AGNIESZKA KURANT'S WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION IN RELATION TO MARCEL BROODTHAERS

Marcel Broodthaers investigated the political economy of the 19th and 20th century: the systems of power and control, the value systems that govern society, and the fictions that underpin economy and politics. I investigate the political economy of digital capitalism, the war machine, and the value systems of the 21st century in which power, money and labour have become ostensibly immaterial. Fictions and phantoms continue to underpin economy, politics and wars, the crowds became the most important assets, the data is the new oil, and AI automates human decision-making — from chess to factory work, from many aspects of artistic creativity to surveillance, control and autonomous weapons. This automation risks an atrophy of reasoning and ethical judgment, and it obscures moral responsibility.

These systems of value and control deserve reconsideration at a moment when aesthetics and theory play a growing role in military operations. In 2002, Israeli army commanders cited Deleuze and Guattari as they moved through the Palestinian city of Nablus by cutting holes through the walls of homes. The Panama Papers exposed hundreds of thousands of shell companies in offshore jurisdictions, fictional entities not unlike Broodthaers' fictional museum, created to conceal economic activity. In the freeports of Geneva and Luxembourg, artworks sit in crates that are never opened, traded as pure financial assets and used to hide and launder wealth. I think Broodthaers would have been fascinated by these processes; by the fact that most of the world's money exists only as digital entries on screens, by crypto-currencies, by AI agents now used to carry out largely autonomous cyberattacks on government agencies, by AI systems that recommend where bombs should fall on the basis of abstract, uncertain and incomplete information, and by what Harun Farocki called operational images — images made by machines for other machines, never meant to be seen by humans.

The six works selected extend Marcel Broodthaers' examination of fictions, value systems and warfare into the age of artificial intelligence, automation, and autonomous weapons.

Maps of Phantom Islands (2011) chart the fictions on which imperial conquests were built. The work features phantom islands that appeared on real maps from the 15th century to the 1940s, born of mirages, navigational errors or the inventions of colonial explorers. Though they never existed, these territories functioned as virtual capital: they financed expeditions, prompted territorial claims, shaped political decisions and led to real economic transactions and wars.

Unmanned (2026) is a levitating sculpture of an autonomous missile whose unknown trajectory and target are determined by artificial intelligence. The work reflects on how 21st-century warfare is being handed over to machines.

Suspended in midair, the sculptures in the series ***Unthoughtforms*** (2026) draw on the experiments of the cybernetician Gordon Pask, who developed chemical computers for the British military to solve problems beyond the reach of human thought. Kurant extends Pask's experiments, using AI to scan the news and social media for current "unsolvable" problems and converting the data into electric currents and sound waves that control the growth of tree- and coral-shaped copper crystals, which are then plated in nickel and chrome.

The Post-Fordite (2019 – ongoing) sculptures are made in part from Fordite, a quasi-geological formation consisting of thousands of layers of car paint that accumulated and fossilized over decades on automotive production lines. Sourced by former workers from factories shut down by automation and outsourcing, Fordite is cut, polished and sold as a gemstone, its value rising as the supply runs out. Industrial waste turned precious stone, each piece encapsulates a century of human labor and shifting consumer tastes.

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Liquid Modernity (2021) follows metal as it moves between conquest, war and culture. The bronze of the Vendôme Column in Paris came from cannons captured at Austerlitz. More than a century later, between 1941 and 1944, up to 1,750 bronze statues in occupied France were melted down for munitions. Drawing on this back-and-forth traffic, I fused miniature replicas of contested and toppled monuments into a single mass: Leopold II of Belgium, whose exploitation of the Congo underwrote Belgian imperial wealth; Robert E. Lee; Joseph Stalin; and Michael Jackson. They are joined by a miniature of Rodin's *The Thinker*, a cast of which was melted down by thieves for its scrap value.

Speculations (2016) presents a chessboard whose pieces are miniature shipping crates said to contain invisible artworks. The series was inspired by the use of crated artworks in freeports as mere pawns or currencies: stores of value exchanged in transactions between wealthy individuals and drug cartels. Here, art becomes a purely speculative asset. The work echoes the way in which Broodthaers opened his fictional museum, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXe siècle* (1968), in his Brussels apartment with empty art-transport crates. In Kurant's work, the game set out on the chess board of this unique work comes from the 2017 match between AlphaZero and Stockfish staged by Google DeepMind in London. Given only the rules, DeepMind's AlphaZero algorithm taught itself chess by playing 44 million games against itself; after about four hours of training, it surpassed Stockfish, then the strongest chess engine. Chess, a war game, was the first realm in which artificial intelligence surpassed humans at strategic decision-making.

Agnieszka Kurant is a conceptual artist investigating collective and nonhuman intelligences, the future of labor and creativity, and the exploitations within digital capitalism. She is the recipient of the 2020 LACMA A+T Award and the 2019 Frontier Art Prize.

Her solo exhibitions include Marian Goodman Gallery, New York (2025 and 2026), MUDAM, Luxembourg (2024); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2021-23); Sculpture Center, New York (2013); and Kunstverein Hannover (2023). In 2015 she realized a commission for the façade of the Guggenheim Museum, and in 2022 a permanent commission for the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge. Her work was also exhibited at the Gwangju Biennale (2024), Sydney Biennial (2024); Istanbul Biennial (2019); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2021), Centre Pompidou (2024), Palais de Tokyo (2014), Jeu de Paume (2025), Pinault Collection – Bourse de Commerce, Paris (2024); MCA, Sydney (2025), Gropius Bau (2023); Louisiana Museum, Denmark (2023); SFMOMA (2020); Kunsthalle Wien (2020), Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2020), Witte de With, Rotterdam (2011), Moderna Museet (2014); the Kitchen (2016), Gamec, Bergamo (2023), ZKM Karlsruhe (2022), Guggenheim Bilbao (2017), Performa Biennial, New York (2009 and 2013), and Frieze Projects, London (2008). Her monograph *Collective Intelligence*, co-edited by Stefanie Hessler and Jenny Jaskey, was published in 2026 by Sternberg Press.

Kurant's solo survey exhibition will open at Museum Tinguely in Basel in June 2027.

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