

CHARLOTTE JOHANNESSEN



**TAKE ME
TO ANOTHER
WORLD**

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The self-taught Swedish artist Charlotte Johannesson is a pioneer in the use of digital graphics, which she employs in her production along with the traditional loom. In addition to her uncommon status as a woman artist who works with machines, Johannesson spent most of her career on the margins of conventional artistic circuits, forming an active part of the Swedish countercultural scene in the 1960s and 1970s.

In *Take Me to Another World*, her first monographic show in this country, the Museo Reina Sofía offers us an opportunity to discover this artist's different periods and facets, inviting us at the same time to revisit the recent history of the visual arts from a feminist perspective.

While it is true that recent years have seen a considerable improvement in the recognition and integration of women in the cultural sector, it is also the case that women are still underrepresented in public institutions. The fight against the gender gap in culture therefore remains a priority for this Ministry.

I congratulate the Museo Reina Sofía on the commitment it has assumed in recent years with the organisation of exhibitions like this one, which try to challenge and expand the canonical narratives of art history. I should also like to express my special gratitude to the curators of the exhibition, Lars Bang Larsen and Mats Stjernstedt, for the rigour and passion they have shown in their work.

JOSÉ MANUEL RODRÍGUEZ URIBES

Minister of Culture and Sport

A key figure of Swedish counterculture, Charlotte Johannesson has worked above all with two tools, the craft technology of the loom and the digital technology of computer programming, to explore and expose the conceptual and methodological connections between the two. She has moreover done so by opting for self-management and the creation of hybrid spaces for artistic intervention while assuming a discourse that is unequivocally critical yet removed from the explicit positions of militant political orthodoxy. The sum of all these factors, traversed and bolstered by the fact she is a self-taught woman artist, has helped to delay institutional recognition for her art until well into the twenty-first century.

To understand the artistically and politically radical nature of her work, a useful notion is that of 'anti-disciplinary protest', a term coined by Julie Stephens on the basis of Michel Foucault's theorising on contemporary power. Lars Bang Larsen, the co-curator of this exhibition together with Mats Stjernstedt, explains that this notion integrates the anti-authoritarian and the interdisciplinary, both key concepts for Johannesson, who moves as an artist with astonishing fluidity between the material and the virtual. She has kept up a very close relationship with the counterculture, from the hippie movement to the explosion of punk, though without ever openly endorsing their discourses and iconographic imaginaries. To an extent, she has always understood her condition as a woman artist as a political position.

Charlotte Johannesson studied at Hemslöjden, a conventional school for applied textiles crafts in her native city of Malmö. It was during this formative phase that she started to work with a simplified prototype of the so-called Jacquard loom, which uses punched cards to weave patterns and thus constitutes an early conceptual model for the computer. Thanks to a teacher at her textile school, she became familiar with the figure of Hannah Ryggen, a Swedish-Norwegian weaver of the 1930s and 1940s whose figurative tapestries had a clear anti-fascist political content. Ryggen had a great influence on Johannesson, leading in a certain way to her realisation that she could work with motifs whose function need not be merely decorative.

After finishing her studies in 1966, Johannesson opened a weaving studio in Malmö that she called Atelier Cannabis, an intentionally provocative allusion to the hemp fibres she used to make her own textile works. That same year, she transferred the studio to her husband, Sture Johannesson, who transformed it into a kind of alternative art gallery that became a meeting point for the city's countercultural scene. It was a place where you could go to have a drink and at the same time see an exhibition or buy magazines imported from London

or San Francisco. It is worth pointing out here that Charlotte and Sture Johannesson's determined bid for self-management, of which the Galleri Cannabis was a paradigmatic example until its closure in 1969, had to do above all with her fluid and anti-elitist concept of artistic practice.

In Charlotte Johannesson's case, the fundamental vehicle for that artistic practice during those years was the production of textile works with references to the social and political events and conflicts of the time. At first by incorporating slogans and phrases in her woven images, as in *Terror* (1970) and *Chile eko i skallen* [Chile Echo in the Skull] (1973), and later also iconographic elements linked to pop and media culture, such as the controversial *Frei die RAF* [Free the RAF] (1976), with its 'pixelated wool' image of Snoopy machine-gunning a tank, this artist performed an operation of deconstruction and critical reappropriation of an artisanal technique associated with the space of domesticity, transforming it into a sort of poetic agitprop tool.

Charlotte Johannesson's artistic career reached a new turning point at the end of the 1970s, when the computer started to replace the loom as her principal working instrument. The binary character of the image resulting from both technologies made her experience this transition as a natural process of evolution. In a 2012 interview with Rhea Dall, included in this catalogue, she said she had recognised from the very start that 'there was a great synchronicity between the two machines.'

After a trip in 1981 to California, where she came into contact with the founders of the Apple Computer Company and the emerging techno-digital revolution of the West Coast of the United States which were genealogically linked to the American counterculture of the two previous decades, she and Sture Johannesson created The Digital Theatre (Digitalteatern) in Malmö, the first digital arts laboratory in Scandinavia. The lab functioned as a self-managed and extra-institutional platform for both artistic projects and purely professional research.

At the Digital Theatre, which built up a network of nine computers and was active until 1985, there was a clear division of labour. Sture handled the technical side while Charlotte took charge of the graphic production, a task for which she had to teach herself computer programming. Through the same kind of arduous work as she had brought to her loom, this learning process allowed her to generate her pioneering digital graphics, often endowed with a strangely ethereal and almost abstract quality. The artist included a broad repertoire of thematic and iconographic motifs, from portraits of popular personalities of the time, like her *Faces of the 1980s* series, to figures with mythological reminiscences

or metaphorical anticipatory exercises on the theme of our dependence on the new communication technologies.

In *Charlotte Johannesson: Take Me to Another World*, a broad selection of these motifs is presented on two supports – printed paper and projections – showing the minute process of investigation of colour and line that this artist carries out in her computerised production. Also on display are textile works from her first phase, including both originals and recent reproductions of tapestries that have disappeared, five of them made expressly for this show. There are also about twenty new textile pieces created by the artist with Louise Sidenius on a state-of-the-art digital loom at a studio in Copenhagen, their starting point being some of the designs Charlotte Johannesson produced during the Digital Theatre period. These 'woven digital graphics', as Johannesson calls them, reflect and help to expand the relationship of circular continuity between her textile and digital productions, showing how the experimental drive in her work is inseparable from the search for an internal coherence of her own.

MANUEL BORJA-VILLEL

Director of Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

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no choice
amongst
stinking fish
dream-walking

Charlotte Johannesson at her studio-cum-exhibition
space Studio 11, Malmö, mid-1970s.
Photo: Per Roland Nilsson

**FACES OF DISSENT:
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LARS BANG LARSEN

Charlotte Johannesson's practice from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s is precocious for the joint conceptualisation of weaving and coding that it established between craft and technology – or, better put, between craft technology and digital technology. However, it is also remarkable for its particular social situation, namely the self-organised spaces and extra-institutional structures that sustained it, and the dialogues with the sub- and counter-cultures that informed it.

Neither of Charlotte's chosen media – loom and computer – were integrated into fine-art discourses at the time. It is only now, well into the twenty-first century, that her work is gaining an institutional reception, which suggests a general lag in the theorisation of these media in relation to neo-avant-garde art: considering the cultural codification of the loom as a woman's tool, this also reflects a gender bias of art-historical narratives of the period. So apart from the fact that Charlotte was a self-taught artist with a background in traditional textile craft, and that her work was unconventionally political, her artistic attitude was complicated to boot, because she defied the 'natural' in a double sense: she defied the norm as a woman artist, and as a woman artist who worked with machines.

The institutional near-forgetting of Charlotte's work also merits discussion from the perspective of her sense of productive autonomy. This was a

structural concern as well as one of artistic media and content. She created her work at a distance from art-institutional discourses, spaces and markets, and established it instead in proximity to social and historical events: in this way it doesn't quarrel with the rarefied tradition of painting, and it is unperturbed by the question of high and low, just as it takes for granted a general crisis of modern art and that an isolation of autonomous high culture is obsolescent. For Charlotte, these were academic problems – even if her work certainly has critical implications for all of these issues. Instead she explored possibilities for social and cultural change in the field of visual culture, through 1960s counterculture, 1970s militancy, the punk movement and the incipient digital scene. These explorations were carried out in spaces for production that she organised as rooms of her own, or together with her partner Sture Johannesson (1935–2018), another self-taught artist. Seeing that Charlotte and Sture worked individually, the spaces that they co-organised were not collaborative structures, but made for mutual support systems and fields of shared creative tension that allowed them to do their own thing.¹

MEDIA FREAKS

'They want to "save" our world', roars a headline in a 1967 issue of the Swedish *Allers Familie-Journal*, a Scandinavia-wide conservative monthly magazine aimed at a female readership with feel-good items such as cooking recipes and easily read novellas. This article, however, concerns the decadence of the youth: 'Cannabis ... sweeps like a smoke screen across the land right now. A psychic infection of epidemic character that is very dangerous. And seductive. For the cannabis smoker preaches world salvation and lives in a world of illusions.'² At the centre of the spread, flanked by statements from concerned representatives of official patriarchy, is a colour photo of Charlotte and Sture: Charlotte, sporting a two-piece suit and a fashionably short haircut above large earrings, holds a match to the hash pipe of Sture, who sits cross-legged in a bohemian outfit of corduroy and a gaudy shirt, eyes closed behind heavy-rimmed glasses and blonde curls bobbing to the side. They both look hip, sexy and carefree.

1 For a discussion of the work of Sture Johannesson, see my monograph *Sture Johannesson* (Helsinki: NIFCA, Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art; New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002).

2 'De vill "frälsa" vår värld', *Allers Familie-Journal*, no. 11, 19 March 1967 (my translation).

The *Allers* article is hilarious in its moral alarm – which is no coincidence. It is an example of countercultural ‘media freaking’: a provocative, unexpected happening staged at public sites and in media ordinarily used for the dissemination of dominant norms and reality principles. Thus by letting themselves be portrayed as documented members of the insidious ‘cannabis cult’, Charlotte and Sture flipped collective perception. They could enjoy shocking the Swedish petite bourgeoisie in four colours, but they also managed to inveigle a mainstream medium of straight society to unwittingly generate a piece of advertising for the hip underground.

For Charlotte and Sture art was an attitude and a lifestyle that played out in a collective ambience through embodied dissent. It was a political struggle by different means than the conventional ones, playing on the capacity of media to initiate transformations of behaviour and social space – whether these media were narcotic, printed or electronic. In this way, crises of representation could be performed, and other images, other ways of being, could be desired and gestured forth. Charlotte focused the counterculture’s media-sensitive subjectivisation into her textile works. The loom is perfect for extending the body through its slow tactility, with every string sliding through the fingers like the bead in a rosary – or, conversely, it can be seen as an apparatus that extends into the nervous system through the perfectly mechanical procedure it makes the weaver perform.

Her early textile works from the late 1960s referenced historical and non-Western patterns and motifs: the loom as an anthropological or transcultural transport or escape vehicle. With concrete poetry’s sensibility for the materiality of language, she began to integrate slogans and sentences in her woven images. This was as much a way of gaining a voice as a woman artist as it was about giving a voice to a ‘mute’ medium that is mythically associated with female isolation.

As a student at Malmö’s conventional school for applied textile crafts Hemslöjden, Charlotte ‘got a kick’ when a teacher introduced her to Swedish-Norwegian artist Hannah Ryggen. Ryggen’s figurative work is a kind of history painting transposed to tapestry, and in her work from the 1930s and 1940s there is an anti-fascist tenor that is both heroically modernist and, at the same time, oriented towards folk art. Beyond an initial artistic impulse and a feminist affirmation, however, Charlotte seems to have taken little from Ryggen. Whereas Ryggen was a craft puritan who bred her own sheep and dyed her own wool, for instance, Charlotte would weave with whatever was at hand – old bed linen, leftovers of wool. Her works attacked the flaccid institutions of art and democracy without

any pathos or sincerity. What is more, it scrambled immediate decoding with its counterintuitive strategies: *subversive weaving* with fast and hard messages, turning the soft, warm domesticity of female craft inside out to public space – what delicious paradoxes! Her textiles weren't left-orthodox political art, then, but a double-sided deconstruction of existing political symbols and the loom's mythical and folk-humanistic connotations. With this, and through references to both contemporary events and struggles and personal doubts and convictions, Charlotte imbued the loom with a surprising, sceptical force.

The Johannessons' revaluation of the concept, practice and contexts of art didn't have the art institution as its condition of possibility. Just as they were not academically certified artists, nor did they have gallery representation – Charlotte's works would initially be sold at markets, later in her career from the odd gallery show – and their careers as exhibiting artists took place at unorthodox venues along with art institutions. It wasn't the case that they were anti-institutional, exactly, but their anarchistic and anti-elitist intuitions pushed them in the direction of a subcultural frame of reference for their work. Self-organisation of their practice, then, became a necessity for the fluid conception of artistic practice.

However, to begin with, self-organisation was gendered. Charlotte agreed to move her loom out of her workshop in central Malmö and cede the space to Sture's project of starting a gallery for underground art, Galleri Cannabis. This was a take-over in more than one sense, given that Charlotte had registered her workshop under the name Atelier Cannabis. With Sture at the helm, Galleri Cannabis became a meeting point for his extended social circle; a place to get high and hang out, buy one of Sture's posters or shop for countercultural magazines from London and San Francisco. A little later, in the early 1970s, the couple abandoned the city and retreated to the countryside village of Rickarum. Here an alternative community that experimented with self-sustainability and artisanal creativity had established itself around a defunct watermill, which became the communal setting for Charlotte's art production for a couple of years.

The incident with Charlotte's displacement from Atelier Cannabis reproduced a patriarchal logic within the counterculture, and introduced a distance between her and the local underground scene. This distance was symptomatic of her relationship to subcultures, and points to another paradox of her production: she never straightforwardly represented either hippiedom or punk in her work. She may have been a fellow traveller, an appropriator, even a fan, but she remained unaffiliated. In this way her dialogue with subcultural media attitudes

and styles of image-making enabled her to work through technological, social and ideological pre-suppositions for her production in a becoming of its own.

RETURN OF THE POLITICAL PROJECT

Compared to the 1960s counterculture, with its erotic mythologies and universal identifications, the urban guerrillas of the 1970s seem abjectly alien today. The European radical-left terrorism of the time belongs to another world, an isolated moral universe.

In 1976, the Johannessons opened an exhibition at Stockholm's Kulturhuset titled *Om Tyskland – i tiden* [About Germany – in Time] in homage to Ulrike Meinhof of the West German terrorist group Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF). This was a year after RAF members had carried out the West German Embassy siege in Stockholm, during which three people were killed; a few months before the exhibition opened, Meinhof had died in prison. Insisting on a critical dialogue with terrorism and its context of state violence, repressive legislation and unresolved National Socialist history in West German institutions, Charlotte and Sture singled out Meinhof among the RAF members. She was not a poser and a lout like Andreas Baader, but an intellectual and a woman who had picked up the gun. They had no doubt that the actions of the RAF – bombings, kidnappings, executions – were indefensible: 'We disagree fundamentally with the political views of the RAF and their acts. But at the same time we believe that it only serves the attempt on the part of bourgeois forces to draw a picture of terrorism as identical with the left wing if what RAF stands for is suppressed.'³

Installation views of *Om Tyskland – i tiden* show a densely hung show characterised by the political exhibition's emphasis on content, including text posters, photomontages, black-and-white photographs and graphic art. Some materials had been collected by Charlotte and Sture on trips to West Berlin; an interview with imprisoned RAF member Monika Berberich, recorded at Berlin's Moabit prison, played at the exhibition too. In this, Berberich stresses RAF's origin in the anti-Vietnam War activism of the 1960s counterculture. At the centre of the display, a vitrine contained a large portrait photo of Ulrike Meinhof and her funeral wreath that

3 This quote prefaces Sture Johannesson's interview with Monika Berberich, 'Vi er i krig med staten', *Politisk Revy*, no. 322, December 1977 (my translation).

Sture had collected from a rubbish tip at the Berlin cemetery where she was interred. The exhibition's critical discussion of 'the West German state of affairs' was aimed at parliamentary repression of oppositional tendencies, the withdrawal of civil rights to protect democracy, and the so-called *Berufsverbot* paragraph that the West German government had introduced in response to the terrorism of the RAF: this was the law of professional disqualification that critics claimed contradicted the freedom of occupational choice guaranteed by German basic law. This discussion soon proved relevant also in Sweden, as the Stockholm City Cultural Council intervened and closed down the Johannessons' exhibition two days after its opening.⁴

The Meinhof project demanded of Charlotte and Sture that they became curators and artistic researchers. Even in this layered and extremely politicised context, Charlotte created complex work, with two weavings that produced another space for political critique. One weaving, *Achtung – Actions Speak Louder than Words* (1976), shows a lone figure that tries to rein in a lion, while the other, *Frei die RAF* (1976), depicts Snoopy from *Peanuts* playing at being a First World War fighter pilot and shooting a machine gun at a diminutive tank in the lower right corner. The roof of his kennel is in the colours of the German flag and bears the German title of the work: 'Free the RAF'. There is a tension – to say the least – between, on the one hand, the infantile image of a woollen and 'pixelated' Snoopy who comes out in favour of the RAF, and, on the other, the conventional political aesthetics of the Meinhof exhibition and its hagiographic iconography of the 'Meinhof shrine'. Why Snoopy? Why this sudden playfulness? Was *Frei die RAF* really intended to help build critical mass for the release of imprisoned RAF members?

Charlotte's baffling image that introduced weaving, colour and strategies of appropriation to the exhibition emphasises the hermeneutic without losing sight of the political: whatever the answers are to the questions that *Frei die RAF* provokes, the work makes clear that we cannot neglect interpretive thinking. The work registers Meinhof's outlaw aura and reflects the ethically ambiguous nature of her actions. In doing so, it detaches militancy from terrorism and deploys it instead on the battlefield

4 It was exceptional in Scandinavia, and in West Germany too, that visual artists dealt with RAF's terrorism at this time. Most German contributions came in the 1980s, 1990s and later, with for instance Gerhard Richter's series *18. Oktober 1977* (1988) and Hans-Peter Feldmann's *Die Toten 1967–1993* [The Dead of 1967–93] (1998); Katharina Sieverding created an early piece with her photographic work *Schlachtfeld Deutschland* [Battlefield Germany] (1977).

of image production in an act of pictorial resistance to RAF's revolutionary violence. This resistance was not predicated on individualistic notions of artistic originality or political engagement: debunking essentialist concepts of freedom and authentic identity outside of the existing social order, Charlotte included the social security numbers of Sture and herself in her weavings for the Meinhof exhibition. Refusing to build meaning on already established political contexts, her weavings enabled slow collisions of elements of a compromised social reality by transfiguring its representations, string by string.

THE WEST COAST REALISATION

The Sex Pistols' trailblazing album *Never Mind the Bollocks* was released in October 1977, a year after the Meinhof exhibition, and Charlotte picked up two copies on a trip to London upon its release. The punk movement's anti-symbol the safety pin and its nihilist slogan 'no future' began to appear in her work. Seen from the outside of her work, it would easily make sense if punk had led to her radicalisation and thus had bridged her early, hippie-era experiments and her mid-1970s meditations on militancy. But it didn't add up like that. Even if punk was a clear influence, visualisations of antagonism and social dissonance were already present in her work in the form of bombs, guillotine blades, black crosses and real barbed wire. It would be more accurate to say that punk confirmed a propagandistic direction that she had already established for herself – in the sense that Dan Graham uses the term, as an artistic strategy that 'puts the spectator in contact with, in relation to, social practices existing outside the actual art work.'⁵ Glamorously enough, the Johannessons hung out with the Sex Pistols on their Scandinavian tour in July 1977: at Barbarella's Discotheque in the city of Växjö, Sture recorded an interview with lead singer Johnny Rotten (John Lydon), in which the British teenager sums up the efforts of the Sex Pistols as being all about 'making people think for themselves once again... if they ever did.'⁶

The famous conflict between hippies and punks didn't exist for the Johannesson hippie couple. The two countercultures may have represented two different styles of dissent, but at a grassroots level their creative strategies were near identical, defying

5 Dan Graham, 'Punk: Political Pop' (1979), in *Post-Pop Art*, ed. Paul Taylor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 117.

6 Johnny Rotten, interviewed by Sture Johannesson, 23 July 1977. Archive of Charlotte Johannesson.

specialisation and divisions of labour by way of self-organisation and home-grown forms of expression. Julie Stephens's concept of 'anti-disciplinary' resistance integrates the anti-authoritarian and the interdisciplinary, and is useful in our attempt to map Charlotte's artistic interactions with different countercultures. What was rejected by the 1960s counterculture, writes Stephens – echoing Foucault – was the “‘discipline’ of politics”, with its reliance on doctrine, ideology, party line.⁷ The anti-disciplinary conceptualises a new language of protest that refused rigid distinctions and on which paradigms of the 1960s are founded: New Left/counterculture, activists/hippies, political/apolitical. The term also enables a softening of the polarity between individual artist and countercultural collectivity, counter-public and institutional space – and it can open up the methodological connection between the two technologies of loom and computer, too.

The next transformation of Charlotte's work described a return to the media explorations of the late 1960s at the same time as it sublated all of her previous work. Founded by the Johannessons, the Digital Theatre in Malmö was the Nordic region's first lab for digital arts, where the couple worked on Apple II Plus 'micro-computers' – the first mass-produced personal computer that enabled an advanced data processor to be introduced into domestic space. Previous to this, computers were hulking mainframes owned by international corporations, the state or the military, and thus ideologically tainted in the eyes of left-wing and protest cultures beholden to modernist-humanistic paradigms of authenticity, freedom and self-expression. In other words, there was – once more – controversy in the air as the Johannessons, in early 1980, departed for California to invest a grant in equipment for their new project.

A full circle was drawn as Charlotte and Sture descended on California and caught up with the US counterculture's foundational connection to technoculture. Hippies are stereotypically seen as luddite, and there is no doubt that pastoral metaphor and the fetishisation of nature abounded in their worldview. But when the counterculture turned its back on industrial society, it did not necessarily do so in Rousseauistic modalities: Aquarian Arcadias were also conceived of in techno-utopian visions. In order to gauge the influence of machinic thinking, you need only to consider the fact that the drug metaphors 'tuning in' and 'turning on' are cybernetic figures of speech, and that avant-garde musicians

⁷ Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 23.

and acid rockers creatively misused feedback, a central cybernetic trope of control.⁸ Countercultural attempts at divorcing technological and societal tendency also included lifestyle experiments of building a new kind of city with other technologies than those dominating modernist urbanism. According to Felicity Scott, the disciplinary homelessness between art, design and architecture of dropped-out living proposals connected new media experiments across the post-war technological condition: in spite of their mystical and spectacular tendencies, the validity of such life experiments remain their distinct aim ‘to articulate a dissident and political refusal of American, and hence global, capitalism.’⁹

This implied another way of conceptualising technology that – to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and other critical thinkers of the post-Second World War era – had become instrumental to hegemonic reason. Hence the countercultural pleasure of appropriating new technologies was that of beating civilisation with its own weapons, as well as of departing from established critical discourse. This, according to John Markoff, was ‘the West Coast realisation’: that ‘The personal computer had the ability to encompass all of the media that had come before it and had the additional benefit of appearing at a time and a place where all the old rules were being questioned.’¹⁰ Thus, to Steve Jobs, taking LSD was one of the most important things he had ever done in his life; another important thing was undoubtedly to found Apple Computer Company with Steve Wozniak, the engineer and programmer who invented the PC as we know it. And it was directly through Wozniak that the Johannessons obtained the computers for their Digital Theatre.

Funded by a bank and the National Swedish Board for Technical Development, the Digital Theatre existed until 1985. At the Johannessons’ Malmö apartment, the Theatre grew to a network of nine computers, replete with RGB camera and sound system – ‘We can even equip it with a sense of smell!’, Sture boasted.¹¹ The declared mission of the theatre was to create what the Johannessons called ‘micro-performances’ that could have artistic as

8 See my article ‘Anti-Disciplinary Feedback and the Will to Effect’, *Mute Magazine* 3, no. 1 (2011), <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/anti-disciplinary-feedback-and-will-to-effect> (accessed March 2, 2021).

9 Felicity D. Scott, ‘Acid Visions’, *Grey Room* 23 (Spring 2006): 35.

10 John Markoff, *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry* (London: Viking Penguin, 2005), xix.

11 Gary Svensson, *Digitala Pionjärer. Datakonstens introduktion i Sverige*, Linköping Studies in Arts and Science, no. 213 (Stockholm: Carlssons förlag, 2000), 115.

well as commercial purposes: they saw themselves as computerised avatars of a spiritual revolution of a new age. In this sense the Digital Theatre was a digital upgrade of the media freaking of the 1960s, an aesthetic programme to undo structures of cultural and perceptual dependency. Specifically, the theatre was envisaged as the next iteration of the 1960s multimedia performance: a transition from the analogue technologies of the psychedelic light show (strobos, oscilloscopes, projectors, simple computerised controls, etc.) to a computer world whose potentials were vast but unknown.¹²

Despite the historical connections, at this point little was left of the countercultural collectivities that had been a horizon for the Johannessons' activities. The subversive agenda of previous projects had been replaced by tentatively establishing themselves as service providers to the corporate world and institutions such as the Swedish National Broadcasting Company – another attempt at institutional self-sufficiency. The main outcome of their experimentation as digital actors was Charlotte's production of digital screen and print graphics. While Sture did the talking about the Digital Theatre, she immersed herself in coding, and dedicated herself to the slow and arduous task of digital rendition of contemporary image worlds and media flows. By crafting each pixel and punching each bit, she became a sort of channeller of the visual culture that surrounded her. Her micro-computer was of course an isolated unit, as the internet didn't yet exist; instead, in her work *Me and My Computer* (c. 1980–85), the networks that connect Charlotte to her computer are, in a prototypically cybernetic manner, her central nervous system that tangle and merge with the electronic circuitry of her computer during long nights of programming at the Digital Theatre. Containing a host of virtual secrets to be unlocked – like a digital rabbit hole or picture well – Charlotte's Apple II Plus afforded her a ubiquitous presence as she surfed all kinds of topics, images and media personalities, picking them all out of the ether. The images of her Digital Theatre-era production are built on pixels and patterns, and thus have a proximity to abstraction that tends to dissolve their signifieds and the reality they are taken from: they are the lightest and most unworried, almost weightless, images imaginable.

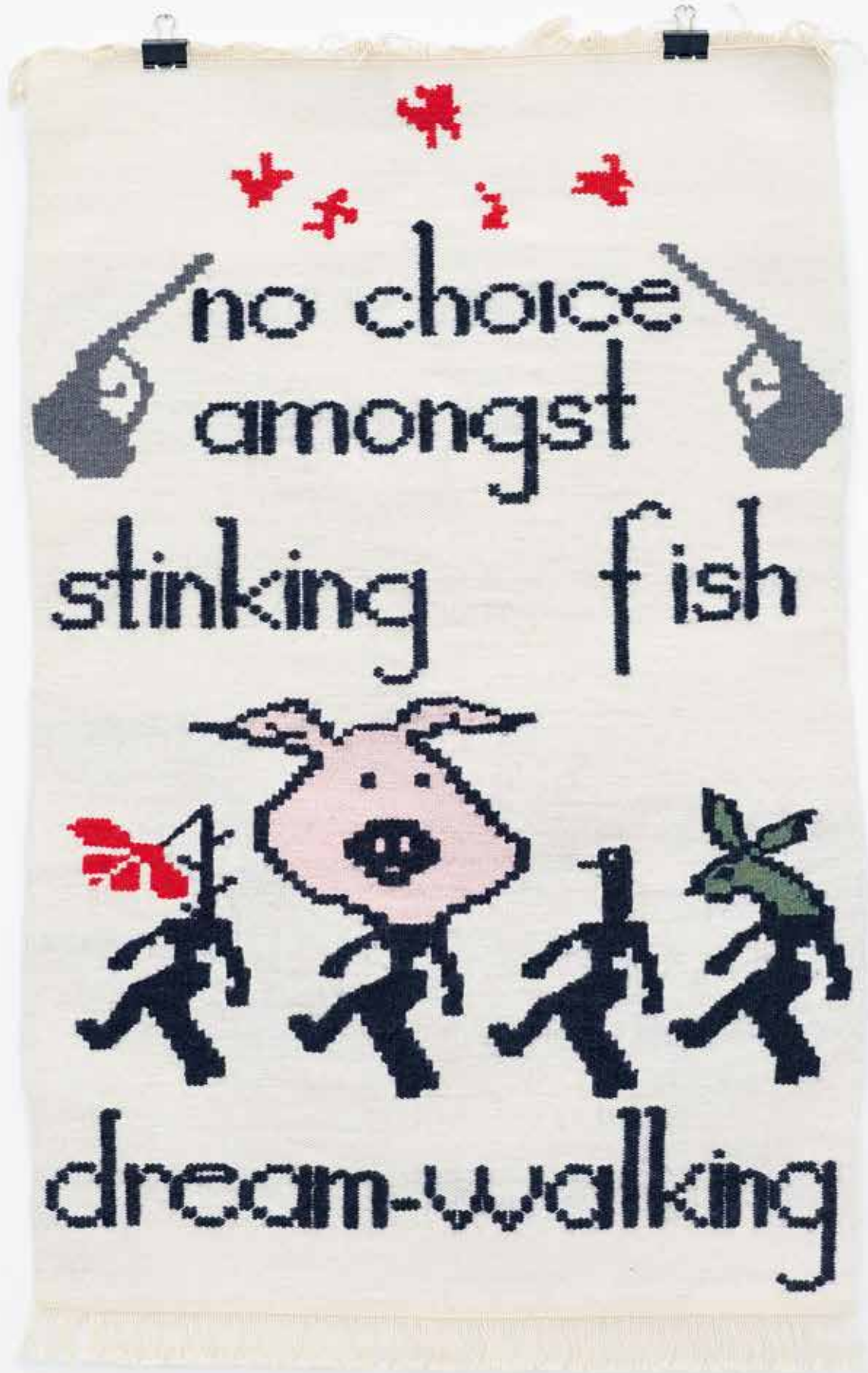
In 1984 Apple presented a new generation of computers, now with a closed graphical user interface that made Charlotte feel creatively restrained and less able to explore. The Digital Theatre

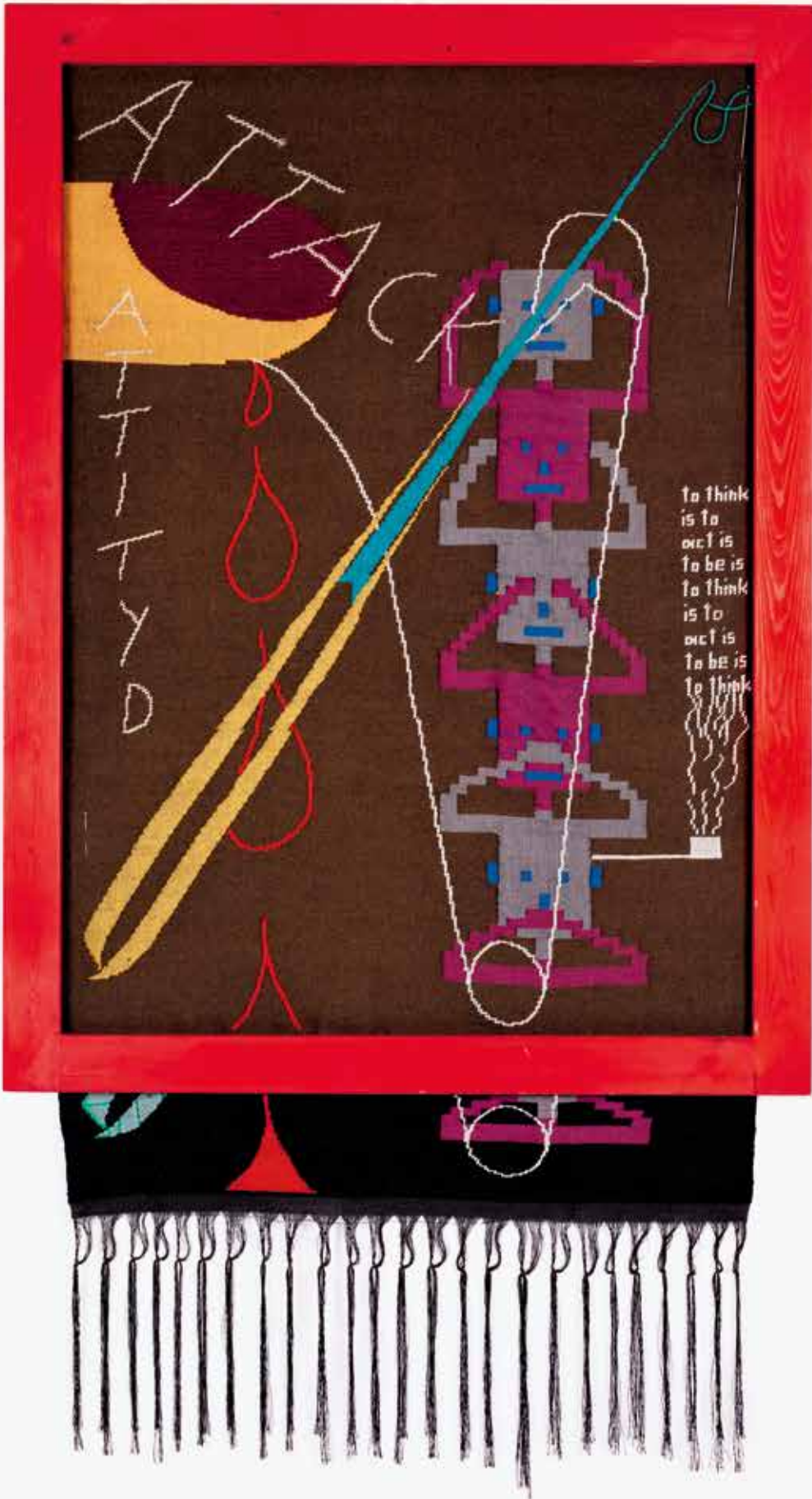
¹² I am grateful to Will Bradley for pointing this out to me in an email of 30 September 2020.

faded and closed down, and she largely ceased her artistic activities. The Digital Theatre was the last joint project of the Johannessons, and, for both of them, a temporary farewell to professional art-making that would last decades. Until then, Charlotte walked a fine line by balancing her production between a precarious, self-organised authorship and a displacement of artistic autonomy through countercultural dialogue. The combination of her anti-disciplinary ethos and the socio-technological commitment of her production, and of her going beyond prescribed forms of institutional legitimation, contributed to a radical artistic stance that is only becoming legible today.

Weaving by Charlotte
Johannesson at a former
water mill in the southern
Swedish village of Rickarum
where she lived and
worked in the early 1970s,
1971. Photo: Charlotte
Johannesson







Attack Attityd
1977



Chile eko i skallen
[Chile Echo in the Skull]
1973 / 2016

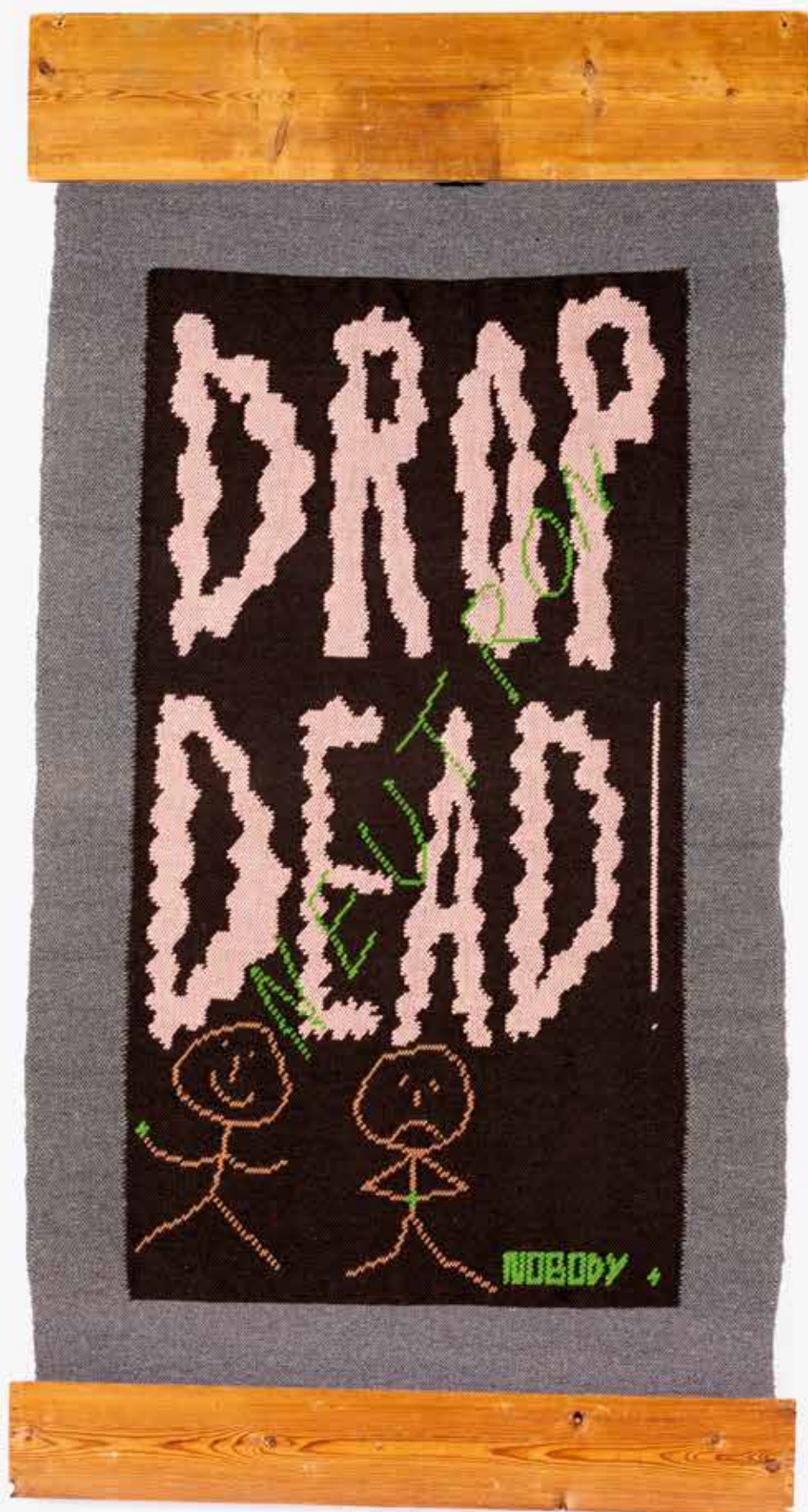


I'm no Angel
c. 1972-73 / 2017



Terror
1970 / 2016





Drop Dead!
1977

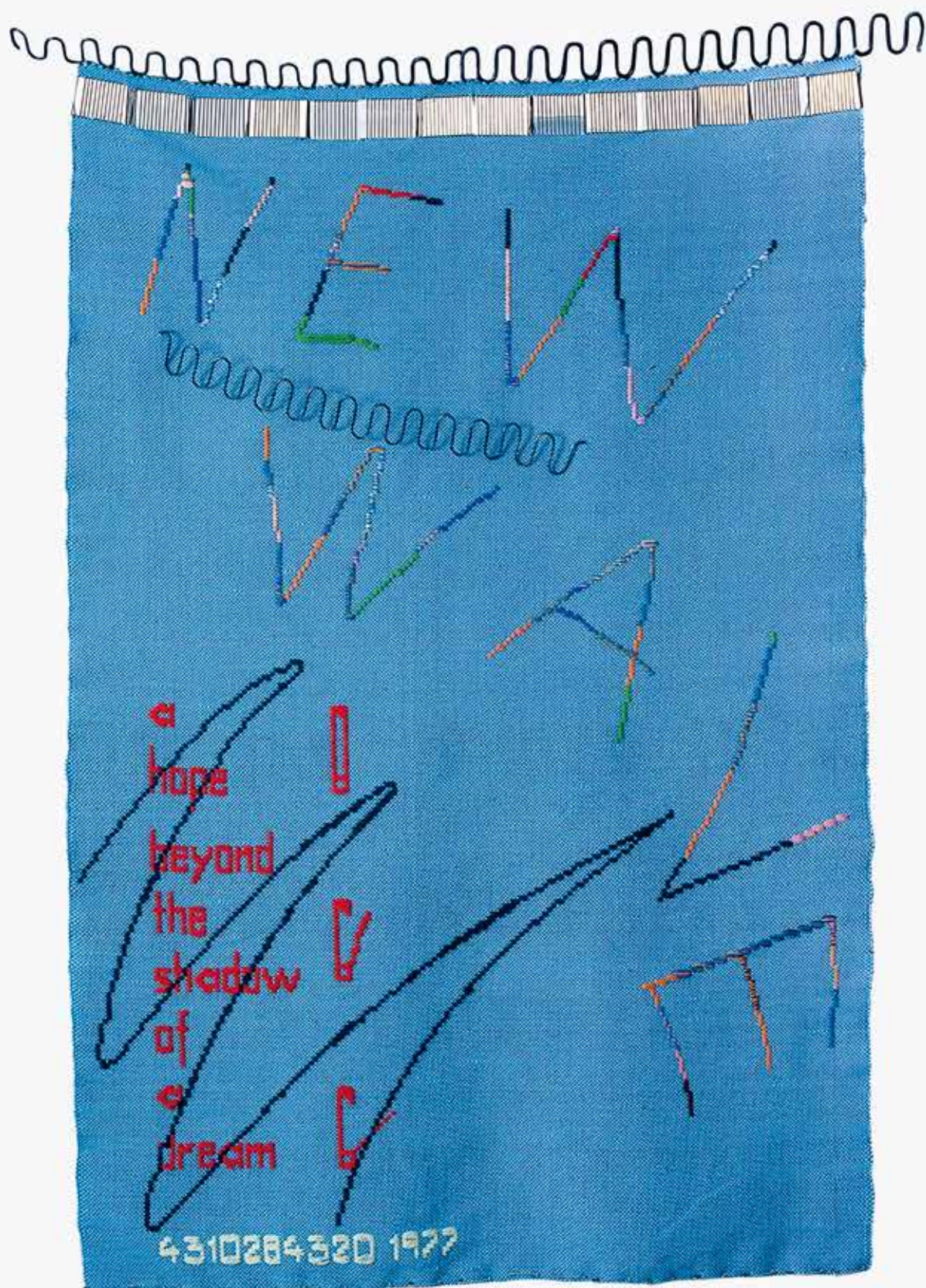


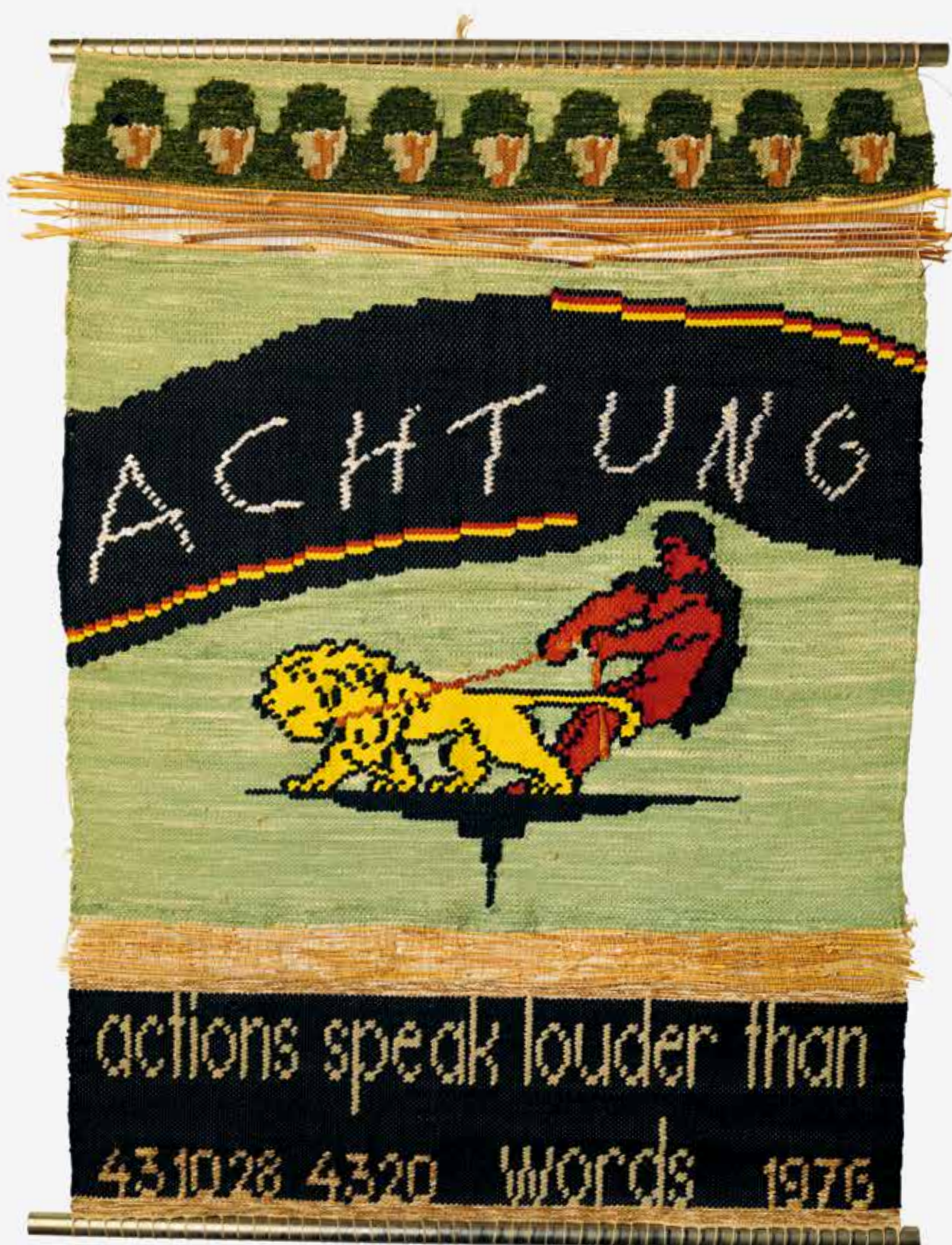
Elle belle bi nu är du fri kvinna
[Elle Belle Bi Now You Are Free, Woman]
1975 / 2020





Trampa ente på gräset
[Don't Step on the Grass]
1970s / 2016





Achtung – Actions Speak Louder than Words
1976



Frei die RAF
[Free the RAF]
1976







Charlotte Johannesson
upon her return from
Silicon Valley with her
Apple II Plus, 1981.
Photo: Per Roland Nilsson



**THE
DIGITAL
THEATRE HYPER-
TEXTILE**

AMALIE SMITH

It's 10.35 a.m. I'm sitting by the window at a café in Copenhagen, writing in a notebook. Through the glass, I can look over the shoulder of a young woman who is leaning against the window from the other side. She's positioned slightly below me, and I can follow along in what she's got in her hands. First, she reads a book with yellowed pages.

After ten minutes, a phone appears and is laid on top of the book, she operates it with her right index finger. Now she holds the phone in both hands, operates it with two thumbs.

Through the window, over the woman's shoulder, I sneak glances at her phone's screen. I look away each time she writes a message – it's only the images that interest me. My morning has already been full of images, but the young woman's phone shows very different images than mine. A face pretending to floss with precise coordination of hands and lips. A glistening sliced egg on a blue china plate. Twins doing a synchronised dance.

While Odysseus is away on his journey, Penelope weaves. I imagine that her loom stands by the window. On the street stand her 108 suitors. Penelope leans out.

'Suitors,' she says, 'let us make an agreement. I will weave a burial shroud for my father-in-law Laertes. Only once I have finished this shroud will I remarry.'

The suitors accept and retreat from her window. Penelope continues at the loom. During the day, she stands by the window and weaves as agreed, but at night she returns and unravels the day's work.

Each day, a waterfall of images. I can no longer clearly recall the images my own screen has displayed since I woke up this morning. Perhaps a child's fist on a cotton sheet, a stack of books that arrived in the mail, an advertisement for a therapeutic weighted blanket, a sweaty torso caught in the fitness studio mirror, a glimpse of a protest or a party.

I don't know how or to what degree the images from the screen are stored in my brain. But when I encounter a person from the screen in the flesh, the images cling to them like a glittering suit.

Digital images are real, alive, animated and animating. When we produce them, we transform our analogue reality, crop it, flatten it and send it into circulation. We apply increasingly advanced filters, trade faces, don masks. We live in the digital theatre. The network of images grows.

The Digital Theatre is the name of the computer graphics studio that Sture and Charlotte Johansson ran in Malmö in the early 1980s, back when digital images were an entirely new and unexplored technology. I wonder whether they chose that name because they could sense that digital images are alive.

Once she has finished unravelling, she falls asleep in the bed Odysseus has carved from a rooted tree. It cannot be moved.

What is Penelope weaving? It never forms an image.

Penelope during the day: Building an image. Penelope at night: Breaking an image down into its physical components.

The loom is an ancient technology, perhaps the oldest. Archaeological findings date the loom back to 5,000 BC. That makes the loom's technology a predecessor to both mathematics and writing. Weaving an image, unlike drawing a picture with a finger in the sand, requires planning and mathematical thinking.

In the loom, the abstract becomes concrete, because a textile is produced, and the concrete abstract, because an image is created.

It's 12.30 p.m., and I've arrived at my studio. I open up a file that curator Lars Bang Larsen has sent me via WeTransfer containing images of Charlotte Johansson's works. I flip through a subfolder with images of tapestries from the 1960s and 1970s, that is, before the Digital Theatre. With a background in traditional weaving, she experimented with hemp fibre in her works. The subject matter of these images was politically charged and contains surprising juxtapositions; a kind of socio-critical 'meme'. The text 'FREI DIE RAF' is interwoven with a picture of Snoopy shooting at a military tank. Pixelated human figures with plant and animal heads march in line. 'I'm no angel' it says on a picture of Mickey Mouse with outstretched arms, and the same slogan is written on the loom.

In an interview, Charlotte explains how in 1978 she trades her loom for an Apple II Plus computer that a young Swedish man had purchased in the US. Elsewhere, it is said that it's a tapestry she trades. That's a good story too, but I prefer the one with the loom. This exchange has a mythical quality to it. Loom for computer, computer for loom. The genders trade places. Notions of craftsmanship are displaced. The young man has exhausted the possibilities of the computer in question and now wants to weave. Charlotte wishes to go the other direction. When she offers up her loom in the trade, it is not just an object with monetary value she is giving away – she is relinquishing the possibility of practicing the craft in which she is trained.

When the merchant Joseph Marie Jacquard uses punched cards to automate the loom in the early 1800s, he streamlines the production of patterned textiles. The punched cards carry textile patterns the same way the studded tin of a music box carries a melody.

Together with the steam engine, the invention fuels France's industrialisation. Thousands of skilled weavers can be replaced by perforated paper cards and steam.

In the United Kingdom, industrialisation picks up speed as well. Here, in the 1830s, it occurs to mathematician Charles Babbage that Jacquard's punched cards can be used to store much more than weaving patterns. He devises the 'Analytical Engine', a steam-powered, fourteen-metre-long mechanical calculator which uses the loom's punched cards to store data and operative algorithms. Although it was never built, it is today regarded as the world's first computer.

Jacquard could apply punched cards to the loom because weaving was already a binary technology – the weft is passed over or under the warp. These two possibilities may be translated into hole or no-hole on a punched card. And later, to zeroes and ones.

Computer for loom. It is difficult to imagine an equivalent exchange before or since in history – with the exception, perhaps, of one nearly 150 years earlier, when the Jacquard loom lent its punched cards to the Analytical Engine. In 1978, the computer has become an image-producing tool. It has gained a screen and visual output, and that makes it comparable to the loom once again. The Apple II Plus has a screen resolution of 280×192 pixels, approximately the same number of threads as Charlotte's loom can contain. Thus, the two Swedes trade hardware capable of producing images in the same resolution.

Whereas a printer, a photographer or a painter would have seen images in poor resolution on the Apple II Plus's screen, a weaver sees opportunities. She knows that it's possible to create meaningful images with a limited number of pixels. Colouring them on screen is tedious manual labour that requires the patience of a weaver. $280 \times 192 = 53,760$ pixels.

In the file from Lars Bang Larsen is a subfolder named 'screen graphics'. It contains screen graphics in the most basic sense: graphic images produced on a screen. They have been recovered from old floppy disks and restored; presumably they've travelled through several file formats and now exist on my computer in a resolution that is precisely double that of the original. Each of them is 645 kB. It is 3.40 p.m. and my computer screen brings almost forty-year-old works to life.

The punched card is the physical link that connects the history of the computer to that of the loom. If we follow that link backwards in time, we see that the history of the computer is thousands of years old.

Already in the practice of weaving, humans dissolved images into points that are assembled into lines, which are then assembled into a pattern or image, not unlike pixels on a screen.

Countess Ada Lovelace, who is a friend of Charles Babbage, studies mathematics by correspondence and writes crucial notes to accompany his invention. She is the daughter of poet Lord Byron and demonstrates a keen sense for the poetic connection between the machine and the loom when she writes:

'We may say most aptly that the Analytical Engine weaves algebraic patterns just as the Jacquard-loom weaves flowers and leaves.'

I imagine Ada at her desk in the summer of 1843, a cool summer. The curtains in her study are drawn, she is completely engrossed in her notes. She doesn't sleep, she doesn't eat, she devotes all her energy to figuring out what a mechanical calculator might accomplish in this world.

Also here, in the digital screen graphics, Charlotte combines slogans and symbols. 'Take me to another world', it says on what looks like a cross between a radar image and a world map. 'x y z ESPRIT SURF..?' it says on a picture of a computer, the Earth, a satellite and some tools, while one of her characteristic pixel men appears to be conducting the image with a wand in his hand. Certain elements recur in several images, but they change colour and orientation – the digital allows for repetition and variation.

The colour black is much more prominent in the screen graphics than it was in the woven works. The images all appear to emerge from a background of black. Perhaps this was in fact the case – the empty screen was black until colour was added. Perhaps digital images are light that emerges from the darkness of a computer's screen.

One image makes me stop my browsing. It shows a drawing of a person sitting at a computer. Growing out of the screen is a structure I recognise right away. It resembles a plant with a single stem, a simple root system at one end and an explosion of tentacles at the other. It's placed in relation to the computer screen in such a way that it appears to be growing backwards and up, like an antenna through which the computer communicates with something greater.

In pencil, she writes: 'In enabling mechanism to combine together general symbols in successions of unlimited variety and extent, a uniting link is established between the operations of matter and the abstract mental processes of the most abstract branch of mathematical science.'

Her notes are labelled A-G, and in note G she describes in detail how the engine could use cyclical repetitions to compute a sequence known as the Bernoulli numbers. This recipe is today considered the world's first computer algorithm.

After finishing the notes, she declares in a letter that she hopes to uncover the laws governing the movements of molecules in the human brain.

'It does not appear to me', she writes, 'that cerebral matter need be more unmanageable to mathematicians than sidereal & planetary matter & movements; if they would but inspect it from the right point of view. I hope to bequeath to the generations a "Calculus of the Nervous System".'

She wishes to leave as her legacy an algorithm of nerves.

She never gets that far.

I recognise the structure because I've seen illustrations of it before. It's how you draw a neuron – that is, a nerve cell in the human brain. I've seen it depicted in an article about the type of machine learning algorithms that are modelled on human neurons, and which for that reason are called 'neural networks', or simply AI – artificial intelligence.

I have to remind myself of when this image was produced – in the first half of the 1980s. At the time, computer-made images were no more advanced than the pattern underlying a woven image. Charlotte must have known about brain neurons. Gibson's *Neuromancer* is from 1984. Machine learning algorithms in the form of neural networks were already underway, but by no means widespread. Nor could the Digital Theatre's computers have been connected to the internet. Yet the image I see in the digital file is an image of the internet as an interconnected neural network. I cannot help but read the neuron growing out of the computer screen in Charlotte's work as a harbinger of the digital neural network of images to come.

For seven years, Charlotte Johannessson works with digital images. Then she abandons them again, around 1985. Apple streamlines its user interface. The algorithms are sealed off in black boxes. As soon as the digital becomes user-friendly, Charlotte can no longer use it to create images. I imagine that it isn't the computer as magic, but the computer as a practical, image-producing tool that appeals to her. As a weaver, she wants to have her hands on the production tools, control them and understand how they work.

The word text comes from the Latin *textus*, which means 'textile', from *texere*, meaning 'to weave'.

The internet gave us hypertext with links and mutual connections between texts. Hypertext unravels the threads of a text and connects them across textiles, inter-net.

It is a piece of silk fabric that convinces the employees at Google that they need to build an image-search algorithm.

Gossamer chiffon with palm-leaf print. Semi-sheer, so it reveals what it obscures. Designed and fashioned into a dress by Versace and worn to the Grammy Awards in 2000 by Jennifer Lopez.

The most googled piece of fabric of its time, the image everyone wants to see.

In the year 2000, the computer can read and search text, but it cannot yet see. It blindly presents whatever images appear in connection with the search words.

How do you get a search engine to search through images that consist of hundreds of thousands of tiny coloured dots? How do you build a loom that can see the image it weaves?

'I'm no angel' was the name of the loom (or was it a tapestry?) that Charlotte traded for a computer. The loom is no angel, but neither is the computer. Both are automation machines, a reduction to zeroes and ones. What distinguishes the loom and the computer after 1985 is whether or not the programming may be touched by the user.

Charlotte Johannessson's digital works from 1978–85 are the product of a very specific period in the history of the computer and of the encounter of a particular craft with that history. Back then, the question 'What is a digital image?' could be answered by the number of hours it took to manually colour 53,760 pixels.

It's 5.35 p.m. when I close my computer and leave the studio with it in a tote bag. I think: Maybe it is in our earliest reactions to new technologies that we see them most clearly. They enter a world that has not yet known them – unlike today, where digital images have infiltrated all our waking hours. Maybe that is why Charlotte's screen graphics still interest us today, all these digital images later.

To make the search engine capable of seeing the content of an image, Google sets to work developing neural networks, training them and making them deeper.

They are not programmed in the traditional sense of 'if x, then y'. Instead, they consist of a network of digital 'neurons' in layers that exchange information back and forth. Like the brain's neurons, a digital neuron can either remain passive or 'go off'. By training the network on vast data sets, it can get better at recognising faces in pictures, for example.

As it is trained, the algorithm writes its own code, but this process makes the code long and incomprehensible to humans. As algorithms gain the capacity to see what is in a picture, programmers lose the ability to see through the algorithms' code.

With neural networks, not only text but also image matter becomes 'hyper'.

Our screens become hyper-fast electronic textiles. Billions of images are woven and unravelled according to infinitely reproducible pixel patterns.

It's 6.45 p.m., and I stream a podcast about the new generation of text-generating neural networks known as GPT-3 from my phone while I cook dinner. The journalist seems alarmed: GPT-3 can generate text on the basis of even very short prompts, detecting the genre and continuing without further information. GPT-3 is an advanced machine learning algorithm with 175 billion parameters. Its predecessor had 1.5 billion parameters.

It's 9.43 p.m. and I'm sitting in bed. On the computer screen, I move screenshots of text around in my document. It's a way of interweaving already published material with that written today. On my phone, the images of other people shimmer. A fly has landed on a computer screen. A runaway cow in the dusk. Someone asks about other people's experiences with weighted blankets, advertisements and user content flow together. Pasta with mushrooms. An exhibition opening.

I want to ask an AI: What happened to the digital images after Charlotte abandoned them in 1985?

I search online for GPT-3 and find a site where you can apply for permission to use the algorithm. In the application, you must explain how you will ensure that it is not misused. I apply, stating that I will use the algorithm for 'artistic purposes', even though I know I won't get an answer straight away, if at all. Instead, I find GPT-2, GPT-3's less intelligent predecessor, which is available online through several different user interfaces. I choose one and type: 'When Charlotte Johansson stopped working with the computer in 1985'. Then I click 'more'.

The computer starts to fabulate.

We may imagine that it is Penelope who weaves and unravels the textiles of our screens. Odysseus has returned home from his quest. Penelope is still sitting at her loom, weaving during the day and unravelling at night. The work keeps her busy. Her days and nights have accelerated to an almost imperceptible flicker. She no longer has time to sleep, so she has her marriage bed converted into a much bigger, faster and three-dimensional loom. It weaves images remotely with invisible rays.

The images that Penelope weaves and unravels remotely are connected in a three-dimensional textile we may call the 'hyper-textile'. Her new loom we may call the 'hyper-loom'.

Unlike computer chips, the hyper-loom does not shrink with technological advancement.

To the contrary: the more data we feed it, the bigger the loom becomes. The hyper-loom grows from the size of a classroom to a factory. It expands to the size of a city, an island, a country.

In 2022, the hyper-loom is the size of Europe.

‘When Charlotte Johannesson stopped working with the computer in 1985, it had a mind of its own. Johannesson would often wake up to find that all of the programs running on his computer were running in reverse. The computers in his home would go through the motions of checking for viruses, but the programs would often switch the virus for something else. It made him suspicious that his computer had been compromised. He also discovered that programs were sending messages to his phone about events in his life. His phone even sent out the time. He tried to fix the problem. He wrote a program that would reverse all the software in the computer, but when he tried to reverse that, his computer started working again. He discovered that the problem was the way the computer was wired. The micro-processor was configured so that any program that ran on the computer would have a backdoor built in.’

And on it goes.

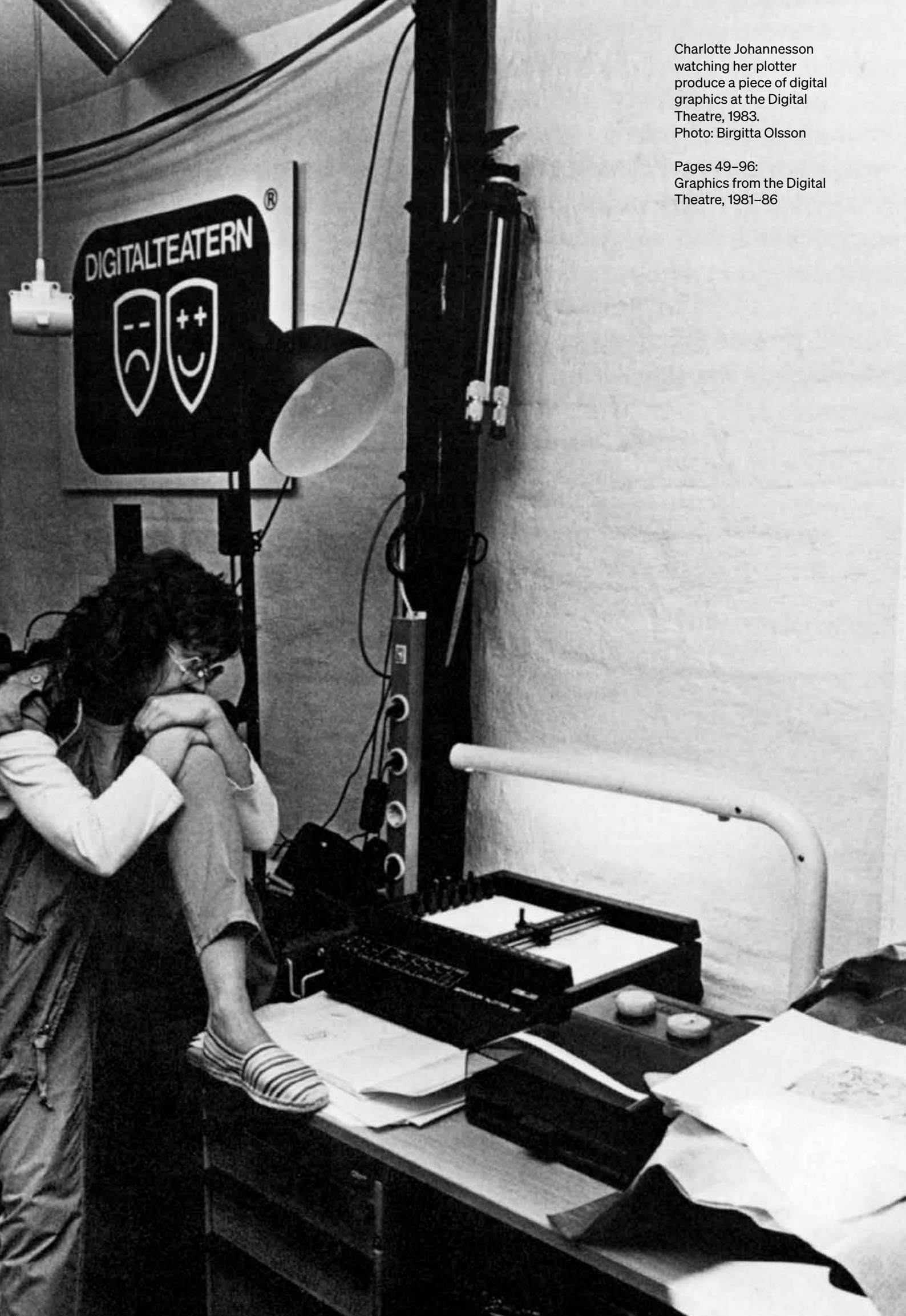
In 2035: the entire planet.

Penelope at the hyper-loom creates tangible changes in the world, on our screens and in the fabric of our minds.

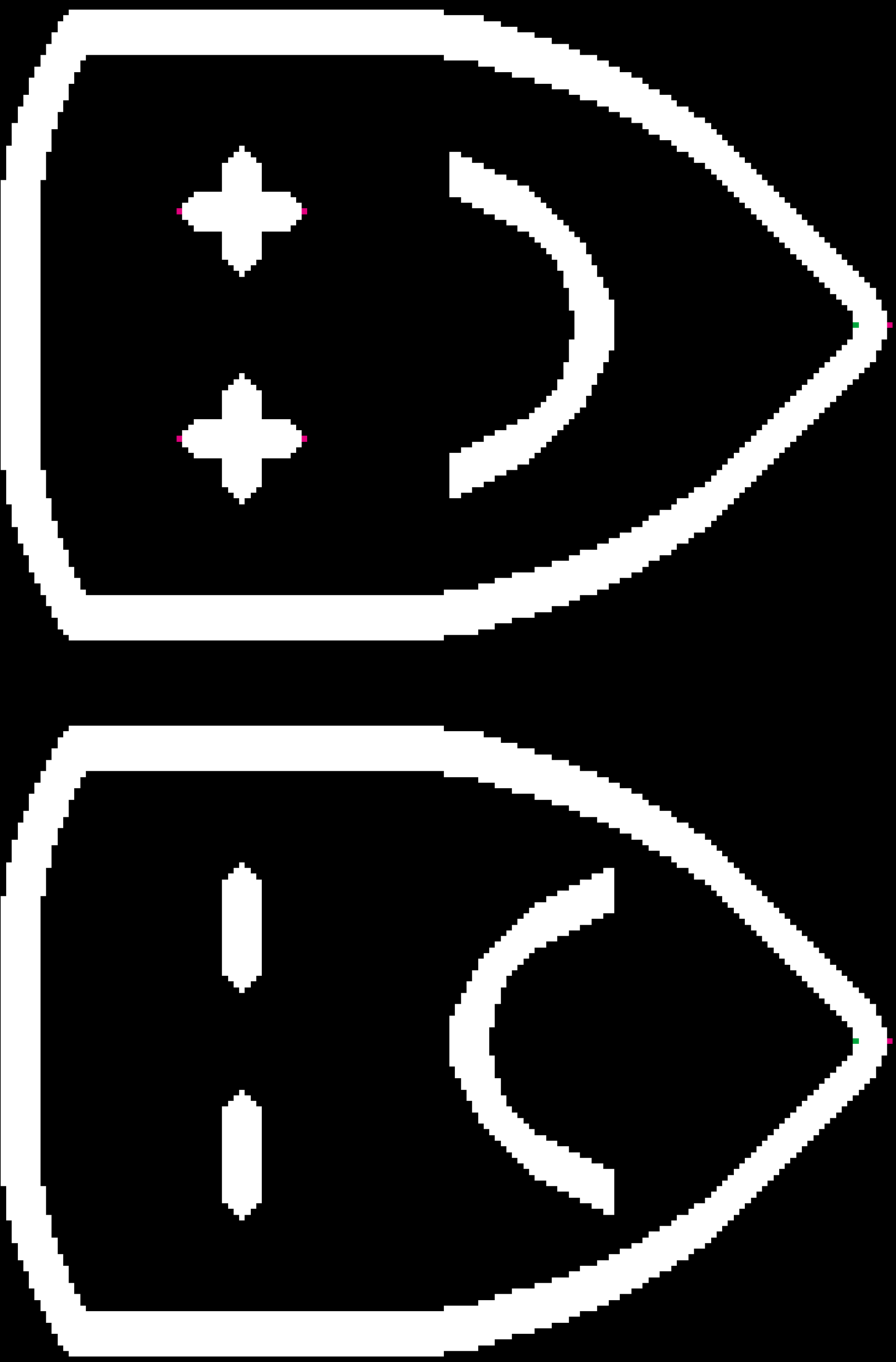
The text ‘Hyper-textile’ is a curated excerpt from Amalie Smith’s hybrid novel *Thread Ripper*, published in Danish by Gyldendal in August 2020.

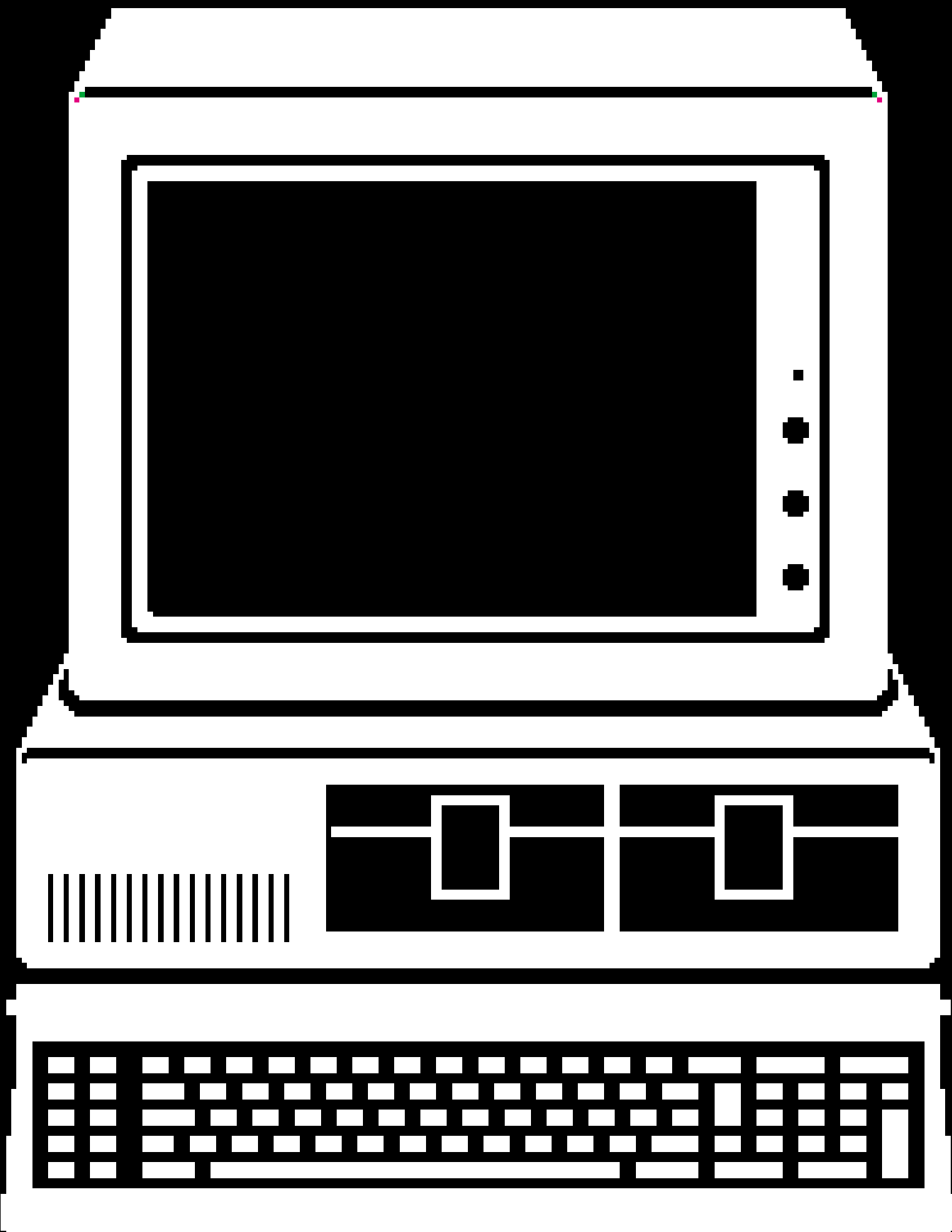
Charlotte Johannesson
watching her plotter
produce a piece of digital
graphics at the Digital
Theatre, 1983.
Photo: Birgitta Olsson

Pages 49–96:
Graphics from the Digital
Theatre, 1981–86

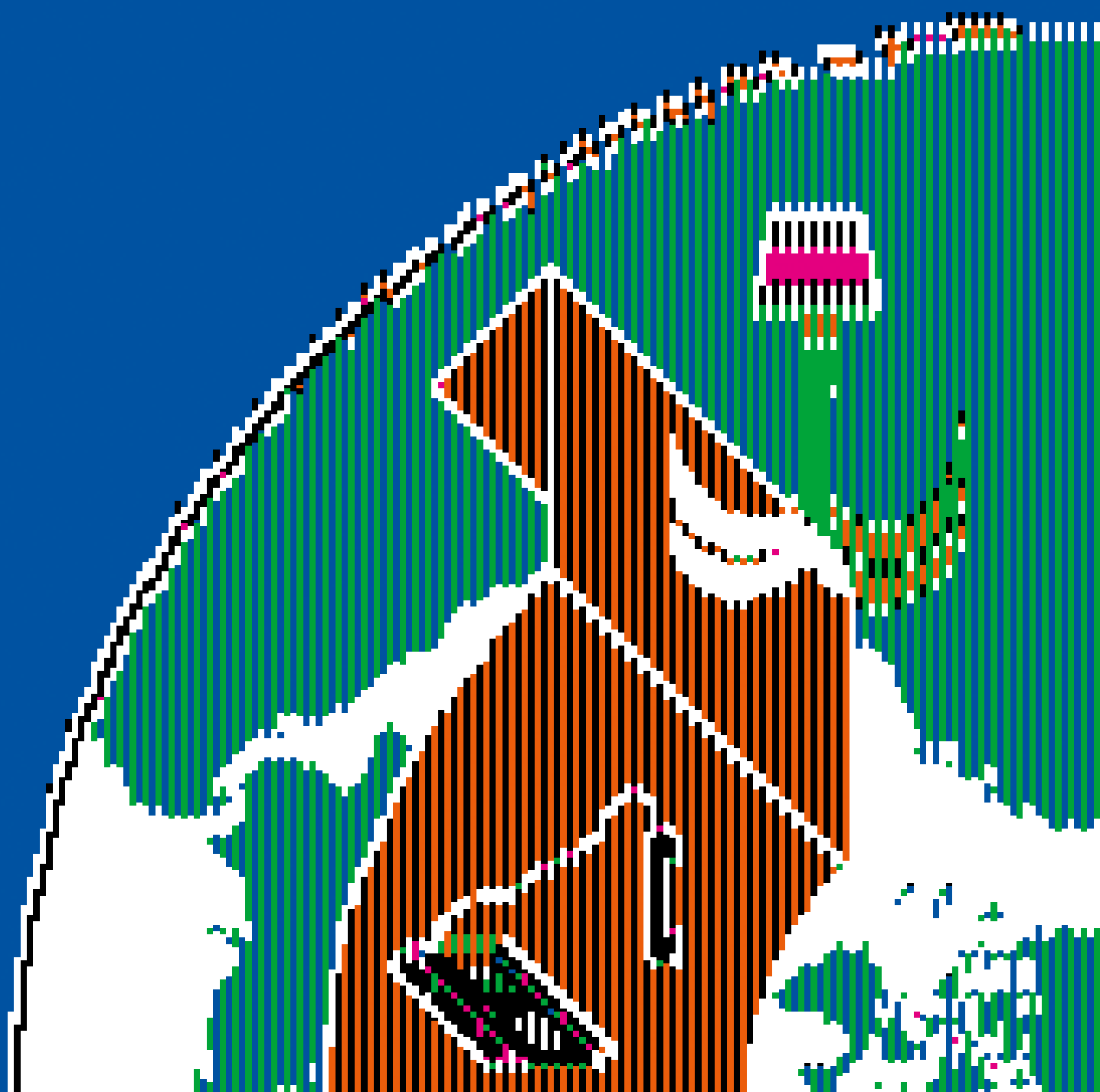


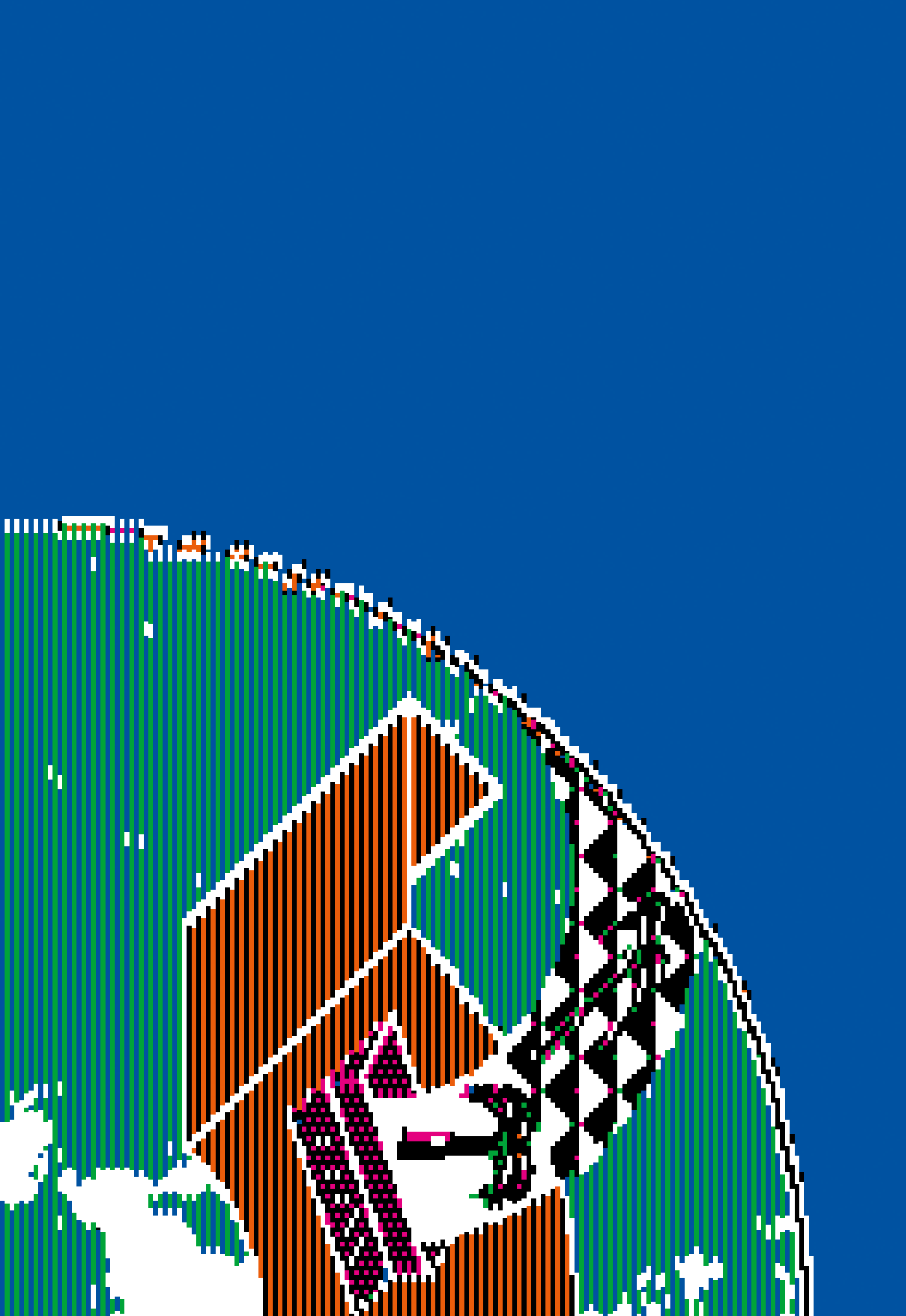
THE DIGITAL HEALTH

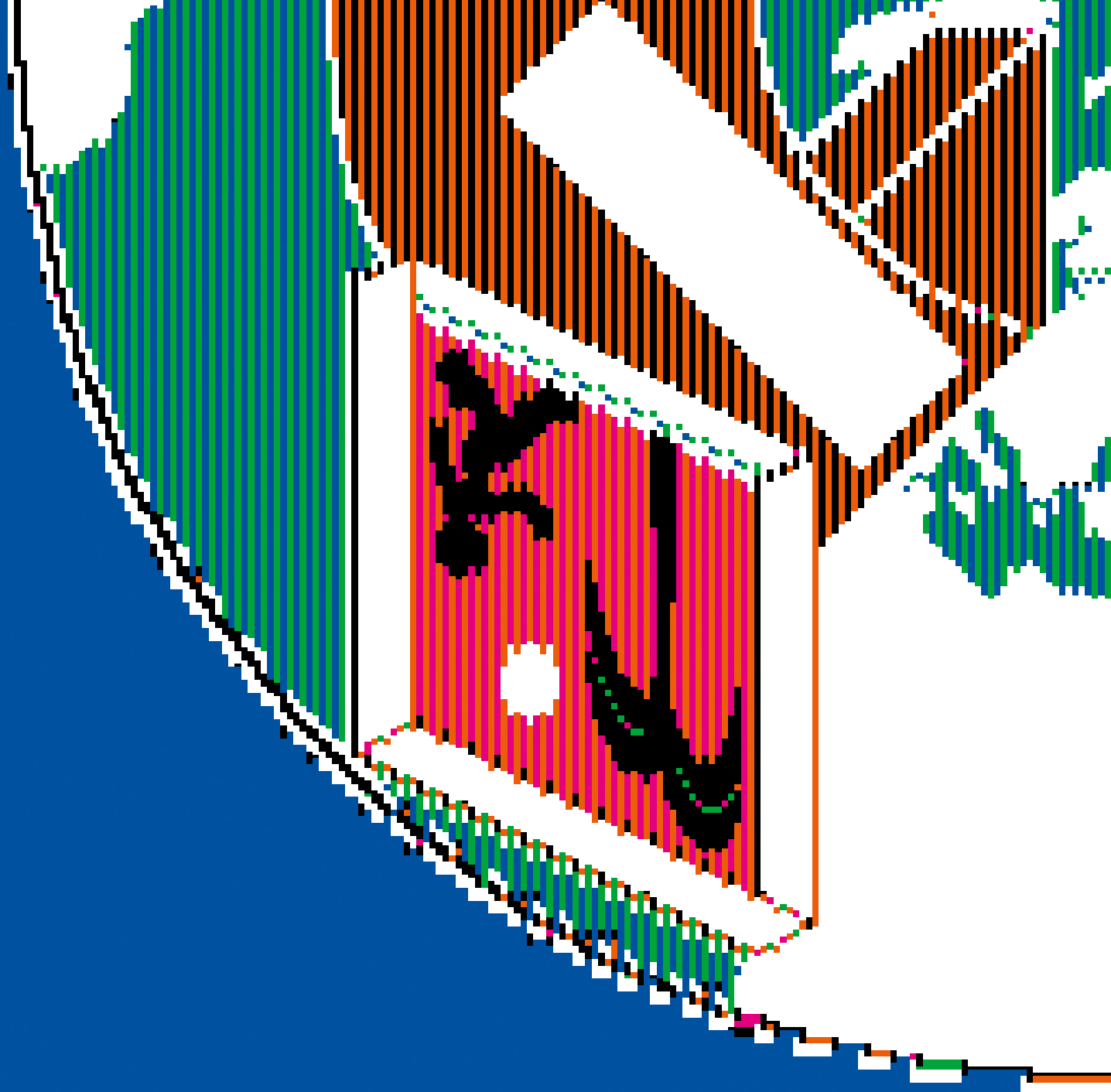


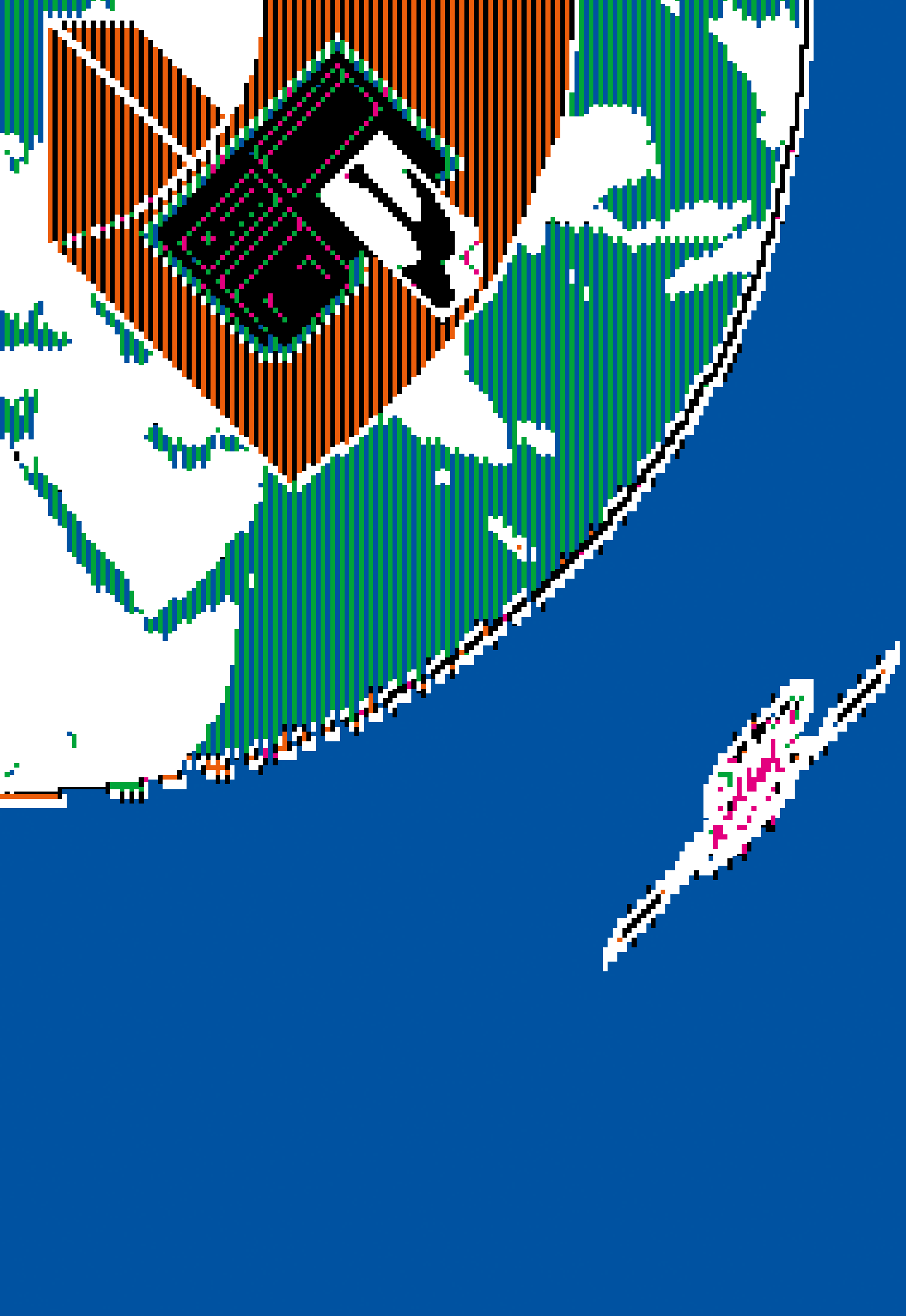


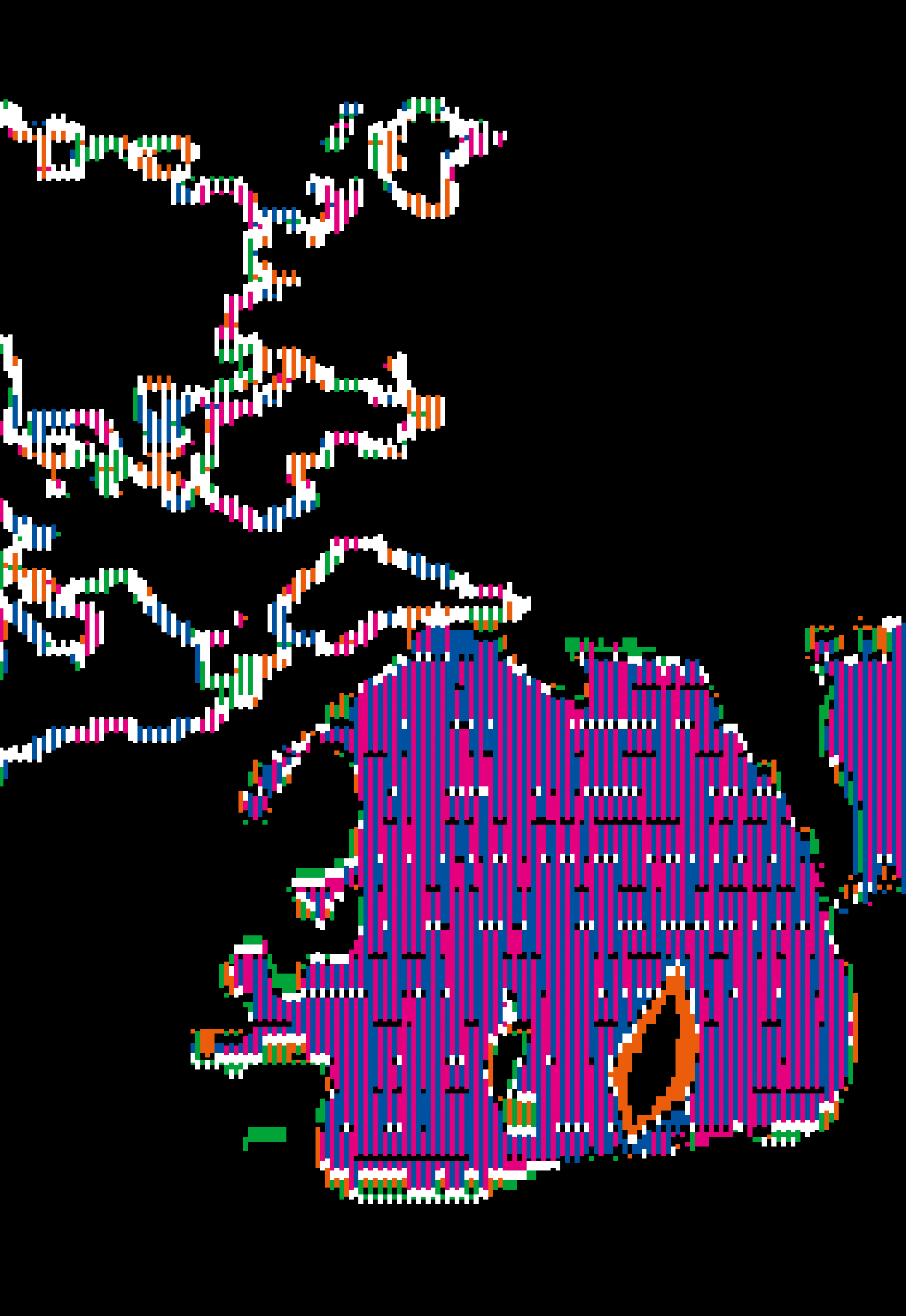


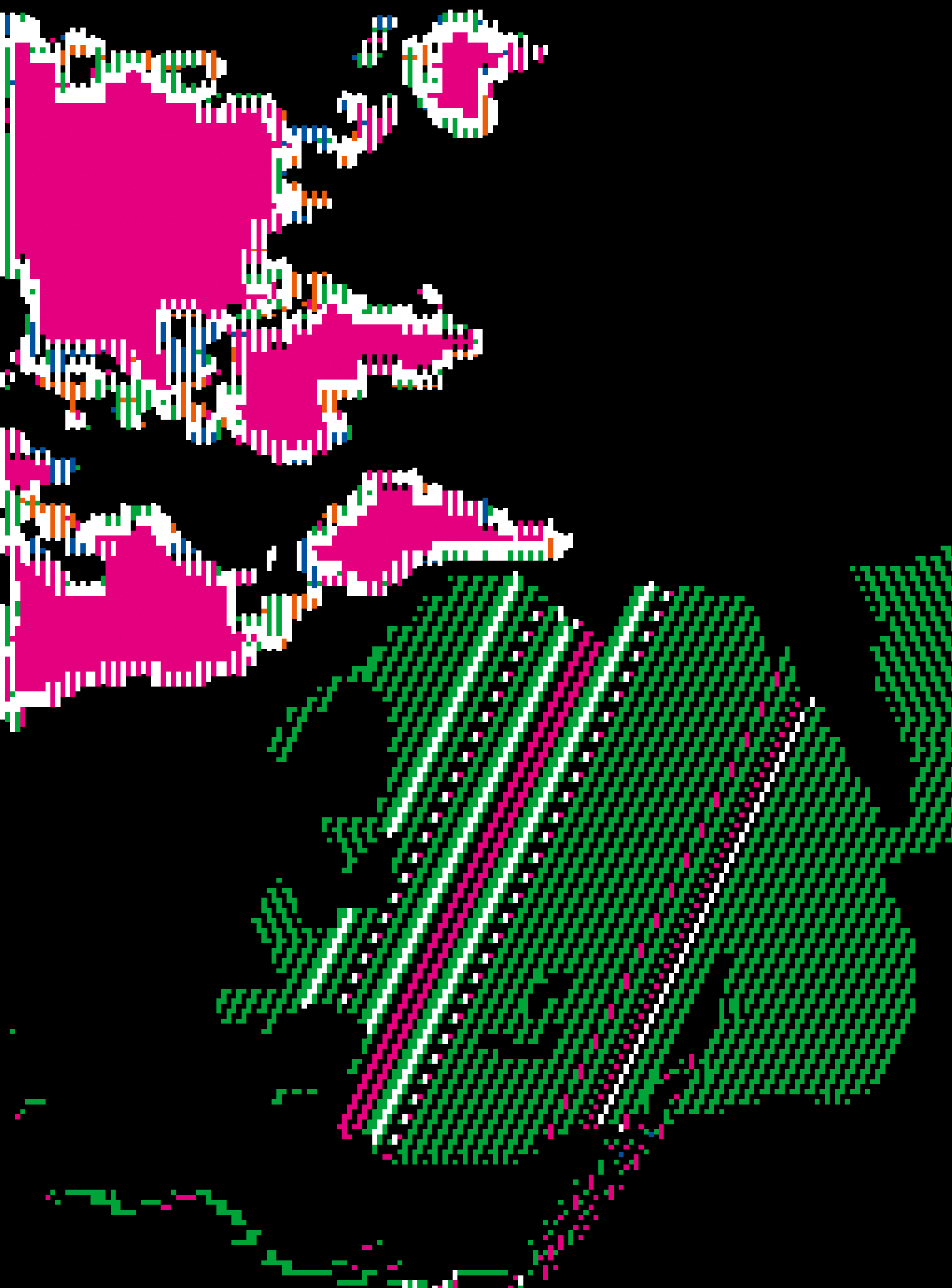


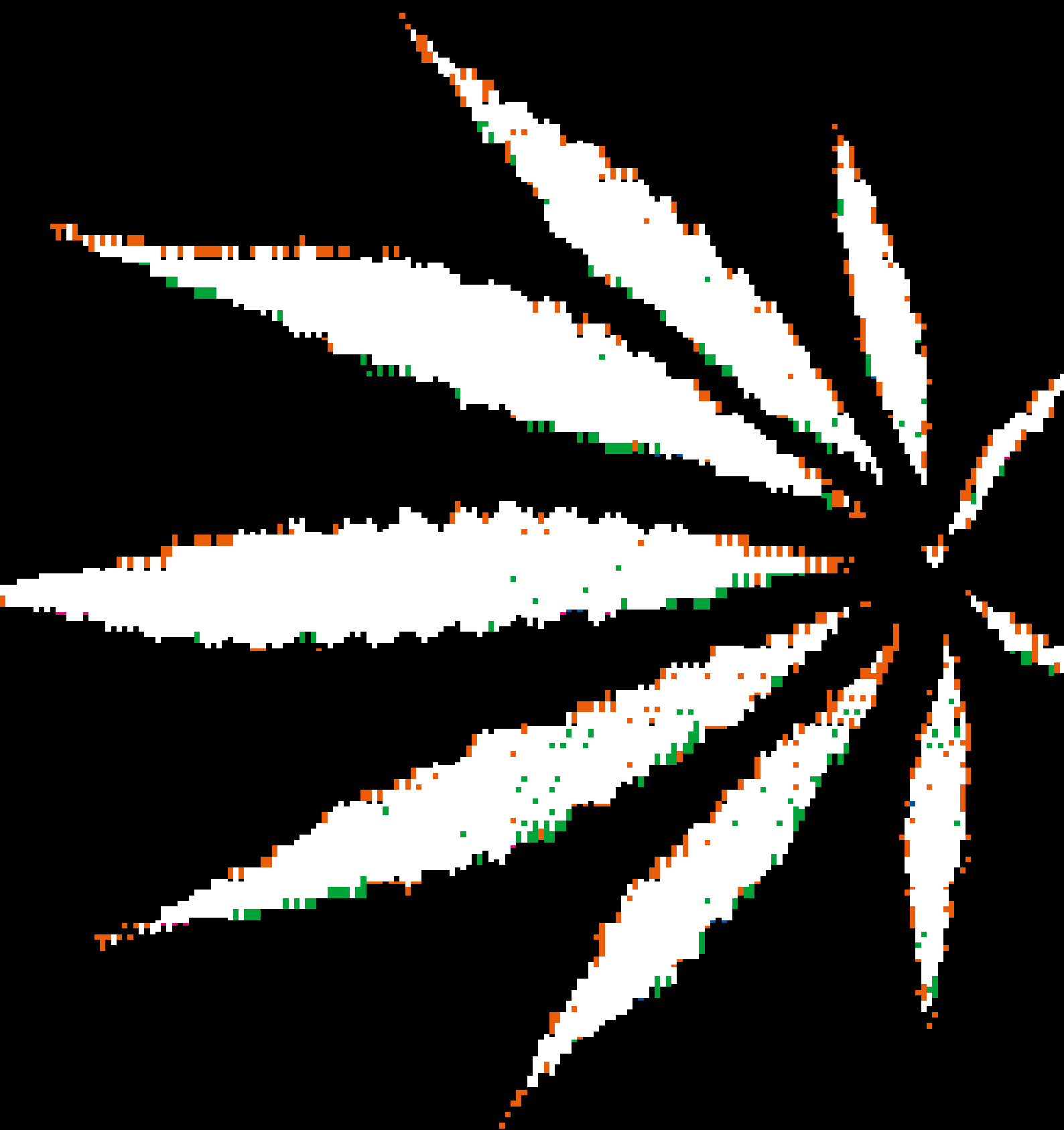


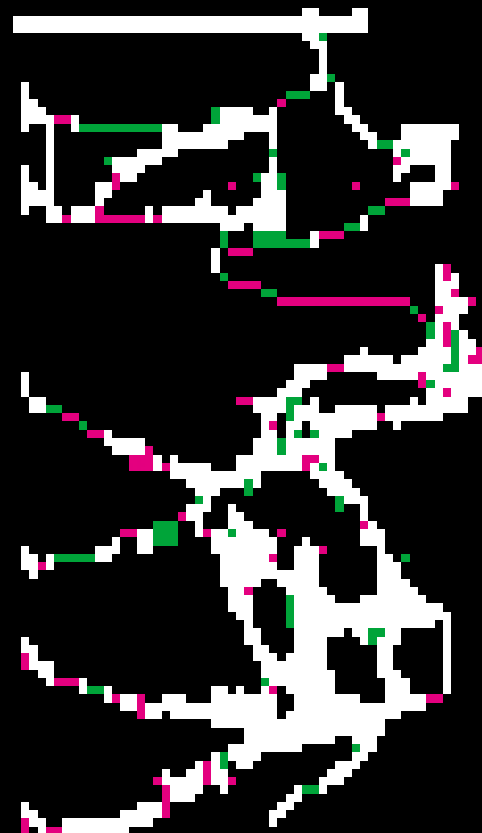




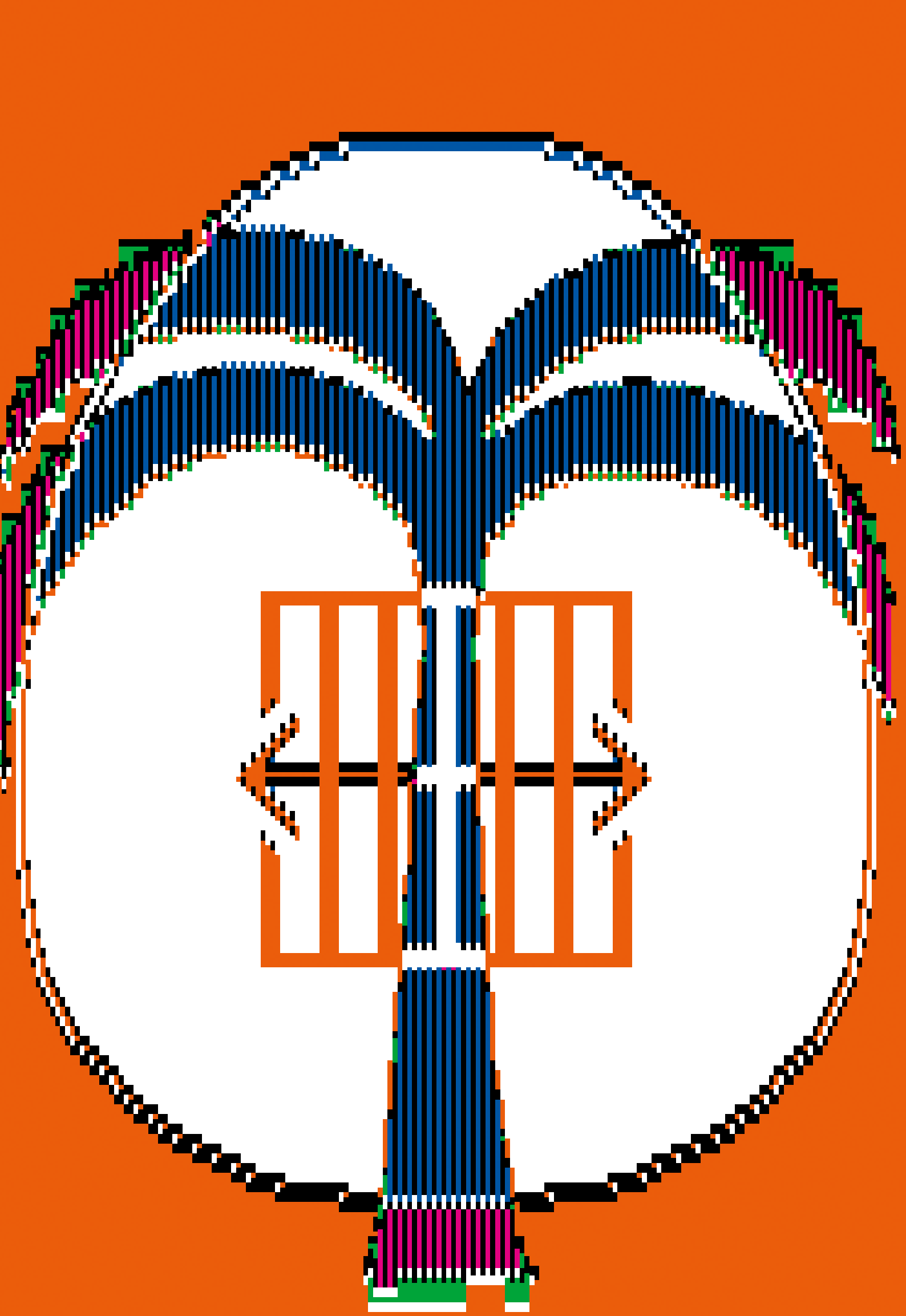


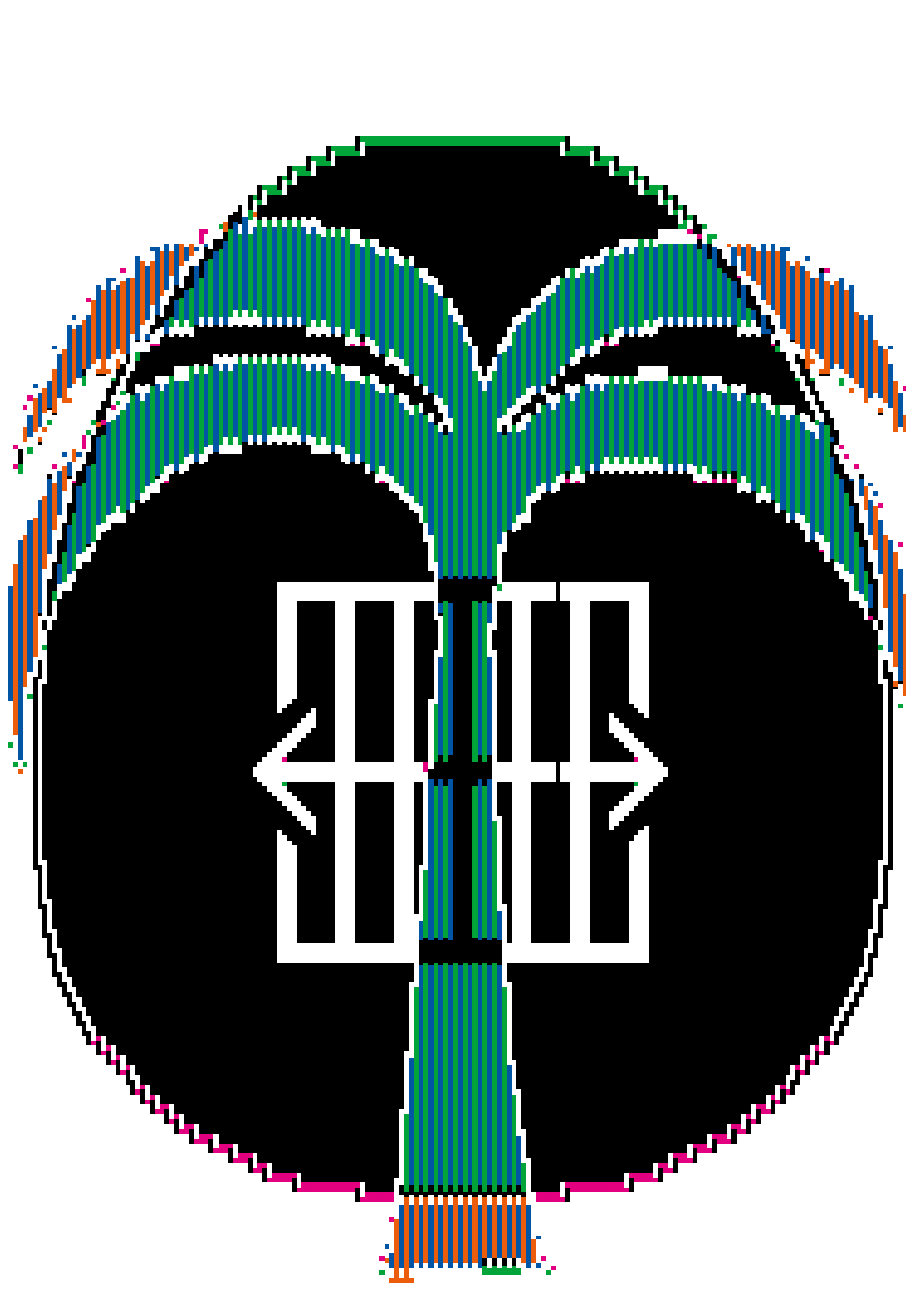






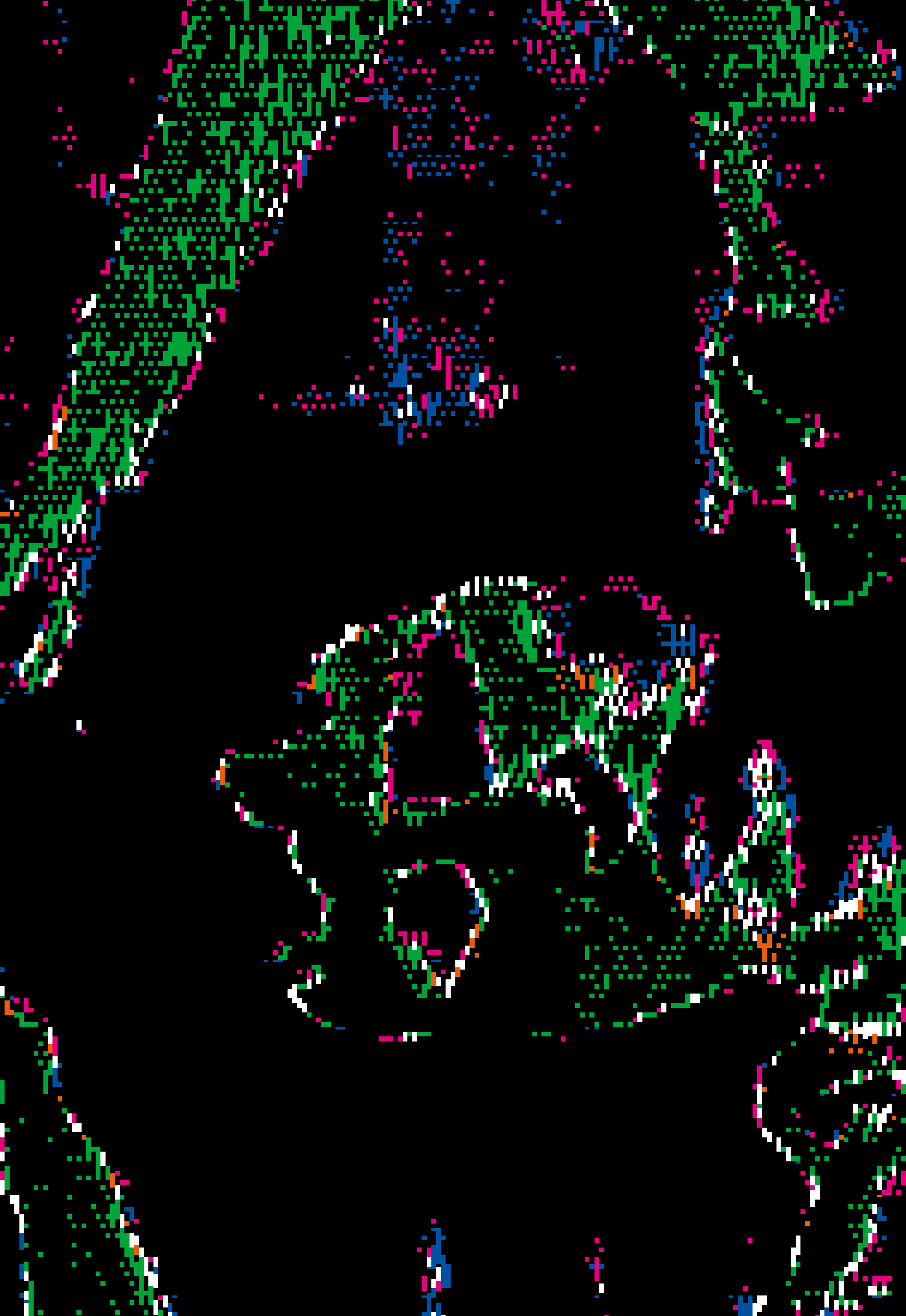


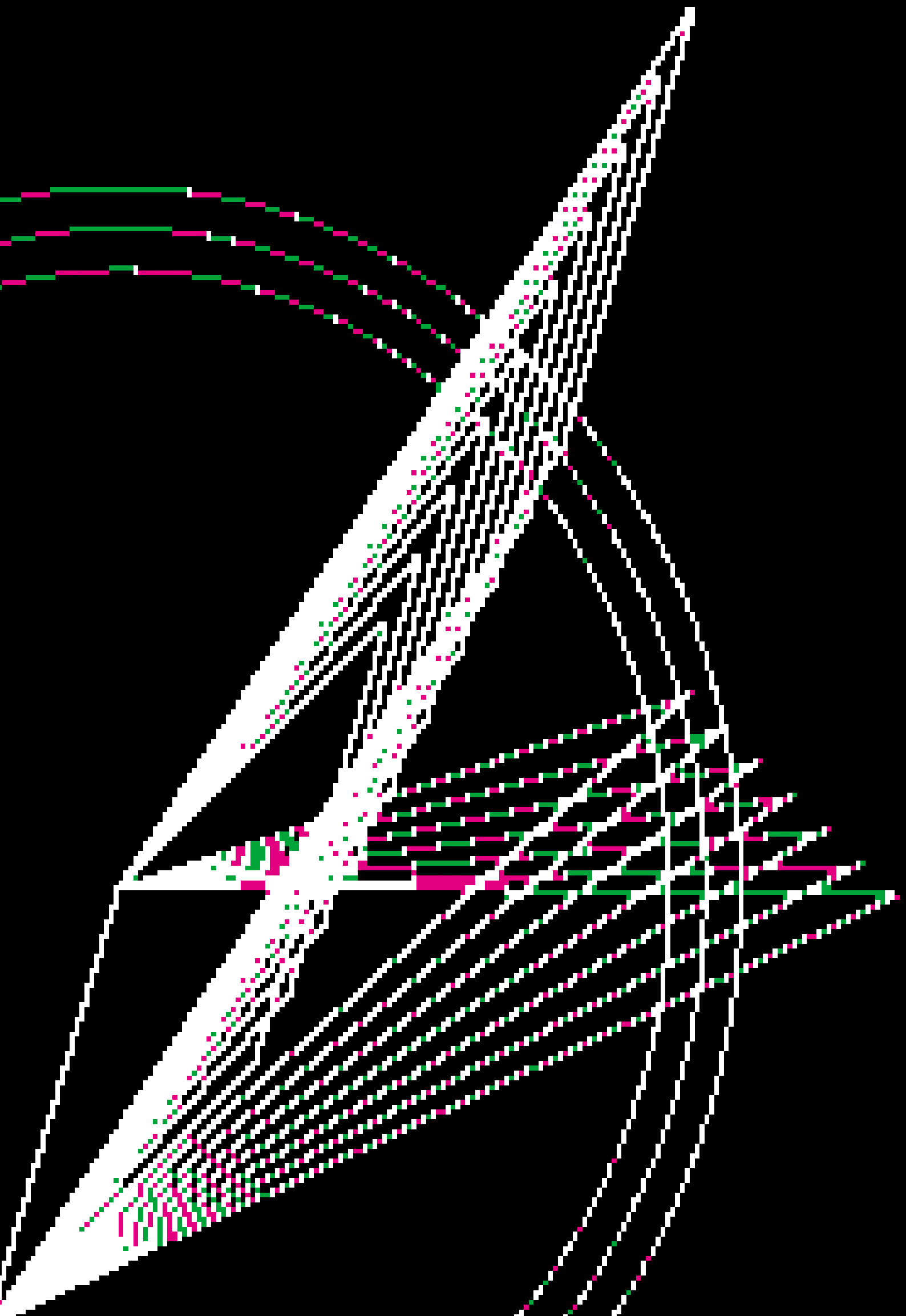


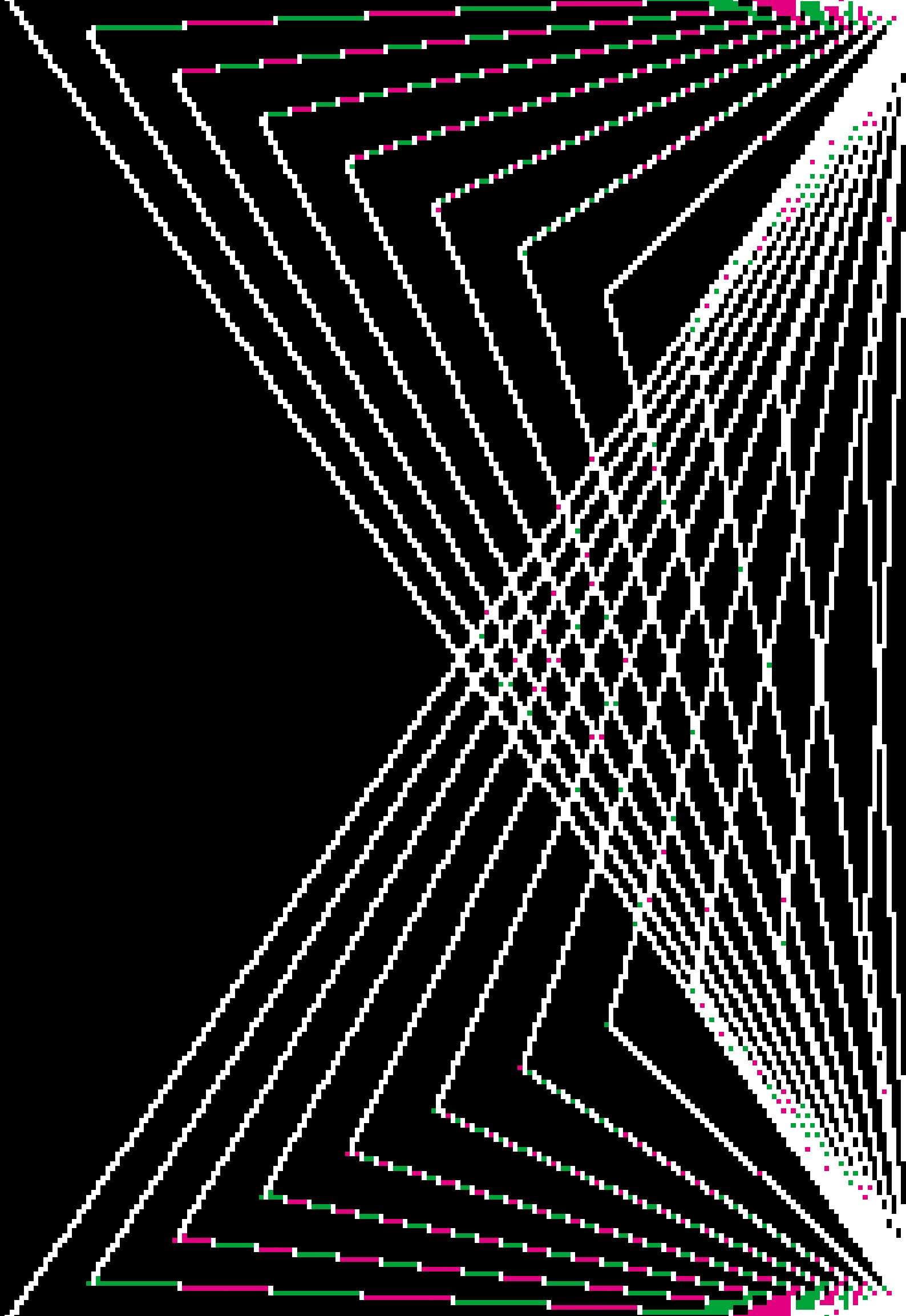


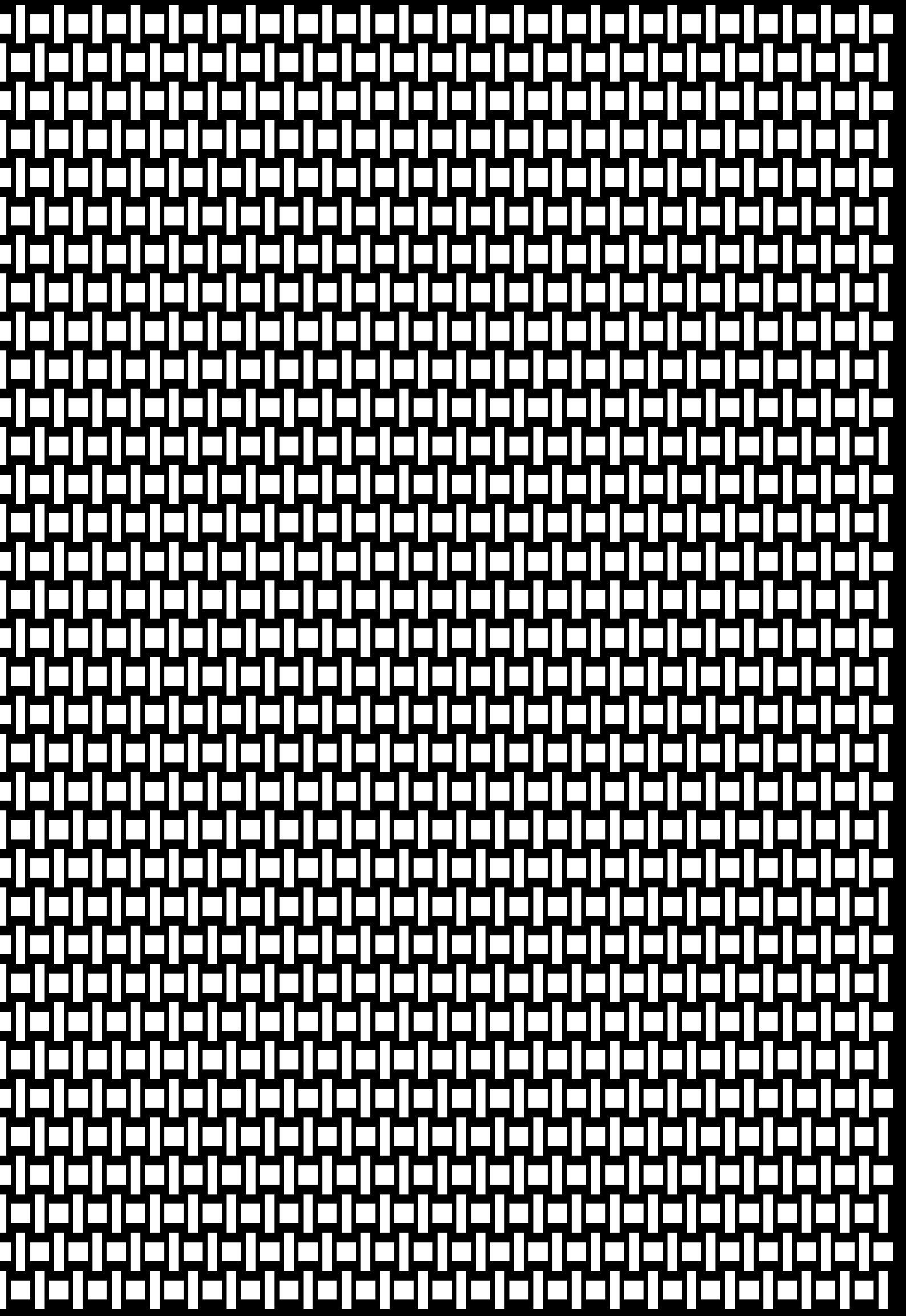


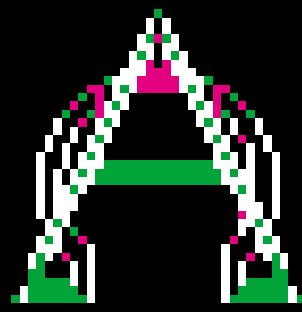




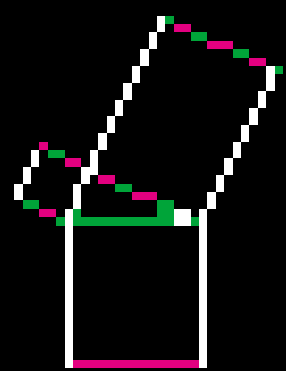








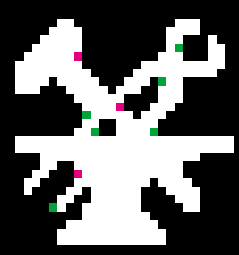
X-Y-Z



ESPRIT



SURF...?



HEILOT 41.49 TO 7777



Технологии искусственного
интеллекта в компьютерной графике 1983

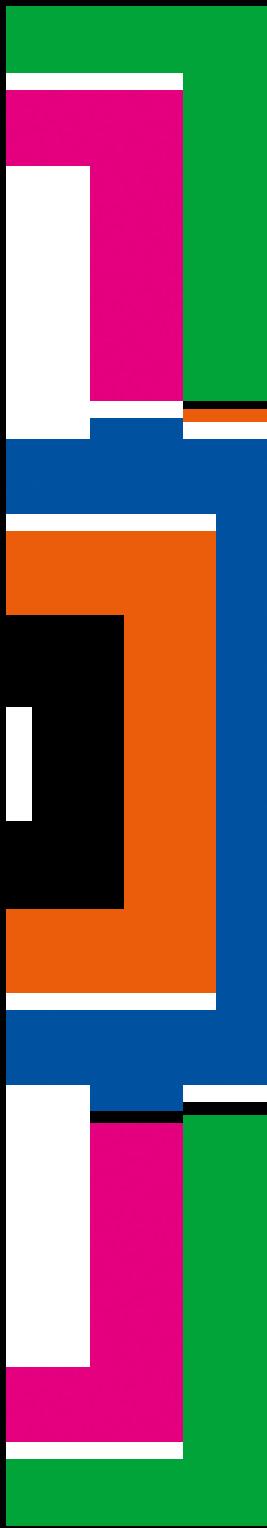
Михайлов Т.А. и
Харитонов А.В.



SAVE AS ART?



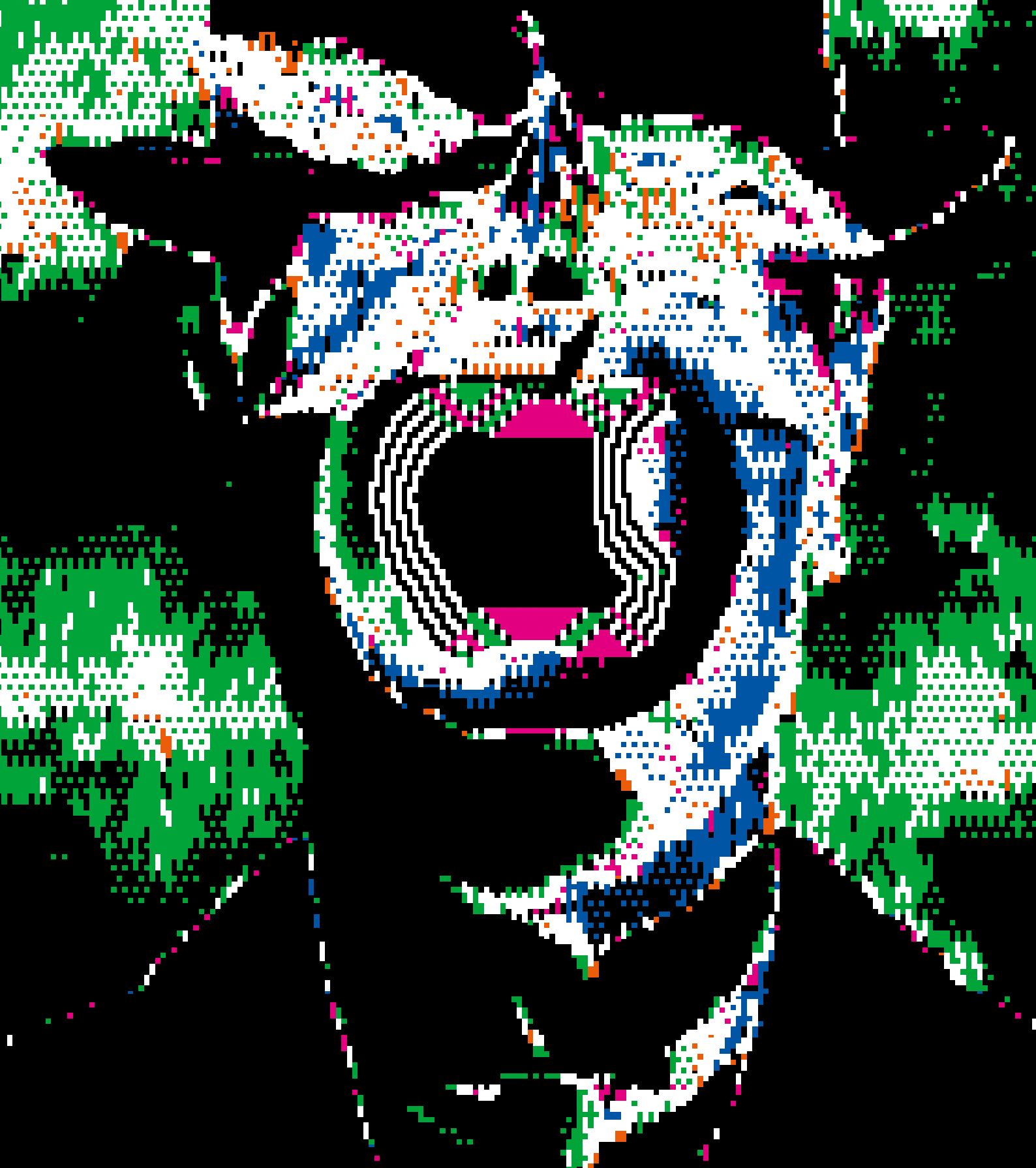
OR NOT?

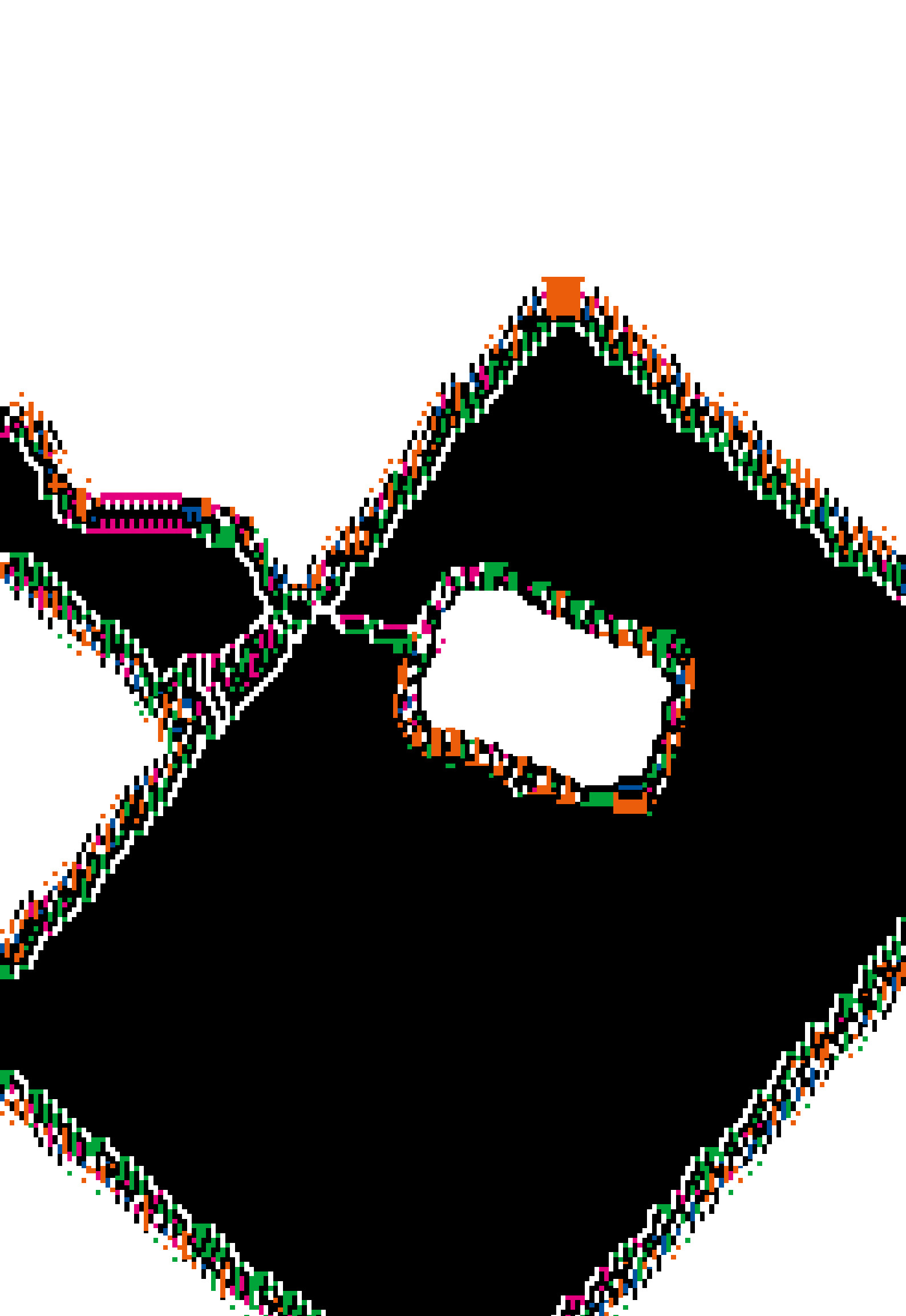


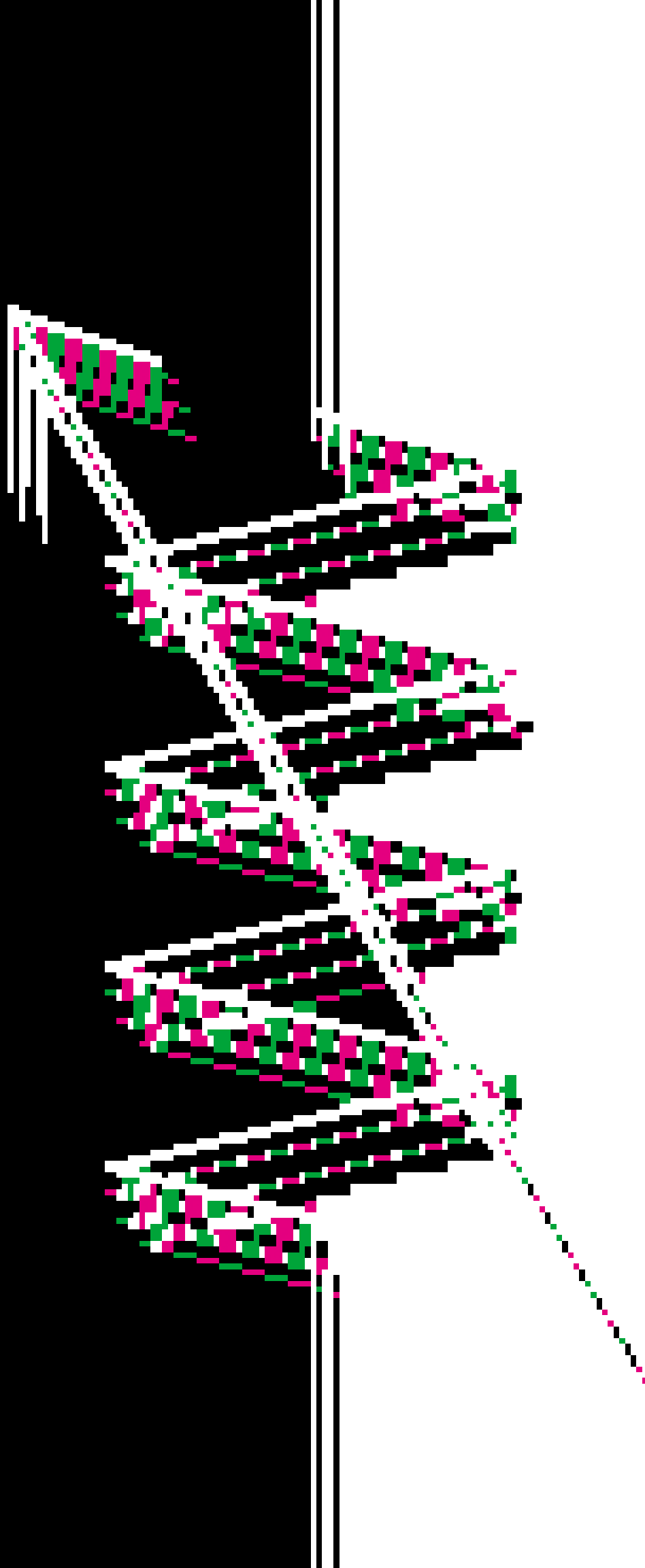




AN APPLE IN ART
IS NOT AN APPLE

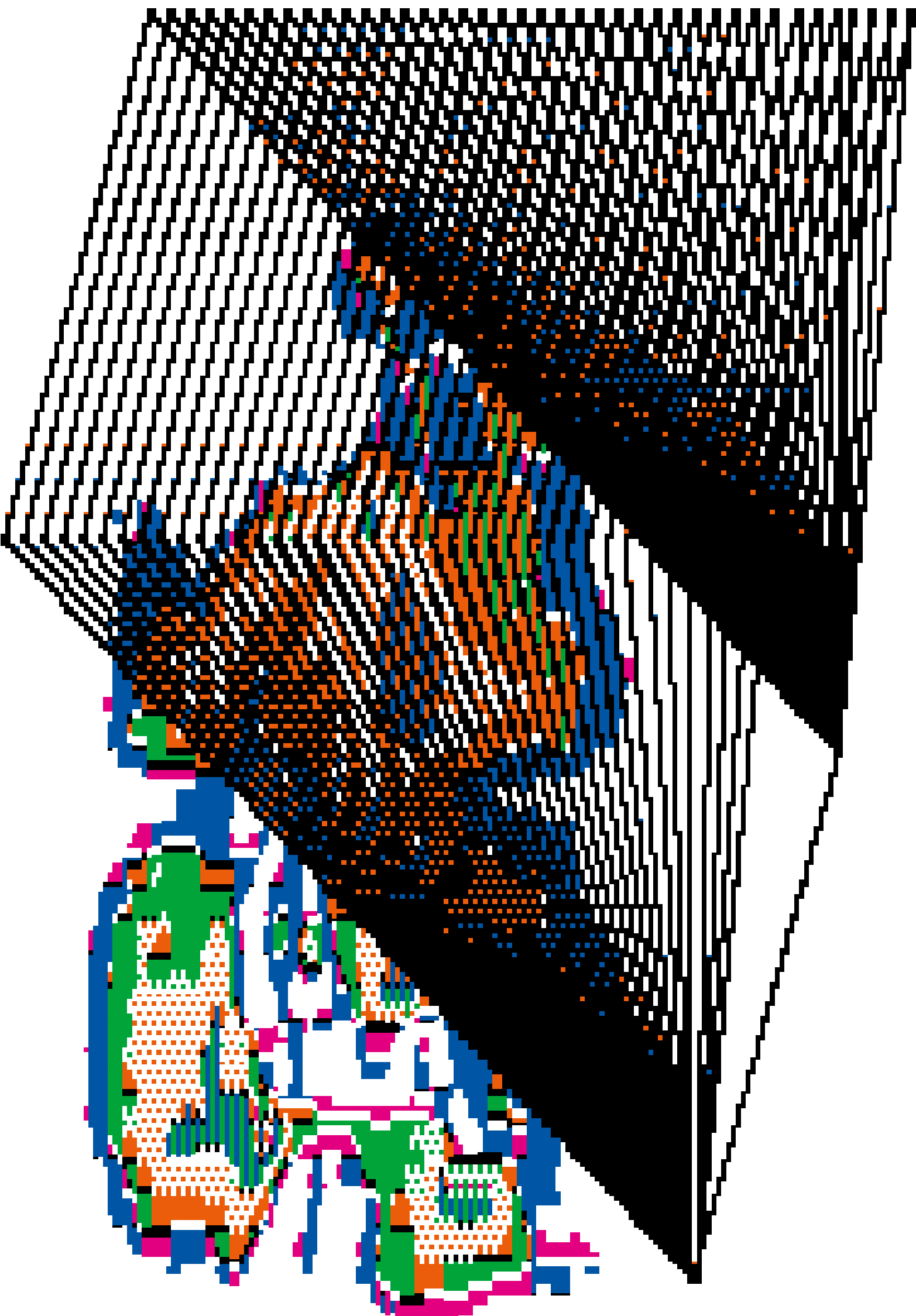




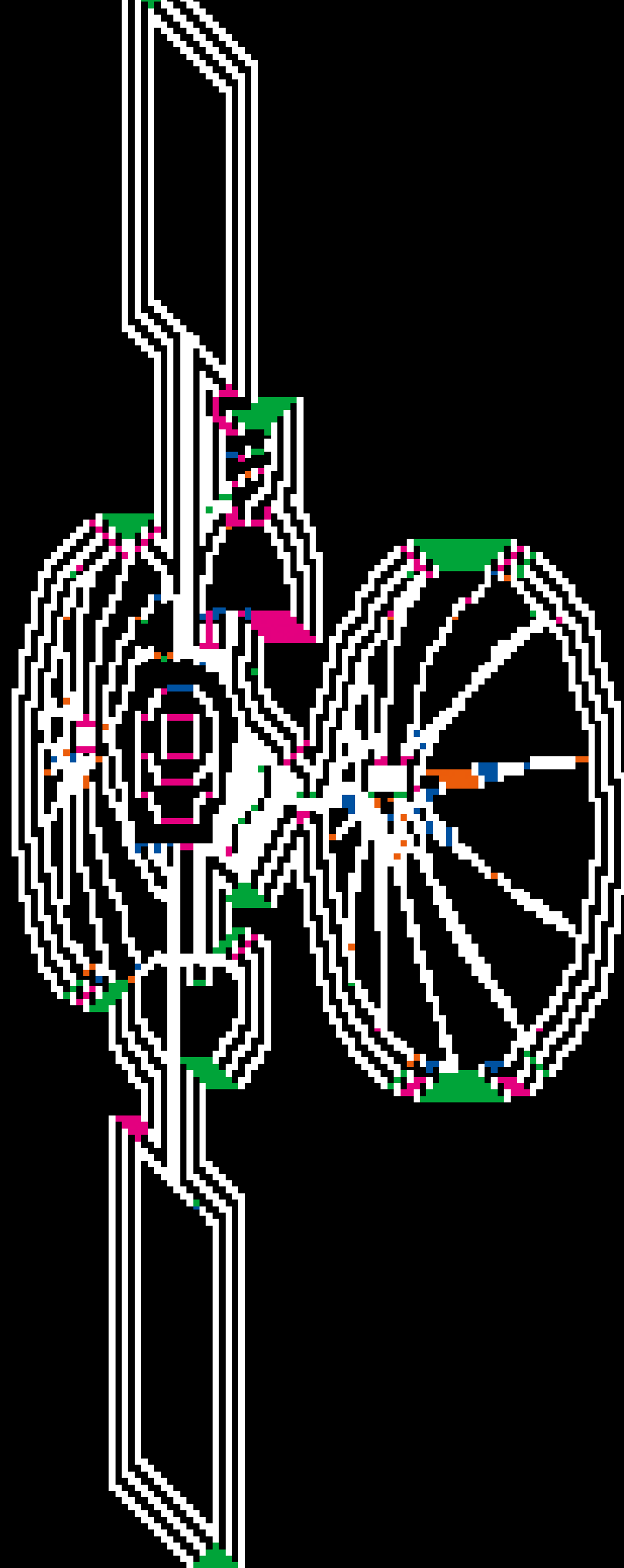


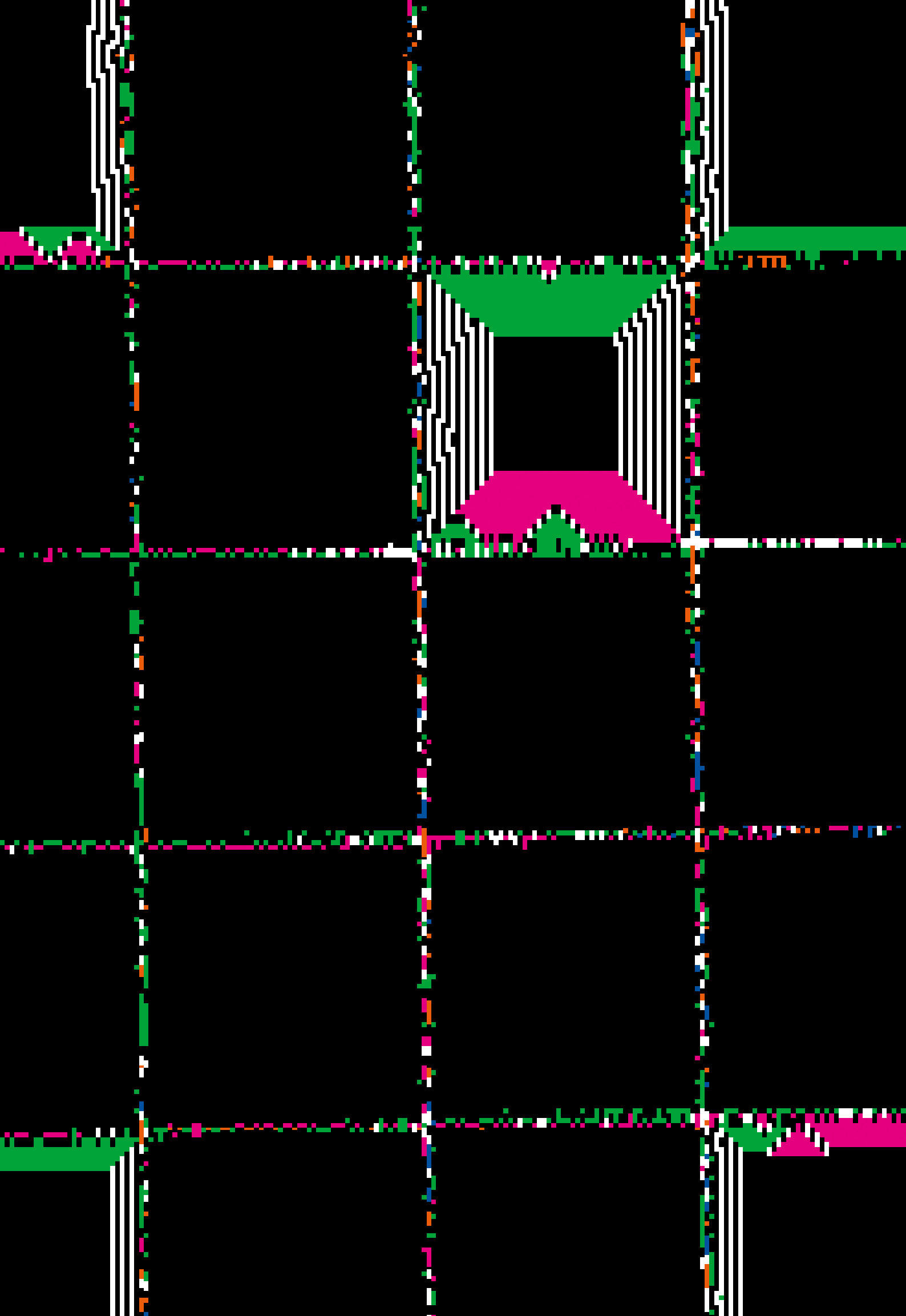
The Great Depression



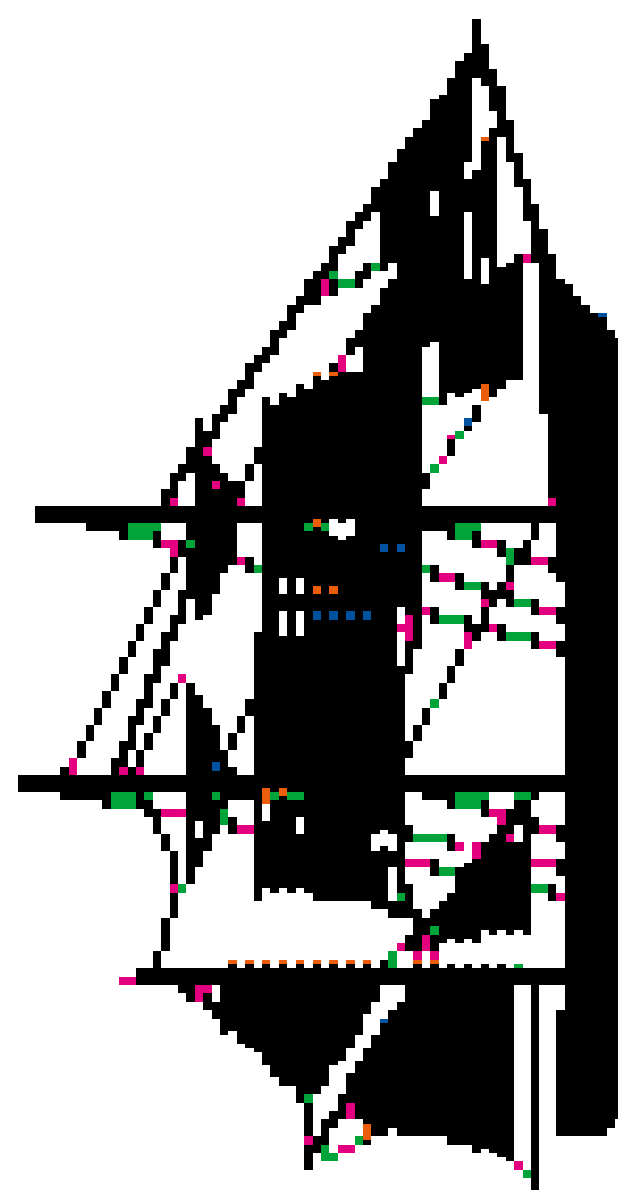


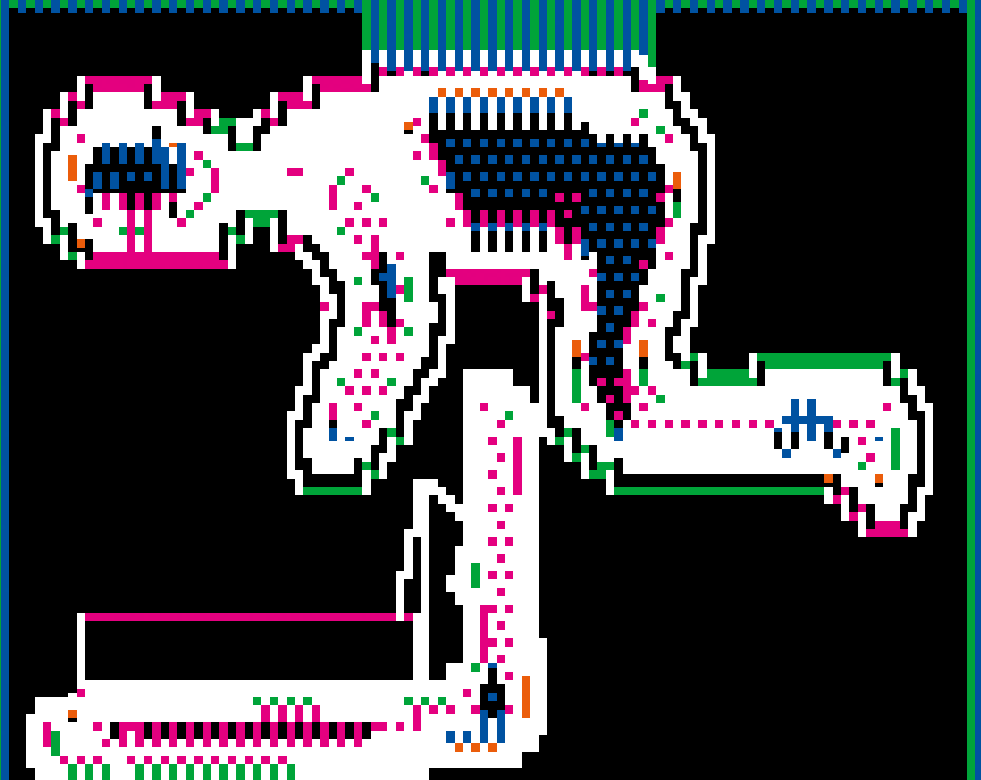
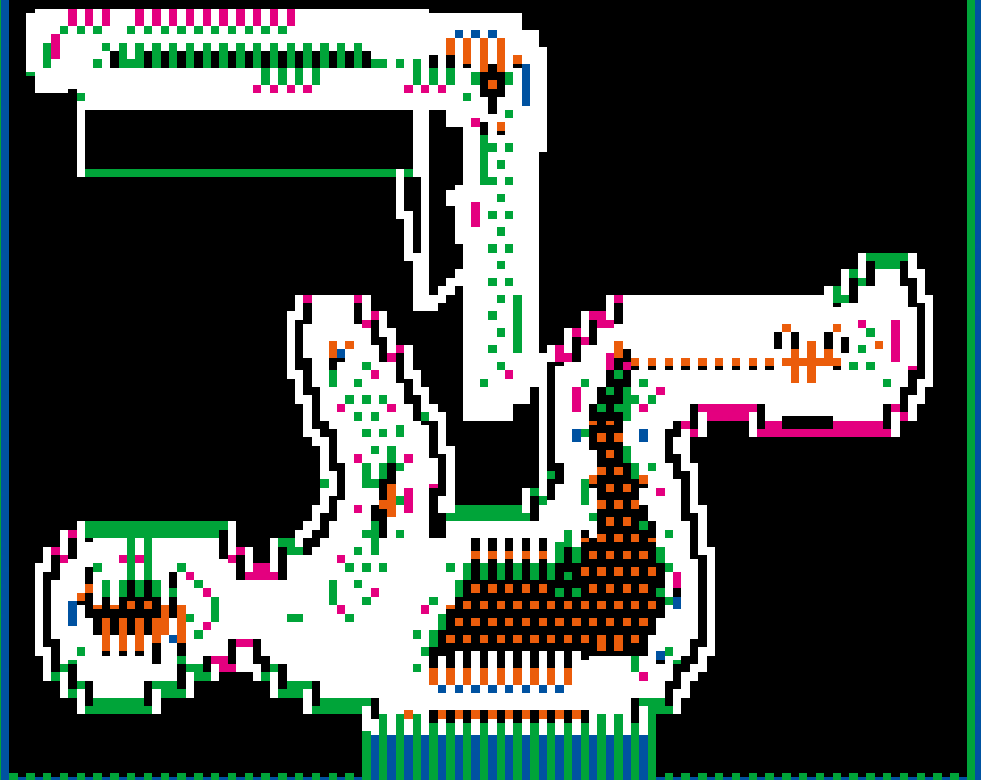


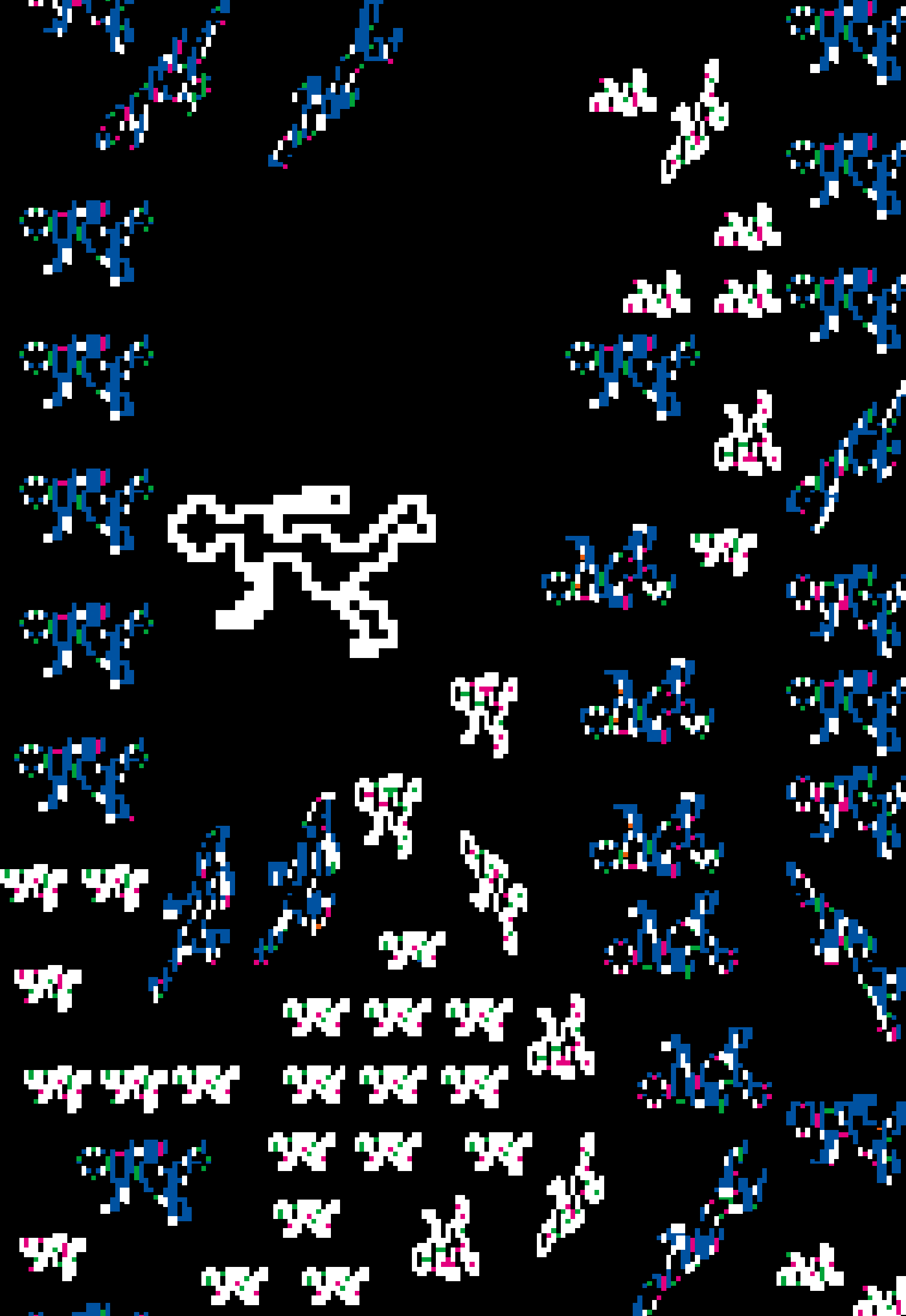




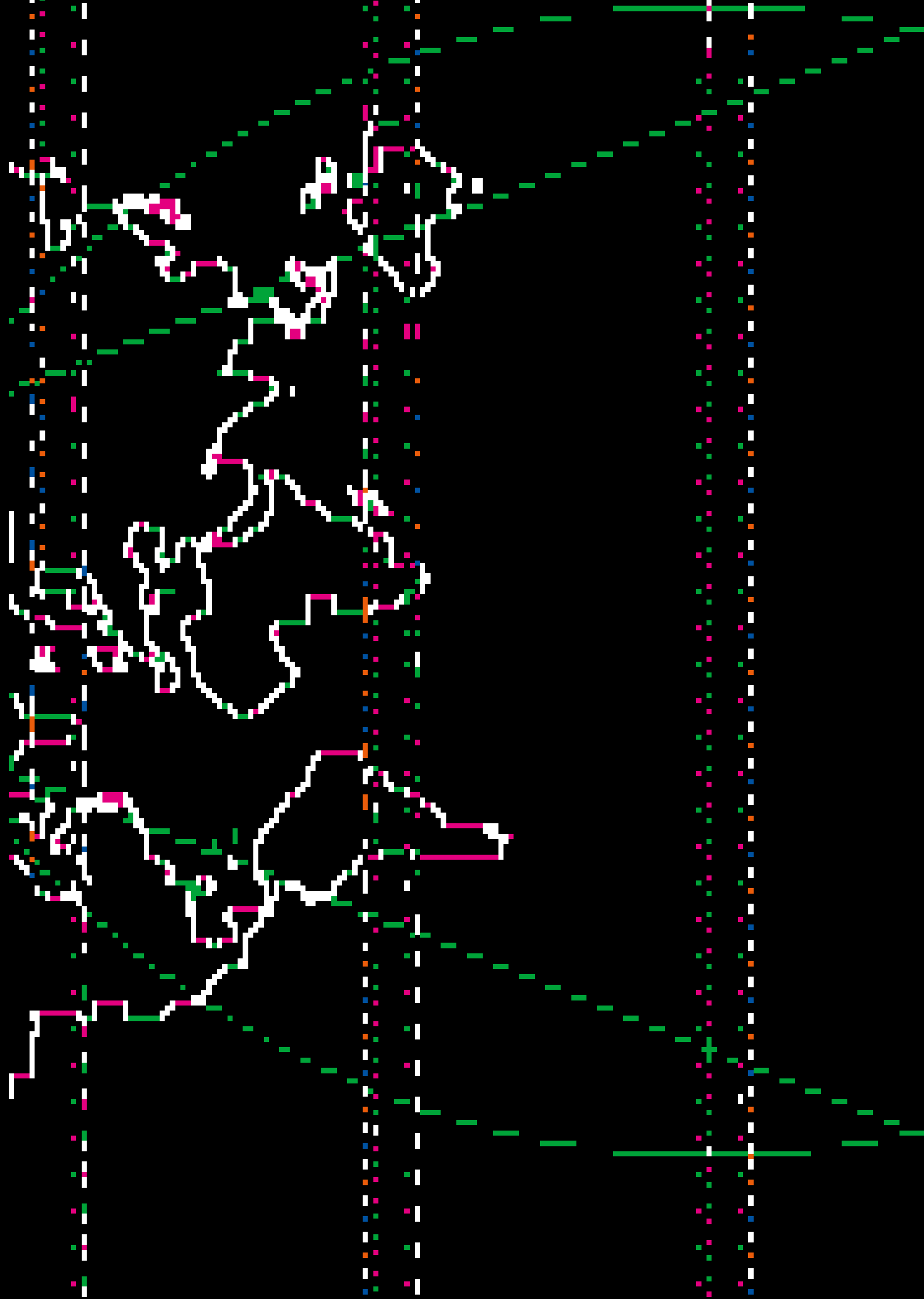


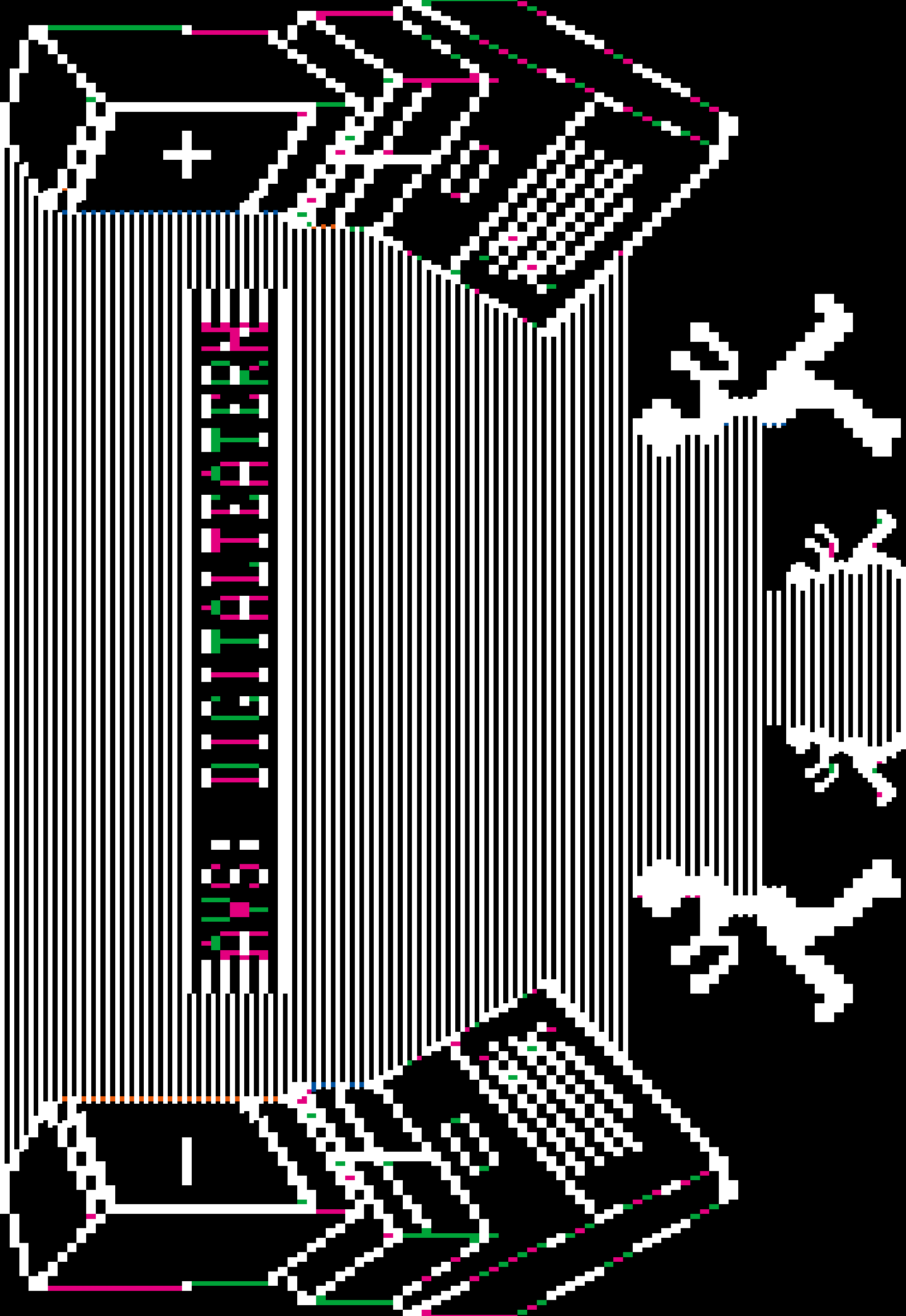






POETRY

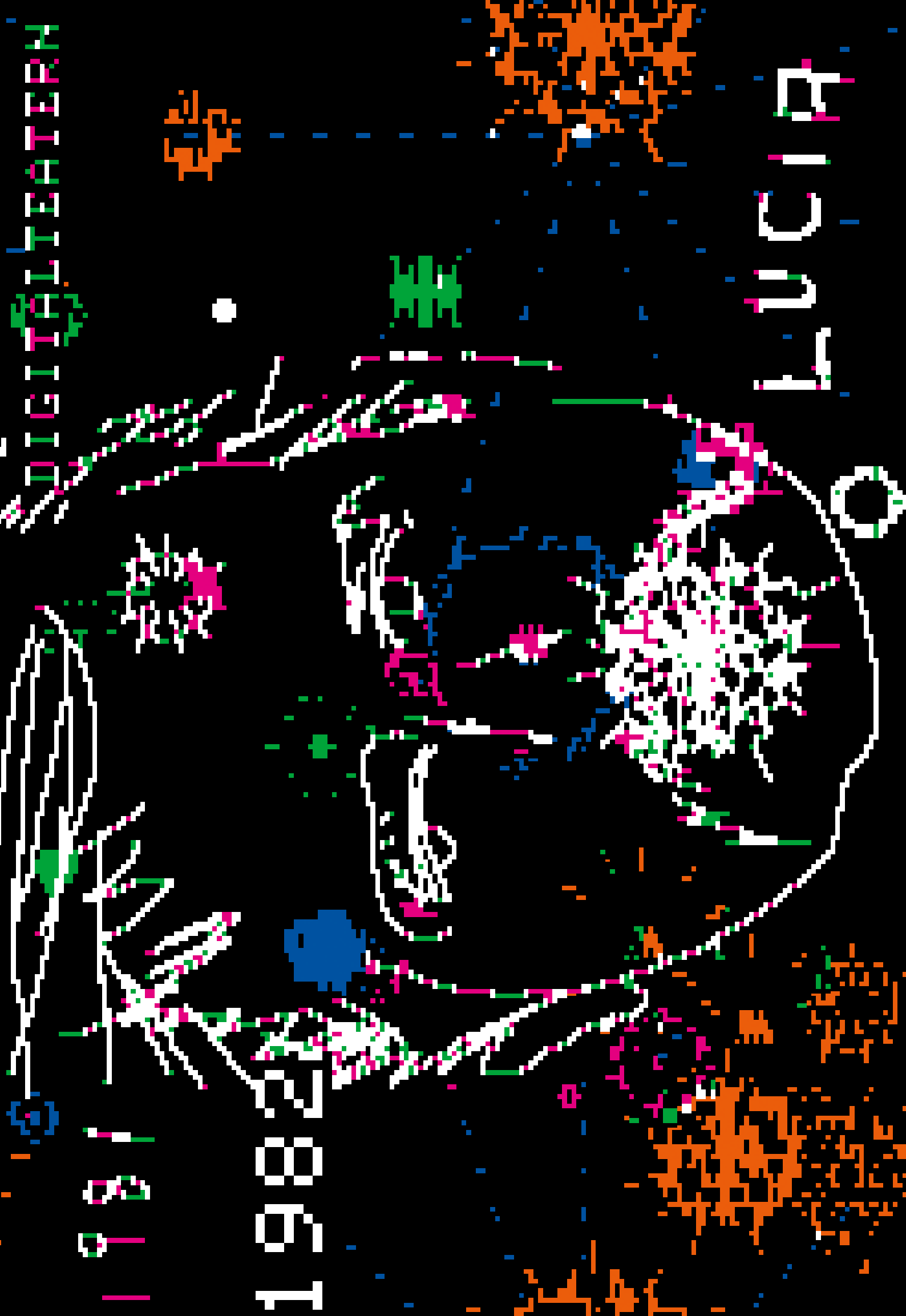


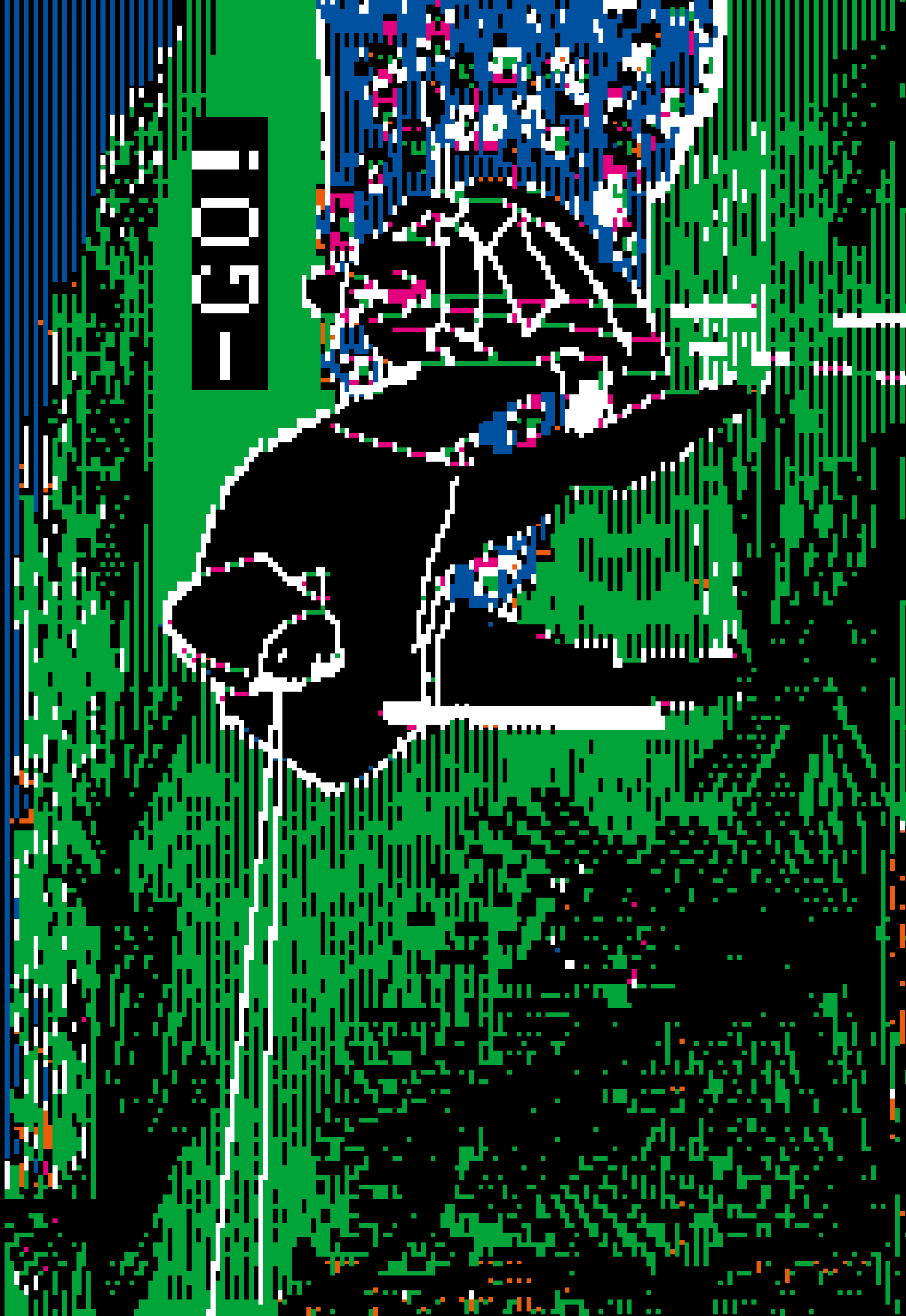


AS: DIGITAL

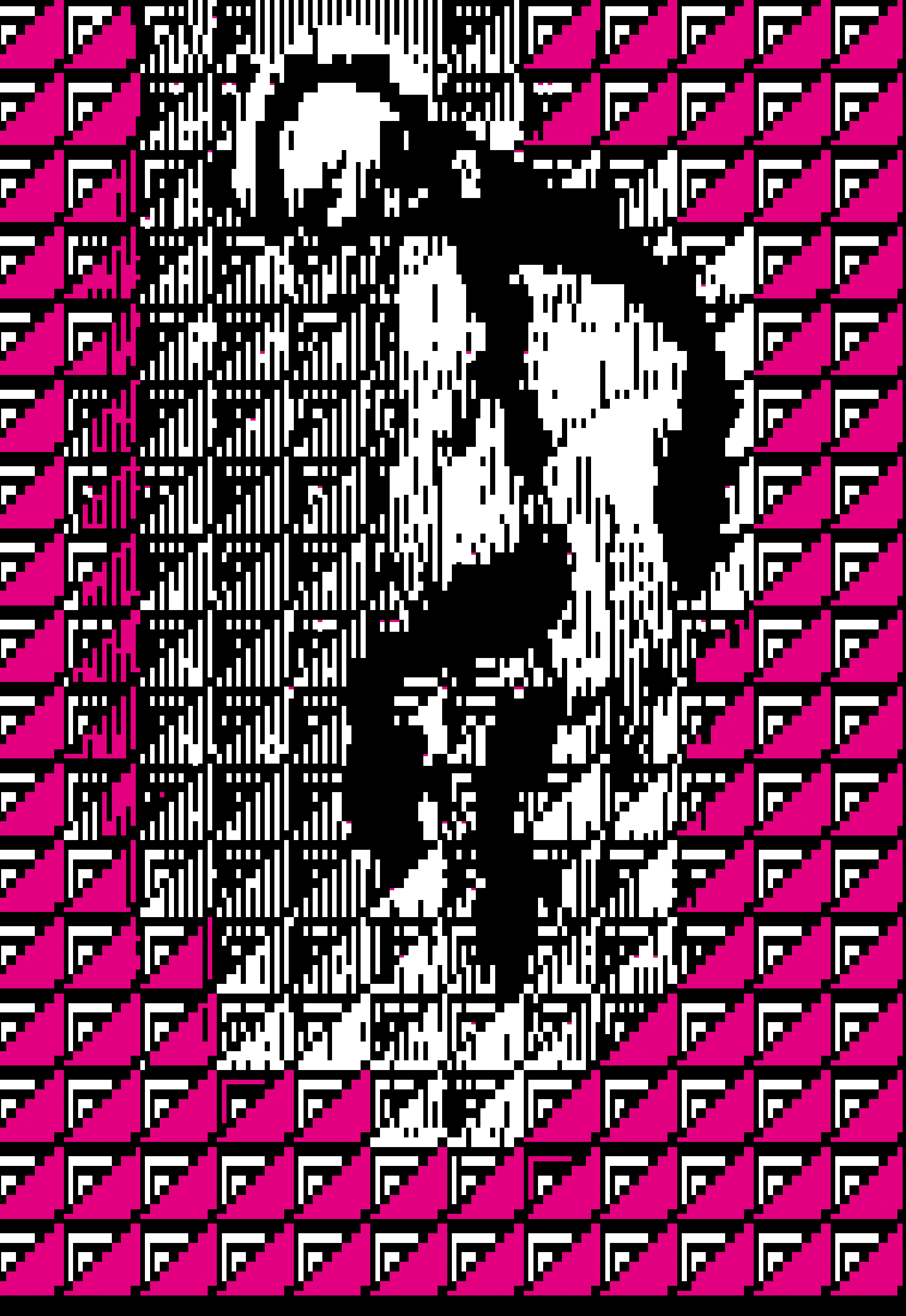








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FAKE
FI

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THOR
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Charlotte Johannesson
posing in punk dress,
mid-1970s. Photo: Per
Roland Nilsson

**RHEA DALL
AND CHARLOTTE
JOHANNESSEN:
*STATION TO STATION***

RHEA DALL So, how did you become interested in weaving and how did you learn to do it?

CHARLOTTE JOHANNESSON I learned to weave in the beginning of the 1960s. It was my formal education. It took around three years back then to go through every kind of weaving technique, but I knew all along that I wanted to make images via this medium. There was no one else around here who really did this then. One important artist I looked at was Hannah Ryggen, the iconic Norwegian weaver. Apparently she had been sitting in her attic in the small family farm, weaving. A teacher I had at the time told us her story. The other women at the course didn't really take an interest in Ryggen. Most were a bit religious and were there to learn to do napkins and so on, but I had something else going on. I wanted to create images, and also to use text or something else loaded with content – something kind of slogan-like. I was interested in the real world – in politics. This was the reality that struck me.

RD Did you also experiment with industrial processes when you were a student, or did the technological aspect come only later?

CJ I was very interested even then in all sorts of techniques you could work with to make images. There was a bit of Jacquard weaving involved, which was very complex. Of course, it wasn't proper Jacquard weaving, rather a simplified version, but based on the same principle of controlling the loom and the design with a punched card. As you probably know, the Jacquard loom was an early conceptual model for the computer. In the 1970s, I started to do some lacing, too. This I really enjoyed, but it takes so long you wouldn't believe it.

RD After school, you started a studio in Malmö?

CJ Yes, it was like this: I had my own weaving studio, and I incorporated it as a company, which I named Cannabis because I was weaving with fibres from hemp plants. These you could obviously use to make threads, just as you might use wool or other things. Later, after my daughter Malinda was born, I left the studio, and the place became a gallery instead. I didn't have time to work there then, as there were so many other things I needed to do, and also I wanted Malinda with me. That early exposure turned out to be important for her, too. When she was a little girl, Malinda once pointed at Sten Kallin from IBM and said, 'I wanna be like him', and she has actually worked for IBM for twenty-two years.

RD Your husband, Sture, worked with IBM from the end of the 1960s through the early 1970s. Were you already working with computers by then, too?

CJ I began working with computers in the late 1970s, when Sture and I began collaborating on the Digital Theatre. Really, we started the research that eventually led to the Digital Theatre in 1978, even though the official years of the Digital Theatre began in 1981, with the Apple II Plus. 1978 was the year I traded my loom for the first 'personal' computer we got. It was a big loom, inscribed with the words 'I am no Angel'. A young man we met in Sweden had managed in some weird way to buy a computer from America, but had decided it was too simple for him. He felt he had already exhausted its possibilities, you see, and he wanted to work with the bigger computers – mainframes – instead.

RD And he agreed to trade his computer for your loom?

CJ Yes, he was interested in exactly this loom. Maybe he saw the likeness between the loom and the computer, as I did. As for me, there was a great synchronicity between the two machines, which I thought I could use – on the computer there were 239 pixels on the horizontal side and 191 pixels on the vertical side, and that was exactly what I had in the loom when I was weaving. I was using the same dimensions. Of course, due to the landscape orientation of the screen, any portrait-type image generated on the computer had to be made sideways, so that the head was actually lying on the side. So, while I was working on the images for the *Faces* of the 1980s series, I had to sit and turn my head the whole time to assure the depictions came out right. [Laughs] That was what one could do back then.

Later, in 1981, after reading about the new Apple devices in *Creative Computing* magazine, we went to California to try to get our hands on them. We got in touch with the owner of a computer shop, and he happened to be a Hungarian émigré. He was so happy to see fellow Europeans that he hosted us at his house while he tried to find the various equipment we needed for the Digital Theatre. His hosting us included giving us a bag of weed and a map and lending us his car for a week. It was a great week, of course, but in the end he simply could not get hold of the items we wanted – they were still in production.

RD How did the idea of collaborating on something with a name like the Digital Theatre come about – were you intending to stage anything?

CJ First and foremost, Sture and I wanted to work on something to do with the future. And we were playing on the notion of the 'free' theatre groups in Sweden. We said we would start a free theatre group. It would be free of actors. The Swedish Arts Council did not support this idea,

so we got support from the State of Sweden's Council for Technical Development instead, as well as a private bank. For us, it was a moment when we shared an artistic project, and it was thrilling, like entering unexplored land. Before and after this period, both Sture and I worked very singularly, but when we worked together, we worked together completely. We would start at eight in the morning and work non-stop until two at night. It was up to me to form the images, and Sture did the technical part. Of course, Sture was essential to making it all happen, but I was really the one who made the imagery.

In terms of actual staging, though, we did make a small animation for the reopening of the Swedish parliament building [Riksdagshuset] after their long renovation. They wanted a TV commercial for the inauguration, so we made the first animated film for Swedish television. It was a small film in which the parliament house falls apart. I did the images, then Sture did the animation.

RD And how did the Digital Theatre actually function? Did people come to the studio to observe it in action?

CJ Yes, since the newspapers announced our work, many people called us up to come and visit the studio. In the end it was rather tiring, and we just wanted a bit of peace and quiet to work. The Digital Theatre was not meant to be a gallery or a theatre in that way – it was more of an experimental workshop.

RD So, what was it like day-to-day?

CJ If you wanted to use a computer to make images back then, you more or less had to figure everything out for yourself. There was no software program you could go out and buy, or anything like that. Or, there was one calculating program and a few graphic design programs – I remember one called Utopia and another called Coloring Board – but they were rudimentary. You could do one thing in one program, then you had to swap to do other stuff in the other program. The process was much more hands-on than now. It all took a very long time – not unlike weaving. There were no manuals. In fact, the only thing that came with a manual was the computer itself, and of course there wasn't a word in Swedish. But in comparison to what you see today, the handbook for Apple was fairly easy to read. It was written in a kind of slang.

Once you were done with the programming, the plots took a long, long time to print, too. And you could only insert one plot at a time. Thus, only one colour could be printed at a time. In the computer, one could specify only four colours

and black or else nothing – white. But of course in the actual plotter, I could use any colour or any tusche. One plot would combine with one tusche and thus give one colour of printed pixels. For every pixel, the tusche needed to touch down twelve times. So, to fill out a whole drawing would be a long process. And if there were any disturbances, like a spike in the electrical circuitry, let's say, the drawing would be damaged and the entire process had to be started all over again. But it was exciting to watch. There was always a great sense of anticipation in the studio when we were waiting for a new plot to come out.

RD *Faces of the 1980s* includes portraits of Boy George, Bob Dylan, Björn Borg, Ahmad Shah Massoud and David Bowie. How did you decide on the motifs in the series?

CJ A magazine contacted us to ask that we do an image of Boy George. We accepted the commission, and it turned out so well that I then felt like doing more faces. Unfortunately, the series ended up being only male faces. I tried Annie Lennox, but her portrait wasn't very successful. Anyhow, a business developer was pushing us to produce something at that time – something commercially viable, not just experimental. So these portraits were conceived with that idea in the background – the thought that we might sell something. And then the images were publicised in many magazines. Boy George was especially popular.

In the case of David Bowie, he had just done the *Let's Dance* album, where he had this haircut that was short on the lower half of his head, with the long bangs on top covering one eye, and I thought that was really hot. Most people think of Ziggy Stardust when they think of Bowie, I guess, but I only became a fan with *Station to Station*. That was from just before his time in Berlin. We were also going to Berlin quite often around then. And that album was more political – it was reality-based. That piqued my interest even before the haircut.

RD Bowie's signature is on one of the prints. What's the story?

CJ Oh, it's a funny thing that happened – we stopped at a gas station on our way from CERN, where Sture and Sten from IBM had been invited to do a lecture. Do you know about CERN? It's the big particle physics laboratory in Geneva – quite an interesting place. So, we stopped at this gas station right outside Geneva, and I noticed this man with the Bowie haircut I liked so much, and then I looked closer and I realised it was David Bowie, himself, right there at the same gas station. Sture is much more blunt than I am. He just

walked right up to him and introduced himself. Bowie was a very nice person – there was nothing affected in his manner. He thought our project was really interesting. Sture went to get the posters to show him, and while we waited, Bowie and I had a quick chat. We were both driving Volvos, and we connected over this, agreeing this was a good car – boxy but safe. Anyhow, Sture picked up a poster for him. We asked him to sign a copy and keep one for himself. Bowie also took one of the prints of Boy George, which he promised to bring to him, so he should have a print, too, somewhere. Bumping into Bowie was pure luck, a little like finding a tiny particle at CERN.

RD When you were working with computer-generated images, were you in contact with any other artists who were interested in the same things?

CJ No, we didn't have any peers, really. No one seemed to be working with computers in such a way at that point, and the art critics didn't think it had anything to do with art. Some even said this was just about pushing a button. I wasn't really interested in other people's ideas about art then, either. I used to read the American magazine *Scientific American*, which was more in line with my interests – in various scientific research fields and in the future, generally. I still don't read much of anything having to do with art or writing about art. I think it's rather boring to read about art. I don't get any inspiration from that sort of thing. As a source for new thoughts, I'm much more interested in reading about developments in science.

RD Do you link the scientific with the psychedelic?

CJ Yes, indeed. Especially when I think of the first Apple products and how they came along. It was mostly the tripped-out types who worked with computers then. Even Xerox had their experimental workshop in San Francisco, and I often heard it referred to as 'the zoo', since most everyone working there were these long-haired, hippie, psychedelic kinds of people.

RD Did you also experiment with drugs as an influence in your work?

CJ I don't know. We smoked a lot of marijuana, since it was really useful to tighten concentration. But we didn't take anything just to trip out. To eat something like that (points to her mesquite cactus) and think you could work is a total illusion. I remember I once sat with paper and drew, but when I looked at it the day after there was literally nothing there. Nothing. What you saw when you created from that state was never the same as what you saw the next day.

RD How did you support your work back in the 1970s and 1980s?

CJ I got the artists' stipend in Sweden in 1976. Later, in the 1980s, I got a three-year work stipend. At that point, the income was granted because of the digital or computer-generated images. I also won the prize at the Design International in California. It was a very early women-only competition. I don't know if it even exists anymore, but back then it was definitely something no one knew about in Scandinavia. I probably found out about it from some American magazine. Since it was a competition having to do with design, most of the work was pretty commercial, but there was a lot of good stuff, too.

RD And what did you win the prize for?

CJ Digital images. One of the images I submitted was of Victoria Benedictsson, a female author from the nineteenth century. She was Swedish, but she died in Copenhagen. She committed suicide because she was in love with a Danish man. She worked under a pseudonym: Ernst Ahlgren. They had to back then. Obviously.

RD It seems that when you were coming up was also a special time, a challenging time, for female artists.

CJ It was extreme, but it was also extreme to be working with computers, which meant that even fewer people wanted to talk to us. The computer was really considered the devil's tool among people in the arts. I thought the feminist movement was narrow-minded about computers, as well. In the 1970s, there was a feminist group in Sweden called the 'Gruppe 8'. They were central to the movement, and if you said 'computer' to them, they would be completely scared.

RD Did you associate yourself with the punk movement?

CJ On one old woven piece I wrote 'Tidiness at any cost'. I guess that was ironic. You could call it punk. We met the Sex Pistols once. We had heard 'God Save the Queen' when the record was still difficult to get. We went to Växjö where they were playing. Sture did a big interview with them.

RD In Sweden now, you're considered a pioneer of digital art, aren't you?

CJ Yes, but one shouldn't marry Sture if she wants to be known on her own. *[Laughs]* Hmmm – moreover, though I guess my images would surely appear in public, I didn't want to be too exposed, myself.

RD Did you continue to make digital images after the Digital Theatre?

CJ No, it was only during those years for me. After that, I got bored with the technique. Somehow, I just didn't take an interest in it anymore. The fun in the beginning was that no one had worked with computers like that before – that was the challenge. After 1985, the Mac computers took hold, and they weren't as interesting for us. The work wasn't creative and compelling in the same way. Sture continued with the grand computers – he moved onto another project named EPICS – but in that work, the drawings were generated by the computer, not by human hand. I worked some with papier-mâché for a while, then I started working at a design centre in Malmö in a more typical job.

RD I'm looking at one of your archival photographs on the wall here, of you next to a big woven face of a fisherman. The design is an all-time Scandinavian classic of the sort that decorates average homes, but your heroic prototype resembles the *Faces* series, both in size and in the semi-frontal facial posture. The image even seems pixelated.

CJ Actually, this is done from a data-print of Sture's, though I guess the image was made in 1974 or 1975, long before we even thought about beginning the Digital Theatre. Sture did a big print, but only with signs for the various colours, then it was just left for me to decide which colour to use where. I made it in brown and beige because I had collected Faroe wool for the purpose, and it came only in natural colours – that is, undyed. I phoned to the Faroe Islands to order the wool, and it arrived in this huge bag with a wooden block attached, with the address written on that.

RD Do your old woven works still exist?

CJ No, I don't think so.

LARS BANG LARSEN

LARS BANG LARSEN Louise, you are a graphic designer and you have been involved with various aspects of the preparations for Charlotte's retrospective at the Reina Sofia. Together with Charlotte you created a series of 'woven digital graphics': a series of weavings that loop back to the transition performed by Charlotte when in the late 1970s she swapped the loom for a computer. Can you talk about the making of the new works?

LOUISE SIDENIUS When I was introduced to Charlotte's work I became very fascinated by figures and motifs that recurred in her work across time and different media: loom, floppy disk, lace, printing, painting, and so on. It gave me the idea of a circular type of production with no beginning and end, and I speculated if this loop or spiral could be extended by weaving Charlotte's digital works.

I applied for a joint residency for Charlotte and myself at the Danish Art Workshops, a studio program in Copenhagen where they have a TC1 – a digital loom controlled by a single thread. In the course of two months we weaved twenty new works that took their point of departure from some of the first digital graphics that Charlotte created at the end of the 1970s.

There were figures that we knew from the start had to be included: the human avatar, Mickey Mouse, the camel, the spliff... Some of the new woven digital graphics – as Charlotte ended up calling them – are direct translations of original digital files, others are composed by combining different digital graphics and adding new text, for instance 'the Brain is wider than the sky' or 'REFLEX'. Charlotte chose the colours of the yarn and went for lighter hues than the original files that were in magenta, blue, green, orange, black and white. The format of the woven digital graphics is also a direct translation of the number of pixels that compose the original digital files.

LBL Charlotte, when you started the Digital Theatre in the 1980s the internet didn't exist, and instead you made all the connections that needed making. It seems to me that you channelled the entire visual culture around you – significant events and people appearing in the flow of the mass media, or in the special connection between your

intuitions and the affordances of your computer. With the woven digital graphics you are turning away from culture at large and instead channelling or cannibalising an earlier incarnation of your authorship. Why this about-face?

CJ All the images that I created at the Digital Theatre with my Apple II Plus 'micro-computer' were stored on floppy disks. This work had been neither seen nor shown since floppies fell out of use. It was only when Mats Stjernstedt invited me to take part in the Nordic Pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 2017 that someone took an interest in this work. When I after thirty-five years had the opportunity to see these images again, I became a little astonished and excited that they were so modern. They seemed classical, somehow, and deserved a new life. So it was like a mirage in the desert... that very slowly gained *reality*, thanks to Louise's help and knowledge of the digital loom. These were images that were created in a low resolution and had disappeared in the obscurity of time, and much later resurrected in the 2010s and saved on what was then a contemporary format – a CD – and on to the computerised loom that Louise and I worked on – and out came a new work of art!

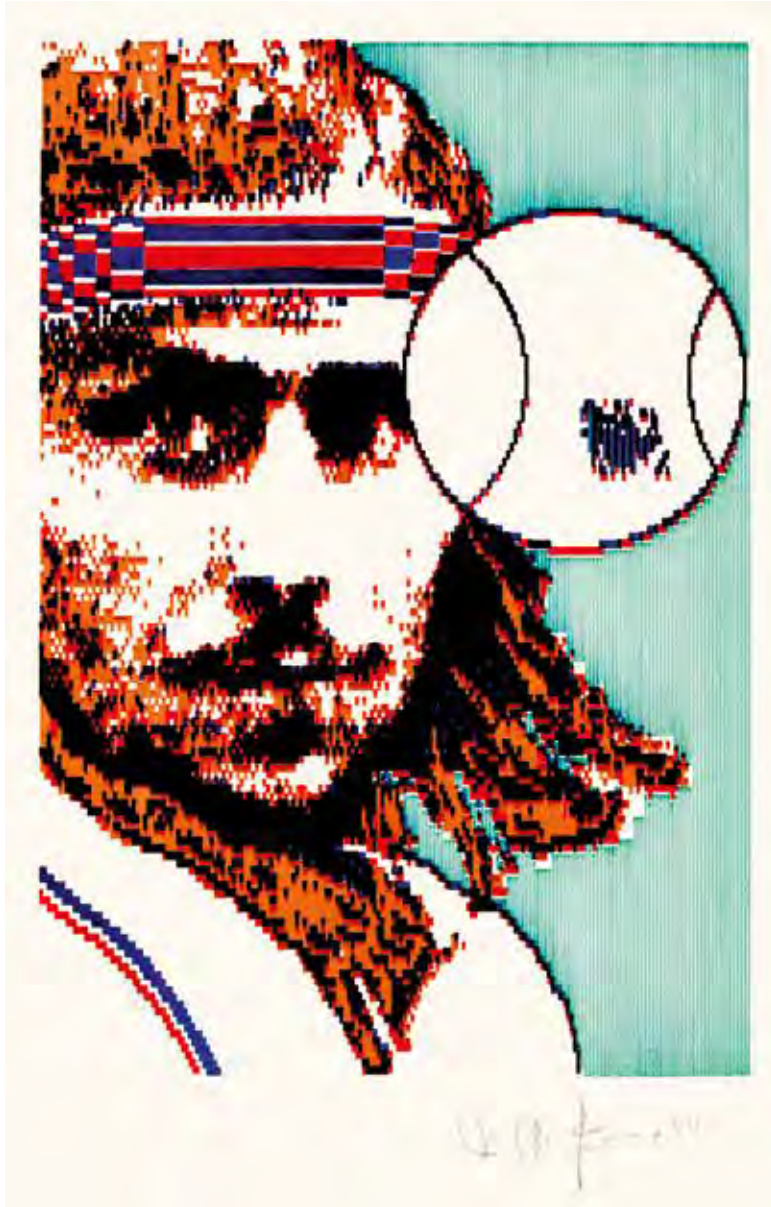
Machines at the Digital Theatre,
1983. Photo: Birgitta Olsson

Pages 109–142:
Computer graphics plotted
on paper

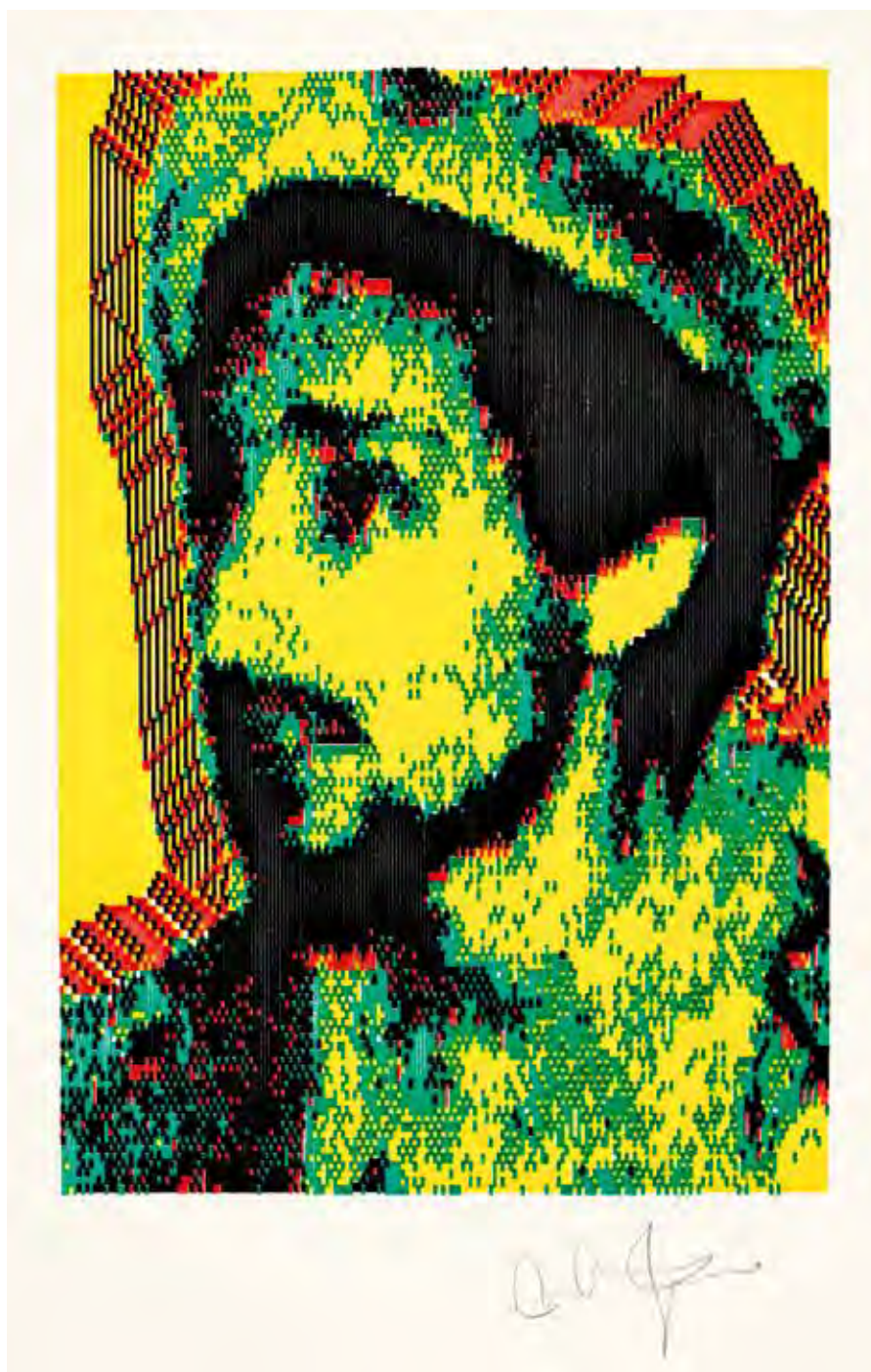




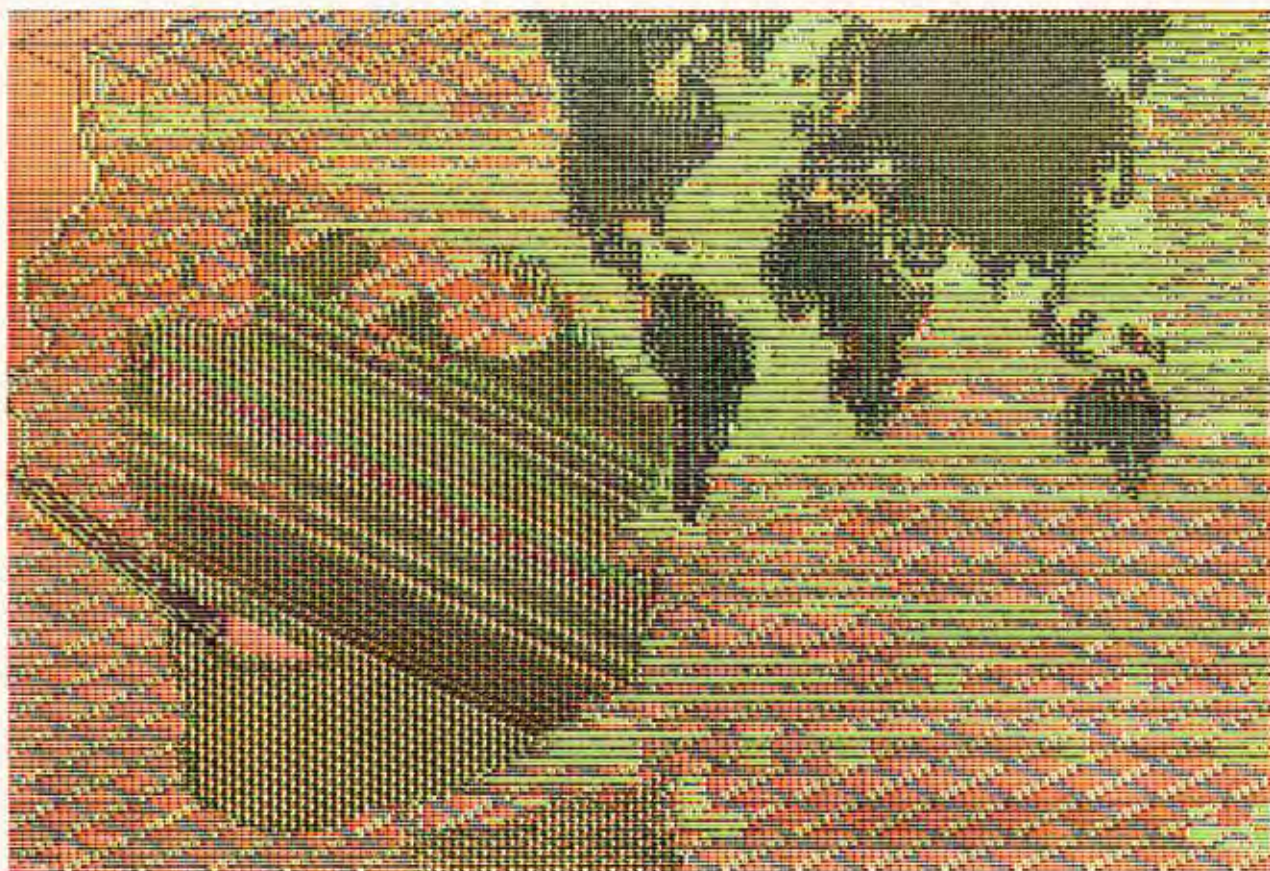
Take Me to Another World
1981–86



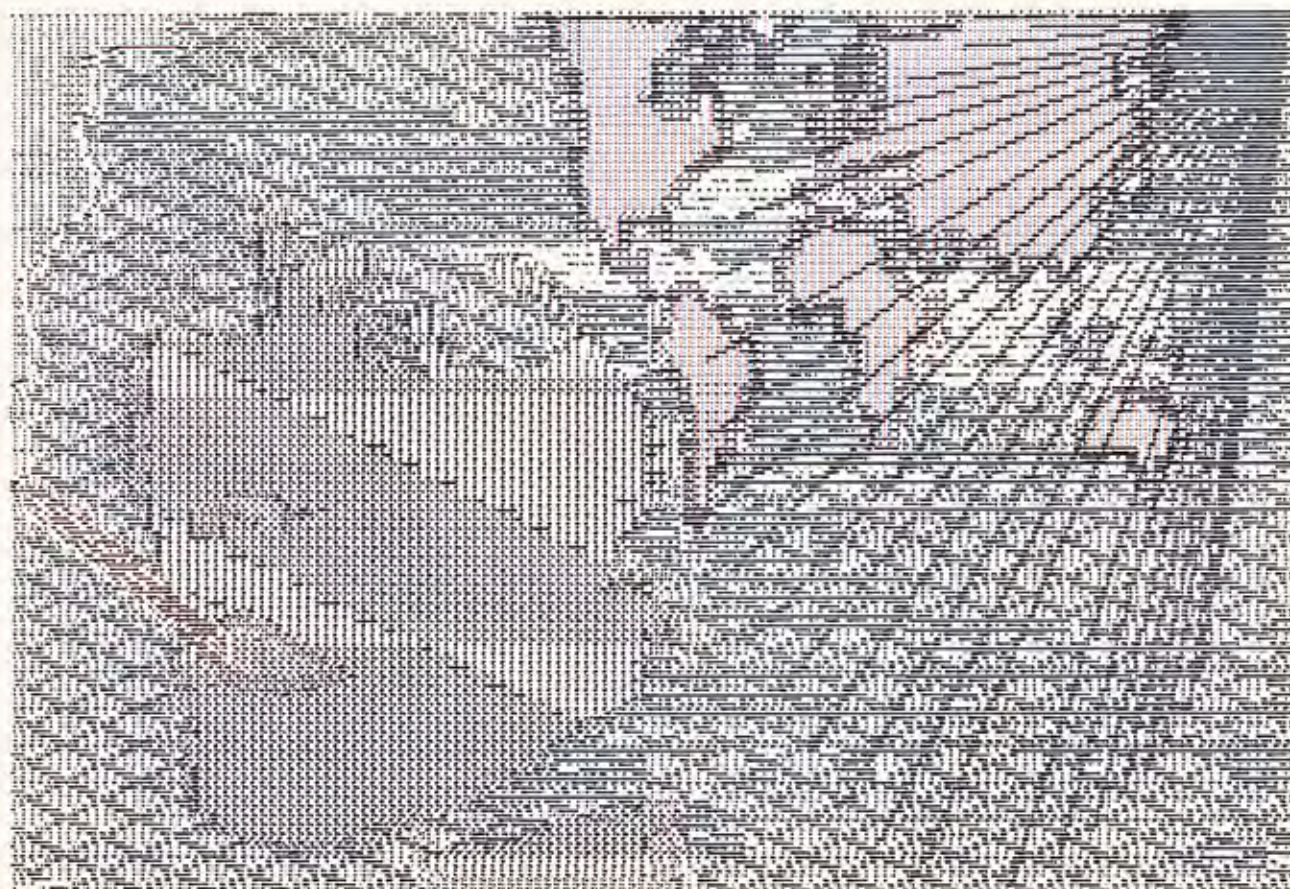
Björn Borg
(Swedish Tennis Player, 1956)
1981–86



Massoud
(Ahmad Shah Massoud, Afghan Politician
and Military Commander, 1953–2001)
1981–86



Chapman



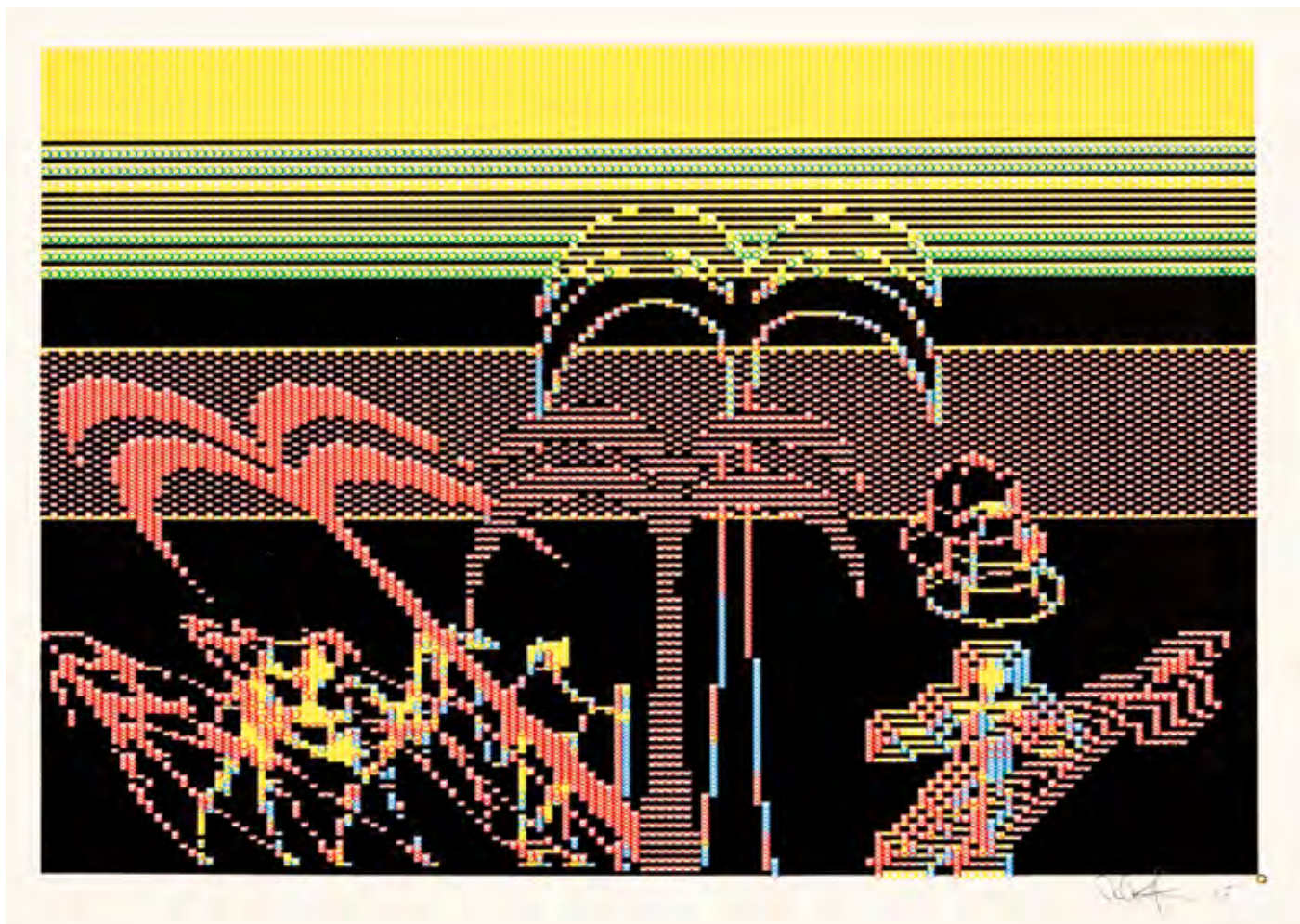
Chapman

Self-portrait
1983

Self-portrait
1981-86

Black Hole (Purple Blue)
1981-86

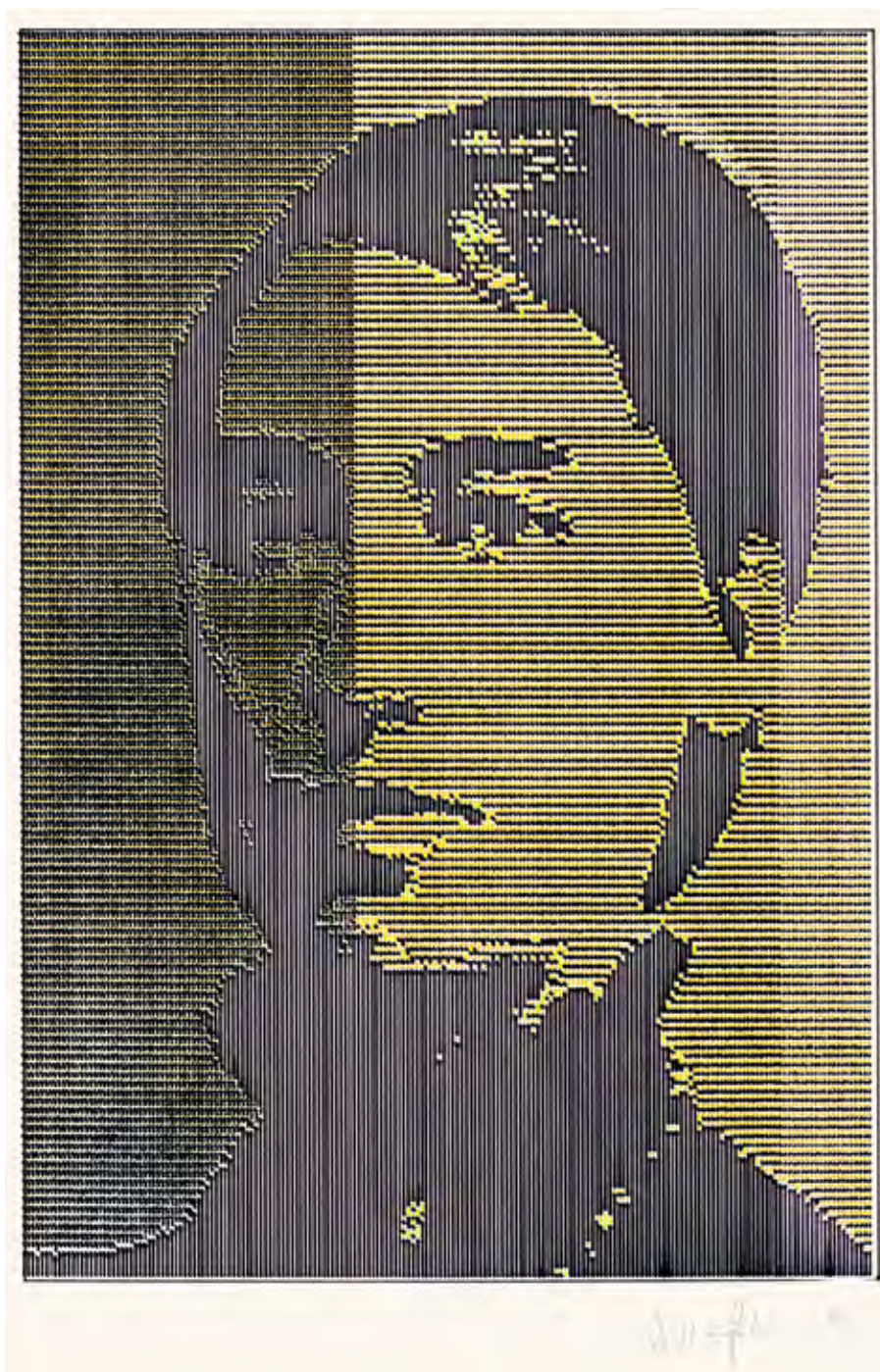




Oasis
1981–86



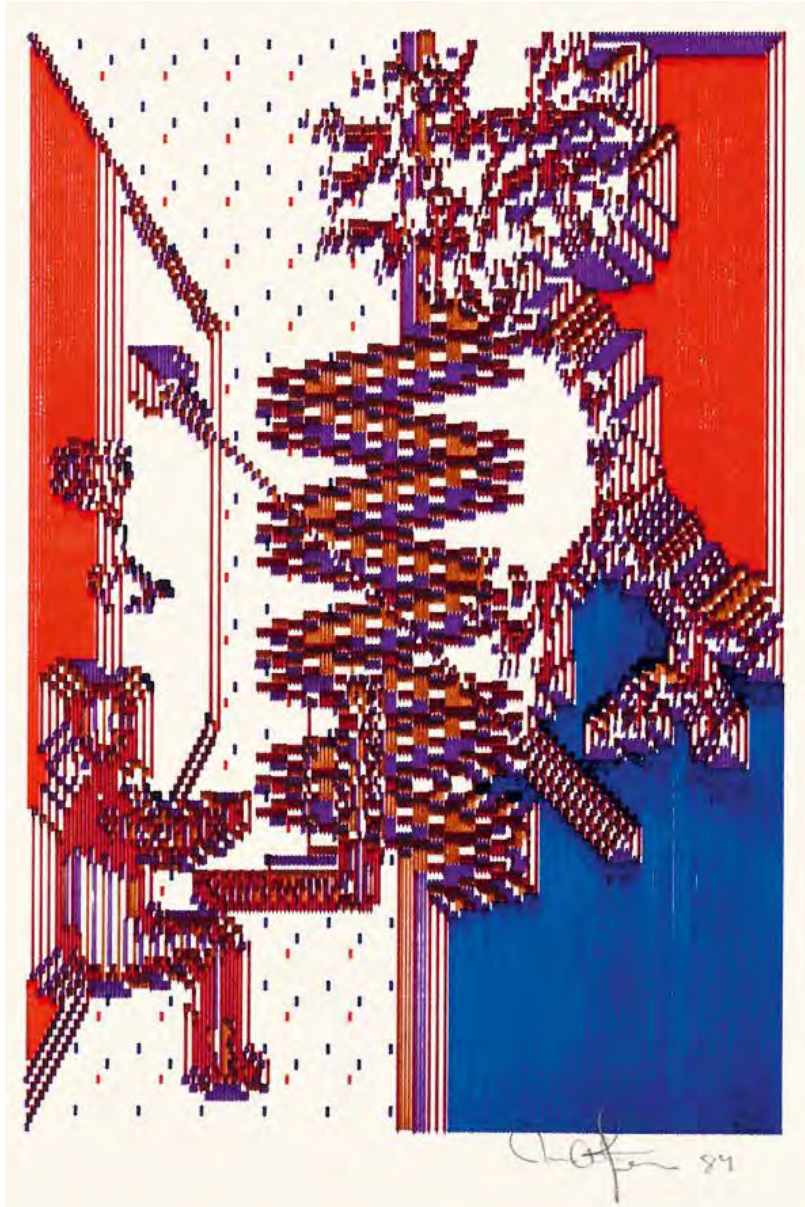
Mystery Ship
1981-86



Victoria
(Victoria Benedictsson, Swedish Author,
1850–1888)
1984



Boy George
(English Singer, 1961)
1983

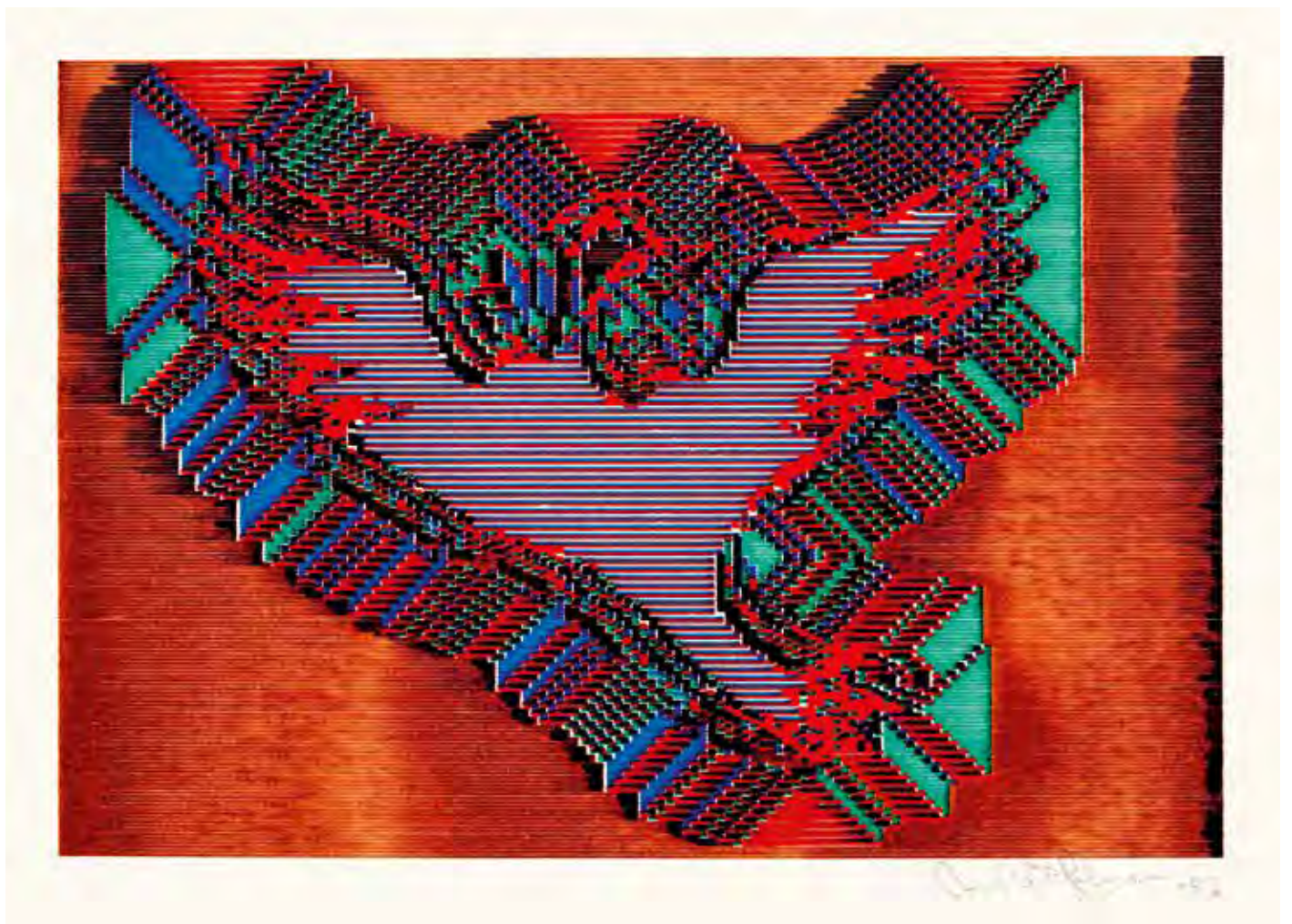


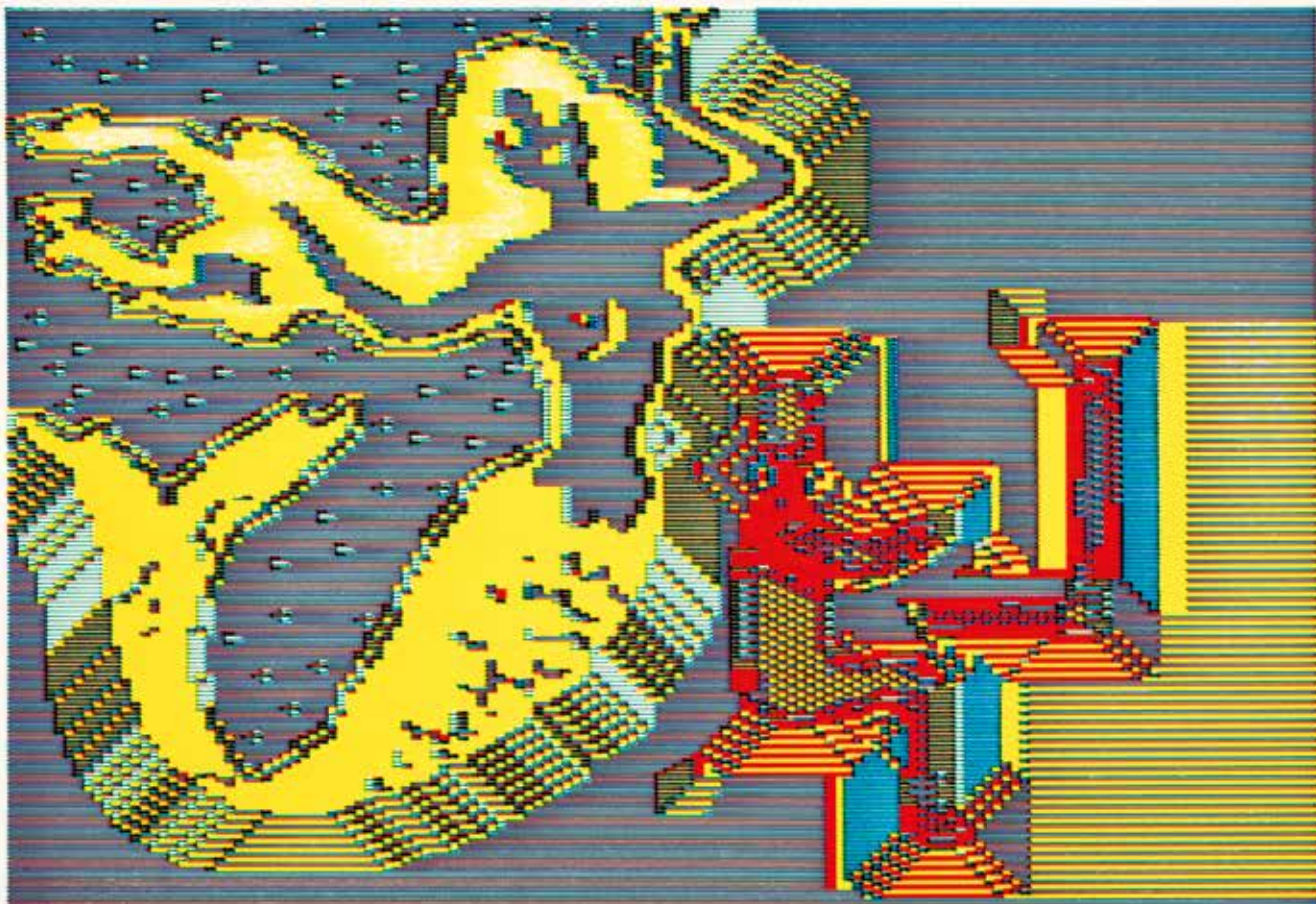
Computer Mind
1984



Our World
1984

Bird
1981-86



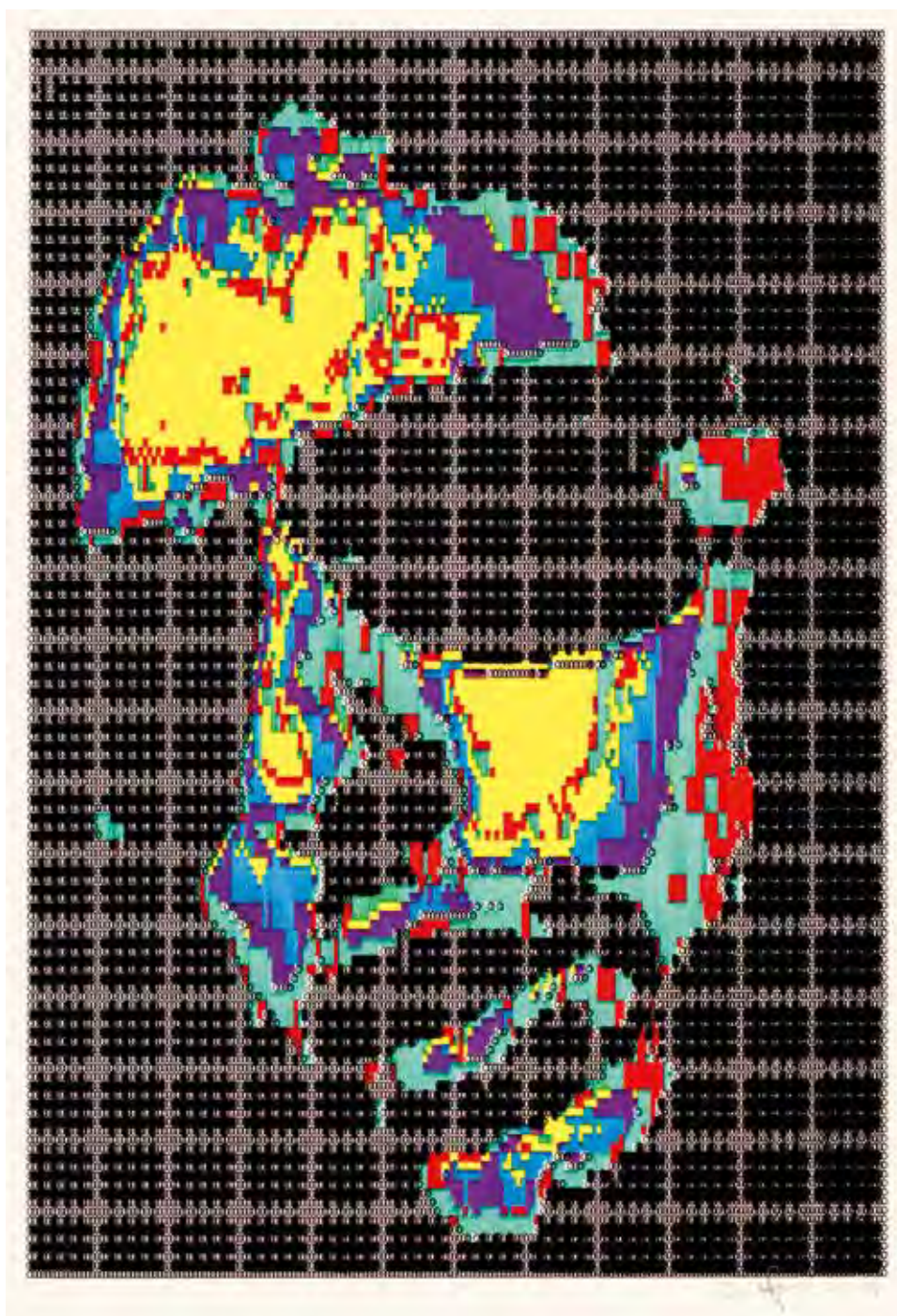


George Condo

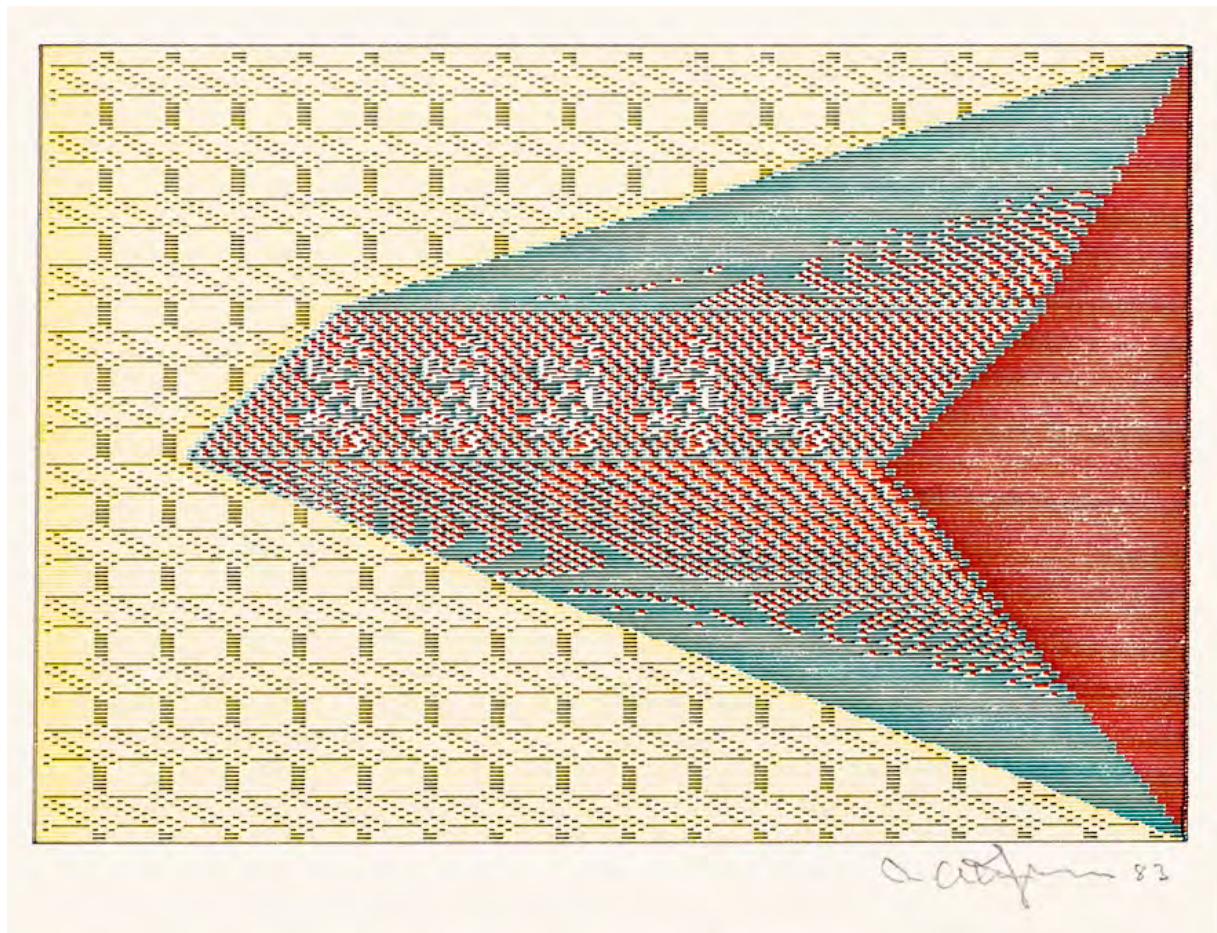
Pixel Dream
1981-86



Ronald Reagan
(American Actor and Politician, 1911–2004)
1981–86



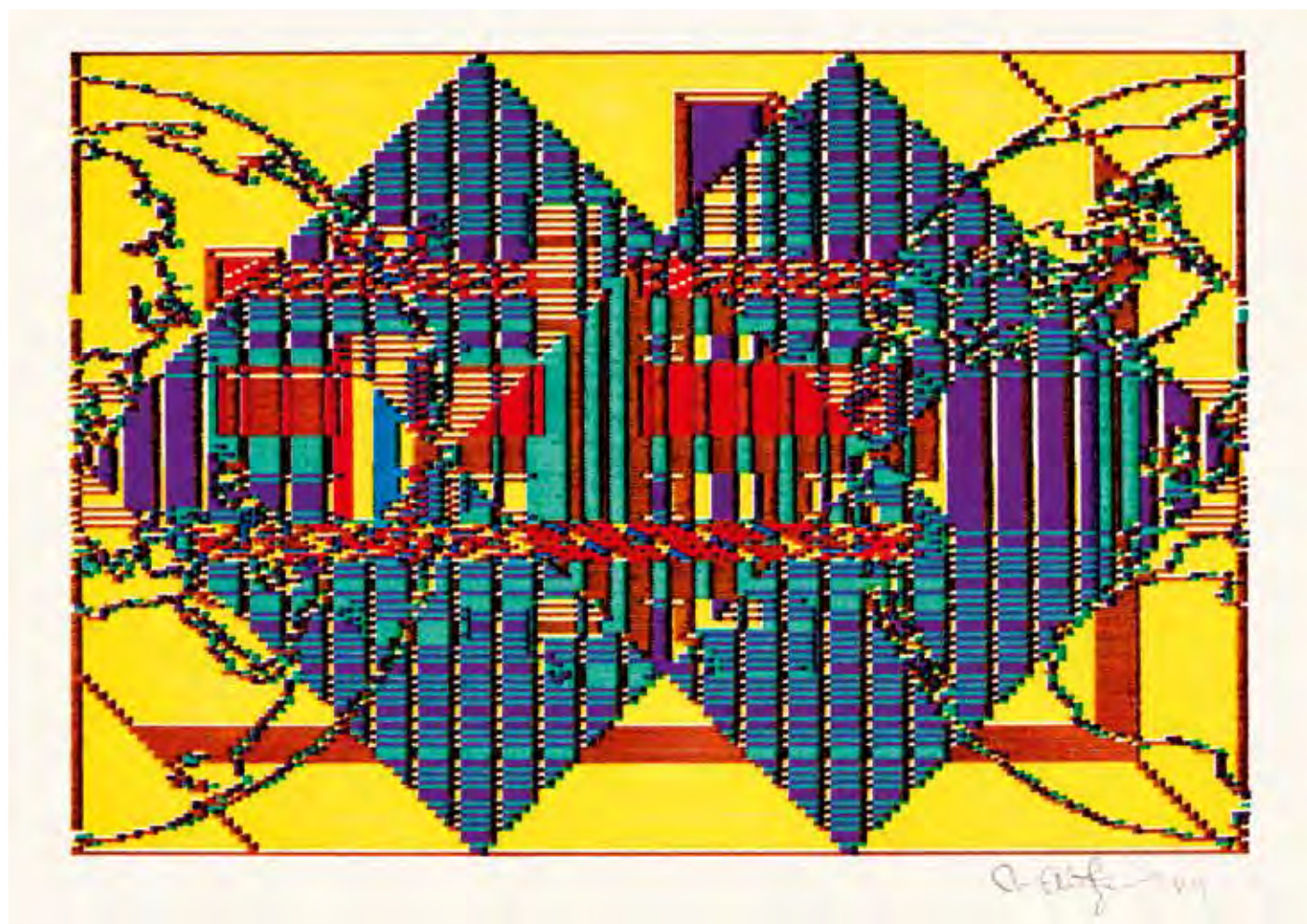
Mask
1981-86



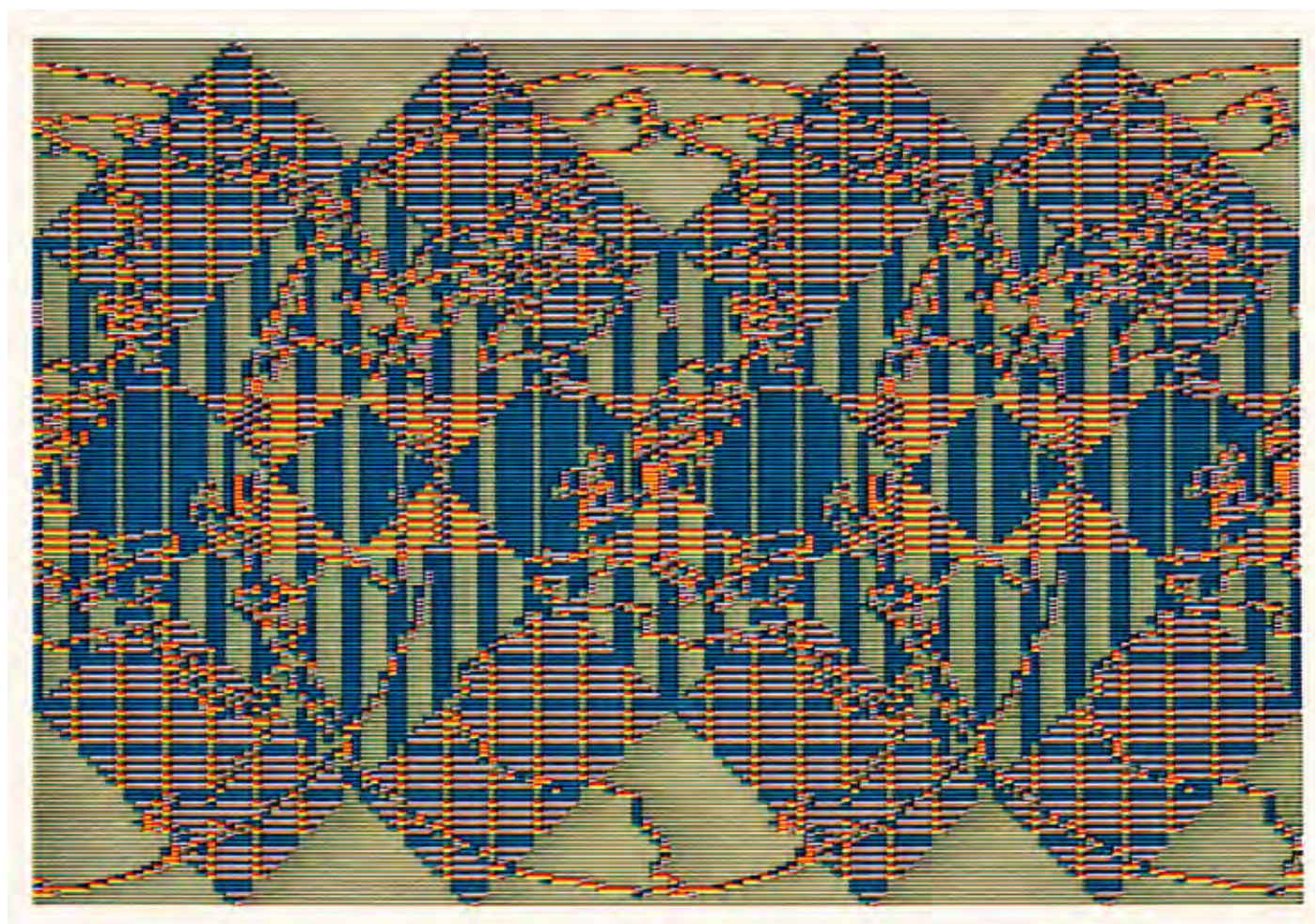
Walk
1983



Walk
1981-86

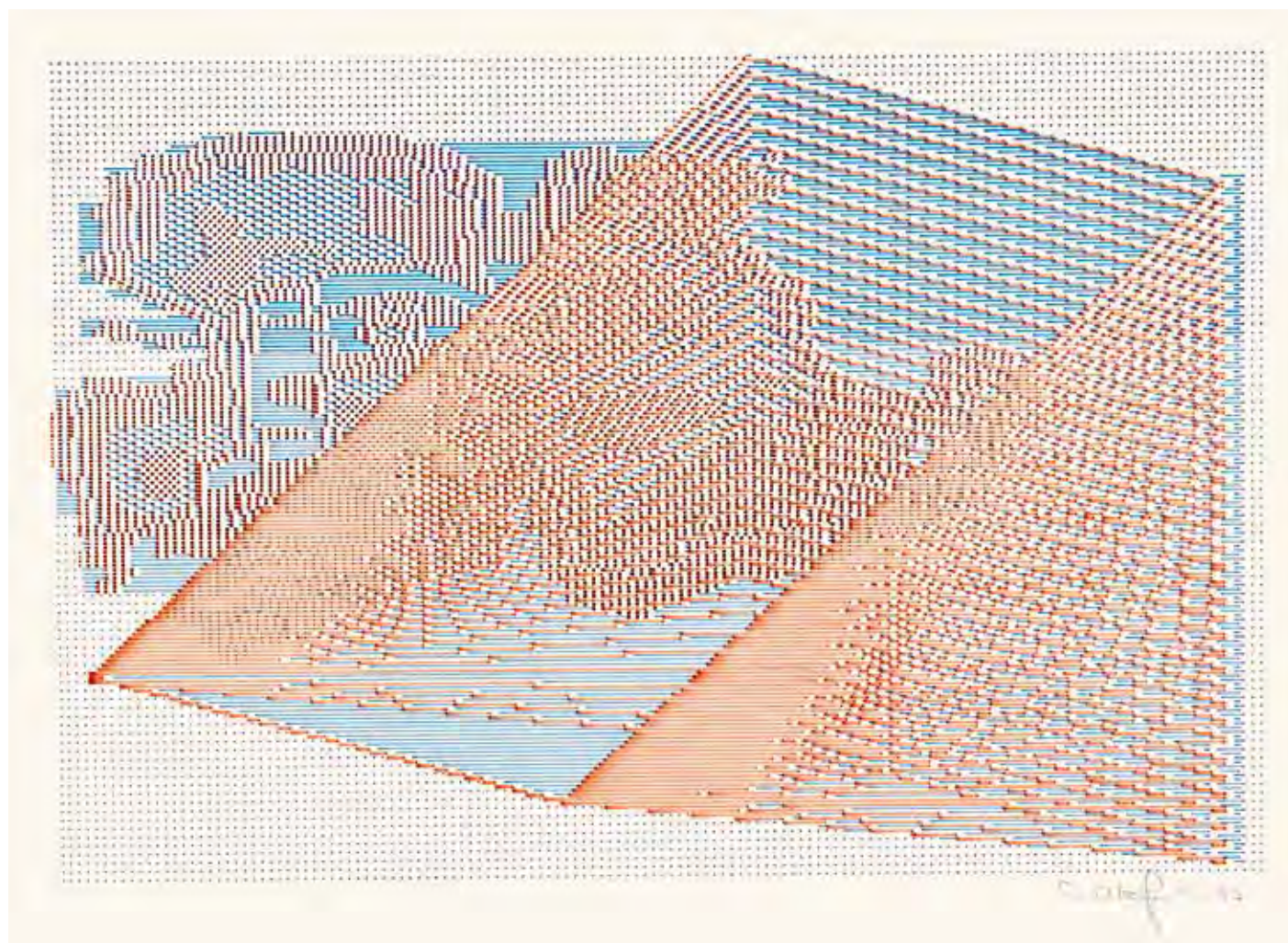


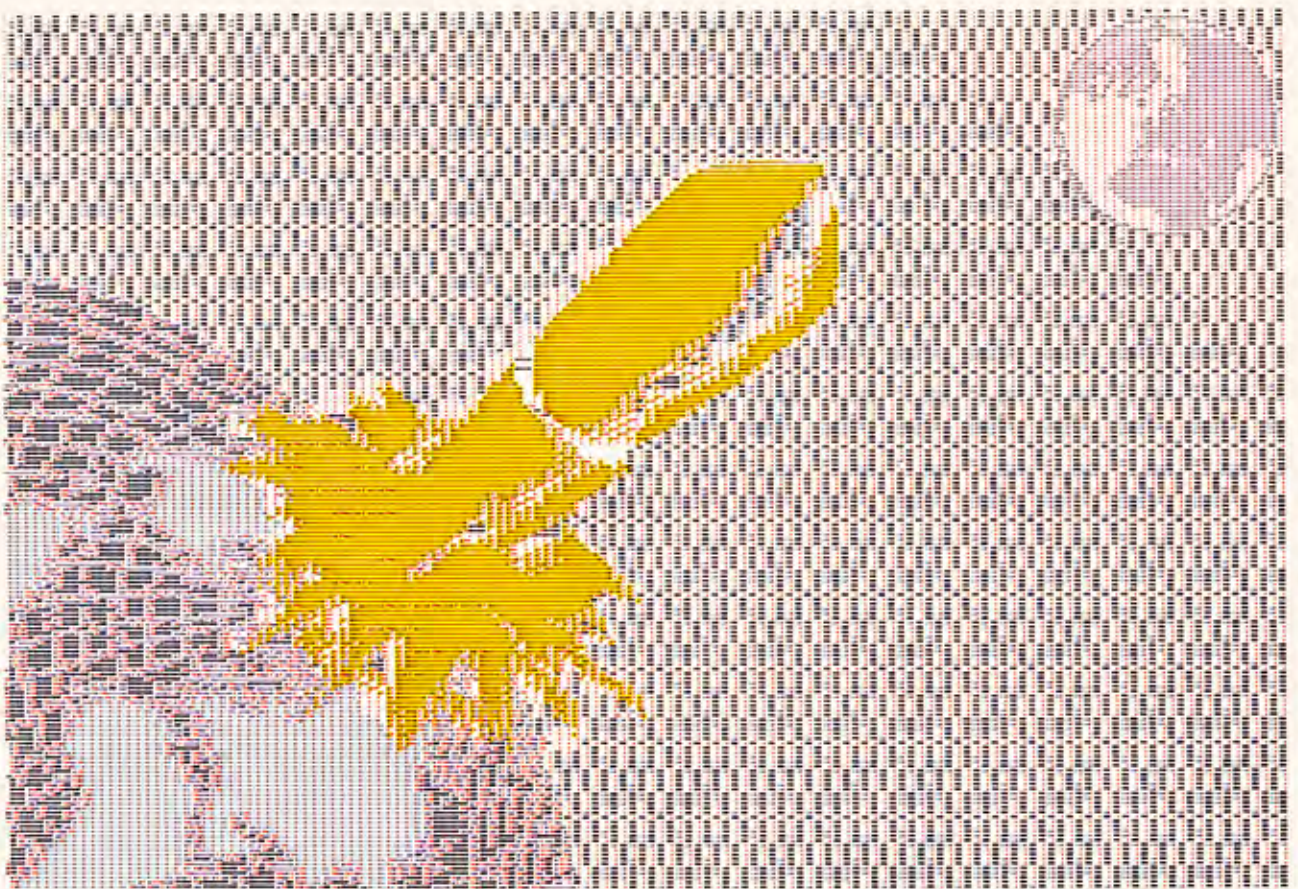
Design
1981-86



Design
1981-86

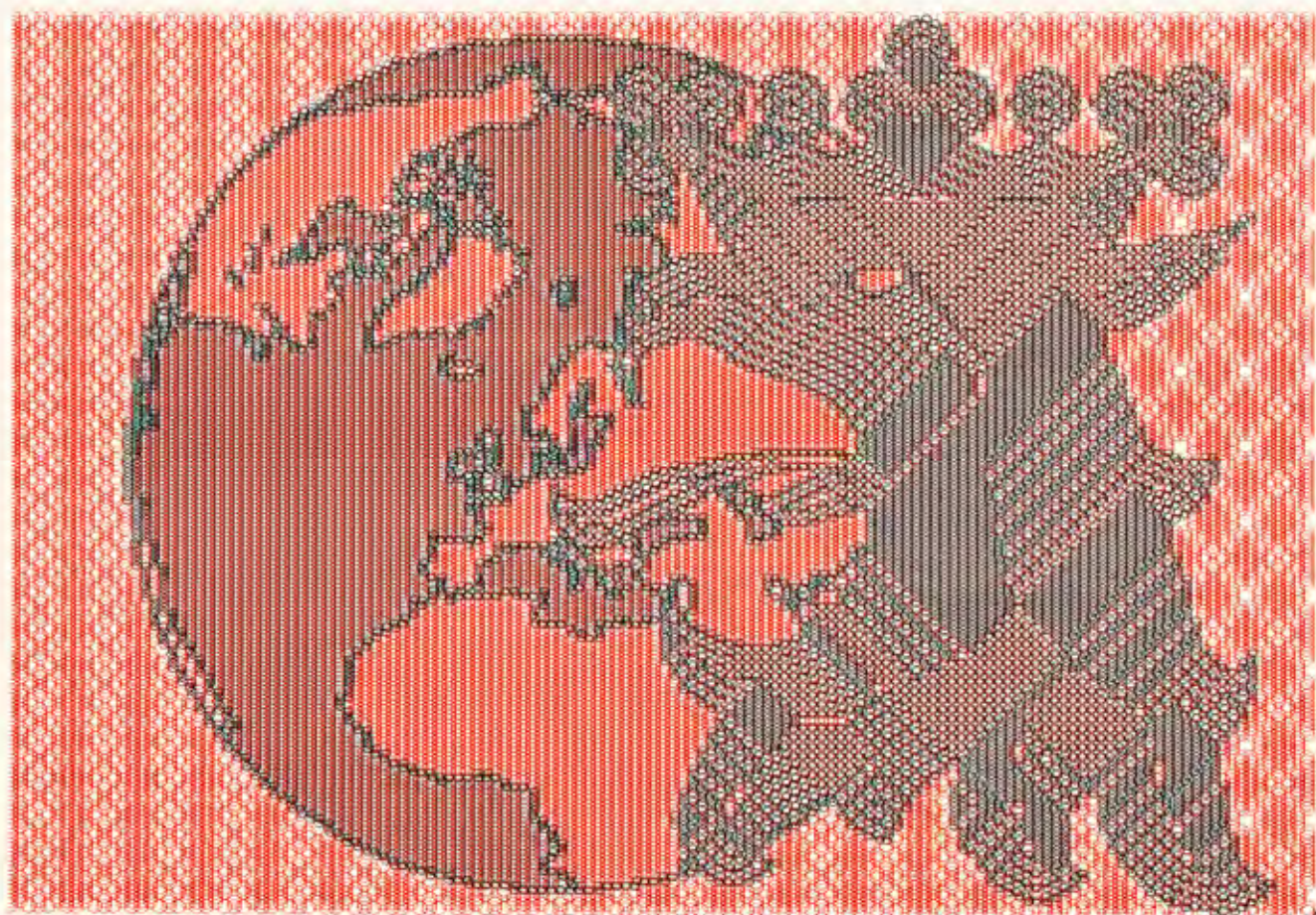
Gösta
1981-86





leaf

Rocket
1981-86

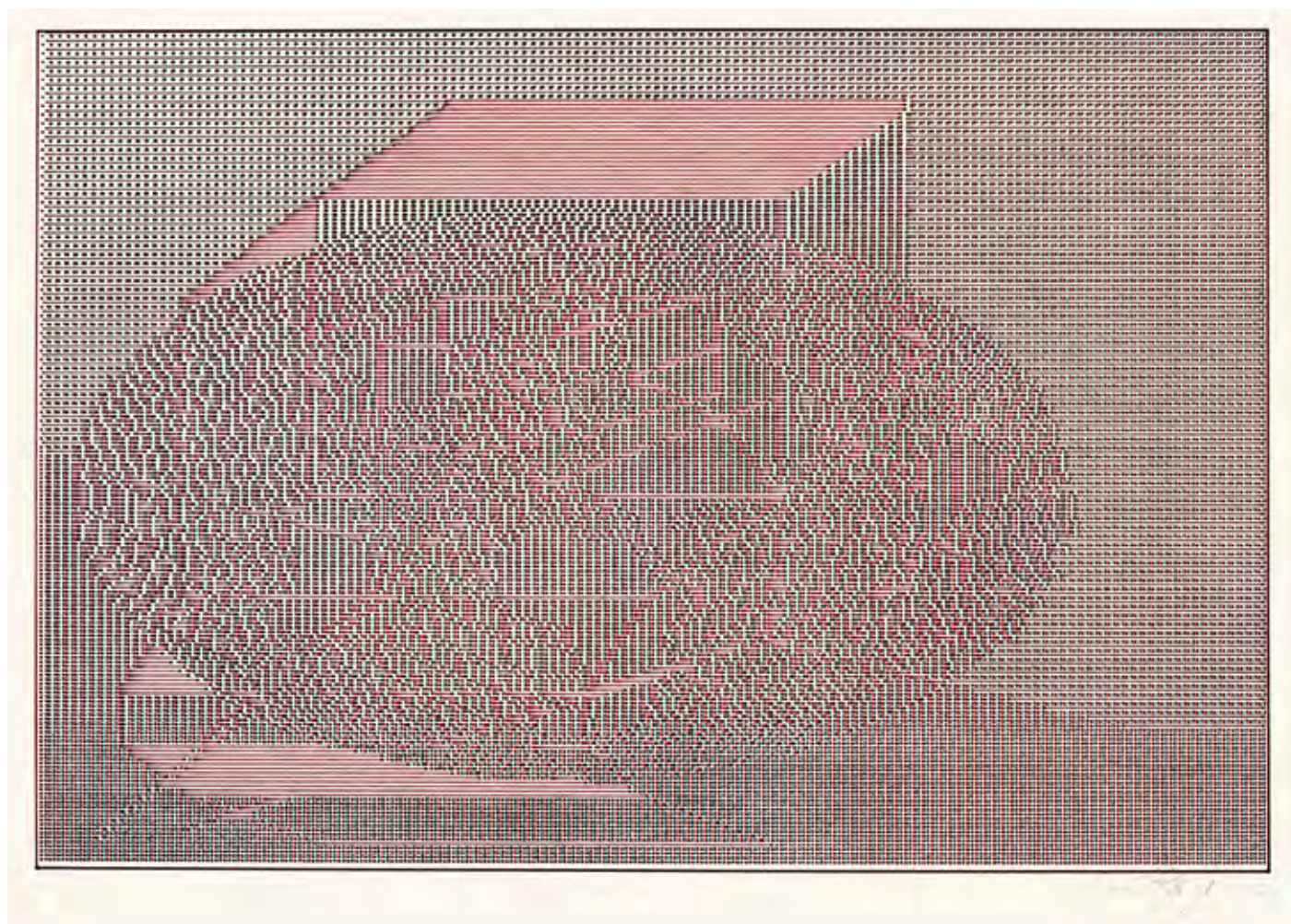




World
1984

Guardian?
1984

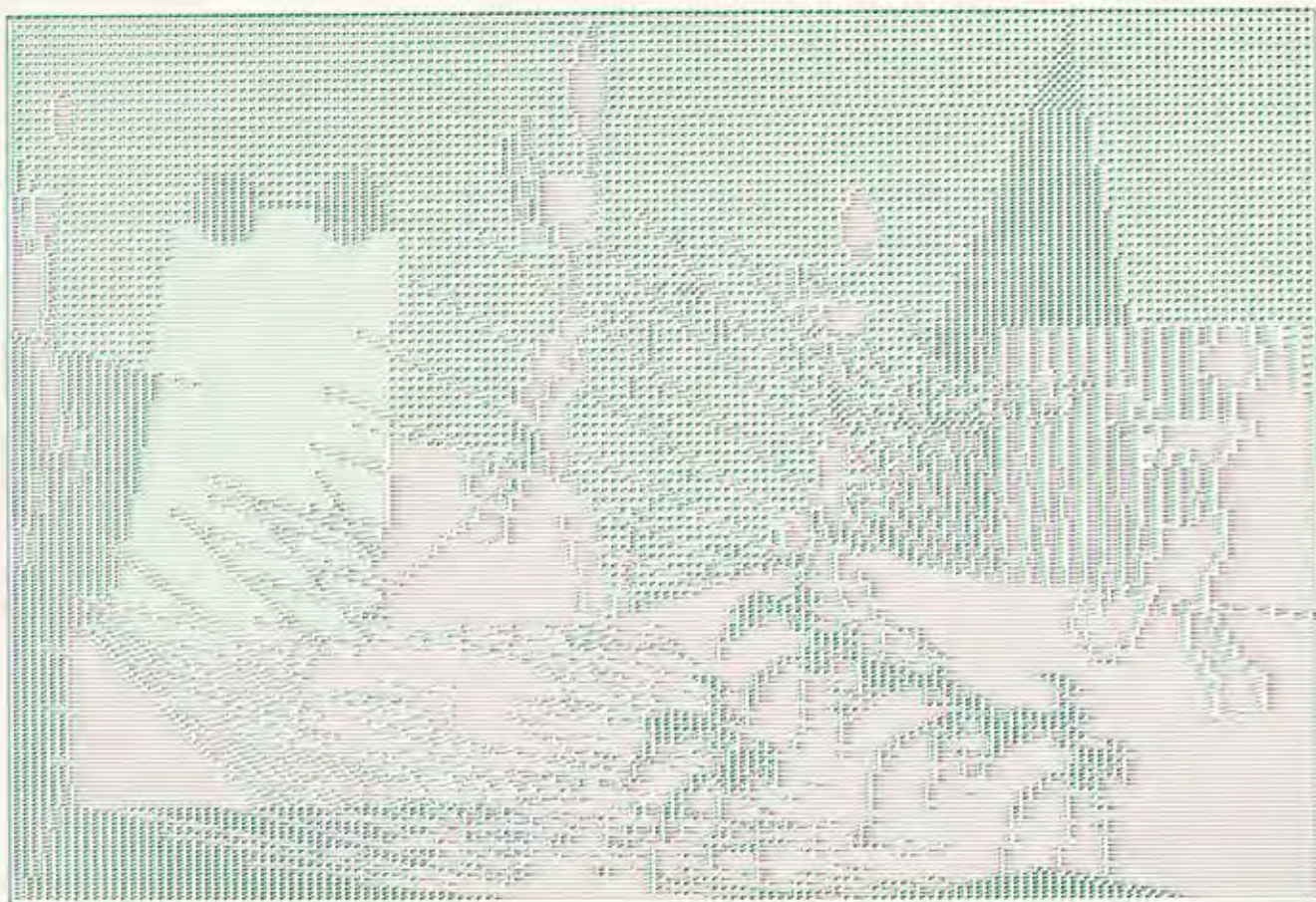
Skåne
[Scania]
1981-86

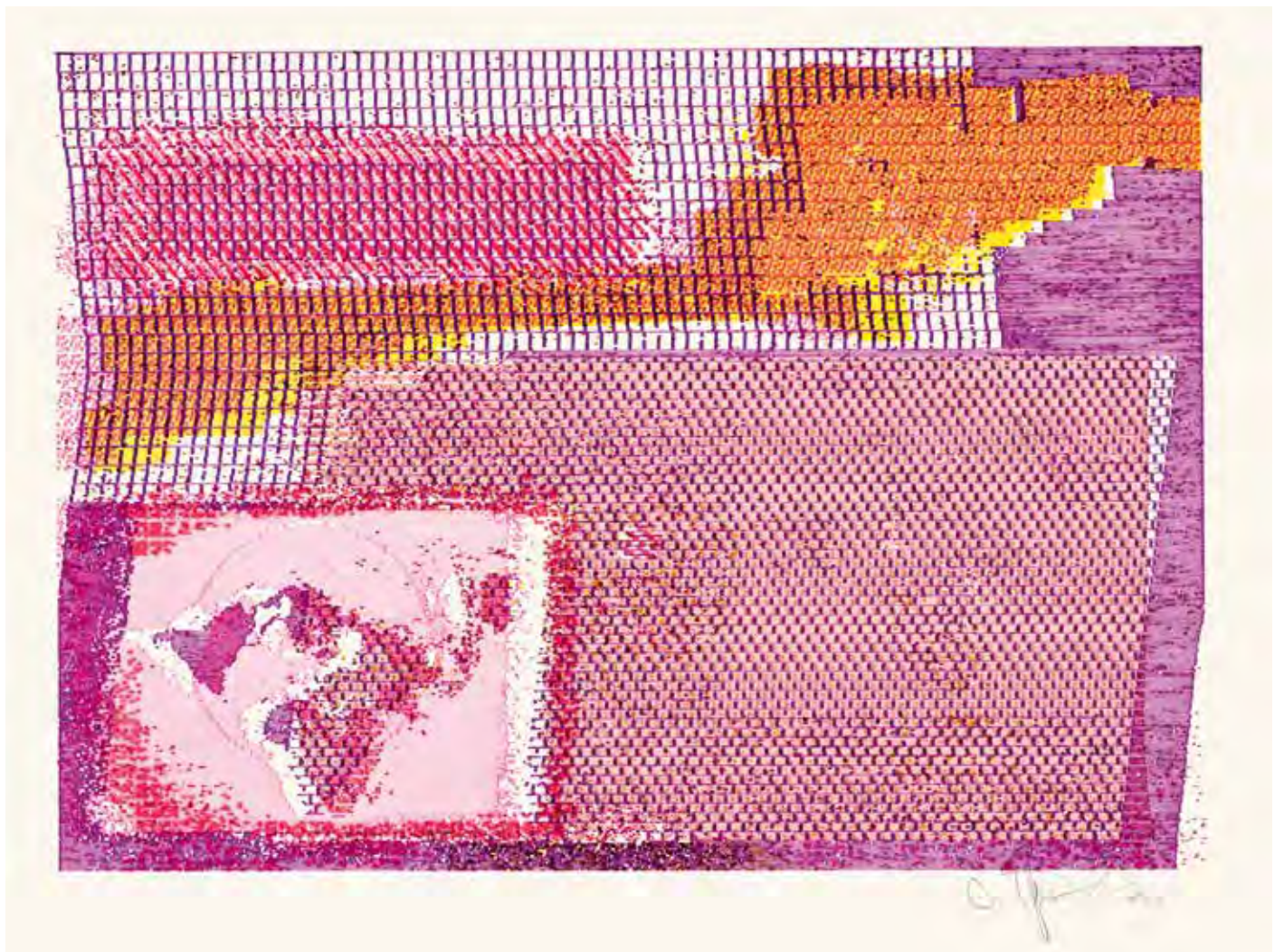


Texture 1
1981–86

Texture 7
1981–86

Texture 4
1981–86





Texture 8
1981-86

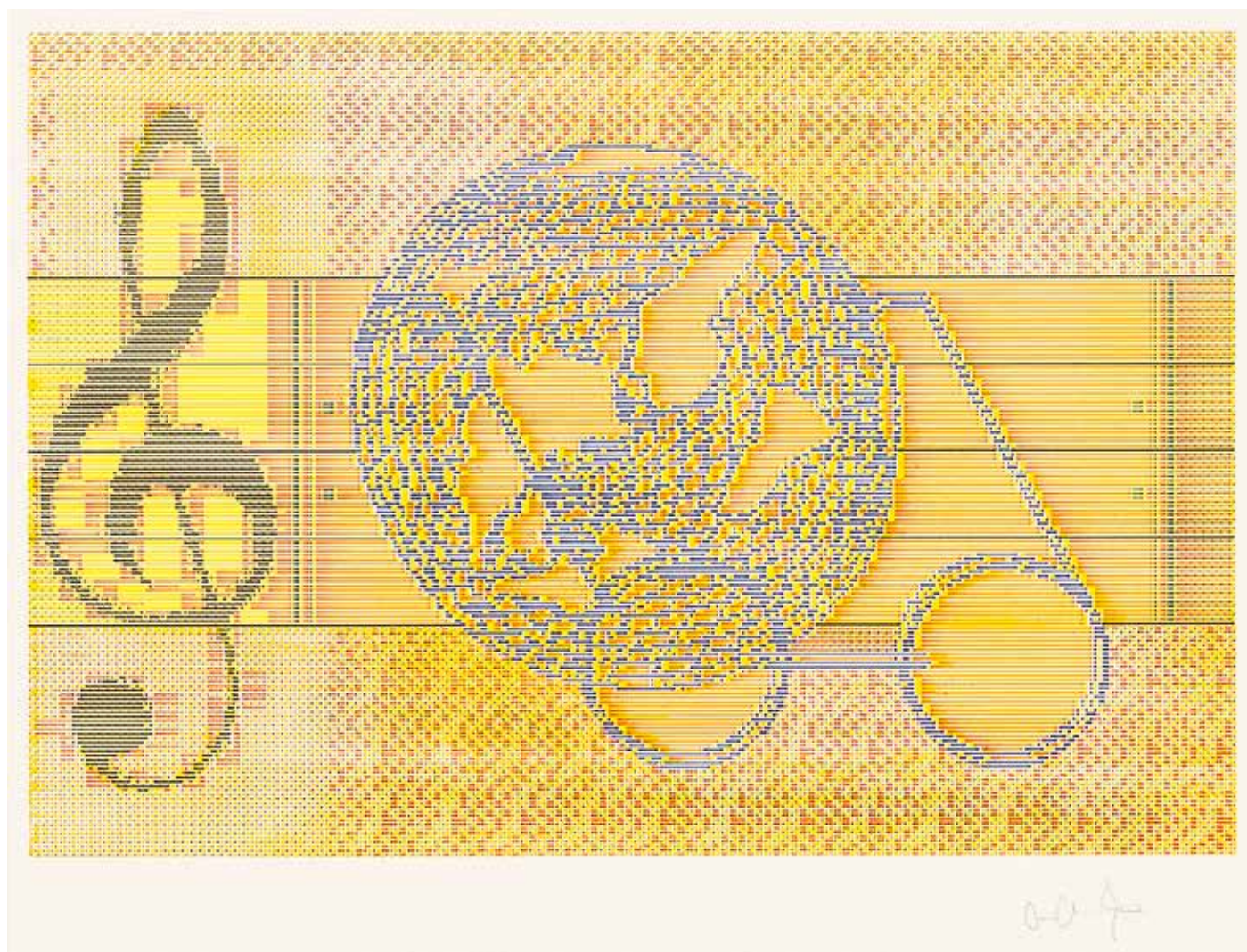


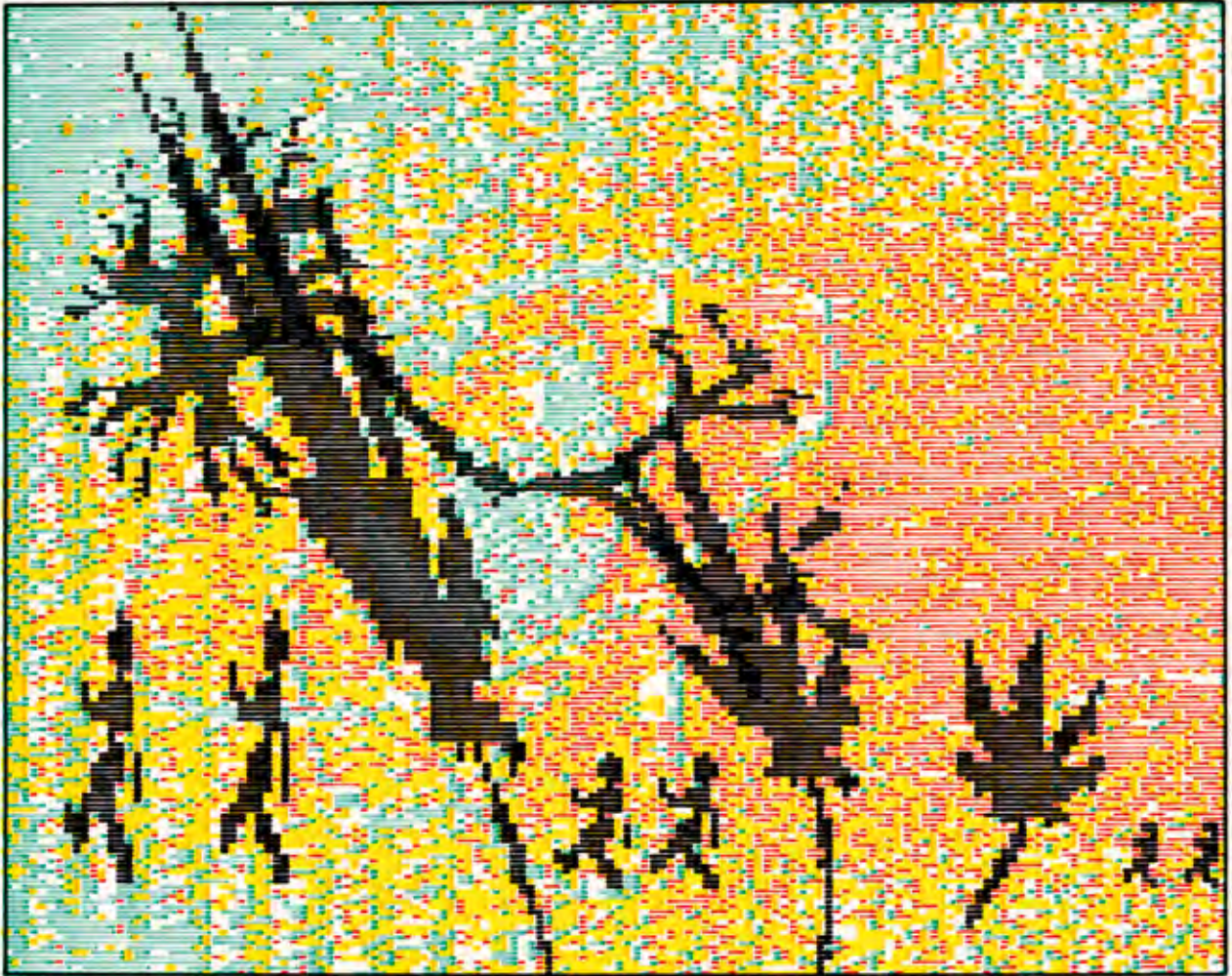
Antique
1981-86



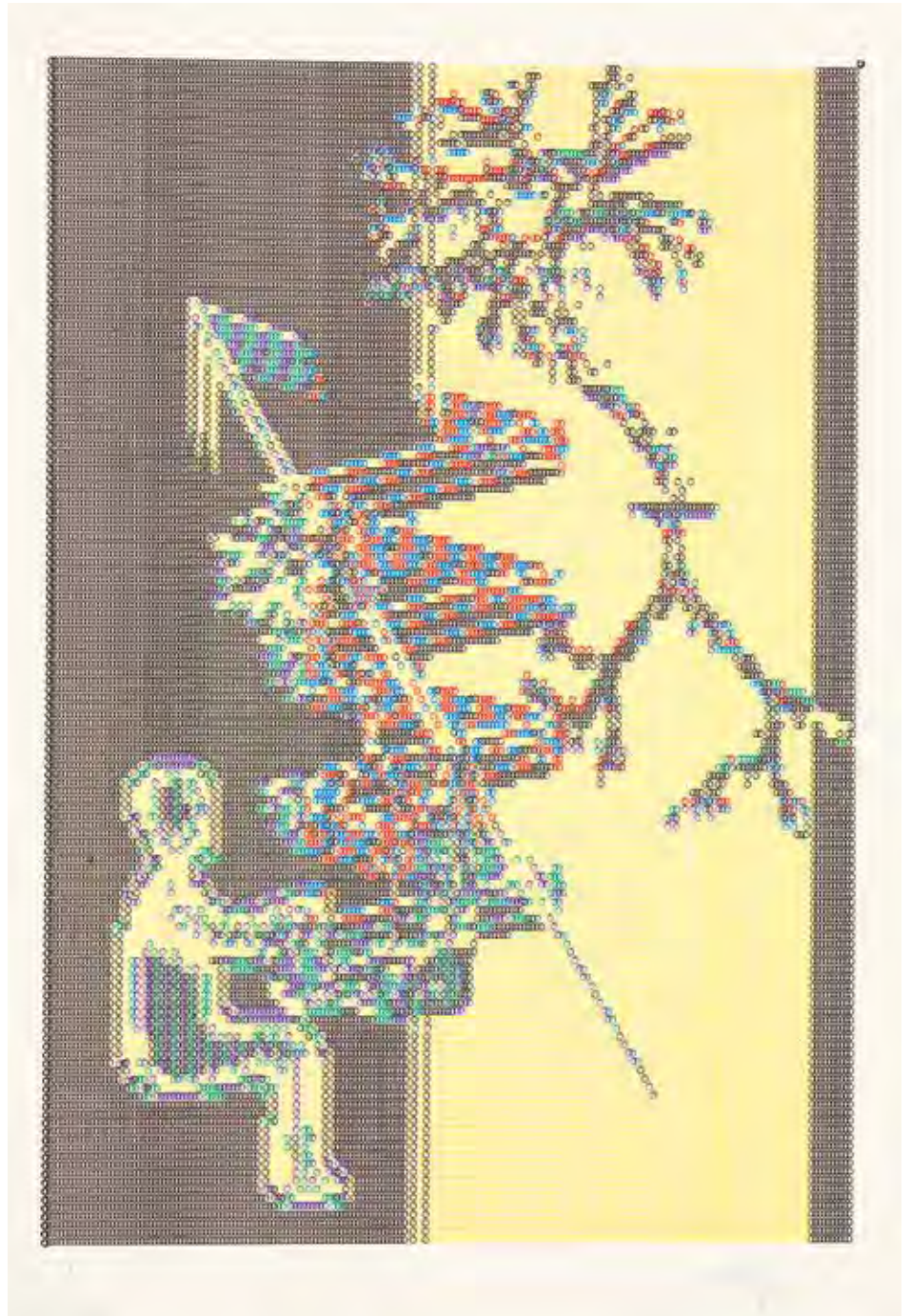
Where
1981-86

Note in Space
1982–85

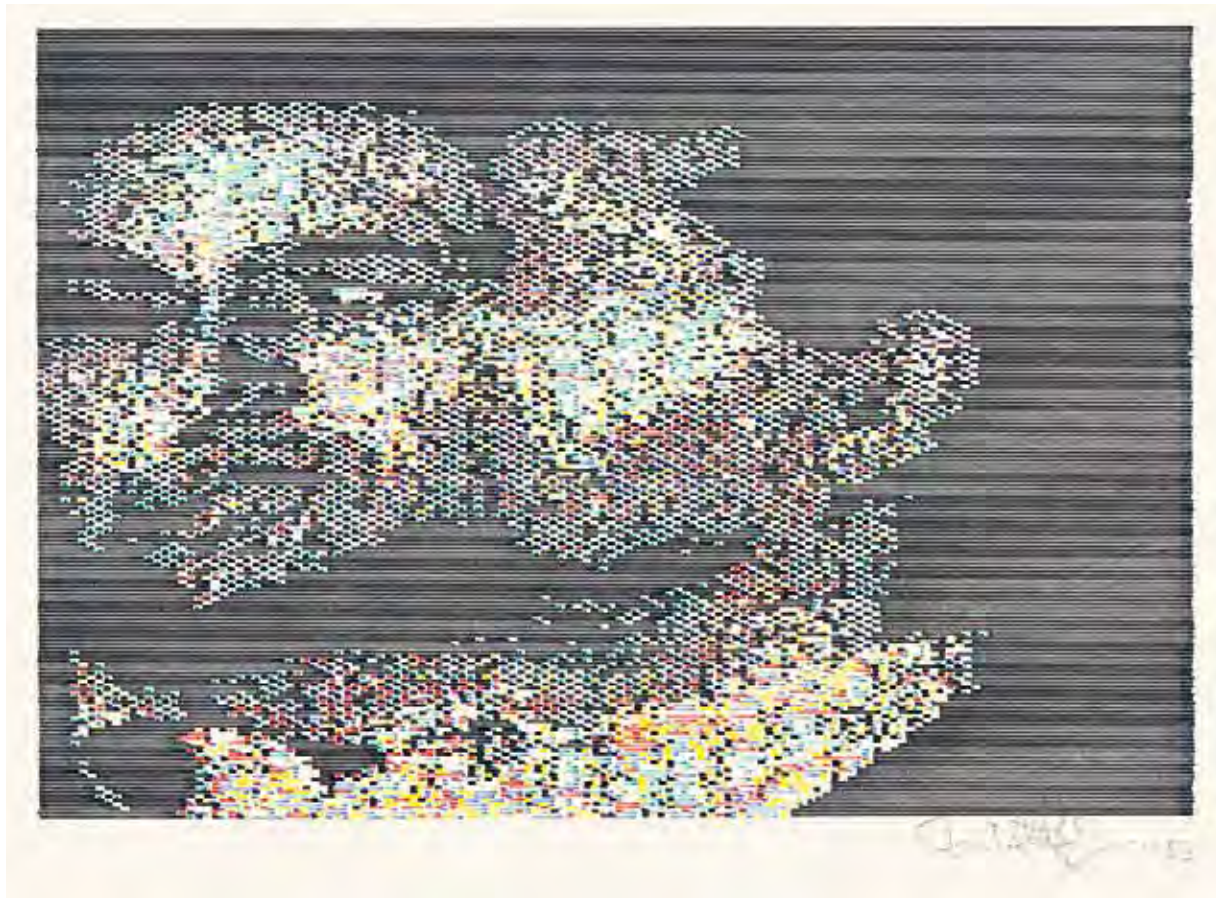




Walk
1981–86



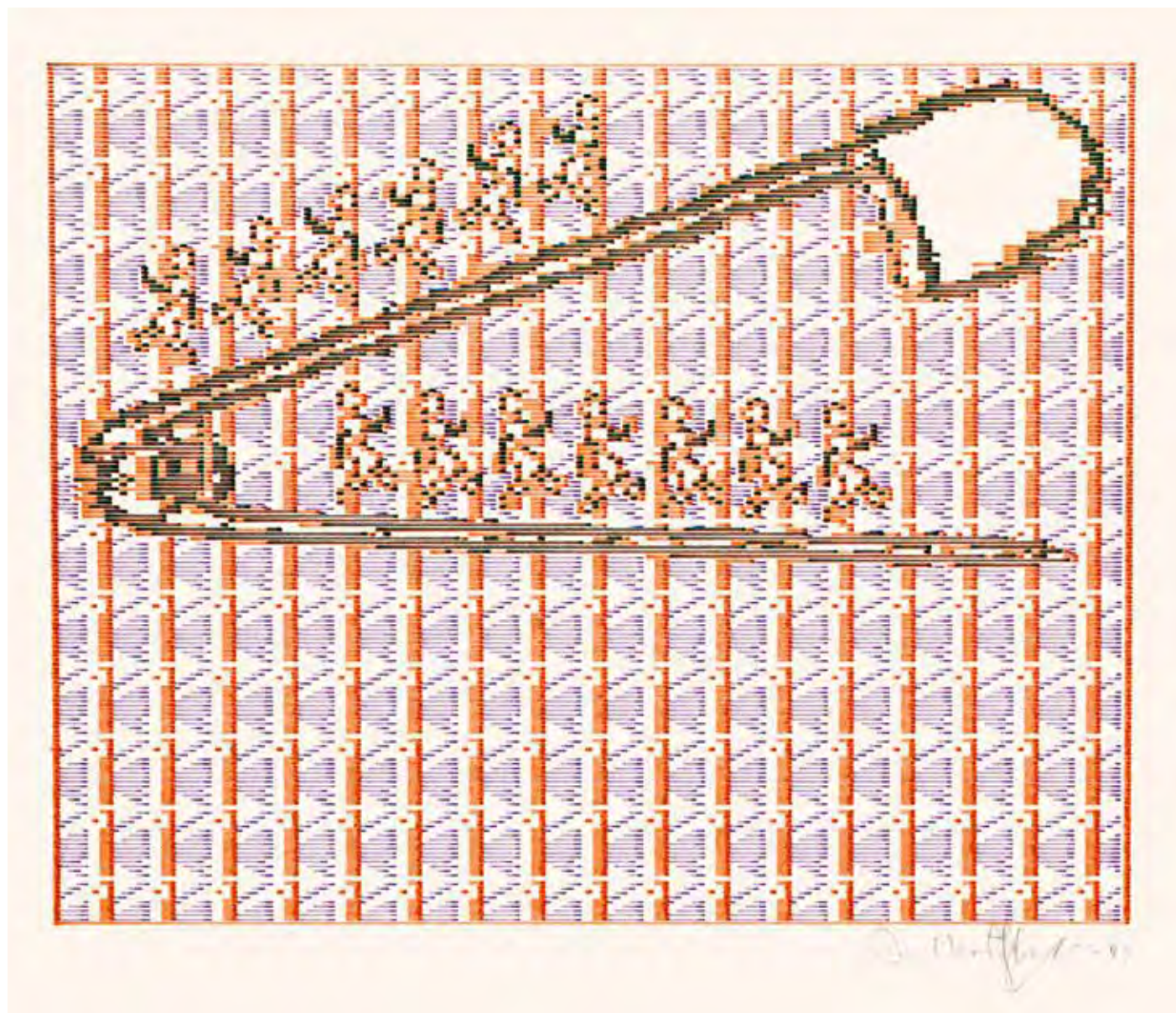
Me and My Computer
1981-86



Transformation
1983



Joseph Beuys
(German Artist, 1921–1986)
1983



Safety
1981-86

When I first saw Charlotte Johannesson's work at the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo it immediately felt like an obvious cornerstone of recent art history.

Her work made apparent the historical connection of weaving and computation that had existed since the age of Ada Lovelace and Charles Babbage. But it updated this link to also superimpose with a 1980s fanzine aesthetic that mined the reproductive power of Xerox machines and cut-up graphics. That this work would constitute an important precursor to the wave of digital arts that until now constitutes the only art-historical innovation of the twenty-first century was obvious. It created a timeless connection between ancient civilisational technologies like textile-making and the emerging aesthetics of early Apple computer graphics. By being completely focused on its own time, it managed to effortlessly span millennia of female-connoted technological development.

Technologies associated with domestic labour like cooking, language and later textile-making obviously preceded digital technology, and the link between them was explored by feminist historians. Yet those narratives were and are still obscured by corporate fairy tales of heroic male engineers, entrepreneurs, PR experts and developers.

It is not a coincidence that Johannesson's work finally gains traction as the false promises of a digital progress connected to a Jobs/Gates patrilineage

crumble into a dystopian present shaped by Nazi bots and artificial stupidity. It creates parallels to a time when weaving became the industrial engine for the creation of mass poverty and destitution, a freelance industry devoid of workers' organisations like today's Uber and Airbnb industries. Showing this link makes clear that these conditions were only to be overcome by tireless efforts of organisation, which in themselves are part of reproductive, usually unacknowledged activities.

Hito Steyerl



Save as Art? Yes/No
2019



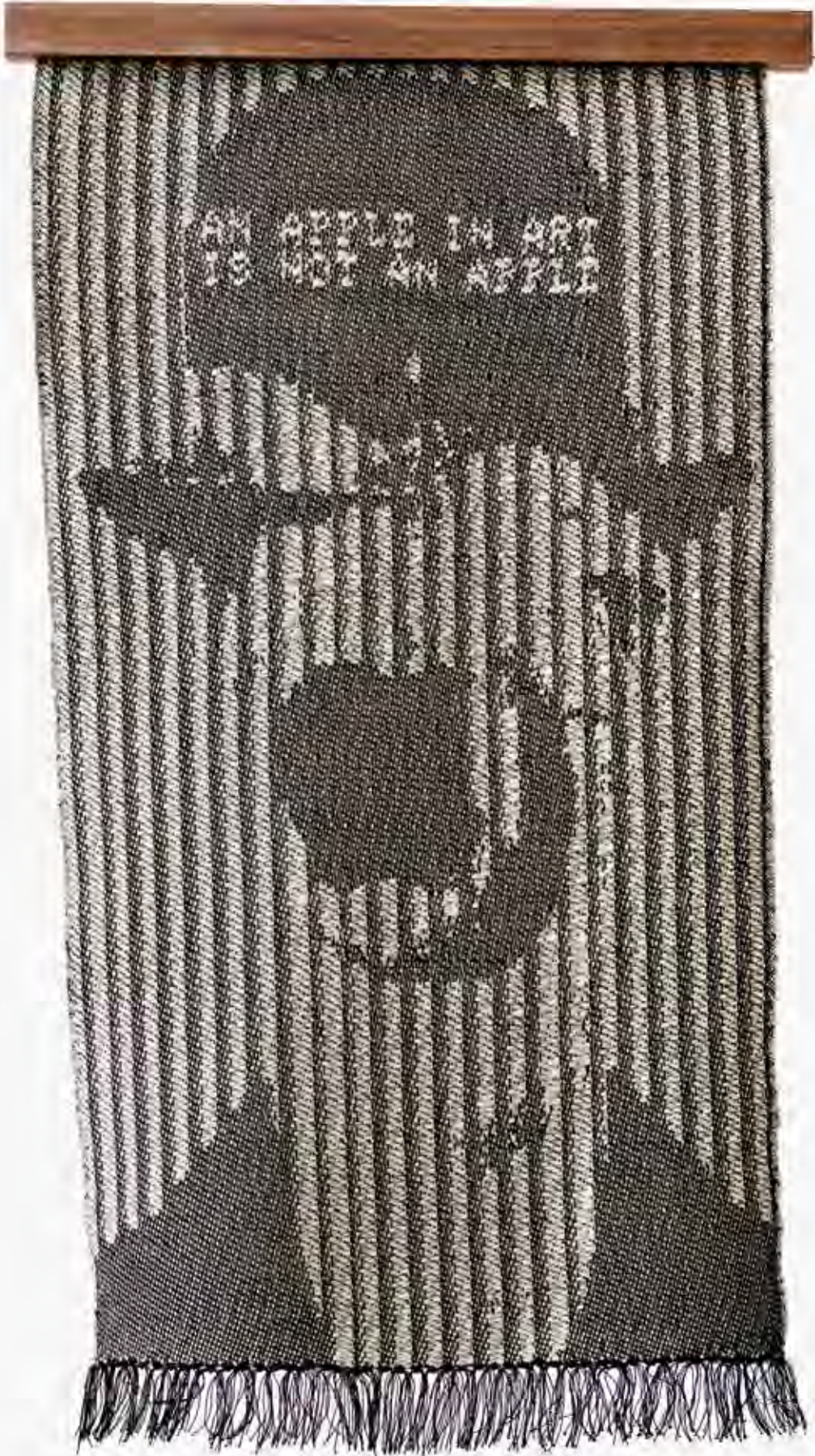


The Target is Destroyed
2019



David Bowie
2019

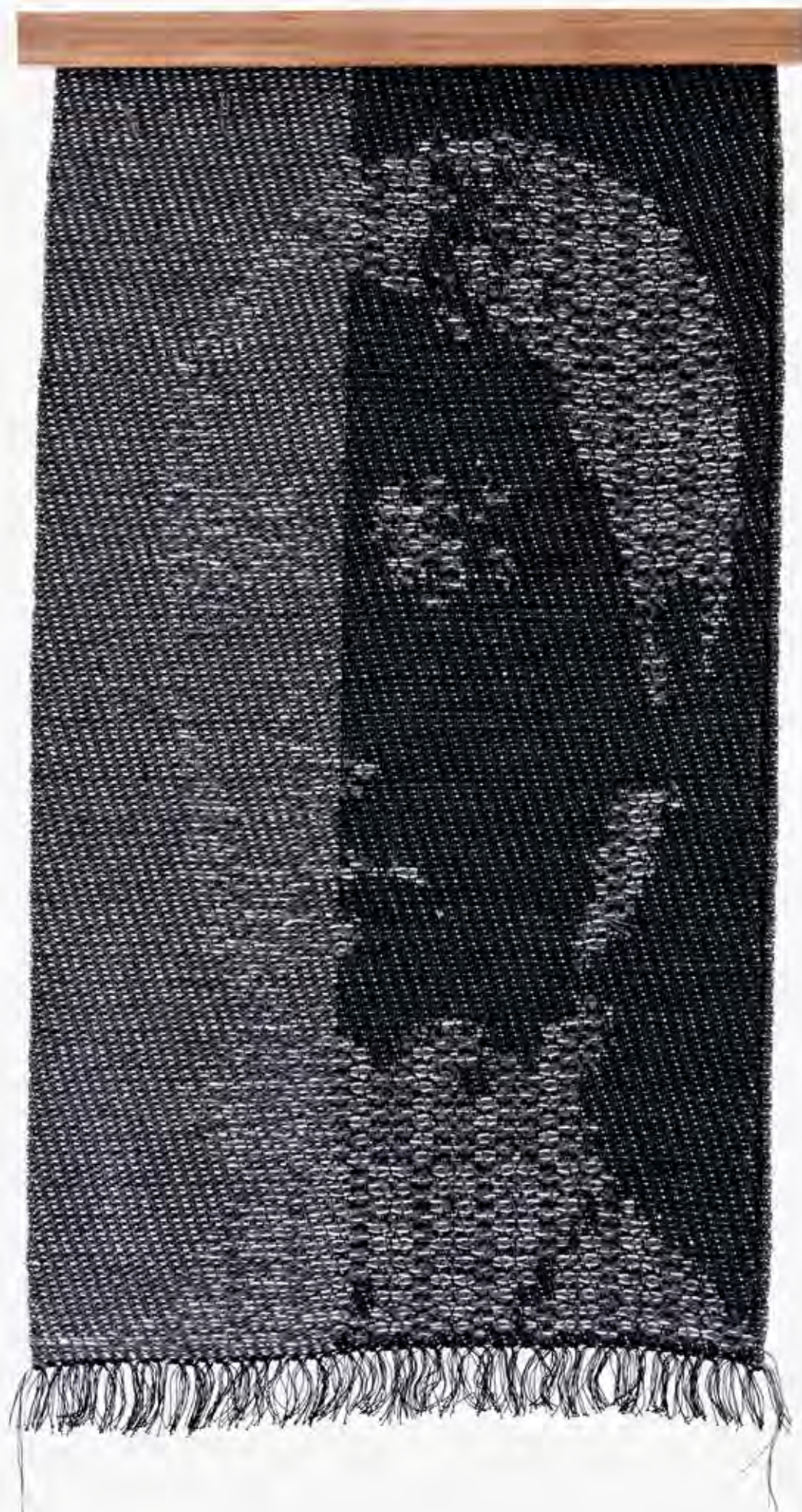






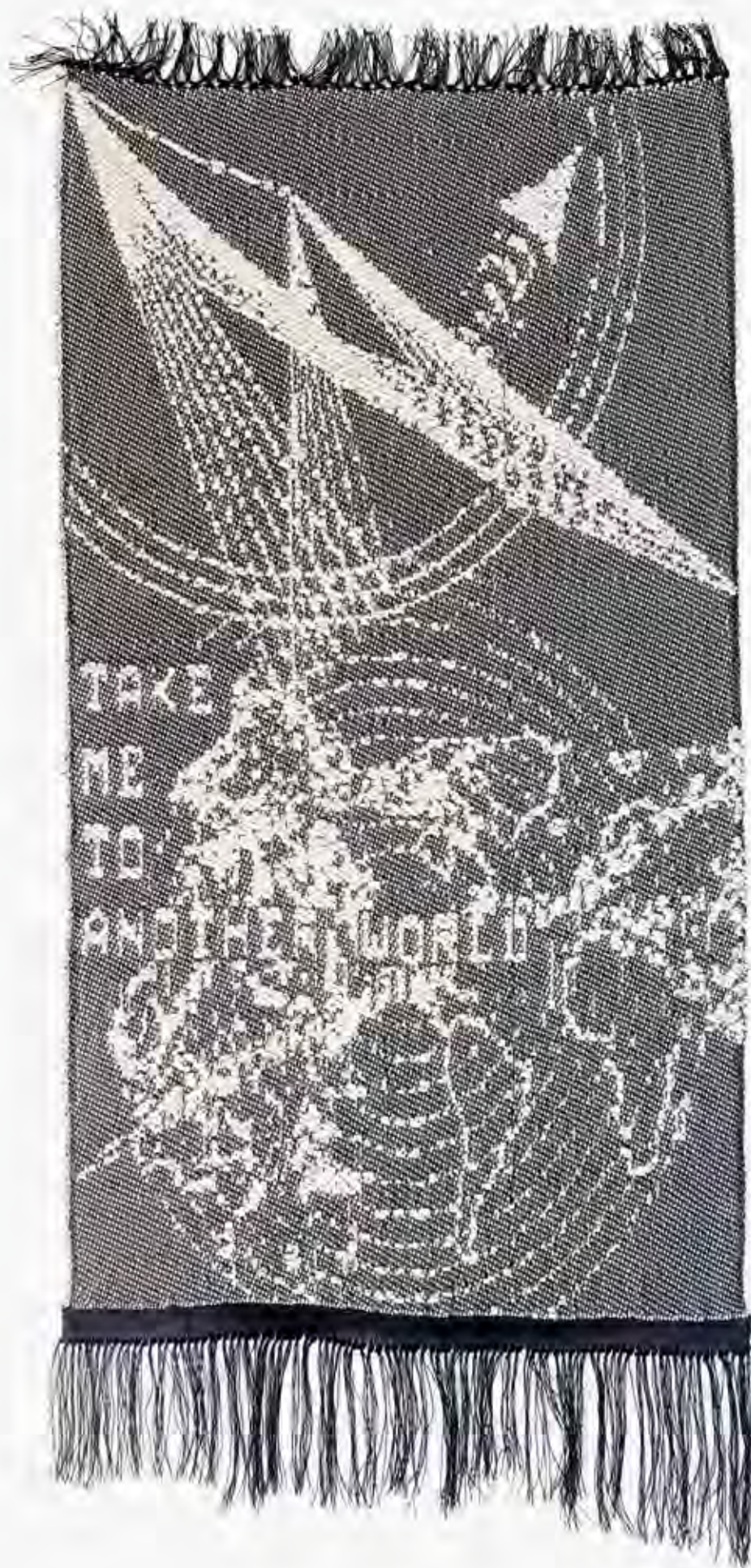
The Brain is Wider than the Sky
2019











Take Me to Another World
2019

Charlotte Johannesson
working at home, late 1970s.
Photo: Ove Hallin



LIST OF WORKS

Look
late 1960s / 2020
85 × 140 cm
Wool, handwoven, rewoven,
reproduction by Tiyoko Tomikawa of a
missing artwork
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 36

Brainwaves
1970s / 2020
Wool, handwoven, rewoven,
reproduction by Tiyoko Tomikawa of a
missing artwork
86 × 121 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Jämlika är vi allihopa [We are all equal]
1970s / 2020
Wool, handwoven, rewoven,
reproduction by Tiyoko Tomikawa of a
missing artwork
88 × 123 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Longing
c. 1970
Wool, wood, handwoven, rewoven
100 × 200 cm
Jakob Örtendahl Collection, Stockholm

No Choice Amongst Stinking Fish
1970 / 2016
Wool, handwoven, rewoven,
reproduction by Tiyoko Tomikawa of a
missing artwork
100 × 60 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 21

Terror
1970 / 2016
Wool, linen, leather, pins, pencil,
sharpener, needle, barbed wire,
buttons, handwoven, rewoven,
reproduction by Tiyoko Tomikawa of a
missing artwork
121 × 60 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 25

Trampa ente på gräset
[Don't Step on the Grass]
1970s / 2016
Wool, handwoven, rewoven,
reproduction by Tiyoko Tomikawa of a
missing artwork
100 × 100 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 30

Worth a World of Arguments
c. 1970
Wool, handwoven, rewoven
146 × 111 cm
Mathias Swinge Collection, Lund

I'm no Angel
c. 1972–73 / 2017
Wool, handwoven, rewoven,
reproduction of a missing artwork
165 × 100 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 24

Chile eko i skallen [Chile Echo in the
Skull]
1973 / 2016
Wool, handwoven, rewoven,
reproduction by Tiyoko Tomikawa of a
missing artwork
108 × 59 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 23

Elle belle bi nu är du fri kvinna [Elle
Belle Bi Now You Are Free, Woman]
1975 / 2020
Wool, handwoven, reproduction of a
missing artwork
70 × 125 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
pp. 28–29

*Achtung – Actions Speak Louder than
Words*
1976
Wool, handwoven, metal, hemp
134 × 105 cm
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Purchase 2016 with contribution from
The Österlind Foundation
MOM/2016/78
p. 32

Frei die RAF [Free the RAF]
1976
Wool, handwoven
150 × 100 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 33

Street Life
1976 / 2020
Wool, handwoven, reproduction by
Tiyoko Tomikawa of a missing artwork
80 × 142 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
pp. 34–35

Attack Attityd
1977
Textile, wool handwoven, wood, metal
200 × 100 cm
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
MMK 9908
p. 22

Drop Dead!
1977
Textile, handwoven wool, wood
200 × 100 cm
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
MMK 9907
p. 27

New Wave
1977
Wool, handwoven
156 × 107 cm
stockholmmodern, Stockholm
p. 31

No Future
1977
Wool, handwoven
105 × 94 cm
Valdemar Gerdin Collection,
Sundbyberg
p. 26

Attitude
1980
Bobbin lace on mirror
77.8 × 53 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Communication
1980
Screen print on paper
105 × 73 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

E-hole: Action, Attitude, Argument
1980
Screen print on cloth
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
60.5 × 65.5 cm
MMK 9910

E-hole: Action, Attitude, Argument
1980
Screen print on cloth
48 × 54 cm
Anna Grankvist Collection, Malmö

Liberté [Freedom]
1980
Textile, mirror glass, lace
77.8 × 53 cm
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
MMK 9909

A Note in Space
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (4)
23.5 × 31.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (Russian
Writer, 1918–2018)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (2)
31.5 × 23.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Antique
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 135

<p><i>Apple</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 31.5 × 23.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Carsten Niebuhr in Happy Arabia, 1758</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 15.5 × 21 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>(DMS) Det Medeltida Sverige [The Medieval Sweden]</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>
<p><i>Bird</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör p. 120</p>	<p><i>Computer Mind</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Fassbinder</i> (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, German Filmmaker, 1945–1982) 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 15.5 × 21 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>
<p><i>Björn Borg</i> (Swedish Tennis Player, 1956) 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 21 × 15.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör p. 110</p>	<p><i>Dancing Native American (Grey)</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 31.5 × 23.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Fenix [Phoenix]</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 21 × 15.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>
<p><i>Björn Borg</i> (Swedish Tennis Player, 1956) 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 31.5 × 23.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Dancing Native American (Orange)</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 31.5 × 23.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Flag (Turquoise Brown)</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>
<p><i>Black and White</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 31.5 × 23.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Dancing Native American (Purple)</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 31.5 × 23.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Gösta</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 19 × 27.8 cm Moderna Museet, Stockholm Purchase 2016 with contribution from The Österlind Foundation MOM/2016/81 p. 128</p>
<p><i>Black Hole</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>David Bowie</i> (English Musician, 1947–2016) 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique (2) 31.5 × 23.5 cm each Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Guardian?</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>
<p><i>Black Hole (Purple Blue)</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör p. 113</p>	<p><i>David Bowie (With His Autograph)</i> 1981–86 Screen print on paper 115 × 85 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>How to Make a Plotting of David Bowie</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 6 images, 210 × 297 mm each Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>
<p><i>Bob Dylan</i> (American Singer, 1941) 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique (3) 31.5 × 23.5 cm each Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Design</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique (2) 23.5 × 31.5 cm each Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör pp. 126, 127</p>	<p><i>Identify (Double)</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>
<p><i>Boy George</i> (English Singer, 1961) 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 31.5 × 23.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör p. 117</p>	<p><i>Development</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 31.5 × 23.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	<p><i>Joseph Beuys</i> (German Artist, 1921–1986) 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique (2) 31.5 × 23.5 cm each Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>
	<p><i>Digital Human</i> 1981–86 Computer graphics plotted on paper, unique 23.5 × 31.5 cm Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör</p>	

Lars Gustafsson (Swedish
Philosopher, Writer and Poet, 1936–
2016)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (4)
31.5 × 23.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Lawrence of Arabia (Peter O'Toole)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (2)
23.5 × 31.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Mask
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
31.5 × 23.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 123

Massoud (Ahmad Shah Massoud,
Afghan Politician and Military, 1953–
2001)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (3)
31.5 × 23.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 111

Me and My Computer
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
33.8 × 23.2 cm
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Purchase 2016 with contribution from
The Österlind Foundation
MOM/2016/79
p. 139

Mystery Ship
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (2)
31.5 × 23.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 115

Native American
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Native American Flow
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
15.5 × 21 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Native American Flow
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Native American (Red)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Oasis
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 114

Parsifal
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Peace
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
15.5 × 21 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Peace
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (2)
23.5 × 31.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Pixel Dream
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 121

Pray
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Red Cross
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
21 × 15.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Revelation
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Richard Wagner
(German Composer, 1813–1883)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (2)
23.5 × 31.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Rocket
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 129

Ronald Reagan (American Actor and
Politician, 1911–2004)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 122

Safety
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
29.7 × 42 cm
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Purchase 2016 with contribution from
The Österlind Foundation
MOM/2016/82
p. 142

Save Us
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Self-portrait
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (3)
23.5 × 31.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 112 (bottom)

Self-portrait (Grey)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Sharp
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Skåne [Scania]
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 130 (bottom)

St George and the Dragon
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

St Olof
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Stockholm City Hall
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (2)
31.5 × 23.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Sunny
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Swedish Parliament
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (3)
23.5 × 31.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Take Me to Another World
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
29.7 × 42 cm
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Purchase 2016 with contribution from
The Österlind Foundation
MOM/2016/80
p. 109

Take Me to Another World
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Texture 1
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 132

Texture 2
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Texture 3
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Texture 4
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 133 (bottom)

Texture 5
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Mats Stjernstedt Collection, Malmö

Texture 7
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 133 (top)

Texture 8
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 134

There
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Torsten (Torsten Weimarck, Swedish
Art Historian, 1943–2017)
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Private collection, Höllviken

Treble Clef
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Untitled
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique (2)
23.5 × 31.5 cm each
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Vote?
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Walk
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 138

Walk
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 125

Where
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 136

White Flag
1981–86
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Note in Space
1982–85
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 137

Identity
1983
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
17 × 11.5 cm
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
MMK 10312:1

Joseph Beuys
(German Artist, 1921–1986)
1983
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
15.5 × 21 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 141

Self-portrait
1983
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
25 × 35 cm
Søren Andreasen Collection,
Copenhagen
p. 112 (top)

Transformation
1983
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
15.5 × 21 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 140

Victoria (Victoria Benedictsson,
Swedish Author, 1850–1888)
1983
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
31.5 × 23.5 cm
Private collection, Stockholm

Vote For Me (51)
1983
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
15 × 22 cm
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
MMK 10312:5

Walk
1983
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
15.5 × 21 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 124

Computer Mind
1984
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
21 × 15.5 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 118

Guardian?
1984
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 130 (top)

Massoud (Ahmad Shah Massoud,
Afghan Politician and Military
Commander, 1953–2001)
1984
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
17 × 11.5 cm
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
MMK 10312:3

Our World
1984
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 119

Self-portrait (12)
1984
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
MMK10312:4

Victoria (Victoria Benedictsson,
Swedish Author, 1850–1888)
1984
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
31.5 × 23.5 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 116

World
1984
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
23.5 × 31.5 cm
Hollybush Gardens, London
p. 131

Parsifal (48)
1985
Computer graphics plotted on paper,
unique
19 × 27 cm
Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden
MMK 10312:2

Sephiroth
1993
Textile print
79.3 × 70 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Camel Cloud
2006
Acrylic on canvas
70 × 85 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Spinning Our Own Fates
2006
Acrylic on canvas
70 × 85 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Apple
2019
Wool, digitally woven
102 × 56 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 150

Braincell
2019
Wool, digitally woven
117 × 57 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Caravan
2019
Wool, digitally woven
104 × 57 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 154

Computer
2019
Wool, digitally woven
108 × 57 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

David Bowie
2019
Wool, digitally woven
111 × 58 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 148

Global Rotation
2019
Wool, digitally woven
195 × 58 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

High Forever
2019
Wool, digitally woven
120 × 58 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Human Figure
2020
Cardboard
150 × 150 × 16 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Take Me to Another World
2019
Wool, handwoven, cloth, thread
305 × 57 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Native American
2019
Wool, digitally woven
117 × 57 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 155

Peace
2019
Wool, digitally woven
95 × 57 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Reflex
2019
Wool, digitally woven
111 × 58 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 146

Save as Art? Yes/No
2019
Wool, digitally woven
128 × 56 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive,
Skanör
p. 145

*The Social Democratic Party Makes
the Swedes Go Crazy*
2019
Wool, digitally woven
125 × 56 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Surf
2019
Wool, digitally woven
115 × 59 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 149

Take Me to Another World
2019
Wool, digitally woven
107 × 59 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 156

The Brain is Wider than the Sky
2019
Wool, digitally woven
125 × 58 cm
Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 151

The Target is Destroyed

2019

Wool, digitally woven

102 × 60 cm

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 147

Victoria

2019

Wool, digitally woven

113 × 58 cm

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 153

Vote

2019

Wool, digitally woven

105 × 57 cm

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör
p. 152

We Are Not Museum Curators

2019

Wool, digitally woven

121 × 57 cm

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Charlotte Johannesson and Sture
Johannesson

*Interview with John Lydon (Johnny
Rotten, of the Sex Pistols)*

1976

Digitalised sound

approx. 15'

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Charlotte Johannesson and Sture
Johannesson

Riksdagshuset [Parliament House]

1983

Digital animation, colour, sound

45''

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Sture Johannesson and Jan Sjökvist

Agent Knallrup med rätt att knuffas

[Agent Knallrup with License to Push
and Shove]

1967

Digitalized 16mm colour film with Bob

Dylan soundtrack

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Sture Johannesson

The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword?

1976

Poster

100 × 70 cm

Mathias Swinge Collection, Lund

KPD/ML and Rote Garde

Funeral wreath for Ulrike Meinhof

1976

Embroidery on silk (found object)

2 pieces, approx. 100 × 30 cm each

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Documentation

Reconstruction of the exhibition

Om Tyskland-i tiden (About Germany-
in Time) presented in Stockholm,
Malmö and Lund. Includes works,
posters, textile elements, prints and
photographs by Sture Johannesson
and Ove Hallin

1976

Variable dimensions

Mathias Swinge Collection, Lund

Various printed matter documenting

Atelier Cannabis, Studio II, the mill in

Rickarum, The Digital Theatre

1981–86

Variable dimensions

Charlotte Johannesson Archive, Skanör

Mathias Swinge Collection, Lund

Interview with Charlotte
Johannesson in the tabloid
Kvällsposten, March 1980: 'The
Loom is Her Weapon Against
Repression'

Vävstolen är hennes vapen mot förtrycket

Attack! Med vävstolen som redskap slår konstnären Ann-Charlotte Johannesson hårt mot alla former av förtryck. Varje människa måste själv söka sin frihet. Det är det budskap hennes garner för fram.

Ann-Charlotte vill protestera mot det snäva debattklimat som råder i Sverige. Frihet är det ständigt återkommande temat i hennes bildkonst. Det gäller att bryta de bestående reglerna. Att våga ifrågasätta.

På en av Ann-Charlottes vävnader framträder tre apor. En håller för ögonen, en för munnen och en för öronen. En pessimistisk bild av välfärdens Sverige.

VI ÄR OKRITISKA

– Jag skulle önska att det fanns lite mer av attack i det här landet. Inte så att man går ut och skjuter med gevär, men med argument. Allt är så indelat. Man väljer en politisk grupp som man sedan okritiskt ställer upp på i varje läge, säger Ann-Charlotte missnöjt.

– Egentligen förstår jag inte varför det blivit så. Vi har ju förutsättningar. Men av allt det som var positivt i samhället för några år sedan, allt det som förde utvecklingen framåt, har det bara blivit en klubb massa kvar.

HOPPAS

Nu hoppas Ann-Charlotte att det ska bubbla upp massor av idéer under 80-talet. De som aldrig kom under 70-talet.

– Men det går inte att hänga upp sig på gamla skrifter och gubbar. Alla måste ta ansvar för sina egna liv – inte överlåta åt institutionerna att omhänderta oss. Frigörelse är inte bara en fråga om fler daghem. Det har med människan som sådan att göra, säger Ann-Charlotte bestämt.

ENSAM I SVERIGE

Ann-Charlotte är ganska ensam i Sverige om att använda vävstolen för att tillverka "affischer". För att få fram vad hon vill ha sagt använder hon både text och bild.

Enstaka ord eller kortare dikter vävs in för att förtydliga budskapet. Påverkan från punk och anarkism är tydlig.

– Att vara anarkist är det naturliga tillståndet om man är konstnär. Man måste kunna slå åt alla håll. Det går inte att släpa på bindningar till någon form av organisation, förklarar Ann-Charlotte.

POLITISKA RÅD

I punken ser Ann-Charlotte en frigörande kraft. En kraft som pumpade upp i arbetarkvarteren i England och som utgick från människor som inte ens ägde kläder att gå i.

Med entusiasm berättar hon vidare om de så kallade spontigrupperna som dök upp i Tyskland i mitten på 70-talet. Odogmatiska aktivistgrupper med klara politiska mål.

– Det var mer på allvar där. Här kan man gå i hur många demonstrationståg som helst utan att det händer något.

STÄMPLAD...

Ann-Charlotte har stämpelplats som terroristsympatisör beroende på sitt stora intresse för Ulrike Meinhof. I Ann-Charlottes ögon var inte Ulrike en terrorist i verklig mening.

– Ulrike jobbade under många år som journalist. Hon ställde alltid upp för de svaga. Man måste sätta in henne i rätt perspektiv. Hon drevs in i terroristrollen. Men jag är övertygad om att hon kommer att omvärderas vad tiden lider, säger Ann-Charlotte och ser tvärsäker ut.

MISSNÖJD

Ann-Charlotte är missnöjd med mycket i det svenska samhället. Men någon propagandist vill hon inte vara.



Ann-Charlotte har hämtat mycken inspiration från Tyskland. Till skillnad från Sverige bubblade det av idéer där i mitten av 70-talet. Den här vävnaden var med på den stora Tyskland-utställningen på Kulturhuset i Stockholm härom året. FOTO: LASSE SVENSSON

– Jag tror inte på att pådyvla människor åsikter. Först och främst vill jag att man ska tycka att mina bilder är roliga. Konst utan humor tror jag inte på. Sedan ska naturligtvis tankarna gå vidare till den underliggande meningen.

Många uppslag hämtar Ann-Charlotte ur tidskriften "Forskning och framsteg". Hon tycker det är viktigt att diskutera hur människan behandlar de upptäckter som kommer fram.

– Egentligen skulle man kanske ha blivit fysiker i stället. Det verkar intressantare,

säger hon och skrattar.

Ann-Charlotte lärde sig väva redan 1962. Men det är först under de senaste tio åren hon utvecklat sin vävkonst till att skapa bilder.

– Jag märker ofta att jag uppfattas som konsthantverkare i stället för bildkonstnär. Men för mig är trots allt bilderna det viktiga, inte arbetsmaterialet.

UPPFRISKANDE

Den 12 april öppnar Ann-Charlotte en utställning på Gallerie Green i Malmö. Det

känns nytt och uppfreskande, tycker hon. En gång tidigare har hon fått chansen.

– Men jag har aldrig känt pressen att ställa ut. Det spelar inte så stor roll om det står hundra personer och hurrar åt mina bilder eller ej. Jag tror att alla konstnärer framför allt vill manifesteras sig själva. Sedan hoppas man naturligtvis att det ska vara intressant för andra också.

– Nu när jag blivit äldre känns det viktigare att nå ut med vävnaderna. Frågan inställer sig – vad ska jag annars göra?

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Programming at the Digital Theatre,
1983. Photo: Birgitta Olsson





With plotted digital graphics
at the Digital Theatre, 1983.
Photo: Birgitta Olsson

