



HYPERALLERGIC

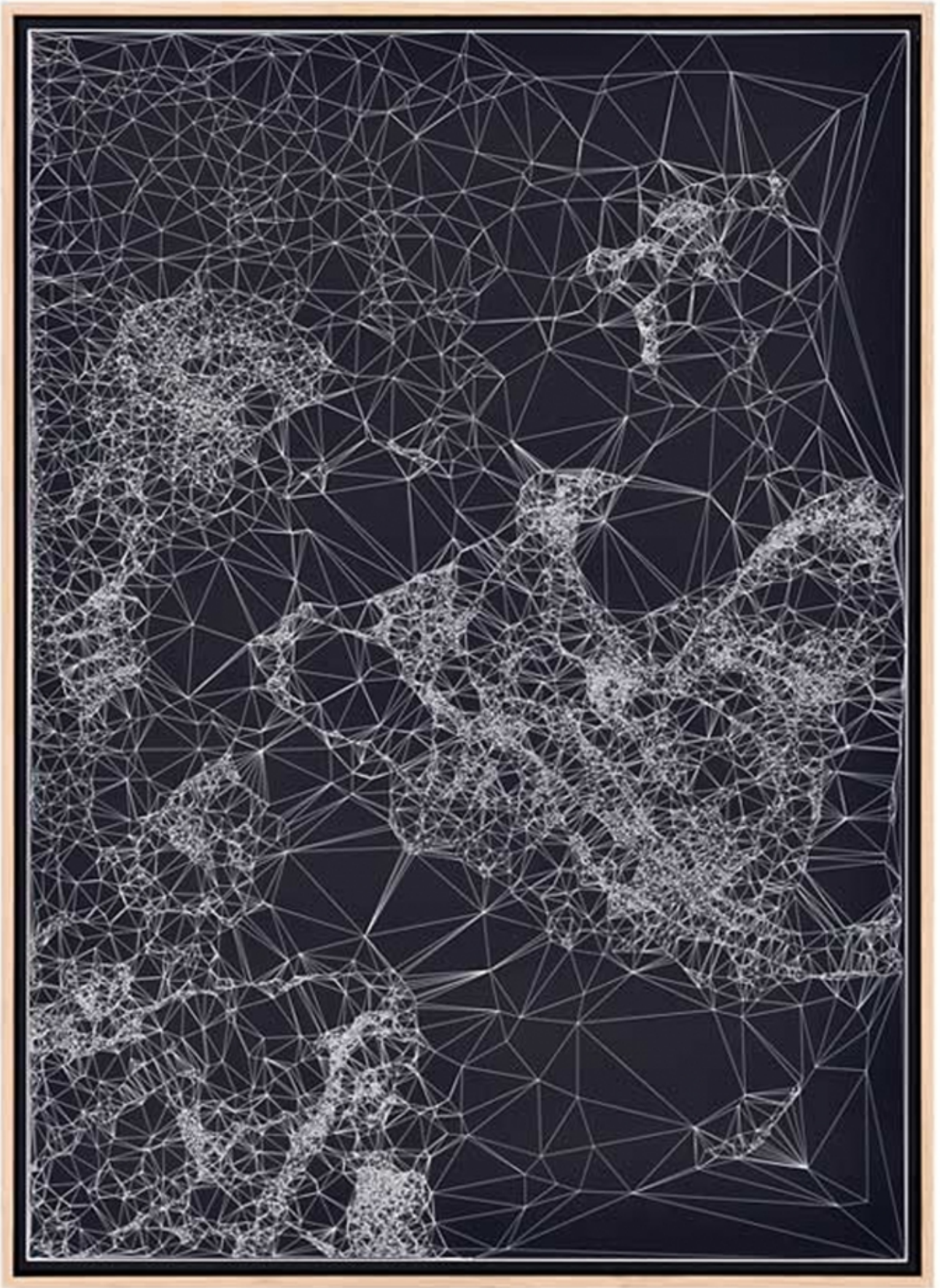
GALLERIES

Post-Internet Artists Crack Open Our Technological Past

A group show at Paris's Galerie Charlot uses bygone tools and techniques to explore modern media.

Joseph Nechvatal | 2 days ago

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Quayola, "Iconographies #44: Judith and Holofernes after Guido Reni" (2015), 58 x 42 cm, engraving on anodized aluminum mounted on wood frame (courtesy Bitforms Gallery, NY)

PARIS — Curator Valentina Peri has made smart, cross-generational, idea-based choices when formulating her excellent group show *Archéonauts*, the best of the Paris season. Citing Michel Foucault’s *Archeology of Knowledge*, the Siegfried Zielinski essay “Deep Time of the Media,” and Jussi Parikka’s book *What is Media Archeology*, Peri has created (or identified) something ambitious: the archetype of a wayfarer physically moving back and forth between west and east while surfing on the internet. This multidimensional traveler, who also crosses between the past and the present, is identified by, and possesses, what Peri calls the archeological gaze.

If you don’t gaze at but glimpse her show’s title, *Archéonauts*, you might first think, as I did, of Greek argonauts — which is not *too* far off. Peri made up the word “archéonauts,” as she explains in her catalogue essay, by combining “archeology” with a word meaning “seafarers” in ancient Greek. The first component (*archaios*) articulates a dominating antiquity, and the second (*nautes*) refers to travel, be it a journey across the universe (astronauts), through the seas (argonauts), or in cyberspace (internauts).



Archéonauts, installation view (courtesy Galerie Charlot)



Archéonautes, installation view (courtesy Galerie Charlot)

All the works in this show exemplify some aspect of media archeology. Insofar as the archeological method implies excavating the past, Peri has chosen art with a media-ghost aspect to it, because she sees the distinction between past and present as being broken down under the pressure of networked technology, exploding what was once the continuity of the contemporary.

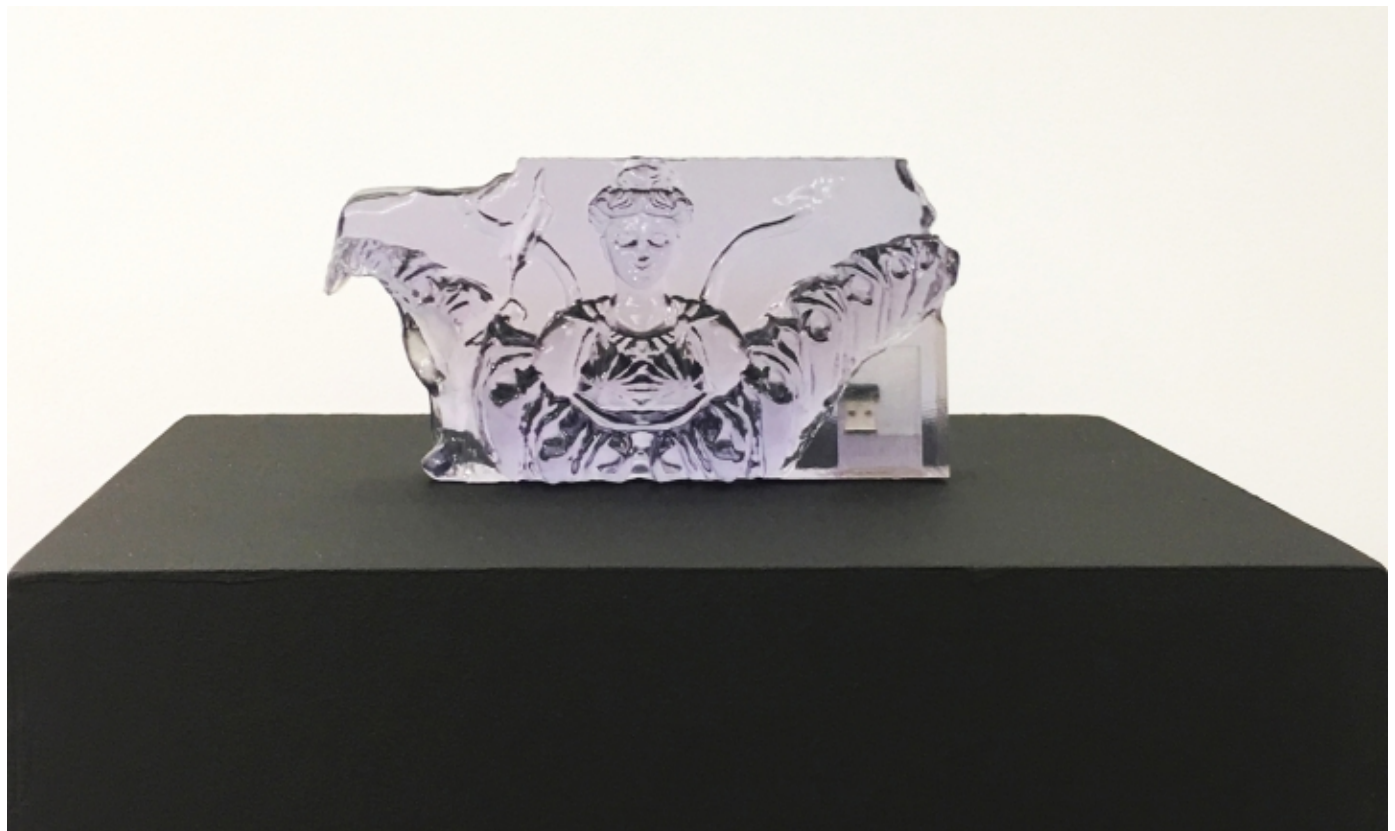
Against this conceptual backdrop crackles London-based Quayola's dark luxuriant fractal-looking images: sumptuous spider-web-y riots that leave you unsure where to look first. Made with custom software written by Nikolai Matviev, they produce a feeling of consummate ease of execution, even while assembling an obscure and complex flurry of ocular connections. The software's computer-vision algorithms remove the iconographic narrative from classical religious/mythological paintings by extracting certain visual characteristics and transforming them into complex computational digital drawings sharply engraved into black anodized aluminum the color of Beluga caviar. Accordingly, Quayola fuses two forms of visual language, baroque representation and minimalist abstraction, confusing their motifs. For example, "Iconographies #44: Judith and Holofernes after Guido Reni" (2015) collapses the space between two extremes: the baroque constructed imagery and flat optic connections. Even as those spaces resist being collapsed, the software overthrows, destroys, and obscures the classic iconographic theme of Judith and Holofernes, where a clever courageous woman frees her people by decapitating the invading general Holofernes (a defender of the godliness of



Quayola, "Iconographies #43: Judith and Holofernes after Guercino" (2015), 58 x 42 cm, engraving on anodized aluminum mounted on wood frame (courtesy Bitforms Gallery, NY)

Nebuchadnezzar II) after having seduced him. Each of the four Quayola works create a slightly different delirium of tensions and equilibriums in this regard, competing with each other in respect to the degree of collapse of the figurative into the abstract, but all delve beneath the iconographic layer to propose proxy versions detached from the narrative.

In the same downstairs gallery, Peri placed works from the Material Speculation: ISIS series (2015–16) by Iranian American media artist/activist Morehshin Allahyari. This is part of her digital 3D-printing project that addresses issues of plastic, oil, techno-capitalism, and jihad. The project reconstructed 12 statues from the Roman city of Hatra and Assyrian artifacts from Nineveh that were destroyed by ISIS in 2015. As I studied the small beautiful resin “Material Speculation: ISIS – Marten” (2015–16), an embedded flash drive and memory card became visible, containing research on the lost original in the form of images, maps, and PDFs. The piece provoked feelings of sweet longing, sadness, and compassion. Also in that room, Eduardo Kac, a pioneer of telecommunications art, brought serendipitous grandeur and theatricality to the little screen with his animated minitel “Reabracadabra” (1985/2015), a short poem loop first shown in 1985 in São Paulo as part of the group exhibition *Arte On-Line* presented by Companhia Telefônica. In it, a large 3D “A” appears from a green pyramid, small white consonants hover around it, then all goes black. Though “Reabracadabra” riffs off the magical incantation Abracadabra, nothing magical happens in the piece, but it’s still delightful and historically significant.



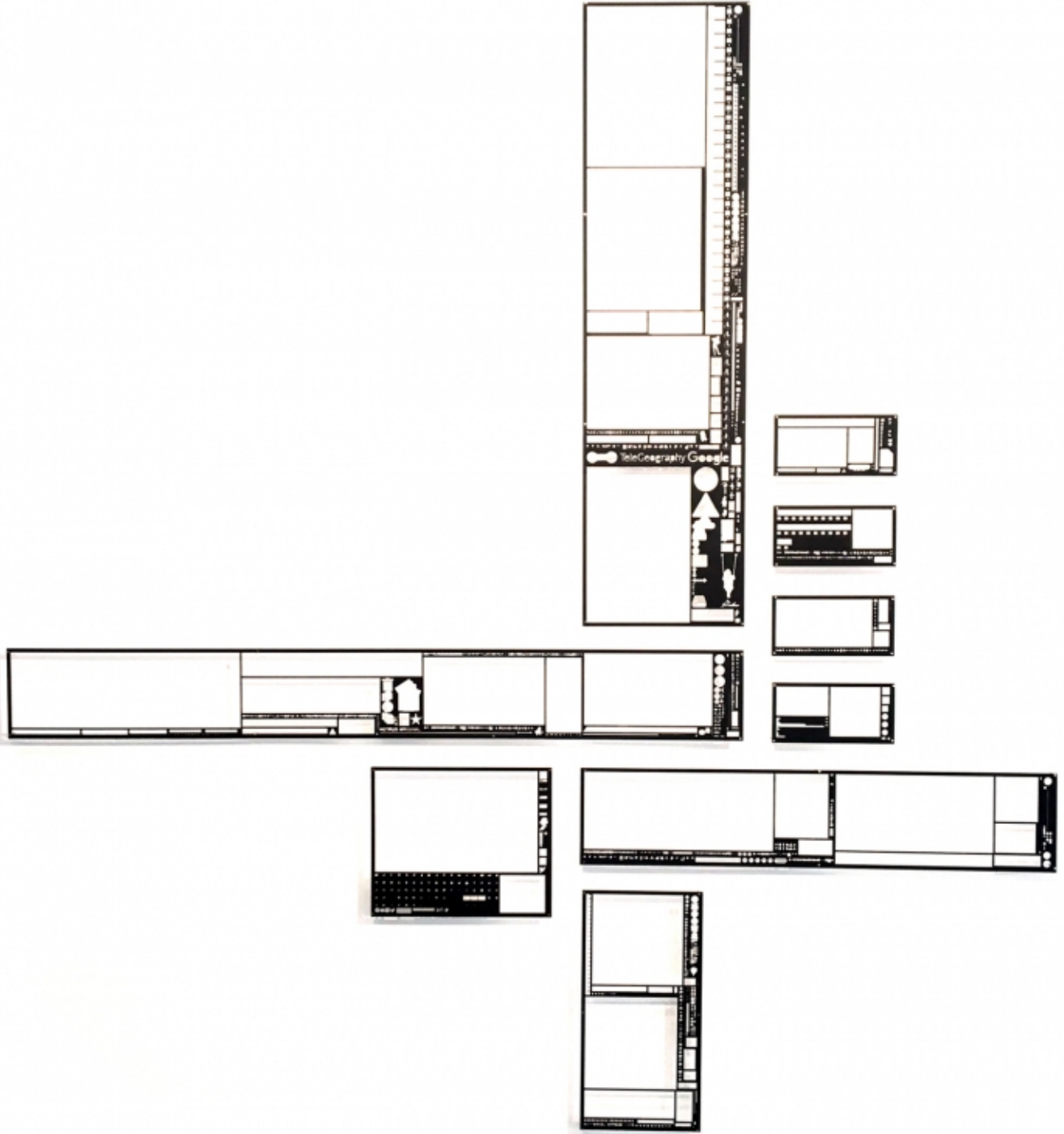
Morehshin Allahyari, “Material Speculation: ISIS – Marten” (2015–16), electronic components, 3D stereolithography print, and resin (courtesy Upfor Gallery, Portland)



Eduardo Kac, “Reabracadabra” (1985/2015), 24.5 x 25 x 24.5 cm, Minitel animation loop (courtesy Galerie Charlot)

Most post-internet art revels in crappiness, but upstairs we encounter that which is elegant. Evan Roth arrived at his austere “Silhouette” (2015) adventitiously, by searching his archived web browser cache history. Using the same 18th-century cut-paper silhouette technique as [Kara Walker](#), Roth transformed nine browser windows into a delicate, complex image array. Stripped of web context and color, “Silhouette” has a stark but expressive pizzazz, and it is as satisfying as a high-quality [El Lissitzky](#) “Proun” (1919–27). The piece struck me as a multilayered meditation on all that has been imperiled, exalted, and made precious.

Making the opposite point in the general spirit of [Alan Belcher](#)’s media-based sculptures is Roth’s rumpled bundle “Forgetting Summer” (2017), which crushes (by industrial compactor) his printed browser history into a spit-wad the size of a newborn hippo. It makes a good punk point of trashing the past while recalling nouveau-réalist sculptor César Baldaccini’s rectangles of compressed consumer objects.



Evan Roth, "Silhouettes Series" (2015), 118 x 136 cm, cut drawing board (courtesy Galerie Charlot)



Evan Roth, “Forgetting Summer” (2017), 82 x 68 x 55 cm, compressed vinyl digital print (image courtesy Priska Pasquer)

Renowned media artists and interactive art pioneers [Laurent Mignonneau](#) and [Christa Sommerer](#)’s crass “Egometer” (2017) mocks themselves (and any artist) through a sophisticated form of kitschification. The piece consists of an antique [ammeter](#) they modified by adding sensors that measure users’ body data. As an ego level is indicated on a scale between 0 and 100, a din is heard, and one flushes with embarrassment.

The other collaborative group, Nicolas Maigret, Clément Renaud, and Maria Roszkowska, is smartly presented. Their “Shanzhai Archeology” (2016–17) is on the floor in black carrying cases, displayed like a fugitive street-merchant’s wares. I looked down on a monitor and three examples from their collection of quaint-looking hybrid mobile phones from China: examples of their *Shanzhai Archeology* project, which investigates the recombinatorial counterfeit consumer goods phenomenon known as [shanzhai](#). Often disparaged as mere substandard forgeries, these objects suggest unusual technological trajectories that (literally) comply with no European standards.



Laurent Mignonneau and Christa Sommerer, "Egometer" (2017), mixed media (courtesy Galerie Charlot)



Nicolas Maigret, Clément Renaud, and Maria Roszkowska, “Shanzhai Archeology” (2016–17), installation variable of collection of hybrid mobile phones, co-production with Cité du design, Saint-Etienne

As amassed by Peri, these distinctive contributors create a non-didactic psychic space that is extensively thought-provoking while still being enjoyable to explore. I drifted in a subjunctive archeological daze through multiple moods of scale and space-timelines, guided by the camaraderie of art rich in topical analogies, diligently cracking open the past to release new futures.

[Archéonauts continues at Galerie Charlot \(47 Rue Charlot, 3rd Arrondissement, Paris\) through June 3.](#)