



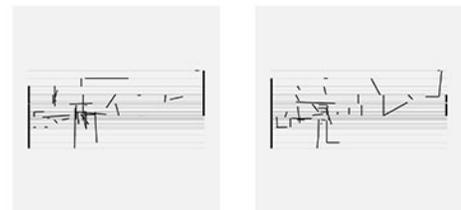
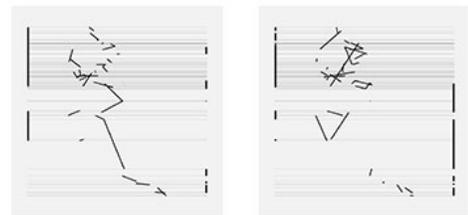
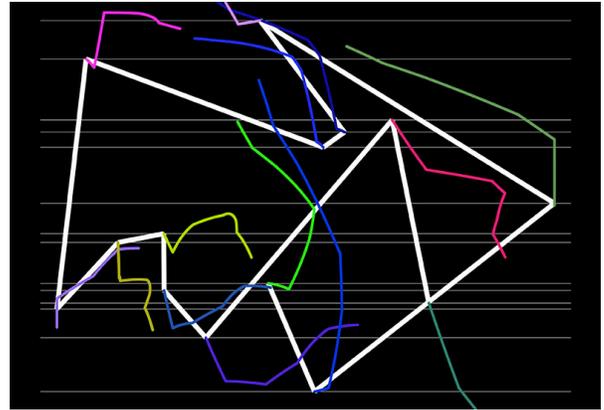
MUSICAL DIMENSIONS

by Helen Longstreth | February 25, 2016

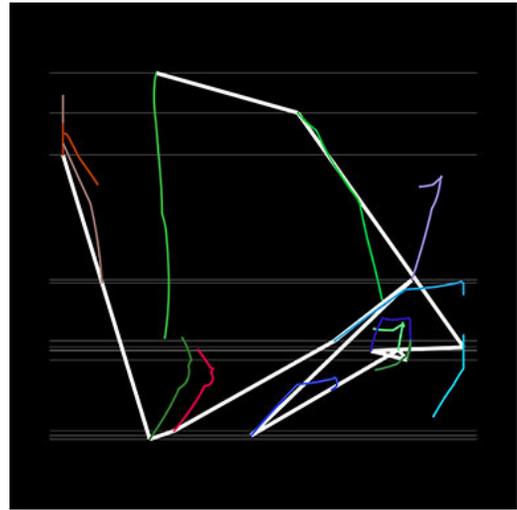
JAGGED MUSICAL SCORES FALL APART AND COME TOGETHER IN DIGITAL ART PIONEER MANFRED MOHR'S NEW SOLO SHOW AT CARROLL/FLETCHER GALLERY.

Is it possible to write abstract art with the same rationality and control as you would a musical composition? Can the human experience of music be depicted by algorithms and machines? These are the big questions that computer-art pioneer Manfred Mohr addressed in 1969, with his project *Artificiata I*, an investigation into the geometries of sound. Almost five decades later, Mohr re-explores these questions with *Artificiata II*, his latest solo show held at the Carroll/Fletcher gallery. As an artist who explored the potential of digital tools before they really existed, the show is a testament to his enduring influence and his continued commitment to artistic innovation.

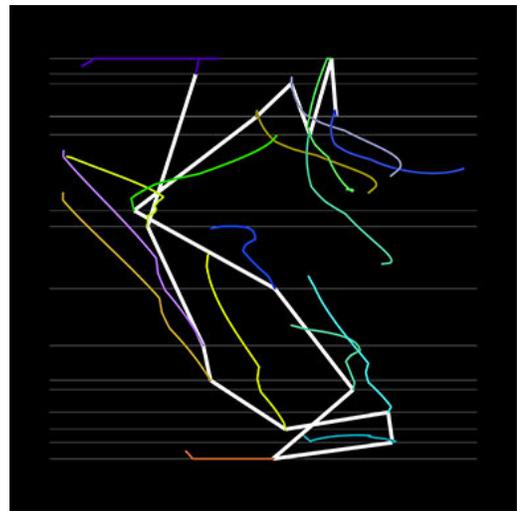
At the gallery's entrance are Mohr's original *Artificiata I* drawings, displayed neatly within a glass case. Meticulously executed they are the last works he produced by hand, before developing a completely generative approach. Yet their musical threads instruct and live on through his contemporary investigations, which fill the rest of the space. Now exploring colour and movement, they include screen work animations, which capture calculated journeys through multiple dimensions. They are flickering geometrics that may make mathematical sense but cannot be quite followed by the eye. Alongside these are inkjet paintings, images taken from this process, that while fixed in two-dimensional physical form have a strong sense of depth, sound and motion. In a selection of black and computer generated drawings uneven horizontal grids are strewn with erratic black lines, as if a jagged musical score were breaking apart.



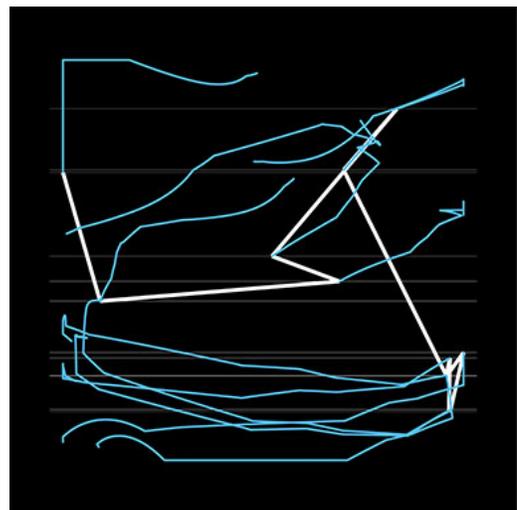
As a jazz saxophonist and an artist informed by abstract expressionism, Mohr's experiments into logical and controlled processes of artistic production stem from a desire to bring to abstract art the rationality and expressiveness found in music. Inspired by German philosopher Max Bense's theories into the potential of information aesthetics, and composer and friend Pierre Barbaud's algorithmic music, Mohr began to experiment with the possibility of generating rational visual art. "As a musician you can write down the melody of something and know what it will sound like," Mohr tells me. "Whereas in abstract art, there is no control. You have to be lucky." Through exploring Barbaud's computerised music, Mohr began to use music sheet staves to guide his visual investigations.



In the late 1960s, he found a computer at the University of Vincennes in Paris. Late at night, he would calculate the drawings and later execute them by hand. "It took me years to figure out what rational art could be," he remembers. "I painted, I drew triangles or squares and then geometric lines." He was eventually able to produce completely 'rational' works through using the first computer-driven drawing machine at the Paris Institute of Meteorology.



"I consider my work as visual music," says Mohr, and this is the driving force behind *Artificiata I* and *II*. Horizontal music sheet staves form the foundation on which he experiments with his compositions. Lines criss-crossing these bars are calculated through the diagonal-path formed by what he calls 'hyper cubes', complex shapes can exist mathematically between four or and fifty dimensions. In my initial confusion, Mohr laughs, "Don't get scared by dimensions! It is all just zigzags and 3D rotations that create a visual game out of this complex line." In *Artificiata II*, the diagonal-path is a multi-segmented line, where each change of direction indicates the passage through a single dimension, projected into 2D space. Visualised, the algorithms become a grid of colourful, fragmented boxes.



For each step of this process, Mohr builds his own programmes, something that he has stringently preserved in order to stay very close to the content of his work. As an artist who explored digital tools before they really existed, new technologies facilitate new discoveries, but his theoretical practise has changed little. "An artist always has to find his tools. Either he has to invent it or he has to build it. Whenever you have an idea, you have to find a right way to produce it or to realise it." It is this belief in the potential for ideas and innovation that guides his art, and that has allowed him to keep developing and progressing fifty years after his first radical show. "Whenever one person has an idea, it is just a matter of time until this idea is realised. As crazy as it might sound today, tomorrow it will be there."

When asked on the direction of digitally engaged art today Mohr is hopeful. Quoting Marshall McLuhan, he intones, “the machine is an extension of our thinking, it is an extension of us,” though he is quick to argue: “Of course any extension can go against you, just as our bodies and our minds do, but art is innovation.” When Mohr exhibited his first computer-generated works in 1969, those fearful of technology and what it meant for their futures assailed him with angry abuse. Fifty years later, he works within the context of a digitally dominated world. Still excited about the future, he retains some distance from the pervasive influence of digital technology today. ‘The idea of the digital is a new invention,’ says Mohr, as our conversation draws to a close. “It is everything and it is nothing.”

Artificiata II is at the Carroll/Fletcher gallery until 2nd April 2016. For more information on Manfred Mohr please [click here](#).

