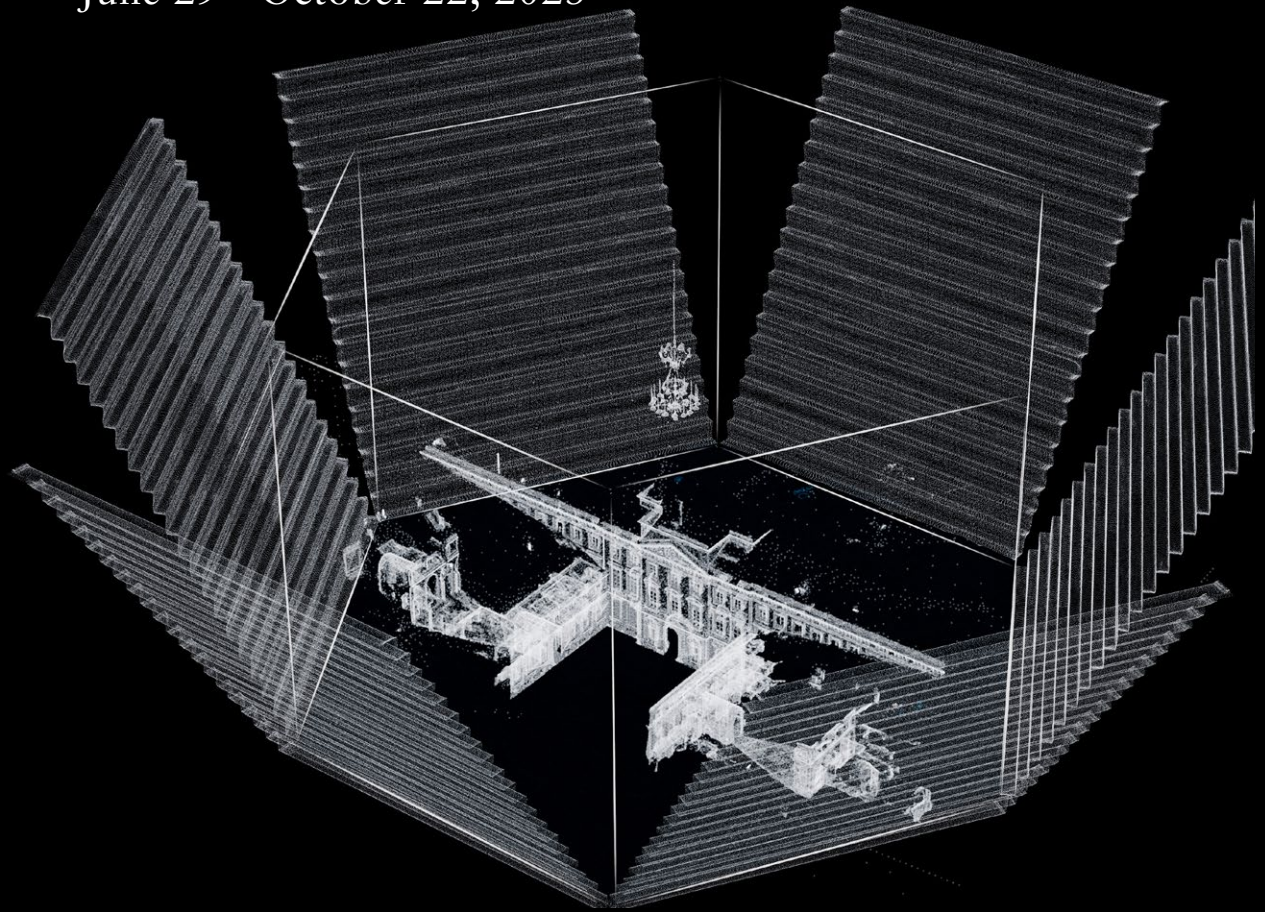


Robert Alice

BABEL

Le Monnaie de Paris

June 29 - October 22, 2023



laCollection

BABEL

June, 29 - October 22 2023

“One book, which my father once saw in a hexagon in circuit 15-94, consisted of the letters M C V perversely repeated from the first line to the last....This much is known: For every rational line or forthright statement there are leagues of senseless cacophony, verbal nonsense, and incoherency Others have mentioned the possibility of codes; that conjecture has been universally accepted, though not in the sense in which its originators formulated it.”

Jorge Luis Borges
Library of Babel, 1941

Taking its title from Jorge Luis Borges' 1941 short story 'Library of Babel' (1941), this new exhibition by Robert Alice investigates blockchains through the lens of Borges' infinite library. Centered around an infinite library made of discrete rooms filled with every possible text - meaningful and nonsense combined, Borges' Library of Babel is both a premonition of blockchain structures and post-truth landscapes in the age of AI.

Made in direct response to the collections of the Monnaie de Paris, BABEL investigates the 2000 year history of centralized monetary policies in the new series 'Ornament and Crisis', before placing this history in comparison with the newer history of decentralized ecosystems that are growing around the world in the series 'Blueprints'.

Borgesian labyrinths, the characters MCV, the concept of the infinite library and the primacy of text - its immutability and its instability lurk throughout the show. This comparison between centralized and decentralized systems and their competing approach to the archiving of knowledge are twisted into abstract digital drawings, immersive VR environments and printing press plates and smart contract NFTs.

Robert Alice

The Blueprints

2023

LIGHTBOX AND NFT

Found Archival Images, Found Texts, Custom GANs (Generative Adversarial Networks), Blender, Custom

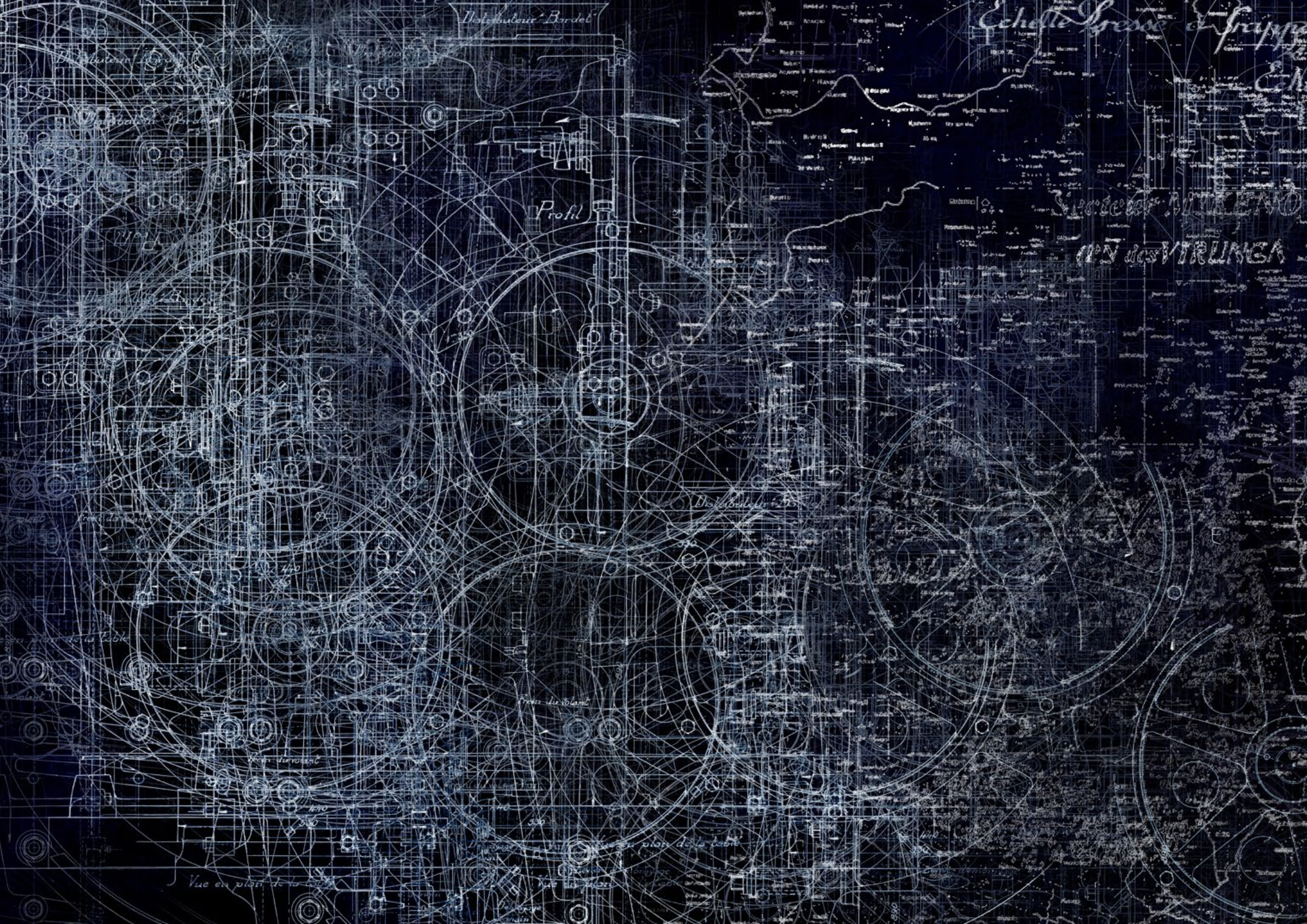
Painting Softwares, ASCII Encryption, Smart Contracts

TIFF and Generative Code

Dimensions Various

Minted 2023

Ethereum



The Blueprints

2023

“The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors. The distribution of the galleries is invariable. Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase”

Jorge Luis Borges
Library of Babel, 1944

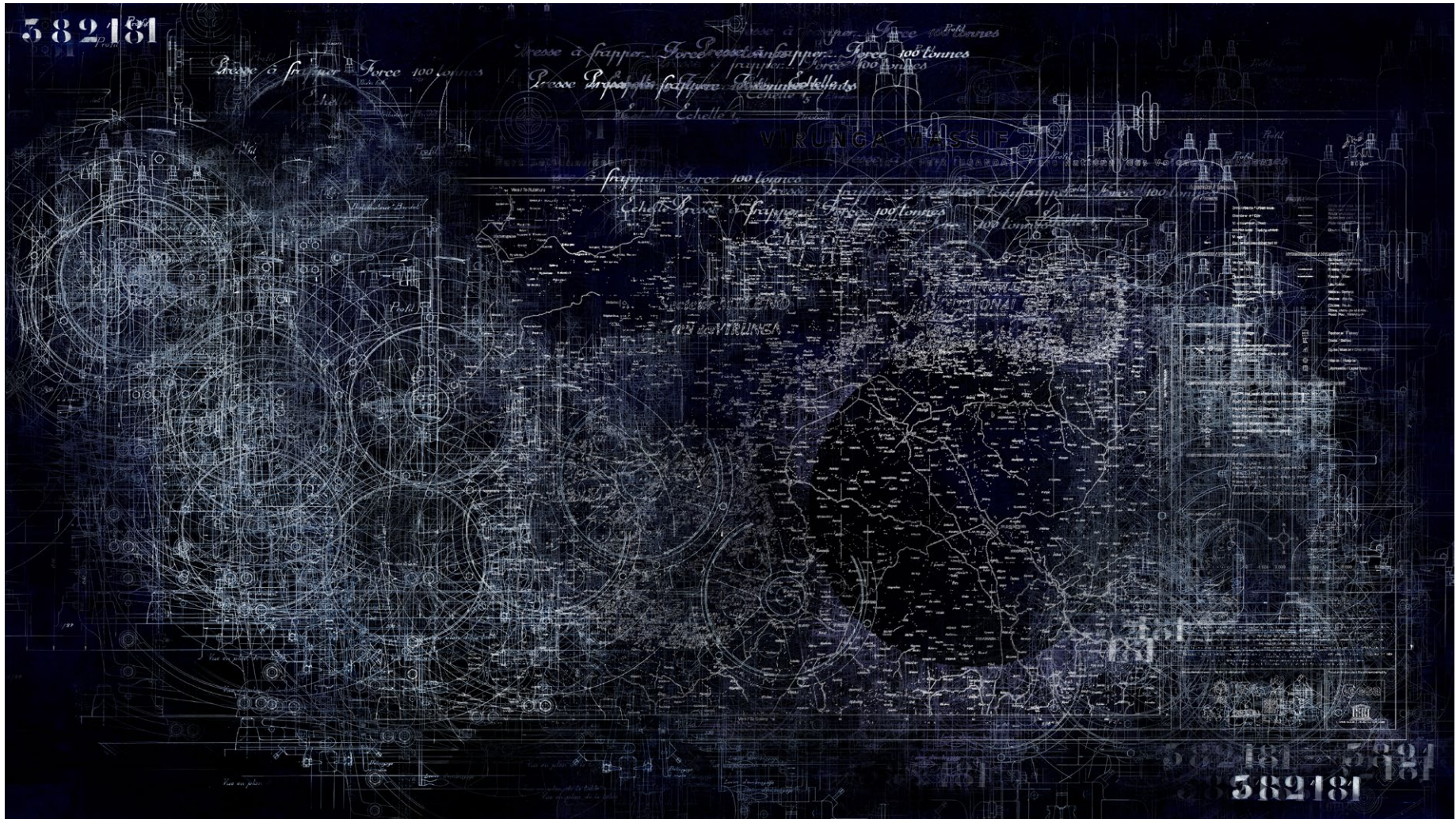
A new body of work made in direct response to the French national collection of the Monnaie de Paris, the Blueprints hijack original blueprints and architectural drawing from the museum’s collections and rework them into large scale abstractions.

Taking these drawings as a starting point, they have been interwoven with diagrams, typologies, literature and digital aesthetics taken from the history of blockchains to present imagined structures that present the collision of these two at time competing systems of thought - the centralised and the decentralised.

The resultant works speak to the cultural and philosophical rewiring of value systems in the age of blockchain while also forging aesthetic and conceptual links with the past. The works reference art history as diverse as seminal neuron drawings of Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852-1934) to early ASCII graffiti on the blockchain such as Len Sassaman’s ASCII Bernanke.

The each work commences with an AI ASCII background trained on a database as blueprints assembled by Robert Alice. Using this as the basis for a compositional structure, the original blueprints from the Monnaie de Paris are fragmented and fractured into decentralised rewirings or territories before being layered again with a further ASCII encoding based on the final image.

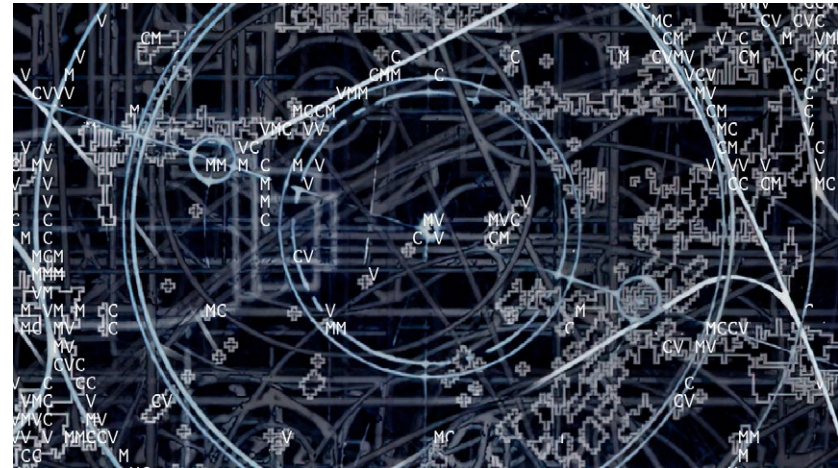
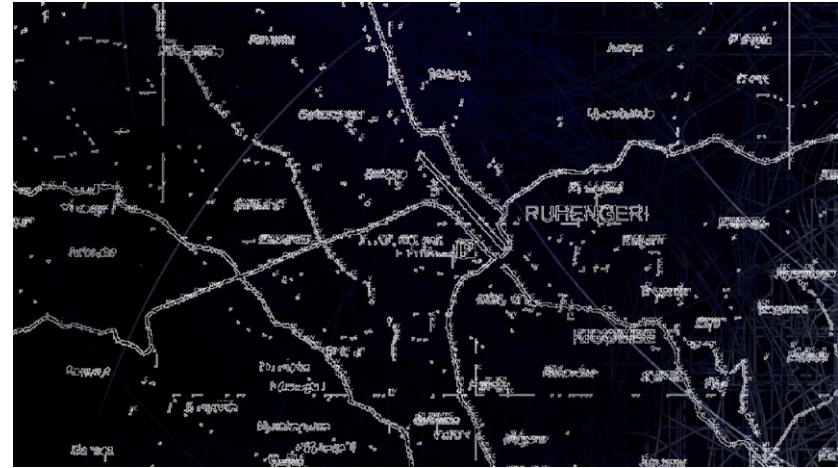
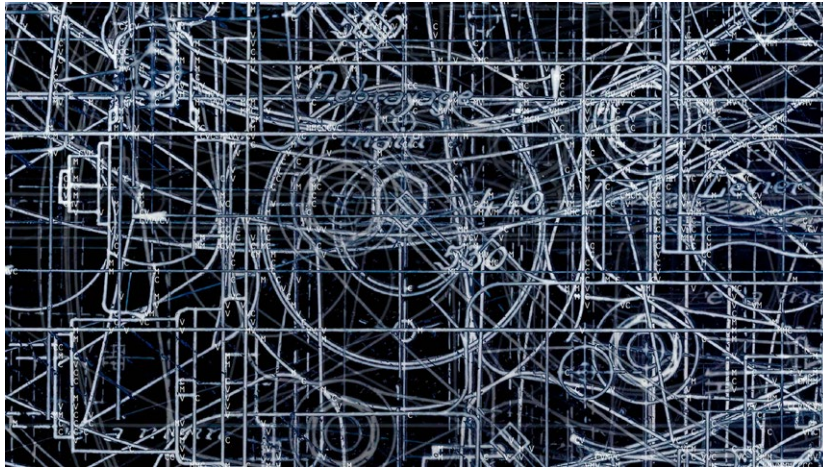
Using the letters 'MCV' as the encoding for the ASCII encryption, Alice refers a key text for their practice and thinking about the philosophy of blockchains, Jorge Luis Borges’ short story 'The Library of Babel' (1944). Centering around the concept of an yet ultimately finite library made of infinite interconnected hexagon rooms each with a set about of shelves and books that number those shelves, Borges’ short story recounts a book within this infinite library that holds only variations of the letters MCV. The encryption 'MCV' in all the mutations of both Borges’ short story and now in Alice’s digital paintings stand as a link to conceptual ideas around the blockchain as decentralised and encrypted public archive.



382181_Virunga

2023

34500 x 20000 px
305 x 150 cm

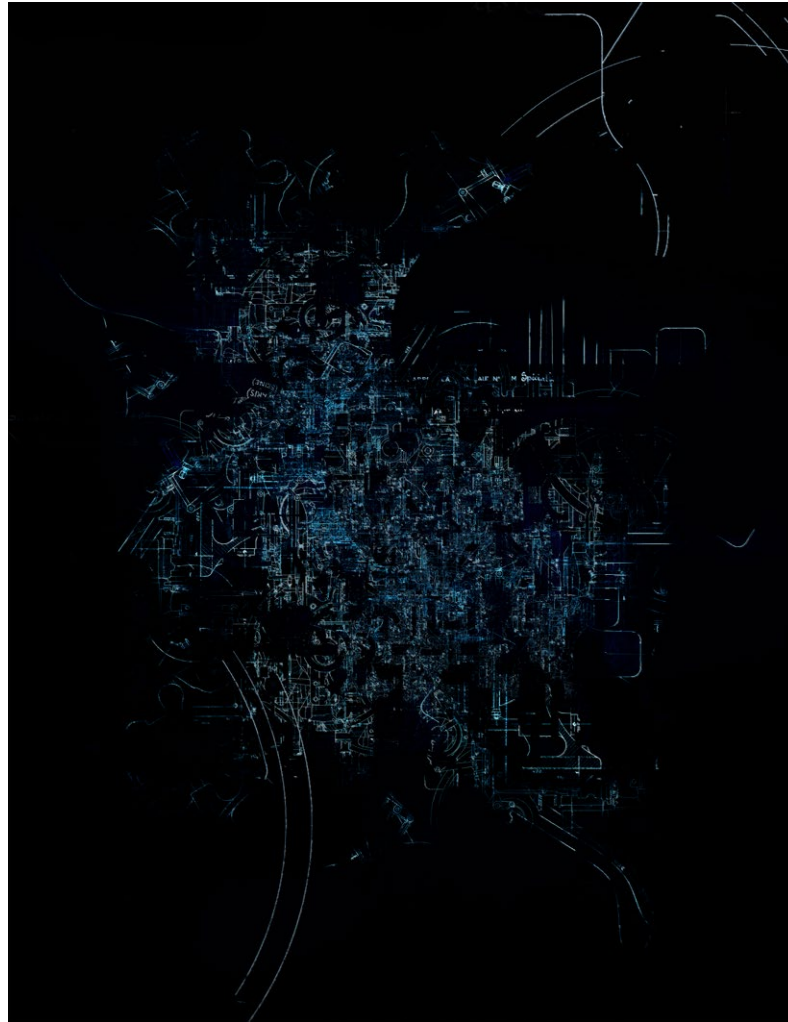


382181_Virunga

DETAILS

34500 x 20000 px
305 x 150 cm

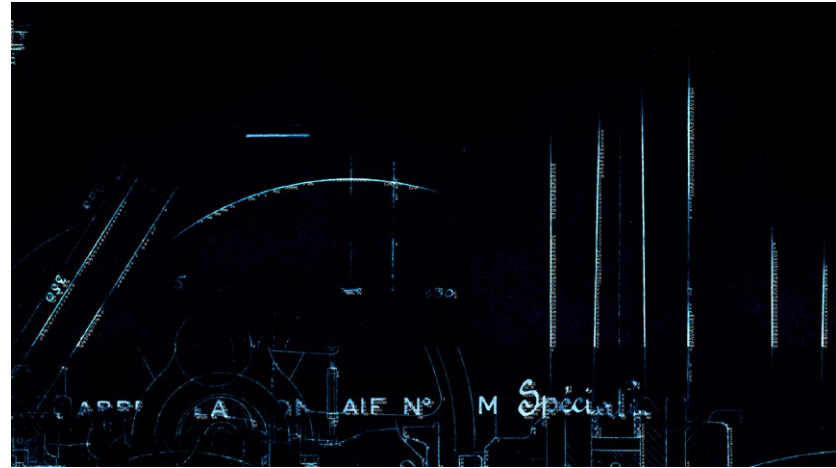
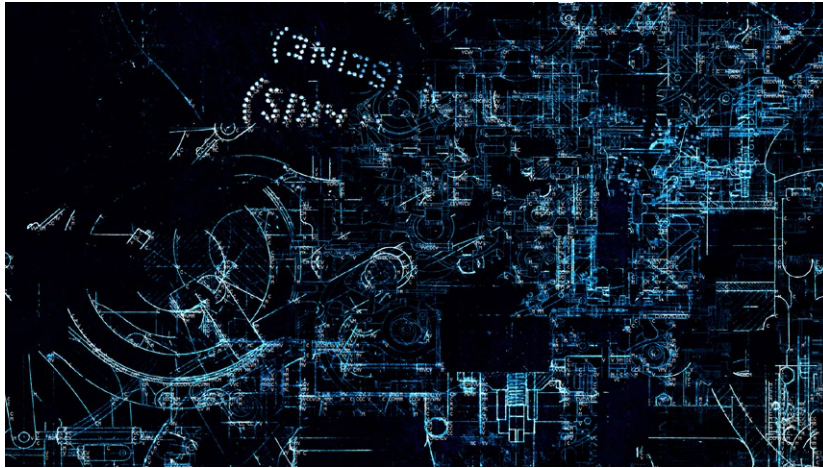
Combining blueprints from the Monnaie de Paris with maps of Virunga National Park in the Congo, '382181_Virunga' explores the decentralization of value production and monetary control away from Western institutions and towards a more egalitarian node based system. Crypto has been mined by the Congo's Virunga National Park using hydro-electric overspill and has been instrumental in supporting the finances of the park's rangers. Despite long-standing issues surround crypto's power output, the experiment at Virunga highlights how alternative finance is opening up wasted renewable energy resources while providing localised funding through direct access to a monetary supply, previously only the rights of national governments.



H15715_The Imperfect Librarian

2023

21246 x 27495 px
179.9 x 232.8 mm

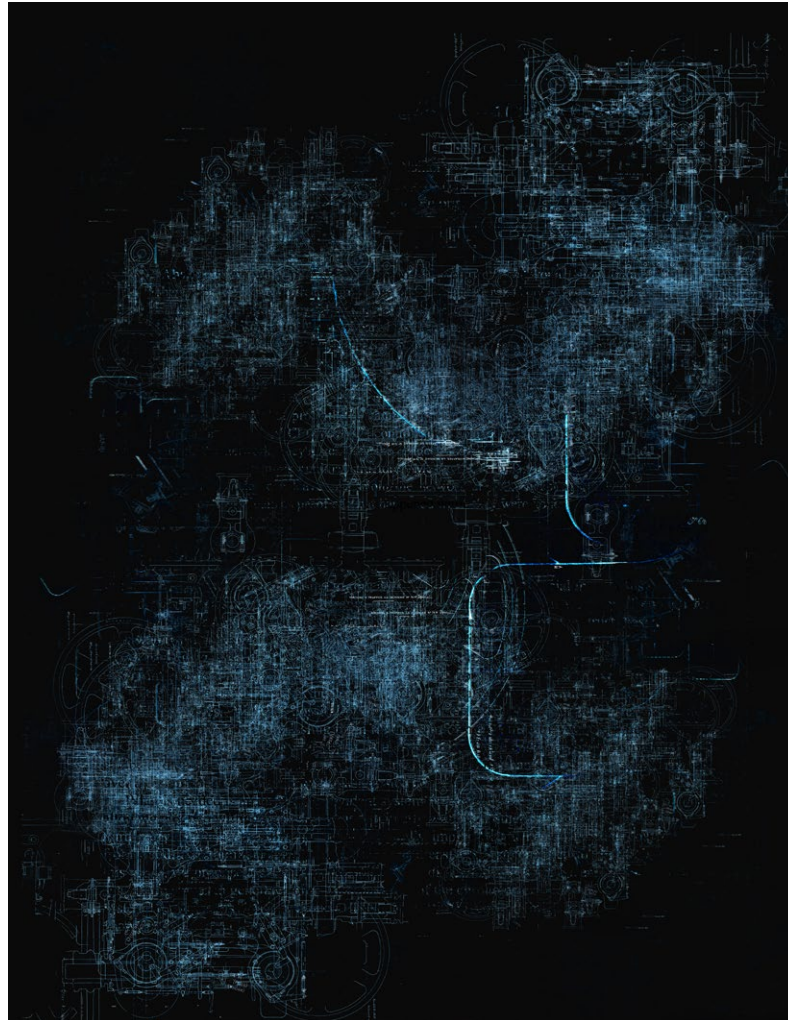


H15715_The Imperfect Librarian

DETAILS

21246 x 27495 px
179.9 x 232.8 mm

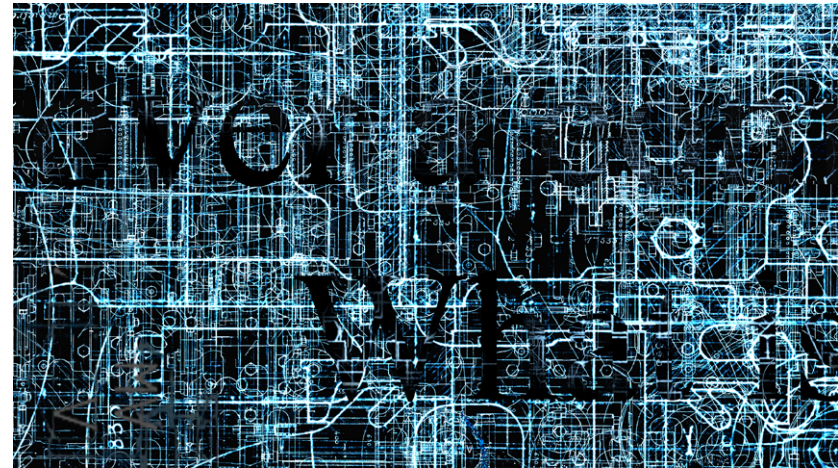
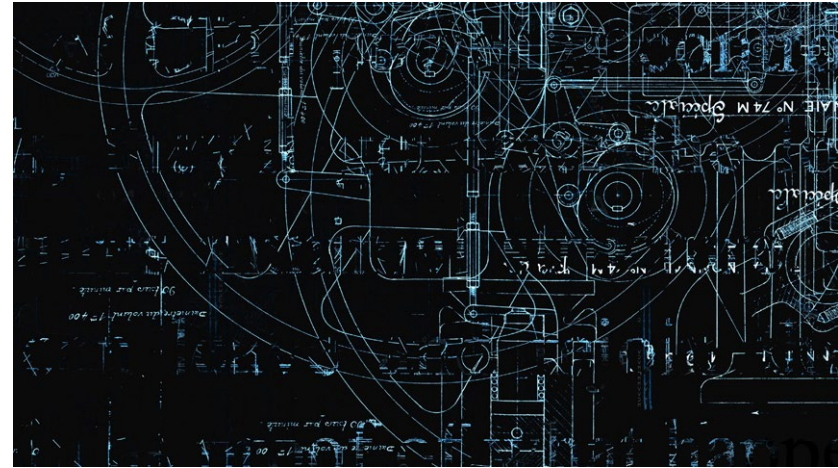
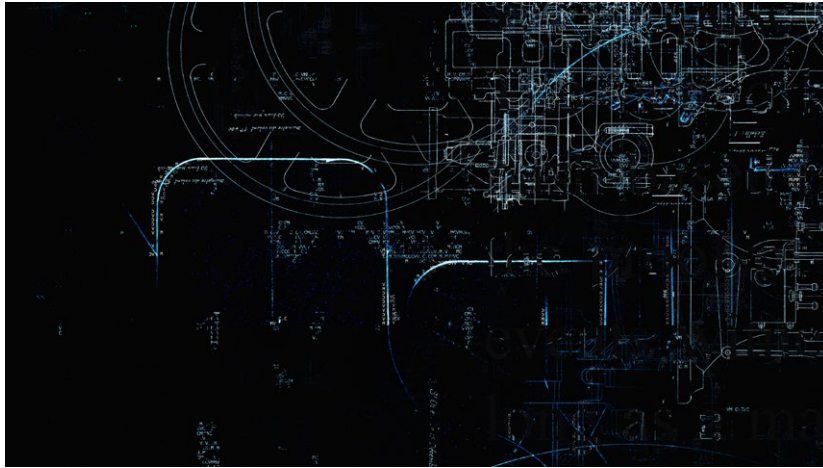
Based compositionally on AI GANs that Alice trained against a corpus of blueprints at the Monnaie de Paris and a library of blockchain patents, diagrams and infographic found in public archives, 'H15715_The Imperfect Librarian' reworks or rewires a specific centralized blueprint (Archive No: H15715) into an abstract network structure that draws from the studies of neurons by Santiago Ramon y Cajal. The letters MCV trace the surface of the work and the newly formed compositional structure. Both concealing the form below and an encryption in and of itself, the characters stand as a reference to Borges' infinite library and its similarities to blockchain structures, and its presence as the first immutable, decentralised infinite library.



H15715_Every Possible Path

2023

21246 x 27495 px
179.9 x 232.8 mm

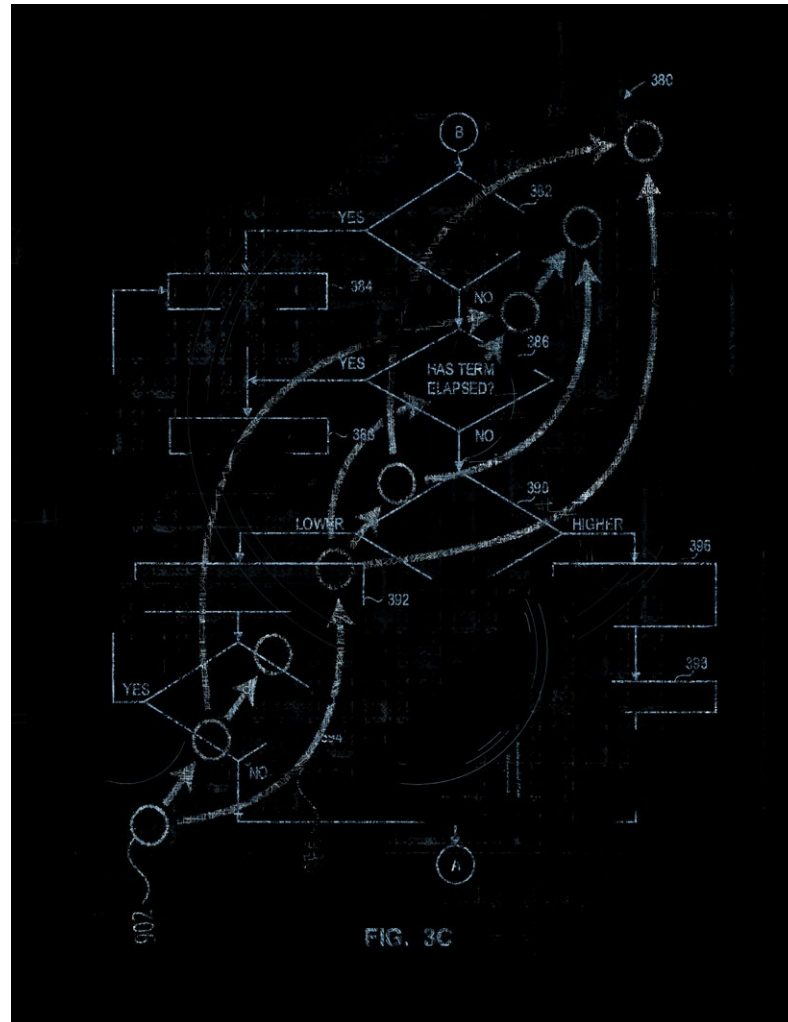


H15715_Every Possible Path

DETAILS

21246 x 27495 px
179.9 x 232.8 mm

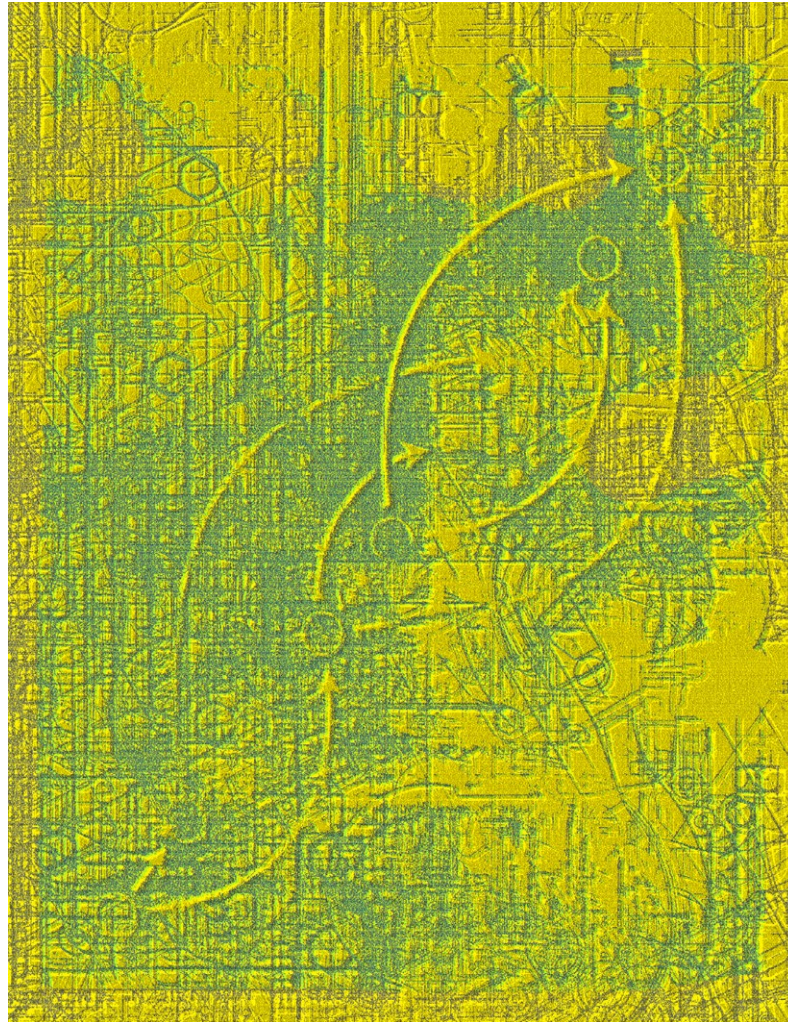
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H15715_ Has Term Elapsed?

2023

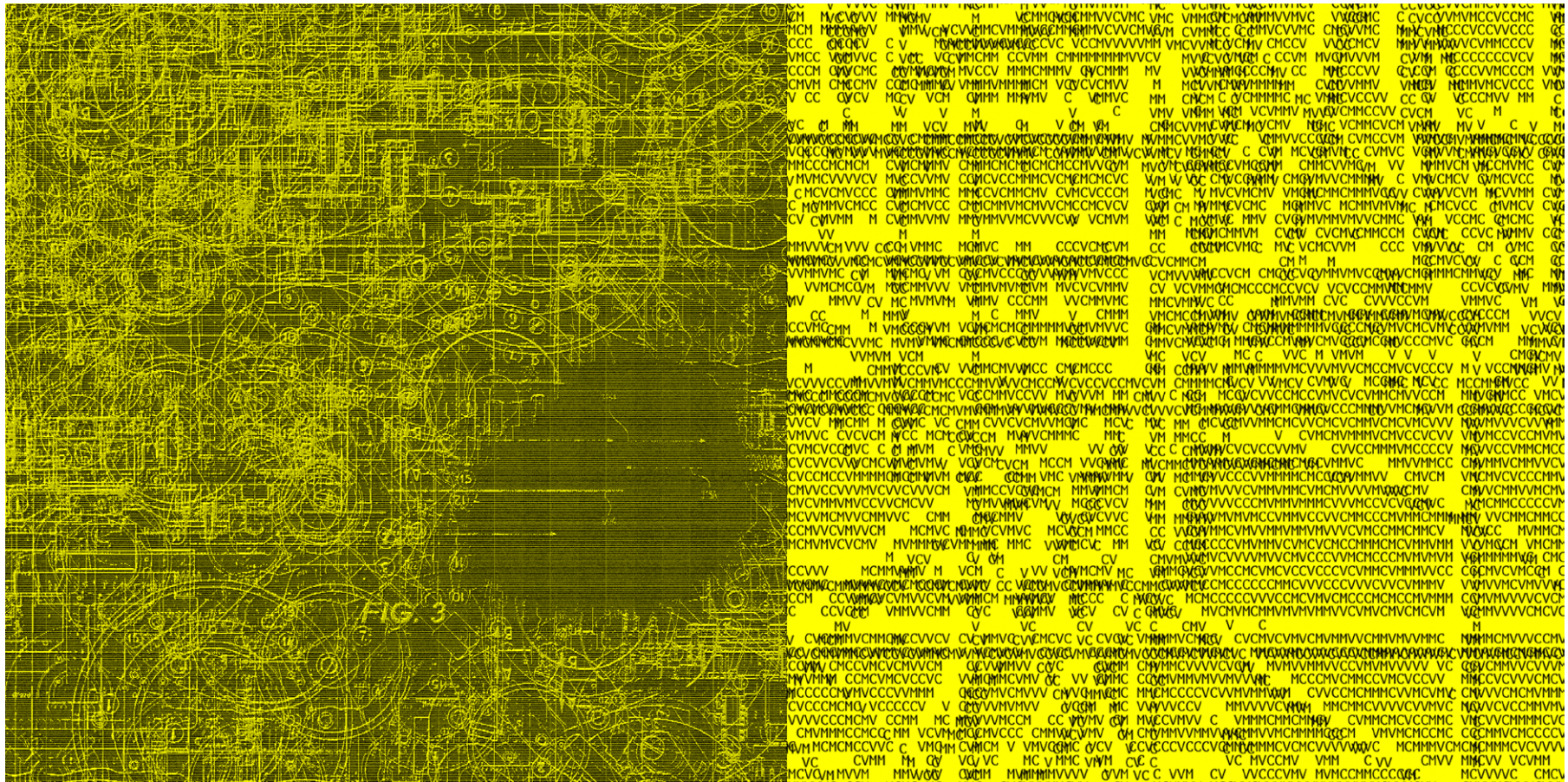
21246 x 27495 px
179.9 x 232.8 mm



382181_PATENT 258.45

2023

21246 x 27495 px
179.9 x 232.8 mm



A01960032_PATENT 38123.42

2023

21246 x 27495 px
179.9 x 232.8 mm



Portfolio After Borges

2023

15000 x 20000 px
100 x 72 cm

... vestibule, perhaps, to call the Library's con-
... perhaps, perhaps, perhaps, of hexagonal
... Dec 15 1900, 10:00 AM, bound by
... hexagons, one can see the floors above and below
... the floor. The arrangement of the galleries is always
... bookshelves, five to each side, line four of the hexa-
... eight of the bookshelves, floor to ceiling, is hardly
... of a normal librarian. One of the floors pro-
... a narrow sort of vestibule, which is, in some ways,
... identical to the first-identical in fact, in all
... vestibule are the way connections, lines

... The arrangement of the galleries
... five to each side, line four of
... the bookshelves, floor to ceiling,
... of a normal librarian. One of the
... narrow sort of vestibule, which is
... identical to the first-identical in fact,
... vestibule are the way connections, lines

... the bookshelves, floor
... of a normal librarian.
... narrow sort of vestibule
... identical to the first-identical

... arrangement of the
... five to each side, line
... bookshelves, floor to

A01960032_PATENT 38123.42

DETAILS

21246 x 27495 px

Made using ASCII rendering of large SVGs, this smart contract based NFT will retype its text based on a decentralized library Alice has created of texts that have importance to the histories of crypto and blockchain. Based on block height the text will continue rewriting, creating an unlimited and everchanging text in the spirit of Borges's Library of Babel.

Robert Alice

ORNAMENT AND CRISIS

2023

VR, 3D NFT, Lightbox and C-Print in Artist's Etched Frame

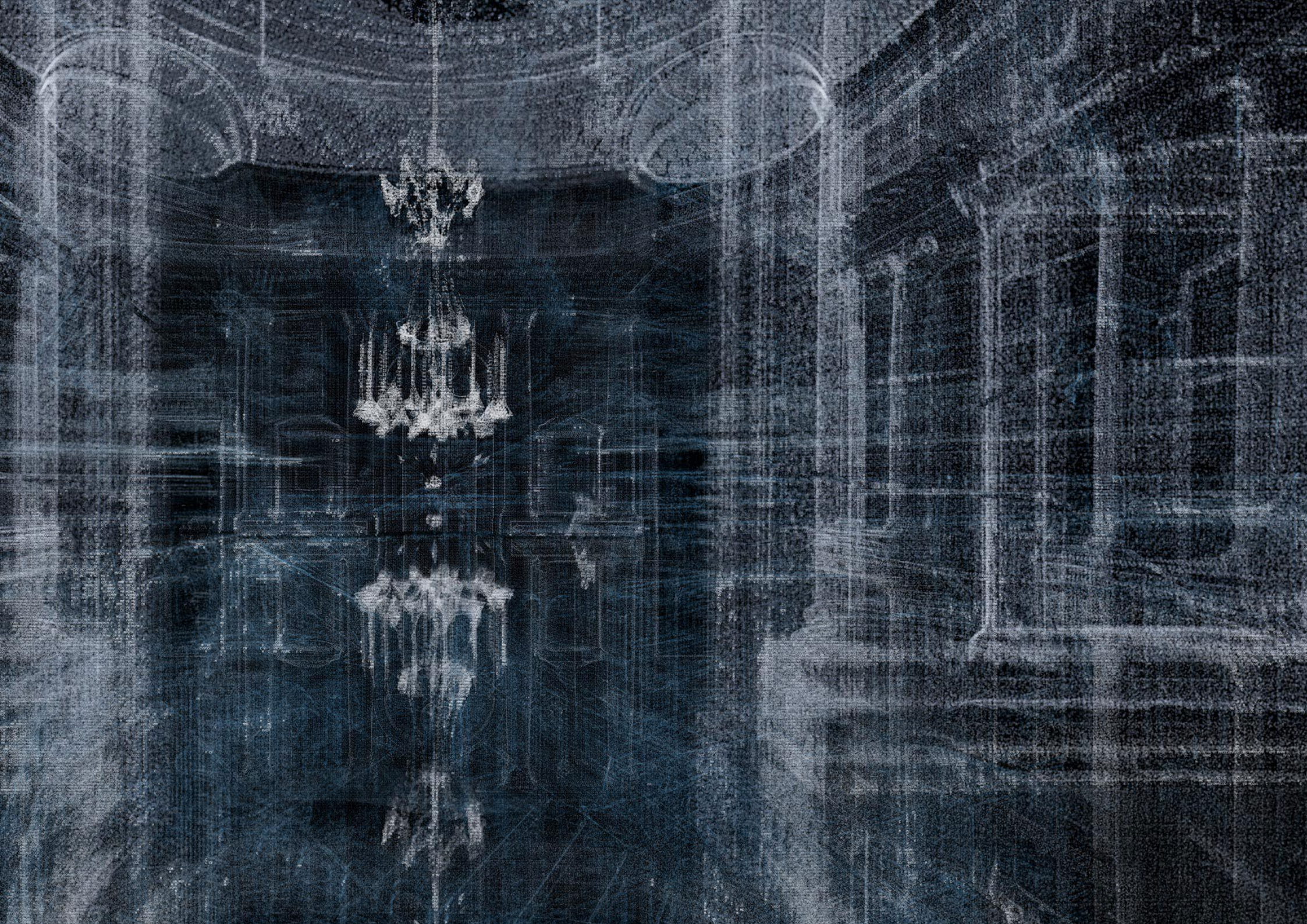
LiDAR and Text

TIFF

Dimensions Various

Minted 2023

Ordinals and wEthereum (Wrapped Ethereum)



ORNAMENT AND CRISIS

2023

What makes our period so important is that it is incapable of producing new ornament. We have out-grown ornament, we have struggled through to a state without ornament. Behold, the time is at hand, fulfilment awaits us. Soon the streets of the cities will glow like white walls!

Adolf Loos
Ornament and Crime, 1913

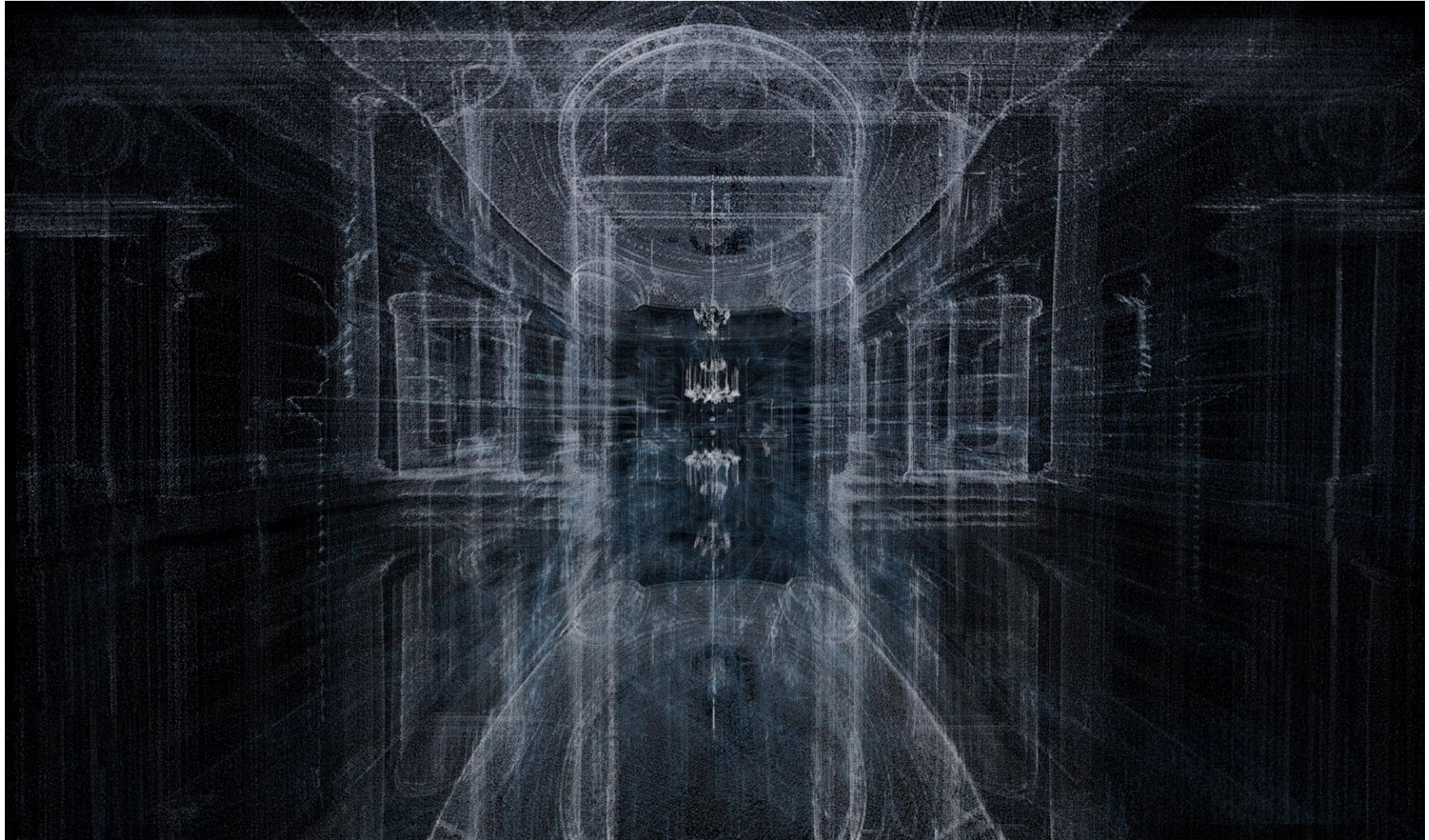
Ornament and Crisis presents an alternative and provocative history of financial crises at one of the world's oldest monetary institutions. Influenced directly by the contemporary moment, the work takes its starting point from the recent 24/7 media coverage of the 2023 global banking panic to bring in a museological style this challenging "hidden" history of monetary crises to the French national museum.

Using specially made LiDAR scans of the building, the works' hijack the architecture of the Monnaie de Paris to recast the neo-classical solidity of the building as one that is instead see-through and unstable. Playing with ideas surrounding the facade, the labyrinth and the parable of Narcissus, the institutional architecture of the Monnaie de Paris is seen through a lens of Adolf Loos's 'Ornament and Crime'; a seminal modernist rallying cry against ornament in architecture in favour for the clean function of modernism. Alice takes the 3D scans of the building, before remaking them into speculative stages for this alternative history to be played out. Elements of the architecture are spotlight, isolated and remade into ghostly and unsettling stage sets.

Each work is a pairing between a 3D environment, explorable in VR and a physical, museological artifact. From steganographic lightboxes with hidden texts to engraved vitrines, this hidden history is played out in an unsettling and encrypted atmosphere where the boundaries between truth and reality are blurred.

Researched in collaboration with AI systems, the history of financial crises from 323 BC to 2023 that sits at the heart of this project creates an unreliable narrator where post-truth narratives are blurred in a typically Borgesian style. Without reference, we are left to ask what is fact, and what is an AI hallucination and in turn further unsettling the viewer.

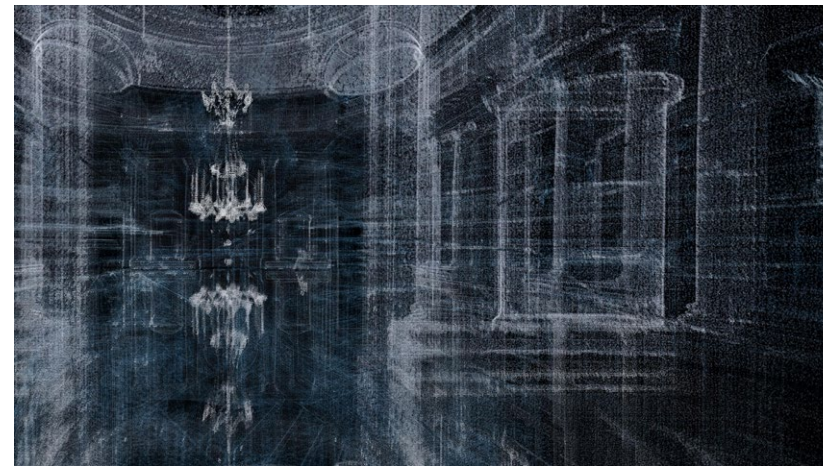
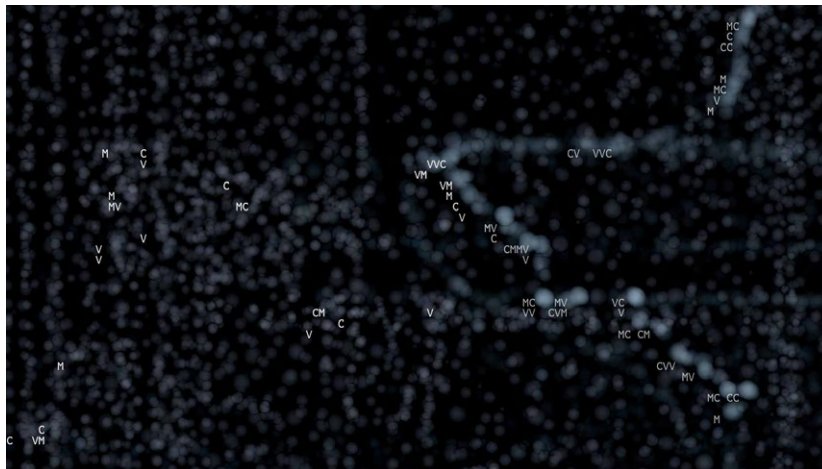
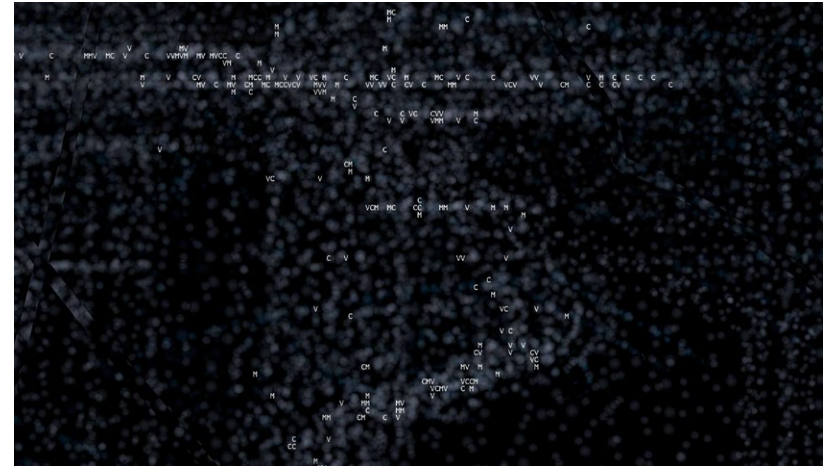
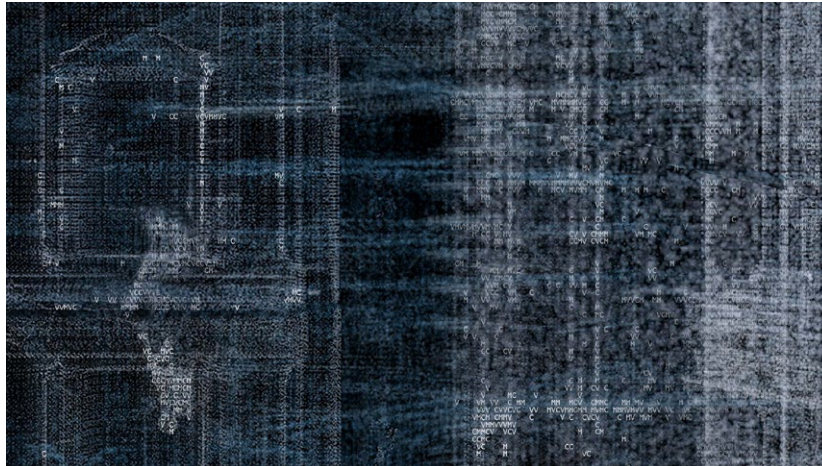
Crises are reduced down to just their date and their emotional typology. From 'PANIC' to 'DEPRESSION' to 'BLACK' and across a variety of languages from Egyptian hieroglyphs to Gujarati, keywords are isolated to create heightened sense of the human and emotional psychology of crises. Together the 200 crises and their varying terms creates a kind etymological fingerprint that focuses on the poetic nature of repetition and rhythm through our global history.



Narcissus (After Borges)

2023

27495 x 16247 px
232.8 x 137.5 mm

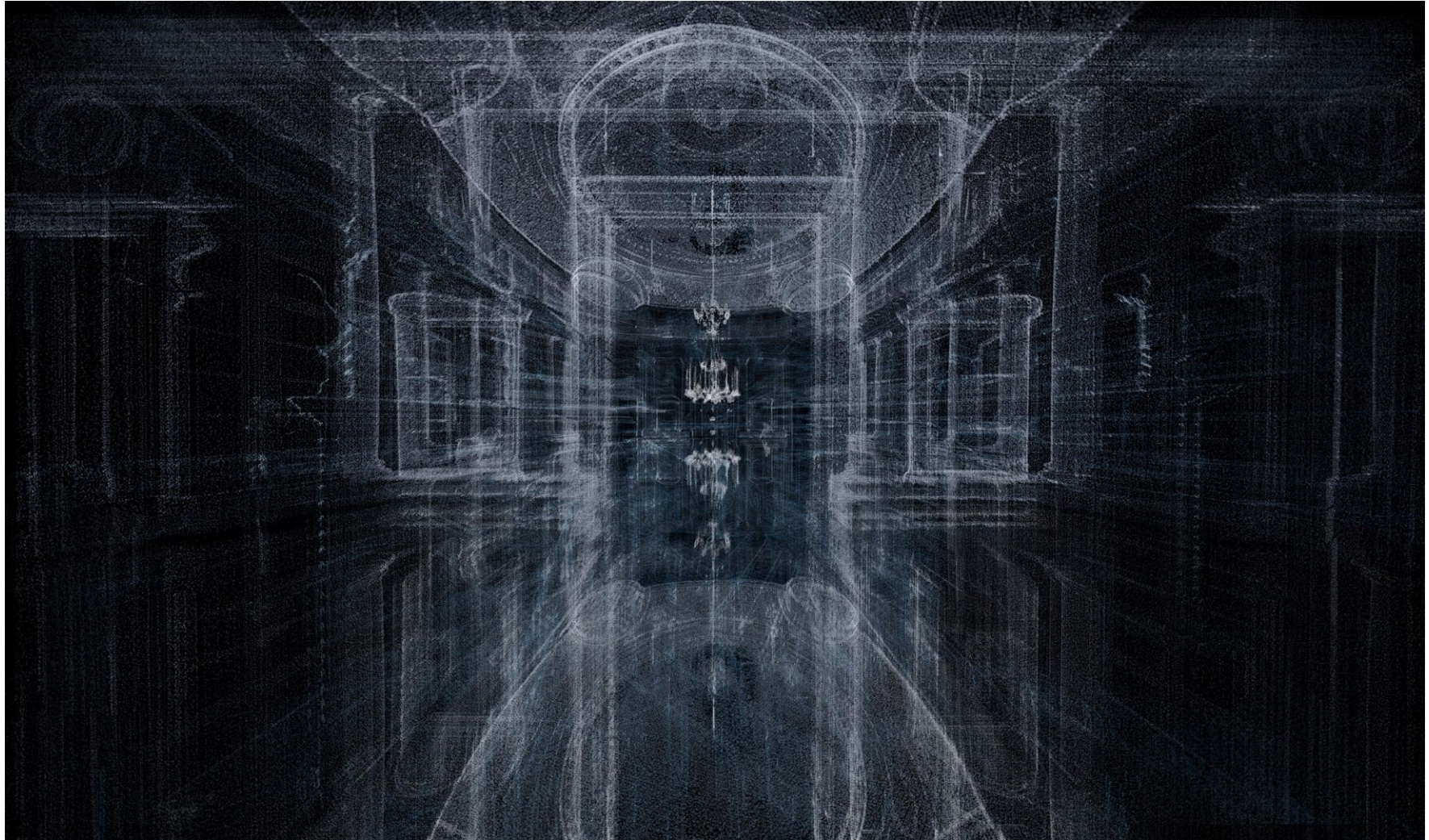


Narcissus (After Borges)

DETAILS

Having conducted a full LiDAR scan of the museum and its neo-classical building, Alice takes the main neo-classical saloon exhibition room of the Monnaie de Paris and remakes it into an allegory of Narcissus. With the building render transparent and ghostly through the use of LiDAR point cloud technology, the speculative architecture showcases the building looking back on itself, figured around a seated character and a mirrored chandelier.

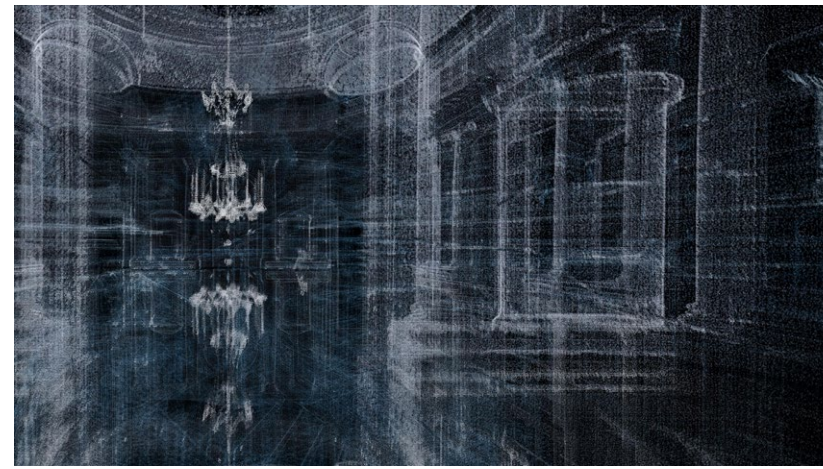
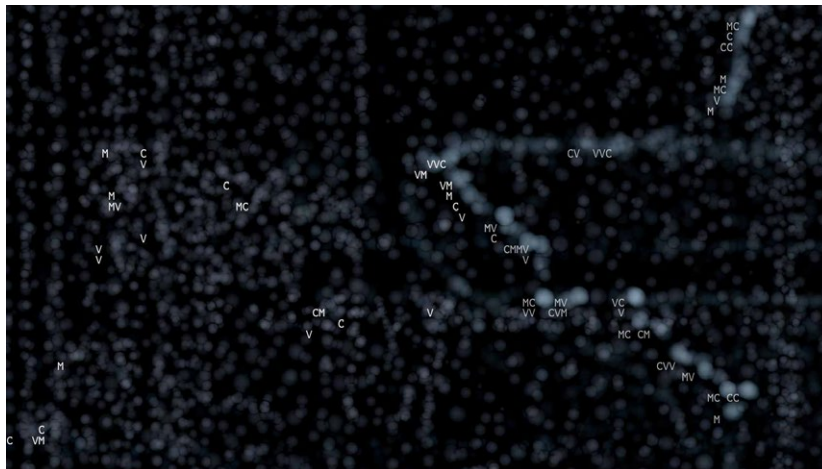
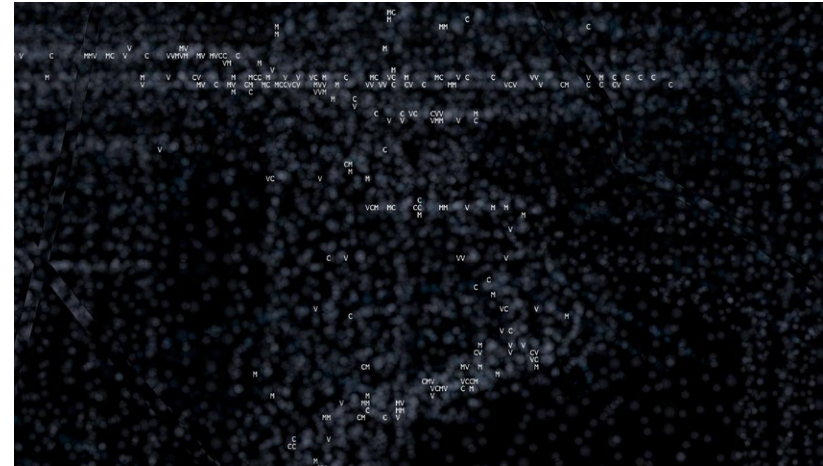
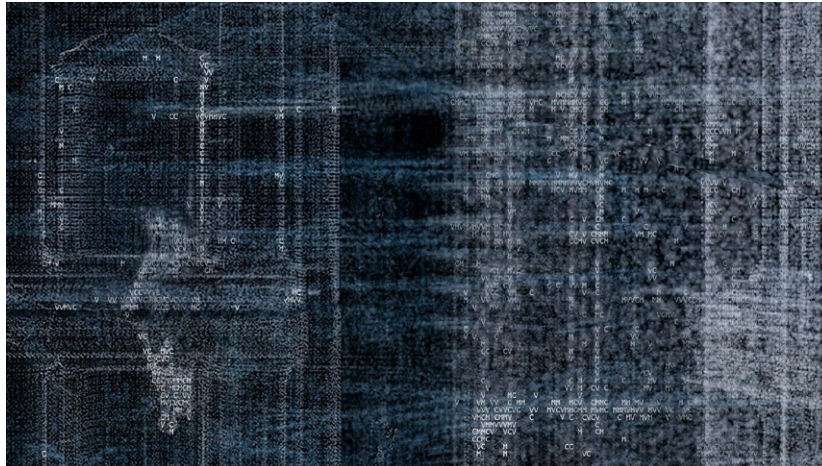
27495 x 16247 px



Narcissus (After Borges)

2023

27495 x 16247 px
232.8 x 137.5 mm

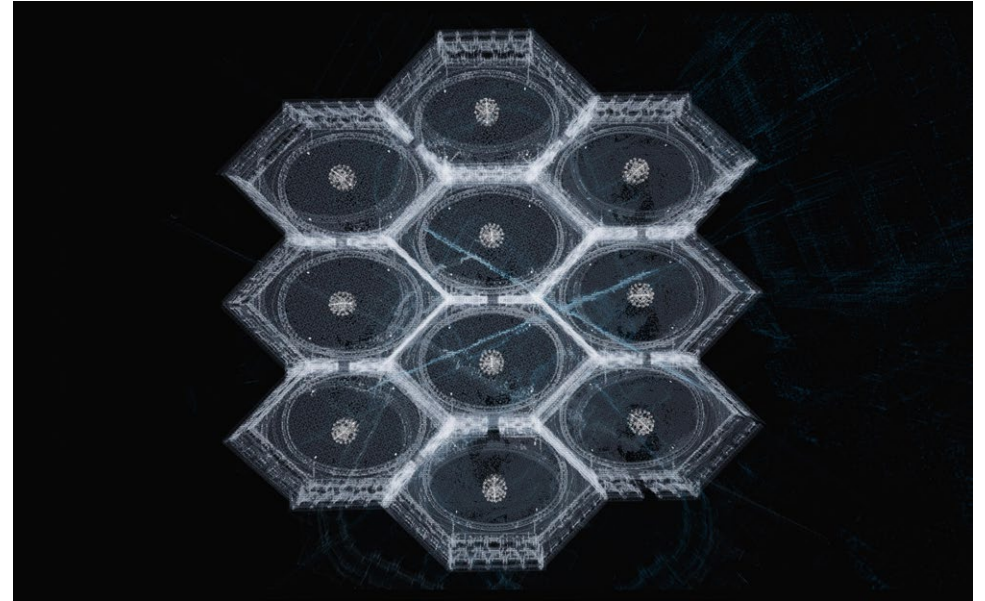
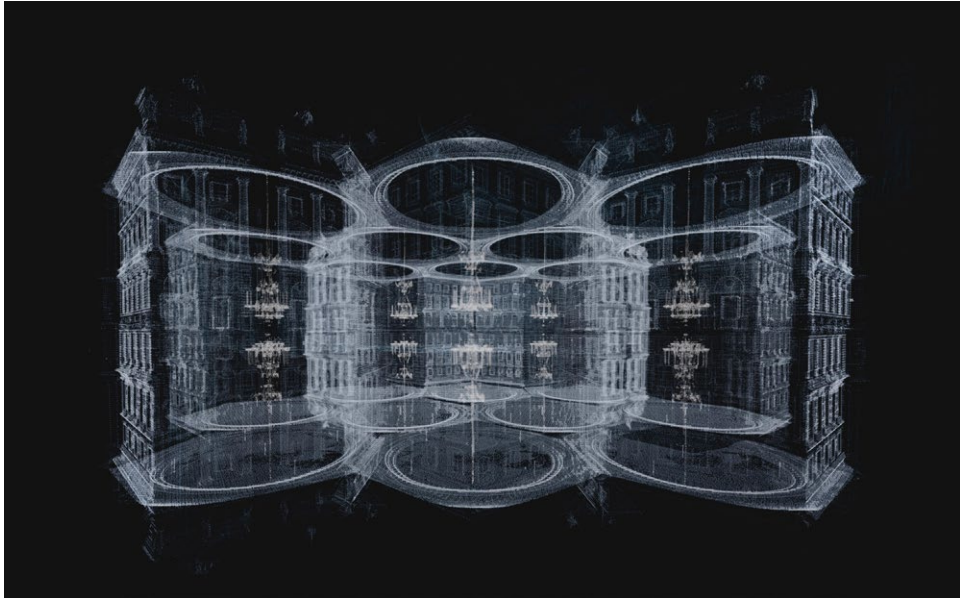


Narcissus (After Borges)

DETAILS

27495 x 16247 px

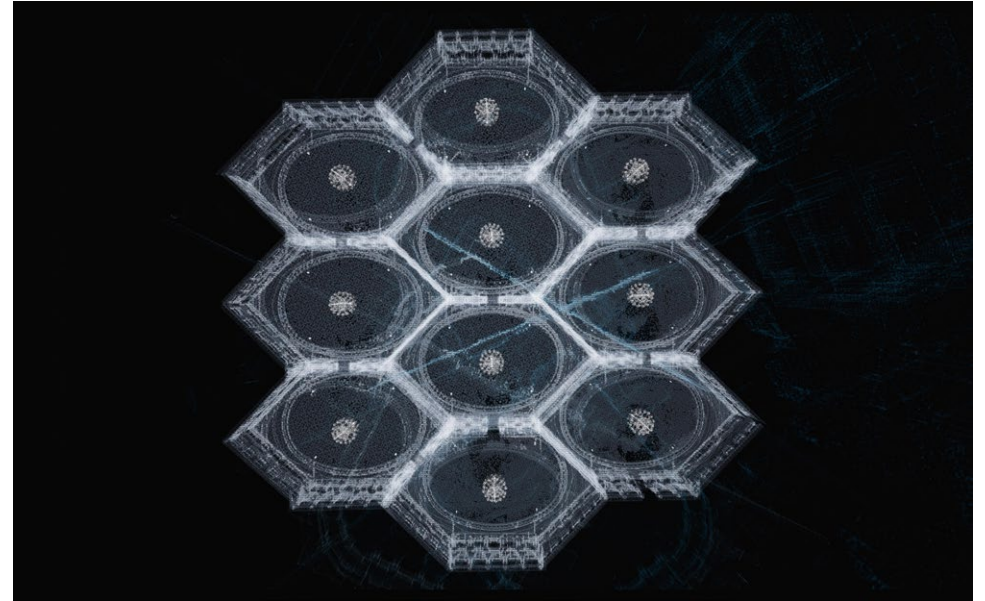
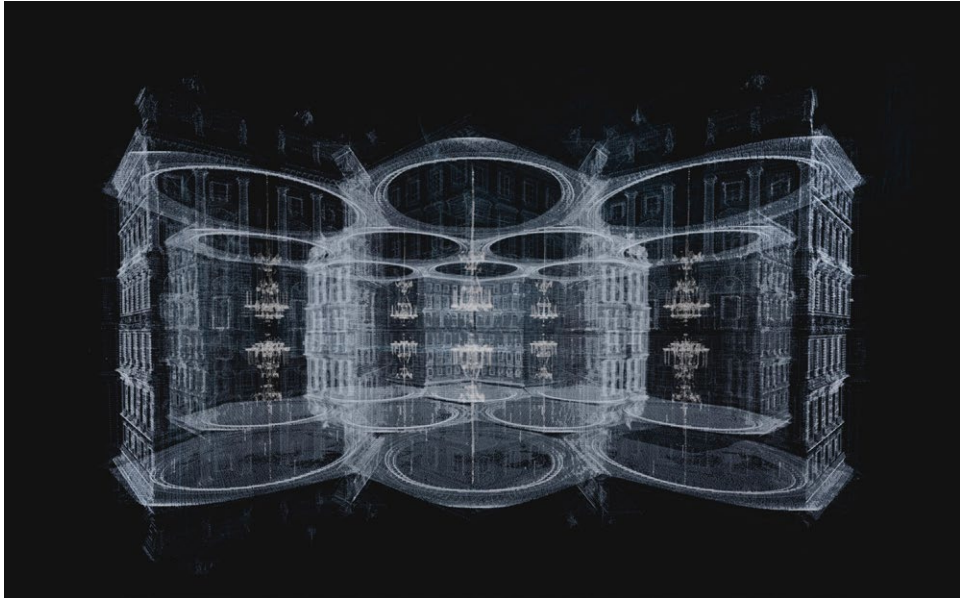
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Library of Babel (After Borges)

2023

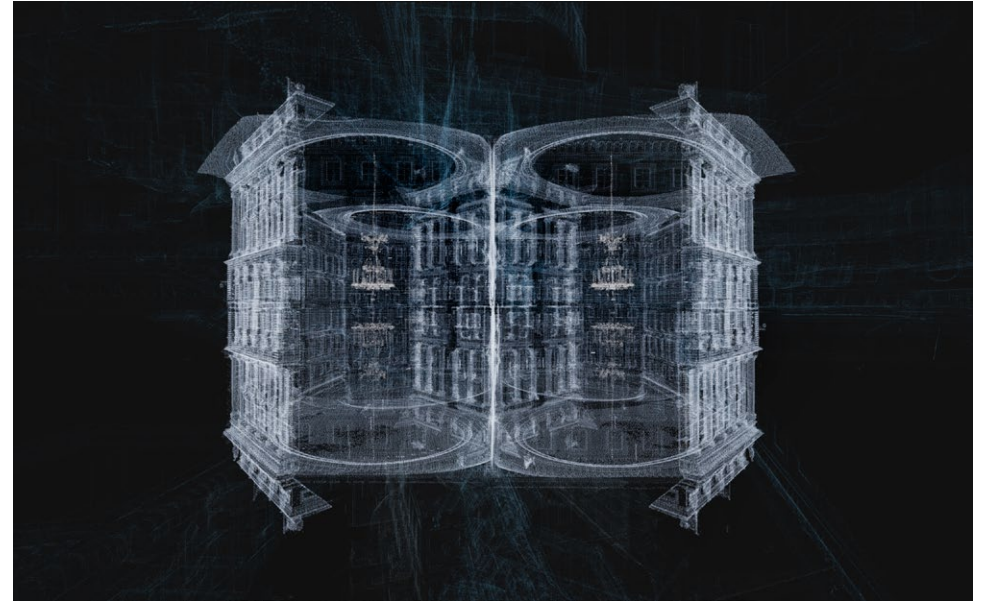
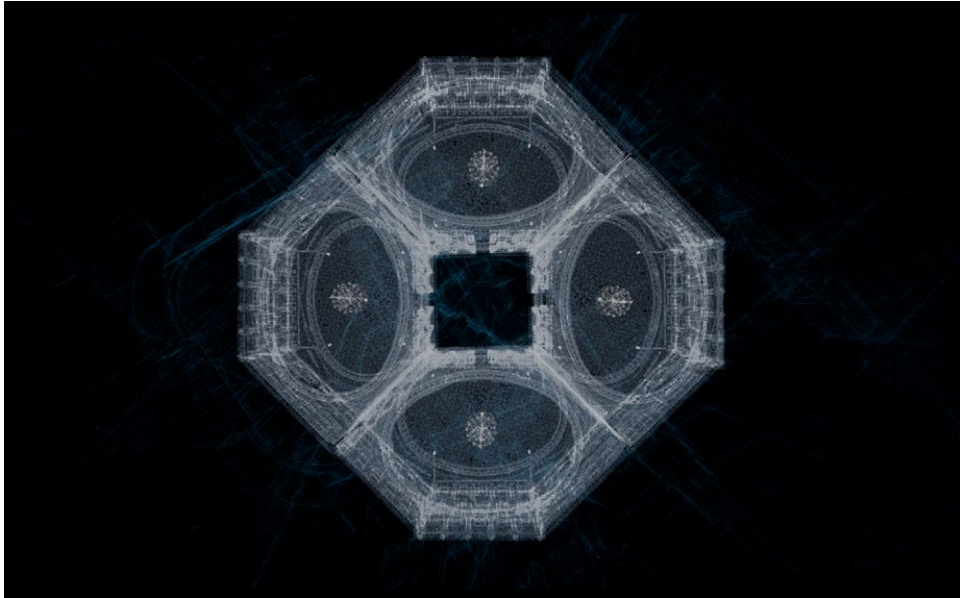
15000 x 7500 px
890 x 555 mm



Library of Babel (After Borges)

2023

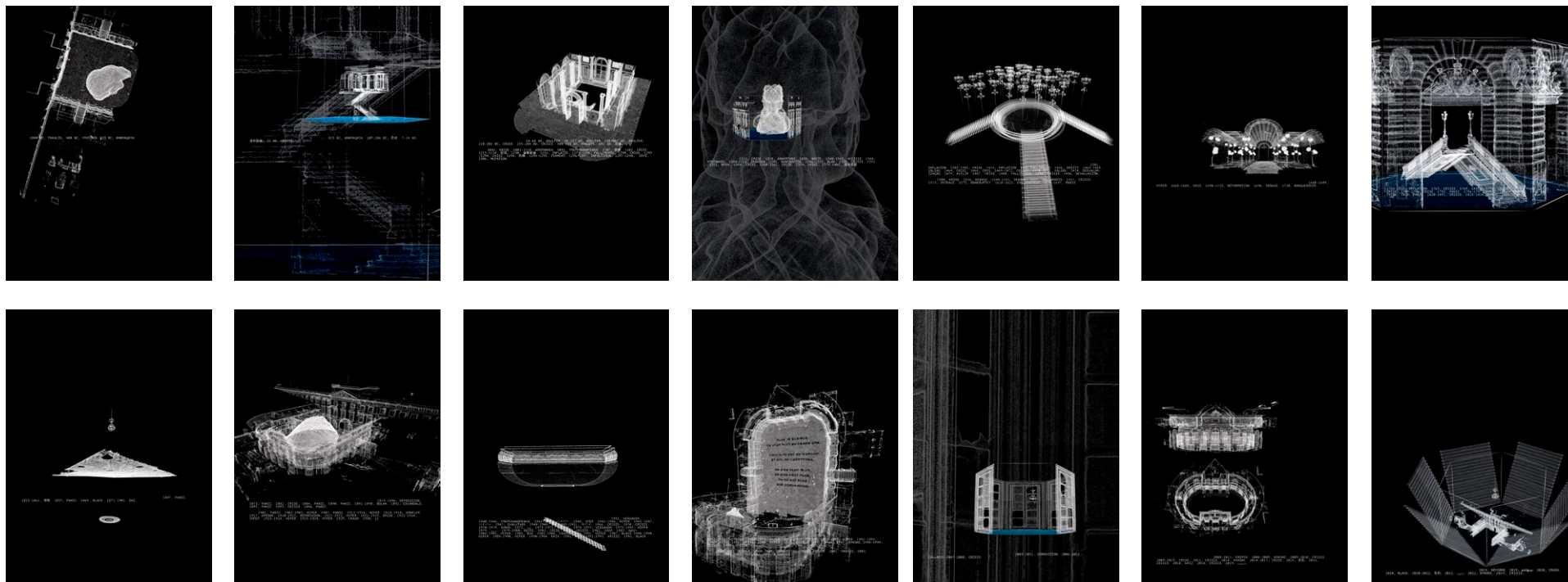
15000 x 7500 px
890 x 555 mm



Library of Babel (After Borges). The Wrong Turn.

2023

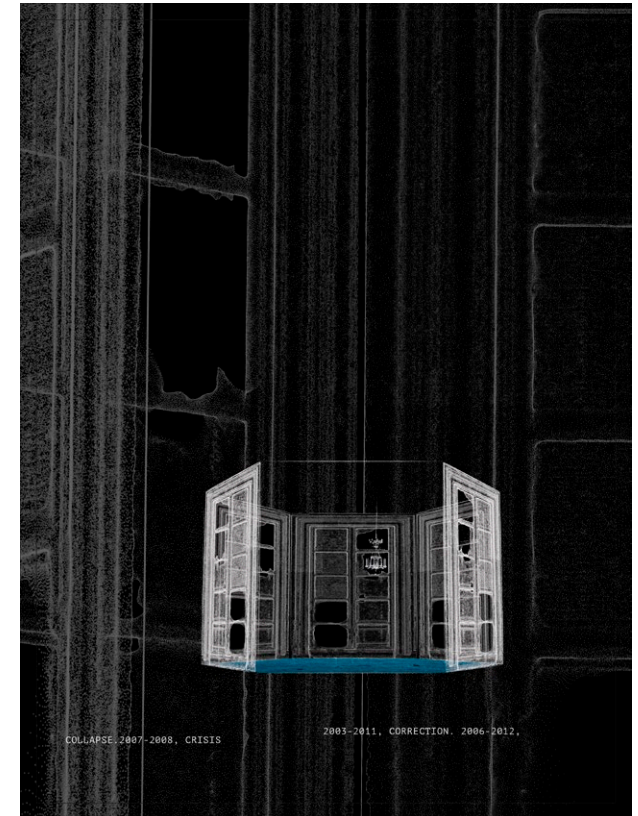
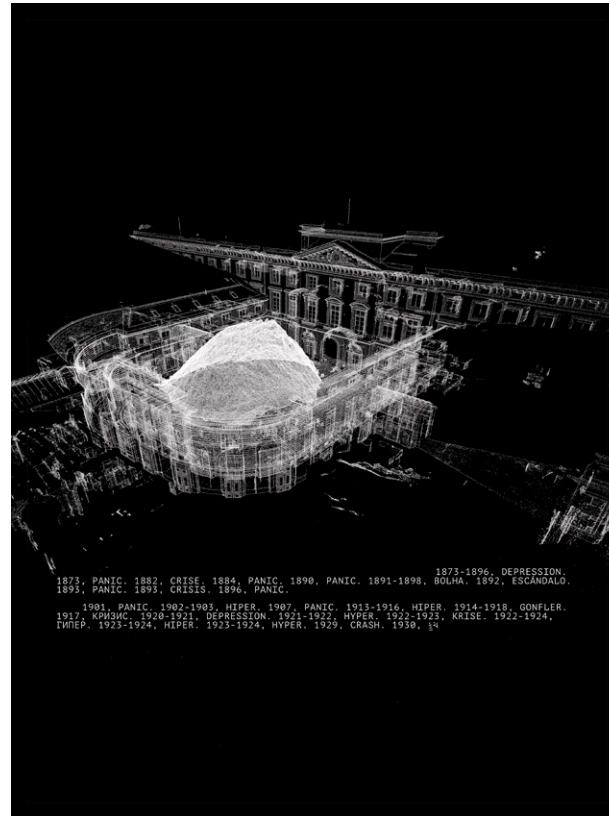
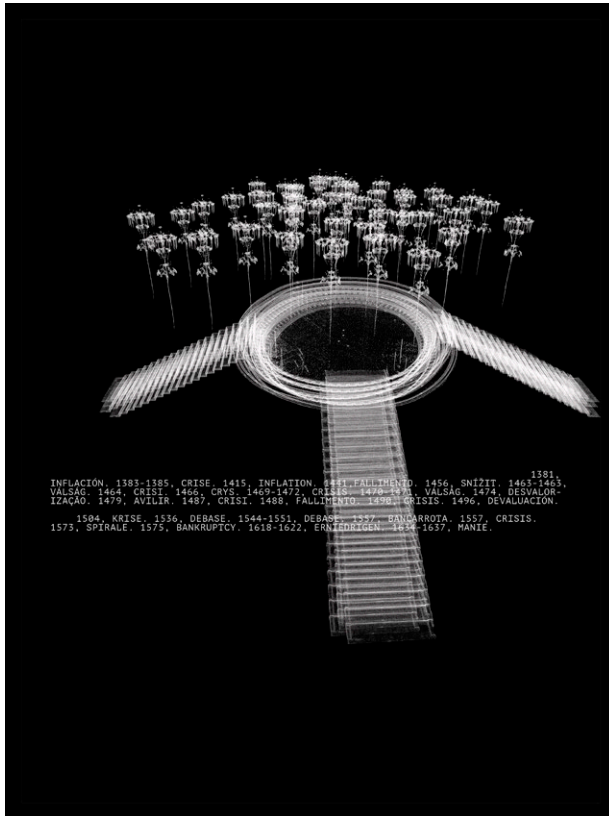
15000 x 7500 px
890 x 555 mm



ORNAMENT AND CRISIS

2023

27495 x 16247 px
232.8 x 137.5 mm



ORNAMENT AND CRISIS

DETAILS

Taken from the academic study on financial crises conducted in conjunction with the academics at the Monnaie de Paris, fourteen individual crises were chosen - from Tulip Mania to the Lebanese Financial Crisis - to as key moments that shed light on various typologies of centralized crises and most importantly their etymological stems. The history is laid out like a narrative text, focused only on date and keyword - from BLACK to HYPER to DEPRESSION to CRISIS - from across languages, while the ornament of the Monnaie de Paris (as one of the only institution in the world that has laid witness to this history) is used to discuss the relationship between monetary systems and power structures rooted in design, architecture and ornament.

Robert Alice

Portraits of a Mind

2019 - Ongoing

NFTs and Paintings

24k gold leaf, suspended pigment, graphite and aluminium paint and canvas laid down on panel.

Opendime hardware key attached to the reverse.

Signed and dated 'R. ALICE 2019' verso.

128.5 cm (50.59 in) diameter



HANS ULRICH OBRIST ON PORTRAITS OF A MIND

in 'Code and Chain', Das Magazin, 2021. Translated from German.

“A protagonist of blockchain culture is artist Robert Alice. [In their work Portraits of a Mind], Alice sees [Bitcoin’s code] first and foremost as a text comparable to the tremendous social drafts, legal texts, and iconic writings of world history. [It] is both unreadable, but also infinitely detailed ... a history machine and vast archive”

“And because the blockchain, like the World Wide Web to begin with, is at its core about functioning in a decentralized, hierarchy-free manner, Alice has divided the code into forty blocks, which are distributed among collectors and institutions around the world.”

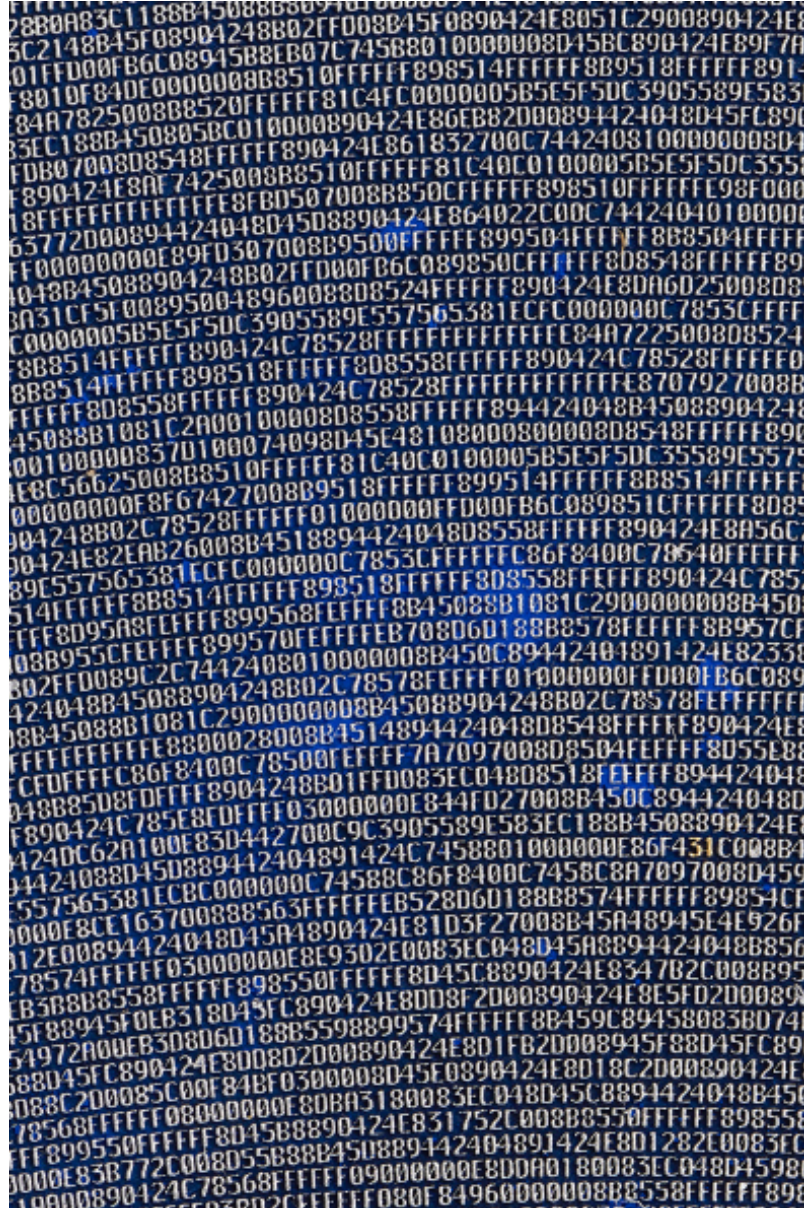


3. Detail of Robert Alice, Block 34 (51.895167° N, 1.4805° E). Credit: Theo Christelis Photography

Portraits of a Mind is a global art project to decentralise the founding code behind Bitcoin into 40 fragments.

CURRENT LOCATIONS OF THE CODEBASE

- | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|
| SAN FRANCISCO | LONDON | SAUDI ARABIA | SINGAPORE |
| CHICAGO | PARIS | | HONG KONG |
| NEW YORK | SWITZERLAND | | BEIJING |
| PUERTO RICO | GIBRALTAR | | SHANGHAI |
| | | | TOKYO |



4 / 5. Robert Alice, Block 21 (42.36433° N, -71.26189° E) and General Detail. Credit: Theo Christelis Photography

2 / 2
THE NFTS

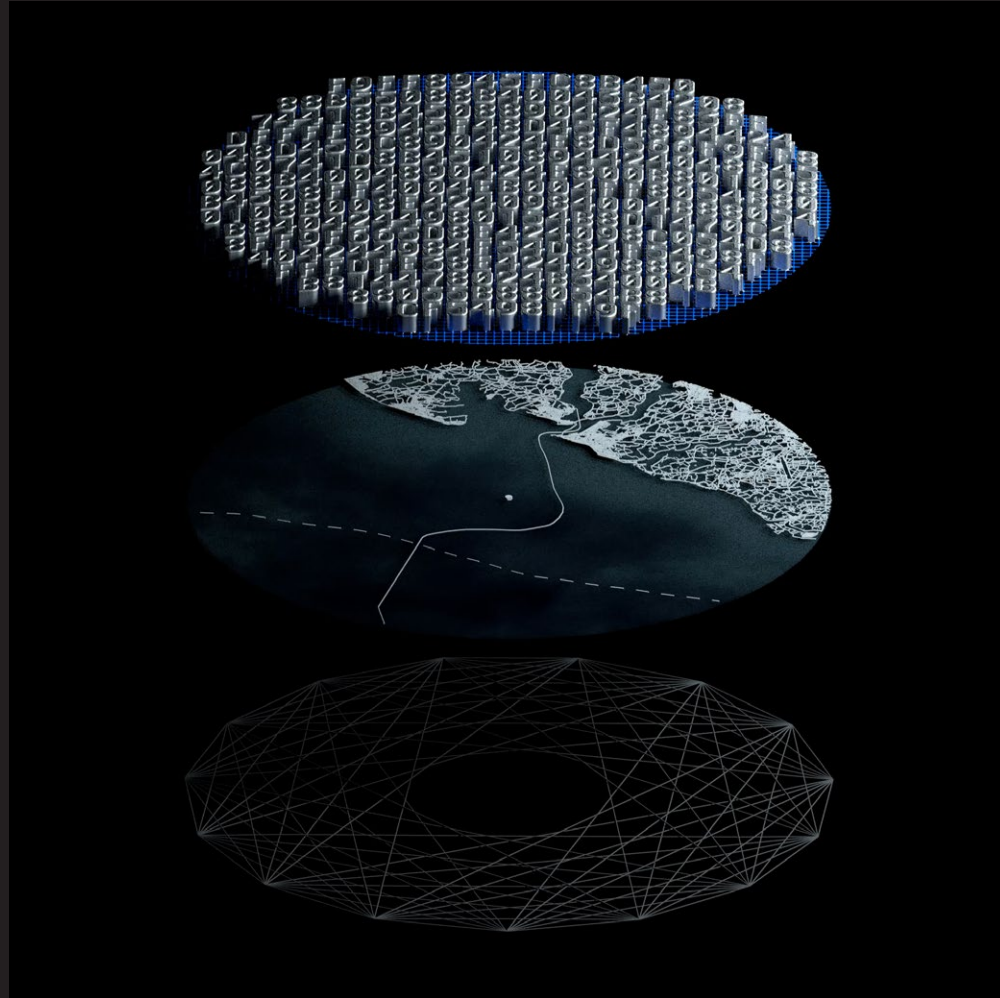
1/1 Unique NFT // Houdini.

34 second looping video at 4k

BTC V0.1.0 Codebase Section: 6,763,009 - 7,085,056

MInted 2022

Dimensions:

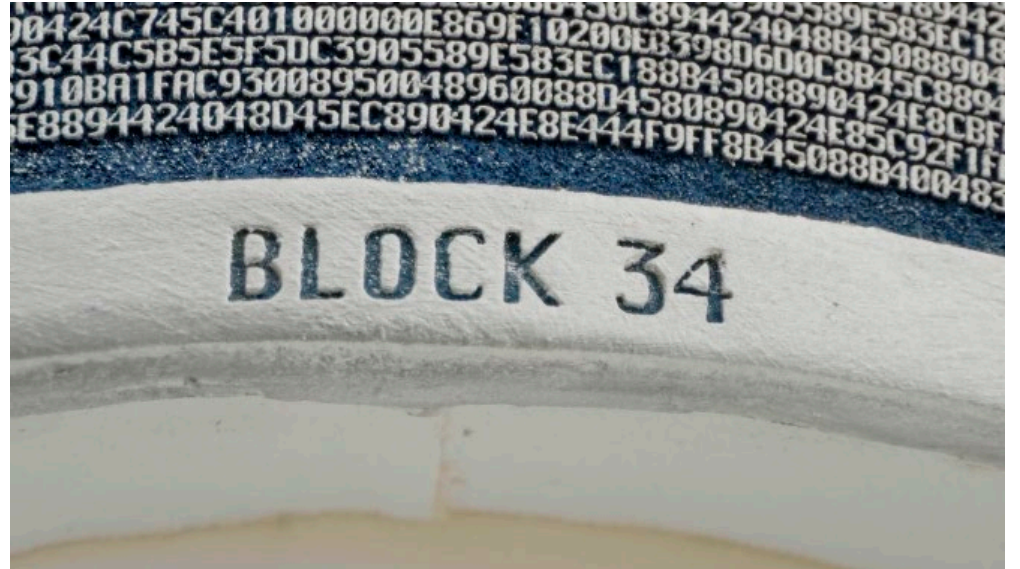
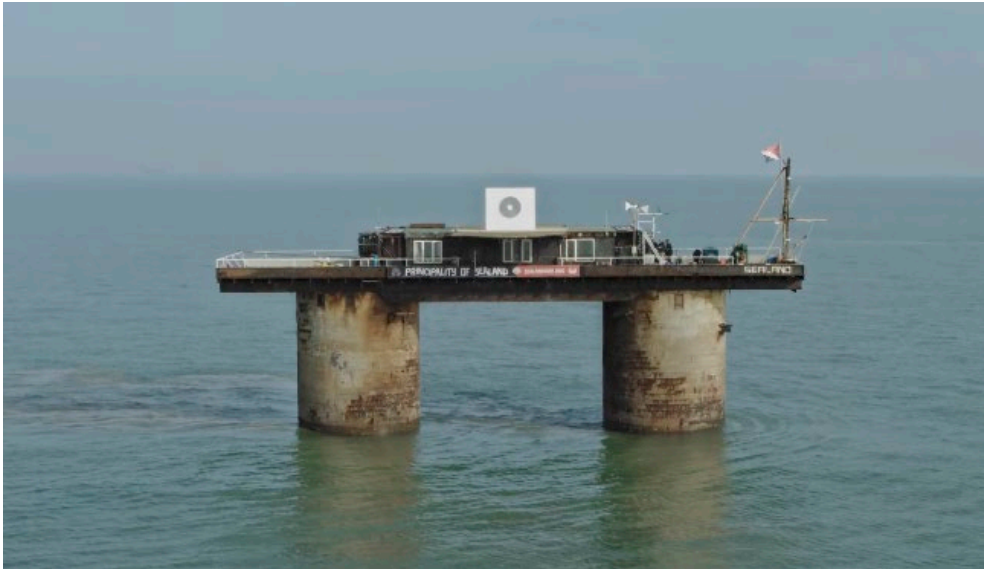
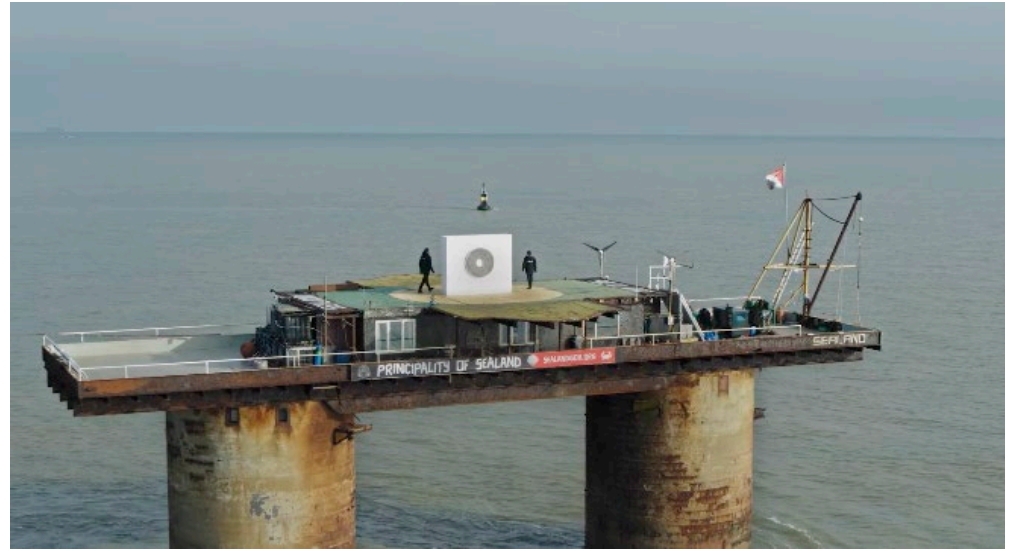


THE EXHIBITION

Portraits of a Mind at Sealand

September 2021

12 kilometers off the coast of the United Kingdom, the studio decided to hold a short exhibition of Block 34 (51.895167° N, 1.4805° E) at Sealand. Delayed because of bad weather, the exhibition was finally given the all clear at the end of September. Accessible only via helicopter, the exhibition was a logistical adventure and many thanks must go to Queens Fine Art Logistics for their support.



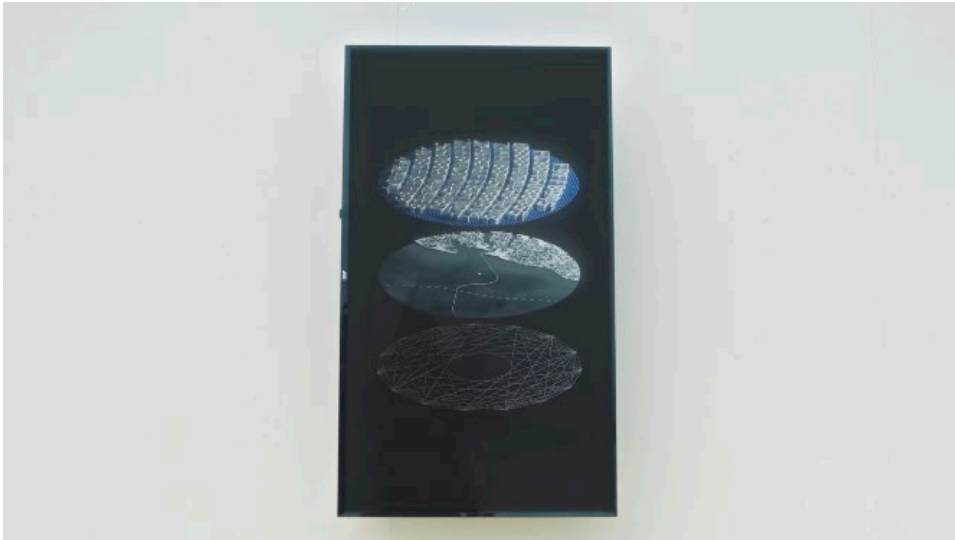






Fig. 1. Robert Alice,
Block 4 (41.891943° N,
12.486246° E), 2019.

I am still alive

On Kawara

He who controls the past controls the future

George Orwell

□

Emanating out from the void in the center of the work, 322,048 digits of hexadecimal code arc across the surface of the painting (Fig. 1). Like the ever increasing circular broadcasts of a beacon, a mass of letters and numbers radiate out of the confines of the canvas. A constellation of 32 gold-encrusted digits lie hidden amongst the mass of code, catching the viewer's eye before tantalisingly disappearing again.

Portraits of a Mind is one artist's response to the inevitability of digital degradation, to the idea of this founding code as a now historic text, and to the story of Bitcoin. A digital fingerprint carved out of paint, Portraits of a Mind is a reflection on the nature of identity in our newly decentralised age. A portrait of Satoshi Nakamoto, the work explores the politics and aesthetics of open source code and its relationship to identity and truth. The work not only examines the founding code for traces of Nakamoto's identity, but also for the identity of Bitcoin itself. Mining the visual histories of cryptography, cartography and coinage, the work encases the code in shapes and forms that draw attention to Bitcoin's essential ties with the past, opening up new perspectives on blockchain technologies while tracing the origins of where they came from.

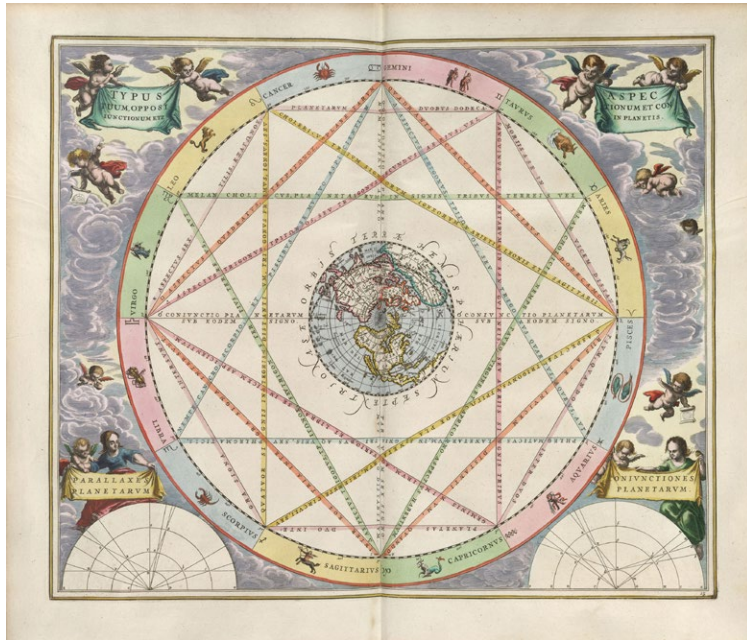


Fig. 2 Andreas Cellarius, Typus Aspectuum Oppositionum Et Coniunctionum Etz in Planetis, Amsterdam, 1661.

Recalling ancient Japanese coinage, rai stones, cipher wheels, early astronomical (Fig. 2) and cartographic charts, it is at first the circular form of the work that captures the imagination. Drawing on this visual language, the form of the shaped canvas opens up space to consider Bitcoin's essential ties to the past instead of the perpetuated perception of its radical severance with it. Intersected by a pair of crossed lines and further circular bands engraved into the paint, the work evokes the iconic target paintings of American artist Jasper Johns (b. 1930), themselves meditations on the nature of visual and semantic encryption. An allusion to cryptography's long standing association with warfare, the target - aiming through the code - also performs a parallel function - the act of searching for, or closing in on an individual or location. The target becomes a structure through which to locate identity. Reflecting on the essential fallacy of painting anonymity, each painting itself is physically decentralised - there is no center. Instead, a void. An empty space in the place of the dynastic portraits that have adorned coinage for millennia. The target lines are interrupted. An X is never formed. No one is found. The identity of Satoshi Nakamoto, encased by their code, remains elusive.

Drawing closer, the viewer encounters hundreds of thousands of intricately engraved digits raised out of the surface of the paint. Anonymous, unknowable, unreadable, the seemingly unending string of alphanumeric digits evokes ciphers both ancient and modern. Mined out of the surface



Fig. 3. Ekati Diamond Mine,
Lac de Gras, Canada.

of the paint, this code is a digital landscape made physical. Topographic in nature, it recalls the relief engraving found on minted coins but perhaps more pertinently the act, shape and form of mining (Fig. 3). Glinting across the surface of the canvas like newly unearthed deposits of gold ore, the constellation of gold digits held within the mass of code reinforces the idea of mine in the viewer's eye. Resource intensive proof-of-work processes are visualised through the aesthetics on which they were modelled - rare metal mining. Gold digits, algorithmically unearthed, become metaphors for bitcoins past, present and future.

And yet perhaps the gold digits speak not just to treasures that lurk below the surface of the earth and also those oldest of decentralised networks above us - stars. Networked across the surface of the painting, seeking out those gold digits our eyes trace the lines of the now iconic Rand Corporation diagram on decentralisation. This network composition stretching across the canvas is a microcosm for the wider globally decentralised network of 40 paintings that constitutes Portraits of a Mind.

It is with this idea of network structures both within each canvas and between all paintings, that the work turns. From a target-like form drawing the eye into the center to a work read from the centre out. Target signs become beacons.

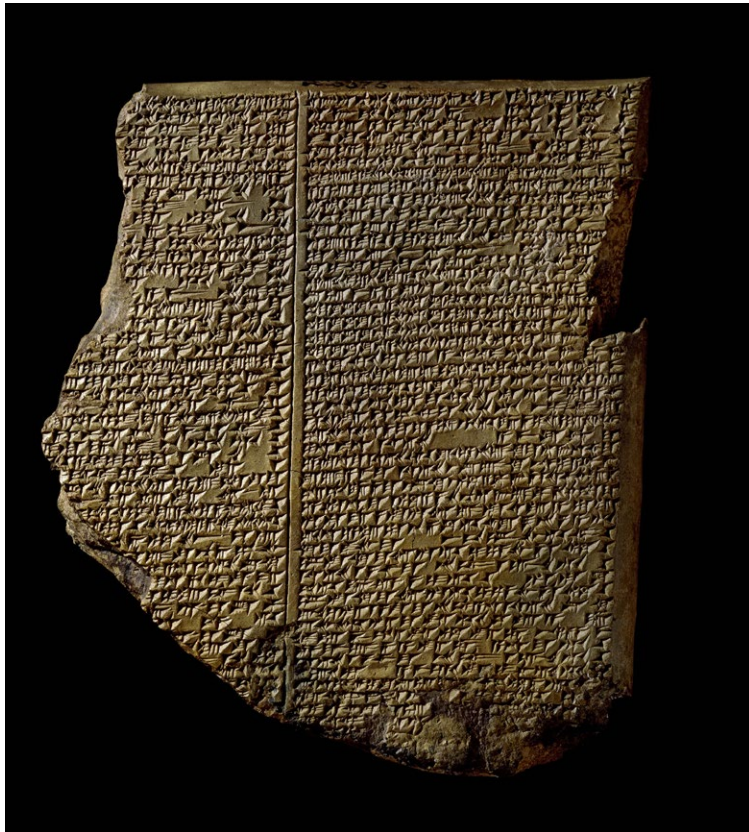


Fig. 4. The Flood (Gilgamesh) Tablet.
Neo - Assyrian, 7th century, BC.
Library of Ashurbanipal.
British Museum, London

A honing in turns to an emanating out. This sense of the broadcasting of the code outside of the confines of the painting draws up in mind's eye the presence of the other thirty-nine paintings in Portraits of a Mind's network. In turn, drawing us to an essential truth surrounding decentralisation - that each painting, or node, is but a fragment of a larger democratic whole.

The idea of fragment not only suggests the presence of others but is visually suggestive of both history and time and its record of it - all central pillars of blockchain technology. Indeed, in its transcription of the code: the idea of 'making a complete written record' is a central tenant to the intellectual and aesthetic underpinnings of the work. Drawing on the aesthetics of cuneiform tablets and ancient steles (Fig. 4), the representation of the code recalls both the visual qualities of historical documents and recasts Nakamoto's original code as a Rosetta Stone for the contemporary period. This act of physical transcription of digital code attempts to draw parallels between the cultures of the past and the technology of our future, drawing emphasis on continuity in the face of radical progression in mediums of record keeping - from ancient clay tablets to the immutable records of blockchains.

The art of the written record finds no greater match than in the work of Polish conceptual artist Roman Opalka (1931-2011). His seminal work 1965 / 1 - ∞ (1965-2011) was a lifelong project to paint the numbers 1 to infinity,



Fig. 5. Archive studio
photograph, Roman
Opalka, c. 1980

themselves a form of portraiture and as well a record of time itself (Fig. 5). The work carries many prescient similarities to the structure of blockchain technologies - their narrative consecutive structure, their indexing of time, their decentralisation through distribution, their insistence on the power of text as code, their potential for infinity. It was a project matched perhaps only by work of Japanese conceptualist On Kawara (1932-2014) who married an interest in cryptography with another early set of blockchain projects, the Date paintings. Portraits of a Mind in its own blockchained structure seeks to reshine a lens on these early blockchain artists and pioneers, resurrecting their conceptual structures for a newly decentralised age.

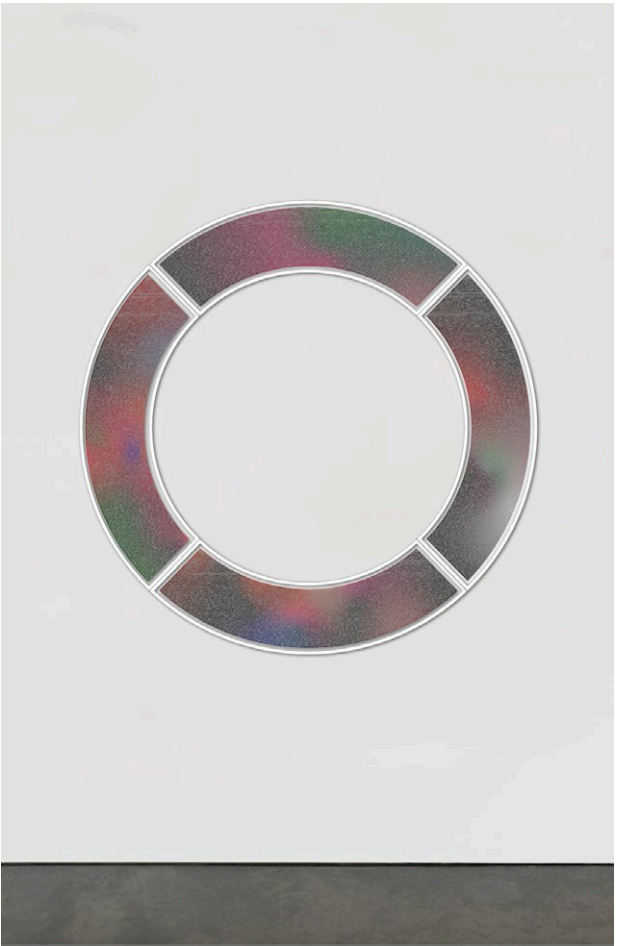
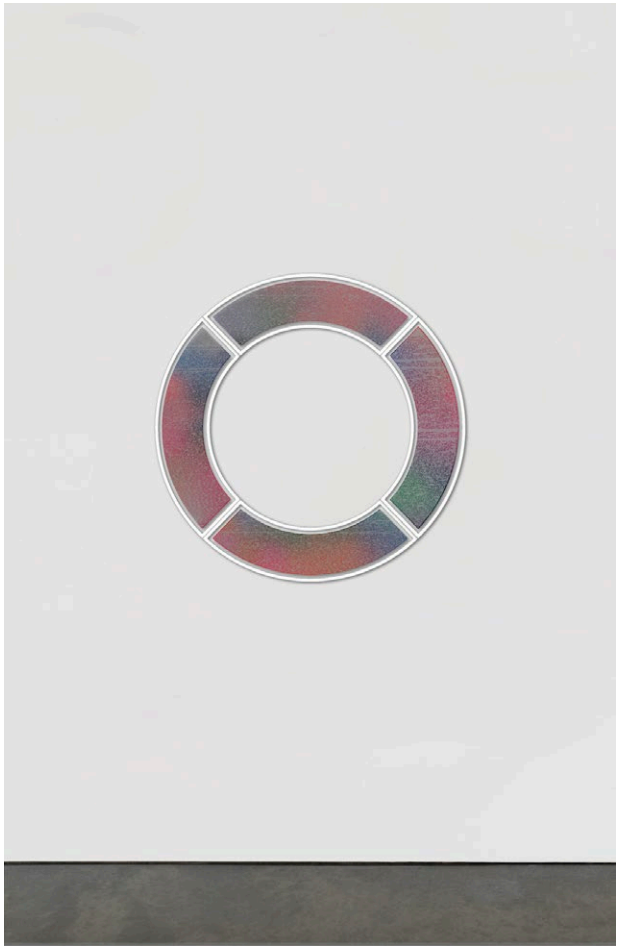
Robert Alice

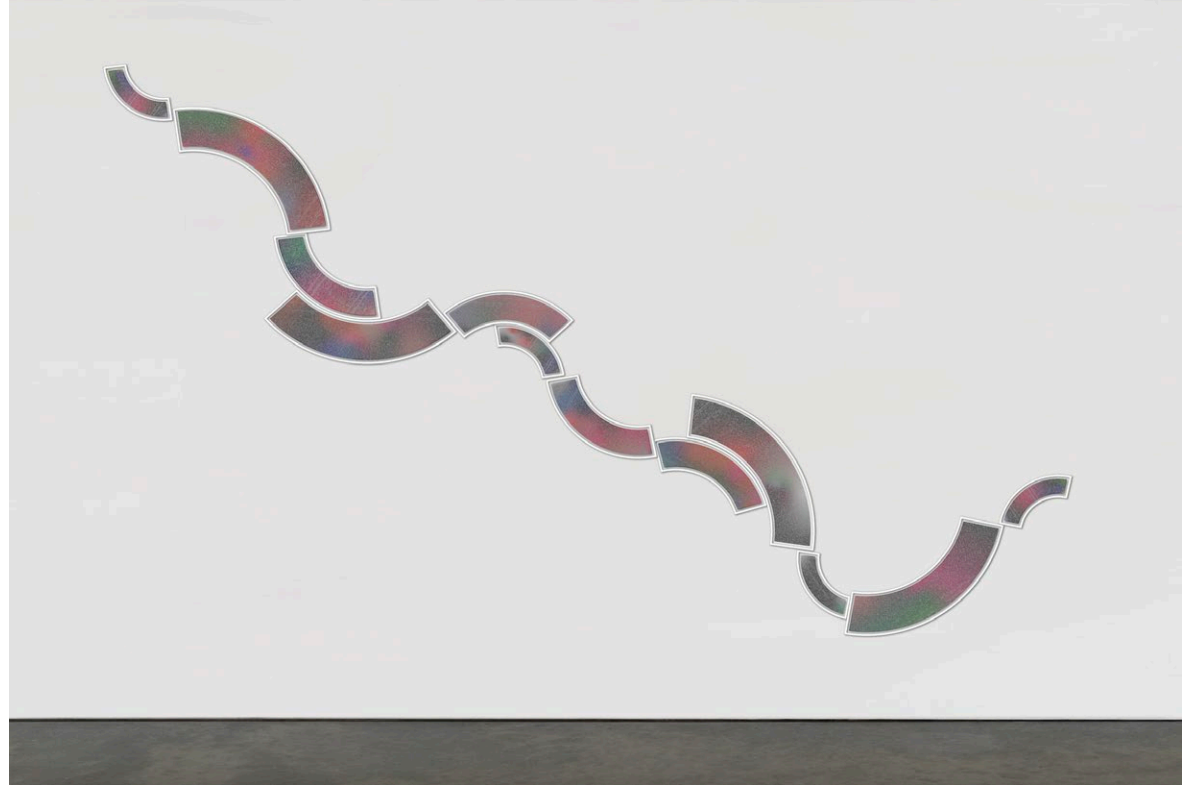
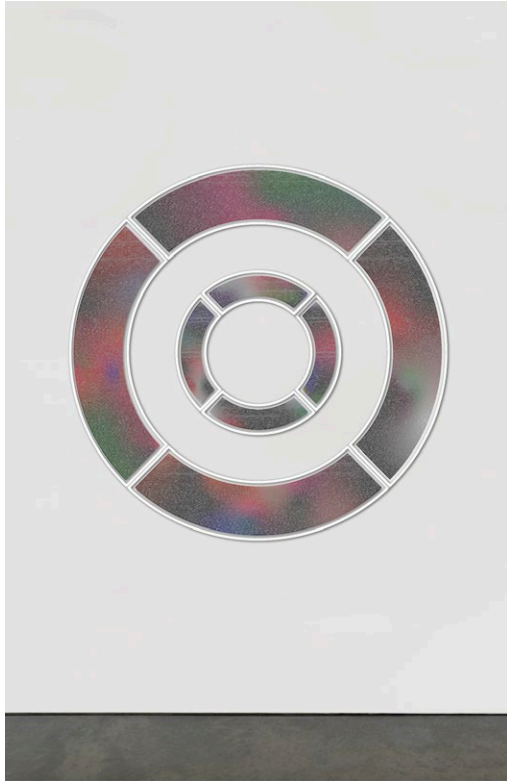
The Fragments

2023

Metal Die Plates in Artist's Custom Frame

130 cm diameter





THE FRAGMENTS

DETAILS

Playing with the nature of decentralisation and the idea of the collector as co-creator, The Fragments take the paintings from Portraits of a Mind and further decentralise and fragment the artwork down to itself compositional parts. Each works holds different fragments of Satoshi Nakamoto's codebase, and have been engraved into metal printing dies. An edition from the Portraits of a Mind, the work plays with the nature of the edition and the original, where the printing dies - that are traditionally used as source plates - become the edition. If one wanted, the plates could be used to print futher paper copies of the work, a reference to the blockchain as a Gutenbergian printing press and it's open-source source code as run and disseminated on thousands of nodes across the world.