host_age : //

host_age:// is a play on words that explores the dynamics between "host" and "hostage," two intertwined concepts that define contemporary political space. It's a curatorial research project that examines how security and control have come to replace free will, privacy, agency, and democracy.

Today's political and spatial order operates on two levels — digital and territorial. The host may be a platform, a state, or a citizen; the hostage, an online user, immigrant, or resident. The exhibition questions how hosts and guests become trapped in a vicious circle, slowly transforming into hostages — the symbolic figure of our era — by drawing on the concept of hospitality, which constructs political space while carrying hostility at its core.

The agency of the subject is challenged in the post-control society, where individuals are constrained not only by territorial borders but also by so-called "personal choices." We allow corporations to access our private data, enabling them to analyze, predict, and influence our behaviors and reactions. Conventional media continues to manufacture the consent of the masses, while increasing authoritarianism, populism, and performativity in politics have become defining features of our time. We are trapped in a political and economic system that profits from war, exploits the labor of the working class and migrants, violates privacy, and manipulates emotions.

The reference to programming language in the title points to the digital systems that hold us 'hostage' through data extraction and algorithmic governance. Subjects are not only controlled by enclosure, but also by surveillance technologies that track our emotions, movements, ideas, political opinions, and consumption habits, which define who we are.

Featuring works by Žarko Aleksić, Laurus Edelbacher, and Azalea Ortega Flores, the exhibition explores the relationship between media manipulation, affective capitalism, and border and surveillance technologies through neuroscience, emotion-driven systems, and immersive 3D environments.

In his installation *The Regime of Dreams*, Žarko Aleksić brings together three works: *Dreamers*, *Bottles for a Bread*, and *Regime of Dreams REM*. *Dreamers* is a photographic journal documenting the artist's bed during a period filled with hope, before his move to Vienna to study art. For six months, Aleksić took a photograph of his bed each morning

right after waking up. *Bottles for a Bread* is a short film portraying the period after his arrival, when his dreams of coming to Europe were confronted with the harsh realities of survival in a foreign country. Together with his partner, he collected bottles to earn money and cover their living expenses. The work reveals how students from third countries with restricted rights experience the European political space as 'guests', witnessing how their dreams and hopes transform into despair.

Regime of Dreams REM consists of two videos. The first presents 18 hours of footage from Serbian National TV, a channel known for its propagandistic content. The artist watched this material continuously before going to sleep. In the second video, he describes the dreams he experienced upon waking from the REM phase of sleep (Rapid Eye Movement—the stage of sleep in which dreaming occurs). The work reflects on how our subconscious can be shaped and influenced by manipulative media content.

In *Borderline*, Laurus Edelbacher reconstructs real-time images from border zones around the world within a game engine. Expanding the physical reality of borders through limited photographic material sourced from the internet, the artist creates a virtual environment in which viewers can observe and navigate these borders in three dimensions. The video game enables users to control and interfere with border surveillance technologies, explore border zones, and even disrupt surveillance cameras. This interaction evokes a sense of emancipation and empowerment—those who are subjected to the border regime in real life are now given the opportunity to reverse roles and exercise control.

Brain Web is a neuro-art installation that enables users to navigate the internet according to their mental and emotional states. Using an EEG headset, the artwork detects mental states (relaxed, stressed, neutral, etc.) and converts them into search queries through an AI system. Each session becomes a personalized journey on the web, creating a feedback loop between the participant's inner state and the content. The brainwaves are displayed in real time, generating awareness of stress/attention and meditation/relaxation levels. At the end of the session, the user receives a ticket summarising the experience: a list of the visited sites, information about their mental state, and personalized AI-generated advice.

The artwork reflects on our relationship with technology and personal experience within affective capitalism—a system in which users' emotions, feelings, and reactions are extracted and commodified for profit.

*Brainweb is supported by Bildrecht.

Curator:

<u>Deniz Güvensoy</u>

Deniz Güvensoy is an artist, curator, and cultural researcher. She received her Doctorate in Fine Arts degree from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in Istanbul and her Doctorate of Philosophy Degree from the University of Applied Arts Vienna. In her artistic practice, she employs performance, painting, collage, photography, digital printing, and installation. Her

research often addresses migration, border theory, and performativity. In her curatorial approach, she brings together the topics of migration, collective practices, participatory and socially engaged art, and intersectional feminism.

Artists:

Azalea Ortega Flores

M.A. Azalea E. Ortega Flores (MEX), curator and visual artist working with transdisciplinary art between Austria and Mexico. Graduated from the University of Applied Arts Vienna with a bachelor's and master's degree in media and digital arts. Drawing on her experience from her previous studies in Mexico—cinematography and architecture—she specializes in immersive art installations, often site-specific. Her internationally exhibited works explore topics such as neurology, mental health care, nature, spirituality, and technology. With an affinity for organizing and promoting cultural events, she has worked for renowned institutions such as the Mexican Embassy in Vienna and the International Summer Academy of Fine Arts of Salzburg

Laurus Edelbacher

Laurus Edelbacher, 1990 geboren in Melk (NÖ), absolvierte zunächst die Fachschule für Bildhauerei in Hallstatt und vollendete darauf folgend ein Studium an der Wiener Kunstschule bei Michael Kargl und Christoph Nebel in der Interdisziplinären Medienklasse. Anschließend schloss er mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg ein Diplomstudium an der Universität für Angewandte Kunst Wien in der Klasse für Digitale Kunst bei Ruth Schnell ab. Laurus Edelbacher lebt und arbeitet in Wien / WWW. Er ist Mitglied im Kunst- und Kulturverein Fabrikraum und ist Teil des Künstlerduos "Rainbow Team" mit der Medienkünstlerin Anna Watzinger. Seine Werke wurden national wie international präsentiert und bewegen sich zwischen Browserfenster, Ausstellungsraum und künstlerischer Forschung.

Žarko Aleksić

Žarko Aleksić was born in Knjaževac, Serbia. He studied philosophy at the University of Belgrade and art and photography at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. His multidisciplinary artistic practice is based on the examination of consciousness, mental processing, and AI, in relation to socio-political issues of *cognitive capitalism*. Taking into account neurobiological and endeavours within cognitive neurosciences, his practice addresses personalized phenomenology through examining his own states of mind. Problems of the *mind/brain* and its processes, structure, and characteristics are elaborated in the methodical appropriation of knowledge produced within the field of philosophy and cognitive neuroscience, tackling perception, imagination, language, memory, attention, reasoning, and emotion within the nervous system. The relation between the approaches is reflected in the interconnectedness between psychological and economic states, with synapses as the main currency. Žarko Aleksić exhibited at numerous solo and group exhibitions in Austria and abroad.