Viktor Kertanov

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PORTFOLIO

Multidisciplinary artist and media researcher. Primary media include video, sound, electronics, and code. Develops post-archival practices in art, working with excessive, decaying, and continuously growing archives. Teaches at the Central University School of Design.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My practice is built around large bodies of data, archives, and cultural material. These have included thousands of unread emails, personal viewing histories, tens of thousands of photographs, and almost 2,000 hours of cinema. I work with code, moving image, sound, electronics, and physical objects, often developing custom software or hardware for a particular project.

My approach is close to Lev Manovich's cultural analytics: working with material at scale can reveal structures that remain invisible at the level of an individual image, text, or video. At the same time, I try to maintain an artistic rather than statistical or engineering perspective. The source material is never simply raw information; its history, imperfections, repetitions, and limits shape the work.

As a media researcher, I develop the concept of post-archival art — a practice that treats the archive as an unstable and continuously changing medium. Contemporary archives often grow faster than they can be watched, read, or interpreted. I am interested in excess, loss, decay, duplication, obsolete formats, and the continuous production of new data.

In "1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die", developed as part of my Master's thesis, a purpose-built algorithm compresses almost 2,000 hours of cinema into a two-hour film. The project treats the cinematic archive as technical memory, processed at a temporal scale inaccessible to ordinary human viewing, where narrative and individual images dissolve into light, color, rhythm, and sound. The work is conceived for two contexts: a feature-length cinema screening and an installation in exhibition space.

The relationship with source material is important throughout my practice. In "Metanoia", thousands of short-form videos from my personal viewing history are reorganized programmatically into a single moving image, turning sequential viewing into simultaneous viewing. In "Non-Object Photography", recognizable objects are removed from my personal photographic archive; the resulting objectless images then become a dataset for training a DCGAN model. Even when the final result becomes abstract, its transformation remains connected to specific data, rules, and operations.

Code is one of the main methods in my practice, particularly where existing interfaces impose limits on scale, duration, or the way material can be handled. Electronics and microcontrollers allow computational processes to enter physical space. Modified clock mechanisms, miniature screens, electromagnetic signals, and second-hand doorbells become systems for working with time, perception, memory, and sound.

The same logic extends to sonification and pen-plotter drawing: data can become sound, movement, or ink on paper. I am particularly interested in crossings between media, and in what happens when digital structures encounter the instability and material limits of the physical world.

Rather than fully determining a work in advance, I try to establish conditions in which archives, algorithms, mechanisms, errors, and materials can influence its final form.

“1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die”

2026 · Video, archive, code, sound

The work is assembled from films made between 1902 and 2021. A purpose-built algorithm compresses the cinema archive into two hours of non-human viewing at high speed — a thousand times faster than normal.

At that speed, cinema stops being narrative and is no longer legible to a viewer: actors, editing, genres, and stories dissolve into a dense stream of light, colour, sound, and rhythmic flashes. What was made for human perception turns into material accessible to a machine rather than to a viewer.

The project confronts human perception with machine time and treats the cinema archive as technical memory — a non-human body of culture that goes on reproducing itself even when watching it has become impossible.

The corpus is based on They Shoot Pictures Don’t They — The 1,000 Greatest Films (974 titles) and supplemented from The 21st Century’s Most Acclaimed Films (26 titles).

1,000 films · 1902–2021 · 1,968 h of source runtime

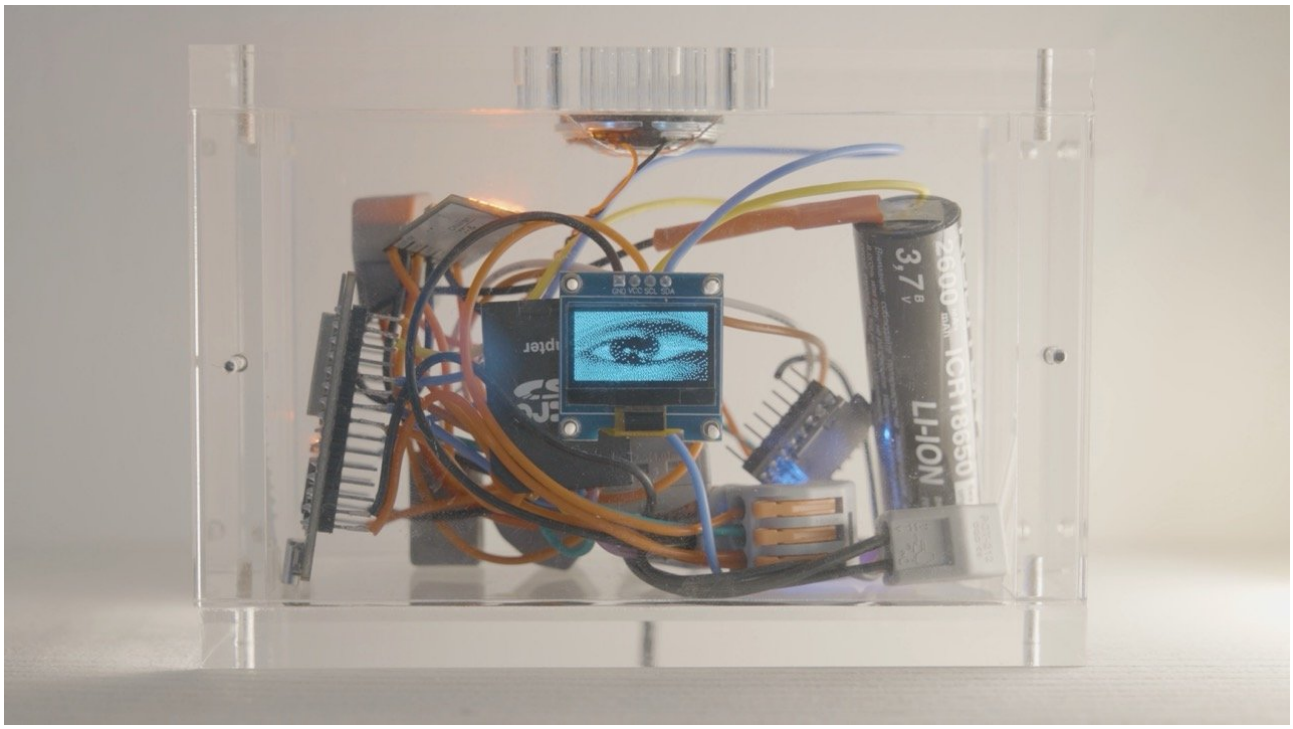
kertanov.cc/1001/eng Video: vimeo.com/1207949930

60BPM

2025 · Installation, mixed media

The 60BPM installation is a spatial composition of twenty wall clocks. Each mechanism is modified by the artist to convey the sensation of elusive time. 60BPM corresponds to a frequency of 1 Hz, the movement of the second hand, and the rhythm of a human heart at rest. The work explores the paradox of the phenomenon of time. On one hand, it's a universal measure; on the other — a subjective experience that cannot be measured by the second hand. The perception of time is constantly changing: childhood seems endless, adult life accelerates the flow of days, and in the post-digital era time has completely lost its bearings — minutes lose their boundaries, merging into a continuous stream. The measured movement of clocks, designed to record "objective" duration, is desynchronized from the familiar scale in the project. The clocks differ in the rhythm of hand movement, demonstrating that astronomical measurement is just one of the possible forms of time perception. For this installation, sound from the clock mechanisms is collected in real time using inductive sensors (chokes). The movement of clock hands is translated into an electromagnetic sound signal, which merges with the noise of water recorded in St. Petersburg. The flickering of light in time with each pulse of the second hand only intensifies the sensation of polyrhythm. 60BPM refers to the ancient categories of Chronos, Kairos, and Aeon — quantitative, momentary, and eternal time. The artist strives to "capture" this spectrum, presenting time as a multidimensional flow. The regular ticking of some clocks conflicts with the delays and accelerations of others, creating the sensation that time is not universal: it oscillates, fragments, and pulsates, reflecting different modes of its experience by humans.

kertanov.cc/project/1 Video: vimeo.com/1191711667

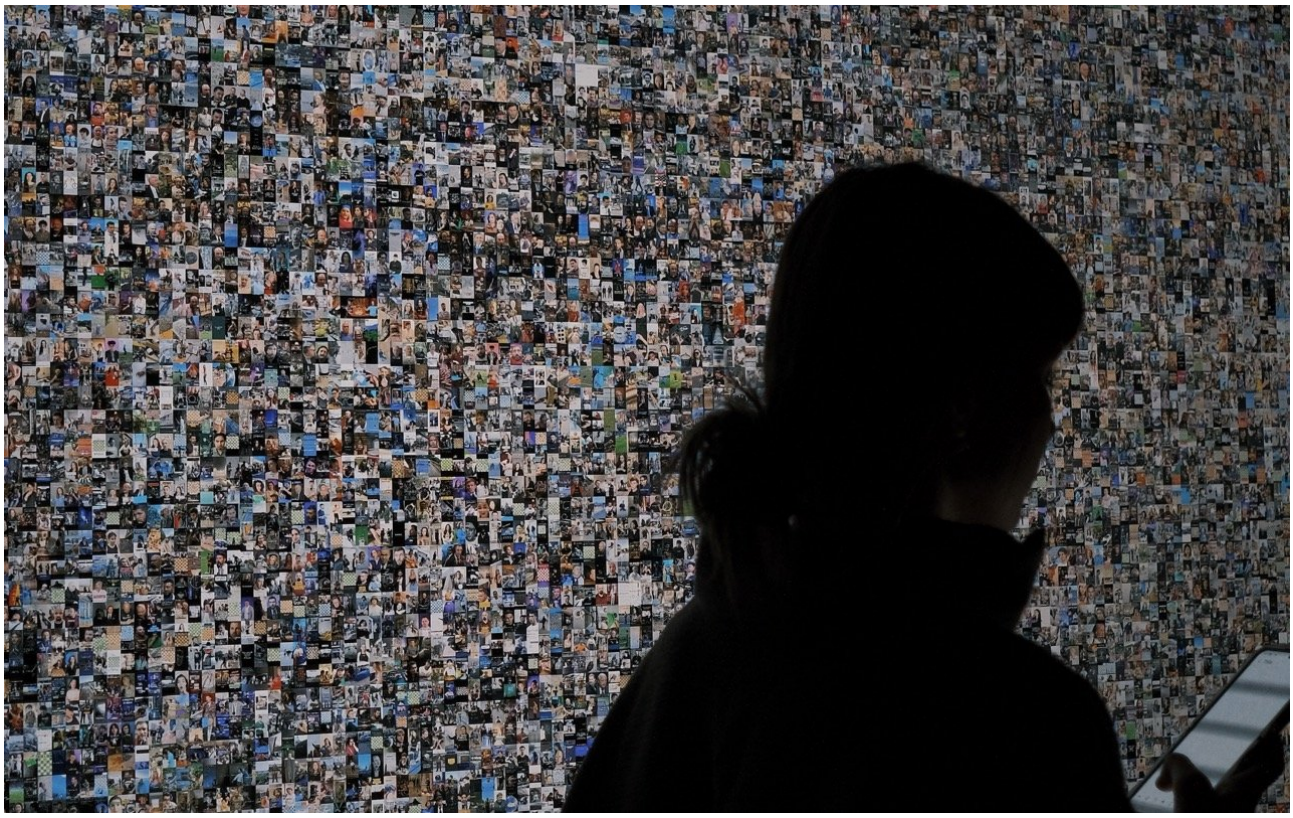


Kino-Eye, or Cinema for Birds

2025 · Object

The history of cinema spans about 130 years. Originally, cinema was accessible on the big screens of movie theaters. Then it migrated to television screens, and today the standard practice is consuming various video content on the small screens of smartphones. The artist in the “Kino-Eye, or Cinema for Birds” project attempts to take this trend to the extreme, creating a small autonomous device for showing films on a monochrome screen measuring 2.5 cm × 1.5 cm (164 px × 128 px). For the project’s author, it’s important to investigate the complexity of relationships between the seeing and the seen, following the teachings of such ancient philosophers as Empedocles and Democritus. The screen, reduced to one-bit pixels, loses its original exclusively utilitarian, display function, transforming into something like an eye in the early stages of evolutionary development — an eye barely capable of separating distinguishable objects, figures from visual noise background. In the “Kino-Eye” cinema, the following films are currently showing: “Battleship Potemkin” by Sergei Eisenstein, “Kino-Eye” by Dziga Vertov, “Man with a Movie Camera” by Dziga Vertov.

kertanov.cc/project/2 Video: vimeo.com/1138402297



Metanoia

2024 · Video

The artist creates a total multiscreen from 6762 shorts — short videos on YouTube — that he watched from March 2022 to July 2024. Arranged in a mosaic, the video clips are essentially equalized and stripped of their a priori utilitarian hierarchy. Conditional usefulness, “content quality”, facts, motivation recede to the background, exposing the unified affect of the established video format. At the foundation of the artwork is an archive of data with viewing history on YouTube, requested from Google Archiver service. Each original short is decomposed into frames: at the standard of 30 frames per second, a 60-second video turns into 1800 images, and 6762 clips — into nine million files, programmatically laid out in corresponding folders on the hard drive. Then the reduced original frames dynamically fill 25800 final frames in 8K format (7680 px × 4320 px). Together with programmatic synchronization of the audio track, everything together is re-encoded into the final video. It’s important for the artist to work with source data as moving pictures outside of video editing programs and to overcome the censorship and strict regulations of interaction embedded in software. The work condenses 78 hours of video content into 14 minutes, inviting the viewer to contemplate a private “as-if-world” — a world contained in a single gaze.

kertanov.cc/project/3 Video: vimeo.com/1138401757

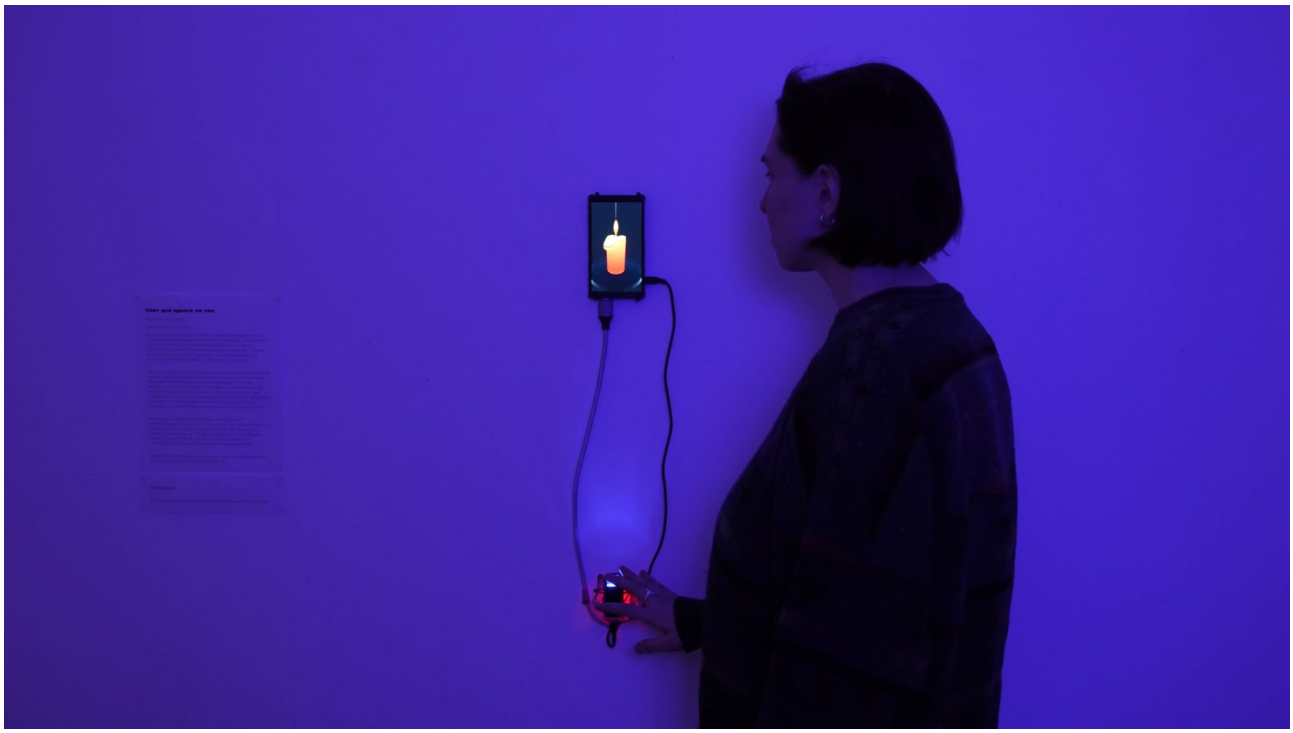
Musical Fragments Shaper

2025 · Installation, object

The creation of this work was based on memories of the sounds of all doorbells I have ever heard. The classic doorbell is an interesting source of sound capable of evoking memories of places (schools, hospitals and other liminal spaces; of cities, “guests”, rented apartments, etc.); of people, and situations. All the bells used in the work were bought on Avito and came to me from different cities such as: St. Petersburg, Smolensk, Orenburg, Kaluga, Voronezh, Moscow, etc. It seemed interesting that each of these bells may have hung for many years in one place or another and notified people of apartments and institutions about the arrival of people. Doorbells are rarely changed and rarely paid attention to. I thought it would be interesting to experiment and create a polyrhythmic object that could use bells as musical instruments, interact with the viewer/listener interactively — using sensors. It was also interesting to explore possible combinations of bell sounds with each other.

Installation “Musical Fragments Shaper” at Third Place (St. Petersburg, 2025)

kertanov.cc/project/4 Video: vimeo.com/1138453979 · vimeo.com/1138457990

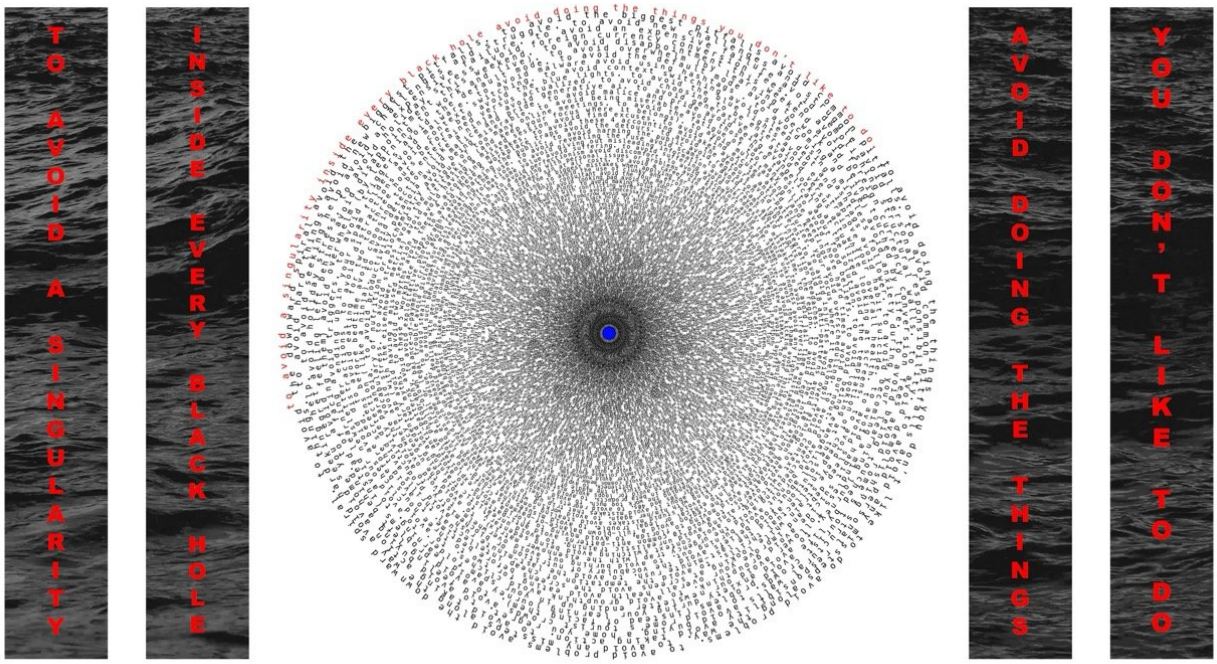


Light for One of Us

2026 · Installation

At the center of the project is the image of a candle flame as a visual and sensory center of expression. Its task is to appeal to the archetypal experience of interacting with fire and to emphasize the sacred dimension of this image. The flame refers to religious and cultural tradition, to the existential experience of presence, memory, and creative principle. The technical solution is built on an extremely laconic scheme: when the viewer touches the fingerprint sensor, a flame lights up on a small monitor. The virtual fire strives to preserve the material qualities of a real flame — its plasticity, light, fluctuations — and thereby overcome the sense of digital conventionality. The sensor glowing with blue fire in turn enhances the aesthetics of technogenic sensuality. Key in the work was creating the sensation of touch and light response — as a Promethean gesture in which light is born through human presence, touch. The project tends toward minimization of rational explanation, focusing on direct visual and bodily experience.

kertanov.cc/project/10 Video: vimeo.com/1191669350

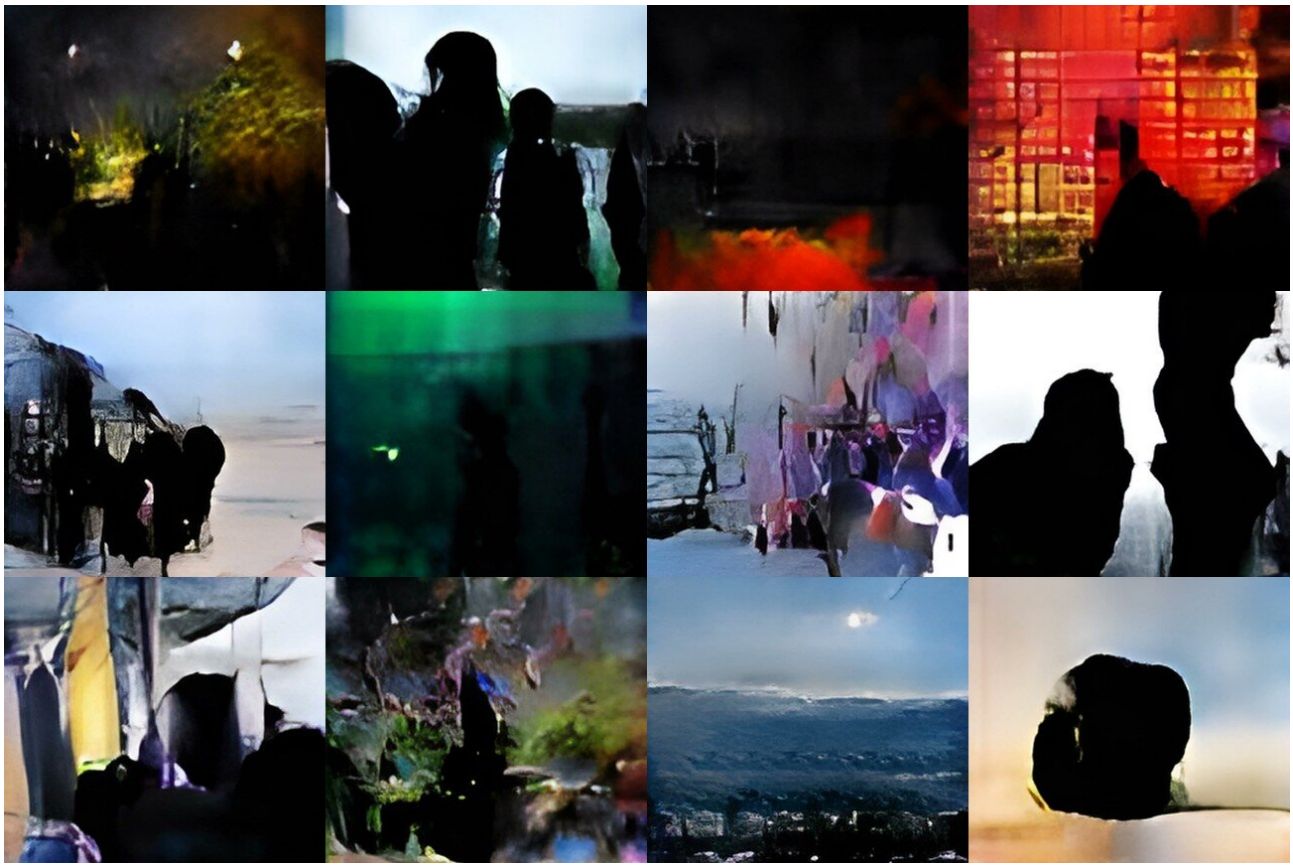


AVOID

2024 · Video, graphics

It all started with extracting 17,000 unread messages from the author's personal @gmail account. From these 17,000 messages, a dictionary of imperatives (imperative mood verbs) was created. The final document contained several hundred imperatives as well as fragments of sentences in which each of the verbs was found. The final document, compiled programmatically, amounted to 2.5 million words. From some imperatives, poems were made using the cut-up technique. For the verb "avoid", an experimental video format was chosen. "AVOID" was chosen as a very tense, anxious and provocative command. What will happen if we try to avoid everything we are advised to avoid? Words working like a spell that a person cannot fully comprehend. From 232 sentences containing the word "avoid", a poetic text was created that formed the basis of the experimental video. Each frame of the 60-fps 4K video was created using Python code: (x,y)-coordinates, the size of each letter and rotation angle were calculated using code and mathematics; the sea video was shot in Istanbul and mixed with a "whirlpool" of words on each frame. For such a volume of work, it was necessary to use both a recursive approach and parallel, asynchronous programming (multithread / async approach). Each of the 45,000 video frames was created with code, and then all frames were compressed into the final video (ffmpeg util). Text and sound synchronization was also achieved using code. Sound from many fragments was assembled in Logic Pro. Python and Google API were used to create a chorus of google voices: a chorus of women, a chorus of sirens, as in ancient Greek tragedies. Also, live voices of 15 people were mixed with artificial voices of the Google service. Due to the specifics of creation, the video is not suitable for YouTube/Vimeo. It's preferable to watch on a large screen (TV or projector).

kertanov.cc/project/5 Video: vimeo.com/1138400845

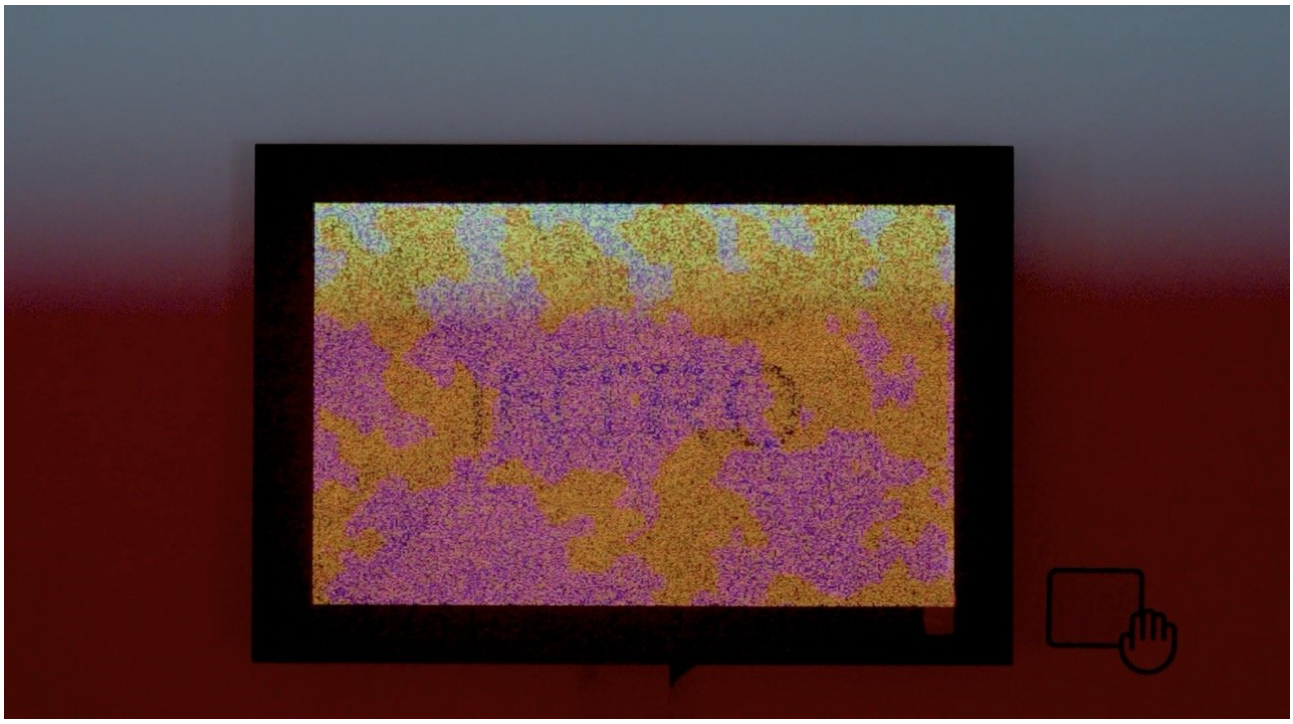


Non-Object Photography

2025 · Photo, video

Non-Object Photography is a study of perception and presence, centered on the background, liminal space that usually remains beyond attention. Human visual perception — both in everyday life and in art — tends to focus on objects, figures, narratives. The gaze doesn't capture the image, the landscape as a whole, but glides from object to object. This project proposes to pay attention to what is usually ignored: to the connective tissue of the world, to areas outside the center of the gaze. Using neural networks that programmatically remove recognizable objects, photographs are cleansed of figurative content. As a result, only those elements of the image that resist classification remain: textures, gradients, light, shadow — everything that usually serves as background. These images resemble dreams or memory fragments: impersonal, "de-humanized", plotless and event-less. The project is based on a unique, non-public dataset; at its foundation is the author's archive of more than 40,000 photographs taken in 2023–2025 by the project's author. This is a personal visual chronicle, transformed into an anonymous and non-objective experience.

kertanov.cc/project/6 Video: vimeo.com/1220234858

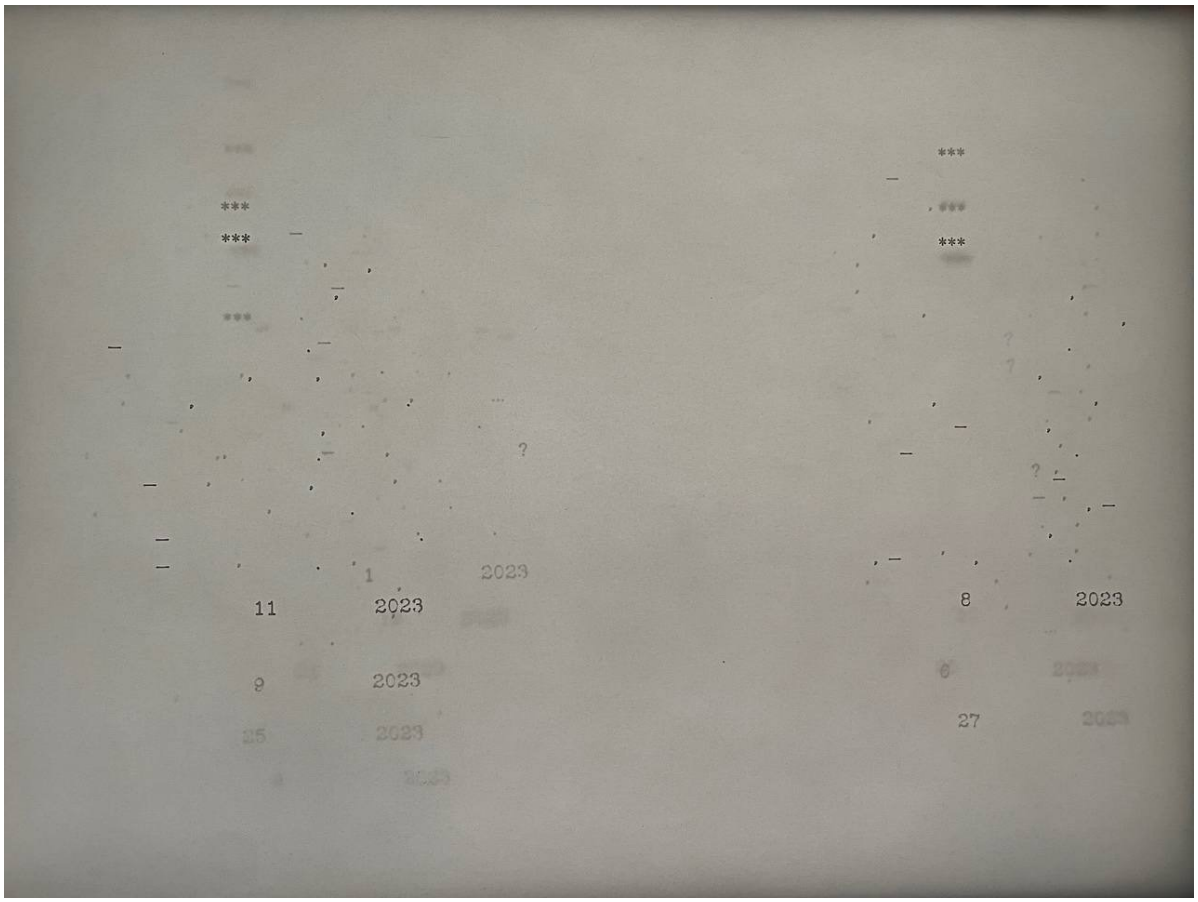


Dictionary of Submission

2025 · Installation

Based on data from 17 thousand unread email messages, the artists attempt to expose the violent nature of language in the capitalist and post-capitalist era. A critical mass of words crashes down on the viewer, broadcasting the unified affect of prescribed obediences.

kertanov.cc/project/7 Video: vimeo.com/1138412168

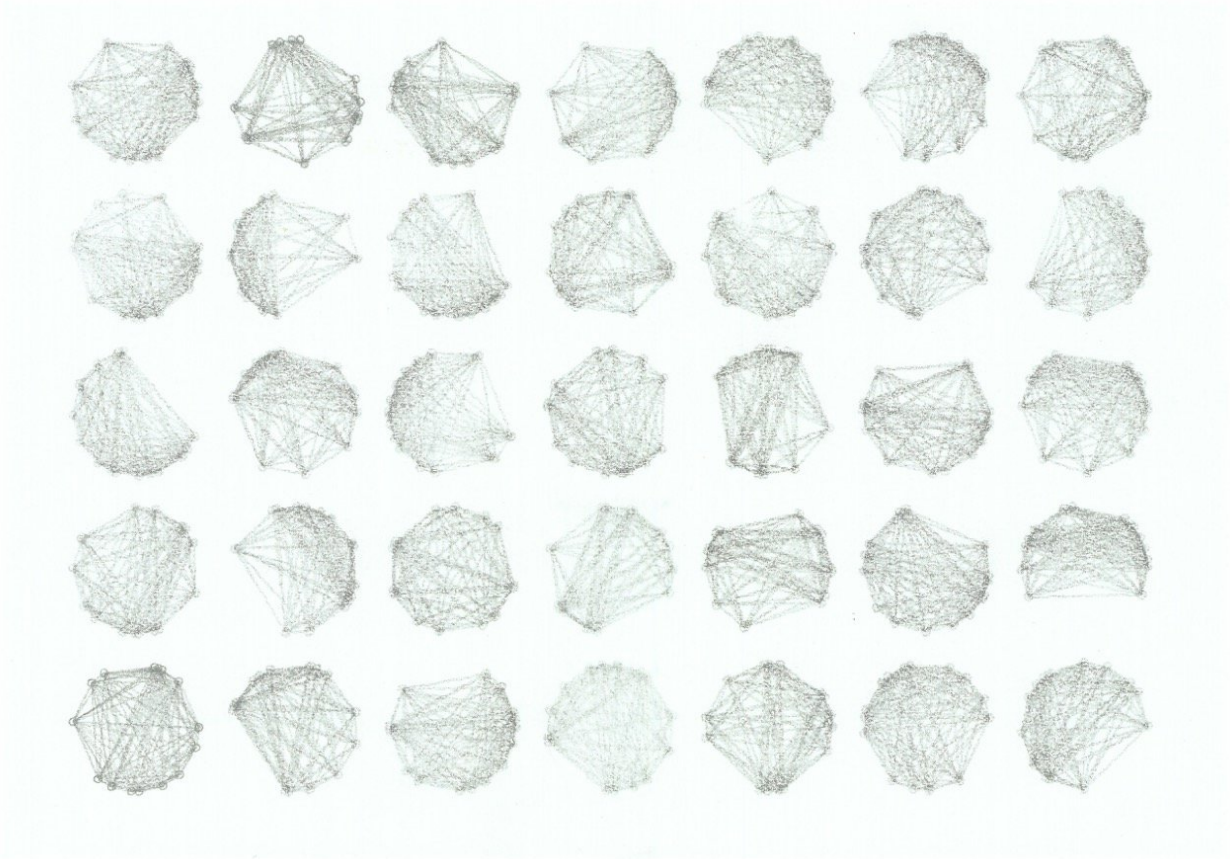


No-medium Poetry

2025 · Pen plotter, code, paper, drawing pens, archival ink, readymade

The basis for the project was an incident that occurred in 2017, when writer and playwright Dmitry Retikh sent the artist a play written in a specialized screenwriting program: “Kit-screenwriter”. When opening the Word file on the computer, nothing remained except punctuation marks and numbers, which was related to an encoding error when transferring the file from Windows to MacOS. In the work presented at the exhibition, the artist reinterpreted the found text glitch effect in the form of minimalist graphic works made with code (to preserve typography), the specialized Hershey font (1967), a pen plotter and technical drawing instruments. Now the basis was Dmitry Retikh’s 2023 poetry collection. The poems are left without words, but even in this form words unexpectedly continue to be present, now in the role of invisible figures. Thus, through the found readymade glitch, it was possible to see that facet of poetic text that usually remains only in the form of a barely perceptible sensation that resists decoding. Moreover, any text requires time to read, and in a situation where only punctuation marks and numbers remain, one can attempt to capture it with a single glance. Turning to the elusive feeling that arises from contact with poetry, the author works in the no medium tradition, similar to how John Cage (4’33”), Robert Rauschenberg (“Erased De Kooning Drawing”), Aram Saroyan and Dmitry Prigov (in poetry) and other artists who turned to emptiness as a medium did.

kertanov.cc/project/8



Pen Plotter

2022–2025 · Graphics

Algorithms of computational geometry transform a sheet of paper into a field of lines, figures and randomness, generating a unique drawing. The series explores the connection between code and gesture, between machine precision and manual fluctuation.

AxiDraw A3 SE; Python code; Paper; Ink, markers, isographs, pencils

kertanov.cc/project/9 Video: vimeo.com/1138402871