

forking paths | channa horwitz, brigitte kowanz, jenna sutela, gabriella torres-ferrer
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forking paths unites four artists for the first time – Channa Horwitz, Brigitte Kowanz, Jenna Sutela and Gabriella Torres-Ferrer's mutual interest lies in art and technology. In historical and recent works this group exhibition demonstrates the central importance in their work with codes, data, patterns and speech, which they each interpret and transform individually, sometimes creating distinct systems.

The title of this exhibition is inspired by Jorge Luis Borges' short story "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" (1941) (The Garden of Forking Paths), in which the Argentinian writer and poet anticipates the possibility of parallel worlds through the interpretation of quantum mechanics. His hypertextual style that does not follow linear temporality and is of a labyrinthine quality using symbols and patterns, can be transferred to the works in the exhibition. Here several realities and systems co-exist while creating their own logic. The artists pose questions about the meaning of control and randomness through the perception of data processing and scientific systems.

As marked out in Jorge Luis Borges' story, **Channa Horwitz** (1932–2013, California, US) is guided by the notion of innumerable possibilities and variations. The series *Sonakinatography*¹ that Horwitz developed from the Sixties to the end of her life was based on 23 compositions and comprises numerous analytical conceptual drawings. Often they are provided with a color code, set in a strict order and based on the number 8. Hence they constitute the substructure for notation-systems or multimedia-based performances: each drawing can be interpreted using different artforms like music or sound, dance or movement, light, poetry and animation, enacting them in a concert, a performance or installation art.

The work of **Brigitte Kowanz** (1957–2022, Vienna, AT) is defined by her intensive focus on language and codes which she started to combine in the Eighties. This enabled her to visualize the complex relationship between seeing and understanding, sensing and recognizing. The artist centred her work around the idea of deconstructing language and information by using different systems like morse or alphanumeric codes. Her round wall objects *123* and *456789* (both 2011) of satin stainless steel and neon light create a sense of convex and concave forms due to the shadows created by the neon light on the surfaces – Kowanz arranged the neon lights based on the morse alphabet. This binary code serves both as carrier of information and facilitator of language, it translates the numerals in the titles into segments of light.

In *Just make sense* (2000) Brigitte Kowanz uses an alphanumeric system, logically replacing the individual letters of the title with the numbers their position in the alphabet represents. This way she creates a mathematical summation. After adding up the neon-numbers she reverses the process and the sum is produced in letters.

Gabriella Torres-Ferrer's (*1987 in Arecibo, PR) use of code is guided by his interest in revealing and visualizing power dynamics and global interconnectivity. *Mine Your Own Business (8)* (2022) is a contemporary still life made out of everyday capitalist consumer products that are either meant to increase productivity or to help relaxation. Some of these have been fitted with microcomputers that are connected to a WLAN: a small display on a beer can shows a ticker with live crypto currency exchange rates, a bitcoin-miner is in progress on a cigarette package and another microcomputer keeps switching between the ticker, the miner, personal information about Gabriella Torres-Ferrer, live information concerning CO2 prices and Amazon's stock price.

1 The series title is derived from the Greek words for "sound" (sona), "movement" (kineto) and "notation" (graphe).

With this Internet-based installation showing real-time data and codes Gabriella Torres-Ferrer is able to reveal the mining-process that is usually hidden. Torres-Ferrer flags up the background and motivation of large numbers of crypto companies that were established in Puerto Rico after the devastating hurricane in 2017 and that seem to prosper with their decentralized technology – even in a place in crisis.

In contrast **Jenna Sutela** (*1983, Turku, Finland) seeks symbols, patterns and reason in randomness with the help of biological and computer-based systems. Three photograms from 2020 – *I is derivative*, *Early reign*, *the lunar goddess* and *The dark boiling* are part of Sutela's multimedia series of works *I Magma* – which also includes head shaped Lava lamps and the app of the same name. In large-sized photograms the outlines of sculptures based on the shape of Sutela's own head are retained on light-sensitive paper. Randomly circulating blobs of wax inside the lamps create net-like or cloud-like shapes when illuminated, while reflected light distorts the image of the head. The photograms' titles are determined by the app-oracle: it provides its users with daily prophecies based on machine learning and AI that was trained with texts of the Internet Sacred Texts Archive² and psychedelic trip reports from Erowid³. The series *I Magma* depicts consciousness as something not only purely human but something blob-like⁴ that expands as colored light in the photograms.

In their work the artists follow codes, data and patterns using various systematics, which uncover only a certain number of variations – but suggest infinite others in space and time. The contrasting juxtaposition of these four artists' standpoints illustrates the complexity and simultaneousness of developments that Jorge Luis Borges describes: "I leave to various times, but not to all, my garden of forking paths".

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2 The Internet Sacred Texts Archive is a freely accessible archive of texts about religion, mythology and folklore, and also includes occult and esoteric topics.

3 The Erowid Center is a non-profit institution of education that provides information about psychoactive plants and chemicals.

4 Blob is the name of *Physarum polycephalum*, a species of slime mould, one of the oldest creatures on Earth and an intelligent though brainless super-organism.