

Bygone Times in Real Time

Artificial intelligence uses social media content to unveil two centuries of world heritage



Thanks to artificial intelligence, the EPFL+ECAL Lab, the EPFL's Design Research Centre, uses today's images posted on social networks to awaken two centuries of world heritage. Its experimental installation *Bygone Times in Real Time* is showcased at the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, in the framework of the exhibition "Knowledge in Images – Information Design Today". The public can discover and test it from September 20, 2019, to March 8, 2020.

On the occasion of the Fête des Vignerons that took place in Vevey this summer, the EPFL+ECAL Lab has joined forces with the Swiss Camera Museum, the Archives of the RTS Swiss broadcasting corporation, the dedicated serie by notreHistoire.ch and the Confrérie des Vignerons to offer an unparalleled exploration of the world of images. As soon as you enter, the installation challenges certainties: the images found on social networks have become actual cards. They take on a material dimension in the visitor's hand. Placed on a lit plate, they trigger the display of a collection of old images on an immersive screen, taking viewers back to the 18th century. Good old photos witnessing bygone times have become digital. Visitors can watch them, scroll through them. A physical present, a digital past: the set-up questions our relationship to time, credibility and materiality.

The combination of these documents of very different origins is based on artificial intelligence – so-called deep learning techniques. But rather than restricting the results to users' expectations or targeted marketing purposes, as Internet recommendation algorithms usually do, the device aims to foster discovery to build bridges between past times and real time. To counter the obscurantism of algorithms, it reveals what the machine recognises in the images and therefore how

it associates them. The user can actually understand how the installation allows us to go back to the origins of the Fête in 1797.

This work continues the exploration conducted by the EPFL+ECAL Lab for a decade on the enhancement of heritage: millions of documents are now digitised and saved, but how do you bring them back to life? How can they elicit interest beyond specialist circles? This endeavour is receiving worldwide attention, as four EPFL+ECAL Lab projects are operating in prestigious venues: *Nina*, the vehicle travelling through the audiovisual heritage of the Montreux Jazz Festival, has taken centre stage at the Festival; *Archives in Motion* reveals the spectrum of the work of Roger Tallon at the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris; *Chronogram* expresses 265 years of Swiss watchmaking in New York and *Temps Passé, Temps Réel* is presented at the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich. This series of installations open to the general public has made it possible to develop scientific and practical knowledge thanks to the new design principles established by the EPFL+ECAL Lab. These findings have now reached international recognition, as they have been also published by the magazine Leonardo-MIT Press.

As with its other projects, the EPFL+ECAL Lab will turn to experts in interface psychology to observe the impact of *Bygone Times in Real Time*. The objective is to find out how this proposal may go beyond the attraction of fun and technical performance to generate new and sustainable practices. The resulting knowledge will help to determine how to enhance the cultural and social wealth tucked away in huge man-made databases.

EPFL+ECAL Lab

The EPFL+ECAL Lab is the design research centre of the Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), founded in 2007 in collaboration with ECAL/University of Art and Design Lausanne. It aims to explore the potential of emerging technologies through design and addresses related challenges by combining artistic creativity, scientific knowledge and the ability to measure user perception. Working on concrete projects, the EPFL+ECAL Lab collaborates with numerous companies, museums and institutes. By harnessing skills in design, engineering, architecture and psychology, it creates disruptive concepts and turns them into functional prototypes.

Nicolas Henchoz, Director
nicolas.henchoz@epfl.ch, +41 79 219 84 14
Géraldine Morand, Communication Manager
geraldine.morand@epfl.ch, +41 78 742 44 08
www.epfl-ecal-lab.ch

Museum für Gestaltung Zürich

The Museum für Gestaltung Zürich is the leading Swiss museum for design and visual communication. Since its foundation in 1875, the museum has included what has taken effect as design. Its internationally acclaimed collection comprises over half a million objects from the history of design. The museum reaches a broad national and international audience, at its two sites in Zurich and through its touring exhibitions. As part of Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich is actively involved in research and teaching and produces its own publications on a regular basis.

www.museum-gestaltung.ch

Useful Information

From 20 September 2019 to 8 March 2020

Museum für Gestaltung Zürich
Toni-Areal, Pfingstweidstrasse 96, 8005 Zürich

Monday: closed

Tuesday – Sunday: from 10am to 5pm

Wednesday: from 10am to 8pm

Opening

Thursday 19 September, at 7pm