

I WANT
TO
KNOW

I WANT TO KNOW

I.R. BACH



Vantage point overlooking Teuhtli volcano, 2016

I WANT TO KNOW

I.R. BACH

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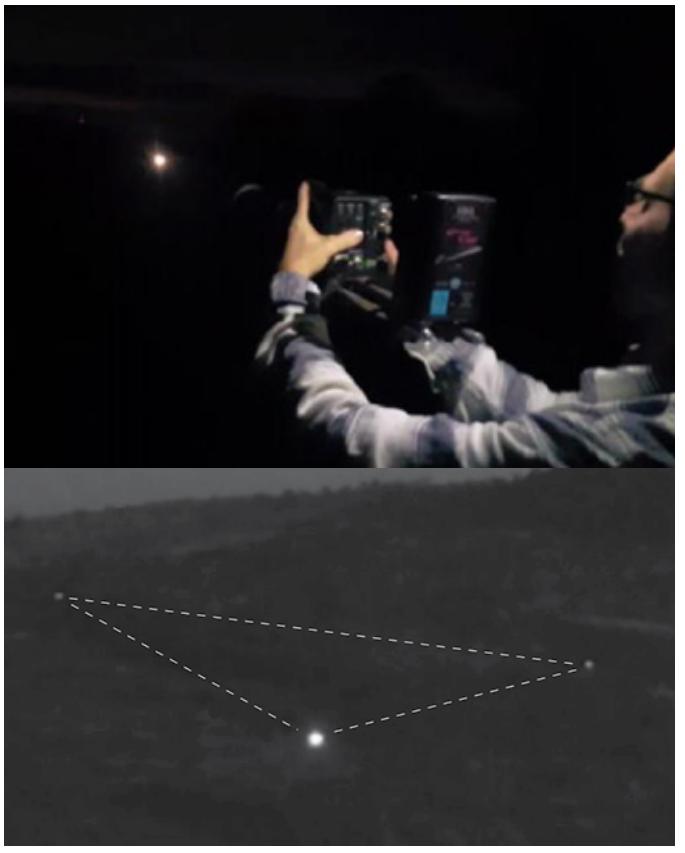
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Cactus field near Valley of Mexico campsite, 2016





INTRODUCTION

JOEL FERREE,
PROGRAM
DIRECTOR,
THE ART +
TECHNOLOGY
LAB

Now in its fifth year, the Art + Technology Lab at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) supports artist projects that engage emerging technology. With the help of its technology sponsors, the Lab provides artists with grants, in-kind support, and facilities to develop new projects that would not be realized otherwise. These projects involve risk-taking and are often highly experimental. For such undertakings, artists push their practices into new territory.

I.R. Bach (Mexico, born 1966) applied to the Art + Technology Lab program to examine and mimic a mysterious encounter he experienced while camping in the mountains surrounding the Valley of Mexico. The first component of the project consisted of fieldwork: Bach made multiple expeditions into the back-country outside Mexico City to investigate the strange flashing lights that were spontaneously appearing in the mountains. For the second component, the artist planned to stage a performance with mirrors in Los Angeles's eastern hills to create a triangular light drawing that visitors could view from the balcony of LACMA's Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) building. Bach also expanded his investigation to encompass a variety of separate yet related unexplained phenomena.

A large portion of Bach's grant went toward photo-surveillance equipment, including a camera drone and a low-light camera. Instead of employing these tools to demystify a given phenomenon, he achieved results that heightened the experience of the unknown. Bach accomplishes this without speculating on the nature of the phenomenon's existence—this he leaves up to the viewer. His artistic investigations do not lead to theories or answers but rather seek to initiate a sense of discovery and a state of wonder. They suggest something more without telling what exactly that something is.

Bach has hacked tools of scientific inquiry in the name of abstraction. Historically, abstraction in art came of age during the rise of scientific and technological progress in the twentieth century. Whether or not we are still in the throes of modernity is debatable; however, there is little doubt that we cling to our belief in scientific and technological progress. The rationality that underpins these beliefs has exiled mysticism, and the vacuum created by this absence has been filled by rationality itself. Rather than ponder the unknown, today we marvel at wonders that are engineered.

Science has equipped us with the ability to formulate questions, hypothesize, predict, test, and analyze. Yet the human pursuit of certitude has dulled our capacity to engage in a state of wonder and suspended disbelief. We see what we want to see or we don't see it at all. Bach has taken something that normally allows us to extend our perception outward and turned it back upon us. In doing so, he has leveraged technology's power to reintroduce the primordial into the contemporary dialogue and, ultimately, examine how we as a society shape and maintain our beliefs.

Top: Setting up the camera, 2016

Bottom: Triangular grouping of lights, 2016



ENTITIES

It happened on the night of January 27, 2009, on a mountain near Mexico City. Although it was getting cold and the rest of the group was seated around the bonfire, I stood by myself a few meters away, contemplating a dormant volcano across the valley. Feeling there was something to see, I stared at it for a while. At around one in the morning, a green-blue flash of light emanated from the darkness, just below the crater. More lights came into view, and their bursts increased in intensity and periodicity as they flashed from different parts of the mountain. They appeared in colored groupings: green-aqua and blue lights on the left, white and red clusters



Bonfire at campsite, 2017

in the middle, a purple triad on the upper-right side, and three bright blue lights that flashed in sequence, forming a straight line along the left ridge like those of an airport landing strip.

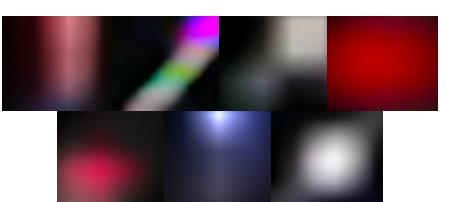
At first I thought these lights might be caused by gases, or by cactus farmers working at night, or by military exercises. But there was a strange quality to them unlike anything I had seen before. Then, when they appeared in the sky, it became clear to me that this extraordinary phenomenon was not a natural occurrence. I stood in awe, transfixed in a way that I had not experienced since childhood,

when a single feeling could alter my worldview. Yet doubt quickly followed, because what my eyes were telling me went against common sense. Even though I questioned my perception, I decided to engage with the experience: *I wanted to know*.

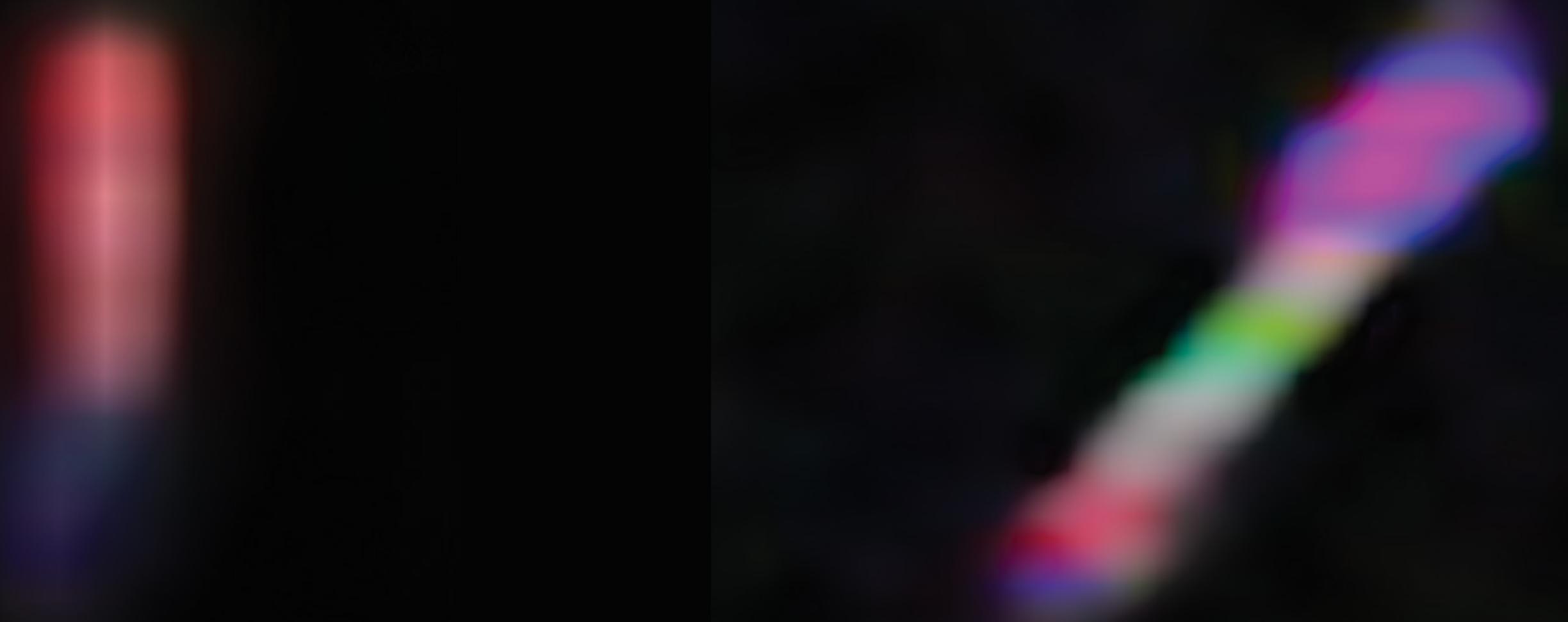
A series of expeditions followed, not only to the original location but also to other sites in the same mountain range. Because some of the lights appeared in the sky as well as on mountainous ridges inaccessible to cars or even hikers, I determined that they were not caused by artificial sources, such as lanterns or vehicles. I tried recording the lights with my phone camera but was unable to capture the colors and context given the low-light conditions. So I continued to explore the sites, logging my experiences; I was not able to document the phenomenon.

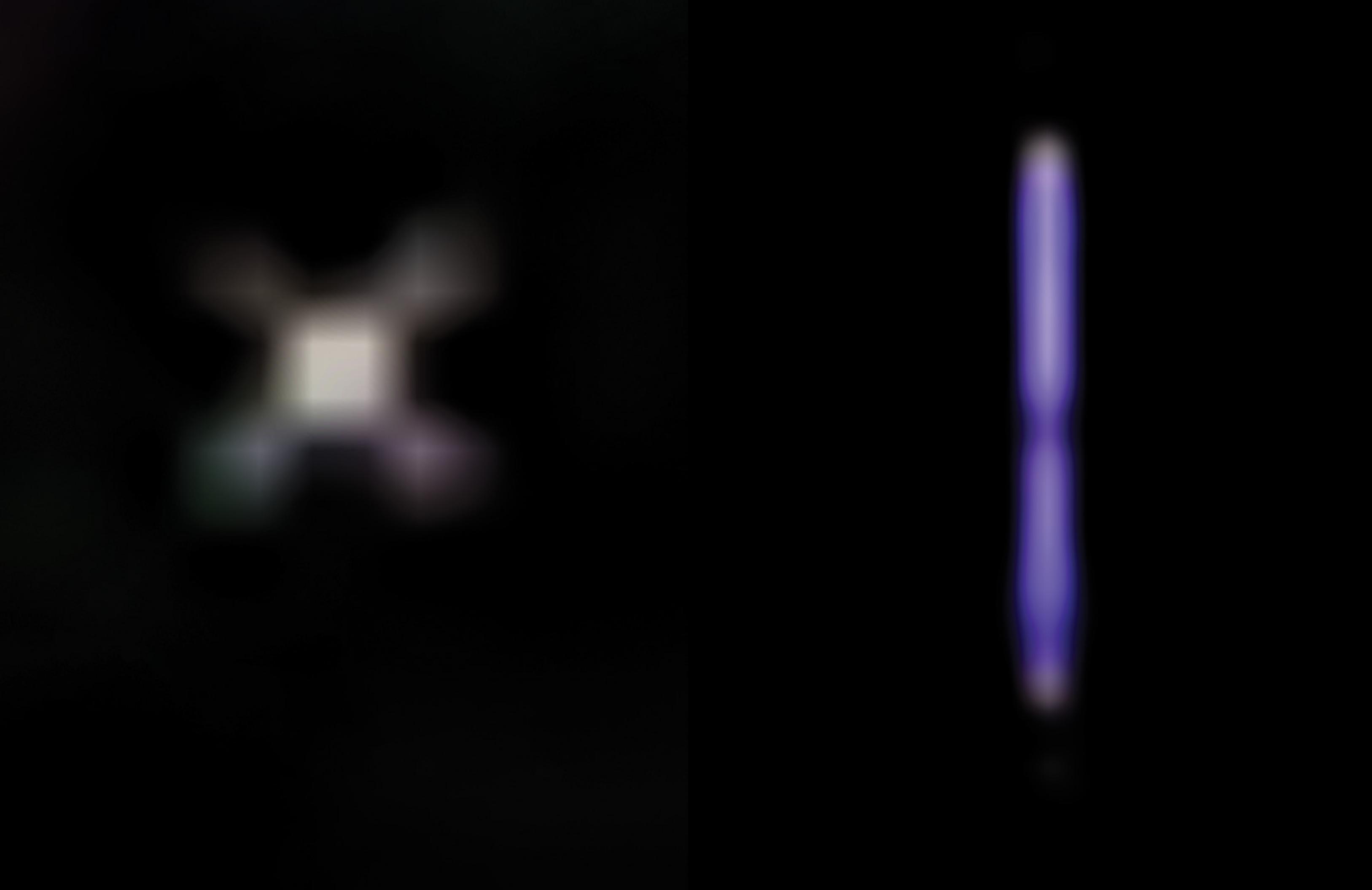
When I received LACMA's Art + Technology Lab award in 2016, I was generously offered support to buy the equipment necessary to fund future explorations, including a drone, an 800mm zoom lens, and the Canon M20F-SH low-light camera, which records at four million ISO, practically lighting up the darkness in full color. Capturing the phenomenon in such a way gave me the opportunity to review the material in hindsight, revealing the lights' textures in motion and detail. I named the mysterious lights *entities*, since they seem to have an agency of their own.

The *Entities* still-frame series explores the phenomenon by recording from predetermined points of view during the night and then zooming into the video frames that capture the activity. To bring forth the *entities*' colors and shapes, the foreground is contrasted without enhancement, so their strange quality remains intact. As for what is behind them, several possible scenarios have crossed my mind, but this publication is intended as a phenomenological report that allows the viewer to speculate and wonder.

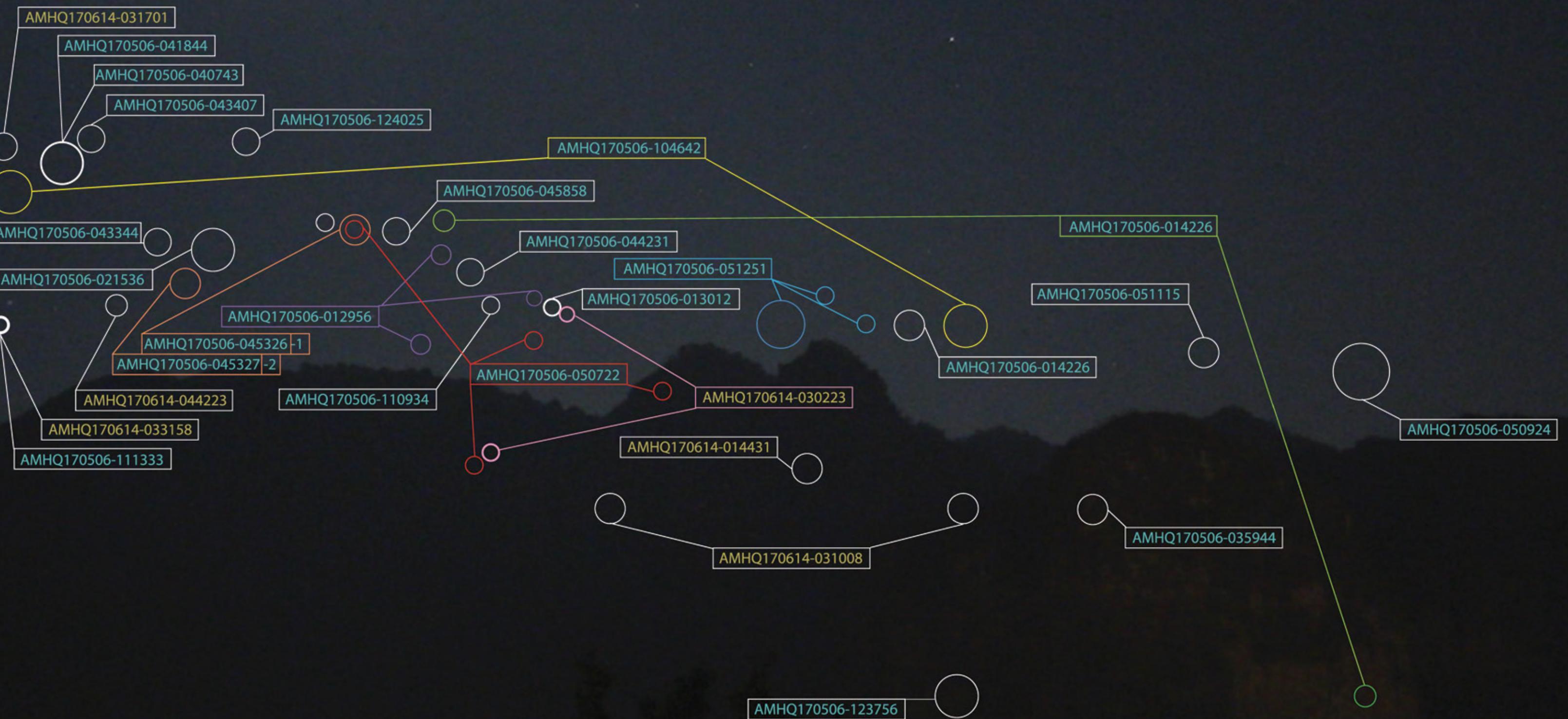












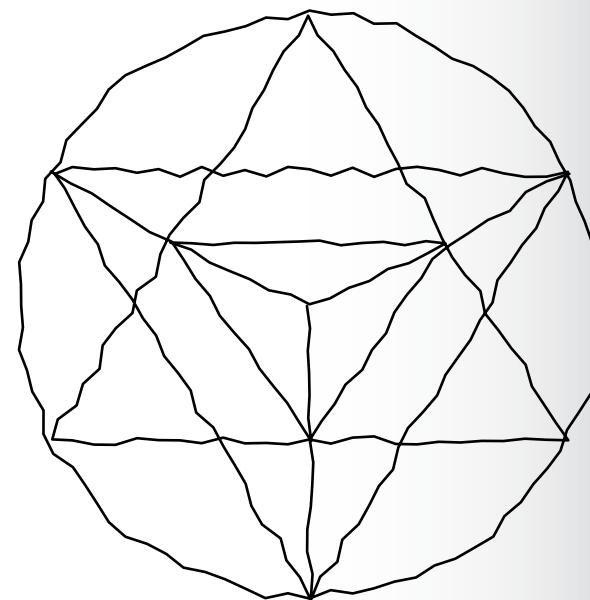
LINES

Lights that appear and disappear are like dots that can be joined. The next level of engagement with the phenomenon was to relate the *entities* to one another in order to generate context, looking for the emergence of patterns in space and time. As geometrical alignments revealed themselves, some appeared to be in unison or sequential order, indicating lines and polygons and suggesting that the phenomenon functions in terms of a contextual grid of some sort. Given this, I intuited a relationship with the terrain and larger geological context.

After closely observing the sites through Google Earth, I recognized a faint but consistent grid of straight lines. These lines, which look like paper folds, run north-south and east-west, concentrating around latitude 19.5° north. If followed eastward from the site, the visible latitude coincides with Maya archaeological sites, continuing on to the Caribbean Sea and toward Guantánamo Bay in Cuba. Westward, it intersects the Colima volcano in Mexico and the Mauna Loa volcano in Hawaii, suggesting a larger contextual reference, as well as a relationship between latitude and volcanic activity. Of course, one can draw any straight line across the world and find coincidences of some type, but volcanic fields, like the ones along the Pacific Rim, follow tectonic plate faults, not arbitrary markers such as latitudes. The fact that the latitude 19.5° north is “visible” is strange.

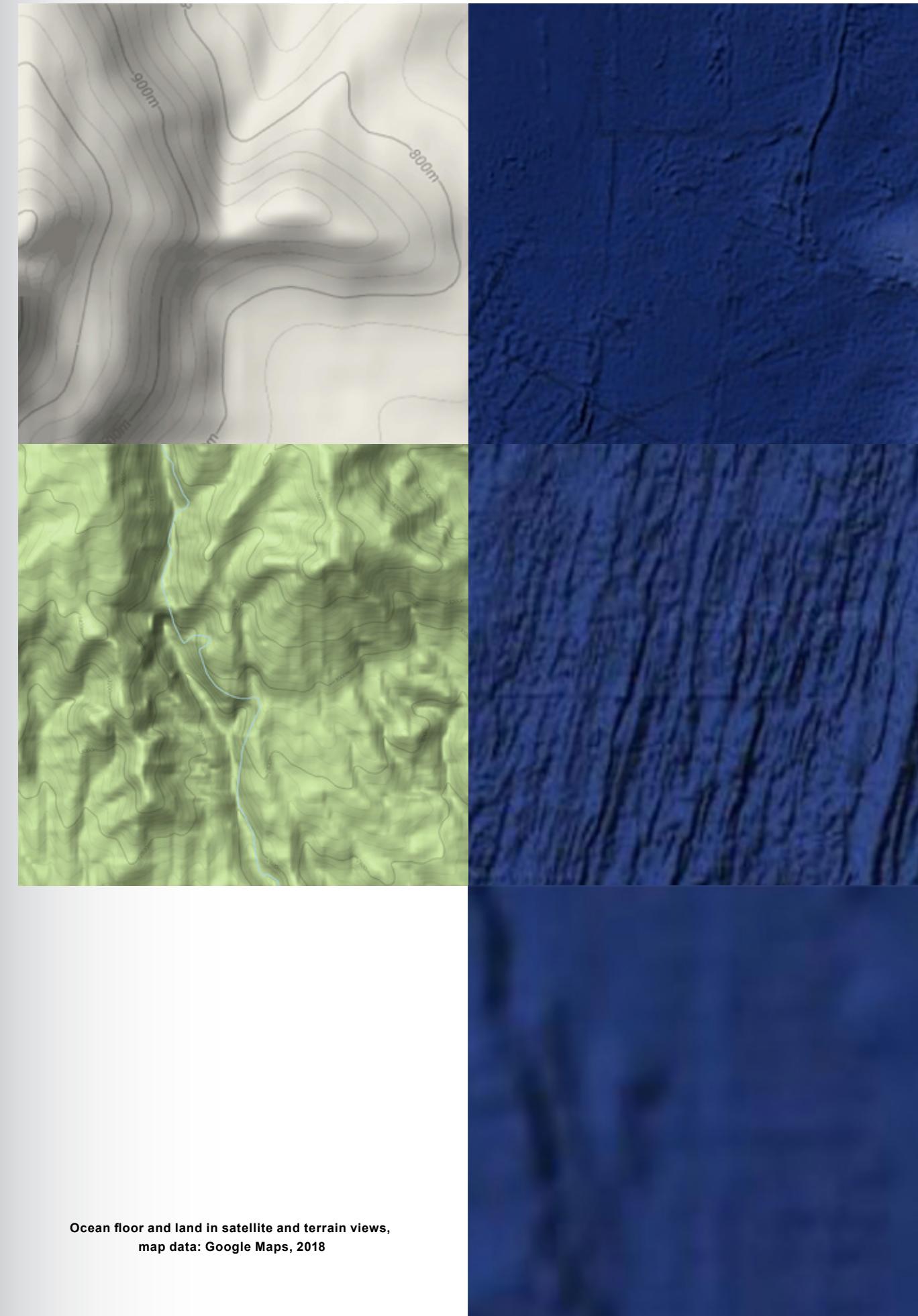
Many straight lines found on the ocean floor are made by ships, their trajectories highlighted as the ships’ sonar maps the seafloor. Yet, there are four lines that circle the globe in its entirety and coincide with southern and northern hemisphere latitudes: 19.5° north, 19.5° south, 33° north, and 33° south. These four lines also are visible inland using the terrain-view mode in Google Maps. There appears to be a square grid, probably due to a glitch in the mapping algorithm, that causes the more rugged terrain to seem tessellated. However, this is not consistent everywhere. Since the sites where I first observed the lines took me to the latitude 19.5° north, which then continues in satellite view to the ocean floor (a different mapping technology altogether), there seems to be a hint of intention, even a fine sense of humor, along these lines.

I could not find scientific papers that study or even acknowledge the visible latitudes, but I did find various websites that claim the latitude 19.5° as relevant, although most of these are devoted to sacred geometry or conspiracy theories. It was nice to know that I was not alone; however, this company seemed uncomfortable, since my experience was the product of observation and not of belief. The esoteric notion of the latitude 19.5° being geographically relevant revolves around a large number of geological and geographical landmarks located on or near the latitude 19.5°. The relationship with geometry is found in the intersection of a sphere and a tetrahedron (made of four equilateral triangles). If the tetrahedron is placed inside a sphere with one apex touching the pole, the remaining three apexes touch the sphere at the latitude 19.5°.



Tetrahedron intersecting sphere at 19.5° angles, 2018

The *Lines* series relates the *entity* phenomenon with time and space as context. Mixed media using acrylic, oil, and supplies such as paper, pins, and thread, are used to highlight emerging patterns. Tangible references aid in conceptualization by holding thoughts in place—in the spirit of a detective’s pinup wall, or the whiteboard of a scientist on the verge of a discovery for which the work of a genius becomes indistinguishable from the ramblings of a madman.



Ocean floor and land in satellite and terrain views,
map data: Google Maps, 2018



Lines series works in progress during YAM residency, 2018



STRUCTURES

Interestingly, the latitude 19.5° mystery extends beyond Earth. Jupiter's Great Red Spot, Mars's Olympus Mons volcano, and Venus's Alpha Regio and Beta Regio volcanoes coincide with this latitude. I repeated the process used for the *Lines* series, staring at satellite photography of the moon, looking

subtle gradients that form when digital photography runs out of definition. At first glance, the work seems abstract; yet it is figurative, since it represents something else. In a way, this is the opposite of painting a realistic representation of an abstract work, sharpening the line between



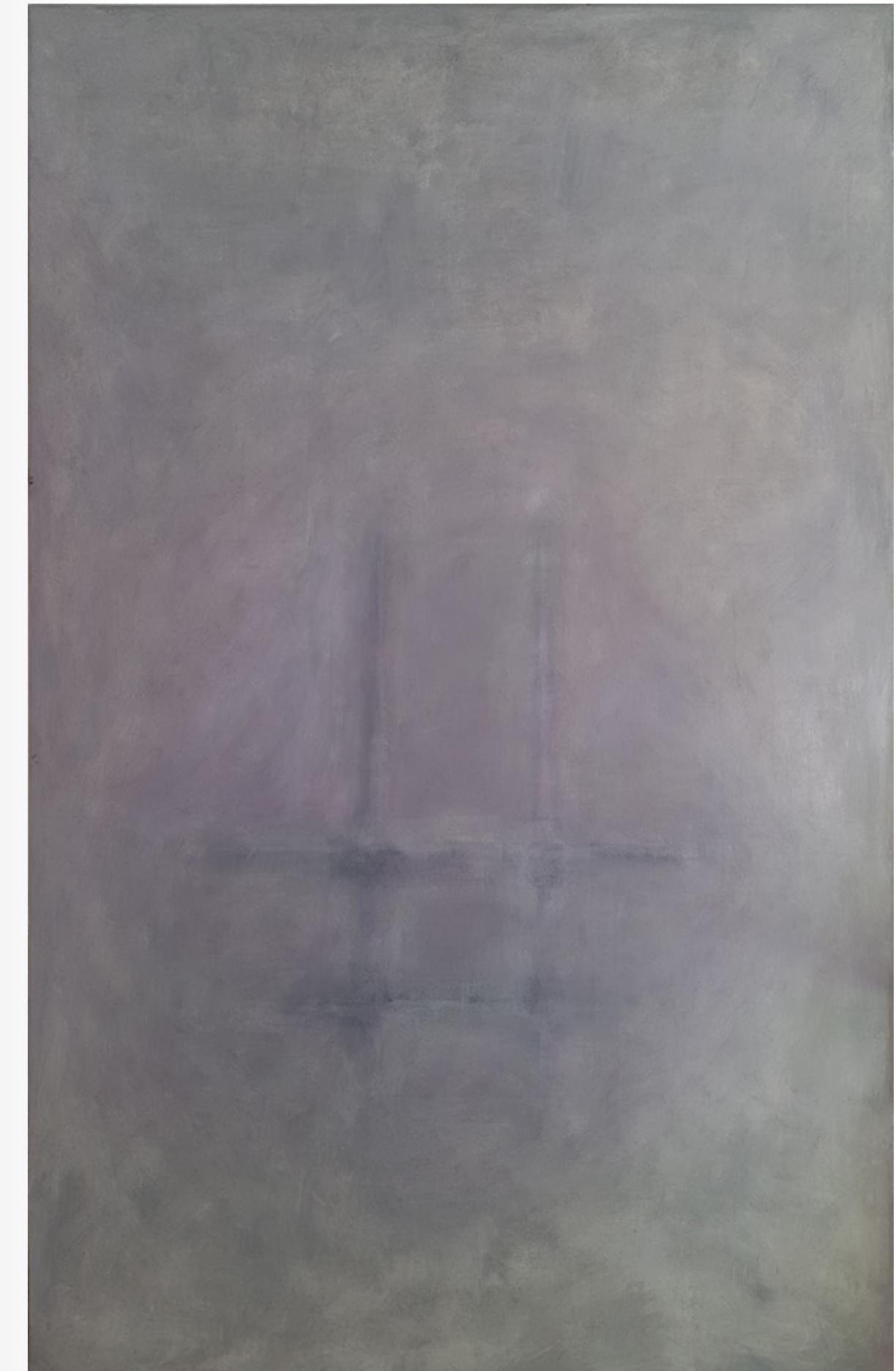
The artist working on the *Structures* series during Forma 110 residency, photo Mariana Valdes, 2018

for patterns. I didn't find visible latitudes there, yet by tracing the lunar latitude 19.5° north, I found clusters of straight-angled black and white lines that, in some cases, were symmetrical. Whether this could be a result of the technological limitations inherent in digital photography remains unclear. When zooming in on the surface of the moon, the terrain blurs, giving way to an abstract play of shadows and light that hints of intentionality because, even though the straight edges may form due to the digital format, that does not explain their symmetry.

The *Structures* series represents these phantasmic images using oil on canvas. The ageless technology of pigment allows me to re-create the

the viewer's experience and the artist's intention, which, like hand and mind, are accomplices, but only to a certain extent. No matter how intellectual an art concept is, it is still the gesture that opens a window for the unconscious so that we can hear what it has to say, pushing for art to escape language.

If science standardizes meaning, art shatters it into a million pieces. If science defines, art blurs. This is the pair of hands that helps us feel our way through the void. We are framed by perception, and there are limits to the tools that enhance our view of the world. The blurred image does not intend to mystify but instead marks the threshold at the end of the road. What happens beyond is the realm of the abstract.





Structures series works in progress during Forma 110 residency, 2018

VORTEXES



Radar images of vortex over Mexico,
map data: Intellicast, 2012

By chance, I learned about a phenomenon caught by Mexican weather radar in 2012. A perfectly outlined vortex that covered the country from its Pacific to Atlantic coasts morphed into many beautiful forms, always symmetrical and consistent with an implicit tri-dimensionality, suggesting a doughnut-like torus shape. It reappeared in 2015 and again in 2016. A similar phenomenon occurred over the northwest and southeast coasts of Australia in 2010, also recorded by weather radars. The phenomena were not visible, nor did they correspond to a weather event, such as a storm, that forms and dissolves gradually. Instead, all these vortexes appeared “out of the blue,” shifting in shape and disappearing in the same way they had formed. When viewed from above, in such a way that top and bottom surfaces are juxtaposed, the torus shapes presented moiré patterns forming as two spirals in opposite directions, pitched against each other.

A common explanation for these vortexes comes from conspiracy theorists, who blame it on HAARP (High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program), a weather research technology developed by US military and academia that is able to aim high-power radio frequencies toward specific areas of the ionosphere, producing heat as a result. This means control of the weather. However, this technology is not potent enough to project a figure large enough to look like these vortexes, which rules it out as a possible cause. So it is likely that the vortexes were actually there, generated by something we don't know.

Even though HAARP and radar-malfunction explanations highlight a possible intention to control the weather, what makes the vortexes relevant to my project is that all of them appeared centered near three of the four visible latitudes: 19.5° north for the Mexican vortex and 19.5° south and 33° south for the Australian vortexes.

The vortexes also coincide with three longitudes that are 30° apart, transforming a one-dimensional set of lines into a two-dimensional grid. Dividing the world in steps of 30° longitudes results in a grid that coincides with landmarks, including the bend of the Nile River, Potosí (one of the highest cities in the



Petrograph at Los Laureles, photo Mirsa Aguirre, 2016

world) in Bolivia, Fiji, the intersection where Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos meet, Tahiti, Bermuda, Hawaii, and Mount Meron in Israel. This may not mean anything in particular, but it does hint at possible spots for future vortexes to appear, confirming that the grid and therefore the latitudes are relevant in a way we can't understand.

If we predict, we control, leaving out chance. On the other hand, if we leave everything to chance, like a weather vane, we lose control. Control of our bodies defines our ability to predict cycles, which in turn allowed us to cultivate nature. The circle is a representation of the cycle. If we are stuck walking in circles, we can move out by tipping the path outward or inward, generating a spiral, although we would still be walking in the same plane. However, a tri-dimensional spiral, or vortex, takes us to another level, up or down. Near one of the *entity* phenomenon sites, a spiral painted more than two thousand years ago on a boulder is theorized to symbolize the wind. Thirty miles away, the eye of the 2012 Mexican vortex is centered near a small town called Temoaya, which in Nahuatl (the language of the Aztecs) means “the place where they descend.” It's located just down the hill from a smaller town called

Transfiguración. Who knows, maybe this is the place to shape-shift, enter and leave, or leap between dimensions.

For the Vortex series, acrylic paint and glass cover a collage made of cutouts from maps and atlas books, relics of the pre-Google era. I miss getting lost in these big old books, which are now obsolete. So I salvage them and arrange them into haphazard versions of the world, where any point can meet any other point, chaotically. The acrylic mix is injected using a syringe, so the solid colors can be infused into one another, giving me control to represent uncontrollable forces.

Maybe the ancient observer who painted the spiral on a rock was representing the wind. Maybe not. What I am abstracting now is a balance between chance and control as a vehicle for transformation. The vortexes came to me by chance, and it is to chance that I leave the possibility of a future iteration to confirm or correct my observations. We might control the weather one day, only to learn that its essence resides in a chaotic nature that if tampered with could tip the weather into an uncontrollable spiral, beyond the possibility of correction. For now, I settle with observation and prediction.



Vortex #2, acrylic on atlas cuts, 2018

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

In order to broaden my perspective, I brought friends along on my trips to the mountains so they could observe the *entity* phenomenon. During one of the most memorable excursions, I invited two friends: a believer and a skeptic. Needless to say, they had polarized experiences. The skeptic talked most of the time, looking away just at the moment when the lights peaked in intensity. The believer, on the other hand, interpreted lightning and airplanes as part of the phenomenon, looking for signs everywhere. Neither of my guest observers transitioned from

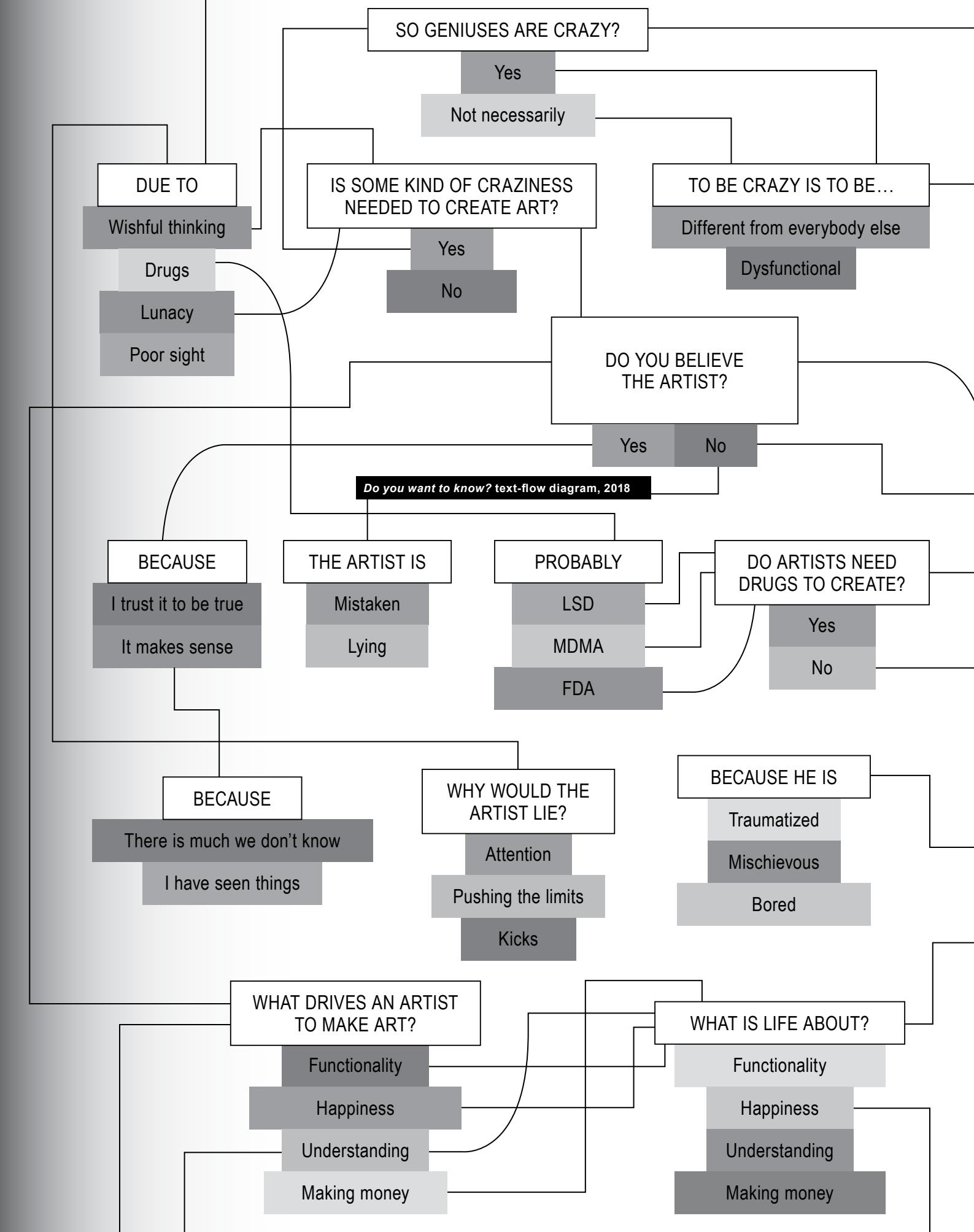


Do you want to know? app sample questions, 2018

skepticism to open-mindedness or from belief to reason. Their reactions were biased toward acknowledgment or denial, confirming what they already believed in the same way that politics are polarized by a feed-forward loop of information that increases tendencies and exacerbates feelings. Perception is modified by attention, making it difficult to see beyond what we want to see.

An altered state of consciousness changes the way we feel about things, either through an external force such as a hallucinogenic or through an internal force such as meditation or fasting. This type of mystical experience can override the vicious cycle of belief, but it is easier to believe in someone else's mysticism than to venture forth with our own

intuition, neglecting our ability to observe. The habit of joining seemingly unrelated events facilitates noticing patterns; so given enough data, a pattern will emerge. The mystical experience can be achieved through observation, but it can only make sense through a logic that contemplates the impossible. Believing our own eyes and thoughts is difficult if they defy common sense, forcing us to choose between trusting society or trusting our own minds.





Shaman Rogelio Chavira, 2017



Artist I.R. Bach, photo Mirsa Aguirre, 2018

THE LIGHT THAT I SEE

Given that my first encounter with the *entity* phenomenon took place during a Huichol ceremony, I decided to weave it into the work. I'll probably never know how an induced altered state of consciousness affected my initial observation. This might have opened my mind to see what was already there but was unbeknownst to me. Ritual became central to the project, even if it is an abstracted form of ceremony, which always includes fire and music.

For *The light that I see*, musician Eduardo Arenas and myself mixed folk instruments and shamanic invocation with electronic sounds for a sort of mystical journey enabled by technology. This style allows for an improvised composition style, produced onsite. As the project took shape, I realized that the music not only could score the art installations but also could function on its own, as an independent series that links the present experience with prior observers who lived long ago and witnessed the same phenomenon.

When observing something we don't understand, we resort to mythological thinking until we establish a cause and effect. We attribute agency to nature in an effort to explain it, but also relate to it by placing it within an anthropocentric framework. Every now and then we encounter phenomena that do not fit within our view of the universe, challenging us to rethink our position. When an experience threatens our paradigms, we put it aside until it conforms to our frame of thought or is dismissed as an equivocation. Rarely does a novel experience pass muster to shatter the mold. So until we reconcile the unexplained, all we have is myth as a question in need of an answer.

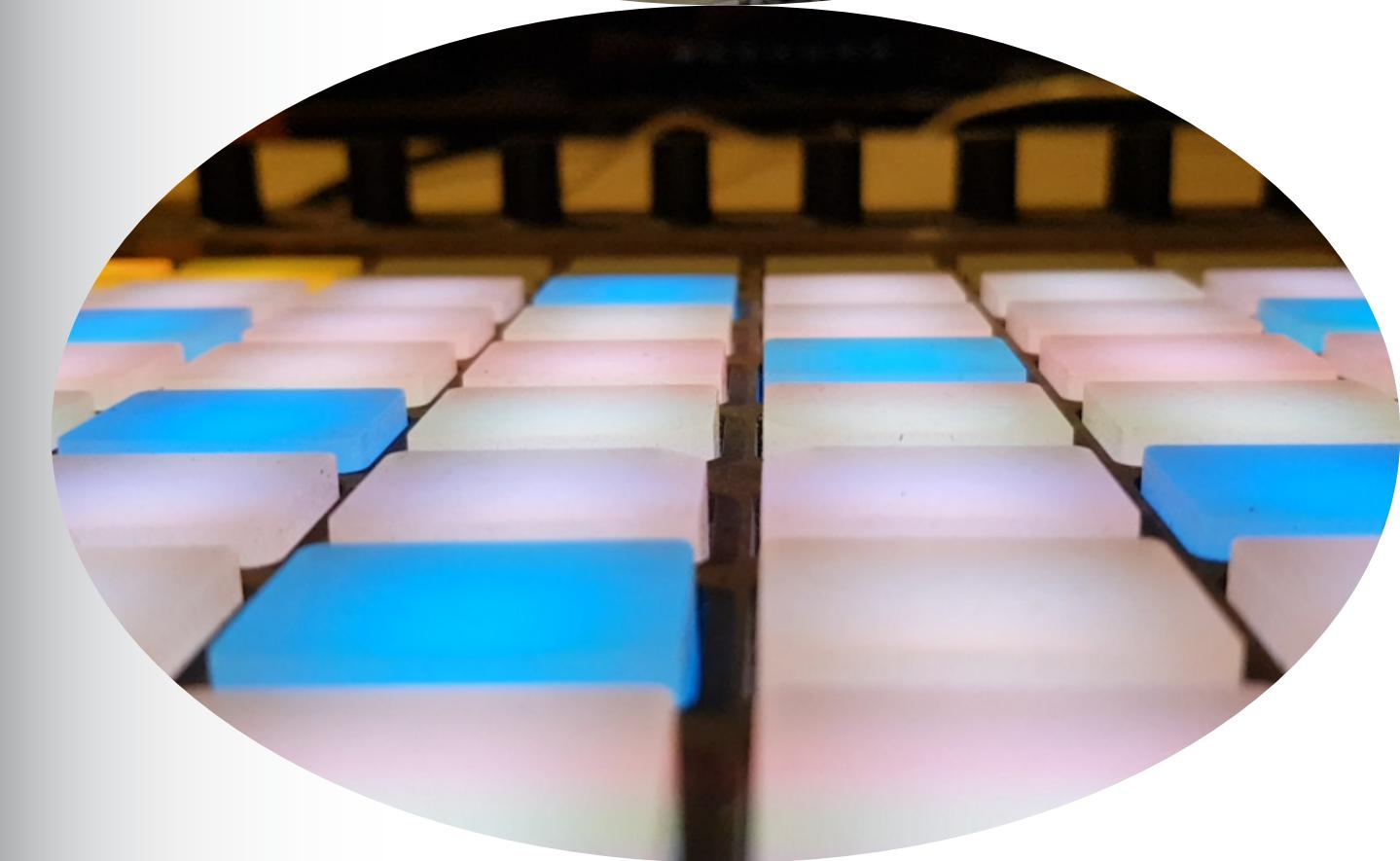
Even though the question-and-answer format is a trademark of thought, it echoes the primal call-and-response signaling format. This is the basis

for music, which arose before words in response to the need to communicate with one another. In an effort to control what we don't understand, we engage in ritualistic performance. As a way to connect, ritual gives way to ceremony through offering, so what began as a plea for the renewal of life evolved into an expression of gratitude.

We are gifted because life is a gift. The more aware we are, the stronger we become. Simultaneously, the deeper our awareness, the more we realize our fragility. Not everything is under our control. As with any of our faculties, consciousness needs to be fostered and shared; but like candle-light, it is too easily quenched by fear, arrogance, or mere conformity. It takes a certain kind of innocence to maintain the flame of curiosity that is lit in order to see but also to signal our position like a beacon. The void is vast and dark, yet light begets light, so I hope for a response that shines back and a voice that responds *I see you*.

The *entity* phenomenon exists. I am grateful for observing it and I am humbled because something tells me that the *entities* come from a better place, or rather with a higher understanding. Whatever force is behind them, the phenomenon has allowed me to observe them. Most importantly, it has let us be, in spite of its implicit technological advantage. Only a highly ethical behavior unbeknownst to man forfeits power for the benefit of respectful coexistence. This we still need to fathom.

In creating my own myth, I am no different from the ancient observers. And like them, I resort to ritual. As a universal language, music transcends spoken language, culture, and epoch. So I offer music, not because I expect a response, but because it is what I have to give as my way to say *thank you*.



Top: The artist (left) and musician Eduardo Arenas working onsite,
photo Sebastian Rodríguez, 2018

Bottom: Electronic keyboard used by the artist, 2018

PORTALS

Technology enables us, yet it does not define us. Communicating presence by stacking rocks could be our first sign of intelligence—a pre-linguistic sign, though not yet a symbol. A rock pile foretells culture because it affirms intention. In its most elaborate form, a rock pile becomes a pyramid. Civilization's intent to bridge society with the cosmos is implicit in all pyramids and emerged in many places around the world, although they proliferated the most in Mesoamerica, where I first saw them.

As a child, I was fascinated by the prospect of another civilization sharing the same space I lived in, only in another time. How could I not be? It was during a trip to the ancient city of Teotihuacan, Mexico, that I had one of my most memorable experiences, echoed by this work. I connect to that kid in the same way that I connect to the ancient observers who looked up at the same sky. We are the same because we feel the same. When it comes to a massive structure such as Teotihuacan's Pyramid of the Sun (that was constructed circa the year 200), one can't help but to feel awe. These buildings became vantage points from which to observe, and landmarks to be observed. As ceremonial structures restricted for the ruling class, pyramids become a symbol of power. Yet, as an elevated position that gives a privileged perspective, pyramids relate to knowledge, in a *knowledge begets power, power begets knowledge* loop.

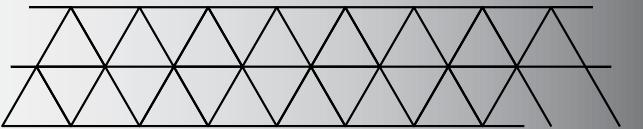
In order to understand, we abstract. By reaching for the essence of things, we are able to relate all with everything else, opening the gateway to universal knowledge. The alignment of rocks into a pile might be primal, but it signals a bright future. As a deliberate intention distinguishable from a natural occurrence, a triangular alignment may be interpreted as the earliest distinction of culture over nature, as a way to say *I am here*. One point says nothing and two points may be a coincidence, but three points make a statement. As three points are arranged into a triangle, with equal distances between them, the message is unequivocal and self-referential. An equilateral triangle may then be a symbol for abstraction.

Triangles can be found everywhere, but three instances—one cognitive, one anthropological, and one linguistic—are noteworthy: First, grid cells,

- (1) ● ● ● ● ● ● which are neurons found in the brain's entorhinal cortex, fire, forming a triangular grid telling the body its position (1). Second, an ochre

slab from more than eighty thousand years ago found at Blombos Cave in South Africa was engraved with a triangular lattice, heralding the emergence of symbolism (2). Finally, in philosophical nomenclature, three points forming an equilateral triangle stand for *therefore* (3), the connective that crowns logical thinking. Just like the use of the triangle as a territorial marking,

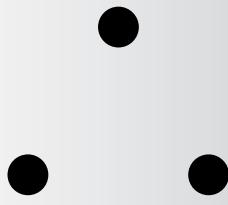
(2)



these marks—biological, *I am here*; anthropological, *I do*; and cultural, *I think*—make the case for the triangular abstraction as the hallmark of human intelligence.

So the *Portals* series proposes the triangle as a symbol to convey conscience. With mirrors

(3)



and photography, I give ancient structures new meaning, juxtaposing them with an abstraction of the pyramid itself, a place to observe and be observed. This triangular symbol of light can be a gateway into the dimension of universal consciousness, daring us to transcend it by understanding not who but *what we are*.

Amatlán portal, digital photograph, 2017



Top: Grid cell spiking pattern, 2018

Middle: An abstraction of the ochre slab indentation pattern found in Blombos Cave, South Africa, 2018

Bottom: Equilateral triangle symbol for therefore, 2018



Shoot at Valle de los Senderos, San Miguel de Allende, 2018

CHRONOS

Chronos is a site-specific portal to be experienced specifically from LACMA. The Broad Contemporary Art Museum's terrace becomes a watching station from which to observe a light drawing, placed five miles away, at the Griffith Observatory. Three points of light emerge at a specific moment in time. By linking two of the city's emblematic buildings—one devoted to science and the other to art—*Chronos* re-creates the ancient practice of astronomical alignment, in this case, intended to highlight a relationship in time and space.

There are already parallels between Los Angeles County and ancient Rome: the Getty Villa, with its cypress trees and well-manicured gardens, the stereotypical banality attributed to both, city and epoch, as well as the cliché of American hegemony as an echo of Roman glory and its decadence. When living in one, an empire seems everlasting, but they all inevitably turn out to be the fizz of an effervescent set of circumstances. The very concept of an *empire* is intrinsically tied to power, yet only power can yield power or change hands. Power is a social construct—ephemeral and, most notably, sterile. Knowledge, on the other hand, can become consciousness, achieving what power can't: transformation.

In Rome's Mausoleum of Hadrian, now called the Castle of the Holy Angel, a light phenomenon is observed when the sun illuminates Emperor Hadrian's sarcophagus during the summer solstice. Constructed of red porphyry stone, the surface generates a purple glow, reminiscent of the Roman senators' vests, which symbolized power. On the opposite side of the Tiber River, the Pantheon faces the Mausoleum, so on the summer solstice the sunset is aligned with both structures. By aligning the two buildings during the most extreme position of the sun, Hadrian, who called himself the sun king, meant to signal something, probably a suggestion of his inclusion within the Pantheon, which was reserved for the gods.

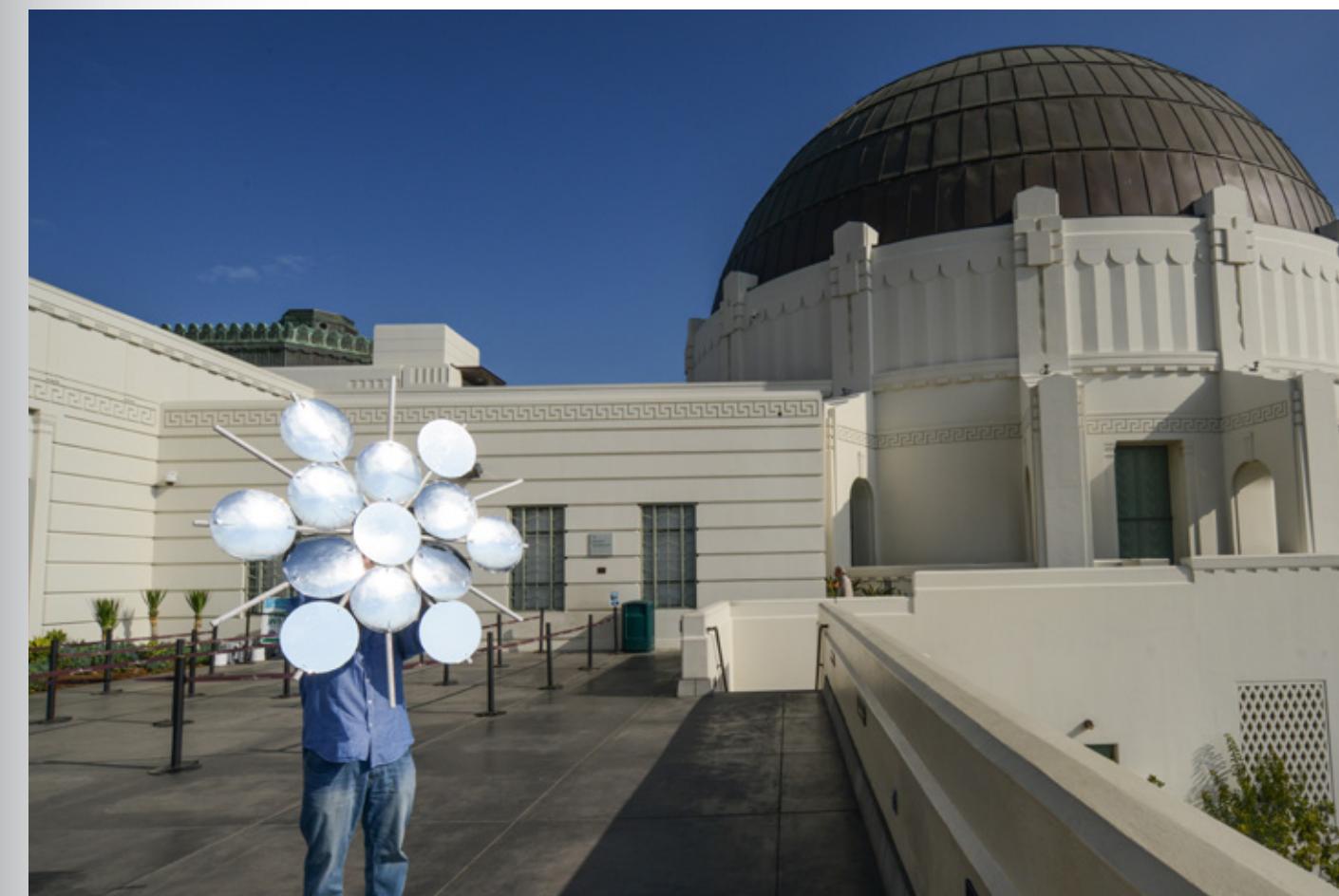
For L.A., Rome hints at the possibility of transformational change. Thanks to the opening in the center of its cupola, the Pantheon resembles an eye; however, it is the Griffith's public dome that actually observes the universe. The Mausoleum was built to honor the memory of an emperor. With its art

collection, LACMA instead preserves the collective memory of a city. From exclusive to inclusive, from private to public, from personal to collective, from power to knowledge, L.A. can diverge from ancient Rome toward a new kind of world.

More than a land-art installation, *Chronos* is an event that underlines the fragility of consciousness. It is as much about time as it is about light, because it lasts for just a few minutes. In order to reflect the sunlight toward the vantage point at LACMA, various forms of improvised heliostats were tested. Convex security mirrors and Mylar balloons did not achieve the needed luminosity. PVC panels fitted with used CDs seemed to be the best option, given their light weight and portability, but the discs' metal coating does not last long under direct exposure to sunlight. Although there is poetry in having my music collection (as well as my friends') burn under the sun in one final performance, it was decided instead to employ signaling mirrors, which can direct light in the direction of a target tens of miles away. This calls for the help of volunteers, and so the land-art installation became more of a performance piece, accenting time as its central theme.

Nested above Los Feliz in the Santa Monica Mountains, the Griffith Observatory maintains a privileged position overlooking the city of L.A. and a privileged position in my personal history. Inside one of its domes is a public telescope through which I observed Saturn (Cronus for the ancient Greeks) twenty years ago. So, personally, this installation aligns my childhood's visit to Teotihuacan and my first sight of another planet with my observation of the *entity* phenomenon as an adult, converging three life-changing moments in one fleeting instant, which also shall pass.

All runs its course, but the American empire does not have to face the same fate as that of the Romans or the Teotihuacans. All empires have been recycled by a new, replacing empire and have, until now, missed the opportunity to transform society by valuing knowledge over power. As in Emperor Hadrian's case, hubris does not die easily, yet regardless of the current state of affairs, there is hope. We can cross the portal of *knowledge over power* to see that there can be splendor in consciousness, if only for a glimpse.



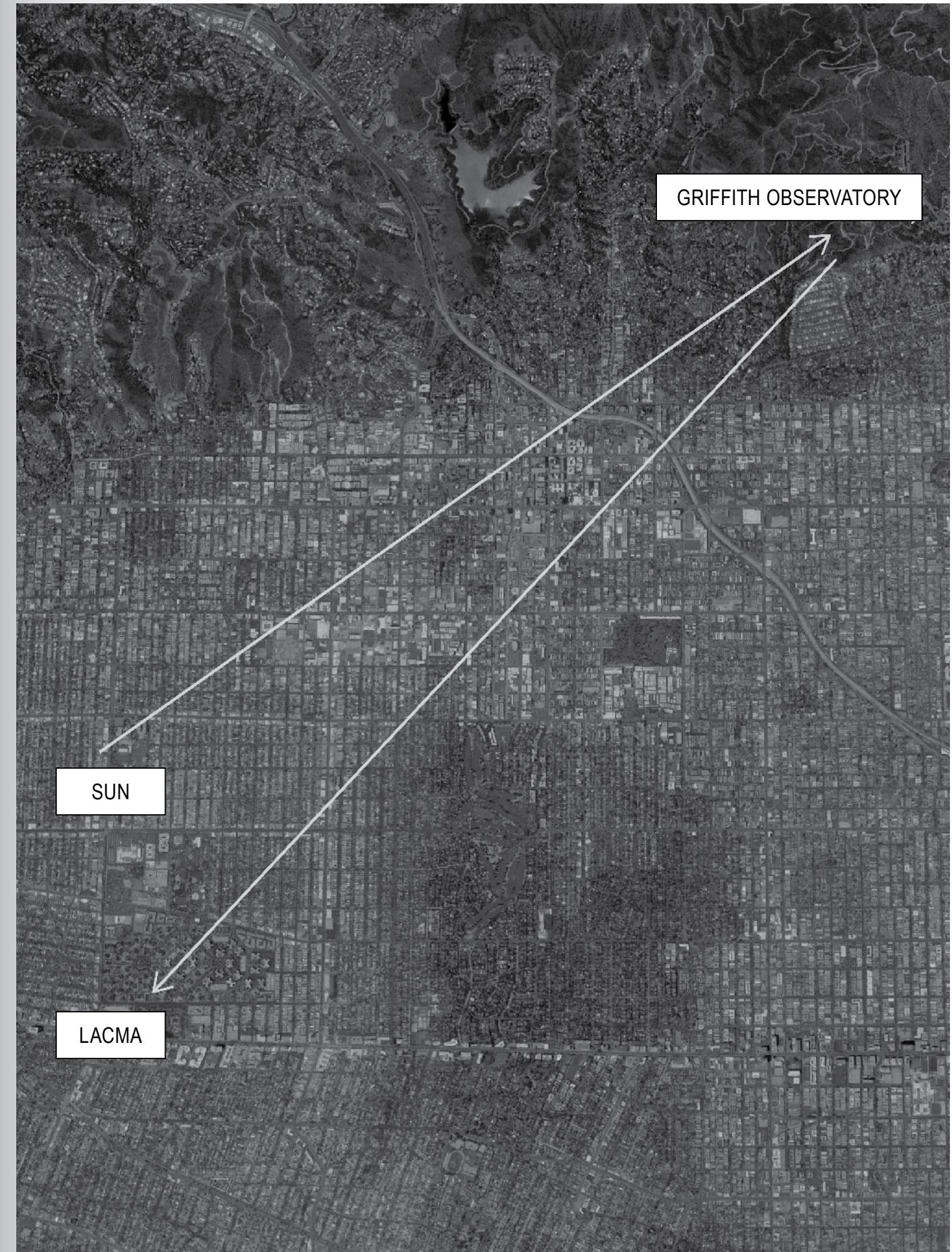


Test at Griffith Observatory, photo Shawn Harris Ahmed, 2017

PARADET
PROMENADE



Chronos test at Griffith Observatory, view from BCAM terrace, 2018



Satellite view of Los Angeles, with LACMA and Griffith Observatory positions, credit: Google Earth, 2018



EPILOGUE

DIANA MAGALONI,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
AND DR. VIRGINIA FIELDS
CURATOR OF THE ART OF THE ANCIENT AMERICAS,
LACMA

I.R. Bach's project *I want to know* is an homage to the profound and contradictory human endeavor, "knowing." His discovery and documentation of these precious luminous *entities* present us with a powerful paradox. As art, the dancing lights of the mountain captured by the sophisticated lens of the low-light camera are precious gems of the night: volatile, immaterial, deeply spiritual in all their blooming colors. As documents, that is, as photographic evidence of an inexplicable phenomenon, they become defiant of everything modern science allows us to believe. Hence, the importance of the title, *I want to know*.

Do we judge true knowledge as something that comes from experience? Do we believe knowledge is a process? Can we accept that deeply seeing, carefully observing, reviling, uncovering, documenting through photography comprise a sufficiently valid method? Can we question our own materialistic biases when confronted with the images Bach brings to us from the mountain? Can we understand his conundrum before a discovery of such magnitude? Imagine being the artist as he makes the decision to document and explain the series of mystifying, beautiful lights that emerge and disappear on their own accord from a massive volcano crater in the Valley of Mexico. Wouldn't you also want to know?

I have known Bach for many years, and I admire his courage and openness of mind. He is searching for meaning, and he communicates with the unfathomable with ease. He can work hours at a time in freezing mountainous conditions waiting for the *entities* to appear. He is able to obsessively follow their trajectories and document their patterns. He can capture the inscrutable lights in photographs and reveal that they have different shapes and colors, and yet, this is not enough. He wants to know. He still needs to explain the phenomenon to his mind—and to our collective, social mind and to the authorized world of science.

Even though Bach's conscious effort is to give us a plausible explanation of these *entities*, his translation of the experience is yet another mysterious path. This path led him to the enigmatic geographical latitude 19.5° north and to the past, because thousands of years ago, other artists like him had found in Egypt and Mesoamerica the same latitude and built their monumental pyramidal structures in response. This same latitude and path propelled Bach into the future, for he was able to see arcane, exquisite structures in the moon and documented them with oil paintings. Lastly, Bach's greatest leap was to create, with a series of mirrored panels, a kinetic light installation and performance at the Griffith Observatory that pointed at LACMA so that the people of Los Angeles could experience something similar to the magic he encountered in the mountains outside of Mexico City. This kind gift allows us to relive the pleasure we had as children, watching the starry night sky with our parents. Kudos to Bach.

Aerial view of Mexico City
looking toward the mountains,
2018



Mist at the observation site, 2018

I.R. Bach lives in Mexico City.

This catalogue is published in conjunction with I.R. Bach's project *I want to know*, which ran from 2016 to 2019 and was supported by the Art + Technology Lab at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

ART+ TECHNOLOGY LAB_-

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To my father, for wanting to know.

Authors:

I.R. Bach, Joel Ferree,
and Diana Magaloni

Editor:

Margery L. Schwartz

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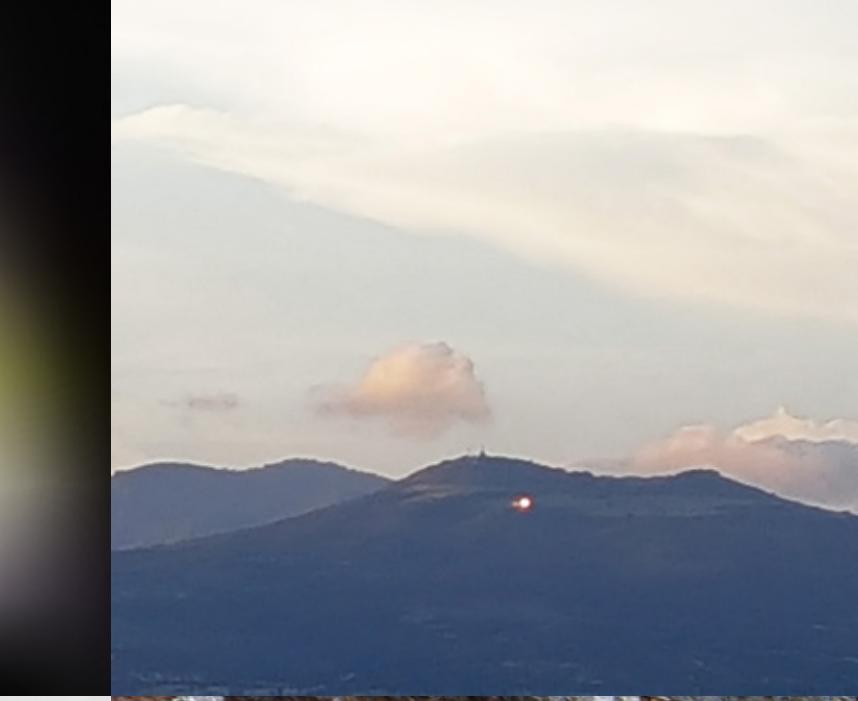
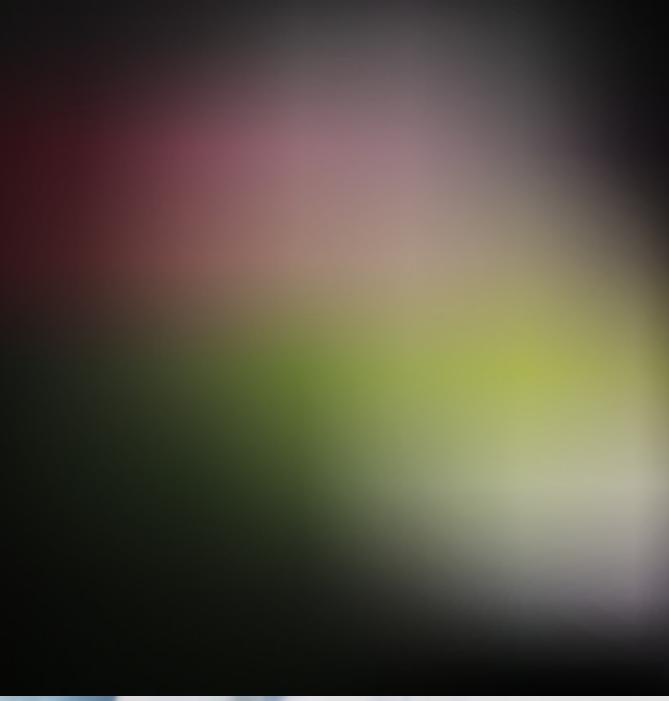
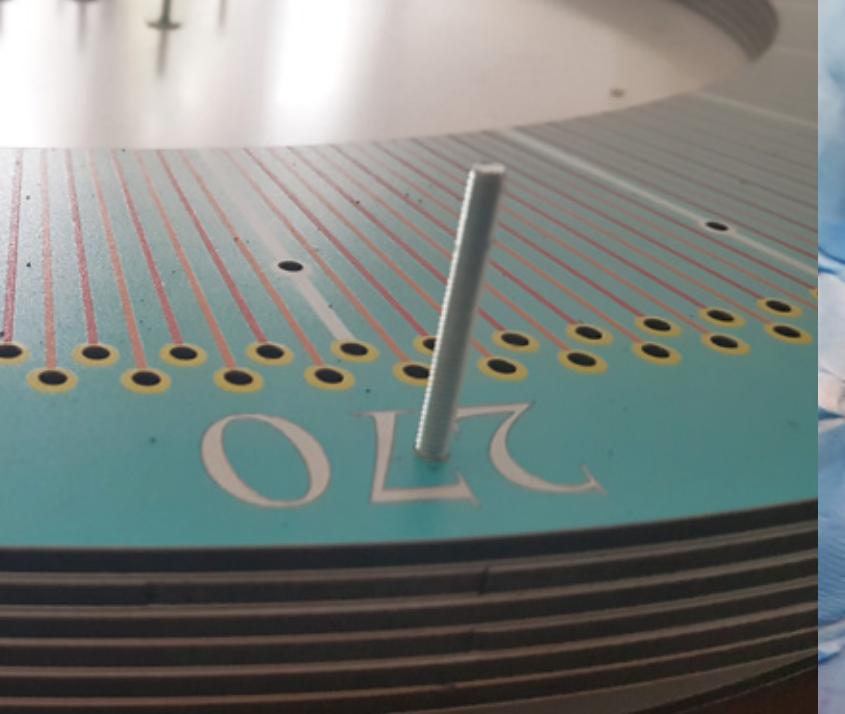
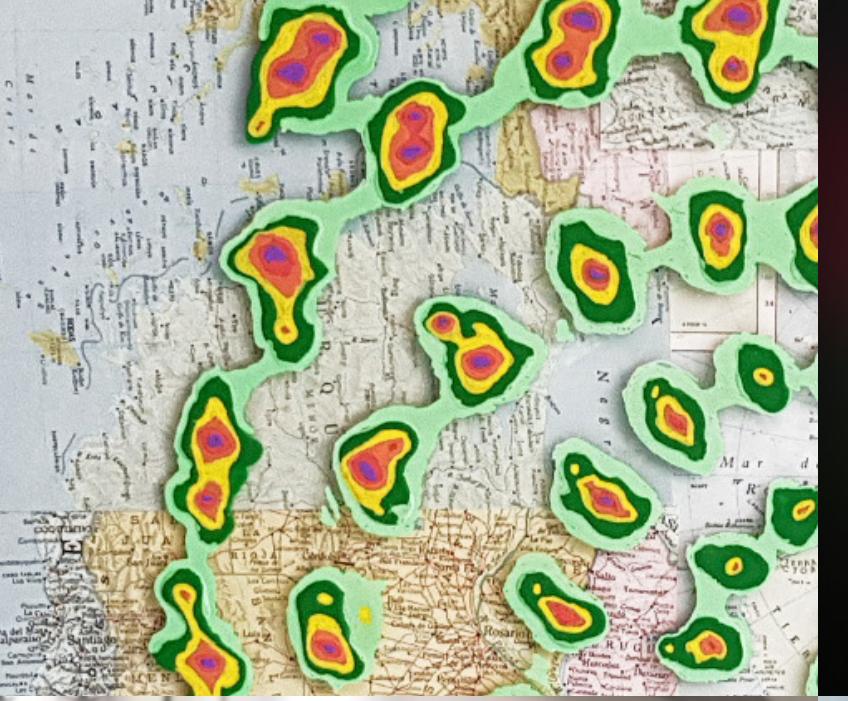
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