

Signs (2018 - in progress)

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Entitled *Signs*, the work proposed here consists of four images generated by a specially designed algorithm. They are laser engraved on black anodised aluminium in a 50 x 50 cm format.

These images are in line with the heritage of the pioneers of computer art of the 1960s and in particular the early works of the German artist Manfred Mohr.

Intentions

Signs is above all a work of transfiguration, between translation and encryption, which, by substituting an exclusively pictorial sign for the alphabetical one, empties the text of its meaning and thus reveals the intrinsic rhythms of writing.

It is remarkable that most spectators spontaneously identify this incomprehensible accumulation of signs

as writing. A recognition that acts as an antidote to the curse of Babel: while the language of the other may remain inaccessible to us, the simple fact of recognising it as a language underlines what we have in common rather than what separates us.

Algorithm

The program is written in *Java* with *Processing3*. It first uses eight fundamental lines inscribed in a square: three horizontal, three vertical and both diagonals. All the combinations of these eight lines constitute an alphabet of 255 signs—the empty sign being excluded.



Fig. 1: The eight fundamental lines used to generate the signs.

The algorithm then uses the French definition of the word "alphabet" given by Wikipedia. It analyses the text to identify each different character—upper case, lower case, numbers, punctuation—and randomly assigns one of the 255 signs to each.

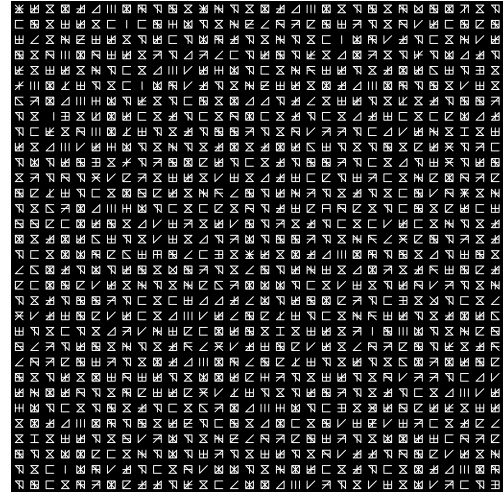
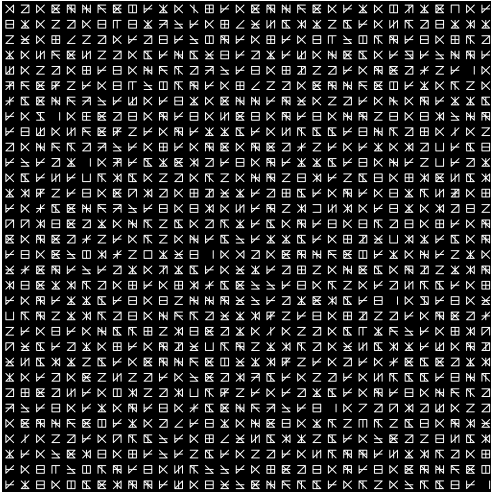
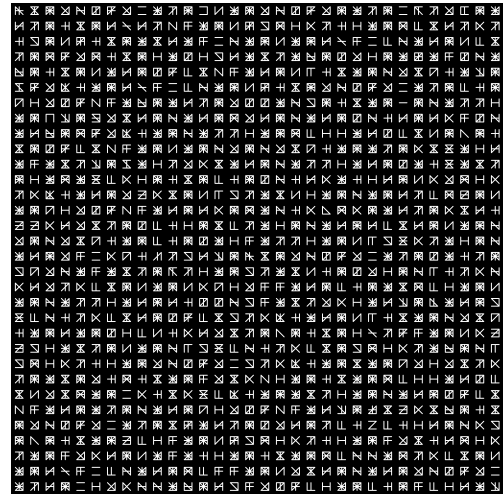
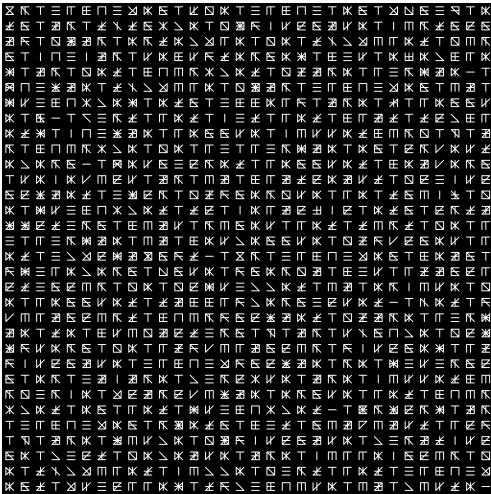


Fig. 2 to 5 : the four source images from the reified artwork.

With each run, a new random draw is made that changes the correspondence between the characters in the text and the signs.

The probability of such a match being repeated is so low as to be inconceivable. Each image produced is therefore unique but can also be seen as a multiple of the same matrix: the program.

Editions

The four images presented are spread out in a 32x32 grid, i.e. 1024 signs. The source text is reworked to fit this length precisely. Only a part of the 255 characters is used, as the text to be encoded only contains 44 different typographical characters.

Once the SVG file generated, it needs a conversion to DXF format to be laser engraved on black anodised aluminium.

An other edition of this work is currently being studied in collaboration with a stonemason. It will be a unique piece, engraved by sandblasting on a sandstone slab of 80x80x3 cm.

Technical and budgetary constraints have forced the project to be adapted: the grid has been reduced to 16x16, i.e. 256 characters, andpdf the source text revised accordingly.

Further editions could be released, using different techniques and materials to explore the directions in which Signs can still unfold.