

## CREATIVITY AND RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF COVID-19 AIAS, 10 NOVEMBER 2021

More than a year of anxiety brought about by the lockdowns, curfews, and other restrictions has made everyday life resembling a dystopian novel all around the world. In the times of Covid-19, we have also witnessed alarming developments: questionable assertions of states' authority, an increase in domestic violence and the rising vulnerability of the lowest paid workers. Our shared vulnerability revealed our commonality underscoring our humanity.

This one-day event, with seminars, documentary viewing and art exhibition, aims to address the role of creativity as a tool for resilience in the midst of a global pandemic –when all the art institutions were closed—by investigating the renewed role of the visual arts and music in re-imagining what it is to be a caring and sharing community.



Image: @Skindian\_art, @HeckIronCloud, @Munkibutts, @HomeGrowNMTradingPost, “Healthcare Heroes” 2021.

### PROGRAM TIMELINE

**10:30-10:35:** Welcome and Introduction by **Tijen Tunali**, AIAS Fellow

**10:35-11:20: Documentary:** “Electronic Art and Covid 19” by Scott Rettberg, Ashleigh Steele, Anna Nacher and Søren Pold

**11:20-12:20: Talk:** “A Pandemic Crisis Seen from the Screen: Digital Art and Electronic Literature as Reflection on Pandemic Platform Culture” by [Søren Pold](#), School of Communication and Culture, Information Science, Aarhus University

**12:20-13:30: LUNCH BREAK**

**13:30-14:30: Talk:** “Building Psychological Resilience Through Creative Engagement With Coronamusic” by [Niels Chr. Hansen](#), AIAS Fellow & Center for Music in the Brain, Aarhus University

**14:30-15:00: COFFEE BREAK**

**15:00-16:00:** “Death, Ugliness and Melancholia: The History of European Art and Pandemics from 6th C Justinian Plague to Covid-19” by [Tijen Tunali](#), AIAS Fellow & School of Communication and Culture, Art history, Aarhus University

**16:00-18:00: Exhibition** and Reception with refreshments



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### ABOUT THE SEMINARS

**Søren Pold, School of Communication and Culture, Information Science, Aarhus University**

#### **“A Pandemic Crisis Seen from the Screen: Digital Art and Electronic Literature as Reflection on Pandemic Platform Culture.”**

How to understand what the pandemic has done to social and cultural life? As pointed out by Astrid Erll, Covid-19 is the first global pandemic of the digital age and even though the Spanish Flu pandemic (1918-19) has been somewhat forgotten and hardly has left any public monuments, partly due to its lack of narrative dimensions, Covid-19 has left a huge archive online on news sites and social media. Digital art and electronic literature have since their beginnings explored new and alternative modes of narrativity and visuality. Exploring the aesthetics of digital art related to the pandemic is relevant in order to discuss how to understand, process and cope with it. Digital art reflects by virtue of its artistic medium of expression on the life at and behind the screen, including how we are increasingly governed by interfaces, corporate platforms and software. The pandemic crisis has been a climax in the age of corporate platform culture from video conferencing to streaming platforms and social media. This talk takes its starting point from the “Covid E-lit – digital art from the pandemic” project (funded by DARIAH EU), and will explore the aesthetics and rhetorics – from dark surrealism to the platformization of discourse - in some of the exhibited digital art works in the exhibition and the interviews in the documentary.

**Søren Bro Pold** is PhD and Associate Professor at Aarhus University, Denmark. He has published on the arts of the interface in its various forms, e.g. on electronic literature, net art, software art, creative software, urban interfaces and digital culture. In relation to these research fields, he has been active in establishing interface criticism as a research perspective, which discusses the role and the development of the interface for art, aesthetics, culture and IT. He recently published “The Metainterface – The Art of Platforms, Cities and Clouds” with Christian Ulrik Andersen. His research in interface criticism has been part of numerous projects and currently he is chair of the research program “Humans and Information Technology”, the research project Covid-19 and Electronic Literature and part of the interdisciplinary research centre Participatory Information Technology. Furthermore, he was chair of Electronic Literature Organisation's conference Platform (Post?) Pandemic (2021). Besides his research interests, he has taken part in university administration and -politics, e.g. as a member of study boards, research committees, academic council (2004-12) and member of the board of Aarhus University representing the scientific staff (2015-2020).

**Niels Chr. Hansen, AIAS Fellow & Center for Music in the Brain, Aarhus University**

#### **“Building Psychological Resilience Through Creative Engagement With Coronamusic.”**

When a sweeping coronavirus pandemic forced public hangouts such as music venues into complete hibernation throughout most of 2020, music life relocated to the digital sphere where sofas and balconies became soft and scenic stages for live-streamed performances and recorded coronatunes. Amateurs and professionals alike swiftly embraced new digital formats and invented novel genres of corona-themed music. This talk draws on recent findings from the global MUSICOVID research network to demonstrate how “coronamusic” was created and consumed at home and on social media across the world to build resilience and cohesion to tackle the psychological consequences of imposed physical distancing measures.

**Niels Chr. Hansen** is an assistant professor at Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies & Center for Music in the Brain, Aarhus University. He is a member of the Danish Young Academy and co-founded the #MUSICOVID research network. With degrees in psychology, neuroscience, music theory, and classical piano, he uses behavioural experiments, neuroimaging, computational modelling, and musical corpus analysis to investigate the cognitive and neurobiological foundations of human musicality.

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**Tijen Tunali, AIAS Fellow & School of Communication and Culture, Art history, Aarhus University**

**“Death, Ugliness and Melancholia: The History of European Art and Pandemics from 6<sup>th</sup> C Justinian Plague to Covid 19.”**

This seminar will be on the history of art and pandemics from Justinian Plague in the 6<sup>th</sup> C to Covid 2019. It will put the pandemic art in historical and social context to show how and why deadly pandemics have been influential and enduring metaphor in European visual arts. The seminar will discuss that during the pandemics not only big changes happened in economic, social, religious and military terms, but also iconography and aesthetics were established that have influenced the entire history of art that followed. For example, the sorrow and melancholia of Romanticism found its initial development in the misery of pandemics and modernist artists appropriated this agony with a personal twist on the perils of modern life. The seminar will conclude with examples of contemporary public art responding to ‘communovirus’. Through a survey of the European art during pandemics, we will observe how anthropocentrism started in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century with the onset of the Black Plague causing major socio-political shifts and conclude how contemporary moment of fear and uncertainty produces a new array of visual images in the public spaces.

**Tijen Tunali** is a postdoctoral researcher at AIAS and C&C. She is an art historian, curator and artist. Her research focuses on contemporary political aesthetics, art activism, art and anti-systemic movements, socio-cultural transformations and artistic resistance in the urban space, the role of art in emancipatory struggles and democratic participation and Marxist theories of aesthetics and politics. Her doctoral research is supported by various fellowships from the institutions including the Andrew Mellon Foundation, Terra Foundation, Tinker Foundation and Phyllis Muth Foundation in the US. Her postdoctoral researches “Art and the City: Urban Space, Art and Social Movements” is funded by CITERES Interdisciplinary Social Science Laboratory at the University of Tours and LE STUDIUM/Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship of Val de Loire Institute of Advanced Studies in France and “Art and Gentrification in the Changing Neoliberal Landscape” by Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin and Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies COFUND Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship in Denmark. She is the founder and organizer of the international and interdisciplinary conference series “Art and the City: Urban Space, Art and Social Change”, each year occurring in a different European City since 2019. <https://artandthecity.sciencesconf.org/>

### **ABOUT THE EXHIBITION**

In the context of a societal crisis, art and musical creativity have the potential to transform urban space and the digital sphere, to foster a sustained political dialogue, and to reach a wide and diverse audience—particularly when museums, galleries, cultural festivals and concert venues are shuttered. For all of these reasons, it is not surprising to see an explosion of new forms of creativity in public spaces and online. This exhibition displays digital arts, e-literature, street art, graffiti, and corona-themed music videos around the world to reveal immediate and sometimes fleeting responses to the Covid-19 crisis. It shows that we are connected in our ways to strengthen social bonds and build solidarity during a pandemic that has physically separated each other, but also points out that the conditions are very different between rich and poorer countries, between countries on the same continent or even neighborhoods in the same city.

Specifically, the exhibition addresses these questions: How does creativity play a role in establishing new social norms in keeping with public health concerns? In what ways can public arts, electronic arts and music be tools for physical and mental resilience? What is the role of urban and digital creativity in memorializing loss, processing grief, and expressing our shared humanity? And crucially, how can arts provide a critical view of the structural inequities and human rights issues that are exacerbated in a time of crisis?