

kennedy+swan
The Red Queen Effect

The exhibition *The Red Queen Effect* by the artist duo *kennedy+swan* addresses the complex relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and medicine. It engages with aspects such as data-based diagnostics and prevention, as well as social and ethical issues raised by the increasing use of AI in medicine.

For the exhibition, *kennedy+swan* have created a new filmic work and watercolor drawings that are integrated into a special exhibition display. The works have been developed in close dialogue with researchers from the Berlin Institute for the Foundations of Learning and Data (BIFOLD). *The Red Queen Effect* is presented as part of Berlin Art Week, which takes place from September 10 to 14, 2025.

Opening: September 10, 2025, 6 – 10 p.m.

Duration: September 11 – November 30, 2025

Opening Hours: Thursday and Friday, 2 – 8 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, 12 noon – 8 p.m.

Free admission

The title of the exhibition refers to the figure of the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll's novel *Through the Looking-Glass*. In the novel, the Red Queen explains to Alice that she has to run as fast as she can to stay in the same place. In evolutionary biology, the so-called "Red Queen Effect" describes a hypothesis of evolutionary adaptation proposed in 1973. According to this hypothesis, species must constantly evolve or adapt to survive in a changing environment.

kennedy+swan transfers the mechanisms of transformation, evolution, and adaptation alluded to in the title to today's health-care system. Medical analysis and treatment methods are transformed through technological innovations such as AI and adapt to the logic of digital systems. *kennedy+swan* inquire into how machines are trained to diagnose diseases at an early stage and reflect on the consequences: What does it mean for patients to be confronted with diagnoses made by AI-based systems?

Watercolors on glass, which have been treated with chemicals, form the starting point for the aesthetic intervention. In collaboration with researchers at BIFOLD, *kennedy+swan* engaged with data-based tools trained to analyze images of human tissue and designed to enhance cancer diagnostics. With support from the scientists, they fed the algorithm watercolors which, scanned on glass, imitated microscopic tissue specimen. The system accepted the artistic works as medical images.

On the one hand, this experiment shows that many systems tend to provide seemingly plausible diagnoses rather than admit uncertainty. On the other hand, it raises our awareness for the fact that the systems' reliability in case of incomplete or imprecise datasets is indeed a matter of concern in current AI research. The latter observation inspired *kennedy+swan* to take a closer look at the blind spots of medical AI systems. They noticed that algorithms exclude certain segments of the population, thus reproducing social inequalities: Women, people of color, and other marginalized social groups are underrepresented in

the datasets. This data bias – systematic distortions of data sets that privilege or discriminate against certain groups and results – can lead to wrong diagnoses or even to the failure to perform medically important interventions. For example, in Europe and the United States many AI systems used to detect skin cancer are mostly trained with images of light skin and can only make inadequate assessments when it comes to skin alterations on darker skin.

In a four-channel video installation, *kennedy+swan* deepens the work that began with the watercolors. The film explores the promises of medical-technological research in a speculative scenario focusing on patients' fears and ambivalences. Volunteers apply to a fictional biotech company called ALICE for life extension clinical trials. Driven by fantasies of immortality, which longevity research already puts within reach, the film reflects on how free we are in dealing with our own bodies. To what extent do the profit-making interests of technology companies and digital infrastructures influence our relationship to our bodies and ourselves?

In the exhibition space, visitors are invited to take a seat on a polygonal platform placed in the center of the room. Four screens are installed on elements that, like the pillar in the room, are covered by white tiles. Tiles, grid structures, and monitors are reminiscent of both clinical labs and *Alice in Wonderland*-like surreal cabinets. Atmospherically, there emerges an ambivalent field of tension, as the sterile surfaces and the technological-artistic works encounter physicality, intimate-private and sensitive issues, and medical research objects in the form of images of human tissue.

Viewers find themselves in a scenario that speaks to them as patients, researchers, and data bodies alike and that reveals the complexity of technological observations and AI-based evaluations.

Related Events

September 13, 2025, 1 p.m.: *Exploring the machinic vision of (human) tissue*, guided tour and conversation with **kennedy+swan** and **Nataša Vukajlović** as part of Berlin Art Week

October 21, 2025, 6 p.m.: Lecture by **Prof. Dr. Petra Ritter**, BIH Johanna Quandt Professor for Brain Simulation at Berlin Institute of Health@Charité and Director of the Brain Simulation Section at Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin, followed by a conversation with **kennedy+swan**

November 8, 2025, 12 noon: *Bodies in Systems: Algorithmic Promises of Cure*, panel as part of Berlin Science Week's Science & Culture FORUM at Holzmarkt 25

For more information, please visit our website at www.scheringstiftung.de

kennedy+swan (founded in 2013) comprises the work of the two artists Bianca Kennedy and Swan Collective. In their collaboration, they explore the future of non-human intelligence and its consequences for plants, animals, machines, and humans. These utopias are liberated from human supremacy, illuminate the ecological benefits of hybrid life-forms, and address the complex relationship between humans and biotechnology. *kennedy+swan*'s work has been shown internationally in galleries, museums, and at festivals, including Lyon Biennial, Gropius Bau Berlin, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, CCBB Rio de Janeiro, and Sundance Film Festival. They received a Studio Quantum residency grant from the Goethe-Institut in Ireland in 2023 and were awarded the "Art of Entanglement" residency by BIFOLD for 2024/25. They live in Berlin.

The **Schering Stiftung** was established in 2002 and aims to promote science and art with a focus on the life sciences and the contemporary arts. A particular focus is on projects in frontier areas, especially at the intersection of science and art. In addition to its operational activities, the Schering Stiftung also promotes science and cultural education projects for children and young people.

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