FUTURING
THE
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EXO

AI MUSINGS
ON THE
POST HUMAN

STENTIAL

11TH TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021

A SOLO SHOW OF AI WORKS BY HARSHIT AGRAWAL

CURATED BY
MYNA MUKHERJEE

PRESENTED BY EMAMI ART

PROJECT BY ENGENDERED
COLLABORATORS 64/1

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FOREWORD

By Richa Agarwal
CEO Emami Art

With its sheer newness and critical nature, the exhibition of Harshit Agrawal challenges our habitual ways of appreciating a work of art. The artworks created with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are compelling yet thought-provoking, problematize the notions of human creativity and authority of an artist over their creations, exploring the relationship between artist and technology as two independent agents of artistic production. I am fascinated by the unique visual appearance of the works on display by Harshit Agrawal, one of the most prominent artists working with AI in India.

I want to thank Harshit Agrawal for trusting us with his work to host the show and Myna Mukherjee for curating such a fantastic and significant exhibition. Emami Art has long been operating as space and forum for new thinking and alternative art practices. I hope that artists and art lovers of Kolkata will find Harshit Agrawal's work fascinating. I also thank Ushmita Sahu, the Director and Head Curator of Emami Art, for her constant effort to connect the gallery to the current trends of global art practices.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude to my team; this show would not have been possible without their dedication.

"The artworks created with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are compelling yet thought-provoking, problematize the notions of human creativity and authority of an artist over their creations, exploring the relationship between artist and technology as two independent agents of artistic production."

CATALOGUE ESSAY
THE SHOW

By Karthik Kalyanaraman

Harshit Agrawal has been a pioneer in the field of AI art since its inception around 2015. At that point of time, the primary excitement was over the ability of AI to create aesthetically interesting and original images from looking at examples provided by the human. Over the past half decade, Agrawal has been part and driver of the steady enlargement of the boundaries of this early practice. This, his first solo show, and indeed the first solo show of an AI artist in India, presents this diversification and maturation of AI art through the lens of Agrawal's evolving work, which though at the frontier of this nascent cosmopolitan and virtual art form does not abandon its rootedness in the Global South.

Agrawal has experimented with almost every aspect of the AI Art process, both aspects that it shares with traditional art practices and those unique to it. So we find in the show not only a diversity of themes, media (painting, sculpture, text, video, interactive media) and aesthetic approach (conceptual, sociological, the painterly) but we also find experiments with AI art-making itself. Agrawal for instance consciously varies the 'learning rate' of the AI to produce striking effects (e.g. in Machinic Situatedness, Anatomy Lesson) or he achieves novel formal patterns by not relying on standard (Eurocentric) datasets (Artist as Community, Machinic Situatedness). Yet another conscious element of artistic manipulation is the degree of human involvement both in the production and the reception of the artwork (Tandem, (author)rise, Artist as Community).

Since the early 20th century, when Romantic notions of artistic genius were put into question, artists have constantly tried to destabilize notions of Creativity, thought of as largely an asocial private influx of 'inspiration'. Whether in the readymades of Duchamp, or the art as instruction of Sol Lewitt, or blurring the line between ad-copy and artwork of Pop or the renouncing of authorship by Rehberger, there has been a long persistent struggle to free art from received notions of creativity still extant in common intellectual discourse. AI art has continuities with this project of decentering Creativity and Agrawal is particularly interested in this project of the abandonment of the self-founded Enlightenment individual. Works like Tandem and author(rise) make the viewer directly experience this alienation when their 'work' gets completed by the machine! Other works (Artist as Community) make it hard to even distribute any sort of creativity quotient across the participants in the creation of the work. We are asked to deeply consider what it means to own a thought, an idea, something we make, when the sources of it are either unknown (or should we use the religiously inflected 'given') to the phenomenological consciousness or are ineluctably communal.

Another running concern in AI art, which Agrawal engages with, is the conjunction and disjunction between machine and human perception of the world. Even when machines look at human-labeled human-curated objects, the generalizations they form of them are profoundly alien

Agrawal's works (The Machine, Still Life) make these fault lines all too visible. How dependent is perception on memory? When we are asked to symbolize universal concepts like 'Blackness' and 'Whiteness' do we not draw on communal conventions and memory? So when surprised by the way an AI represents 'Old', why should we believe our perception of the world is any less 'abstract', conventional and non-representational?

Perhaps the sharpest way in which Agrawal's work differs from those of his Western contemporaries, is his unflinching insistent look at cultural particularity and appropriation, which forms a subtext of several of his works (Masked reality, Machinic Situatedness, Artist as Community). Now, appropriation in the sense of making the other one's own is at the heart of AI practice: AI makes art precisely by appropriating the 'training set'. Further, the very word 'appropriation' is blindly politicized and this is a problem for all aesthetic endeavour since all art is essentially hybrid and it would be intellectual self-mutilation to claim cultural appropriations are one-way and only by the privileged. Yet even if decrying all creative borrowing as 'appropriation' is a mug's game, there still, very much, are lines and axes of power and privilege running through all artistic influence: from Colonial center to periphery, from the educated to the illiterate, from caste society to those marginalized beyond that society, and so on. In a mass image industry, where every image is up for consumption, how can an AI work of art, which relies on that very image economy, be (self)critical of imagistic appropriation? What if the images from which AI art is made come from works made by local

artisans or are images of underprivileged communities and their rituals? One of Agrawal's most powerful and strikingly self-conscious pieces confronts us directly with this question: what is the cost of pursuing cultural particularity from a site of metropolitan privilege? I won't say more about this but will leave you instead to confront yourself in that powerful piece, and in all of Harshit's work which insistently ask us pointed questions about self-control, creativity and identity.

"PERHAPS THE SHARPEST WAY IN WHICH AGRAWAL'S WORK DIFFERS FROM THOSE OF HIS WESTERN CONTEMPORARIES, IS HIS UNFLINCHING INSISTENT LOOK AT CULTURAL PARTICULARITY AND APPROPRIATION, WHICH FORMS A SUBTEXT OF SEVERAL OF HIS WORKS"

AI ART
THE PRACTICE

Catalogue Essay Contd.

The kind of AI algorithm principally used by artists, is called a neural network: its design was meant to mimic the activity of biological neurons. To teach a neural network a visual (or audio) language, the artist does not provide it with any rule or principle, for instance of composition or colour balance; they only expose it to a very large number of curated examples (called the training set) and allow it to draw its own conclusions about the common formal principles underlying the training set. After this 'training' the AI is then ready to start creating the artwork.

What then is the involvement of the human? Of course, the human artist designs the concept behind the artwork. What one needs to realize, however, is that the training is not a mechanical process at all. In fact one may argue that the novel aesthetic practice of the AI artist is really situated here. Not only does the human artist have to carefully choose what kind of images the AI is exposed to (to form its sensibility) but they also have to monitor the learning process to make sure it doesn't overgeneralize or produce work too close to the examples it has seen. And all this is done with a more traditional artistic eye on the quality of the work the AI creates. In other words we have here the combination of the practices of a traditional artist, a computer programmer, a statistician and a data engineer. In any case, the commonly supposed gap between the 'creative' practices of the artist and the supposedly logical practice of the scientist simply does not exist in this realm.

Moreover the still commonly cherished notion of 'genius' of the Artist (which so much of 20th century Art has tried to combat) is also put in question. There are several creative agents at work here: many individuals might have created the elements in the training set, the AI algorithm was conceived by computer scientists and statisticians, implemented by big tech companies like Google and Facebook, and of course there is the work of the machine. Part of the reason to emphasize all this is to counter the rather meretricious narrative one sometimes encounters that AI produces art 'autonomously'. Moreover all this is not to devalue the work of the AI artist (who conceives and executes the project and might even modify standard algorithms to fit their work) but to put it in context. After all, we do have to ask ourselves: is traditional art really created by sole geniuses in the desert?!

AI ART
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Catalogue Essay Contd.

Today's AI art is a very young field, still in its childhood! Perhaps the first wave of interest in images produced by modern AI was in mid 2015 with the Google DeepDream project. However while it sparked some interest in the Art community, it did not quite create an art genre. Based on the uncanny ability of machines for pareidolia, to find patterns (where we might see none), the project created very strange psychedelic images. But they all looked the same. The real infancy of AI art can probably be dated to the common availability of a kind of algorithm called GAN in early 2016 (the algorithm had been invented in 2014 by Ian Goodfellow and coauthors, but it was a few years before artists could access a workable version of it). Another crucial element in the rise of AI art was the democratization of access to large datasets of images (necessary to train the AI) like ImageNet and others which also became available to the public around then. Some of the early pioneers who started working right away with it were artists like Mario Klingemann and Memo Akten. The first global gallery exhibition of AI art at a contemporary gallery happened in 2018 at Nature Morte in New Delhi, curated by 64/1.

In the past several years as the novelty value of the work "being created by AI" is no longer sufficient reason to exhibit it, AI art practice has deepened conceptually and diversified in practice. It is no more purely a visual art genre: there are now choreographers who base their routines on AI, there is AI music, even an art project by TegaBrain with small ecosystems managed by AI with differing ideas on how to manage them. The continuing democratization of

the software (there are now websites like Runway ML for instance which require minimal programming knowledge to create AI art) and the hardware necessary to train these algorithms will only bring more diversely creative intellects to AI art. However, despite much original contribution by and impressive work from the Global South, most of the visibility is quite obviously focused on artists from the West. This is why, showcasing the evolving work of a non-Western trailblazer in this field, at this moment when the field is defining itself, is an important art-historical endeavour.

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CURATORIAL NOTE

By Myna Mukherjee

A new form of life is emerging. We are building a God, something that transcends humankind. Artificial Intelligence is rapidly reshaping the world. It's going to be everywhere all the time. It's going to hear everything. It's going to be connected to every single camera on the planet. AI is going to be the most important technology in history of the planet. Mentions of artificial intelligence have become ubiquitous in the healthcare and patient care industry, financial & loan markets, policing and criminal justice system, and of course the gaming and entertainment world. .

Artificial intelligence has sparked more discussions about the interplay between human beings and machines than perhaps any previous technological development. In fact there's no telling how profound the impact of artificial intelligence on social justice frameworks could be, there is untold potential at the intersection of social work and AI.

That's why this is the most important conversation of our time.

Will humans actually benefit from AI? AI will ultimately either be the best thing ever to happen to humanity or the worst. If we look at what AI is mostly being developed for; it's killing, spying, and brainwashing. Computer algorithms can reveal our political views or sexual orientation. Privacy is gone. AI has created new forms of oppression, and in many cases disproportionately affects the most powerless and vulnerable. We as humanity are

about to go into a very dark time. Cyber-attacks, fake news, totally automated AI weapons. What we are seeing now is like a train hurtling down a dark tunnel and it looks like we're sleeping at the wheel.

As a curator what strikes me most about Harshit's work is that it consciously engages with this inevitable techno-centric reality we live in, rather than being simply sucked into it. AI's usage in art elevates it from being a tool of utility and function to being a conspirator in the artist's imagination, and the pursuit of aesthetic ideas. It allows us to witness how humans can work with machines to enhance their creativity, rather than allow their creativity to be replaced by machine labor.

Since inception, Harshit's work with AI has engaged with contemplations of social, cultural and ethical issues, with it's unique ability to work with large amounts of data and act as a conduit to explore internal biases at an individual and societal level. Further he has consistently used a rootedness in Indian particularity to question the absolutist Eurocentric philosophical outlook that has informed the development of AI. How can AI help us stay sensitive to the relations of power that exist in the real global world? How can we use it creatively in collaboration with marginal cultures towards representation and avoid appropriation? Can we use AI to transcend the limitations of gender? These are fascinating lines of inquiry within the show that we are excited to explore. In the artist's words "Can I use this body of work to

offer alternate narratives and immersive embodiments of deep rooted sociological divides, of seemingly universal perceptions of themes like gender, of our sense of authorship and agency– through and with AI? I find this space of engagement with the machine fascinating to work with."

Finally, is AI (Artificial Intelligence) art any good? Is it truly the future of Contemporary art? Does AI re-conceive the human imagination or ready us for its end? Is AI competition or collaborator? Does AI blur the definition of the 'artist'? Does AI perpetuate bias or become a new lens to understand it? EXO-Stential – AI Musings on the Posthuman, offers a deep dive and contemplation of this emergent ontology.

It gives me great pleasure and pride to introduce you to India's first solo AI art show. Welcome.

"How can AI help us stay sensitive to the relations of power that exist in the real global world? How can we use it creatively in collaboration with marginal cultures towards representation and avoid appropriation? Can we use AI to transcend the limitations of gender? These are fascinating lines of inquiry within the show that we are excited to explore."

HARSHIT AGRAWAL

"By working extensively with AI algorithms and datasets, and often creating them as an essential part of my practice, I want to consciously engage with our inevitable techno-centric reality, than being simply sucked into it. In my work with AI art since it's inception, it has evolved to become a vehicle of engagement with social, cultural and ethical issues, with it's unique ability to work with large amounts of data and act as a conduit to explore our internal biases at an individual and societal level."
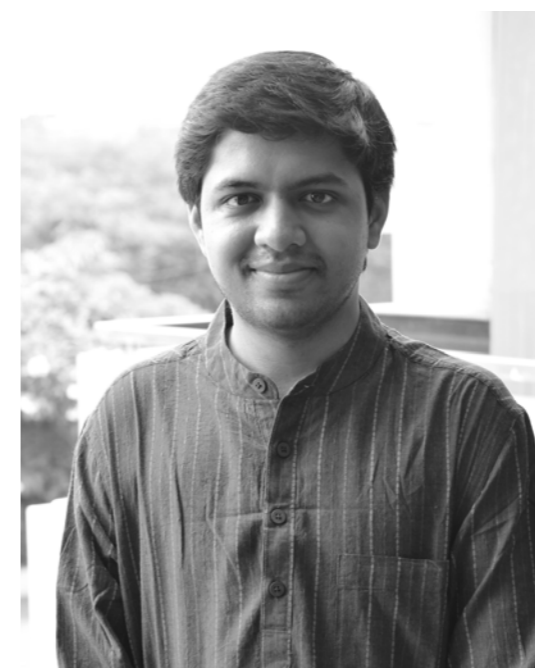
Harshit Agrawal is a graduate of the MIT Media Lab and IIT Guwahati. He has worked with AI art since its inception in 2015; his work has been nominated twice for the top tech art prize, the Lumen Prize, and he was the only Indian artist at the first global group exhibition of AI Art at a contemporary gallery in 2018. He has shown at group shows at many venues including the Tate Modern (UK), Asia Culture Center (Korea), Ars Electronica (Austria) and the Museum of Tomorrow (Brazil). His work has been featured in international media like the BBC and the New York Times.

MASKED REALITY

AN INTERACTIVE VIDEO, WHERE THE VIEWER'S FACIAL EXPRESSIONS ARE TRANSFORMED INTO THOSE OF A (FEMALE) KATHAKALI PERFORMER AND A (MALE) THEYYAM PERFORMER
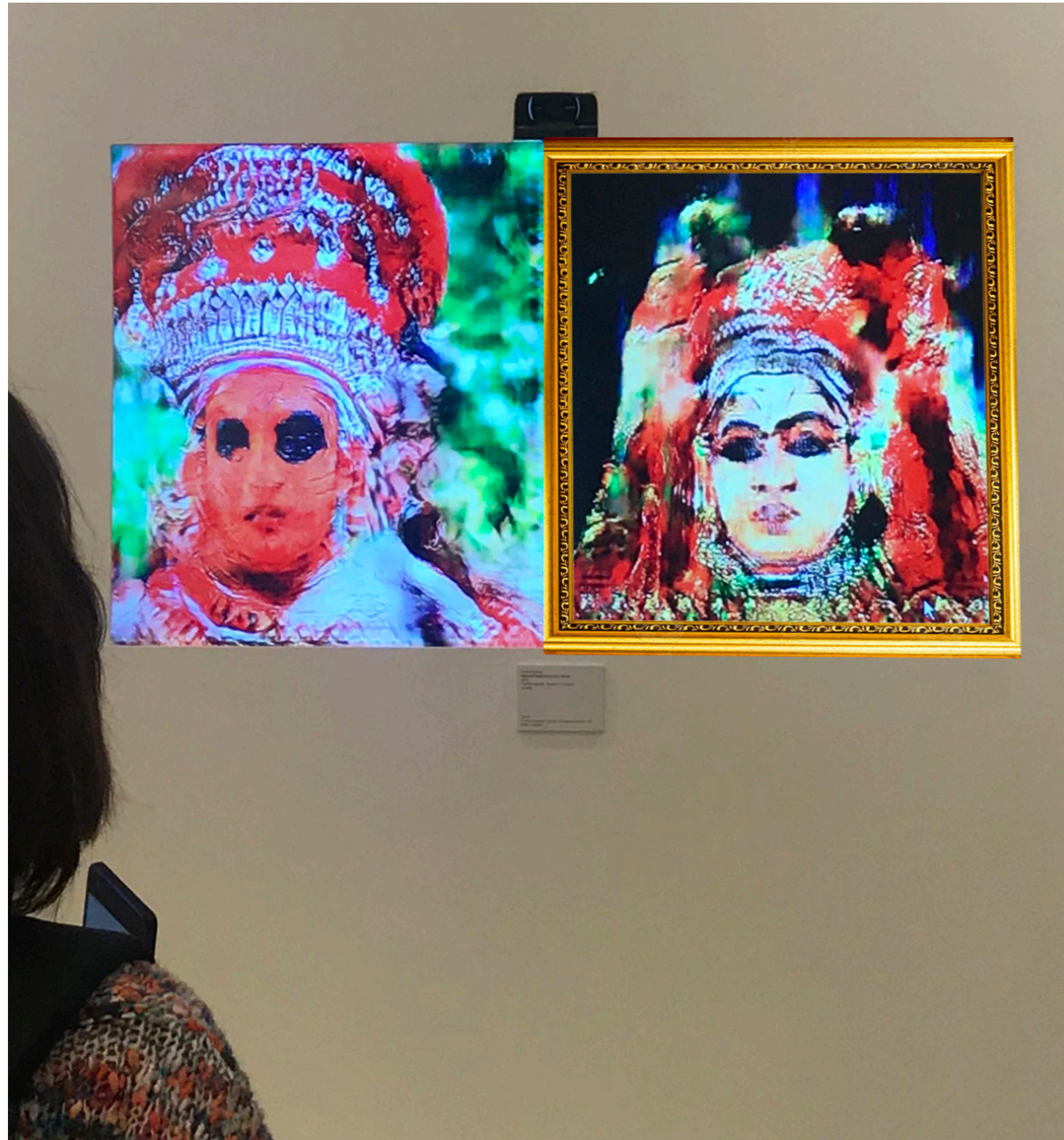
In this interactive video, where the viewer's facial expressions are transformed into those of a (female) Kathakali performer juxtaposed simultaneously with that of a (male) Theyyam ritual participant, Agrawal has worked with 2 different AI algorithms. The first algorithm learns to break down the structure of any video image of a face that it sees into the basic facial structure, and the second learns to add the appropriate face paint to that basic structure to transform it into the face of a Kathakali performer or a Theyyam medium.

What results is a deep, self-conscious and subtle exploration of cultural appropriation in the Internet age. Kathakali is a performance art deeply informed by Sanskrit aesthetics and epic, patronized by royal families and "sattvic" temples (where typically the scheduled castes had no entry); Theyyam, a deity possession ritual, is locally varied and participated in typically by the lower castes, and is today consumed as an 'aesthetic product' due to the image industry of the Internet. In making all this visceral by making their juxtaposition and their appropriation deeply personal (you are watching yourself mirrored as these cultural others!) Agrawal asks important questions about the role of technology in the process of defining/preserving 'cultural heritage' and about the fuzzy space between appropriation and creative borrowing.

Masked Reality
TV Screens, Webcam, GPU Computer, Custom AI code
Dimensions variable
2019—2020

STRANGE GENDERS

**THE ARTISTS INVESTIGATE OUR CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER BY PASSING HUMAN DRAWINGS THROUGH THE MIND OF A MACHINE**
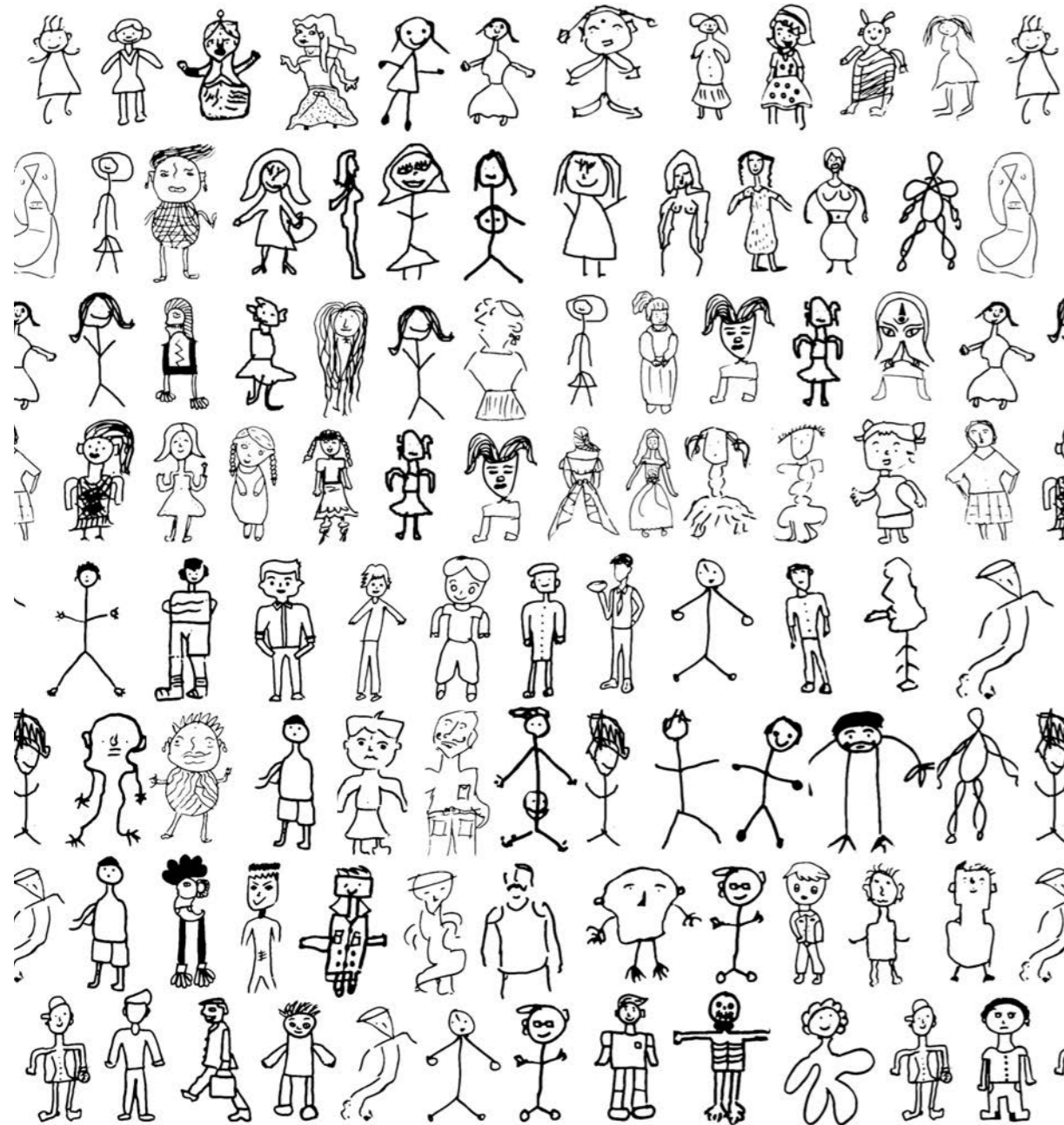
Around 1000 people are asked to draw a standing 'woman' and separately a standing 'man'. An AI is trained on these drawings and taught how to draw human figures. However, unlike humans, an algorithm trained on both genders, when asked to produce drawings of humans, can only produce an image that has a certain probability of being recognized as, say female, by a second AI which is taught to classify an object on a spectrum from 'female' to 'not female'. Two works of art are created from this process: a poster inspired by the S. Indian Saiva Siddhanta concept of the bindu or the female material origin of the universe, and 3 books that catalogue both the (strange) human binary conception of gender and the machine's (natural?) reconstruction of a gender spectrum.

We, as humans, are conditioned to think largely in terms of binaries when we think 'gender'. This is neither necessary nor 'normal' for a machine. The artists investigate our cultural representations of gender by passing human drawings through the mind of a machine, and have these conceptual representations returned to us 'more truly and more strange' by their passage through this alien 'mind'. Moreover, a human is born morphologically female then 'somatically' differentiated during embryonic growth, the female alone is capable of parthenogenesis. Inspired by the female centric vision of certain Tantric schools of thought, adopted by the nada-bindu philosophy of South Indian Saiva Siddhanta , the artists invite us to contemplate the radiation of the female outward into the 'male' in their central artwork.
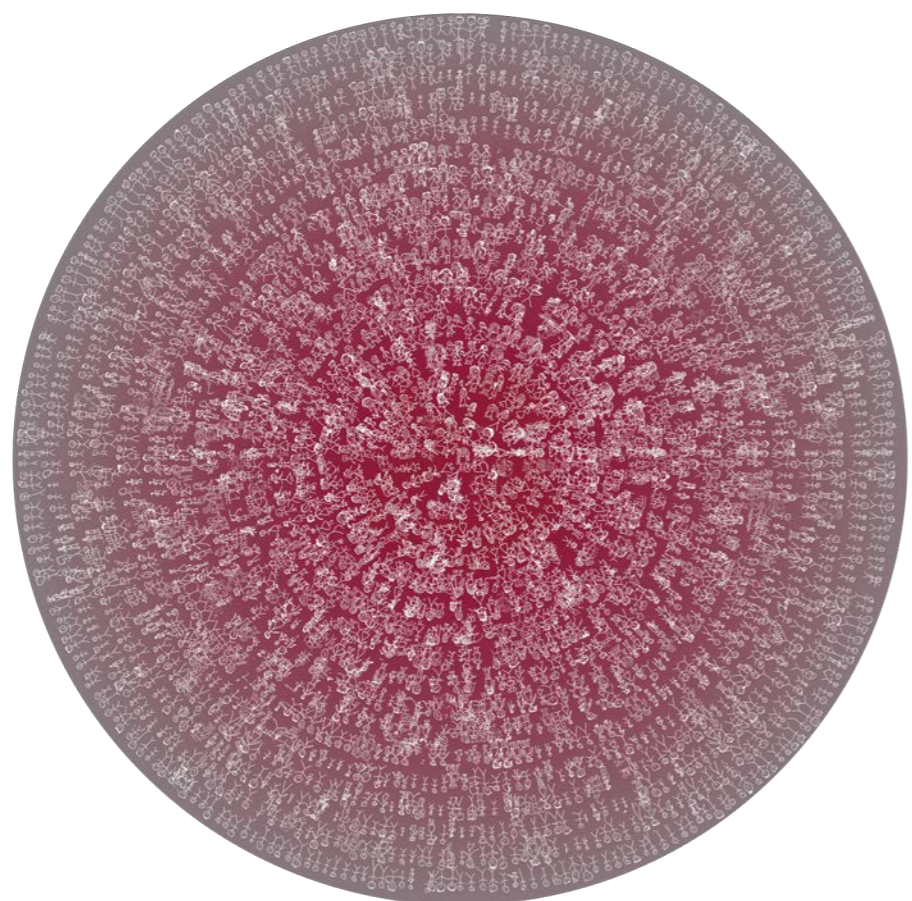
A piece by 64/1 (Karthik Kalyanaraman and Raghava KK) and Harshit Agrawa, commissioned by Myna Mukherjee for Artissima.
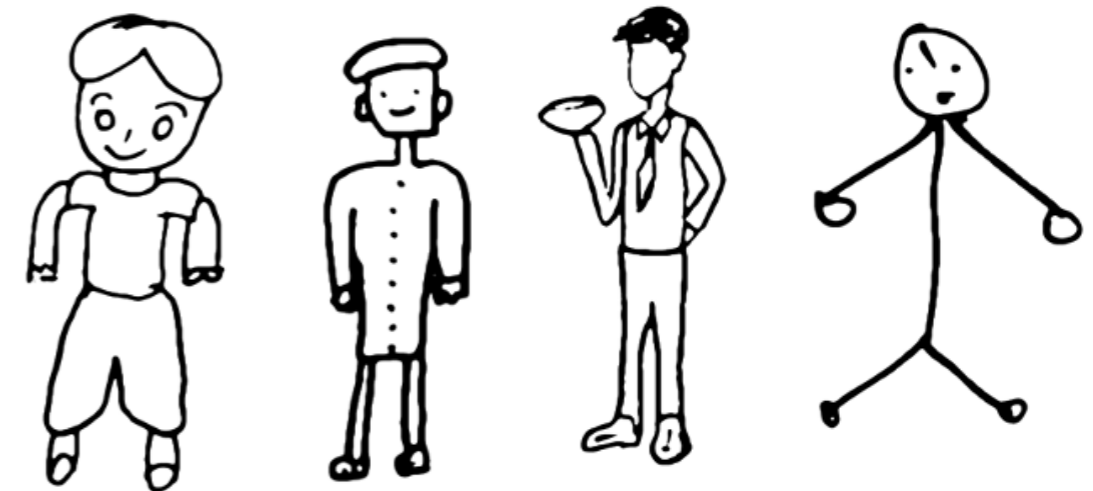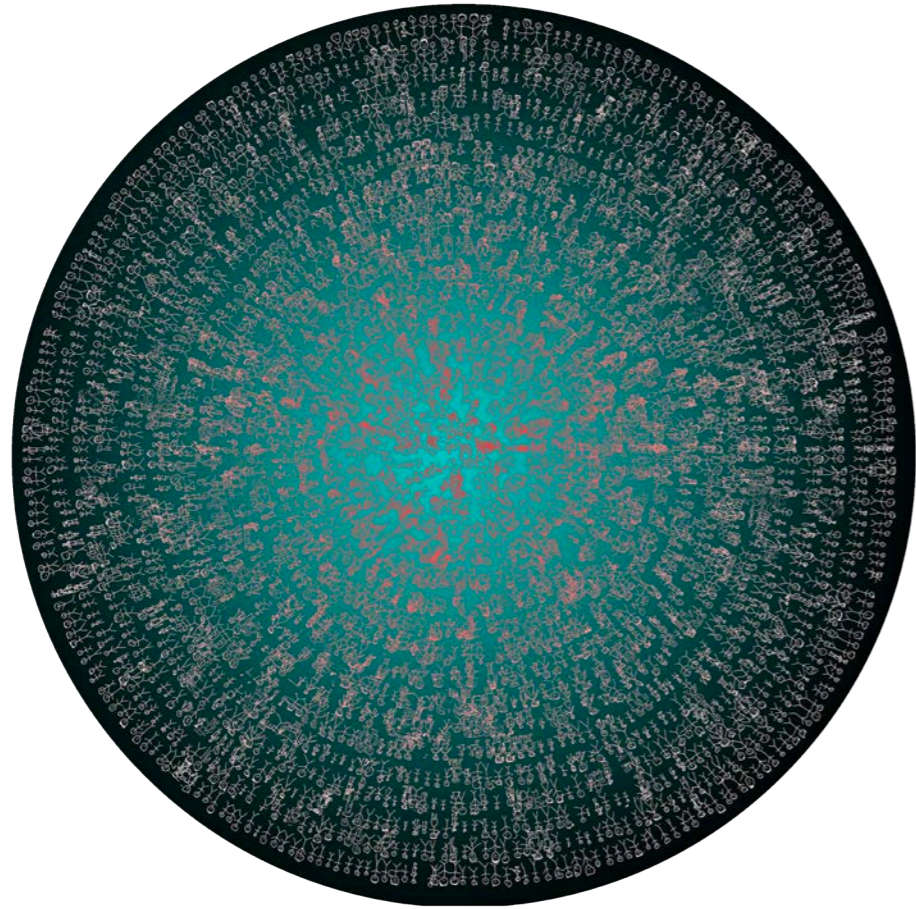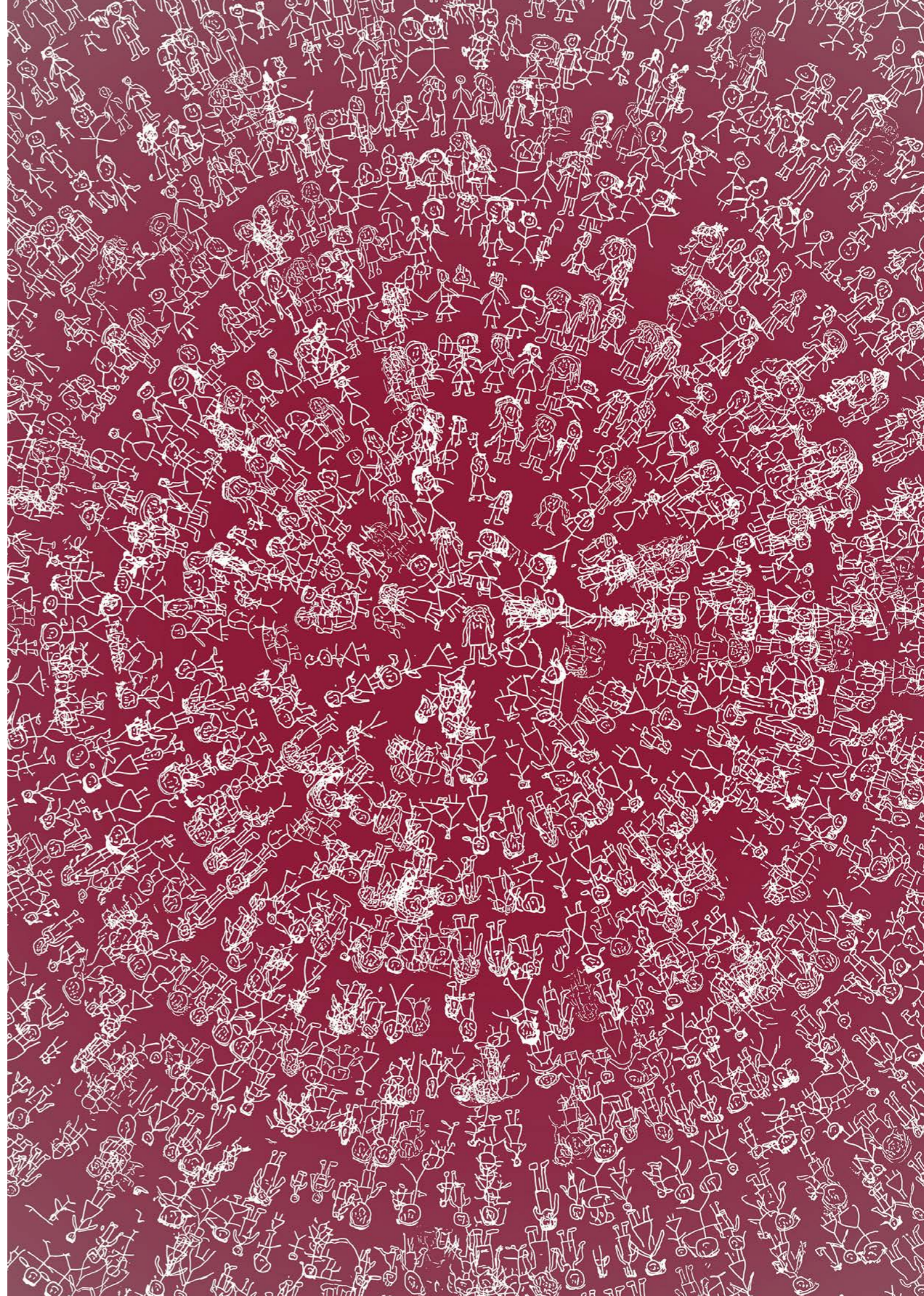
Strange Genders Manifestation 1
Archival Print on Circular Canvas
41 x 41 inch diameter
2020
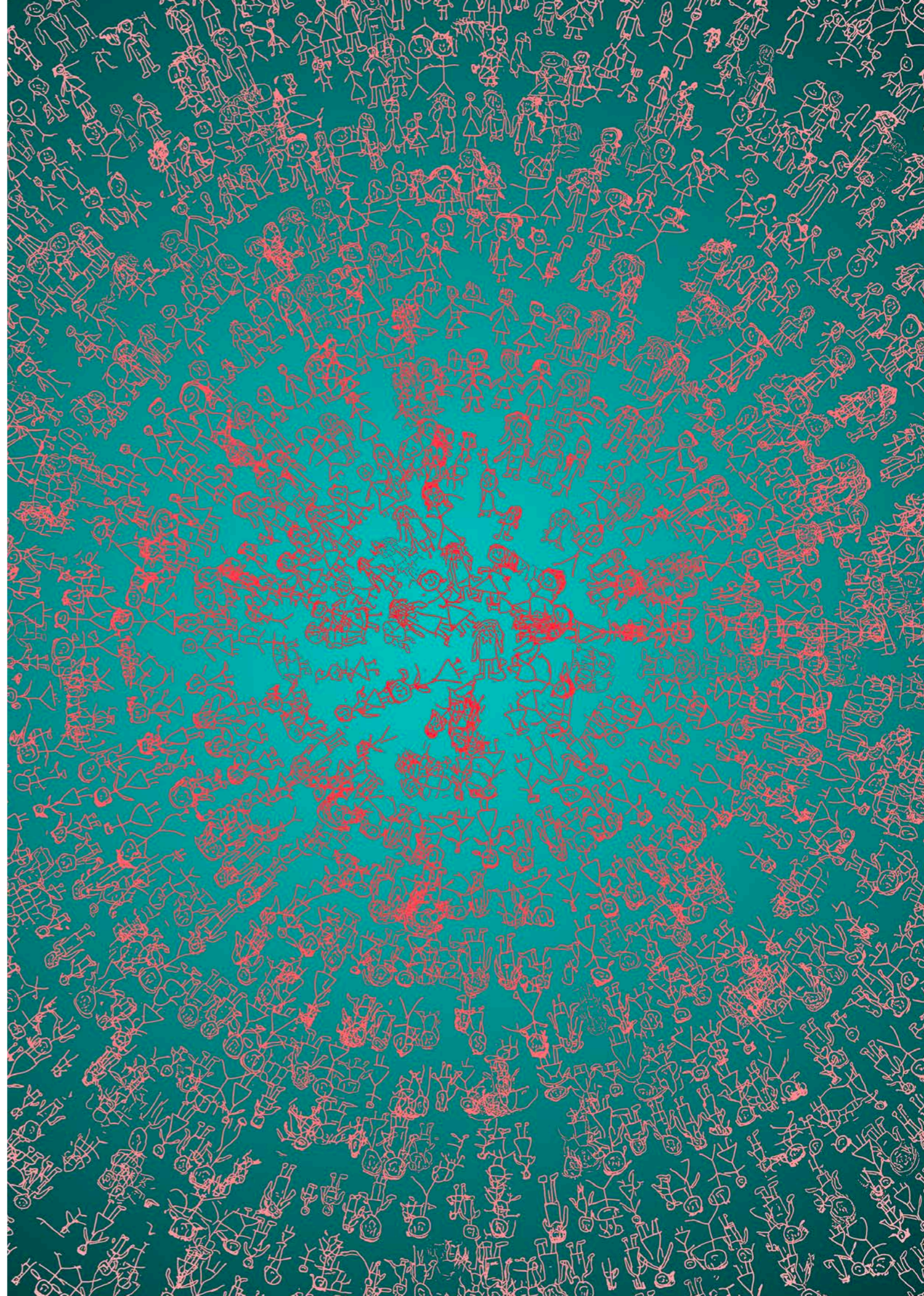
Strange Genders Manifestation 2
Archival Print on Circular Canvas
41 x 41 inch diameter
2020

STILL LIFE: ICON AND FETISH

AN EXPERIMENT IN UNDERSTANDING COMPUTER VISION, THIS WORK TRIES TO TEACH AI THE CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE COMPOSITIONAL AND THE PAINTERLY


BRIEF

A diptych is created, where in the first, the AI develops a sense of form from studying examples of whole paintings in its collection of European still lives of floral arrangements; in the second member of the diptych, the AI develops its aesthetics by only studying random details in the still life paintings it has access to.

An experiment in understanding computer vision (and hopefully towards advancing the field of AI art), this work tries to start to teach AI the conceptual distinction between the compositional and the painterly. In any painting what is the relation of the part (as fetish) to the whole (as icon)? How can one teach a computer compositional structure and painterly texture? This work makes an important headway in answer to this formidable set of questions.

Still Life: icon and fetish, Manifestation 1
Set 1 and Set 2
Archival Print on Canvas with Custom Frames
32 x 26 inch and 4 works of 13.5 x 13.5 inch in each set
2021
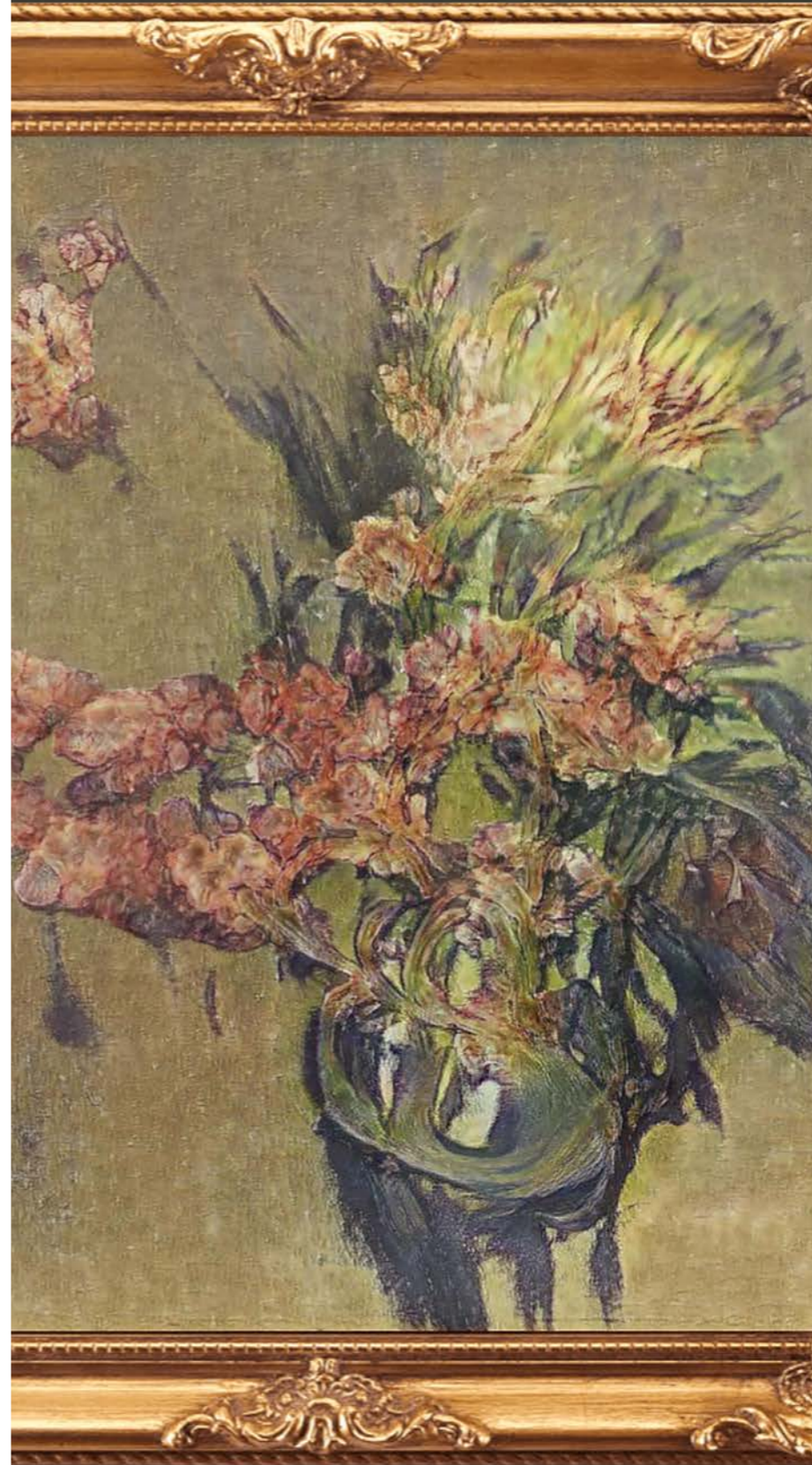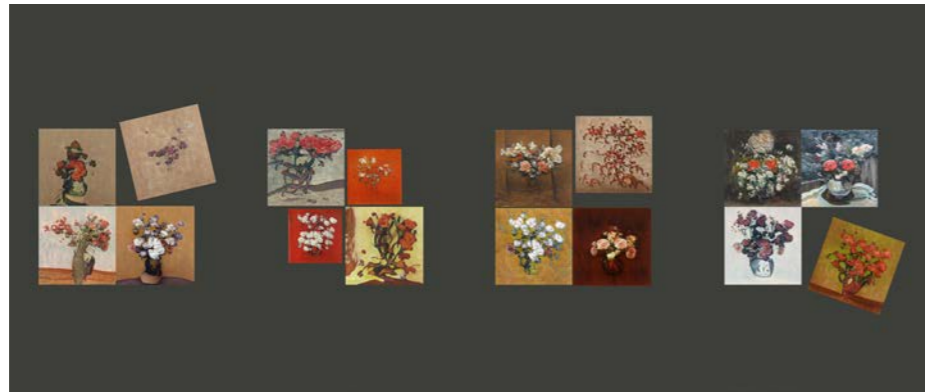
Still Life: icon and fetish, Manifestation 2
Set 1, Set 2, Set 3 and Set 4
Archival Print on Canvas
4 works of 10 x 10 inch for Set 1, 3, 4
2 works of 10 x 10 inch, 2 works of 7 x 7 inch for Set 2
2021

Still Life: icon and fetish, Manifestation 3
Archival Print on Canvas
26 works in grid of total 42.5 x 47 inch
2021

THE MACHINE IN THE WORLD OF PLATONIC FORMS

THE MACHINE IS ASKED TO PRODUCE IMAGES FOR SENTENCES LIKE "THIS IS WHITE" OR "THIS IS BLACK"

BRIEF

This is 'Loath'

An AI uses a massive database of images with captions (like "facade of an old shop") to learn verbal-visual connections. It is then trained to produce images for sentences it has never seen before. In particular, it is asked to produce images that correspond to sentences like "This is white" or "This is black" which elicit from it its visual representation of universal qualities like 'old', 'young', 'black', 'white' etc.

Both western and Indian philosophies have been very concerned with how we intuitively form universal concepts (like blackness or even numbers for instance) when all we have access to are objects that are similar or dissimilar in several ways. Plato, for instance, famously concluded the only reason we think something is beautiful is because 'Beauty' actually exists in the world of ideal forms! But this is a debate that is still ongoing. A fascinating question this artwork poses: how would a machine understand a universal quality, given all it sees are examples. The images it produces tell us something about our own selves, refracted through the alien eye of the machine looking at the way we attach words to the world!

This work was inspired by conversations with 64/1 (Karthik Kalyanaraman & Raghava KK)

This is 'Lust'

Black White Lust Loath Old Young Mechanical Human
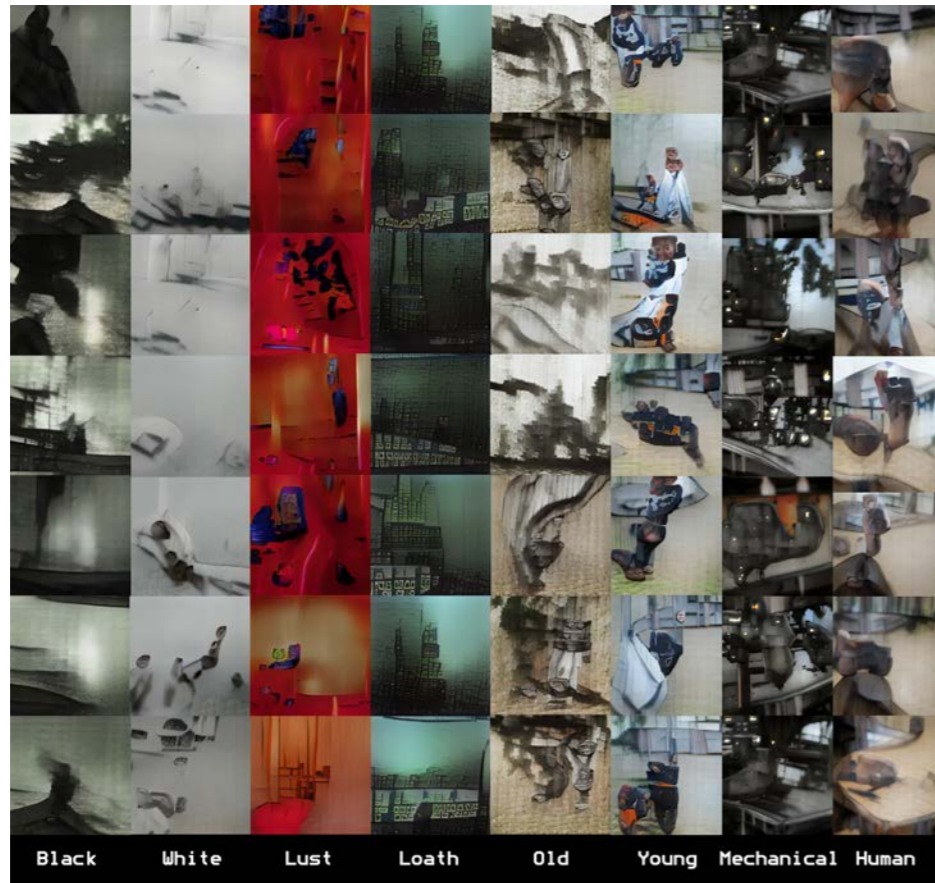
The Machine in the World of Platonic Forms
Archival Print on Paper
23 sets of 16 8x8 inch works
2020

MACHINIC SITUATEDNESS

THIS WORKS BRINGS OUT A WHOLE NEW AESTHETIC COMPARED TO THE DOMINANT WESTERN INFLUENCE IN AI ART BY FIRST CREATING A DATASET OF THANGKA PAINTINGS AND USING THAT TO BRING A FORMAL FRESHNESS TO AI ART

BRIEF

Most AI art depends on large publicly available datasets, which largely tend to be Western in origin and content. Agrawal here brings out a whole new possible aesthetic by first creating his own dataset of Thangka paintings of the Buddha and using this dataset to bring a formal freshness to AI art. Further aside from the AI that learns the formal structure of a thangka painting, there is another 'upraising' AI that is trained to convert low resolution blurry images to higher resolution, that then works on the low res thangka paintings of the first AI to produce the final paintings.

There is a natural tendency to associate high production value and high resolution with a more achieved (and expensive) aesthetics, and this association though problematized by glitch art and pixel art, still reigns as orthodoxy in the High Art world. Agrawal's work uses this resistance to 'finish' to create a startling formal beauty not present in the original Thangka works at all: the final images look as though a Fauvist like the early Matisse reimagined Tibetan cloth painting!

Machinic Situatedness 2
Translite Print on Paper in Backlit Frame
18 x 18 inch
2018

Machinic Situatedness 3
Translite Print on Paper in Backlit Frame
18 x 18 inch
2018

Machinic Situatedness 4
Translite Print on Paper in Backlit Frame
18 x 18 inch
2018

Machinic Situatedness 5
Translite Print on Paper in Backlit Frame
18 x 18 inch
2018

⟨AUTHOR⟩RISE

IN THE INTERACTIVE 'ROBOTIC OUIJA BOARD', NOT A SPIRIT BUT AN EQUALLY
DISEMBODIED ALGORITHM, TAKES CONTROL OVER WHAT WE WRITE WHEN WE ARE
MIDWAY THROUGH A SENTENCE!

In the interactive 'robotic ouija board', not a spirit but an equally disembodied algorithm, takes control over what we write when we are midway through a sentence! A somewhat strange algorithm is trained in the English language by only looking at works of philosophy (it looks at all the works so tagged on the open source text database Gutenberg)! We start to write a sentence, and after 10 seconds the AI takes over through a robotic system and moves the pen in our hands to complete that sentence.

The rise of AI can and has the ability to create a deep sense of loss of control over our identity as more professions get 'automated'. Machine learning is a ubiquitous though invisible part of life in the various subliminal nudges we are the objects of in the form of the visual field we get to see on a website (say, a search result) or more overtly 'recommendations'. This meditative piece allows us to experience this decentering without mediation, as the sense of the ownership over even language production is displaced out of us and onto the machine, or perhaps really onto the collective unconscious where it always belonged.

This work was created while in residency at Yasuaki Kakehi Lab, Japan
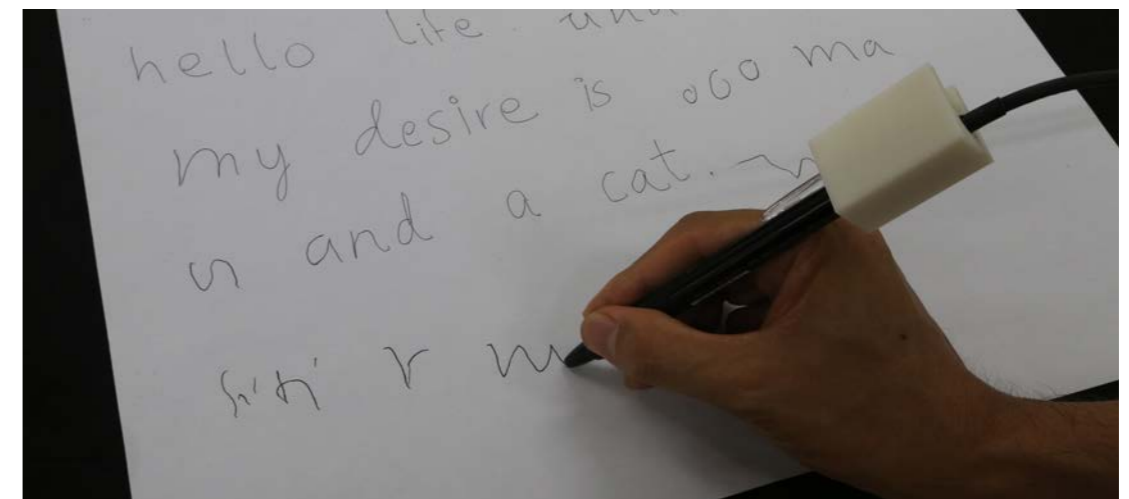
art is all thinks that lie strangely
Can humans be Susceptible and faith mechanize
machines need not express the ancient
aesthetics and conscious of specific wisdoms

(author)rise
Ball Pen on Paper
Set of 8 works each of 11.7 x 16.5 inch sheets
2017

mind is a u struct
are of am. Is thought
who we are? He is t
he same firm and k 1

freedom of man is a myth
work who is a moral u
nd u nice person? uf c1
ne state to say the truth

THE ARTIST AS COMMUNITY

3D PRINTED SCULPTURES CREATED FROM AI GENERATED IMAGES TRAINED ON INDIAN TRADITIONAL MASKS
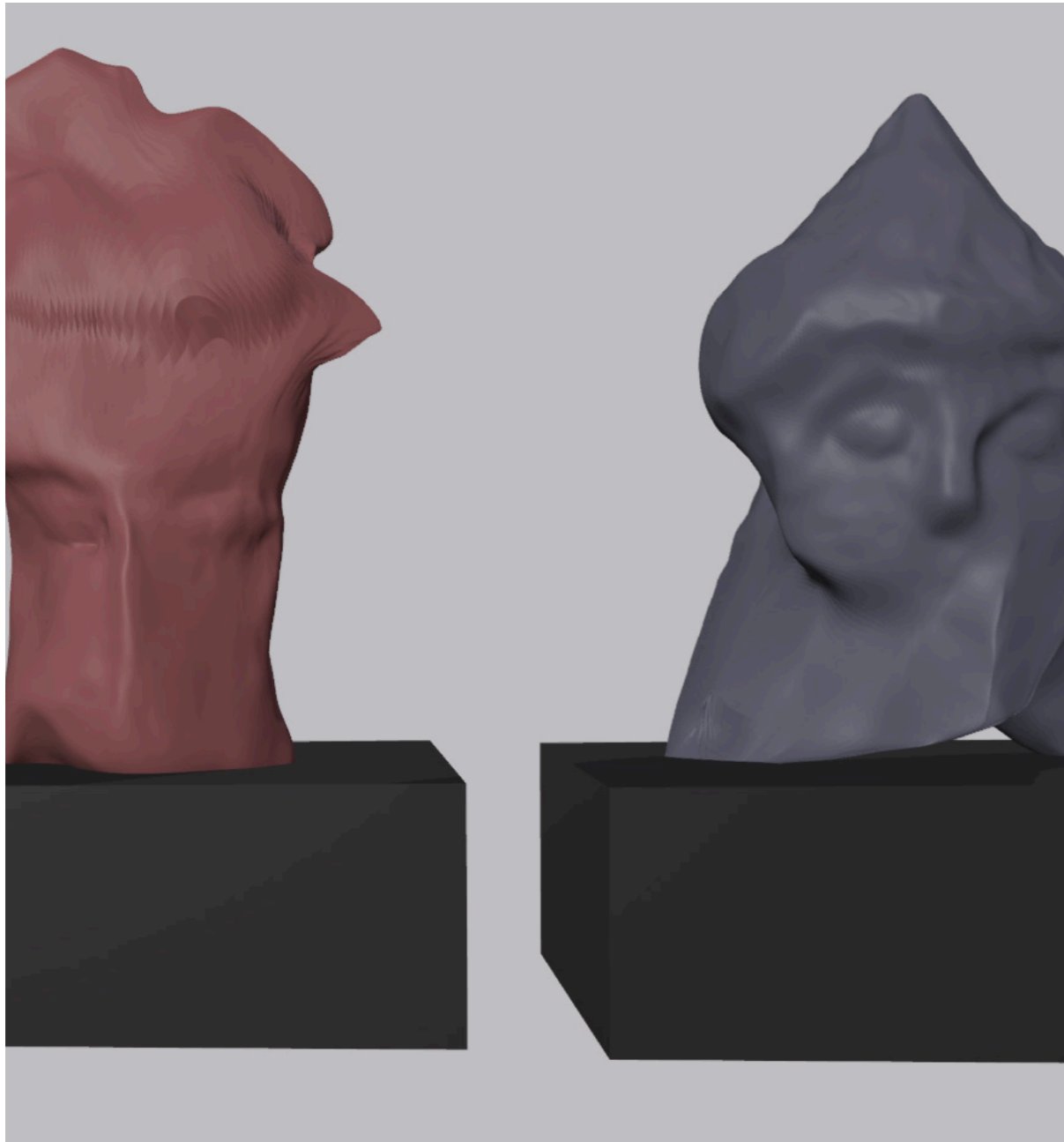
Agrawal radically foregrounds the human machine interaction in the process of the making of this work. First an AI learned the basic structure of a Seraikela mask (made by artisans in Jharkand themselves varying their borrowings from traditional designs) from images collected from the internet. It then produced original mask designs of its own. A 3D modeler (Tarang Hardikar) then worked with the artist to transform these designs into 3D computer models, which were then printed by a 3D printer (Stratnel) with various aesthetic decisions (e.g. granularity) made by Agrawal. Finally some of the 3D sculptures were painted by hand (using the original AI design) by painter Vijeta Srivastava.

There is a fascinating interplay of creative labour here that foregrounds the communal human creativity involved in an artwork produced by AI: from the algorithm written by someone, to a dataset produced by someone else, to the artist then curating that dataset and 'training' the AI and then using their aesthetics to choose the output, AI art is a deeply communal endeavour, as perhaps all art is! What is creative appropriation when all is hybridity? We have a work here that insists that we contemplate this 'social' element in (any) artwork, in a world still too obsessed with perhaps tired ideas of lone artistic genius.
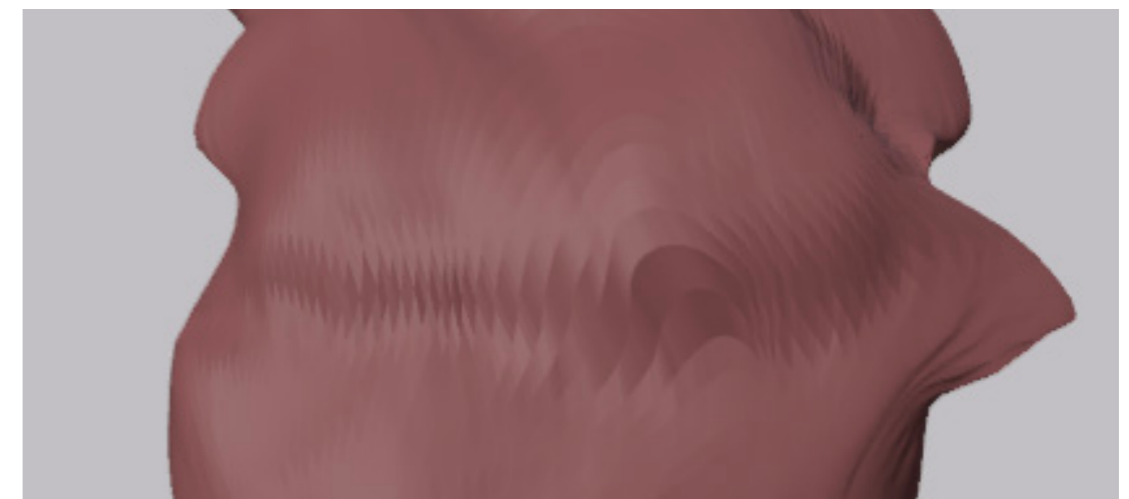
The Artist as Community Sculpture 1
Acrylic on 3D printed PLA plastic
16 x 16 x24 inch
2019
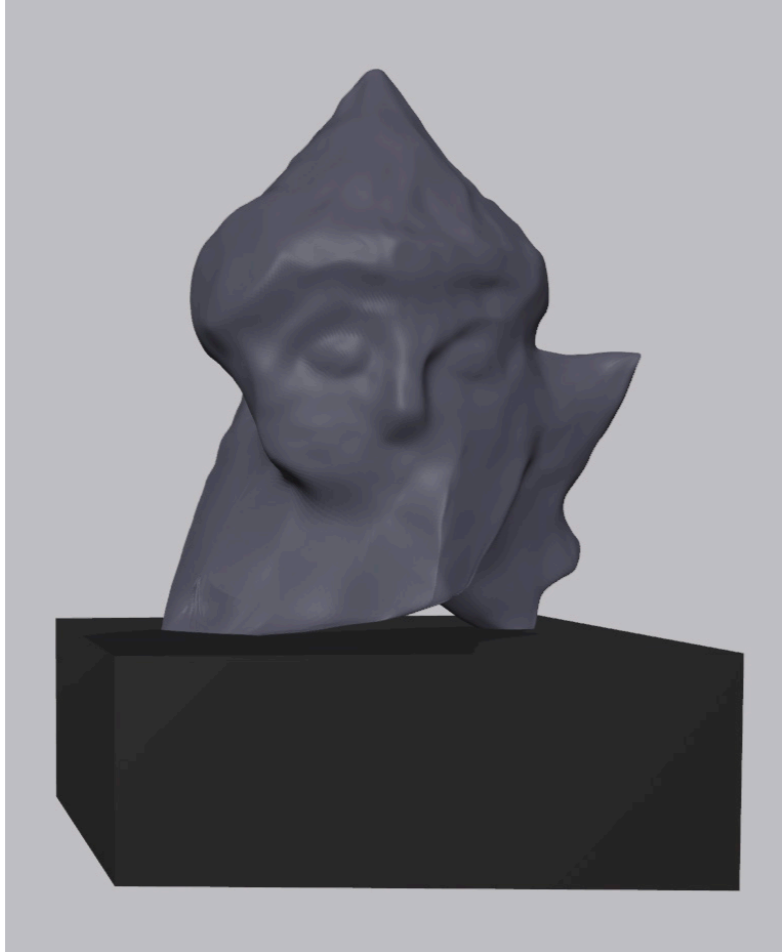
The Artist as Community Sculpture 2
Acrylic on 3D printed PLA plastic
16 x 16 x24 inch
2019

TANDEM

BRIEF

In this interactive work, one of Agrawal's early pieces, an AI algorithm is trained to recognize objects from around 1,00,000 images from an open source database (ImageNet). When the human starts to doodle something, the AI 'recognizes' it as objects it knows and 'finishes' the drawing. A non-AI algorithm is then called on to alter stylistic elements in the final drawing if necessary.

Someone interacting with this work experiences the eerie continuities and discontinuities between the human and machine imagination where our own human visual categories (which the machine has been trained on) are filtered and estranged through the (sometimes alien) associations the machine actually makes. We are left to wonder whose was that final drawing?: the human interlocutor's? the AI's? or does it really belong to the deep formal patterns in the human subconscious that the machine learns through looking at the way we form associations between the verbal and the visual?
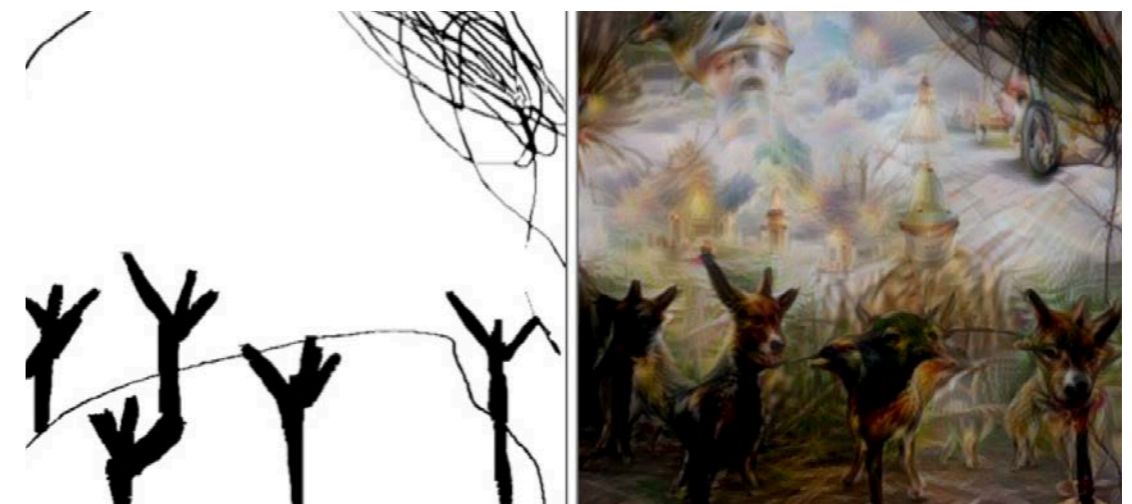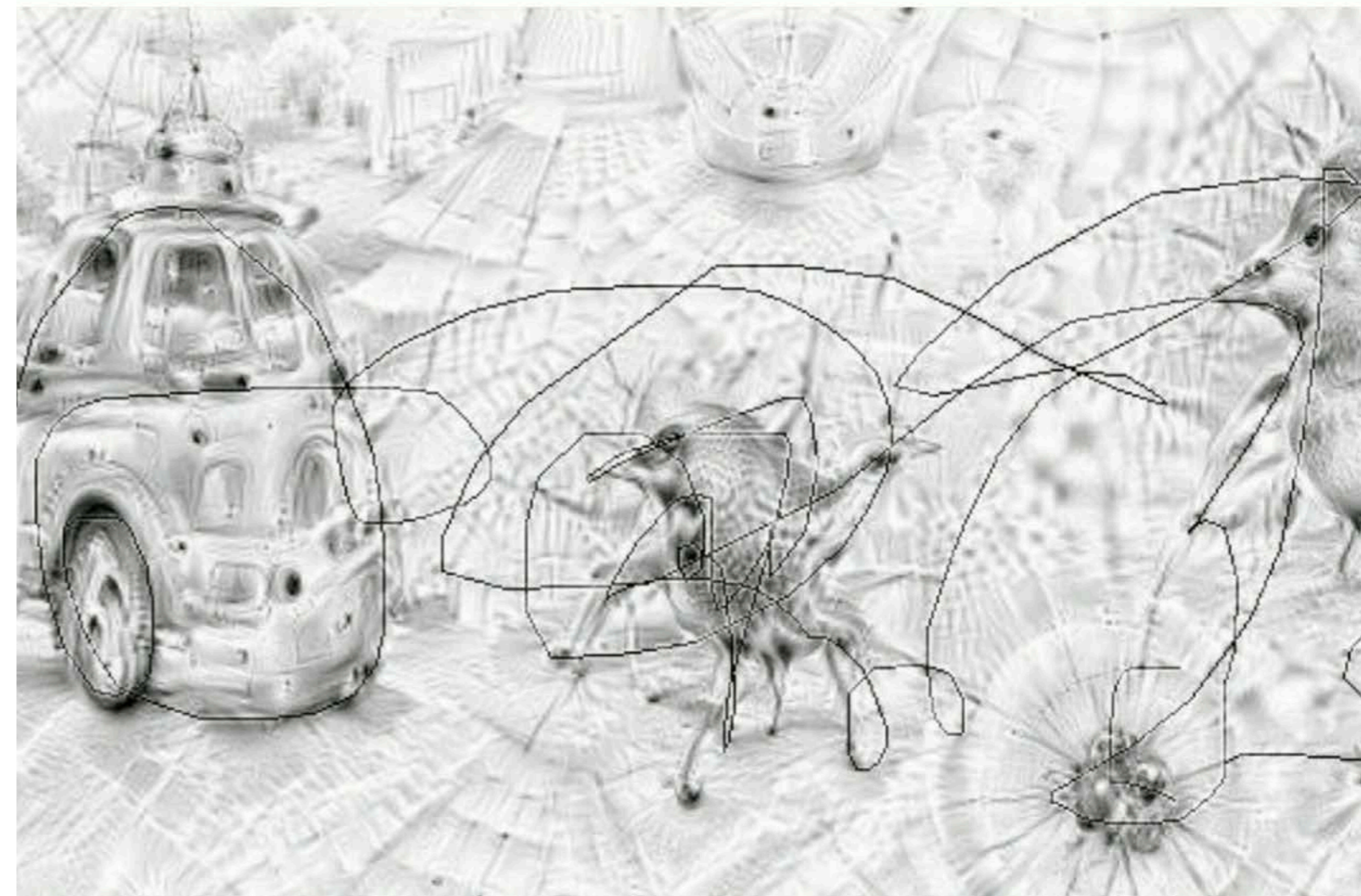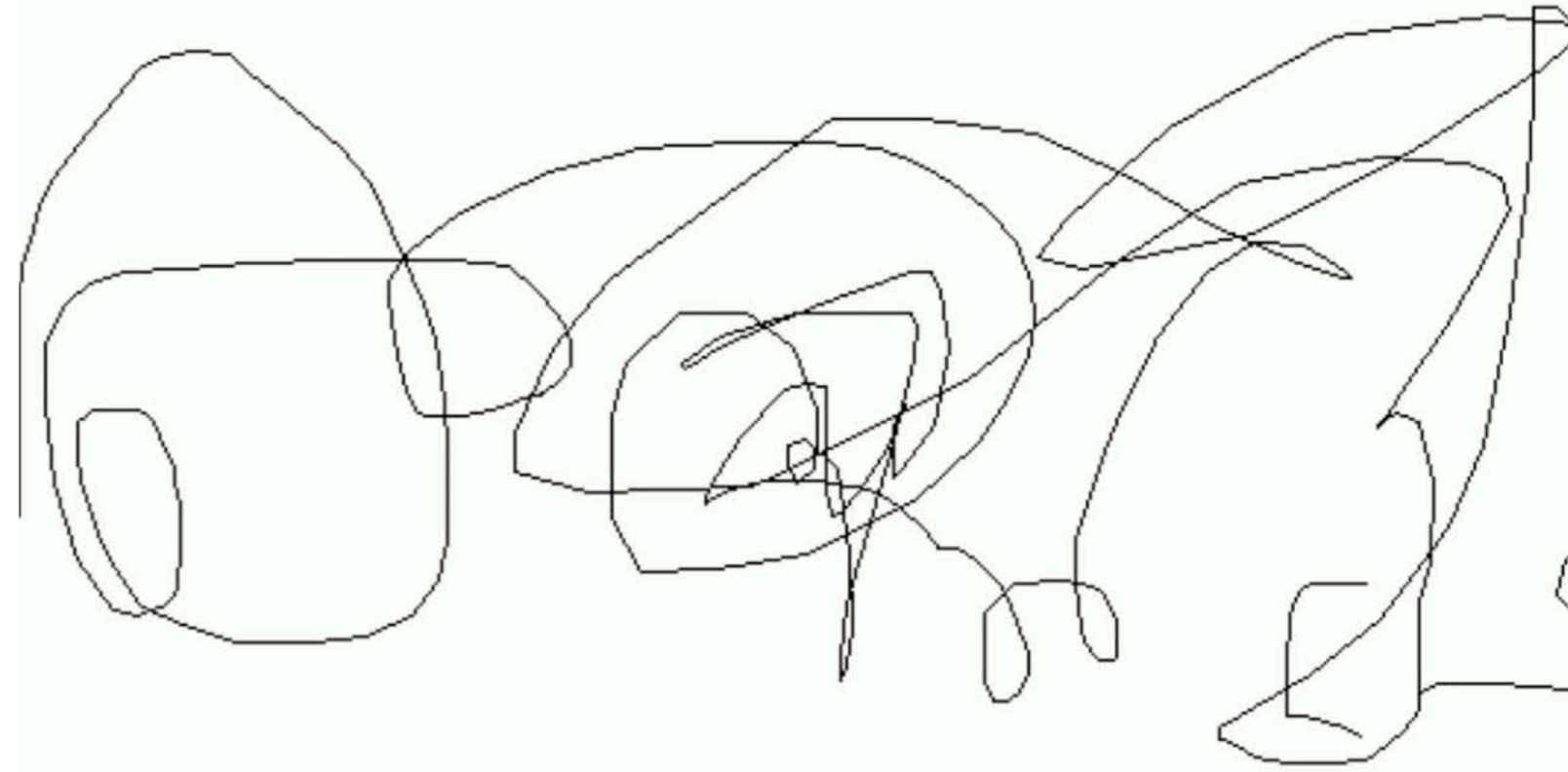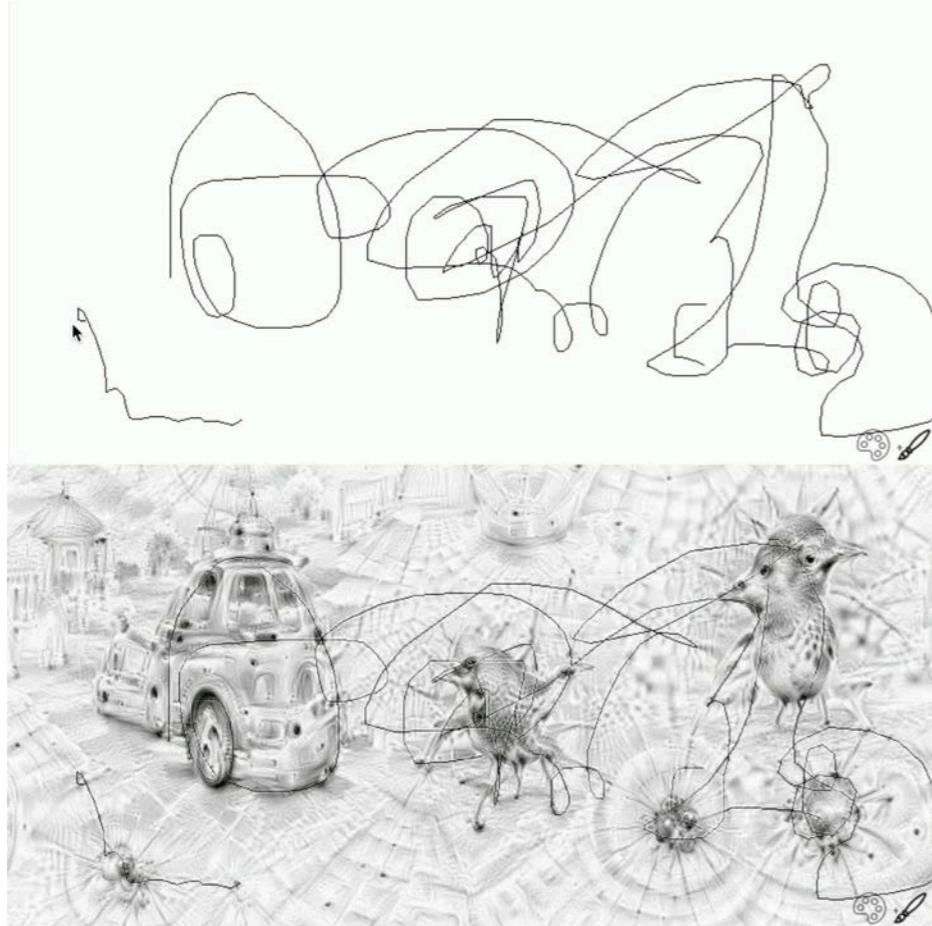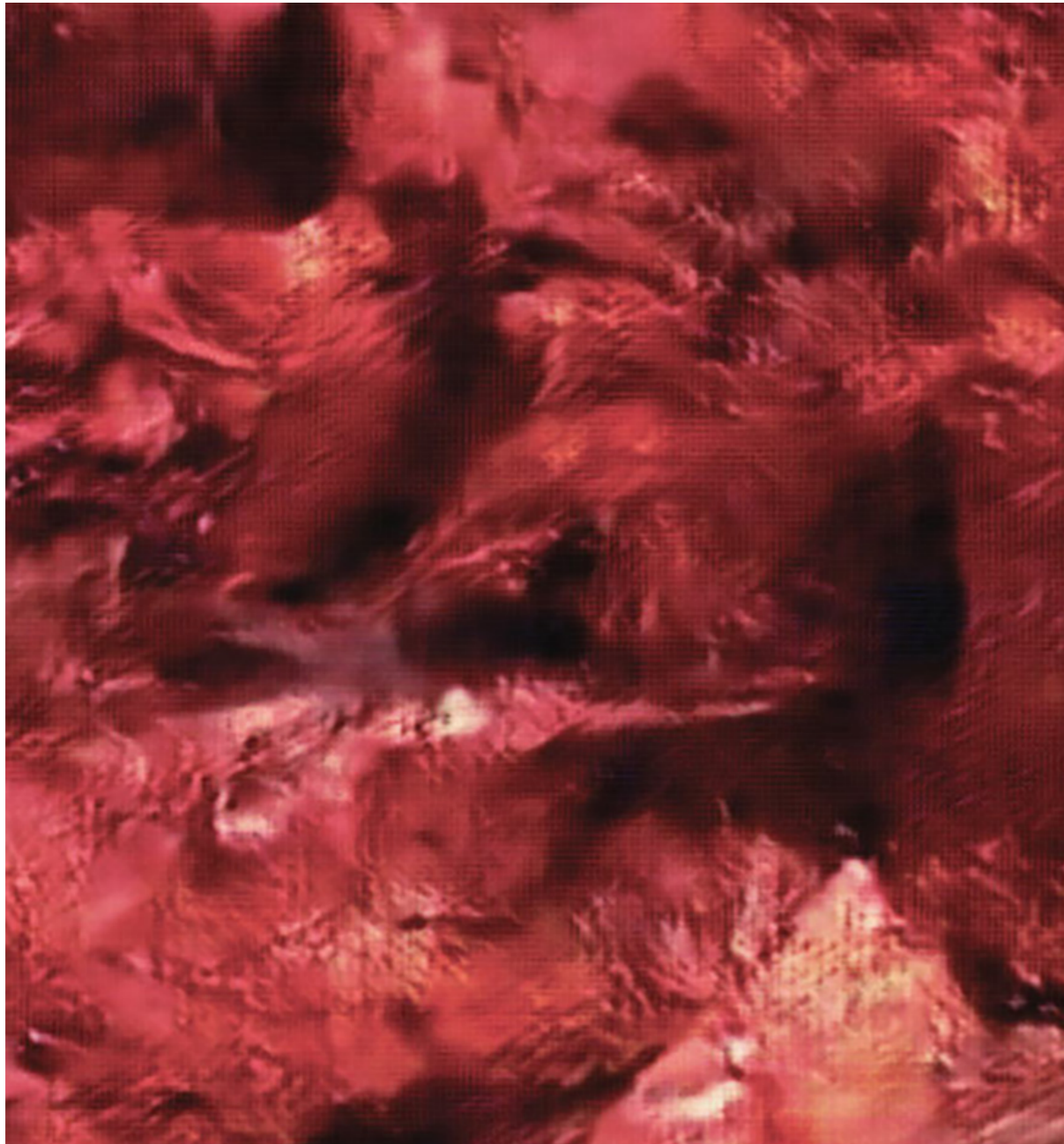
Tandem
TV Screen, Drawing tablet, GPU Computer, Custom AI Code
Dimensions Variable
2015–2017

THE ANATOMY LESSON OF DR. ALGORITHM

THIS WORK TEACHES AN AI WHAT THE HUMAN INSIDE LOOKS LIKE BY SHOWING IT SEVERAL VIDEOS OF SURGICAL OPERATIONS AND DISSECTIONS

BRIEF

Agrawal teaches an AI what the human inside looks like by showing it several videos of surgical operations and dissections. The algorithm then is allowed to produce its own images of an imagined dissection. By experimenting with the amount of training the algorithm gets, Agrawal generates vivid abstract painterly images which recall Shiraga and sometimes de Kooning. At the same time by keeping the pixelation, he refuses to erase the digital mediation in the production of the artwork.

The work not only disturbs us with its aestheticization of human insides, but also looks distinct from much AI-produced art, due to how the artist restricts the visual language the algorithm is taught. There is an ironic reference to Rembrandt's early masterpiece in the title; that painting was produced by humans in an era of troubled fascination with medical technology; this one is produced by AI, in an era of troubled excitement about its rise.
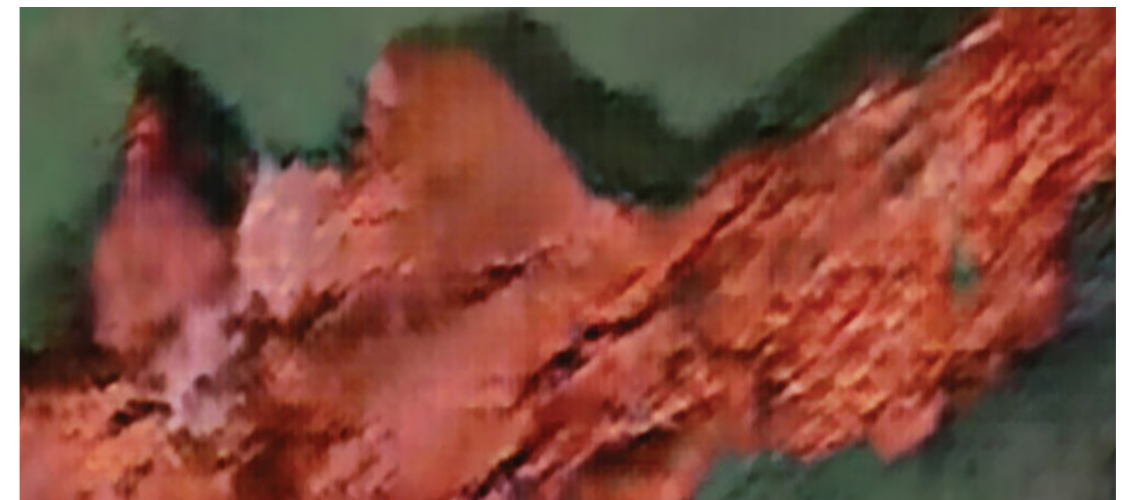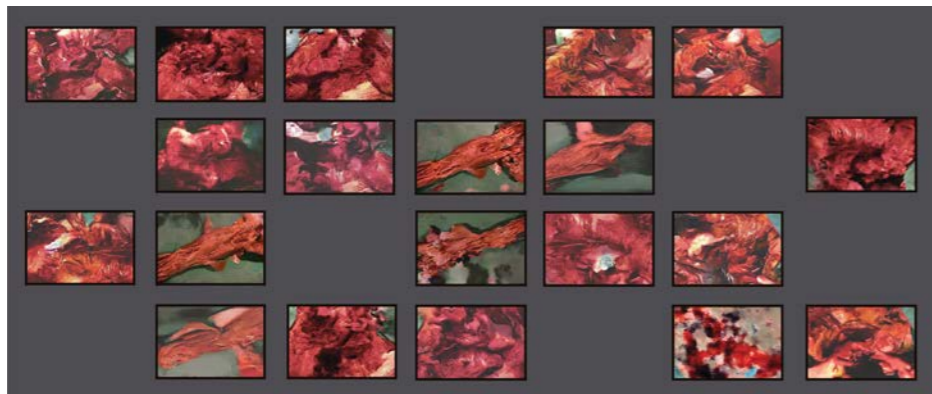
The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Algorithm
Archival Print on Paper
Set of 20 works
12 x 8 inch each
2018
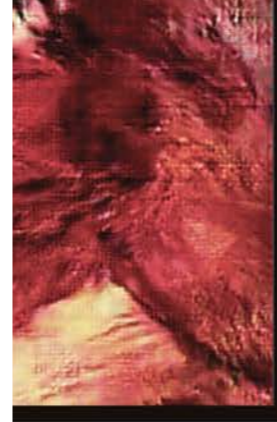
EMAMI ART

Emami Art, Kolkata, one of the most significant art institutions in the eastern part of India, is a key space for cultural production in the region. The organisation is focused on a future-forward, complex, multi-dimensional approach and steadfast in the advocacy of emerging, mid-career and established artists as well as an engagement with contemporary and historical material. The gallery aims to create dynamic, wide-ranging registers of exhibition-making and viewing.

In addition to hosting exhibitions, participating in art fairs and events of national and international import, Emami Art has a diverse parallel programming. With a focus on engagement with the region and beyond through continuous short and long-term projects, Emami Art has launched EA Locus in Focus, EA Co-labs (Collaborative Programme) EA Initiative (Public art endeavors) andEA Hybridwhich integrates both the physical and virtual interfaces. Other programs include EA Incubatorthat comprises of mentorship programs, workshops, residency opportunities and innovative educational activities that facilitate artistic development, help build networks of collaboration and provide a supportive environment for emerging talent. As a centre of excellence, Emami Art wishes to be identified as a platform rather than just a facility.

Critical discourses, interactions, documentation and exchange are also essential to our agenda. Under the umbrella of EA Discourse, we are committed to developing and producing original writing, artist's books, monographs, periodicals and catalogues that will focus on artistic, creative and pedagogical materials. Furthermore, the EACommunicatorlineup of talks, seminars, panel discussions and conversations with artists, curators and key partners provides a space for critical engagement as part of our knowledge-making and archiving process.

Deeply committed to promoting a regional, national and international agenda through innovative and alternative programming, emphasis on community and socially relevant engagements, institutional partnerships and more via a multi-year vision for the future, Emami Art is resolute to be a catalyst of change, research, innovation and inclusivity.