

Fondazione Prada

HITO STEYERL THE ISLAND

ENG

Milano

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THE ISLAND

Hito Steyerl's (b. 1966, Munich, Germany) site-specific exhibition project "The Island" immerses Osservatorio in a flow of multiple interwoven storylines united by the recurring motif of flooding, addressing urgent topics such as the rise of authoritarian tendencies driven by emerging technologies like AI, the climate crisis, and the growing political pressures on scientific research.

Artist, essayist, filmmaker, and lecturer, Steyerl has developed an experimental practice grounded in critical research into contemporary socio-political and cultural debates, tracing hidden connections among power, emerging technologies, Internet cultures, and global capitalism. With a distinctive mix of satire and critique, since the early 2010s Steyerl's work is situated at the intersection of documentary film and experimental cinema, often extending these forms into the spatial and digital realms.

The exhibition unfolds over the two floors of the Osservatorio, featuring a new film created by the artist for this project, which takes shape as a video installation and articulates through installations, structures, and video interviews. Together they form a physical and conceptual landscape where the notion of time and space superimpose and interact, reorganized through the logic of quantum physics and science fiction.

The inspiration for "The Island" originates from an anecdote told some time ago to Hito Steyerl by literary critic and academic Darko R. Suvin (b. 1930, Zagreb, Croatia), author of the seminal book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979). During a bomb attack in Zagreb in 1941, Suvin reacted to this shocking event by projecting himself into the American sci-fi serial film, *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* (1938), where the comic book hero saves the Earth's destiny. As explained by Steyerl, "This was the idea of science fiction, to create parallel worlds even under very adverse circumstances. Later, it occurred to me that we could implement this visually through quantum technology, as it deals with sudden jumps in states and the idea that several states can coexist simultaneously."

"The Island" stages unexpected leaps across alternative spatial and temporal dimensions. References to quantum physics—superposition, entanglement, higher harmonics—serve to "bring to-

gether all the disparate realities” into a choral composition. Within this framework, science fiction functions as a register of invention that estranges viewers from habitual assumptions by fusing speculative narratives with scientific data. Echoing Hito Steyerl’s claim that “the opposite of truth is not fiction, but a lie,” the exhibition uses speculative narrative to investigate the concept of truth. Steyerl’s project unfolds into four interrelated narratives—“The Artificial Island,” “Lucciole,” “The Birth of Science Fiction,” and “Flash!”—and spans multiple scales, ranging from animal microorganisms to galaxies, from Neolithic ruins to imagined futures, from literary and cinematic narratives to popular cultures, from the pop visual language of comic books to the virality of AI-generated images.

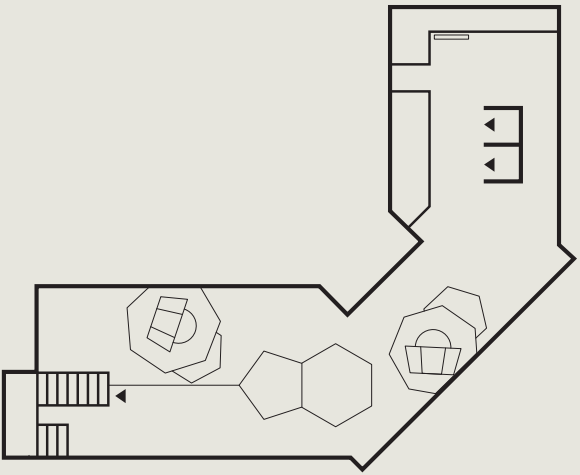


Hito Steyerl, *Image* CC 4.0. Courtesy of the artist, Fondazione Prada, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul

The present already seems to be a world of different alternate realities, a parody of a quantum many-worlds interpretation, a world of filter bubbles and closed information horizons. So, in a way, the lesson was to reverse Suvin's conclusions and explore entanglement and superposition instead of the splitting and bifurcation of alternative worlds. [...] So now the task is to find the harmonic overtones of the different worlds in order to try to weave a composite, or even a composition, like the waves of the sea overlapping and creating different patterns. As quantum physicist Tommaso Calarco says in the film, "There is such, I think a higher harmonics generation which is really about, you know, overtones coming out of interactions."

Excerpt from *The Island: Hito Steyerl, Quaderno #40*, published by Fondazione Prada.

LEVEL 1



The first level of the Osservatorio introduces Hito Steyerl's new film "The Island," which is displayed on the second level. The film explores four main storylines, unfolded within the exhibition space: "The Artificial Island," "Lucciole," "The Birth of Science Fiction," and "Flash!"

At the entrance to the first level of the Osservatorio, visitors encounter two poems by Darko R. Suvin, presented within an installation composed of driftwood and a copy of his book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*.

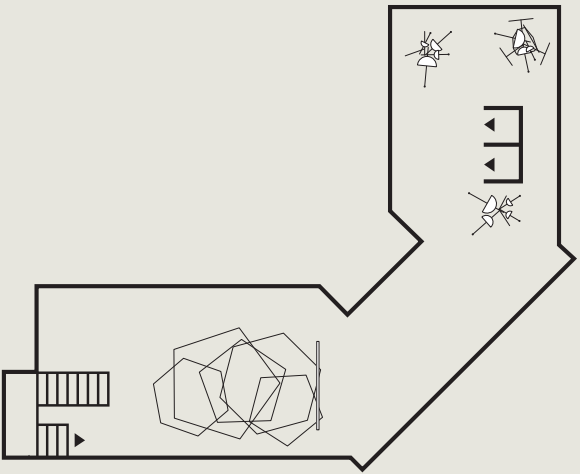
A luminous spherical installation transports the audience into the imagery of a submerged archaeological site scanned in 3D, revealing the key narrative strain of "The Artificial Island." It is a documentary scan of a submerged Neolithic artificial island off the coast of Korčula in Croatia, discovered in 2021 by archaeologist Mate Parica of the University of Zadar. Once a heptagonal settlement linked by a narrow walkway, the prehistoric village has lain submerged for 7,000 years beneath 4.5 meters of water, representing a sinister premonition of the future consequences of climate crisis disasters.

The visual and symbolic presence of bioluminescent plankton and drifting jellyfish glowing across the sea surface refers to the narrative strand of "Lucciole" (fireflies). In the 1960s, the organic molecule Luciferin was studied by Japanese scientist Osamu Shimomura (Kyoto, 1928 – Nagasaki, 2018),

who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2008 along with Martin Chalfie and Roger Y. Tsien, for the discovery and development of Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP). Shimomura isolated Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP) from jellyfish and discovered that the protein glowed green when illuminated with ultraviolet light. GFP, which emits a shimmering light, operates as a bioindicator to track and visualize pollution and ocean acidification, as well as a marker for medical screening.

Within a glowing molecular outline on the floor—traced in electroluminescent blue tape—four LED screens display documentary clips. These video fragments anticipate and expand on the project's central scientific themes, featuring interviews with quantum physicist Tommaso Calarco, archaeologist Mate Parica, language historian Sachi Shimomura, daughter of the Nobel Prize-winning chemist, and author Darko R. Suvin. In his interview, Suvin mentions the anecdote that inspired Steyerl for the project. During a bomb attack in fascist ruled Zagreb in 1941, he projected himself traveling to Mars, echoing the adventures of his hero Flash Gordon, thus outlining the storylines "Flash!" and "The Birth of Science Fiction." This fusion of two separate worlds, one dramatically real and the other imagined, marked the foundation of Suvin's interest for how science fiction operates. His definition of this genre as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" sparked a decade-long critical debate that extended beyond literature, approaching science fiction with a political and philosophical perspective.

LEVEL 2



On the second level of the Osservatorio, every artwork encountered on the first level reveals itself as an emanation of the film “The Island,” which gathers the exhibition’s narrative threads into a multilayered composition, resonating as a single, compelling orchestral whole.

An environment suggests the movie theater where Darko R. Suvin first watched *Flash Gordon’s Trip to Mars* in the early 1940s. Red armchairs are placed on a platform whose geometric form echoes both molecular structures and the heptagonal perimeter of the Dalmatian submerged island. Projected on the screen, Hito Steyerl’s film intertwines scientific discovery with science fiction, traditional Dalmatian choir (Klapa) with quantum physics, and AI-generated content with archaeological ruins.

Around the cinema setting, three driftwood installations support a set of hemispheres displaying projections of 3D scans of Neolithic artifacts and photogrammetries of the archaeological site. The presence of the visitor triggers a visual quantum-noise effect.

Through her film and exhibition project, Hito Steyerl connects the concepts of hyper fragmented “junk time” of technology-driven capitalist world and the notion of “deep time,” encompassing nonhuman geological and planetary timescales that exceed the constructed boundaries of human temporality.

CENNI BIOGRAFICI



Hito Steyerl, Photo Leon Kahane

Filmmaker and writer, Hito Steyerl was born in 1966 in Munich, Germany and lives in Berlin. She teaches media art at the Academy of Fine Arts Munich.

In 2025 she was awarded the Erich-Fromm Prize, which she shared with artist and author James Bridle. In 2021, Steyerl received the Honorary B3 BEN Award in the category Art. She is the recipient of the 2019 Käthe Kollwitz Prize from Akademie der Künste in Berlin. In 2015, Steyerl was awarded the EYE Prize from the EYE Film Institute Netherlands and the Paddy & Joan Leigh Fermor Arts Fund. In 2010, she received the New:Vision Award from the Copenhagen International Documentary Festival.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

OSSERVATORIO

Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II
20121 Milan

M1 or M3 Underground

Duomo stop

Tram 2, 3, 12, 14, 15, 16, 27

Duomo stop

Tram 23, 24 Piazza Fontana
stop

Bus 54 Piazza Diaz stop

Connection with Fondazione
Prada Milano

M3 Underground from Duomo
stop to Lodi T.I.B.B stop

Tram 24 from Duomo stop to
via Ripamonti / via Lorenzini

Opening days and hours

Monday – Friday: 2 pm – 8 pm

Saturday – Sunday: 11 am – 8
pm

Closed on Tuesdays

Last access at 7:30 pm

Information

info@fondazioneprada.org
fondazioneprada.org

Reservation of guided and
group visit

visit@fondazioneprada.org

PUBLICATION



Quaderno #40

THE ISLAND – HITO STEYERL

Published by Fondazione
Prada

16×22.5 cm, 56 pages, €15

Available at the bookshop
and on fondazioneprada.org

2025 – 2026 PROGRAM

FONDAZIONE PRADA, MILAN

Sueño Perro: Instalación

Celuloide de Alejandro

G. Iñárritu

18.9.2025 – 25.2.2026

Mona Hatoum: Over, Under,
and Between

29.1–9.11.2026

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4.12.2025 – 30.10.2026