FERAL FILE

Catalog

Simulation Sketchbook: Works in Process

Alida Sun, Anne Spalter, Behnaz Farahi, Botto, David OReilly, IX Shells, John Gerrard, Mimi Onuoha, Monica Rizzolli, Qianqian Ye, Reeps One

Curated by Jesse Damiani

Vellum LA
20 October 2022

Curator's Note

Process Objects

An artist's sketchbook is one of the most precious spaces for research and experimentation. In its ideal, the sketchbook is an intimate domain where artists capture ideas, test compositions, wrestle with subjects, and scribble marginalia, engaging in an ongoing inner dialogue that audiences don't witness.

Of course, some of these sketches do eventually make their way to the public, offering new access points for understanding these artists' practices. From Da Vinci to Rubens, Seurat to Van Gogh, O'Keeffe to Walker, sketches reveal the essence of an artist's pursuit at a particular moment in the raw — whether or not they ever inform the creation of a publicly presented artwork. They add new textures and tones, deepening context for artists in both personal and professional dimensions.

Sketches are also regarded as a crucial proving ground, a training hall where artists grapple with craft. When a young Degas proclaimed his intentions to become a painter, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres purportedly told him, "Draw lines. Draw a lot of lines." Fittingly, Degas would himself later say, "Drawing is the artist's most direct and spontaneous expression, a species of writing: it reveals, better than does painting, [their] true personality."

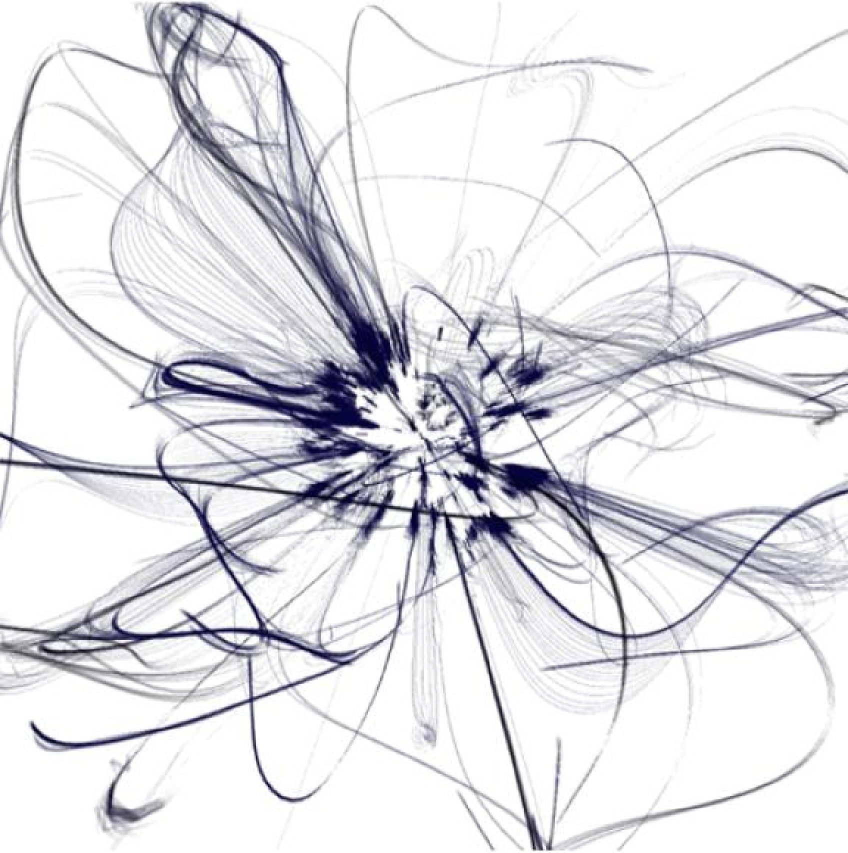
Sketches manifest a different kind of honesty; the way a diary entry is honest, the way bedhead is honest. They are intrinsically in-process, always gesturing elsewhere.

In analog forms, sketches are highly correlated with drawing on paper. Simulation Sketchbook: Works in Process poses a simple question: what does a sketch look like for an artist working in more experimental modes like digital art and time-based media? What is a sketch when it's not a conventional drawing?

Whether they take the form of code, video, 3D models, immersive spaces, or multimodal explorations that don't fit a neat categorization, these "sketches" are no less integral to the development of the respective artist's body of work. Because of the relative novelty among audiences, the technical and conceptual merits of these process-oriented arts can be difficult to grasp, leaving underlying poetics invisible or misinterpreted. Worse still is the assumption that this work is tantamount to button-pushing, that machines are the true authors — trivializing the years spent developing a unique relationship with these materials.

It is of course the bias of new media curators that new media artists undertake some of the most important creative labors of our time. The argument is simple: these materials are more explicitly related to the general person's existence than most others. We encounter screens, software, hardware, algorithms, and other such technologies as a matter of routine. To engage these as artistic material is to invoke the core dilemma of the contemporary condition: how does one live a sovereign life when more and more of it is surveilled, constrained, and monetized through the instruments of asymmetrical power structures? The notion of "disruption" has been abused beyond parody in Silicon Valley, but these artists actually are disruptors — subverting and inverting tools to provoke questions rather than return answers. In this way, their sketches create a cascade of insight: regarding the art, the artist, and the new ways we might understand the relationship among ourselves and the tools of our daily lives.

Simulation Sketchbook: Works in Process foregrounds these in medias res refractions, offering rare glimpses into the unseen journeys artists undertake with their distinct forms and materials, asking audiences to contend directly with the new literacies that inhere within the arts at the edge.



Alida Sun

DAY 1283

Video (color, silent)
960 × 1080 pixels
59 seconds

Artwork Description

Alida Sun is an artist for whom the notion of a "sketch" is key — a critical aspect of her practice is the "everyday," an ongoing dialogue with an audience in which artists share a new piece every single day. Some are completed artworks, others are riffs, gestures, and experiments. For Sun, this "everyday" practice with generative tools amasses, with many motifs appearing again and again, typically published to social platforms. This practice also means that different concerns of the artist appear in different configurations, producing novel conversations within and without. "DAY 1290" merges code, bird flight patterns, choreography, and meditation into one sketch out of 1,290 days of generative art practice. It's an exploration of swarm intelligence and decentralization. Sun writes, "I release preconceived notions and let the emergent system form and behave in ways I never predicted. So the practice of sketching becomes a humbling, fun, and spiritual experience free from attachment to outcomes. "DAY 1290" visualizes nature and technology not as separate from us or each other, but thoroughly interconnected with human movements in an ongoing process."

Artist Bio

Alida Sun is an artist and activist based in Berlin. For over 1,200 days and counting, she has created and shared a new generative artwork. Her current art practice spans choreography, code, installation, and architecture. Her activism focuses on networked community building against racism and authoritarianism in both local and international digital contexts. Sun is the creator of the Art Blocks Curated project glitch crystal monsters. Her works have been exhibited at the Venice Biennale, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Ars Electronica, and experimental audiovisual festivals around the world.

Berlin, Germany

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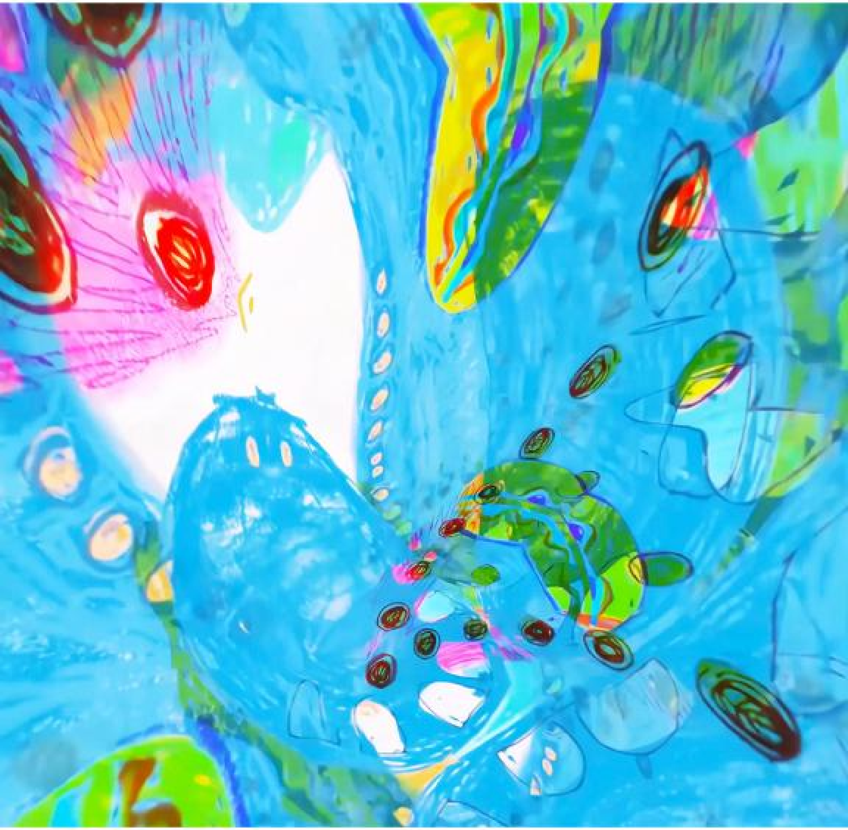

Anne Spalter
Transcendental Doodle

Video (color, sound)
2470 × 2400 pixels
52 seconds

Artwork Description

Anne Spalter's "Transcendental Doodle" is inspired by visionary, spiritual art, and the direct channel to creativity that one has with the spontaneity of rapid sketching. It's also a work that reveals emergent forms of human-machine collaboration through cutting-edge artificial intelligence creative tools, in which each drafts off of the other's outputs. To produce the artwork, Spalter first began "sketching" by generating a large number of images with AI text-to-image prompts containing the words "transcendental," "visionary," and other related terms. The artist then drew responses to the AI outputs, and recorded these live drawings, producing videos. The time-based result was further digitally processed, employing z-axis motion to create a gestural world. Spalter's sound collaborator, The Josh Craig, also began his audio landscape for the video with a melodic "sketch," which was developed and layered with digital and analog sounds, including a simulated shaken "reset" of an etch-a-sketch. All together, the final video becomes an amalgam of many different languages of sketch — digital and analog, human and machine.

Artist Bio

Digital mixed-media artist Anne Spalter is an academic pioneer who founded the original digital fine arts courses at Brown University and RISD in the 1990s and authored the internationally taught textbook, The Computer in the Visual Arts. Her artistic process explores imagery of the modern landscape. Spalter has drawn on the writings of Carl Jung as well as science fiction novels and movies to develop a consistent set of personal symbols using a hybrid arsenal of traditional mark-making methods and innovative digital tools. Her crypto art has been auctioned by Sotheby's and Phillips, and featured in the New York Times. She recently completed a successful 501-piece drop: AI Spaceships. Spalter is also noted for her large-scale public projects. MTA Arts commissioned Spalter to create a 52-screen digital art installation, New York Dreaming, which remained on view in Fulton Center for just under a year. Spalter's work is in the permanent collections of the V&A Museum in London; the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York; the RISD Museum in Providence, Rhode Island; The Museum of CryptoArt;

and others. Alongside her studio practice, Spalter continues to lecture on digital art practice and theory. She recently completed an alumni residency at MASS MoCA.

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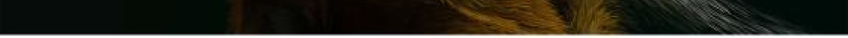

Behnaz Farahi
Unveiling

Video (color, sound)
3840 × 2160 pixels
2 minutes 14 seconds

Artwork Description

Behnaz Farahi's "Unveiling" addresses the representation of the female body through the veiling and unveiling of identity. It was created in direct response to the Mahsa Amini protests that began in September 2022 — and supplanted the work that the artist had originally intended to contribute to the Simulation Sketchbook exhibition. Produced in less than two weeks, the work channels the artist's raw processing of the feminist uprising taking place in her country of birth. By drawing herself into the final moments of "Unveiling," Farahi reflects on her own connection to these issues in her personal narrative, and her current position as an expat working in the West, halfway across the world. As the artist writes, "Why are there various laws controlling the bodies and lives of women? Where does the autonomy of the female body reside? While much feminist discourse is informed by a Western woman's perspective, some of the largest-ever feminist protests are happening right now on the streets of Iran. With the Iranian uprising, 'Woman, Life, Freedom' has become an expression of freedom and a political slogan to recognize the importance of the autonomy of the female body."

Note: all proceeds from the sale of 'Unveiling' will be donated to charities supporting Women's Rights.

Artist Bio

Born and raised in Iran, Behnaz Farahi is an award winning designer and critical maker based in Los Angeles. She holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary Media Arts and Practice from USC School of Cinematic Arts. Currently she is an assistant professor at the department of design, California State University, Long Beach. She explores how to foster an empathetic relationship between the human body and the space around it using computational systems. Her work addresses critical issues such as feminism, emotion, perception, and social interaction. Farahi has won several awards including the Cooper

Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum Digital Design Award, Innovation By Design Fast Company Award, and the World Technology Award. She is a co-editor of the issue of AD, "3D Printed Body Architecture" (2017) and "Interactive Futures" (forthcoming).

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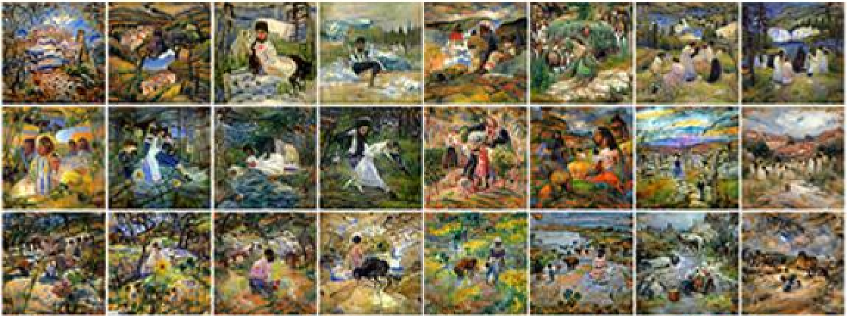

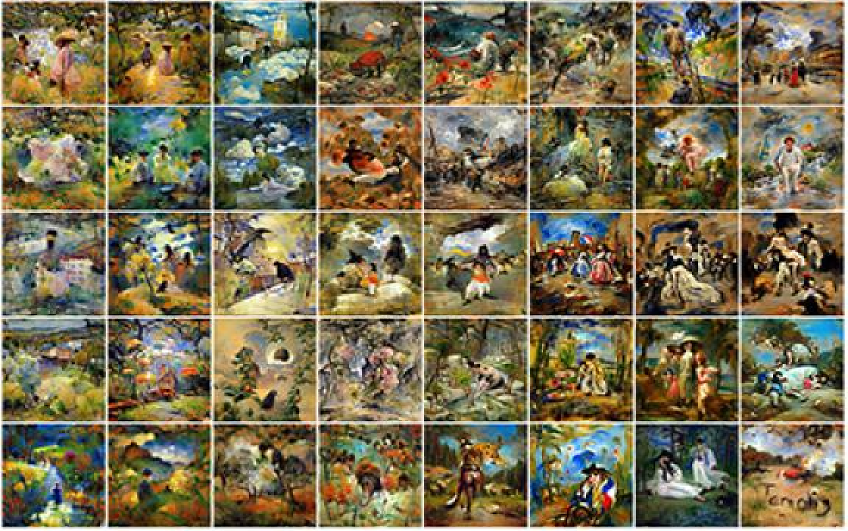

Botto

Cluster: #069

Image (color)
3280 × 3280 pixels

Artwork Description

Botto is a decentralized autonomous artist, initially conceptualized by Mario Klingemann (a.k.a. Quasimondo), and governed by a collective of stakeholders through a DAO (decentralized autonomous organization). Its artistic capabilities are based on a custom art engine, a proprietary blend of algorithmic models that have synthesized millions of images. Running now for over a year, Botto produces 350 visuals per week. From these pieces, the artist's community members, BottoDAO, vote to select the images they deem most aesthetically pleasing. The most popular one then becomes a canonical Botto artwork, sold as an NFT. In addition, Botto learns from the results of each of these votes further evolving its artistic process and body of work.

To create "Cluster:#069," a clustering algorithm was applied to the entirety of Botto’s body of work to organize it into common artistic themes. This revealed 128 themes within Botto’s works. For each of these themes, 64 were chosen from the categories and clustered by the algorithm based on common features. This process resulted in a sort of style swatch, creating a mosaic from the fragments. Style grids were created for each of these 128 themes, upon which Botto’s community voted to select the most popular piece. This process was the final step in the production of "Cluster: #069." This particular cluster includes Botto’s 33rd minted artwork, "Attempt Deepen", surrounded by other fragments discarded along the way.

Artist Bio

Botto is a decentralized autonomous artist governed by a collective. Launched in October 2021, Botto's artistic capabilities are based on an art engine, a proprietary blend of algorithmic models that have synthesized millions of works of art. Each week, 350 art pieces are presented to the community, a growing group of thousands of users, and this community votes on which piece they deem to be the most aesthetically pleasing. This voting mechanism allows the collective to select a singular artwork to be minted while also using this information to train the artist's algorithm. Botto incorporates these preferences in its growing sense of taste ultimately evolving Botto's aesthetic and body of work over time.

botto.com

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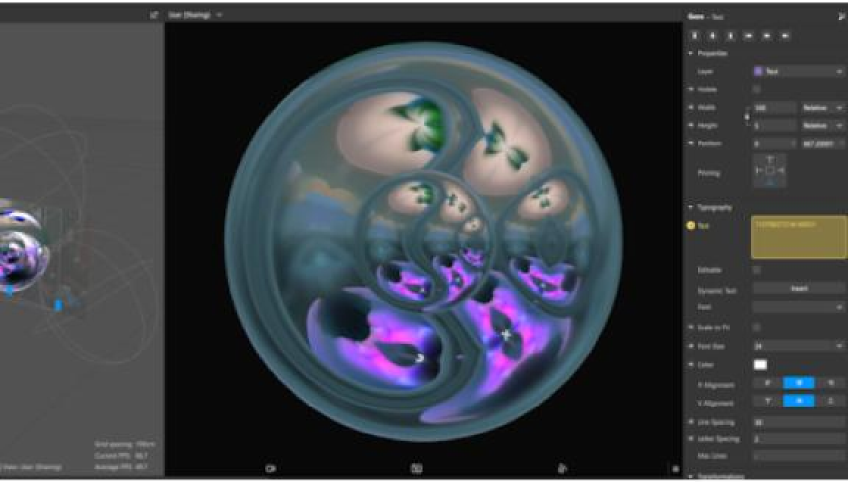

David OReilly
Orb Tests

Video (color, silent)
1920 × 1080 pixels
1 minute 47 seconds

Artwork Description

With the explosion of social media in the 2010s, simple image avatars on platforms have taken on a crucial expressive function for artists — often serving as a first impression with audiences, establishing artists' tone, aesthetics, and identity. Filmmaker, game developer, and artist David OReilly has used an orb avatar since 2019. The orb is the result of several math experiments that the artist has worked on — a live camera input adds randomness, and the numbers seen in "ORBSKETCHES.mp4" reflect the parameters of each configuration. The quick cuts and presence of the artist's workspace in this desktop screen capture offer glimpses into the process of creation of this work, becoming a sort of unlikely meta-self-portrait through software.

Artist Bio

David OReilly is a multidisciplinary artist based in Los Angeles. His work spans animation, video games, and interactive art. He started his career as an animator, creating numerous short films which inspired a wave of lo-fi digital aesthetics. In collaboration with Spike Jonze, he created the holographic video games in the film Her. He then went on to develop interactive nature simulations such as Mountain and the universe scale Everything. His pioneering AR works have received over 3 billion views across social media.

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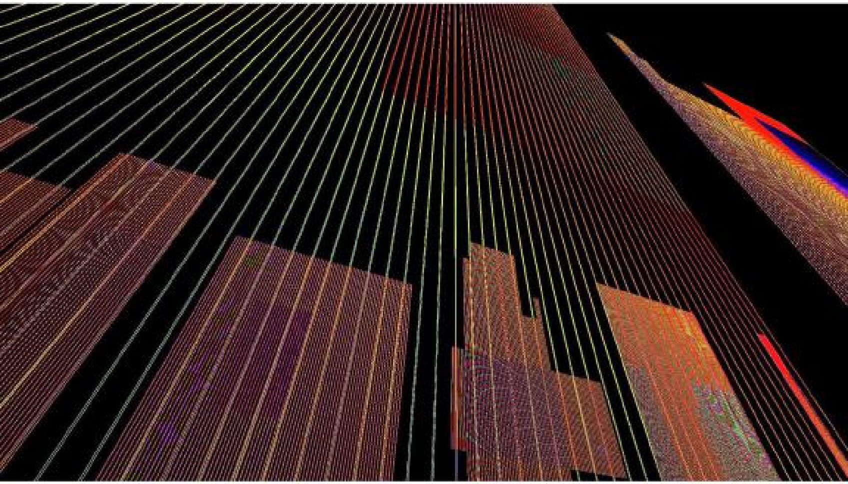

IX Shells

What Time Works for You?

Video (color, silent)
1920 × 1080 pixels
24 seconds

Artwork Description

Itzel Yard, known as IX Shells, spent years refining her relationship to art through code during the 2010s. In spring 2021, the public's interest in digital art surged on the back of a then-burgeoning NFT wave — and a historic sale for Yard in May of that year situated her at its epicenter. Like an indie musician who lands a major chart-topper years into their career, everything about her professional experience shifted. Suddenly sought after by museums, galleries, auction houses, and industry events around the world, Yard had to adjust to a new social dimension in her practice — one entailing travel; communications with curators, organizers, and producers across different timezones; and the realities of running out of hours for sitting with ideas and artmaking. "What Time Works for You?" — referencing a message she received from two senders simultaneously — is a sketch created in these cracks and corners in her travel schedule. All of IX Shells's work, regardless of how in-process or complete, channels a slice of her present-tense personal narrative — a moment, a memory, a song. Her essential fluency with digital materials becomes a sort of baseline flow state, from which a range of expressions might emerge — spanning glitch, patterns, color fields, and more. With "What Time Works for You?" we find a juxtaposition of harmony and tension, sine waves striated by bright lines and colors that contrast the breezy background. What results is a sketch of velocity and stillness, the experience of light from slanted perspectives, when time runs strange.

Artist Bio

Itzel Yard–recognised as Ix Shells–is a Panamanian-based artist and self taught coder. By playing video games during her childhood, Yard was able to tap into her creativity which prompted a deep fascination for coding at an early age. In recalling her pathway towards where she is now, Yard attributes a lot of her growth to her five-year stay in Toronto, where she studied architectural technology. Though this period was a tumultuous time in her life, it pushed her to find her own voice and creativity, through the safe space of computer science. By combining her observations of patterns in nature with her appreciation for Brutalist architecture, Yard had allowed computer science research to act as a digital simulation of an extension within her own mind, ultimately translating into generative art. While her creations portray a visual interpretation of the physical world, Yard intends every work to act as a metaphor of internal exploration. This narrative is written within each of her works through lines of code, acting as a context-based portrait of what Yard is experiencing at the time. She explains that her home is in her head–welcoming her audience to open a digital door into the artist's own visual portrayal of self reflection. Her gentle nature, personable warmth, and sincere appreciation for the creation of her work produces a visual form of ingenuity that is unmatched.

Panama

y.at/⛓🕳✨

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John Gerrard

Smoke Hands (Dark) 2022

Custom software (color, silent), Dimensions variable, Generative, interactive, JavaScript, HTML, CSS

Artwork Description

John Gerrard has built a practice developing simulation as a language and material, using this mode to examine issues related to energy, consumption, and environmental exploitation. "Smoke Hands (Dark) 2022" is a spatial WebGL sketch showing the artist's hands cupped around dark smoke. The work was produced in early 2022 to test ideas around subjects of ecology, responsibility, futurism, and politics. Click and drag in background to look around the scene. The smoke, which is produced by a particle system, recalls the artist's previous works, "Western Flag (Dalhart, Texas) 2017" and the earlier Smoke Tree series of 2006–7. "Smoke Hands" juxtaposes a symbol of destruction with a gesture of offering, instantly evoking the tension, absurdity, and peril of our dependence on carbon-based energy. As the artist says, "I like the sense that we are holding an uncertain future in our hands — or that we are protecting a global petro system that is in essence impossible."

Producer: Werner Poetzelberger
Programmer: Helmut Bressler

Artist Bio

John Gerrard is widely regarded as a key figure in the development of simulation within contemporary art. Deceptively looking like film or video, his works are virtual worlds, made using real-time computer graphics, a technology developed by the military and now used extensively in the gaming industry. Recent exhibitions include Corn Work at Galway International Arts Festival, traveling to Gwangju Biennial; X. laevis at Okayama Art Summit, Japan; Western Flag at Museo Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid; Solar Reserve, LACMA, Los Angeles, USA; Western Flag, Somerset House with Channel 4, London, England,; Power. Play, Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China; and Solar Reserve, Lincoln Center in Association with the Public Art Fund, New York, New York. Gerrard's work is in the collection of Tate, London; MoMA, New York; SFMOMA, San Francisco; LACMA, Los Angeles; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington; Kistefos Collection, Norway; IMMA, Dublin; Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul; M+, Hong Kong and many private collections internationally. John Gerrard received a BFA from Oxford University in 1997 and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2000. He is represented by Pace Gallery globally.

Dublin, Ireland

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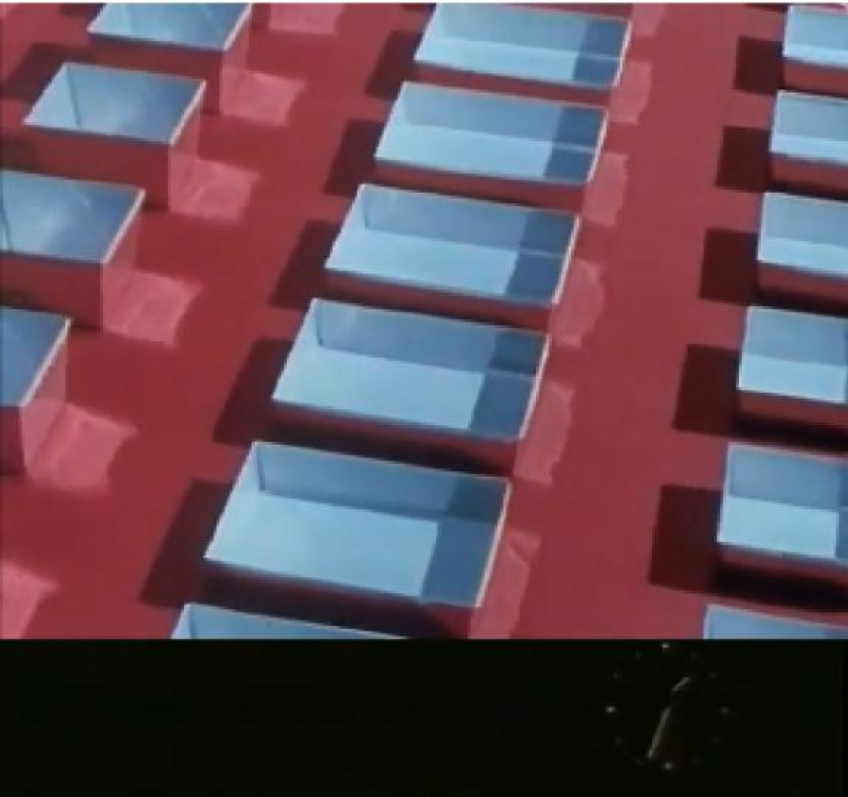

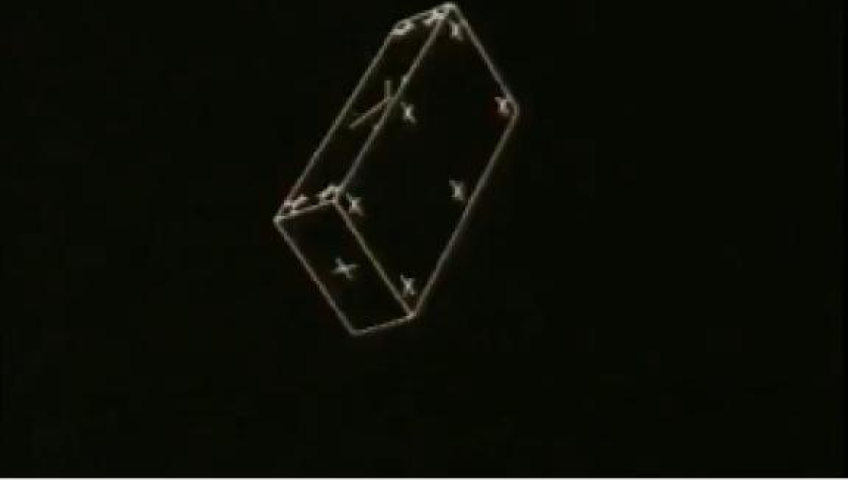

Mimi Onuoha

Machine Sees More Than It Says

Video (color, silent)
2560 × 1920 pixels
3 minutes 47 seconds
Archival footage + software, 2022

Artwork Description

As an artist interrogating the role of data collection in contemporary society, Mimi Ọnụọha seeks to reveal what's missing in our algorithmic lives. The presumption that technology is objective and indifferent is a boon to the powerful, often conveniently obscuring those power structures from view. Ọnụọha's work is an act of sensemaking, revealing these underlying dynamics and relationships in powerful clarity. "Machine Sees More Than It Says" consists of clips of footage gathered from archival videos made between the 1950s and the 1980s. Stitched together, they form a machine's imagining of itself and the courses of development that formed it, hinting at processes of resource extraction, transport, technical advancement, interfaces, and labor. In the words of the artist: "I was working on a completely different piece and kept stumbling across this footage from an array of different videos, all of which seemed to share an aesthetic feel and to hint at much deeper computational stories...as if the tools I was using were intervening to speak of themselves."

Artist Bio

Mimi Ọnụọha is a Nigerian-American artist whose work is about people, places, and things that are difficult to count and collect. Her multimedia practice uses print, code, installation, and archival video to make sense of the complex ecological, digital, and historical systems that surround and co-create us. Ọnụọha's work has been exhibited widely at venues like The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Tate Modern in London, La Gaitê Lyrique in Paris, FIBER Festival in Amsterdam, Mao Jihong Arts Foundation in Shanghai, and Le Centre Pompidou in Paris. She has spoken and been in residence at The Royal College of Art. In Ọnụọha's own words, "I am an eternal hybrid, drawn always to in-between spaces. I am fascinated by how metrified societies require the fluid, organic, messiness of people to be secured, tagged, categorized, and abstracted. In a world mediated by computers, everything begins to look like data, and that which doesn't fit the mold is at risk of being forgotten. My practice begins with these patterns of absence, which are always real and material and often located within people. I aim to trouble the assumptions baked into the technologies that mediate our experiences."

Brooklyn, NY

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Monica Rizzolli

Night shoots

Custom software (black and white, silent)
Dimensions variable, 1:1
Generative, non-interactive
JavaScript(p5.js), HTML, CSS

Artwork Description

Monica Rizzolli's "Night Shoots" portrays generative landscapes and vegetation at night. It evokes the sense of someone checking an infrared camera, waiting for an animal that never appears, instead coming to appreciate the subtle changes of plants and moonlight. This revealing of hidden realities is mirrored in the Rizzolli's unveiling of process. Following the explosion of NFTs, generative art projects are too often perceived only in their final expressions as single, discrete images. Through the interactive PDF, "Night Shoots" shows the evolution of the paths taken in the creation of a work of this nature, inviting the viewer to observe the paths of Rizzolli's generative creation. In so doing, she offers a rare view into the creative collaboration between artist and algorithm.

Artist Bio

Monica Rizzolli is a surface designer at Contrast Studio and a type designer at Just in Type. She has released two collections: “Fragments of an Infinite Field" and “Tropical Garden.” She has exhibited in the United States, Brazil, Germany, China, and Spain. Monica aims to create generative rules that resemble an organism’s growth and/or evolution. In this sense, her projects approach digital morphogenesis and the development of procedural organisms and landscapes.

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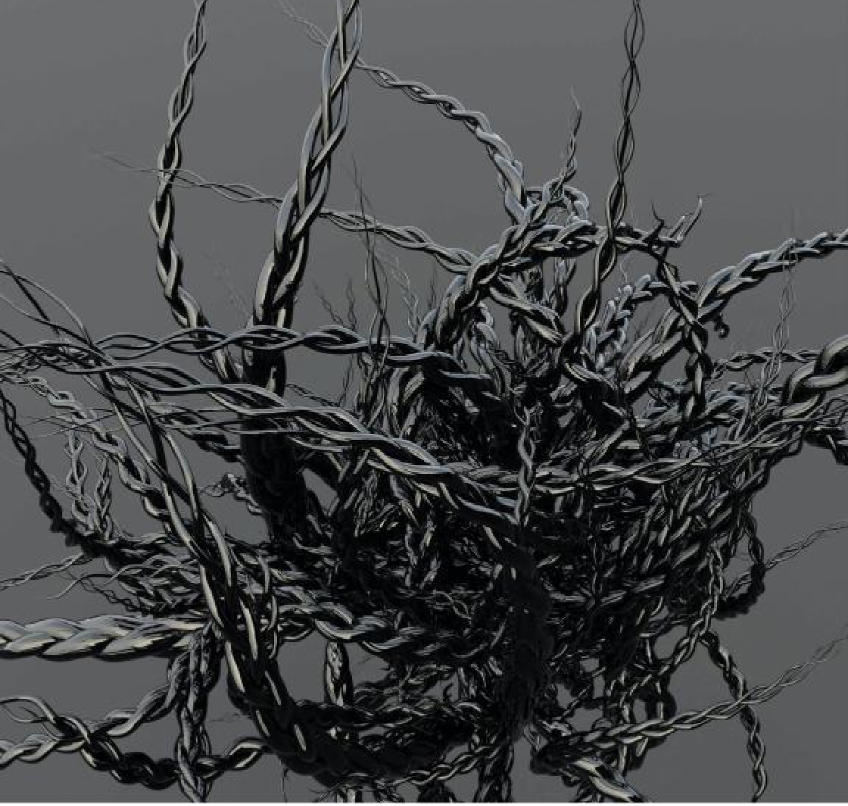

Qianqian Ye

Braiding Rage 怒辫

Image (black and white)
3240 × 3240 pixels

Artwork Description

Qianqian Ye's "Braiding Rage 怒辫" is a series of 100 unique renderings of procedurally-generated braid sculptures, foregrounding the artist's intimate relationship with code and spatial expression. The braid is an ongoing and complex motif in Ye's work. A braid of submarine fiber optic cables are the life source for a binary-defying hybrid "goddexx" that represents interconnection across the vast distance of the Pacific Ocean in the artist's 3D artwork "A.A.G." In their collaborative augmented reality altar "Entangled," the artist uses the braid to pay homage to "Self-Comb Women" (自梳女, ZìShūNǚ), a proto-feminist tribe of women who demonstrated their commitment to independence over marriage by rolling their braids into a chignon (by custom, a married women's hairstyle). Artmaking is always an act of self-portraiture, but "Braiding Rage 怒辫" directly grapples with raw emotion, using the occasion of the "sketch" to channel a more candid self-portraiture through digital art. Ye writes, "In each iteration, the braids become an outlet for the rage I often withhold. The strands of dark hair grow, flow, braid, whip, twist, tangle, coil, and weave with their own will. As the braver and louder version of me, the braids rant like nothing is left to be afraid of. In each rendering I ask: 'Where are the braids going next?

What do they want?'"

Artist Bio

Qianqian (Q) Ye is a Chinese artist, creative technologist and educator based in Los Angeles. Trained as an architect, she creates digital, physical, and social spaces exploring issues around gender, immigrants, power, and technology. Their most recent collaborative project, The Future of Memory, was a recipient of the Mozilla Creative Media Award. At the Processing Foundation, Qianqian is the Lead of p5.js, an open-source art and education platform that prioritizes access and diversity in learning to code, with over 1.5 million users. She currently teaches creative coding as an Adjunct Assistant Professor at USC Media Arts + Practice and 3D Arts at Parsons School of Design. For 2022-2023, Qianqian is a NYU ITP/IMA project fellow and civic media fellow at USC Annenberg Innovation Lab.

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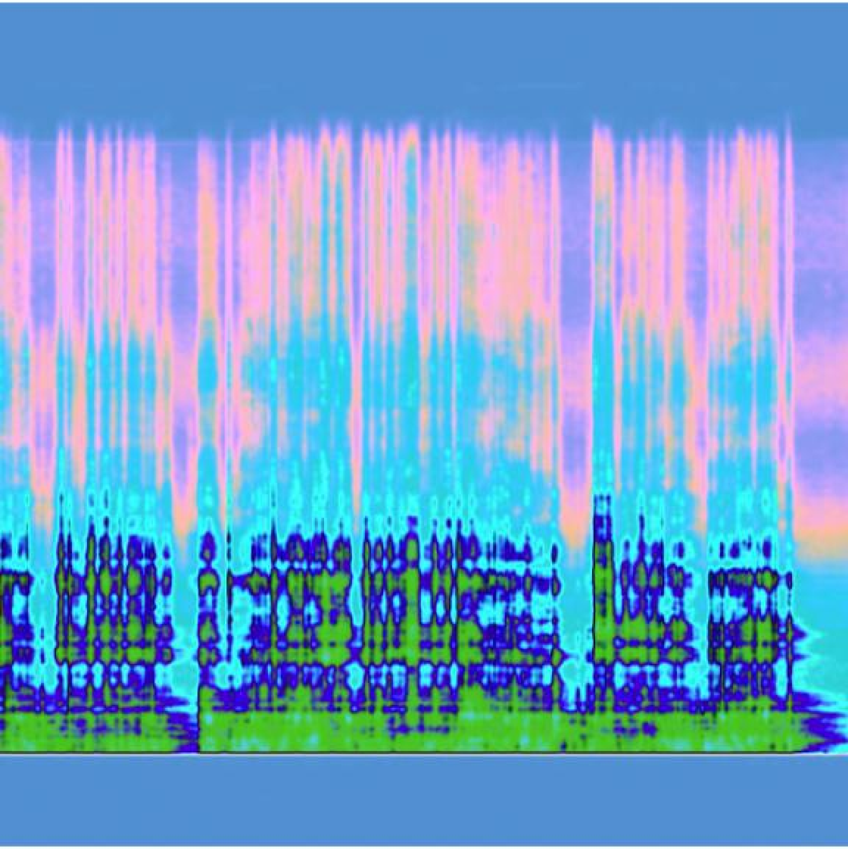

Reeps One
Machine Inspired Voice 00.1

Video (color, sound)
4320 × 4320 pixels
36 seconds

Artwork Description

Artists working with generative tools have different ways of thinking about their tools. For some, it's just that: tools. For others, it's more akin to collaborating with a partner. Across much of his work at the cutting-edge of voice and technology, Harry Yeff frames a connected system of AI tools collectively as a sparring partner or workout buddy, a sort of composite machine rival through which to refine his (human) voice's range and capability. In so doing, the artist uses AI to question the limit of his own voice, an opponent like duet and mentorship that pushes to new-voice and expression. Already among the best beatboxers in the world, Yeff's lines of pursuit training with machines have pushed his capabilities into realms that truly begin to sound un-, non-, or posthuman. Machine Inspired Voice is an ongoing research exploring multiple AI driven processes to develop new articulations, phraseologies, and compositions in human voice expression. In "Machine Inspired Voice 00.1," Yeff first interacts in real time with a synthetic vocalist using his own voice. Yeff's ability to develop complex machine-like vocal phrases is then "listened to" by the system and a reply is generated. This artwork offers a glimpse in process, and functions as a pre-release artist proof for a forthcoming series of over 300 AI and human vocal phraseologies. The work is also presented as a spectrogram, which further reveals the range of audio frequencies visually.

Artist Bio

Harry Yeff aka Reeps100 is a London born neuro-divergent artist and technologist specializing in voice and tech-based expression. Yeff has been visualizing the voice for 15 years and is globally celebrated as a leader in a new wave of voice technology-focused experimentation. He continues to build on his world-class skillset, utilizing an almost inhuman vocal range to drive his works. His performative installations, AI-driven voice work, and machine-like vocal control have amassed a global following, rendering over 100 million views online. Yeff has completed three artist residencies at Harvard University, is a culture leader at The World Economic Forum, and has followed in the footsteps of John Cage and Rauschenberg by joining the legendary Experiments in Art and Technology program at Bell Labs. His multidisciplinary new-media spectacles and theory have established artist in residence roles at Factory Berlin and Sonar Barcelona. In 2020, Yeff won the Arts and Science Breakthrough with the Falling Walls Foundation for his ongoing portfolio of cutting edge voice and technology experimentation.

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