

“The library is being built; it is the universe.”

J. L. Borges

The library and autopoiesis as an artistic question: a portfolio by LAb[au]



Photos: Botanique, Brussels; LAb[au] exhibition POSSIBLES | PROBABLES



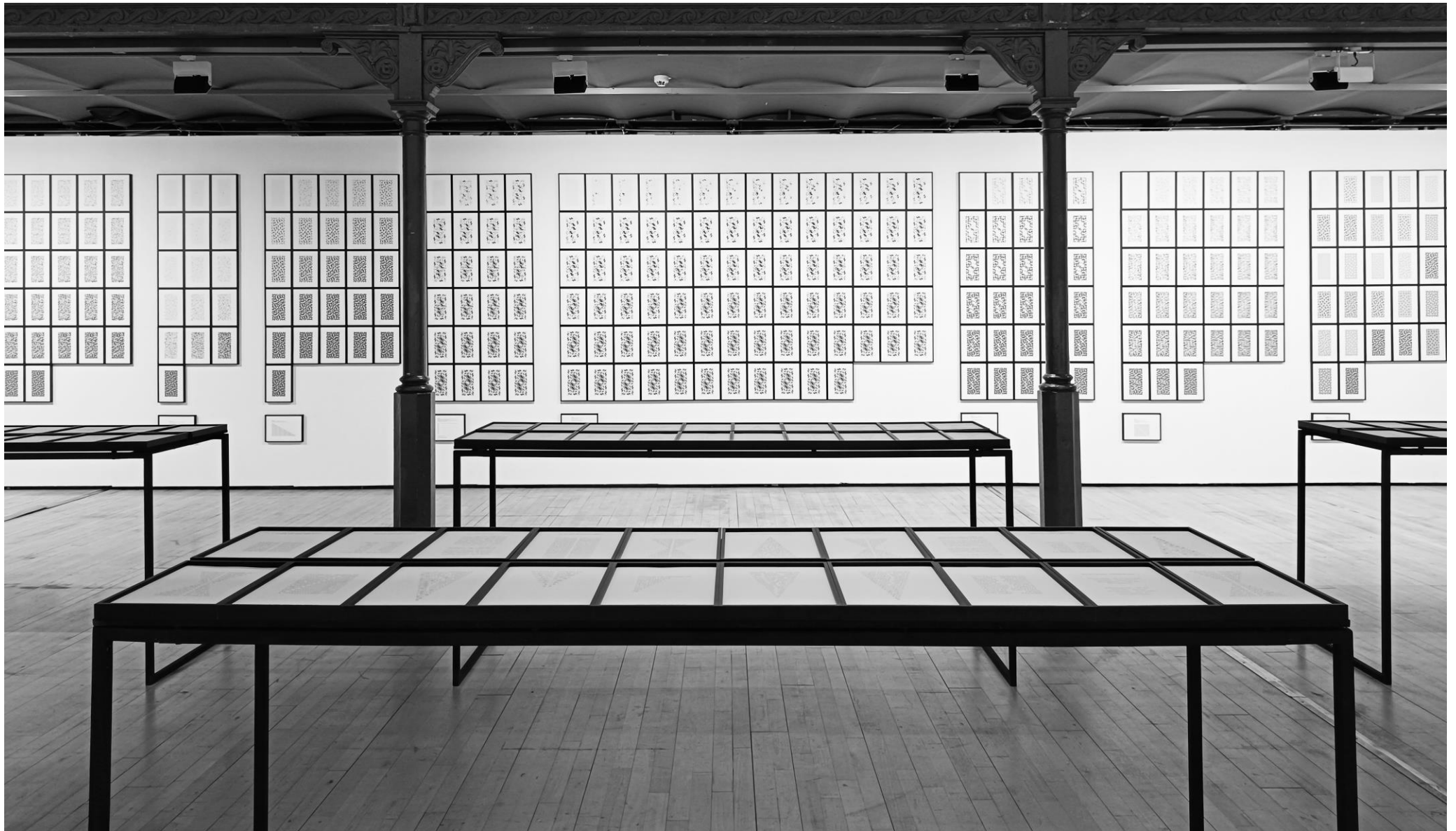
Photos: Botanique, Brussels; POSSIBLES | PROBABLES exhibition

The Library of POSSIBLES | PROBABLES

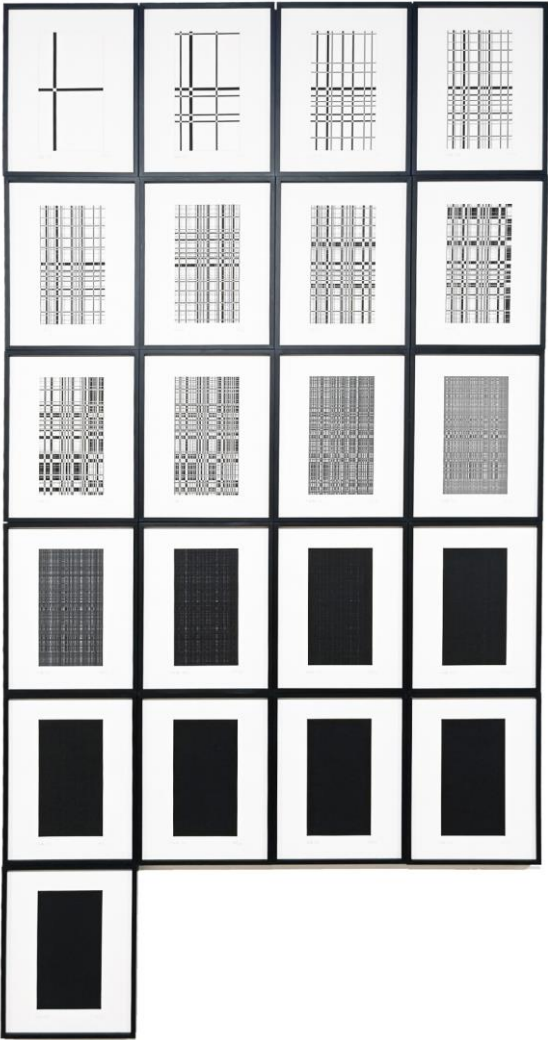
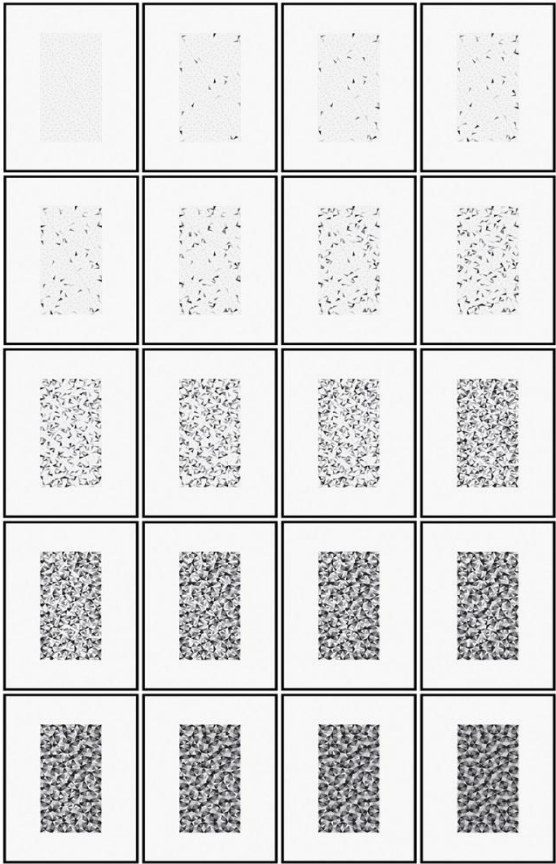
This inquiry began with a simple question: how can an empty white page be filled until it becomes entirely black? For each new attempt, each new chapter, rules are defined: strict, regular rules of proportion, division of the plane or the Fibonacci sequence, alongside others that are more singular, arbitrary and impossible to classify. Slowly, chapter by chapter, a lexicon takes shape, potentially indexing every possible way of carrying out the task of filling the page. The question might now be put differently: is there an end to our imagination, to the possible? Infinity?

Within this intellectual construction, the blank page can be understood as the starting point of all artistic work: a singularity. Here it is both the object and the subject of the work. It becomes a conceptual structure, a simple idea through which to reflect on art, form, object and message. The procedural nature of the work also reveals our capacity to translate any artistic idea into written, formal rules. In doing so, it exposes the relationship between art and language.

It can also be understood as a form of introspection, a way of considering art as a philosophical question and approaching its original nature. This lexicon, this field of possibilities and probabilities, is never complete and always expanding. It is only one stage in a body of work that, without repeating itself, has a purpose but no end. The library will go on being built: it is the artistic universe of the possible | probable.



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How to turn a white page into a fully covered black page
Rule: each iteration randomly fills 25 cells

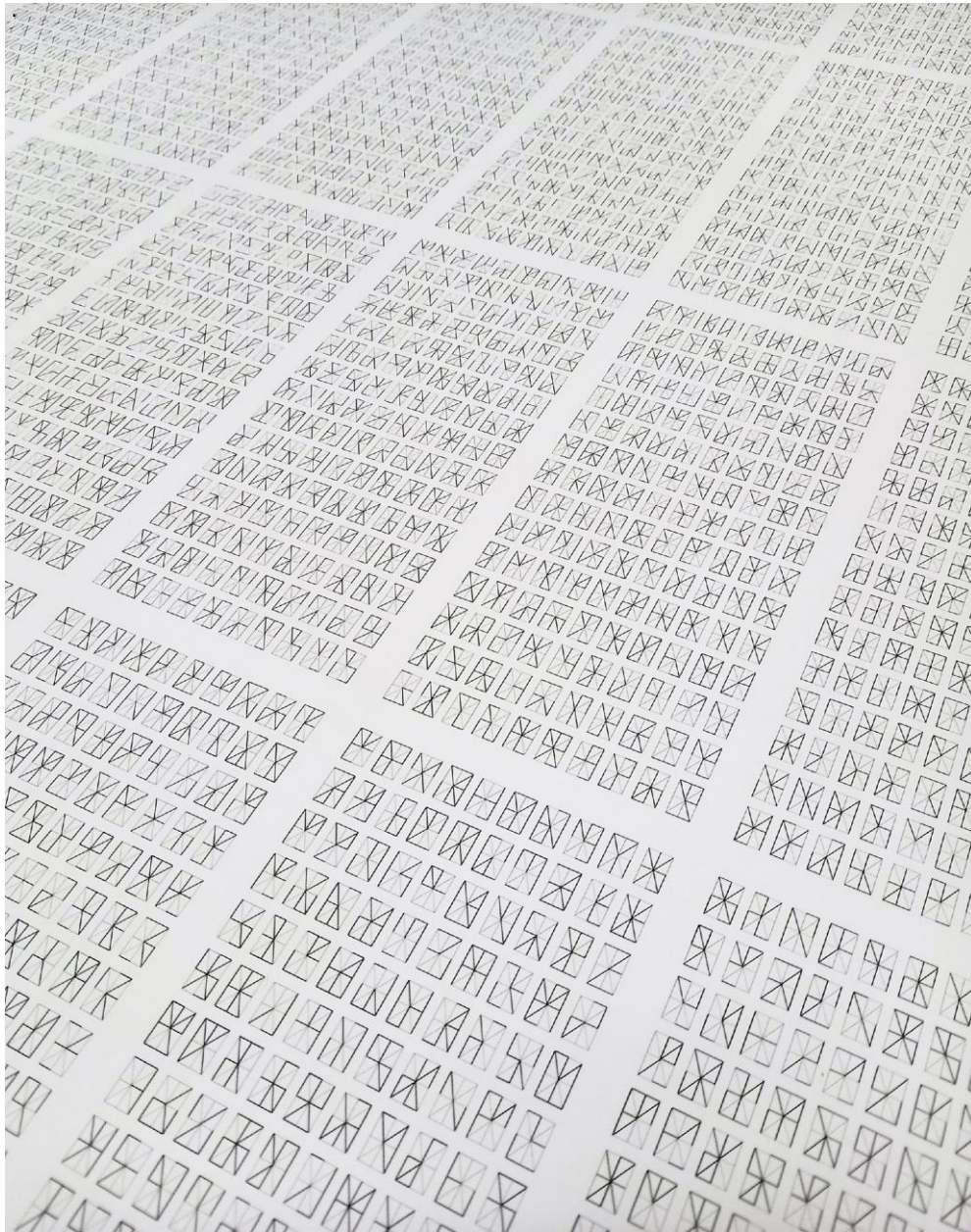


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finite | infinite
possible | probable
micro | macro



Casino Luxembourg, contemporary art centre, 2019



Random combinations on a 16-segment display

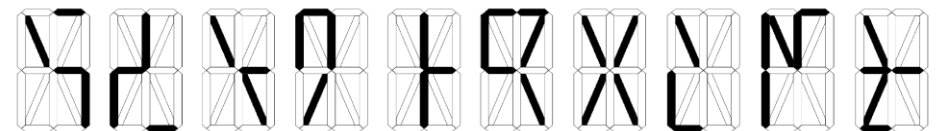
ONE OF A BILLION YEARS

When we think about time, we may turn to the sun, the tides, the stars or radioactive decay. Each lets us measure its pulse, its scale and its essence. This work uses a 16-segment display to show far more than alphanumeric symbols: it explores the almost infinite combinations of its segments.

$2e180 =$

1532495540865888858358347027150309183618739122183602176.

From this simple construction, almost limitless variations emerge, including words, sequences of words and texts: all a matter of probability and time. If one random combination is displayed each hour, showing every one would take longer than human beings have existed on Earth. At this pace, each of the 365 frames on the wall displays the results of a day, while the entire wall represents a year. One hundred books of 365 pages each extend the work to the scale of a century: the span of a human life. The work thus links the measurement of time to phenomenology, while locating us within it.





For us, everything has not already been written—we do not turn into ghosts. We walk the aisles, searching and rearranging the shelves, looking for lines of meaning amid cacophony and incoherence, reading the story of our past and future, gathering our thoughts and those of others, and occasionally glimpsing mirrors in which we can recognize creatures of information. — L. Borges



100 books = 100 years of combinations = a lifetime



1 column = 15 min; 1 frame = 6 h; 4 frames = 1 day; 28 frames = 1 week



HEIDENHEIM LIBRARY, GERMANY



XXXX XXX (permanent work)

The installation is an illuminated eight-letter sign at the centre of the entrance hall of the public library in Heidenheim, Germany. It can be seen through the windows from the public space, by day and by night.

The displayed words are produced by a process that generates letters at random, one after another, while checking each combination against a dictionary. If it is not a word, the process begins again until one is found. On average, producing an eight-letter word takes about four hours, though in theory it could take anywhere from one second to infinity. This writing process replaces conventional narrative with a logical system, creating a playful approach to the boundary between sense and nonsense. The work belongs to the tradition of concrete poetry, offering an agnostic perspective that invites viewers to interpret and make their own associations.





Kunstmuseum Heidenheim, Zeit Zeichen | Zeichen Zeit, 2022



Kunstmuseum Heidenheim, Zeit Zeichen | Zeichen Zeit, 2022

This yellow field belongs to the avant-garde tradition of painting, celebrating the monochrome as one of its most iconic forms.

Where Kazimir Malevich's Black Square offered a Suprematist and emotional representation of space-time, and Yves Klein's blue pigments embraced the infinite, this radioluminescent monochrome expresses something finite and concrete. Yet its reason for being is found in a simple condition of reality rather than in pure abstraction. Uranium shale continually emits energy; its intense yellow slowly fades, ultimately becoming black after 1,600 years.

This is a painting in constant transformation, made tangible only by the clicks of a Geiger counter. Here colour is a state in time, on a scale beyond human perception. The work explores the duality of visible and invisible, conceivable and unimaginable, thereby revealing the limits of representation.

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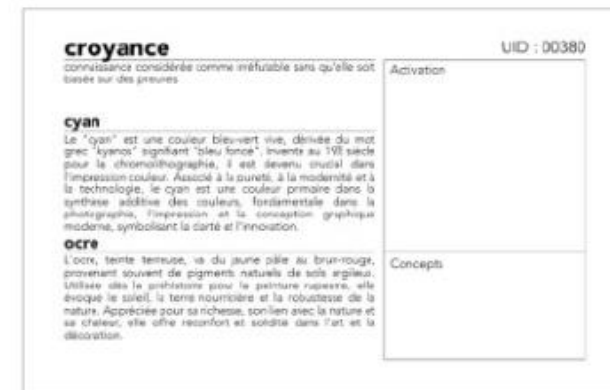
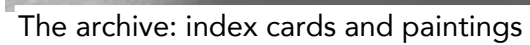
Anagrams of colour names, index card

The Colour Archive, since 2023

From the etymology and taxonomy of colour names
to a colour model derived from language

“Everyday language has no means of describing a particular shade of colour. It is therefore unable to produce an image of that colour.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*

It began with a simple idea: rearrange the letters of colour names to produce another word. In French, cyan + ocre = croyance (“belief”). But combining words is not the same as mixing colours. This tension continues the long duality between the visual and the written, between image and language. To explore it, a database of colour names was assembled and an algorithm written to combine them, while checking the results against a dictionary of existing words. After months of computation and trillions of permutations, thousands of words emerged, adding new meanings to the etymology and multiple meanings of colour. The archive is a theory of colour derived from language, proposing a unity of image and word, of the emotional and perceptual with the logical and conceptual.





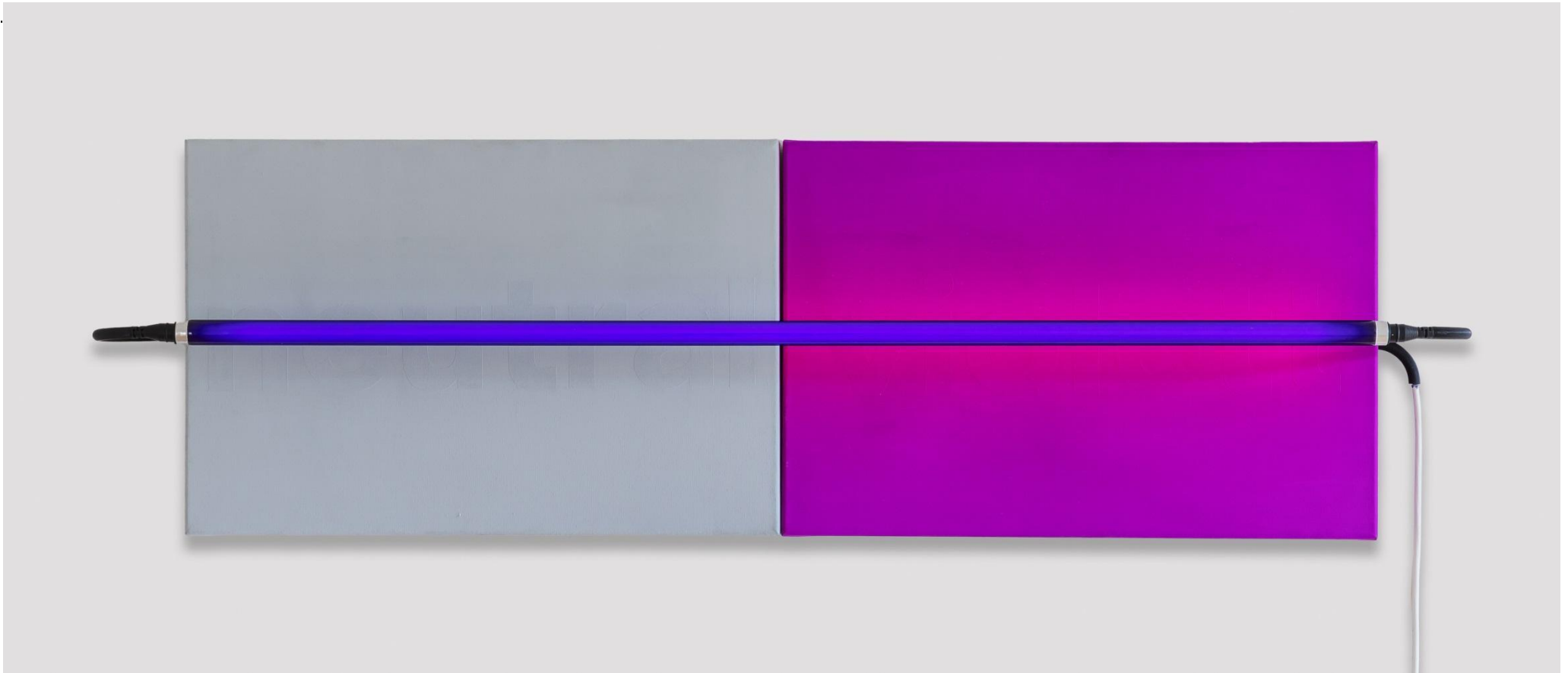
Diptych:

Bleupersan = sable + prune

Ultramarinblau = umbranatur + lila

The two paintings reveal the difference between language and colour. Mixing the colours sable (sand) and prune (plum) will never produce bleupersan (Persian blue); nor will umbranatur (natural umber) and lila (lilac) produce ultramarinblau (ultramarine blue). The diptych plays with the tautology of language, while its impossibility shows the independence of colour. The work pays tribute to the interaction between the language of colour and the colour of language.





The wordplay reveals a property of light and a way to paint with its invisible spectrum. The invisible “ultraviolet” light tube makes the violet canvas glow, but not the neutral one: the invisible partially changes our perception of the visible. Guided by language, this becomes a play of perception that unites the two.



Colour theory derived from language

The etymology of colour names as the content of painting





This is the infinite monkey theorem: given enough time, a monkey pressing keys at random on a typewriter will eventually produce a complete copy of Shakespeare's works.

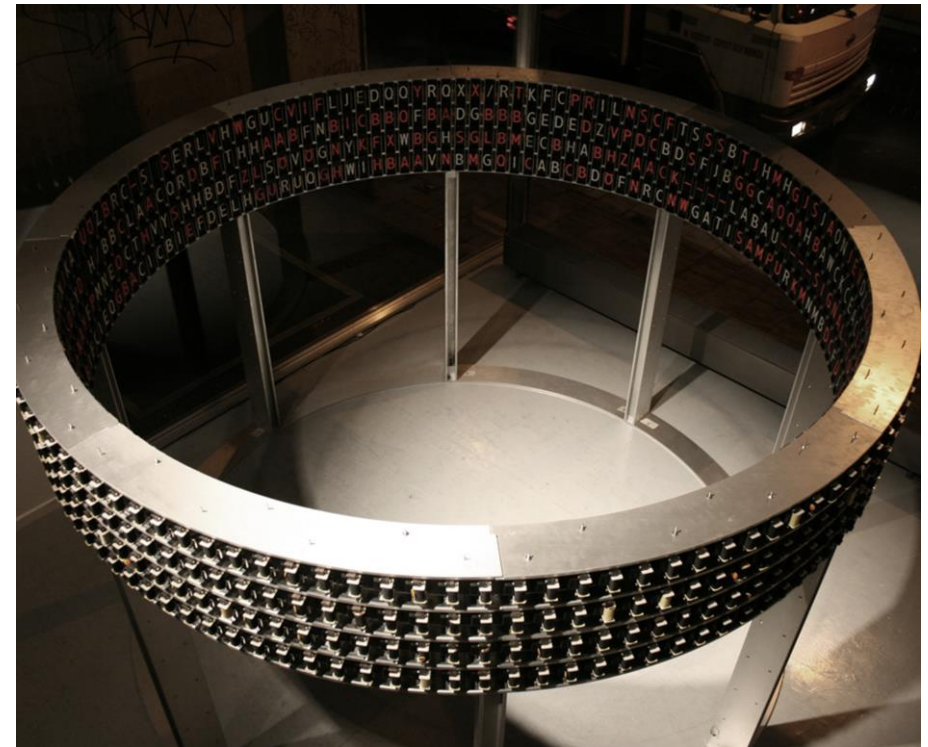
The emergence of such complexity from chance runs counter to intuition and to our tendency to recognize patterns and find meaning everywhere, all the time.

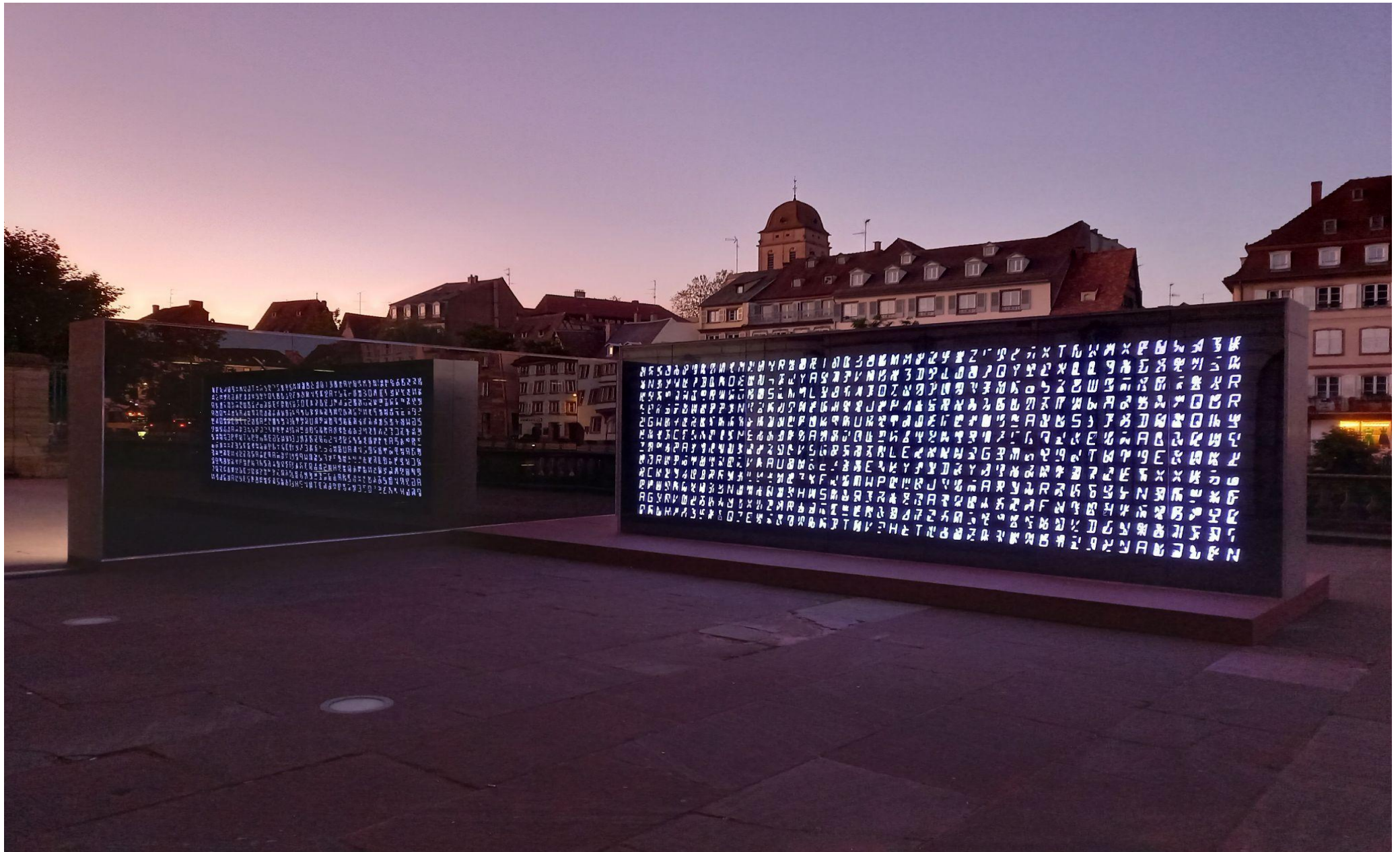
To grasp what the theorem really means, it helps to move from science to art.

Consider Signal to Noise, an installation by LAb[au] made with modern computers and old split-flap display boards. It lets viewers watch machines cycle through random collections of letters. Potentially meaningful sequences are marked in red. You can see some red letters become complete words.

Order emerges from chaos and meaning from randomness, right before your eyes, without a banana in sight. Wire, 2013

This machine consists of 512 split flaps turning at random speeds, placing the viewer at the centre of an endless stream of letters that sometimes form words. The familiar clatter may evoke nostalgia for the pre-digital age or offer a deeper view of logic and meaning.







Terrasse des Rohans, Strasbourg 2021

What if we could know the on/off state of every switch in the world? Would that mean anything to you, to us, or to anyone? Would it be data, or information? This permanent installation was commissioned by the Franco-German electrical equipment manufacturer Hager.

It explores the chance that random data—zeros and ones, on and off—might yield a tangible, usable meaning. The work has two wall-mounted components. The first comprises 576 displays showing random combinations of sixteen segments. Now and then, letters emerge from these proto-signs, and sometimes, by chance, words. The second wall displays those words, which are then placed in a logical order with the help of artificial intelligence. The work thus produces an entire text stochastically and sends it into the public realm, as though we could find meaning within a mass of random zeros and ones.





The work confronts viewers with the endless digits of pi scrolling across a split-flap display. It is one of the few truly random sequences we know, containing every possible combination of digits and thus, in this sense, a description of the whole universe.

At the speed at which the digits pass across the display, showing all the digits of pi calculated to date would take 3,600 years. The digits are first translated into characters, then checked for possible words, which accumulate along the installation. This endless calculation of pi becomes the origin of autopoietic* poetry, a sequence of associations attempting to decode the secret of the universe.

* In systems theory, autopoiesis describes a self-sustaining organization, a system capable of producing and maintaining itself. Here, the production of meaning is contained entirely within the system's own construction.

