At the heart of Mika Tajima's multidisciplinary practice, which spans performance, sculpture, painting, and new media installations, is a profound inquiry into the conditions of human agency and self-determinacy in the built and virtual spaces that we inhabit. Tracing modernist architecture and design from the Industrial Revolution to the sharing economy, Tajima draws on Hannah Arendt's idea of a social space—by which living things make their appearance to probe the visibility of performance, control, and freedom—and investigates how different digital and aesthetic technologies manifest as sensorial and psychic experience.

Interrogating agency through collective action, Tajima's early practice explored the modernist ideologies of productivity and efficiency of labor by analyzing how human bodies are regulated through ergonomic designs and our built environment. Producing installations that deconstructed and reconfigured brightly painted modular cubicle panels, she also activated these spaces as live recording studios for her noise performance collaborations with her group, New Humans (derived from shin-jinrui—or "new breed"—a generation of disaffected, media-saturated Japanese youth who experienced the rise and fall of the bubble economy in the 1980s, which marked the dawn of a new subjectivity). Paralleling noise, she probed spaces of disruption through her collaborations with renowned figures such as artists Charles Atlas, Vito Acconci, and philosopher Judith Butler. In particular, she interrogated the constructs of language in TODAY IS NOT A DRESS REHEARSAL, in which Butler (among many others) reads and literally performs the speech act within the context of a live film set amid props and fragments of scenery flats within SFMOMA's postmodern architecture. In THE PEDESTRIANS, she exposed the labor of filming the literal act of walking as the work itself. In the lineage of artists who integrate institutional critique with multiculturalist discourses emerging in the mid-1990s, such as Renée Green and Rirkrit Tiravanija (whom she studied under), these early performances exploited the museum or gallery as a site to reassess subjectivity through appropriating and subverting the language of film production and sound.

Tajima's early investigation into the regulatory and relational structures of human bodies in built environments would eventually lead to looking at the role of human labor in industrial and digital automation. Perhaps her most recognized series, NEGATIVE ENTROPY (2010-present) comprises abstract woven portraits of field recordings of production noise at industrial textile factories and data centers (in addition to human voices) that are converted into digital spectrogram images, which are then translated into a pattern by a weaver who creates a Jacquard fabric of it. This series has extended to biotech companies producing medical devices and labs developing aneutronic fusion power.

Tajima has also explored psycho-geographic data to measure the collective sentiment of specific geographic regions affected by political events and market trends in real time. This interest in mood as material can be traced to Tajima's ART D'AMEUBLEMENT (2011-present) series, paintings made from vacuum-formed transparent shells that are reverse-sprayed in a vibrant gradient of acrylic colors. The series, each subtitled by a geographic location, as a nod to Erik Satie's "furniture music," is meant to recede into the periphery, like wallpaper. These imaginary associations have extended to the use of algorithms to measure real-time sentiments impacted by the price fluctuation of gold in MERIDIAN (GOLD), and through Twitter feeds corresponding to political events in HUMAN SYNTH, which are both illuminated by plumes of vapor or smoke. As data is increasingly customized, the boundaries of our own agency, identity, and privacy become obscured. Questioning the indefinable limitations of a virtual self in NEW HUMANS (2019), Tajima uses machine learning to conceptualize a hybrid user profile that integrates DNA, fitness trackers, and dating apps in the form of magnetized ferrofluid. NEW HUMANS was installed adjacent to FORCE TOUCH, a wall of punctured jet nozzles emitting air that corresponded to reflexology pressure points and emulated human touch and touch screen technology.

The artist first began using jet nozzles in TOTAL BODY CONDITIONING, a series that appropriated hot tubs built to conform to the body as a form of hydrotherapy, which she displayed upright in a color gradient on vacuum-formed materials—akin to her ART D'AMEUBLEMENT paintings—that point to regulated modes of communal leisure. Tajima has taken this further in her PRANAYAMA sculptures, which are shaped by indexical impressions of the body on carved wood, marble, or rose quartz and punctured with bronze jet nozzle holes that correlate with pressure points, thereby opening up unmediated flows of breath and energy as counterpoints to the ways customized algorithms regulate our daily life. The artist has attempted to capture this flow of "breath" in the form of blown glass in her ANIMA series as a means to materialize agency. As Tajima states, "In our current moment, in which capitalism has appropriated the intangibles of our inner life (i.e. affect, subjective information, and emotion now used as raw material and data), maybe we can locate agency in the freedom of disclosure and right to opacity—to be seen on our own terms."

What New Spring Growth Emerges after Scorched Earth…

Beginnings: Agency and Disruption

Mika Yoshitake (MY) In reviewing your work over the past two decades, I'd like to start by thinking through the three loosely interconnected themes of performance, control, and freedom that structure your practice in relation to your formation as an artist. Can you tell me about your beginnings, your influences and inspirations, and how and where your thought processes began that inform the evolution of your practice?

Mika Tajima (MT) Ever since I could really draw as a kid, I wanted to be an artist, which is funny because my parents are both scientists. My father is a theoretical physicist, and my mother is a geophysicist—even my brother studied physics. After taking a seemingly divergent path, I am finding commonalities with my parents' fields of study. The way that I think is similarly informed by researching the material world and connecting it to abstractions and invisible forces. As an artist, I also consider what it means to be an embodied subject in this world by trying to understand the physical and social realms together.

College was my first introduction to thinking in a more abstract way. I took a lot of art history classes and that was the first time I was introduced to critical theory and philosophy. I was informed by 1990s cultural studies discourse, and the artists that came up through that generation have continued to influence me and helped form my foundation and thought process, for instance, Renée Green, who I admire so much. In my work, identity and subject formation is not obviously visible or literal, but it's an underlying concept: What does it mean to be who we are? Who is determining who we are? How are all these power relations shaping us? How do we negotiate living in the world in this way?

I began using forms, such as architecture and design as a way of examining how we are shaped by the things around us, these systems of control and ideas of freedom. My work has

evolved over time, which now also includes forms of technology itself, and necessitates thinking about ways in which not only external coercive elements determine us, but also things that are internalized and emanate from within ourselves.

MY: I am wondering about the origins of your thinking in your early work in the ways it addressed ergonomics and efficiency, and the idea of our bodies being shaped by the built environment. I am thinking, in particular, of DISASSOCIATE (2008) and THE EXTRAS (2009)—installations of deconstructed and reconfigured painted cubicles and performances, as well as the more Gesamtkunstwerk multimedia productions such as TODAY IS NOT A DRESS REHEARSAL (2009) and PEDESTRIANS (2011). On reflection, those were incredibly interesting ways to think in terms of a physical awareness of our built work environments and how we interact within these spaces, but also as covert references to identity as a social construct. You question the apparatus of agency and intentionality, first through language in TODAY IS NOT A DRESS REHEARSAL and then through the act of walking in PEDESTRIANS. Your investigation of the relational structures of human bodies in built spaces would eventually lead to the invisible apparatus of digital technology and its systems of control and regulation. As an artist trained under figures at the forefront of identity politics in the age of multiculturalism, I wonder if there was a connection between probing the social constructs of language and action in these early installations and performances, and the fraught experience of cultural assimilation and invisibility that is inherent to Asian American identity. Looking on that now, from the current moment when we are experiencing a renewed resurgence in racial reckoning, do you feel that in probing agency and intentionality, identity may have also been a motivating factor within the terrain of those early works? I remember seeing your work for the first time at Uncertain States of America: American Art in the 3rd Millennium (2006) at the Center for Curatorial Studies Bard and wondering, What are the stakes here?

MT: Yes, that work was really abstract and intimated ideas of multiplicity and anti-essentialization as possibilities rather than the condensation of identities and social representations. At the time, I was processing how these constructions can somehow become uncontainable through installation and performance, as sites for new ways of being at the brink of legibility. For that reason, I was drawn to working with people like Judith Butler, Charles Atlas, and Vito Acconci on different projects. Each of them had such a specific way of approaching and representing these ideas in their practice.

In graduate school, I studied under Rirkrit Tiravanija, who is also a huge influence for me. That work was coming out of the 1990s politicization of everyday moments and gestures in an art context. That was powerful to me. To see how various gestures in socially determined spaces recontextualized really had a different power and impact. It makes the viewer very aware of its construction. That was the genesis of questioning: What are the determined spaces we inhabit and what are the gestures within that space?

In the early days for me, it was integral to think about creating a disruption in a space. The New Humans performances were rooted in the ethos of noise music, which draws on negation and refusal, in opposition to the context of aesthetics, audience, and site of performance. Being visible as an Asian woman foregrounded in these performances put me at odds with determined expectations and spaces where I'm not supposed to be, where a certain type of person or action is not expected to appear.

The performances came out of working through a lot of minimalist tropes—visual and musical—by breaking their formalisms and repurposing them for other functions that involved people and actions. For example, DISASSOCIATE was an installation of modular paintings configured as a recording studio space in which paintings were relegated to act as wall barriers for performances and music production. The performances and events were not theatrical or oriented as a tableau for the viewer. Much of it was obscured in service of the actual recording function of the space and the interaction of the performers. Those performances were meant to demonstrate the usage of artwork, to be the site of production versus a discrete finished artwork. The beginning and the end of the artwork was undefined. DISASSOCIATE was about ongoing process rather than defined states and modes of encounter. So yes, with these projects there is a heightened constructivist awareness of infrastructure and us together.

MY: I'm thinking back to the nineties and Byron Kim's minimalist grids of skin color as an abstract, yet clear-cut visual problematization of identity, but what you're doing seems to be the opposite, a more affective approach. There's no obvious referent to identity, but rather an uncanny awareness through highlighting the cursory, the disruptions in noise music, or probing the foundations of agency and intention through appropriating the language of film production and sound.

MT: I think my predecessors necessarily experimented with abstraction within a very specific dialectic with representations of identity. I wanted to pull the camera back to expose this as an untenable construction by repurposing these inherited structures and creating ruptures.

In the early performance-based works, I worked through

different formalisms. With DISASSOCIATE I was using music production as a structure, and then the next iterations were about filmmaking. Within both types of practices there are hierarchical or determined actors or roles that people inhabit. And so, for me, it was using that as a metaphor for the world at large: that's the director, that's the cameraman, that's the musician, that's the poet, that's the philosopher. What do those relations, inhabiting those different positions, mean?

THE EXTRAS installation presented a scene of film production. However, what was on display were leftover props from a shoot—the ones who are not the main figures. But, for me, the excess could be, the potential, the space for something else, because these designations are all undetermined.

That particular film-production project came right at the time of the financial crisis, which dramatically shifted the context for art making after a global economic boom. When the crash happened, it was a chance for me to think: what are all the empty shells of this mode of capitalism and production? Everything left in my studio was used to make THE EXTRAS. I had to reimagine what these works can be when they're not in the same circulation of fast-moving capital.

MY: It is so interesting to hear that work happened around the financial crisis in 2008. It makes me think of the context of the bubble economy in 1980s Japan when Seiji Tsutsumi, the owner of the Saison Group, which included Seibu department store, Parco, Muji, Loft, etc. was teaching his employees about Jean Baudrillard as part of his marketing training; cultivating the art of parody and simulacra in advertising. He set a trend in Japanese capitalism right after the depression in the seventies. This need to cultivate consumption as a mise en scène somehow made me think of your early practice. Even though there is a two-decade gap, you are addressing the problem of agency under capitalism, the culture of image saturation (à la Society of the Spectacle), the more recent experience and sharing economies via social media platforms. I'm wondering if maybe these two moments—the burst of Tokyo's bubble economy to the total collapse of the financial crisis—may be internalized in your practice?

MT: I really like that you're making this connection. The name New Humans—used for my performance collaborations—actually comes from the Japanese term shin-jinrui, which was coined in the 1980s to describe a generation of individualistic, disaffected youth that emerged from the rapid economic boom and subsequent crash of that decade. It spawned a literary genre that captured the torn spirit of a new society. I liked the term because I can use it to point to new subjectivities instead of a dead end in postwar consumerism. This generative possibility is the reason for using this name.

I still feel that I'm a child of the eighties. Especially in regard to my connection with Japan, because when I was a kid, we'd spend the summertime there with my grandparents.

MY: So did I. That's how we became bilingual.

MT: I think these multiple perspectives in terms of history, geography, and languages are important to figuring out how we can be in a shared world as individuals—in the same way that a performance or installation can generate these viewpoints.

Spaces of Appearance

MY: Your approach also reminds me of third-wave feminism and the deconstruction of determined categories of identity and marginality.

MT: Related to poststructural feminism and to Butler's politics of the performative in the public sphere, I've been thinking a lot about Hannah Arendt and her concept of "space of appearance," which has to do with visibility, action, and freedom. I'm interested in forms of agency and self-determination in terms of how we can choose to appear to others (and disappear). While the work is evolving and in many ways becoming more abstract, the main themes are all still interconnected—the duality between the undetermined and the identified, control and freedom, the two sides of a coin.

MY: Let's talk about this concept of the "space of appearance." I can think of other degrees or thresholds of the term, like Heidegger's Lichtung (or "clearing") an ontological emergence of being, as opposed to an epistemological inquiry in line with your early practice. Before there was a more dispersed aesthetic with the reconfigured panels, performers, and noise, arising out of regulatory systems and disciplinary institutions via ergonomic design and built environments. But now, your work has gotten much tighter.

Hannah Arendt's appearance as a spatial mode of experience and location of agency also relates to the notion of topos (space) by philosopher Yūjiro Nakamura (1925-2017) who theorized this in four ways in his book Common Sense (1979). The first is an ontological grounding; the second is somatic, bodily space; third is symbolic, and the final is discursive. You seem to hit all of these in your practice. For Nakamura, the community, the unconscious and the native environment all come together, and these elements come into play in your practice.

MT: I like how you describe the way Nakamura synthesizes a space of appearance as an experience involving these different registers: being, body, and discourse. It's in line with the turn in my work that you mentioned, but still connected to an embodied subject in real and discursive spaces—feeling through things.

My current approach is a combination of ideas, beginning with Arendt's idea that social space is where "living things make their appearance like actors on a stage set for them" to think about the politics of self-display and plurality, which Butler takes up further in her own way. I bring this into tension with a visual apparatus that seeks to identify, control, and normalize. This bridges to the Foucauldian concept of surveillance space and disciplinary power of visibility. That's why I'm interested in the different digital and aesthetic technologies that govern us and also the sensorial and psychic experience produced in this space—the feeling of being a subject and object in this world.

It's true that my work seems tighter, and I think it reflects the real spatiality of technocapitalism which encompasses exterior and interior life instead of thinking of it as only an external structure that could be represented as a mise en scène. In terms of agency and freedom, by playing with the invisible and material in my work, I can intimate ways of being unknowable.

MY: How are you articulating this "space of appearance" in terms of various visual or sensorial affects associated with each theme: performance (color); control (digital); and freedom (light)?

MT: It can be both a form of resistance but also a quality of undetermined sheerness that Arendt refers to when describing things before they take recognizable form. Both HUMAN SYNTH video works and the ANIMA sculptures materially represent this sheerness as dissipating clouds of digital smoke and clear, amorphous transparent glass. I want to get to the sensoriality of appearance and disappearance—something to be felt by ourselves and others. In my recent works, I have been using mood as a material and it is transformed into sensorial objects and installations, taking form as light color, water vapor, smoke, aerated pigment, ferromagnetic liquid, and glass.

MY: I am now seeing the significance of how this space of appearance operates in terms of the politics of the self and self-regulation in social space, and the internalization of ideological apparatuses of power (à la Althusser). I am curious about the way you update the registers of agency and experience to our contemporary moment of technocapitalism and reveal them through the sensorial and psychic experience produced in this space. And it is even more fascinating to

see how you use mood and sentiment data as transformative media to “reveal” the effects of the political climate as communal spaces of appearance.

MT: In our current moment, in which capitalism has appropriated the intangibles of our inner life (i.e. affect, subjective information, and emotion now used as raw material and data), maybe we can locate agency in the freedom of disclosure and right to opacity—to be seen on our own terms. This also links up to current social issues such as representation, identity, and even privacy today. I try to heighten the awareness of this immaterial economy and its production in my work through the images, material, and spatialities it conjures. For instance, the PRANAYAMA series are sculptures punctured with holes to expose an implied internal space to external flows.

MY: How do the PRANAYAMA sculptures operate in terms of control and energy?

MT: The title PRANAYAMA draws on the ayurvedic practice of controlling the breath or life energy. The works in the series have been made of various solid materials which are perforated with bronze Jacuzzi jet nozzles in the pattern of an acupuncture diagram, evoking a release of air or energy. The nozzles represent this pressure to regulate and reform the body. The materials have included walnut, black marble, and most recently rose quartz. For this most recent PRANAYAMA (MONOLITH, ROSE QUARTZ), I selected rose quartz as the material for its ability to transform bodily energy, generate electricity, and regulate time keeping.

MY: It’s very anthropomorphic to me.

MT: Very anthropomorphic for sure. It’s soothing and violent at the same time.

MY: The penetrating jet nozzles could be gunshots.

MT: You can imagine the piercing feeling of an acupuncture needle hitting a pressure point and accessing some internal circuit.

MY: In FORCE TOUCH (MANU DEXTRA SINISTRA) (2017), you had reflexology pressure points of a pair of hands on the wall, but do the jet nozzles in PRANAYAMA series correlate with a specific part of the body?

MT: For the rose quartz PRANAYAMA, I used the head as it is a microcosm of the body mapped as points on the head. I am linking acupuncture, an ancient practice, to a technology that penetrates your psyche, one’s mind becoming a new zone

to dominate. For instance, Elon Musk is developing neural lace to put inside his head to augment and integrate his mind with computers.

Another related series is ANIMA, which consists of blown glass sculptures that are also punctured with jet nozzles. These elements in the recent show were about invisible things—air is life force, an unseen pressure against our bodies. I think a lot about this early Michael Asher piece that involved an invisible source of air blown into a museum space. These glass works make energy and air tangible and physical. They come into form with human breath.

MY: How does that process work? Where does the breath stop and how is the shape of the breath formed?

MT: I would have sketches of forms I was imagining, for instance evolving deep sea creature forms as well as amalgams of prosthetics, internal organs, robotics, body braces, things that are used to shape the body or internal body parts. When the glass is molten, we inflate the structure by blowing air into it and then we manipulate the soft glass until we arrive at the shape we want.

MY: I showed my daughter, who said, "It looks like an underwater seashell."

MT: So that's what I was tapping into—things that we don't fully know, can't fully access, like deep sea creatures or aliens.

MY: They're very corporeal, definitely breast-like as opposed to the prosthetic walnut body braces. There is almost a reversal between the breath versus external material, and how that interacts.

Evolution of an Acoustic Portrait

MY: One of my personal favorites has always been NEGATIVE ENTROPY. Can you talk about the evolution of that textile series—acoustic portraits—from Jacquard looms recording the actual conditions of its own obsolescence to recording meditations and temples, and now even construction sites in Toranomon?

MT: The NEGATIVE ENTROPY series started at a Fabric Workshop residency, which came through Karin Higa and Russell Ferguson. The idea was to try to use Jacquard weaving, as you said, to record its own post-industrial condition. The first body of work could be seen as a portrait of Philadelphia as a city unevenly shifting from an industrial technology to an information and services economy. The process of making NEGATIVE ENTROPY involves multiple translations that are materialized into textile form.

The first group of NEGATIVE ENTROPY was literally about

the machines and production sites, including some of the new tech industrial sites like data centers. While it seems we're accelerating towards total dematerialization and digital life, there are still these obvious physical or bodily experiences of the world. Life still has physicality.

MY: How does NEGATIVE ENTROPY address the preservation of human labor in light of machine errors, i.e., checking and repairing threading errors in blankets?

MT: I'm interested in the thing that's hidden, that's invisible. This includes the human hand and people (operators, technicians, translators) involved in the production process. That is why I refer to NEGATIVE ENTROPY as portraits because materially it is a rendering of the site, labor, technology, and individuals involved in its production. It compresses something like a recording studio and film set into an image and fabric.

When I started thinking about the next body of work, I went to Japan to find more types of weaving facilities, both ancient and modern. And in that research, I learned that Toyota started as a loom manufacturer—they invented the first automatic loom in the 1920s. Before automation, people had to actually hand-shuttle the loom with several workers at each machine. The idea of automation (jidoka) that was fundamental to Japan's industrial development was really developed from Toyota's loom technology.

They were able to expand beyond looms because all of it was centered around the Toyota production system which was a Taylorist management philosophy. In the 1980s, Toyota was focused on this idea of automation with a "human touch," which at first sounds humanist but it is really about the integration of workers into the machinic assembly line. On my tour of the facility at a Toyota car plant, they were singing the praises of automation and the choreography between the workers and the robots to make these cars with maximized efficiency and lowest loss of materials. What struck me was the cacophony of the assembly line filled with not only machine sounds but also a mashup of recognizable songs "Happy Birthday," "Für Elise," "Mary Had a Little Lamb," all playing simultaneously to alert workers of problems occurring in real time. Specific songs would signal that there was an error with a robot in a particular section. The workers were conditioned to aid the robot instead of robots helping people. This goes against the utopian idea that automation will free us to pursue meaningful life activities, including contemplation as Arendt puts it.

If the first body of work was about this shift from the industrial economy to information technology, and the question of human presence, it was also about what's made visible and what is obscured in our humanity. The slogan "automation with a human touch" inspired the idea to visit

a biotechnology company that's producing artificial, internal organ parts and medical devices for the body. Here, I'm coming back to this idea of internalization of these technologies.

The latest NEGATIVE ENTROPY works from the PSYCHO GRAPHICS show at Kayne Griffin (2019) focuses on high-tech and new age technologies centering on the production and capture of energy. I made recordings at a fusion energy company, TriAlpha Energy, which is developing a new type of compact reactor to produce clean power. Those recordings were nanosecond fusion explosion tests. From making textiles to making energy, there's a through line and its counterpart is human energy. In line with this idea, I found sites associated with harnessing the power of internal human energy: a group meditation startup, ancient Seishōji Zen temple, and even Shinto shrine prayer sessions where tradition meets new world concerns. This idea that if you do your morning clapping ritual, you get a raise at your job.

MY: Shinto caters towards rituals and customs rather than on deep religious scripture. It is fascinating to see how the NEGATIVE ENTROPY series has dramatically shifted from questions of labor in terms of human touch or presence in the industrial economy, to questions of humanity in terms of biotechnological devices that serve human bodies and our environment (via clean power through fusion energy) to contemporary spiritual practices that harness human energy.

MT: Contemporary mysticism, I think, parallels technology. Instead of developing an inner spiritual life, it seems to be instead about finding life hacks that rationalize the unknown and to maximize personal performance.

MY: There is a whole culture of spiritualism in the high-tech industry where new churches are getting very powerful.

MT: Yes, but it is in service of the full integration of productive capitalism into your life. I did a tour of one of Google's campuses and I witnessed how this culture is fully integrated—nap pods, a climbing wall, and lunchtime yoga. There is a micro kitchen, every hundred feet. It's set up so you don't need life outside of your office. The origin of these amenities may have been related to generosity or better working conditions. But that ignores the reality of the context—you work at Google. It's in service of something outside of yourself. So, in reality, it harkens back to the assembly line where it's actually flipped.

MY: Lifestyle itself is increasingly being programmed into a wholesome balance of productivity, spiritual life, and leisure. Even though I'm not in the tech industry, it has certainly reached beyond this context as well, insofar as

I incorporate holistic and Ayurvedic medicine into my daily routine in order to sustain my productivity.

In the latest series, are you also interested in the transformative element of the human voice, i.e. prayers? I'm thinking of for example your acoustic portrait of the translator and critic, Kazue Kobata. Her role as a mediator was huge in the way she impacted culture, language, and the arts. Are you interested in preserving her voice as a symbolic form of transformation?

MT: I am interested in agents of transformation and with the portrait of Kazue it was about her role as a cultural and language translator. Also, I was thinking about how language or information literally passed through people, like a conduit. On the other hand, with the recordings from Seishōji for instance, it represents a harnessing of human energy and the power to mediate things in the world.

MT: I think that actually segues well into HUMAN SYNTH or even the NEW HUMANS piece at the Okayama Art Summit in 2019 that use algorithms and machine learning to process real-time sentiment data and user profiles. Thinking about the psychographic analysis of millions of users by Cambridge Analytica or the algorithmic social media bubbles that silo people, I'm interested in what can be known about us and the type of subject positions and affective energies that are extracted to reproduce this current system. It touches back again to the '90s thinking of identities and what is captured.

With these digital works, I use similar tools but instead make them create emergent things instead of reinforcing existing categories and knowledge. In HUMAN SYNTH, sentiment is distilled by algorithms that are processing real-time social media feeds and then predicting future moods using natural language processing. It is literally generating new text that have emotional valences that are then visualized as light or smoke in these works.

The NEW HUMANS piece uses machine learning to constantly mutate rather than converge or normalize like usual algorithms. It's synthesizing human profiles using data from a dating app and biometrics and genomic data from health and fitness startup companies. The algorithm creates unlikely identity combinations and discovers new affinities between them—it's reconfiguring and reshuffling these identities to form possible communities. The process looks like a morphing, swarming mass that never reaches permanent stasis. This looks like an undulating black pond of magnetic ferrofluid. In a way, it goes back to this notion of the primordial emergence of life. New alien life emerges from a black liquid abyss.

MY: It's the most visceral and abject project that I've seen of your work that elicits a foreboding sense of dark futurity. There's something eerily grotesque about it, but then it also has this incredible order to it, especially in combination with FORCE TOUCH.

There's a broad interpretive kernel to each of your works, which are deeply interrelated and relevant to the futurity of our social reality. I'm thinking of MERIDIAN (GOLD) at the SculptureCenter and how the work is literally affected by the fluctuating valuation of gold, which in turn is driven by investment trends in the stock market, political events, government policies and economic uncertainty. On the surface, I think it's hard to make those immediate connections when we are mesmerized by the vivid plumes of smoke rising out of an abstract open cube-shaped bath across the East River, which combine the playful, political and psychologically arresting.

MT: Gold is a precious metal and a crisis commodity; it congeals material and affective elements. It is also tethered to our sentiment about geopolitical events (i.e, when there is instability in the world, people hoard gold as a secure investment). MERIDIAN connects the fluctuations of the gold market to light, color, and water vapor, which appears as prismatic clouds rising out of a hot tub. The viewers can essentially bathe in collective uncertainty or confidence.

MY: This communal sentiment relates to my current interest in how artists have been impacted by or experiencing the pandemic. Most recently, I have been speaking to Kenjirō Okazaki, one of the most critical artist-intellectuals to come out of the 1980s New Wave poststructuralist generation in Japan, whose work has encompassed dance, robotics, and meditations on various art historical narratives. His current series TOPICA PICTUS, which is drawn from Aristotle's treatise on the art of rhetoric, is an opportunity to access our own systems of knowledge and even memory fragments. And he creatively translates how those memories materially congeal into his objects. This experience has been especially poignant during the pandemic, a place where you can go anywhere virtually, but you can't go anywhere physically.

MT: That approach is similar to the ART D'AMEUBLEMENT paintings. The works from the past several years are subtitled after desert islands—they exist in your imagination, but also symbolize the unreachable and unknowable. I like to think of these paintings as containers for matter that usually dissipates into the air. The particles of paint accumulate on the inside and make the overall object appear visible to the viewer.

MY: That element of Okazaki refers to the three-body problem from celestial mechanics, where the three different bodies of the sun, moon, and earth, orbit continuously, and how meaning continues to change based on those various relationships. I believe your installations also operate based on this three-body problem. The interrelationships between HUMAN SYNTH and then putting that in relation to PRANAYAMA (MONOLITH) and NEGATIVE ENTROPY are as affective and powerful as each individual work itself. Also, there are unexpected synesthetic elements that function as disruptions like the incense in PSYCHOGRAPHICS (2019), as much as the live contortionists in some of your earliest installations.

MT: Whenever I put together an exhibition, I really think about what will be the "third" element? I remember this phrase that Vito Acconci always said: one is solo, two is a couple, and the third person starts an argument. I'm always thinking about disruption, for instance what I was saying earlier about change of context: the feeling of something being where it shouldn't be.

With the incense, I'm trying to connect HUMAN SYNTH and digital smoke with something actually burning. It is another way we can sense changing states. In the video, what was being burned was really people's emotions used to power a digital smoke animation. Incense burning is an ancient technology that was used for smoke reading and divination. I wanted this to be the first encounter for visitors. You go into the show and you sense something burning.

MY: Yeah, the familiarity of those smells brought me back to memories of traditional homes and temples in Japan.

MT: For that incense, I made a formula that incorporated traditional materials used for ancient capnomancy, the ritual of reading smoke to interpret the future. My added secret ingredient was psychotropic mushrooms to signal envisioning completely new possibilities. The incense in the exhibition was linked to both HUMAN SYNTH and the burned PRANAYAMA (MONOLITH), which was blackened with Japanese shou sugi ban technique. Counterintuitively, this method is a way to preserve wood by burning it just before the point of destroying it. The PSYCHO GRAPHICS show was all about burning—what new spring growth emerges after scorched earth…