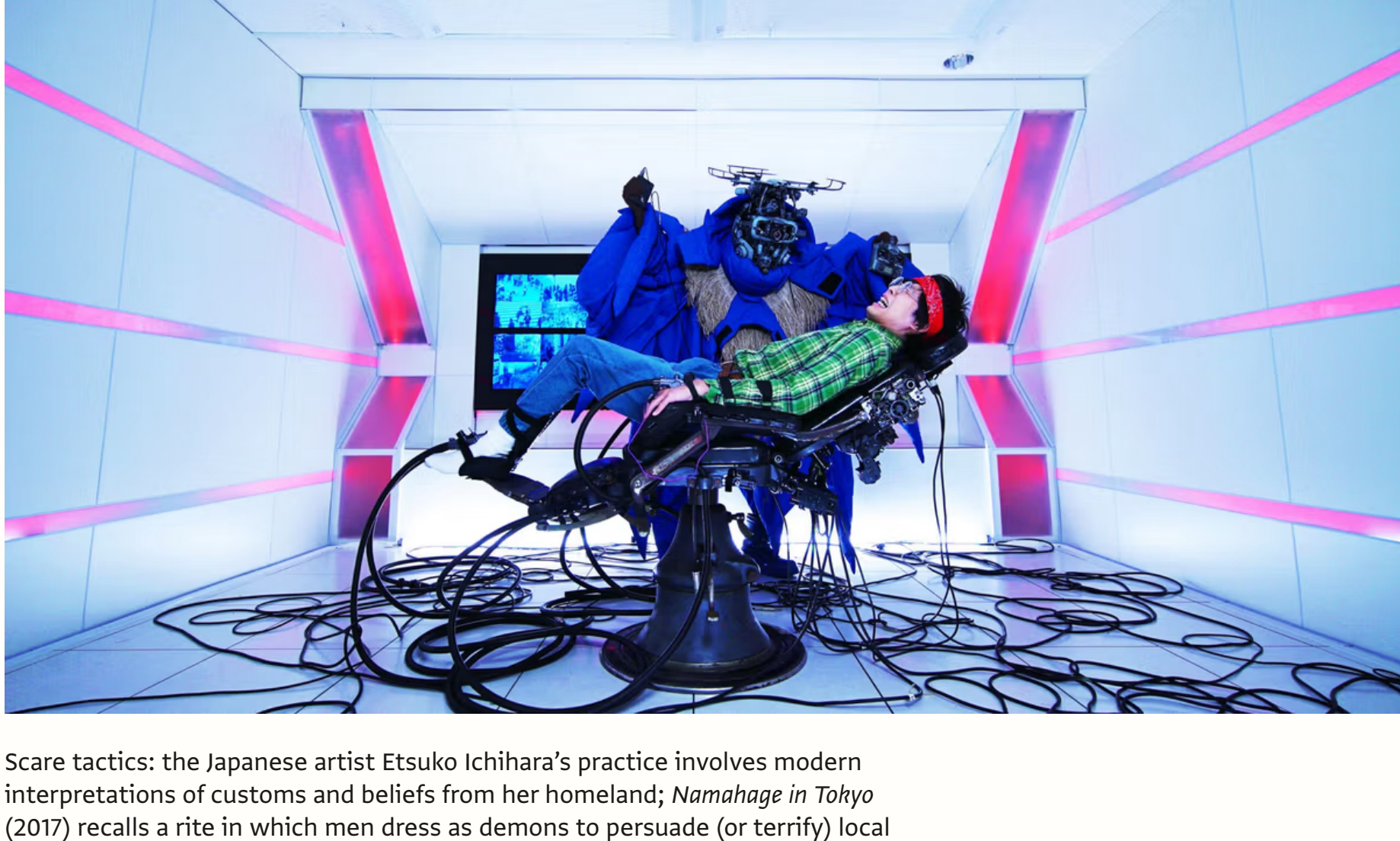


Art Basel 2026 // [Preview](#)

Group show explores where technology meets spirituality and folklore

The exhibition at Basel’s HEK showcases artist whose work responds to “unstable and apocalyptic” times, drawing on religion, myth and ritual



Scare tactics: the Japanese artist Etsuko Ichihara’s practice involves modern interpretations of customs and beliefs from her homeland; *Namahage in Tokyo* (2017) recalls a rite in which men dress as demons to persuade (or terrify) local children into being well-behaved

Photo: Kenji Watanabe

J. Cabelle Ahn

17 June 2026

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In May, an AI-powered robot named Gabi became the first ordained Buddhist monk in South Korea. Footage showed the 1.4m-tall enrobed humanoid, complete with a helmet resembling a monk’s shaved head, participating in purifications and pledging itself to the Buddhist values of benevolence and compassion.

This strange merger of technological achievement and deeply held spiritual beliefs is the central premise of *New Rituals [for the End of the World]* at the House of Electronic Arts Basel (HEK). Co-curated by the artist Anan Fries and the curator Marlene Wenger, the group show examines explicit and latent ritual practices as a way to navigate a world increasingly shaped by headlines of crisis and collapse.

“We live in times that feel unstable and apocalyptic for many,” Fries and Wenger tell *The Art Newspaper*. “Because so many crises are unfolding simultaneously (ecological, political, technological) we were interested in addressing this feeling of being overwhelmed, rather than trying to do justice to any single one of these enormous problems.”

Some works draw upon folkloric traditions. Etsuko Ichihara’s *Namahage in Tokyo* (2017) is inspired by a centuries-old rite in which young Japanese men dress as *namahages*, mythical demons whose name roughly translates as “peeling blisters”, and storm into homes to frighten children into behaving for the coming year. Updated for an age of surveillance capitalism, Fries and Wenger say the work asks “what protective and corrective rituals might look like when the threats are structural rather than supernatural”.

Other works expand on religious sacraments. Auriea Harvey’s *Idol.App* (2025) is an interactive software installation that periodically prints lines of what she calls “encrypted prophecies” on red paper from a ceiling-mounted printer. The prophecies are produced by what she describes as “a generative system which pulls lines from a database culled from biblical prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, Daniel) and the ancient oracles”. Visitors can prompt the prognostications using a custom-built plastic keyboard embossed with “human and creature parts”, including eyes, ears, mouths and hands.

Harvey says the work is “about the impossibility of understanding the prophetic warning in our constantly (perhaps intentionally) distracted state”. The artist, who converted to Catholicism in 2023 and was baptised by Pope Francis at St Peter’s Basilica, cites the Old Testament verses Isaiah 6:9-10 as a framework for the installation: “Listen carefully but do not understand. Look intently but do not perceive.”

Harvey says that this excerpt “struck me as incredibly harsh words from a loving God and made me wonder if the so-called inevitability of our own tech-destruction is really just a lack of faith”.

AI the bogeyman

The show arrives amid a wider resurgence of interest in spirituality in the face of accelerating technological change, with AI as a recurring bogeyman of the present. “We live in a moment in which AI is crawling into every aspect of our lives, into all our devices, into all platforms and into bureaucracy and governance,” Fries and Wenger say. For them, the opacity of AI’s “black box” can lead to new forms of mysticism around its inner workings, and to what they describe as the rise of “otherworldly thought”.

At the same time, they note that the architects of technological upheaval have often embraced ritual and legend as strategies of persuasion. “Silicon Valley tycoons deliberately work with mythmaking in order to narrate their products as powerful [and] life-changing,” add the co-curators.

During Art Basel, HEK will also stage Stefanie Egedy’s *Sonic Energetics* (2026) as part of the exhibition. The 20-minute aural installation emits deep frequencies intended to calm the nervous system, furthering the show’s mission of welcoming religious and profane ceremonies as a coping strategy to understand the myriad forces shaping contemporary life.

Ultimately, despite its doomsday premise, the exhibition is fundamentally optimistic. “While we certainly live through terrifyingly brutal times, we also want to propose hope for a post-apocalypse which, hopefully, allows the emergence of new, better systems of power,” Fries and Wenger say.

Harvey is more direct. “This isn’t the first tech hype-cycle (the web, videogames, ‘the metaverse’, NFTs), and I think when technological systems become sufficiently complex and opaque, they begin to function mythologically,” she says. “Ritual is how humans negotiate with what exceeds their understanding and pushes them into unknown territory, for better or for worse.”

• [New Rituals \[for the End of the World\]](#) [HEK \(House of Electronic Arts\)](#), Until 9 August

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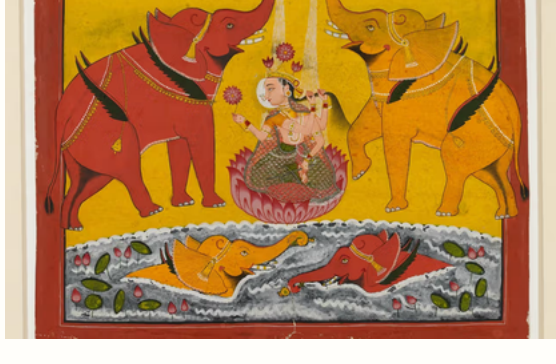
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Gabriella Angeleti

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