These two prints are based on generatively created still frames from an animation. The images capture fleeting moments of a form that is constantly transforming into amorphous shapes.

### **5. *Lost Trajectory*, 2026**

The work addresses the creeping decline in male fertility in Western industrialised nations. It draws attention to invisible harmful factors which, beyond human perception, deeply interfere with our biological existence.

Three phallically charged, gold-plated plastic bananas are arranged on a wooden plinth. Sterile water vapour continuously escapes from the interior of one of the fruits. The combination of a trivial object, refined surfaces, and a process-based element draws on strategies of Neo-Dadaism. In this way, Winterberg highlights the absurdity of a civilisation that pays for its material prosperity with the gradual destruction of its own reproductive foundations.

However, following Donna Haraway, one could argue that, in the face of global overpopulation and ecological crises, dwindling fertility should be understood less as a loss and more as a potential relief for the planet.

#### **6a. *Licking Ice Cream Under a Large Mushroom, 2023***

For this work, the artist uses the computer as a tool for image generation. To this end, he fed variations of the work's title as prompts into an early version of an image-generating AI model.

From the resulting images, he selected those exhibiting digital artefacts, image errors and unnatural distortions. Presented in rapid succession, they create a chaotic flood of images in which female figures oscillate between humorous absurdity and grotesque disfigurement. They appear beneath gigantic mushrooms amidst surreal landscapes.

The work reveals how algorithmic biases and coded inequalities are further reinforced by the filtering logic of technical systems. Winterberg thus builds on the work of artists such as Trevor Paglen and Stephanie Dinkins, who have been critically examining the bias of AI systems since the 2010s.

#### **6b. *Licking Ice Cream Under a Large Mushroom, 2026***

The artist selected from the AI-generated images in *6b* those that most clearly reveal the algorithmic distortion of female faces. These images were then printed on aluminium Dibond panels.

The work illustrates that computer-generated art, which initially exists only as code, only becomes suitable for exhibition once it has been transferred to a physical medium.

### **Gallery II**

#### **7. *Nimmersatt, das Spiel mit den Hungrigen, 2012***

The sound-responsive installation *Nimmersatt, The Game with the Hungry* consists of 25 saucepans arranged in a square formation. Via a cybernetic system, each lid is connected to a servomotor by means of a cord.

As soon as viewers approach the installation, a motion sensor detects their presence and activates the motors via a computer-controlled system. This causes the lids to rise rhythmically, accompanied by a soundscape reminiscent of a whimper. The sequence of hoarse sounds creates an atmosphere of existential distress. When the strings relax again, the lids slam hard against the metal of the pots.

With this work, Winterberg addresses the contradictions of global consumer society. Through the title and the sound installation, he creates a powerful image in which abundance and hunger appear as two sides of the same system.

#### **8. *Traces of the Ephemeral Code, 2026***

We live in an age of total documentation, yet its longevity is uncertain given the instability of formats and our dependence on physical infrastructure. In *Traces of the Ephemeral Code*, Winterberg envisions a future in which all that remains of our digital world is an illegible layer of sediment. Like the legendary snow woman Yuki-onna from Japanese folklore, the digital world seems fleeting and intangible. It is like a phantasm that leaves no trace.

At the heart of the installation is a device incorporating components used for cooling gaming computers. Using ultrasonic technology, water is atomised and settles as a growing layer of ice crystals on a cooled cast aluminium figure representing Yuki-onna. The figure's aura is part of a cybernetic control loop: it reacts interactively to loud noises, causing its appearance to darken.

On this circular projection surface behind Yuki-onna, the artist visualises the decay of digital data. He demonstrates how image information becomes illegible due to the short lifespan of storage media and playback devices. Images of our world, such as snow, microchips or family videos, are transformed into abstract pixel patterns and digital glitches. Glitches are digital faults caused by incorrect, defected or missing information.

In Winterberg's video, images of microchip circuit boards are overlaid with petrification effects. These resemble fossilised remains from a distant future. In it, humanity, along with its digital world, appears as an illegible layer that has been deposited in the earth like geological sediment.

This decay is accompanied by a soundscape of manipulated data noise.

#### **9. *Zeitstrom*, 2022**

In *Zeitstrom*, Michel Winterberg transforms his own video and audio footage from Delhi in 2014 into a digital painting. He uses the computer as an image-generation tool to create glitches through custom-programmed code. These multiply the figures in slowed-down sequences of movement and alter their appearance through a digital colour aesthetic.

Whilst bicycles glide horizontally, diagonal cascades of colour break through the image, an aesthetic reminiscent of Gerhard Richter's squeegee paintings. Motifs dissolve into meditative veils of colour that flow into one another in slow motion, forming high-contrast surfaces. In this way, the algorithm transforms documentary reality into an endless, flowing abstraction that conceives of life as a constant, digital process of transformation.

#### **10. *The Oracle of the Hidden Flow*, 2026**

The interactive installation brings a hybrid sea goddess to life, allowing visitors to experience the ecological crisis of marine pollution first-hand.

Through an interface utilising sensory feedback, visitors can communicate with an oracle. Images of marine litter appear on the interface. This dystopian view of the state of the oceans is countered by an immersive soundscape of ethereal water sounds.

Winterberg programmed and constructed the entire system. In the spirit of subversive engineering and precise bricolage, he avoids reliance on off-the-shelf consumer products. He creates a technological depth that lends the 'oracle' its credibility.

#### **11. *Anderswelt*, 2026**

In *Anderswelt* too, Winterberg uses AI for image generation. Through text-to-image prompting and a step-by-step 'morph-mix', he creates hybrid beings with the aid of machine creativity. Their existence inhabits an intermediate realm between familiar form and machine-like strangeness. The repetitive process remains in a state of permanent metamorphosis and becomes an image of a hidden algorithmic reality.

#### **12. *Melting – the show must go on!* 2021**

In this expansive installation, Michel Winterberg combines cybernetic systems with highly aesthetic, computer-controlled image generation in a most intriguing way.

The electrical apparatus consists of a cooling circuit into which the artist has integrated elements from computer and cooling systems. In an endless cycle, water mist freezes onto a cooled metal plate and slowly forms a delicate layer of ice crystals. After around seven minutes, the ice suddenly melts again.

A webcam is directed at the metal plate and captures the process in real time. The images are modified by software and projected live. A kaleidoscopic effect makes the ice patterns appear like glacial moraines or rock gardens. The reflections of the green light from the apparatus's tubes create visual effects reminiscent of sprouting vegetation in parched landscapes.

With this installation, Winterberg draws attention to the enormous resource consumption of by our digital society and its environmental impact. The work reveals that cooling has become the 'life insurance' of digital infrastructures: a significant proportion of data centres' electricity usage is accounted for by the removal of the heat generated during data processing. In this way, the installation becomes an ecological warning about the hidden material footprint of our digital existence, in which the melting of glaciers and the 'melting' of hardware both threaten systemic collapse.

### **13. *Der Versuch eines Wiederaufbaus*, 2022**

In *An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Michel Winterberg employs computer-assisted image generation and generative sound production to transform landscapes of rubble into new visual compositions. Taking a photograph of the destroyed old town of Homs by Andrew McConnell as his starting point, Winterberg uses the computer as an active creative tool that continuously rearranges the ruins through a digital kaleidoscope.

Users must physically kneel before the interface to intervene in the process using a joystick. Yet, the attempt to piece the fragments of destruction back together into a coherent whole inevitably remains futile.

The work constitutes a radical rejection of the promise that AI and digital technologies can heal or reconstruct any form of destruction. Here, Winterberg uses computer technologies to lay bare a deep cultural wound that no algorithm in the world can heal.

### **14. *Weapon Rain*, 2023**

In *Weapon Rain*, Winterberg uses a physically simulated animation as a form of critical data visualisation. In it, he translates abstract statistics on national arms exports and displaced and internally displaced people into an animation set against a menacing soundscape. As toy-sized ammunition, money and oil barrels swirl through the visual space, rankings of arms exports alternate with figures on displaced persons in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia and Congo. In this way, the work makes tangible the entanglement of profit, displacement, and the economic logic underlying the violence.

## Events

### Vernissage

Sun 10 May 2026 | 11 am | Foyer, E-WERK

### Workshop | *Hacking the Mouse* with Christoph Schneider

Sa 6 June 2026 | 2–5 pm

Target group: young people aged 12–18 years. Everyone is warmly invited to participate!

Registration until Fri 5 June 2026 via Mail to [gruen@ewerk-freiburg.de](mailto:gruen@ewerk-freiburg.de)

### Sound Performance: *Symbiotic Distortion* with Michel Winterberg

Tue 30 June 2026 | 7 pm | Kammertheater, E-WERK

### Public Tours

Fri 15 May | 6pm

Fri 5 June | 6pm

Sat 13 June | 2pm

Sun 5 July | 2pm

### Special Opening Hours | *Performing Democracy 2026*

Tue 12 May | 6-8:30pm

Wed 13 May | 6-8:30pm

### Galerie für Gegenwartskunst, E-WERK

Eschholzstr. 77

79106 Freiburg i. Br.

[www.gegenwartskunst-freiburg.de](http://www.gegenwartskunst-freiburg.de)

### Opening Hours

Fri 5–8pm

Sat 2–8pm

Sun 2–6pm