

Errorism.

Agnieszka Kurant

Agnieszka Kurant's art explores the invisible: the flows of virtual capital, immaterial labour, concealed forms of exploitation, and fictions impacting reality. The artist has developed novel methods of producing artistic forms, speculating about the future of work and creativity while examining the blurred boundary between the natural and the artificial, the human and the nonhuman. The exhibition *Errorism* focuses on the simultaneously creative and destructive role of error in the face of present-day automation and algorithmisation.

The presence of error is crucial to both evolutionary processes and human creativity. Many scientific discoveries considered to be the result of rational progress were in fact accidental. The goal of risk management, a neoliberal endeavor, is to prevent errors. However, such an approach fails to anticipate disasters or election results because it ignores the irrationality of many types of human behaviour. What will happen to creativity once artificial intelligence eliminates our mistakes and we stop erring? How will we acquire new knowledge or create culture? By asking questions about the value of error, Agnieszka Kurant continues to reflect on the ways in which societies evolve.

The works presented here ask questions about the relationship between an individual and collective intelligence. The term refers to the process of collective decision-making as well as novel forms that emerge from interactions among thousands or millions of humans, animals, molecules, or bacteria. This phenomenon occurs on the internet, in the world of insects, and between neurons in the human brain. It demonstrates that the whole is more than the sum of its component parts. Agnieszka Kurant often uses *crowdsourcing* strategies, a technique that allows her to shrewdly transcend boundaries between species or imposed by geography. Her work criticises contemporary capitalism, which exploits the labour of entire societies through a global factory, the product of which are digital footprints created through our behaviours and emotions.

Today, commodification concerns not only the world of material goods and services but also information. Information is the key to creating the simulation of the future.

What we cannot predict, we try to calculate with the help of algorithms.

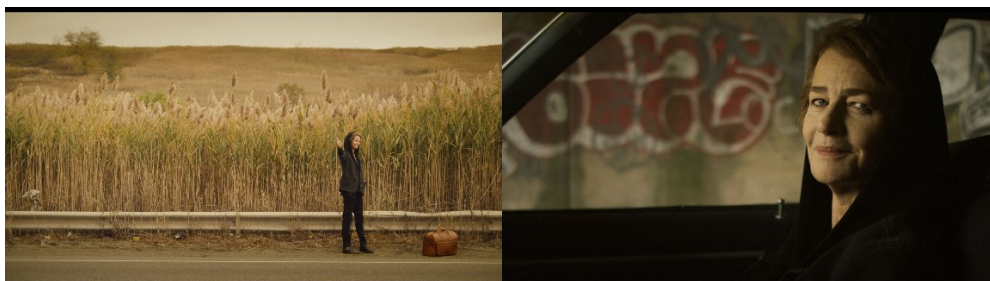
The artist problematises methods of predicting the future and critically examines theories of progress shaped by colonialism and neoliberalism. Her interests also include the activities of insurance companies that speculate in risk: methods of trading around the unknown and the future. Today, data has become the most important asset of capitalism. It is yet another resource, like coal and oil, that drives the economic system devastating the planet. The artist analyses how it influences not only what is virtual but also that which is material: organic and mineral.

The works on display are the result of constantly occurring processes and the collective work of entire societies: para-geological structures, termite mounds, images borrowed from scientific simulations or generated with the help of algorithms. They all question the idea of individual authorship and of a stable, finite form. Agnieszka Kurant points out parallels between the cristalization and emergence of forms in biological, social, and virtual systems. For the artist, a mineral crystalizes much like the evolution of a sign or language, the circulation of memes and rumors, or the development of social movements and ideas. The exhibition presents various stages of emergence, growth, and decomposition of forms that reflect and comment on the ways societies evolve.

Cutaways, 2013

film, 24 min

collaboration: Walter Murch, Will Holder, John Menick, Manuel Cirauqui,
Stefan Węglowski
courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles





The work presents a collection of abandoned ideas, a junkyard of deleted plots and narratives. It is a portrait of three characters cut from different films by editors, directors, and producers. *Cutaways* tells the story of an encounter between three cut-out characters played by their original actors: Charlotte Rampling as the hitchhiker from Richard C. Sarafian's *Vanishing Point* (1971), Abe Vigoda as the lawyer in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), and Dick Miller from Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). The film, which posits that invisible labor and editing are political tools for organizing reality, is also a statement on the paradoxes of intellectual property rights. The deleted characters, their existence ultimately determined to be unnecessary, are still protected by copyrights. The typography used in the film's credits, which lists characters cut from 50 other films in the original typefaces of these films, is the result of Kurant's collaboration with the designer Will Holder.

Emergent Alphabet, 2021

typeface, plastic plaque

collaboration: Radim Peško

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles

This project discusses the gradual privatization of the commons as exemplified by the privatization of knowledge and design. Emergent Alphabet employs a new font, Emergence, recently created by Kurant in collaboration with the typographer and designer Radim Peško. This hybrid typeface-artwork uses the history of typography as a gene pool. Kurant and Peško used 26 typefaces from the history of typography to create this composite typeface, the summa of knowledge and collective intelligence in typography since its beginning in ancient Rome by thousands of anonymous stonemasons on the Trajan Column to contemporary digital fonts

owned by corporations like Microsoft. Each letter in Emergence is composed of fragments of a given letter derived from the 26 various typefaces. These combinations produce mutations and errors resembling living organisms. Emergence was used by Kurant to create *Emergent Alphabet*, a reference to Marcel Broodthaers's *Alphabet* (1969).

Placebo, 2021

custom display cabinet with custom printed paper, metal, and plastic containers

collaboration: Krzysztof Pyda, Krzysztof Smaga

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles

The display case brings together a series of imaginary pharmaceuticals mentioned in literature, films, comic books, and pop culture. The phantom drugs come to life as physical objects, packaged in colorful vintage and contemporary designs displaying their dosage and a description of their use within their fictional source. Each box is filled with actual placebo tablets. The work demonstrates the ways in which fictions affect our understanding of reality, both past and present. The pharmaceutical industry often preys on patients' blind faith in the power of para-drugs and vitamins. The industry also over-prescribes painkillers, the result of which has been an increase in addiction among millions of Americans. *Placebo* shows how contemporary culture represents and perpetuates ideas about health and medication as they relate to the body and mind. More recently, placebos have taken on a new meaning and are increasingly used to support treatment, with many scientific studies indicating their real and positive psychosomatic effects.

Risk Management, 2020

pigment print on archival paper

the work commissioned for: the New York Times

collaboration: Krzysztof Pyda

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles



The work draws on the inability of risk-prediction models and forecasts of collective decision-making to consider irrational human behavior and other largely impactful social phenomena. The neoliberal concept of risk management treats human beings as rational, consistent decision makers (*Homo economicus*), but history has shown that people often behave irrationally, illogically, and unpredictably as individuals and in groups. The geographical map presents outbreaks of behavioral contagions spanning the last thousand years: collective hallucinations; waves of UFO sightings; laughter epidemics; global social panics; and mass hysterias at schools, factories, and convents. Unpredictable social contagions like rumors, urban legends, or crazes can cause a stock-market crash, a bubble in the real-estate market, or a revolution. Unlike real epidemics, these outbreaks are based on imaginary threats, phantoms, and fictions and fueled by anxiety and uncertainty in society.

Air Rights, 2021

foam, wood, powdered rock, metal, electromagnets

collaboration: Krzysztof Smaga

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles



The levitating meteorite gives visual weight to the empty space above properties, an intangible commodity allowing for the creation of value out of nothing but air. The market of air rights constitutes an important part of real-estate market in New York and other major cities around the world. Kurant used a system of electromagnets to produce an electromagnetic field and permanently suspend the sculpture in air. The form of the work addresses financial speculation around industries that might develop in the future, such as recently proposed projects to mine asteroids and comets.

Chemical Garden, 2021

sodium silicate, copper, nickel, cobalt, chromium, manganese, iron, zinc salts
the work created in collaboration with dr Magdalena Osiat
courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles

The installation investigates the relationship between the digital, biological, and mineral. A chemical garden is a set of complex crystalline structures resembling plants created through a mix of inorganic chemicals: metal salts with water glass. The installation combines the artist's interests in alchemy and in the boundary between what is biological and mineral, living and inanimate. The first documented chemical garden was created by the German alchemist Johann Rudolf Glauber in

1646. Modern research shows that chemical gardens in hydrothermal vents on the sea floor are a plausible path for the origin of life on Earth. Some of the earliest purported fossils of life might be from fossilized chemical gardens. Copper, chromium, cobalt, manganese, and iron are essential ingredients in modern computers. The industrial extraction of these metals, which formed quasi-biological structures at the inception of life, leads to geological changes and the devastation of entire ecosystems.

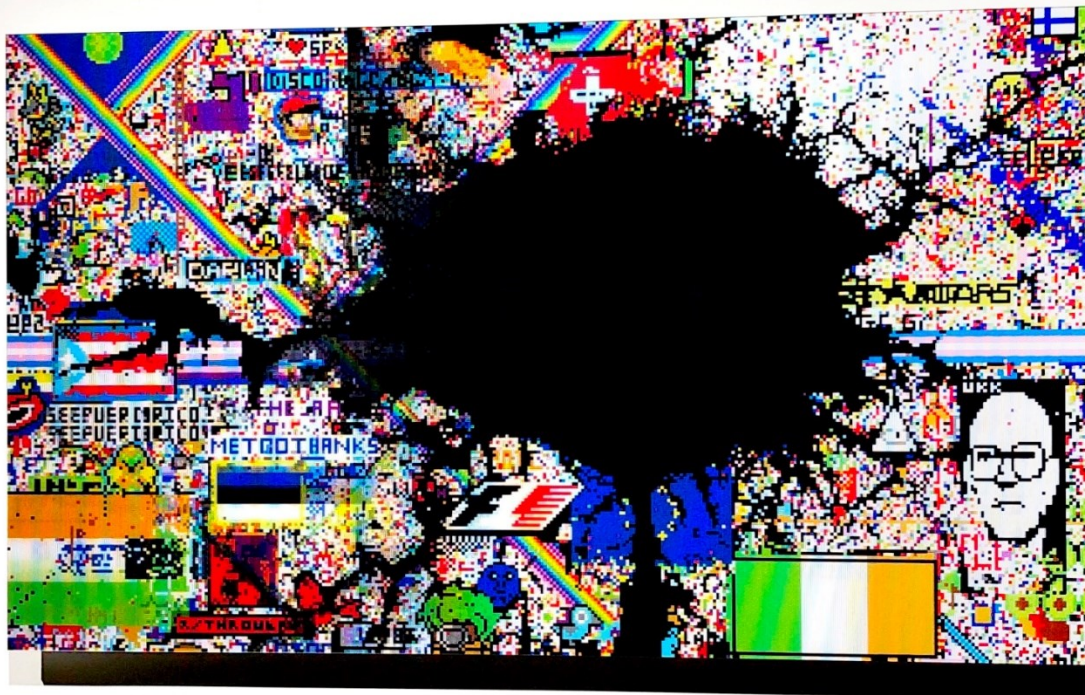
Collective Rorschach Test, 2019

lenticular print

collaboration: Krzysztof Pyda

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles and Fortes

D'Aloia & Gabriel Sao Paulo/ Rio de Janeiro



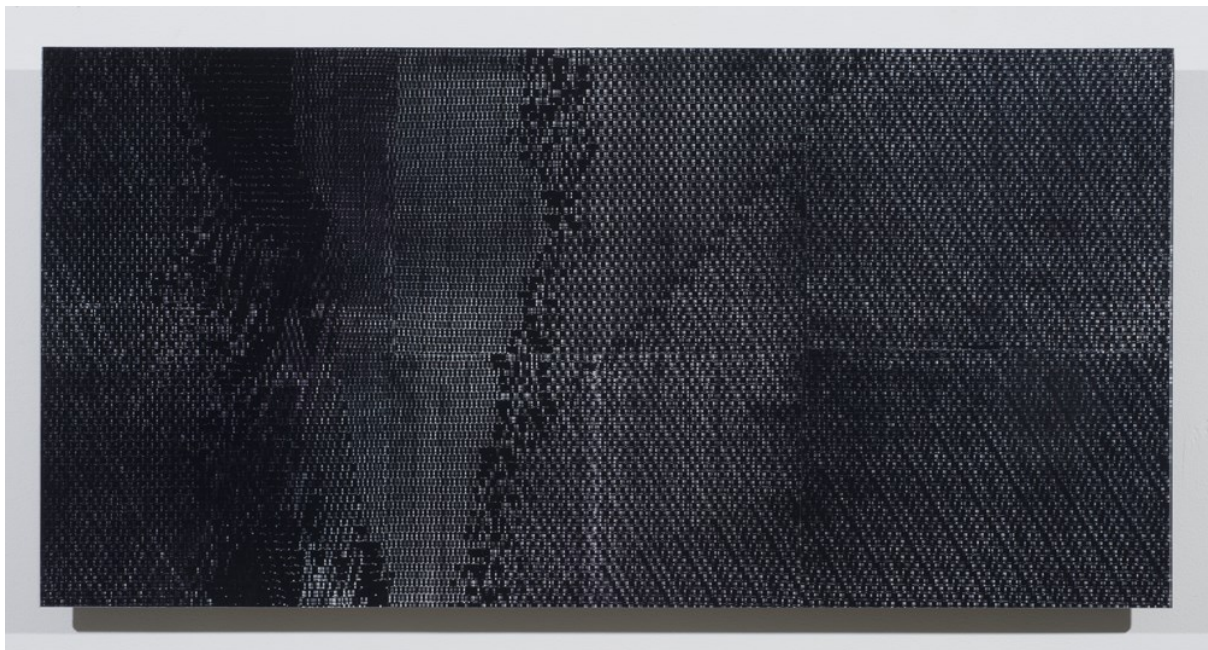
The work was inspired by a social experiment conducted by users of the online social platform Reddit in 2017. As a result of the cooperation of over 1 million people globally, a virtual canvas was filled with collectively made forms that appeared and disappeared over the course of a few days: flags, fictional characters, famous works of art, portraits of politicians, slogans. The most interesting irregular form created there resembled a black hole, a virus,

a living organism, or a Rorschach inkblot test. The latter is a psychological test in which patients interpret inkblots in an effort to reveal their unconscious. The work is an example of the evolution and mutation of memes, anonymous and mass information exchange, and the coordination of thoughts on the internet.

Evolutions, 2014

lenticular print

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles



The piece draws on the work of the Princeton University mathematician Nils Barricelli, a pioneer of computational biology and evolutionary algorithms. In the 1950s, Barricelli worked on the ENIAC computer, simultaneously used to build the atomic bomb, to develop the first forms of artificial life: digitally grown algorithmic organisms evolving in a numerical universe. In opposition to Darwin, Baricelli proposed that evolution does not have to always happen on the basis of natural selection but can also be a product of emergence and collective intelligence. Barricelli documented the evolution of his synthetic algorithmic organisms, capturing every 50th generation. The work presents a lenticular animation developed from three consecutive printouts discovered by Kurant in the Barricelli archives that document three moments in the evolution of digital life-forms.

A.A.I. (Artificial Artificial Intelligence), 2015

termite mounds built by colonies of living termites out of colored sand,
gold and crystals

collaboration: dr Paul Bardunias, dr Leah Kelly

private collections



Critically commenting on the outsourcing of western industrial production to Asia and Africa and the digital exploitation of global labor through data mining, the artist outsourced her art production to another species. Working with entomologists at the University of Florida, Kurant employed an entirely unaware worker society of millions of termite specimens to build her sculptures. The artist supplied the termites with alternative building materials, such as colored sands, crystals, and gold. The resulting structures, oscillating between nature and culture, also problematize the idea of individual authorship. In the contemporary world, where singular authorship is being replaced by complex collective forms (e.g., Wikipedia), *A.A.I.* proposes a way of producing artworks through the work of the entire society. The title of the work refers to a concept coined by Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, who defined the invisible ghost work of millions of employees of Amazon Mechanical Turk, the online crowdsourcing platform, as *artificial* artificial intelligence.

Errorism, 2021

hologram, 3D animation, GPT3, GPT2

collaboration: Ziv Epstein (MIT Media Lab), Holly Grimm

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles

The hologram presents a simulation of several artworks of which Kurant is not the author but which were generated by artificial intelligence algorithms based on her works created to date. The piece employs AI algorithms GPT3 and GPT2 — models for natural language processing that create new texts based on existing publications by the same author and the entire corpus of English language online. In this case, the algorithms were trained on a set of descriptions of all works by Agnieszka Kurant and the artist's essays. The algorithms generated a set of descriptions of conceptual works, which the artist never authored but could potentially create. These descriptions were visualized by Kurant as holographic animations. Perhaps the algorithms revealed ideas for artworks rejected by the artist's unconscious but reflect what is possible: the margin of error, an alternative configuration or future forms of her artistic work. Using the example of her own art, Kurant analyzes the role of error in the creative process and undermines the idea of creativity as an individual endeavor.

Artificial Society (Self-Segregation Model), 2017

lenticular print

collaboration: Joanna Zielińska

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles

The development of information technologies has created possibilities for algorithmic predictions of the future as well as computational social analysis. Agent-based computer simulations, so-called artificial societies, are used by economists and social scientists to analyze how social structures and group behaviors emerge from interactions between individuals. The models mimic and predict complex social phenomena, such as migrations, epidemics, or ethnic conflicts. This lenticular print presents one of the earliest examples of an artificial-society simulation. Created in 1971 by the American economist Thomas Schelling to study the dynamics of racial segregation, the model shows that even in an evenly mixed neighborhood, the social

system will always self-segregate over time, suggesting the need for constant monitoring or an interventionist policy from the government.

Half-Life of Facts, 2017

pigment prints on archival paper

collaboration: Madeline Hollander, Joanna Zielińska

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles

The half-life of facts is a term describing the time needed for false information once considered to be scientific fact to cease functioning in literature. The work compares fictions as the building blocks of societies to the elements of the periodic table, which are the building blocks of physical matter. It consists of two prints portraying a conceptual periodic table of elements. The first depicts various fictional minerals and elements featured in books, films, and comic books along with a short description of the source and the given mining industry for each. The second panel depicts a selection of common misconceptions and urban legends that have had an actual impact on economics or politics divided by category, such as "Marketplace Rumors," "Conspiracy Theories," or "Mass Hysteria." The artist catalogues collective delusions, panics, and urban legends to examine the fluid form of what is considered to be real. By examining the relations between the material and the imagined, Kurant shows how fictions penetrate society and are mined for profit like minerals.

Post-Fordite, 2020

fossilized automotive paint, epoxy resin, powdered stone

collaboration: Krzysztof Smaga



The sculpture speculates on future geological formations. The piece is made of Fordite, also known as the Detroit agate, a hybrid, quasi-geological formation created through the fossilization of automotive paint accumulated on car-production lines at factories since the establishment of Ford manufacturing plants in the early 20th century. Recently, these fossilized-paint formations began circulating online given their aesthetic value. Since Fordite can be cut and polished, it is often used like gemstones to produce jewelry. The sculpture was created out of pieces of Fordite collected at several now-defunct car factories. While Fordite is a quasi-geological consequence of Fordism (a capitalist economic model based on physical labor and physical products), Kurant's post-Fordite speculates about the geological consequences of the post-Fordist economy based on immaterial products.

Minus One Dollar, 2012

metal coins

collection of: CSW Znaki Czasu, Toruń



What at first glance looks like quarter-dollar coins scattered on the floor is a collection of coins of a negative value, minus \$1, produced by the artist. A group of identical coins was also released into circulation. The work reflects on the value of debt and the idea of generating negative profits. The piece asks about the ways in which different material and immaterial currencies are used to shape not only the economy but also interpersonal relationships and dependencies. Both historically and today, debt has been used as a technology of power. The production, distribution, and sale of debt is used to discipline and subjugate both private individuals and entire social classes and nations.

Aggregated Ghost, 2020

backprint on acrylic, dibond

produced by: The MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (CAST)

collaboration: Boris Katz, Andrei Barbu, David Mayo

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles



Kurant teamed up with the scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to create this work based on data mining and crowdsourcing. The image is a collective self-portrait of the new online working class. Ten thousand employees

of the Amazon Mechanical Turk online crowdsourcing platform were paid by the artist to submit selfies. Through this action, one of the many jobs that remote workers take daily becomes the starting point for reflection on privacy and data sharing. A custom algorithm combined all the self-portraits into a single form. If the work is sold in the art market, the workers who contributed to its creation share in the profits via a bonus system. Symbolically connecting the dispersed worker community, the piece asks questions about agency and the possibility of redistributing capital in surveillance capitalism.

Liquid Modernity (Kilroy and Jozef Tkaczuk were here), 2021

bronze, brass, aluminium

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles

This work refers to the historic statue of Charles Fourier in Paris that was melted down and turned into bullets by Nazi soldiers in 1942. The small sculpture created by Kurant raises questions about the fluid nature of collective memory and images that circulate in culture. The work consists of miniature versions of several monuments, the originals of which were contested and removed (Confederate Robert E. Lee, King Leopold II of Belgium, Joseph Stalin, and Michael Jackson). Kurant purchased miniature copies of these monuments at art auctions and fused them into one form. The mixture was complemented by a miniature version of Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker*, which was stolen from a private collection in the U.S. with the intention of melting it down for bronze. The monuments are juxtaposed with the fluid, immaterial character of the protagonists of memes circulating in the collective imagination. The artist used the metal form of the first known meme "Kilroy Was Here," which spread around the world during WWII through writings on walls. Memes, unlike physical monuments, can evolve and transform into new forms. Kilroy and his Polish counterpart Józef Tkaczuk are heroes functioning as urban legends, their popularity often an unintended consequence of error or misunderstanding.

Mutations and Liquid Assets, 2014

steel, bronze, brass, silver, certificates

following works were used: Joseph Beuys, Magnetischer Abfall, 1975;

Richard Prince, Playboy key, 2003; Carsten Holler, Key to the Laboratory of Doubt, 2006; Carol Bove, Nut and Shell, 2010

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles and Fortes

D'Aloia & Gabriel Sao Paulo/ Rio de Janeiro



To create this work, Kurant melted sculptural multiples from artists Joseph Beuys, Carsten Holler, Richard Prince, and Carol Bove. The piece contains the original certificates of the melted artworks. The resulting hybrid object is a quasi-alchemic mixture of forms, meanings, authorships, and value. The piece also relates to the artist's interest in artworks as living organisms, their evolution and mutation, and the role of chance and error in the evolution of ideas. Kurant considers the increasing use of artworks as mere currency and the parallels between the liquidity of artworks as assets storing value and the liquidity of ideas in flux.

Hyperobjects, 2017

pills made of powdered plastic, metal, fiber, glass, cellulose

collaboration Madeline Hollander

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles



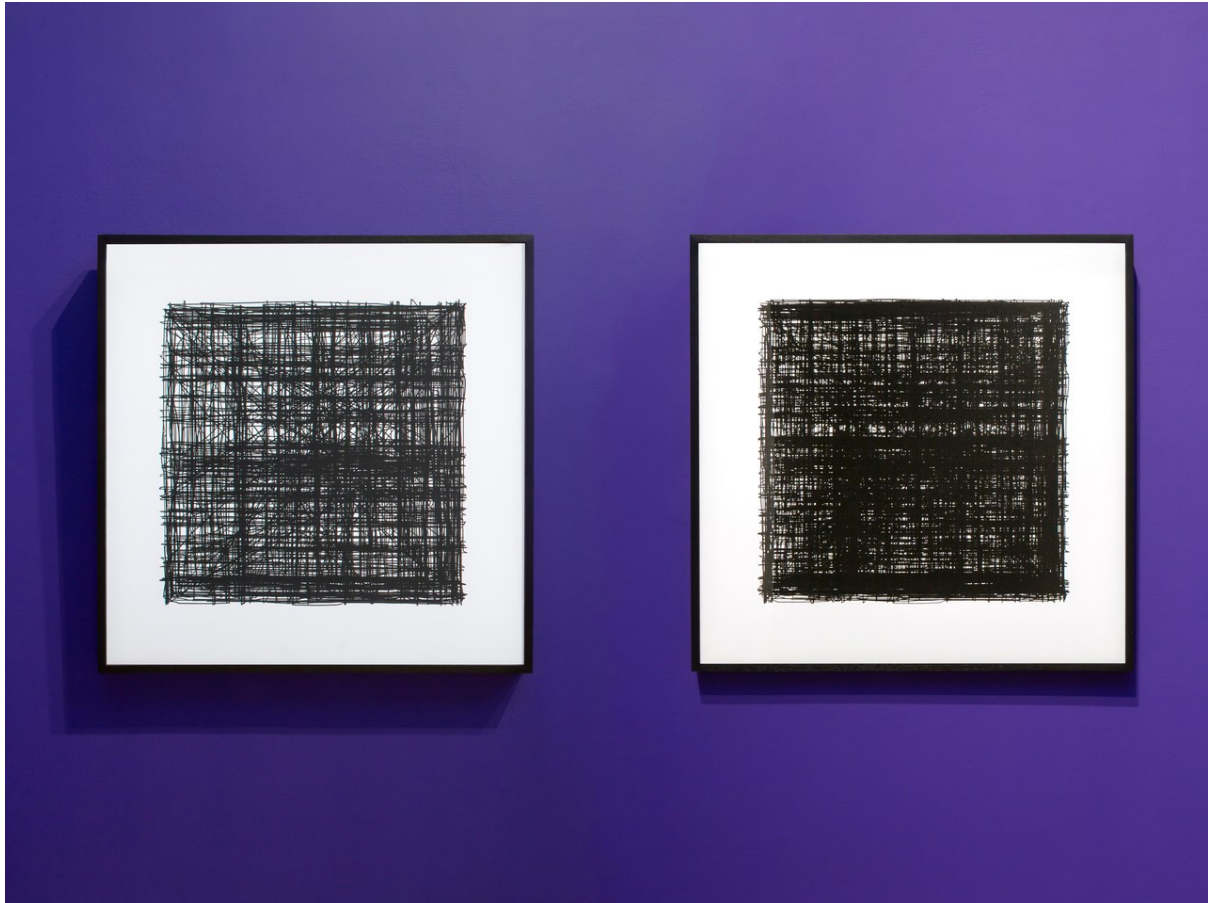
The pile of colorful pills made of accumulated, mass-produced objects shows the constant flux and transformation of matter and the transitional character of all forms. A selection of various objects purchased at dollar stores (ranging from plastic cups, books, toys, trophy statues, globes, vitamins, shoes, toothbrushes, N.Y. souvenirs, Hula-Hoops, basketballs, mechanical household equipment, and electronics to pasta noodles, potato chips, and instant soups) was pulverized into powder by a professional industrial company. The powder, consisting of plastic, metal, glass, and fiber, was then compacted into placebo pills by a manufacturer specialized in the production of pharmaceutical tablets.

Agnieszka Kurant, John Menick:

***Production Line*, 2016–2017**

ink plotter drawings on paper

courtesy of: Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York/ Los Angeles



The production of this series of abstract drawings was outsourced to thousands of online workers via the crowdsourcing website Amazon Mechanical Turk. The platform allows individuals and organizations to post simple tasks to a freelance labor pool of around 2 million workers. These people work from home on small, low-paid online tasks: image captioning, text transcription, and website testing. For *Production Line*, they were asked to each contribute a single line drawn with a computer mouse. No worker could see the contributions of other workers or knew that he or she was participating in the production of an artwork. A simple algorithm assembled the thousands of individual lines into a single drawing. Each new line was drawn from the point where the line drawn by the previous worker finished. The resulting continuous line, functioning as a virtual conveyor belt at a dispersed factory,

is output to an ink-pen plotter. If the drawing is sold on the art market, the workers share one-third of the profit via a bonus system.

*Agnieszka Kurant is a conceptual artist whose work investigates collective intelligence, non-human intelligences (from microbial to Artificial Intelligence) and the exploitations of social capital under surveillance capitalism. She studied art history at the University of Łódź, photography at the National Film School in Łódź, and Creative Curating at Goldsmiths College. Kurant is the recipient of the 2020 LACMA A+T Award, the 2019 Frontier Art Prize and the 2018 Pollock-Krasner Award. She is currently an Artist Fellow at the Berggruen Institute and was an artist in residence at MIT CAST in 2017 - 2019. Her recent exhibitions include the Istanbul Biennial, MoMA in New York, Kunsthalle Wien, De Young Museum, MOCA Toronto and the Milano Triennale. In April 2021 Kurant launched her permanent public commission for the MIT List Visual Arts Center and Kendall Square in Cambridge. In 2015, Kurant presented a commission for the Guggenheim Museum façade in New York. In 2010 she co-represented Poland at the Venice Biennale of Architecture (with Aleksandra Wasilkowska). Her work was also exhibited at Sculpture Center in New York, Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Guggenheim Bilbao, Witte de With, Rotterdam; Moderna Museet; Cleveland Biennial; MUMOK, Vienna; The Kitchen, New York; Bonner Kunstverein; Grazer Kunstverein, Kunsthalle Mainz; MOMA in Warsaw; MOCA Detroit; CAC in Cincinnati; Mamco, Geneva; Frieze Projects, London, Performa Biennial and Momentum Biennial. In November 2021 her commission will be presented at Castello di Rivoli. Kurant's monograph book *Collective Intelligence* will be published by Sternberg Press and MIT Press in the fall of 2021.*

Agnieszka Kurant

Errorism

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