

Quote as: Ana Carvalho, Cornelia Lund. “Interview with Eva Fischer.” *AV Assemblies. Conversations on Sight and Sound*, edited by Ana Carvalho, Cornelia Lund, Sara Lua Ruíz, Feb. 2025, <https://www.fluctuating-images.de/projects-av-assemblies/>.



Interview with Eva Fischer, Vienna

Interview conducted by Ana Carvalho (AC) and Cornelia Lund (CL) in the framework of “AV Assemblies. Conversations on Sight and Sound,” a project by Ana Carvalho, Cornelia Lund, and Sara Luna Ruíz.
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- (CL) Eva, maybe you could start by presenting yourself and giving a short description of your work and relationship to the AV context.

Thank you for having me. I am an art historian. I am an art historian by training with studies in art history and cultural management in Graz, Vienna, and Utrecht. Already during my studies, I was interested in transdisciplinary approaches. My background is rooted in music—I attended a music high school—which shaped my initial interest in the relationship between sound and visual formats. During my studies in Graz, festivals such as the Spring Festival already presented hybrid formats, presenting AV acts like Fritz Fitzke & Kruder and Dorfmeister. For me, this marked a special moment in the emergence of AV culture, VJing, and expanded visual practices. I also perceived a particularly strong development of this field in the Netherlands—where I did an Erasmus year in 2004/2005—which led me to dedicate my thesis to the topic and to initiate curatorial work in this direction.

The festival sound:frame (<https://soundframe.at>), founded in 2007, was conceptualized during this period. It began with an exhibition at Künstlerhaus Vienna, which quickly attracted significant public attention. The project expanded rapidly—from 200 to 1,500 square meters of exhibition space within three years—evolving into a broader festival format that continued for a decade.

This is also where all of our paths intersected. I was very glad to be part of the *Audiovisual Breakthrough*¹, alongside many other collaborative formats we developed over the years.

Today, almost two decades later, I direct the media art platform Civa—Contemporary Immersive Virtual Art, which adopts a broader thematic scope. While still engaging with audiovisual practices, it extends into media developments, art and technology, and art–science collaborations, with a strong socio-political orientation (<https://civa.at/en>).

Interestingly, after this trajectory, I find myself returning to AV practices. What is emerging now does not appear to be a simple revival, but rather a reconfiguration of the field under new technological and cultural conditions.

- (CL) I realized that, at this year’s Civa Festival, there were more AV performances than, for example, last year. So, your return to AV practices seems also to be sneaking into the new festival. Is that so?

Yes, I would agree. These developments often become visible through attention: once you begin to focus on a field, connections reappear. Reflecting on the past twenty years has prompted many people to reconnect—artists and collaborators who return with ongoing or newly developed projects.

There is a sense of reactivation within the community which I am really enjoying at the moment. Some connections have remained continuous, while others—dormant for ten or fifteen years—are now resurfacing. I observe similar tendencies elsewhere, for instance with initiatives such as BINÁLÉ (<https://binale.art/>) in Budapest. At Civa, I recently met a curator from Mapping Festival in Geneva (<https://www.mappingfestival.com/>), and shortly after, at Numix Lab (<https://numixlab.com/en/home/>), I encountered Electromoon from Patch Lab (<https://en.2023.patchlab.pl/artists/elektro-moon-vision/>). These encounters reinforce the impression that the AV community is currently reassembling itself across different contexts.

- (CL) That’s very interesting. We presented the “AV Assemblies” project at the Sound/Image Festival in Greenwich (see <https://www.gre.ac.uk/research/sound-image>), where we were also reconnecting with The Light Surgeons (<https://lightsurgeons.com/>).

At Civa, which is a collaboration with Belvedere 21 (<https://www.belvedere.at/en/visit/belvedere-21>), we have the cinema space of the museum and an event space, so I think AV formats make a lot of sense there. This year, we had quite a big collaboration with III, the Instrument Inventors Initiative (<https://instrumentinventors.org/>) from The Hague, and they commissioned many artworks

¹ The *Audiovisual Breakthrough* is a collaborative book project kicked off at the sound:frame Festival in 2014. The articles by Ana Carvalho, Eva Fischer, Cornelia Lund, Gabriel Menotti, and Adeena Mey explore the concepts of visual music, expanded cinema, live cinema, VJing and live audiovisual performance. Download the PDF here: <https://www.ephemeral-expanded.com/audiovisualbreakthrough/>.

in this very field. I have the feeling that this is a collaboration that gets more and more established. We are definitely going to work with them again next year.

- (AC) You mentioned that, with the Civa festival, you address social and political concerns. If you could explore that a little more?

I would say that the foundation of our work is informed by a queer feminist perspective, engaging with Black studies, queer theory, and ecological thought. We are constantly asking how technology is embedded within larger power structures, and we aim to approach technological transformations very critically. A key concern is to remain aware of the position from which person or which collective speaks, curates or gets heard. This also includes a critical posthumanist perspective—examining how humans, technologies, and more-than-human environments are entangled within broader systems of power.

For example, in this year's edition, which focused on quantum science and technology, we were particularly interested in examining the scientific apparatus itself—the institutions, infrastructures, and epistemological frameworks through which knowledge is produced.

- (CL) When we started working on that small new wave of AV performances that is getting bigger, we had the feeling that, in this area, too, the concerns have changed. The AV scene formerly wasn't necessarily known for being highly political. Of course, this didn't exclude political approaches, but the scene per se was not really hugely political. We have the impression that this might have changed. For Sara Luna, for example, our third partner in the project and an artist and VJ herself, the political approach is extremely important. Do you have the feeling that, in the performances you recently came across, this plays a bigger role now?

Yes, I would agree. There has been a shift. In earlier phases, the field was not necessarily understood as explicitly political ("being unpolitical as a political position"), even though political approaches were always present. Today, I see a stronger articulation of socio-political positions—not only in AV, but across music and other artistic practices.

At the same time, there remains a connection to the creative industries. Many artists operate between artistic and more commercial contexts, using their technical skills and aesthetic approaches in multiple fields. This hybridity has always been characteristic of AV practice. Interestingly, this dual positioning may both enable and complicate political engagement.

Another important aspect is the transformation of technology. When I began working in Vienna, there was still a strong presence of analog practices—overhead projectors, VHS, and other (s)low-tech approaches. Today, younger practitioners increasingly work with game

engines such as Unreal, AI systems, complex lighting technologies, and mobile interfaces. But there is also a reconnection to analogue practices, leading toward post-digital approaches: any medium is valid, yet the impact of digitality cannot be denied.

This shift in technological frameworks also transforms aesthetics, modes of production, and potentially the degree of accessibility. Whether this leads to a more democratic field is still an open question, but it is certainly worth examining how technological change reshapes artistic practice and its political dimensions.

- (AC) So, it means that, basically, the renewed interest in live performance is a return, but not a revival of the technology.

Yes, exactly. While some continuities remain, I observe significant shifts in aesthetics and approaches. What stands out to me is an even stronger emphasis on spatial and dramaturgical thinking – closer to stage design than to traditional video mixing. Artists are increasingly engaging with the entire environment, not just the projected image. This includes the use of light as a primary medium, as well as the incorporation of sculptural and performative elements.

This development is closely tied to the growing accessibility and usability of contemporary technologies. It has arguably become much easier to acquire technical knowledge through widely available online resources such as YouTube and social media tutorials.

- (AC) So, more complex, in a way.

Yes, I would say so.

- (CL) Yes, well, I think that the classical VJ approaches are still there, and I'm not sure if the aesthetics have changed that much.
But what you say is interesting: I was talking to Lucas Bambozzi (<https://lucasbambozzi.net/>) in São Paulo, asking if he knew any people of the younger generation getting involved with AV performances again. He had some young women in mind, who actually come from doing stage design creation for concerts, and maybe also film sets, and this kind of area. So, that would fit very well with what you said, Eva, that younger artists think about AV performance a little bit differently nowadays. Perhaps it also related to all the node-based approaches, where you can work differently.

Yes, I think that is very much the case. Part of the foundational team of Civa, for example, artists like Klimentina Li (<https://www.klimentinali.com/>) and Maximilian Prag (<https://maximilianprag.com/info>), come from institutions like the Art University in Linz or the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Their work integrates elements from stage design, installation, and performance. One example involved the use of inflatable structures as projection surfaces that they performed at Civa 2025—combining light, spatial design, and

performative elements. This points toward a broader understanding of AV practice, expanding beyond traditional formats into more immersive and scenographic approaches.

- (CL) Let's talk about your curatorial approach. As a curator, how do you choose, what is interesting to you? This year at Civa, obviously, there was the quantum physics topic, which already gave a direction.

I think it is as important for Civa as it was for sound:frame: each edition is structured around a central theme, which also reflects my own current research interests. For example, I am currently developing a focus on *acceleration* and *simultaneity*—the increasing speed of technological, social, and communicative processes. While this may seem like a contemporary phenomenon, it also has historical precedents, and I am interested in examining it from many different perspectives, such as a sociological, media theoretical, technological or political angle.

Equally important are artistic counter-strategies, practices that engage with slowing down, with concepts like Jenny Odell's *resistance-in-place*, refusal, or alternative temporalities and non-linear perceptions of time and space.

My curatorial approach is strongly network-based. Rather than working with open calls, I rely on ongoing conversations, recommendations, and long-term relationships. I am talking to people, and they say: "Oh, if this is your topic, you have to talk to this and that person.". This allows for a more focused and, in my experience, often higher-quality selection process. My research builds on a personal archive, that grows and grows and grows, combined with exchanges across artistic and scientific fields. In the case of the quantum theme, for example, it was essential to collaborate closely with experts in order to avoid superficial engagement, like Ana Prendes who worked as a curator at Arts at CERN at that time and co-curated the Civa |*indeterminate*⟩⟨*apparatus*| exhibition and parts of the festival together with me (<https://civa.at/en>).

- (AC) One of the questions that we have for our interviewees is to suggest artists or artworks, but perhaps it would also be interesting in your case to include events that are really making a difference, that are within a continuation, but that make a difference, that actually demonstrate or express how particular this return of the live AV performance is.

In Vienna, there is a particularly strong scene that has developed in recent years, often emerging from sound-based practices but expanding into interdisciplinary formats.

Artists such as MONOCOLOR (<https://mnclr.com/about>), Klimentina Li and Maximilian Prag, who I already mentioned, come to mind. There are also important platforms such as Unsafe+Sounds (<https://unsafeandsounds.com/>) and Hyperreality (<https://hyperreality.at/>), although mainly concentrated on sound.

Beyond Vienna, initiatives like BINÁLÉ in Budapest, PatchLab in Poland are very relevant. I would also highlight the Instrument Inventors Initiative (III) in The Hague, as well as V2 Lab (<https://v2.nl/>) in Rotterdam. These institutions provide stable environments for long-term experimentation, which is crucial.

I think collectives and established institutions like that are very important for an international artist community, and this is something that unfortunately remains underdeveloped in Austria. Infrastructures that support sustained experimentation are less established, with such work often taking place within universities rather than independent institutions – for example at The University of Applied Art or the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, as well as at Universities of Applied Sciences in Graz, Salzburg, or St. Pölten. Beyond these contexts there are mainly smaller initiatives, alongside formats like Civa that found its home at Belvedere, which need to operate without the scale of a larger institution.

- (CL) Yes, I think the stable base is a question everywhere, because you also have initiatives in Berlin, for example. But with all the cuts in cultural funding, of course, space has become the big question. The people are there, and their work is also there, but where to perform, where even to meet, you know? So, it is not that easy any longer.
- (AC) I suppose it's the same everywhere—in Europe, at least. We all have the same problems here.
Anyhow, do you have more questions, Cornelia?
- No, I don't, but maybe Eva has something she would like to add as a conclusion?

I would definitely be interested in staying connected to your research and following how it continues to unfold. On my side, I am currently looking toward the 20th anniversary of sound:frame in 2027. Despite the ongoing challenges around funding, I see this moment as a chance to reconsider the role of such a platform—not only as a festival, but as a space for continuity, for discourse, and for shaping future modes of artistic production and collaboration.