DART 17: a test laboratory for interactive experiences, objects and tools in Silicon Valley

Projects in design, art, research and technology with an entrepreneurial spirit can now apply with their interactive projects to DART 17 – the new one- to three-month incubation program in the heart of San Francisco. In a tailormade program, participants can test and further develop their prototypes in areas of virtual reality, augmented reality, games, or smart objects. We will help to expand their network with technology companies, industry experts, and investors. DART 17 is the brainchild of four Swiss organizations: swissnex SF, Swisscom, Pro Helvetia, and the Engagement Migros development fund.

In today’s world, startup funding is primarily geared towards technology companies and rapid commercialization. This is not necessarily the right environment for designers and creatives – but their perspectives that are particularly important. Even the best technologies are empty without the ideas that bring them to life. We are seeking creative minds who can push the edge of potential in new mediums.

The creative economy is growing, and the field of interactive technologies is leading the way. There is ample encouragement of creative projects in universities and art colleges. However, few programs teach entrepreneurial skills that help these ideas become financially sustainable. DART 17 bridges the gap to unite creative projects from Switzerland and all over the world with the right resources in Silicon Valley.

DART 17 – Design, Art, Research, Technology – is an initiative from swissnex San Francisco, Swisscom, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, and Engagement Migros. DART 17 offers the opportunity for participants to explore new ideas for one to three months in Silicon Valley. Working in the heart of the international market, budding entrepreneurs will further develop their prototypes, receive direct feedback, and expand their network with technology companies, creatives and investors. DART 17 is housed in Pier 17 in the brand new swissnex building on the San Francisco waterfront and shares the premises with Swiss tech startups, companies such as Nestle, Swisscom, SwissRe and Logitech, and university representatives from ECAL, the University of Geneva and Lausanne’s Ecole hôtelière.

“A customized program is drawn up for each of the various projects, including preparation training, mentoring, coaching, workshops and a grant of $5,000 (USD),” said Arijana Walcott of Swisscom, a Co-founder of DART 17. “In addition, matchmaking and profile-enhancing
events are also organized in the US. DART 17 offers participants the ideal conditions in which to successfully develop their projects."

“When designers, artists, researchers and technology specialists come together in an open setting, new ideas and innovations are born,” said Sophie Lamparter of swissnex San Francisco, a Co-founder of DART 17. “Switzerland in particular has enormous creative potential, as we’ve seen over the past few years with the successes of projects and startups such as the famous VR bird simulator ‘Birdly’ by Somniacs, the facial recognition technology ‘Faceshift’ that got acquired by Apple or MindMaze, a med tech start-up that combines EEG and VR and recently became Switzerland’s first unicorn.”

Max Rheiner, interaction designer and founder of Somniacs, believes the San Francisco location was essential to his startup’s success. "To show the first prototype of Birdly in San Francisco two years ago had a huge impact," he said. “The media attention and positive feedback from VR industry leaders like Google, Oculus or HTC Vive motivated us to create our start-up, Somniacs, around it. Such a rapid testing would not have been possible in Switzerland."

“Swiss creatives such as VR bird simulator Birdly, the spatial storytelling studio Apelab or ArtAnim, who create real virtuality experiences with motion capturing, have benefited considerably from the successful partnership with swissnex San Francisco and Pro Helvetia. Thanks to the San Francisco location, the projects not only gained visibility, most also only realized their enormous potential here on the US west coast. With DART 17 and the strong partners behind it, we are continuing to pursue the same strategy that has helped write some of the greatest success stories of young Swiss creatives looking to make their mark on the future of digital technologies and immersive media” – Sylvain Gardel, Head of Impulse programmes at Pro Helvetia.

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