Antoine Schmitt

Artist - Visual Artist - Paris

We are in Geneva as part of our partnership with the Mapping Festival. After a pedal boat ride on Lake Geneva, we return to the new campus with the modernist architecture of the HEAD, High School of Art and Design Geneva, where the festival has installed its new neighborhoods. We then find Antoine Schmitt, visual artist who presents 2 works at the Mapping Festival this year. Sitting in the middle of a large green lawn, he tells us about his atypical career and shares some of his world in motion.

Previous portrait

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Can you describe your activity, your artistic universe?

I am a visual artist, but I sometimes do sound too; I am a visual artist, but I prefer to say multidisciplinary artist. If I have to specify for the world of art, I am a digital artist, in the sense that I use a lot of programming as a material. This medium, I always appreciate it because it is active: it acts on itself , about the world and its environment; he can also be sensitive to the world, to the human and thus becomes interactive. This active side of programming does not exist elsewhere in the world of art, except perhaps to a certain extent the sculptures with engines.

The programming allows me to approach and to treat the theme that mainly occupies my work, that is to say the process of the moment: why do things move? And how do they move? It is the relationship between the causes of movement and the forms of movement. And that in everything: in galaxies, particles, human beings, societies, animals, the living ...

To summarize, I would say that I work on the issues of what brings to movement, what brings change, and the relationship between these causes and forms.

HEAD

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"Programming allows me to approach and deal with the theme that mainly occupies my work, that is, the process of the moment: why are things moving? And how are they moving?

What is your background ?

I have a rather atypical course, because at the beginning, I am a professional programmer. I design programs, usually computer that will have a task to achieve.

The programming is a real passion that I have contracted since adolescence, I feel totally in tune with.

It was also a real encounter when I discovered this material: the idea of writing something, and that this thing then acts on the world is for me incredible. This report, almost philosophical, almost metaphysical, spoke to me immediately.

So I very naturally studied engineering and then worked in industry in Paris and Silicon Valley for more than a decade. And then at some point, I came to the end of something, I had some frustration and a desire to go further, to have a more personal narrative perhaps ...

I then met 2 artists, and I discovered the world of art and especially the process of artistic work that was quite mysterious for me.

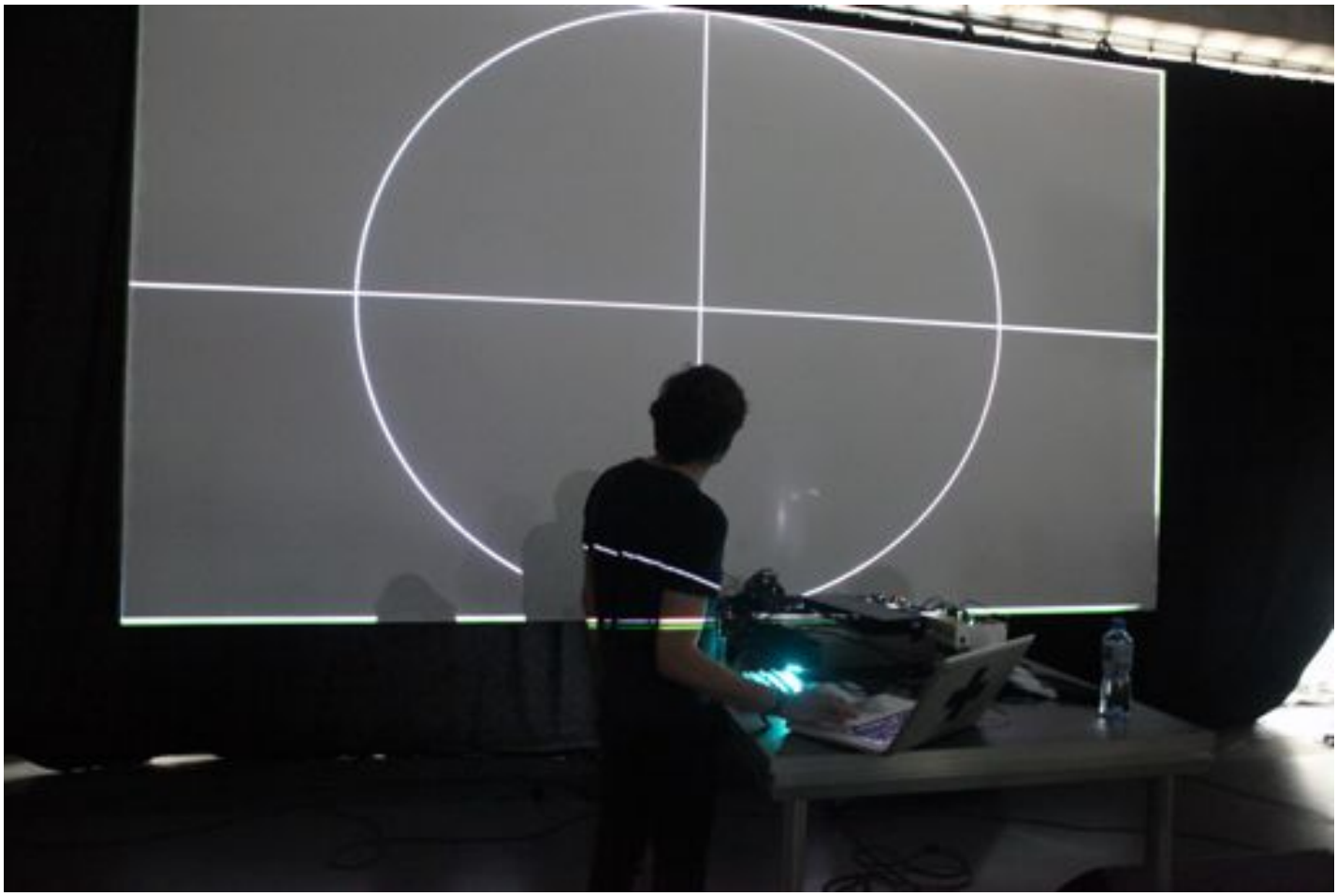
One of the 2 artists was extremely passionate, and the other was very whimsical but with great intellectual rigor that reassured me immediately. I understood that one could be artist and rigorous. This process of creation and these dimensions of passion, freedom and rigor allowed me to realize that I could be an artist, that I could exercise my desires and desires in true freedom. Arriving at the end of something in my engineering life, it was well articulated. I made a big choice of life and decided to become an artist myself.

I resigned from my job as a salaried employee in a great box in Silicon Valley and I went back to France to meet the artistic world.

My life as an artist took a while to work because I was self-taught, I did not have any network, and I used programming as a material that was unusual in that sphere at the time, in 1995.

Some people even say I'm a pioneer (laughs), but I would not go that far. There are still artists who used the program in the 50s and 60s, as Nicolas Schöffer, who was a great architect-artist who programmed dancer robots in 1956, was a true visionary in fact. After there were some experiments in the 60's with Vera Molnar or Manfred Mohr who are now recognized as pioneers in the digital art, but had at the time some difficulties to be understood.

I'm not saying I'm a pioneer, there have been pioneers before. But in the 90s there was a kind of revival of digital art, programmed art, so I am part of this renaissance.



What is your activity? How would you describe it?

I really have trouble with labels. I dig projects that interest me and they take many forms.

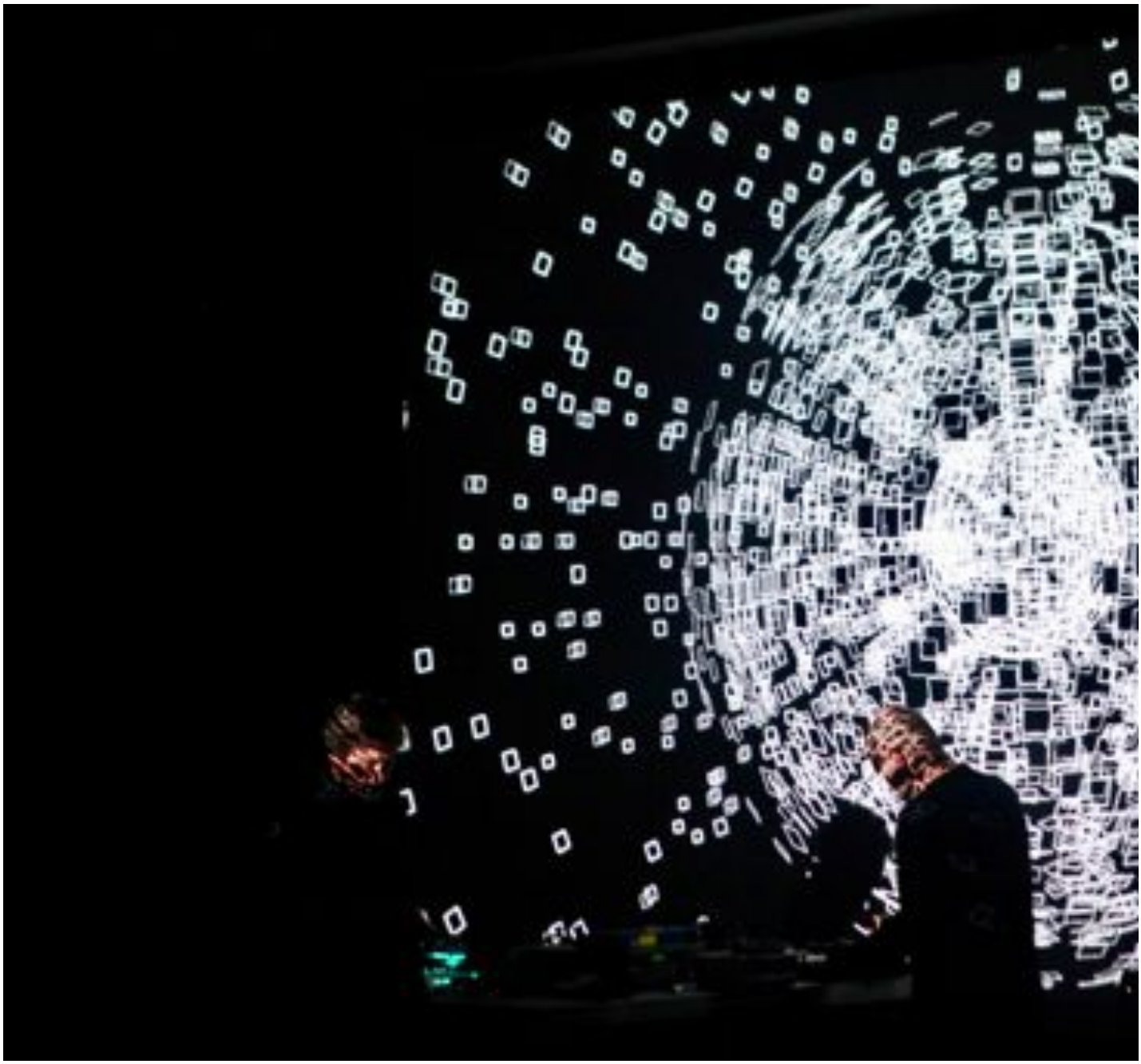
There is a traditional form of plastic art when I work for galleries, including the Charlot gallery in Paris. She presents my work in galleries and fairs of contemporary art, which is really the classic circuit. It's like painting to put it simply, except that it's computers that rotate, and moving images.

I also have a whole production around the interactive installation, but it turns more into art festivals because these installations are larger and require a lot of space.

There is also an urban form, which is related to architecture, like my City Lights Orchestra project presented here tonight at the Mapping Festival. The project consists of an open visual symphony for houses and buildings in the neighborhood of the HEAD At night, each computer connected to the internet illuminates the window of the room where it is and blinks, pulses, beats, turns on and off, each according to its own participation, but in rhythm with all the others), and which is on the scale of a building, a district or even an entire city. This project has been realized twice at the scale of a city, Albi and Reims.

I also receive some orders, for example, I worked on a lasting work for the city of Antwerp in Belgium as well as an ephemeral work for Vinci Immobilier as part of the Festival of Lights in Lyon. I like responding to commands because there are always more constraints imposed, and I feed on them to develop my thinking.

Finally, there is the audio-visual form during which I am live on stage with one or more musicians. This work "live", that is to say in real time, and semi-improvised, I like a lot especially for its relation to the different time precisely and it works well in resonance with the public. I have several projects currently running, especially those developed with Franck Vigroux , an electronic musician. Tomorrow evening, we will also play together Chronostasis , which is a fairly new project dealing with Time (NDLR chronostasis is a cerebral illusion that corresponds to those moments during which time seems to stop.The audiovisual performance Chronostasis reproduces this feeling by dilating to the extreme a catastrophic present moment, by stretching and inversions of time over the entire duration of the performance).



How is the composition of a project with a musician?

In projects that I like, or at least that I want to push, we really conceive the project to two. We choose a subject and we prepare our materials. The musician prepares his sounds and sound materials and for my part, I make an instrument - different for each project - that is to say that I program my own

visual instrument that will serve my live. When I speak of an instrument, it is a software that I parameterize and that I control on stage with a MIDI controller, with many potentiometers. I program a parametric visualized universe, and for each project, I create a different universe and a different way of playing.

The musician and I therefore work on our own and in a second time we go into residence together and we repeat a lot. We advance like that, we build the project together in a dialogue between our mediums. The performance is an immersive audiovisual project where the sound and the image are constantly responding and echoing each other.

«I program a parameterized and parametric visual universe, and for each project, I create a different universe and a different way of playing»

Who is the person who has influenced you the most?

Overall, I would say the great abstract artists. Kasimir Malevitch was my first aesthetic shock with the Black Square on a white background , the meeting with his work subjugated me. And then come literature, there is Philip K. Dick that I read since very young and inspires me a lot.

But it's difficult to answer this question actually ... I have a lot of inspirations that I draw from many areas: in philosophy, literature, music, but I always have a little trouble quoting names when asked.

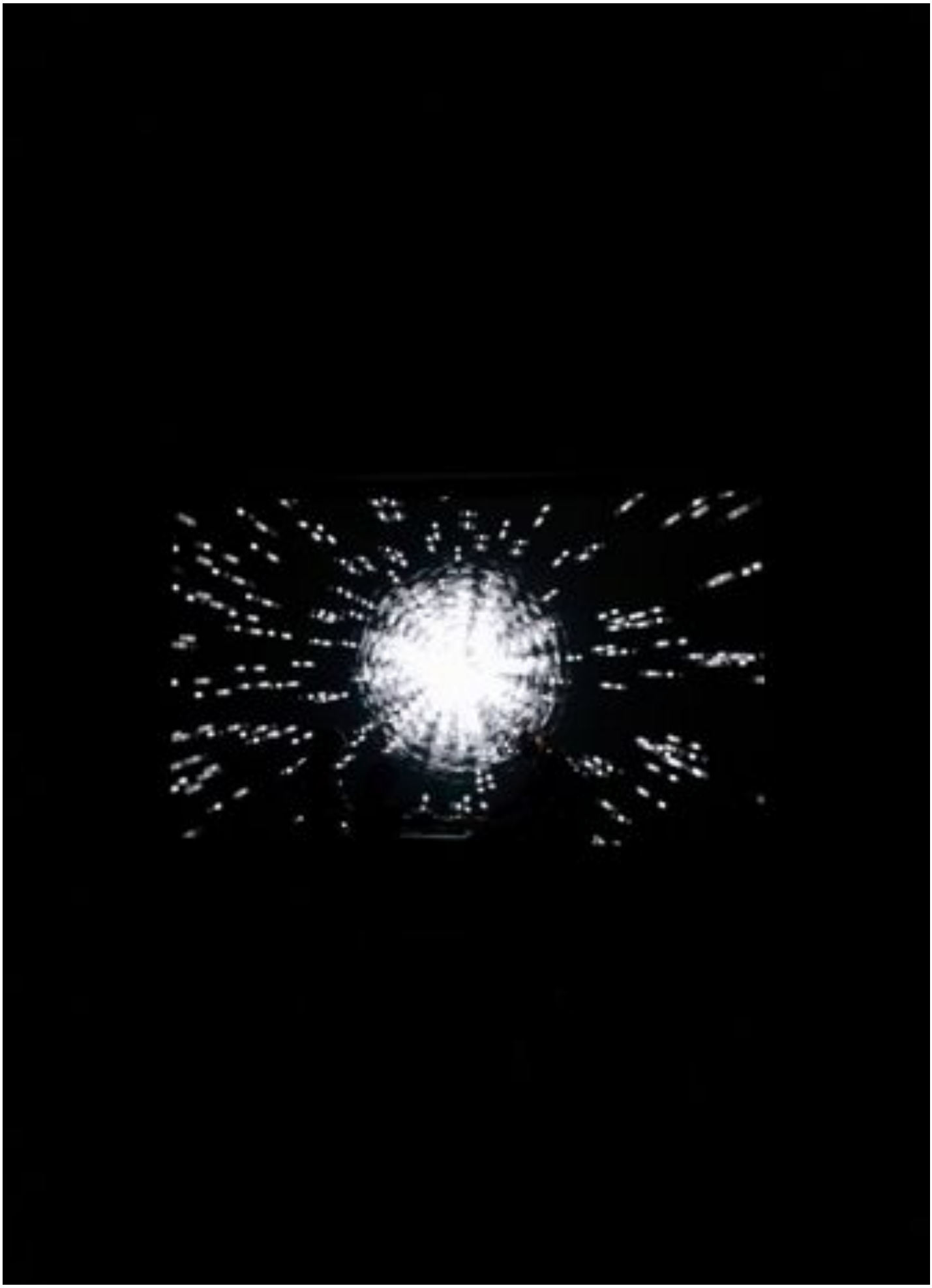
What projects are you working on now?

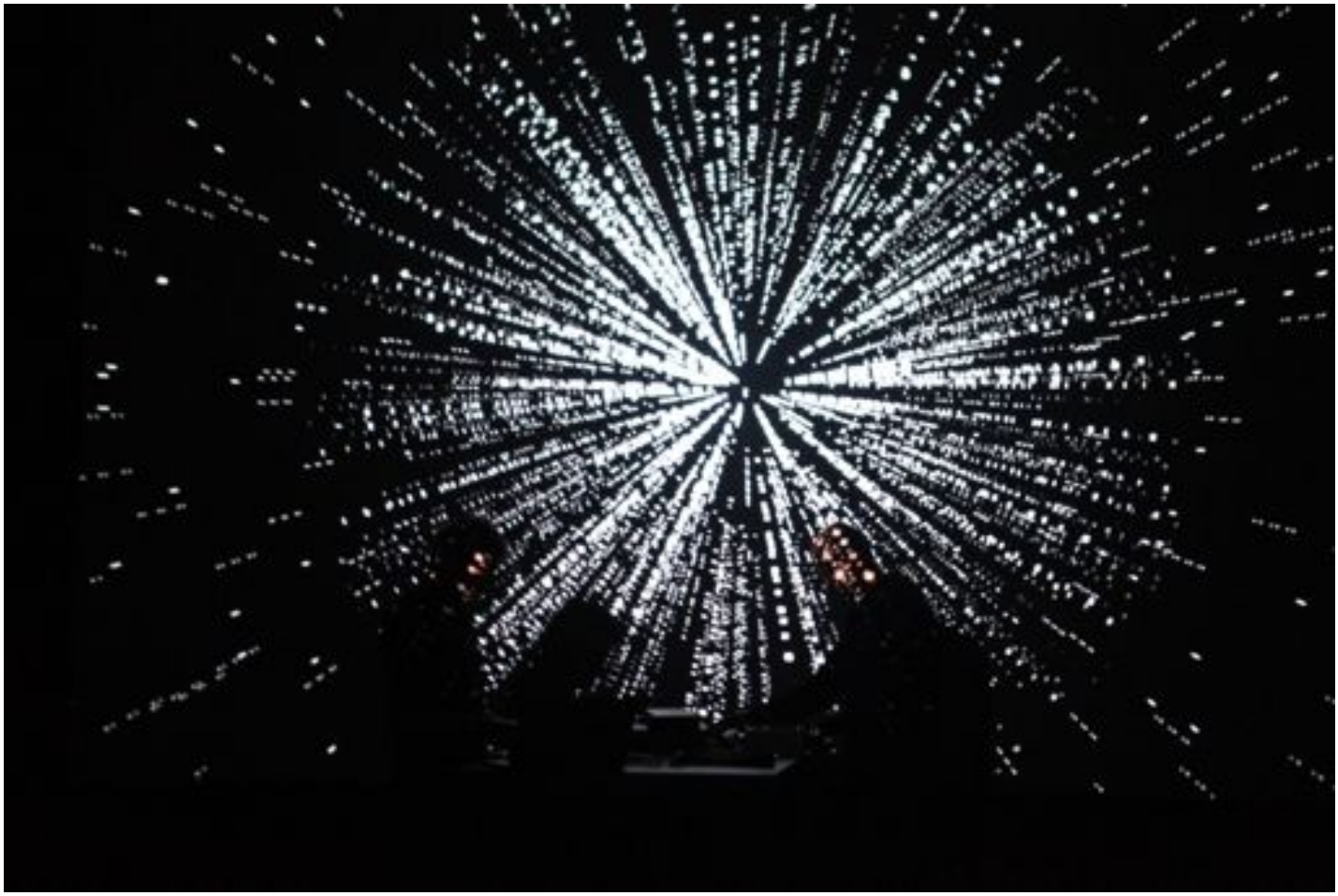
There is a new audiovisual project that I'm working with Franck Vigroux scheduled for 2019. I'm also working on a choreographic show with Jean-Marc Matos and Marianne Masson from K. Danse . We will work with a dancer and a

visual work autonomous and sensitive to the movements of the dancer. This visual work will also reflect somewhere the dancer herself; a kind of dialogue between a human being and a non-human being.

I am also preparing several plastic works that the Charlot gallery will exhibit at the VOLTA fair in Basel next June; the fair VOLTA is a fair fair of the Art Basel which takes place in Miami and Hong-Kong.

But I also have other plastic - and a bit political - projects for the public space. These projects deal with the idea of programming and deprogramming society; there are programs at work in society that must be discovered and deprogrammed.





A tip to give to someone who would like to embark on art?

I like this question, and I've already been asked recently ... The advice would be fair to go, do not hesitate. If the desire is there, you have to go for it.

Do you have another job that you would have liked to do?

I have already done other trades, and I went to the end. Today, I could not do anything else. My job, my activity, is a way of being in the world, everything is connected to it - except the hyper personal like the children and the love.I took some time to find what I wanted to do, and now I would not want to change it.

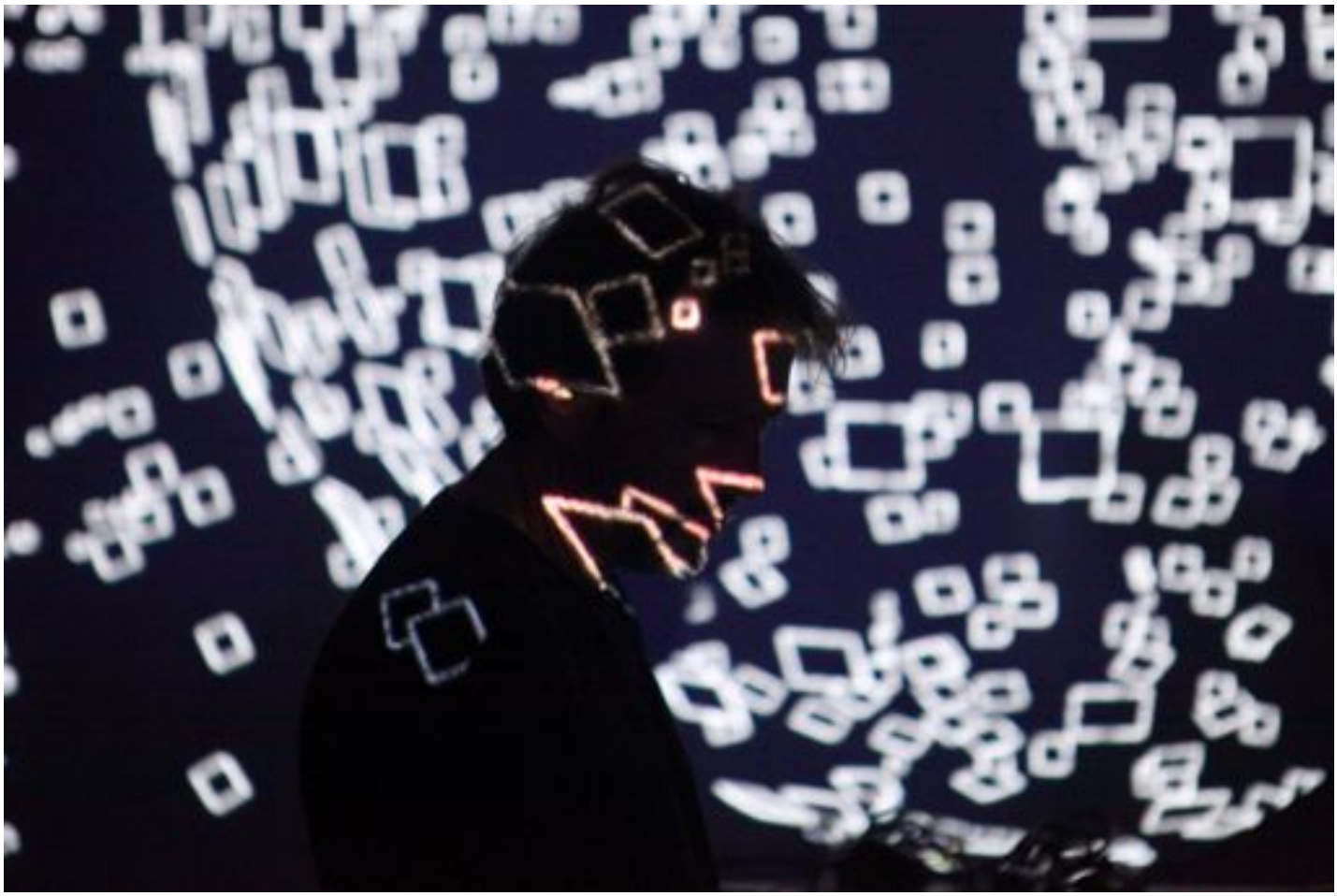
"My job, my activity, is a way of being in the world"

Is there a place you like to go?

I like to go back to my family home in the Vosges. It is a region that I like a lot and in which I refocus.

A song you're listening to right now?

This is not an easy question because in recent months, I use Soundcloud including its radio station. I leave a piece that I like, and I let the flow flow; I am fed by all sorts of pieces that the system gives me. In fact, I do not listen to anything fixed right now, just music streams but the piece that is often the starting point of these streams is called The Blue House Saschian group.



Thanks to the Mapping Festival <3

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interview and texts **Sophie Farnier**
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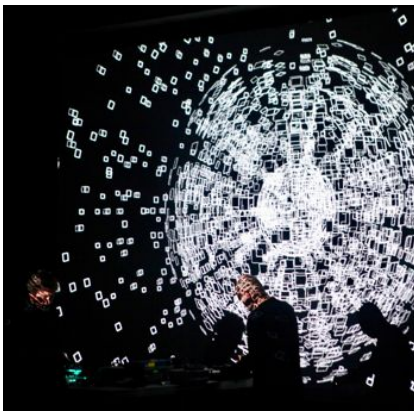

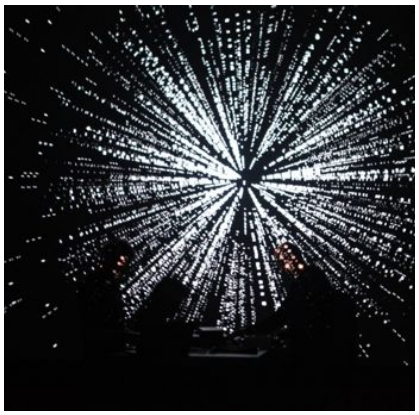

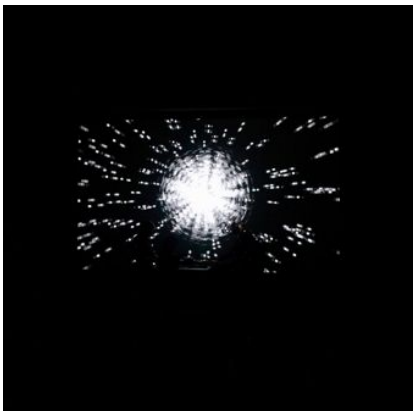

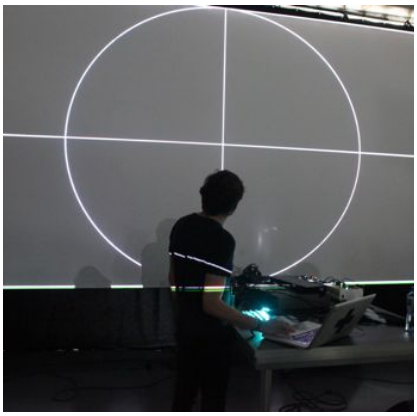

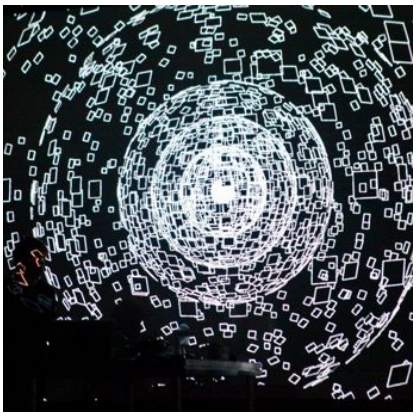

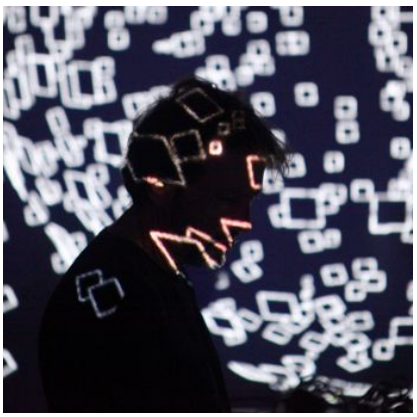

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