

*Maciej Zdanowicz*

## НА ГРАНИЦАТА МЕЖДУ – НА ГРАНИЦАТА НА ДИСКУРСА. ТРАНСМЕДИЯ ПРАКТИКИ В ПОЛЕТО НА АБСТРАКТНАТА ГЕОМЕТРИЯ

*Maciej Zdanowicz*

## ON THE BORDER OF MEDIUM – ON THE BORDER OF DISCOURSE. TRANSMEDIA PRACTICES IN THE FIELD OF ABSTRACT GEOMETRY

**Abstract:** В статията са разгледани примери за артистични реализации, в които авторът вижда преследването на широко третираните опити за визуализиране на информация, получена от други области на изкуството или човешката дейност. Често това визуализиране включва използването на други видове медии, популярни средства за комуникация и цифрови медии. В тях изображението се превръща в паралелен носител на вече трансформирани данни. В тази връзка изкуството на дискурсивната геометрия се вписва в колективен ритуал на потребление на съдържание и е проява на механизми, характерни за съвременните общества. Езикът на геометрията, по-рано свързан с трансцендентната структура на реалността и считан за израз на борба за утопични концепции, перфектна визия за световния и обществения ред, сега е инструмент за диагностика и представя фиаското на модернизма.

**Keywords:** *трансмедия, мултимедия, дискурс, абстрактна геометрия, цифрови медии, трансформирани изображения*

### 1. The notion of a discursive geometry. The links of geometry with reality

The beginning of XX century is a time when arises many different art movements, which totally rebuilds the image of art and its meaning. One of the most radical phenomenas is constructivism and in the effect of its development - concrete art. In this field art is the goal in itself. Władysław Strzemiński understands the image as a creation parallel to the world of nature, with identical status, specific principles of creation and structure, just like any other element of the surroundings. In 1930, Theo van Doesburg proclaims the “Concrete Art Manifesto”, in which he calls for creation that will stop the imitation of nature. A similar opinion is expressed by Jean (Hans) Arp, who wrote in 1942: (...) *we reject imitating nature, we do not want to recreate, but create, just like a plant which forms fruit (...)*.

More than a hundred years’ tradition of geometric art, significant achievements of the artists arising from constructivist trends of the first half of the 20th century as well as an intensive time of work and exchange finally results in exhaustion. At the dawn of the 21st century, this area is perceived as reduced. The art world (curators, artists, art critics) begin to depreciate this phenomenon, denouncing its narrow formalism and lack of communicativeness [komjunikejtivnes]. It is the intention of the Discursive Geometry project to face this situation, since its assumption is to restore the relation with broadly-understood reality. Wiesław Łuczaj writes:

*Concrete art should be free from any symbolic relations with reality because the lines and colours are the concrete in themselves, whereas the Discursive Geometry depicts various relations with reality, such as,*

*e.g. social behaviour of people, their participation in culture and art, our everyday life and other social relations, e.g. “references to the world of mass media, scientific references (such as references of art to mathematical systems, or post-humanistic reflexions on genes or artificial life) – relations to art and humanities (such as inspirations by music, architecture, written cultural documents or iconography).*

Assuming that the contemporary reality is a space and time formed by a number of parallel discourses, the art is a tautology, one of the examples of such coordination. Thus, the language of geometry is again becoming the medium which is the means for interpreting reality and the expression of currently occurring [ekering] changes. The way of representing such concepts is taking different form than in the past. The artists mainly make references here to separate messages, medial forms, they borrow the constructs of such utterances [etjuranses], they use quotes in an attempt to find their visual dimension. While noticing in the discussed trend the examples of attempts to transform and process the texts from a variety of sources, I set them within the area of transmedial practices.

## **2. The issue of transmediality**

Contemporary art is the open field with tendencies of exploring, creating ever new relations which connect it to other fields of artistic creation as well as to any other area of human activity. All borders, both internal and external, are removed. Any attempts to defend the homogeneity and specificity of particular fields bring the opposite results, as they lead to and provoke the occurrence of a series of artistic practices, the essence of which may be described as transitive, as well as objects of art – medial hybrids which cannot be categorised as a one, specific form of expression. Marshall McLuhann states that such situation is caused by the fact of previous media being depleted.

I can trace back the sources of such transformations as early as to ancient times. I am referring here mainly to the notion of ekphrasis, a term derived from Greek, which literally means “direct description”. This term denotes [dinolts] a series of literary references to specific works of art. On one hand it is the above-mentioned description, and on the other – a proprietary [pripaetry] interpretation of an object conceived earlier by another creator, fitted within a specific framework of a given literary form (epic, lyric, dramatic). This notion demonstrates strong connotations with the aesthetic category of mimesis, that is, the tendency for imitating nature. As noted by Jacek Szerszenowicz, however, the difference between the terms is that the aforesaid [aforsed] mimesis corresponds to (...) the primal, pre-artistic reality.

Siglind Bruhn, a German musicologist, links the notion of ekphrasis to the area of artistic practices located between fine arts and music. She replaces the above-mentioned term with the notion of transmedialisation, borrowed from the reflexion and the studies on new media-related phenomena [fenolmena], in particular digital means of communication. The term of transmediality was introduced by Henry Jenkins. The American theoretician focuses on permanently occurring processes of interchange and rotation of contents between various forms of broadcast, both the analogue and digital ones. In his understanding, the changes are maintained [mejntejnd] not only by the technologies and development in this industry, but also social and cultural behaviours and expectations of a contemporary human being. At this point, Tomasz Załuski presents a synonymous [synonymes] term of remediation, introduced by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. This term indicates the capability of media to undergo transformation towards a different form of communication. The authors observe that particular media do not exist separately but determine one another.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Siglind Bruhn’s definition of transmediality. In her meaning it is the process of transferring certain structural properties and the content to another artistic medium.

## **3. Pictorial diagrams of statistical data**

An important part of Wiesław Łuczaj’s work is the series of “Statistic Images”, realised continuously [kontiniusli] since 1999. The starting point for its creation is the statistic information regarding the contents of social life, contemporary social and cultural transformations, resulting from studies and surveys conducted in representative groups of adult inhabitants of Poland. The artist notices the changes after 19th century as well as the formation of mass societies. This fact has a considerable [konsiderebyl] impact upon the understating of a human being – as an element of a greater community rather than a individual entity [entity]. Thus, the most frequent method of study and characterisation are the tools developed by [das] sociologists and based

on measurements [mežerments] and quantitative representation. Their results enable to outline the opinions, functioning models, transformation mechanisms and other elements that dominate in a given group. They are represented as numerical data assembled [esebeld] in a charts, but also in the form of geometrical diagrams and graphs. This type of visualisation is comparable with Wiesław Łuczaj's working methods. Transposed numbers, translated into a plain, allow to obtain a shape proportional to their values. The picture constructed in such a way is becoming both an aesthetic object and a visual representation of a specific social issue.

#### **4. Image as topography – visualisations of spatial data**

Joanna Zak uses mapping procedure [prisdje], which consists in spatial demonstration of a content in relation to the assumed [issimd] topography, which represents a specific place, geographical context, but also a virtual dimension, that is, architecture of Internet network, contents found therein, abstract space, maps of thoughts or so called mind mapping. Her images are dedicated to record her own everyday activity as well as that of her family. Her work involves a meticulous [metikeles] recording of the route each person makes during a day. It mainly involves private space – the flat, presented as a grid, where each square symbolises one room: living room, child's room, atelier, kitchen, hall, balcony, bathroom and toilet. The last field refers to an external space and the action of leaving the house. As she notes the directions of walking and time spent in particular rooms, Zak creates a simultaneous [simultenjes] visualisation of everyday life activities, behaviours and cultural rituals. This picture is presented in the form of a diagram, a map, a stratifying [stratifajn] structure of lines, dots and circles, while the scale is determined by time and the colour suggests activity of a single person. Dividing the composition into separate modules allows to introduce change, combine it with other works, to establish a multi-aspect game with the addressee [addressee]. Through her practice, Joanna Zak fits into the area of reflexion regarding the condition of a contemporary woman. As she records her everyday route and creates a simplified evidence of her activity, she presents the role of a woman – mother, wife and artist. By analysing the links between specific items the addressee is able to notice and guess the functions the artist performs most frequently as well as their extent [ixtent].

#### **5. Visual transpositions of linguistic and digital systems**

The works of Josef Lischinger, relate to the notion of language and extraverbal means of communication. The author aims to develop a message, a visual system that may be used as a means of communication. He is inspired by ancient, pre-alphabetic icon-based manuscripts. The process of achieving and developing the concept is manifested in the artist's initial stage of work. The starting points for the synthetic geometrical compositions are the letters, typeface and colour, which – deconstructed and transformed – lose their original shape and change into a new, interesting form. In the subsequent realisations, more and more consequent equivalence system is visible, a translation of language into a visual form. The compositional framework is outlined by a strip structure, a discipline of horizontal axes analogical to printed verses. Particular phones are represented as coloured rectangles, where the colour is linked with a specific letter. The works demonstrate a suggestive rhythmicity and relations between particular elements that are characteristic to a language.

An opportunity of a sound examination of Lischinger's transposition system of a letter or a number into colour is provided by the series titled "Sudoku", in which the artist makes a reference to this logic riddle. These are the pictures created on a grid of 81, small square cells [sells] of identical size. The arrangement is similar to a Sudoku board, and the method of applying particular colours is also borrowed from the game principles. The idea in the game is to complete each field with a number from one to nine in such a way that no number is repeated in any of vertical and horizontal columns. Lischinger assigns colours to specific numbers: 1 – red, 2 – mixed red and orange, 3 – orange, 4 – combination of orange and yellow, 6 – yellow mixed with green, 7 – green, 8 – combination of green and blue, 9 – blue. This arrangement suggests logic in considerations about colours, it is a specific [spesifik] colorimetric pattern. The transfer of colours into the picture is subject to above-mentioned clearly outlined rules. Subsequent solutions present new possible layouts and combinations. Lischinger's concept also contains an element of interaction with recipients [risipjents]. Particular solutions of a colourful Sudoku represent three corresponding systems. This triptych is created by: "complete picture" being the vision of a completely solved visual puzzle, "riddle-picture", where some cells are black and enable searching for own, correct solution, and, finally, the "key-picture" demonstrating the elements missing in the previous work. The empty space here is filled with white colour.

An example of the art based on mathematical system is the work of a German artist, Gerhard Hotter. The series of his paintings include an almost infinite string of transformations, combinatorics of artistic form, inspired by the sequences of Dudley Langford. In his studies, this Scottish mathematician analyses the issue of permutations and creating regularity-based strings of numbers. The essence of those studies comprises [komprajses] the calculations of the distance between the same numerical values in a given sequence, finding of a function that governs the sequence in the established system. As in the mathematical model, Hotter creates a set of smaller input forms – modules based on a square structure. The artist limits his choice of colours to two contrasting hues [hjus], which results in a system that resembles [rezembels] the form of a binary, zero-one, code. In this case, zero represents the background and one is the filled [felld] area. The further process consists in a scrupulous [skrupiles] finding of the established order, the sequence of arranging particular elements in a larger, consistent pattern. To do it, Hotter uses computer software. A close proximity of each element results in their merger [merdze] into new, geometric forms. The artist understands the adopted method of work as a universal one, which can be used for composing [kompolsing] music or literary works of art.

Another artist who makes references to the architecture of information and aesthetics of mass media, is the French painter Jean-Francois Dubreuil. His work involves [involls] illustrating of journal publications and those of information magazines, including the most recognised and popular titles, such as “Le Monde”, „Le Figaro”, „Deutsche Zeitung”, „NY Times”. Dubreuil sets his work on principle of transposition, which he established himself and which refers to the structure of the visualised information. The artist maps the layout of a given page and then he classifies its content according to a type of medium and performed functions. Each group is attributed with a specific colour. Photographs and illustrations are represented by black, advertisements – by red, the grey colour represents the text, while other colours are selected according to specific factors and they result from a character of a given magazine and the significance [signifikens] of its content. The colour in paintings is presented in two ways. The first one is expressed by flat, uniform spots, whereas [heras] the other is presented as a coloured contour. The title of each painting contains information about its source, that is, title and the date of the original publication. A clear and simple principle of transposition allows not only to map the structure of contemporary information and freely available content but also to observe certain relations specific for present times, such as, among other things, the proportion between the visual and textual contents or between advertisements and news.

## 6. Geometrical ekphrases

Rita Ernst is an artist that creates paint layouts based on regular grids. She uses the elementary geometrical shapes, such as squares, rectangles, circles, vertical or horizontal lines, thereby [derebaj] achieving an impression of harmony and order. As she claims, the order and other classification systems have been the subject of interest to people since ancient times, because geometry gives the world the form and shape. The “excuse” to create particular paintings are the works of the most distinguished creators of the German modernistic architecturelike: Eduard Ludwig, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Groupius. Rita Ernst is inspired by architectural plans, perspective projections of a given assumption. Her works are creative interpretations of the architectonic concepts rather than their accurate [akjuret] projection. Her artistic method uses the principles of construction and functionality of building industry as the rules of forming the painting and outlining its role. The artist confronts the architectural and artistic understanding of harmony. From the architecture-related discourse, the artist shifts towards the discourse about painting. Very often, she displays her works in the buildings designed by the above-mentioned architects.

The scope of my artistic reflexion includes music and broadly understood sound. I refer both to specific works of art of classical music, in particular the contemporary one, as well as the sounds heard or recorded in a surrounding acoustic landscape. Geometric form is both a medium of expression as well as an essential equivalent of an audio event. Mathematicity and measurability of particular sound parameters acquires its objective, visual form, which has a regular shape. My method of transposing audio material into image consists in comparing the intensity of sound, that is, proportion between its loudness and the scale of a given element, correlating tone frequency to hue [hju] brightness and sound timbre to a colour associated with it. The sound sustain corresponds with a horizontal extension of the format of the composition or, the verse structure of a system, similar to a structure of a score. While analysing the music, I employ a clean art form.

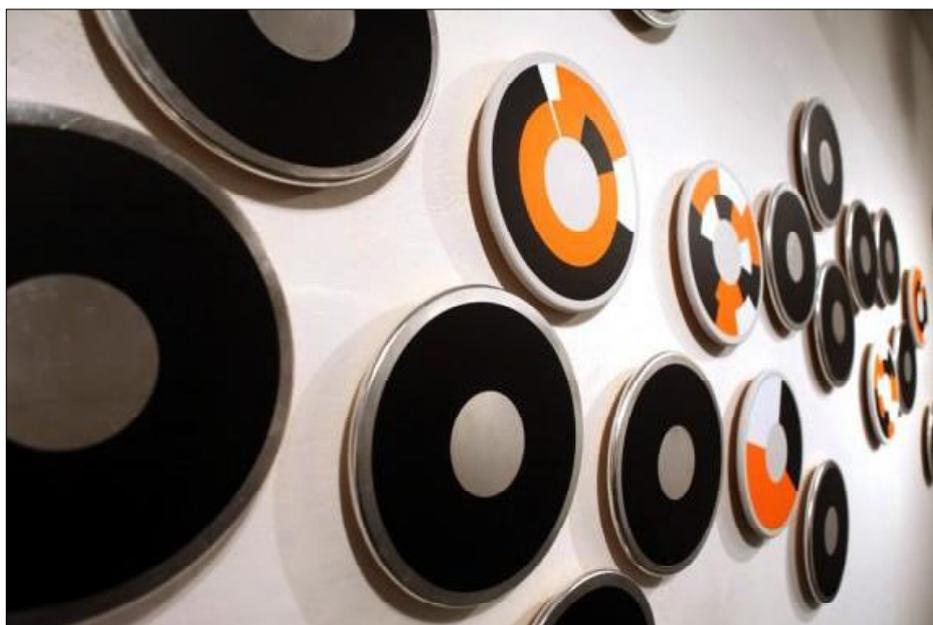
I refer to the principal property of art, which is its absolute character, no connotations whatsoever with reality and abstraction.

## 7. Summary

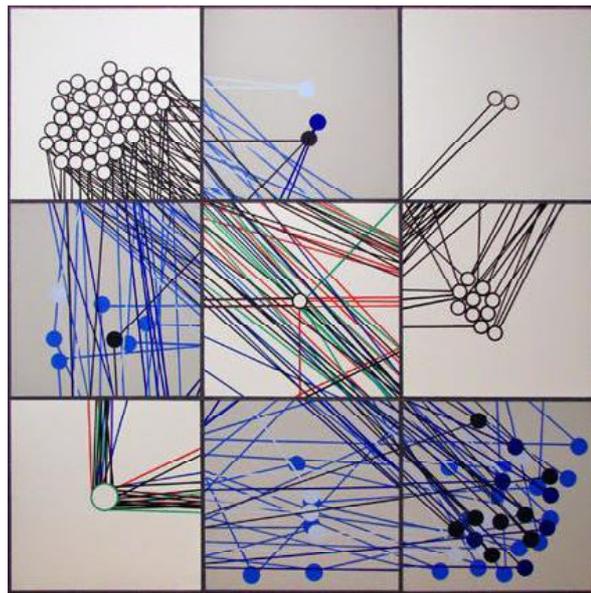
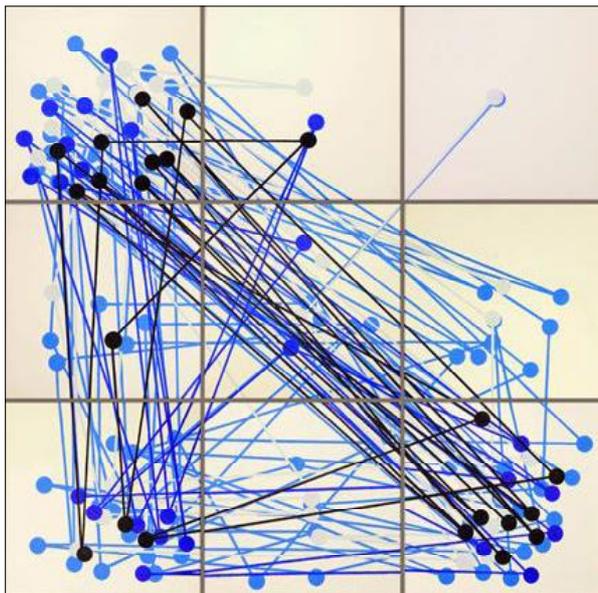
In the those examples of artistic realisations, I notice the pursuit of broadly understood attempts of visualising information derived from other fields of art or human activity. Quite often it involves using other types of media, means of communication, in particular digital media. The image is becoming a parallel carrier of the previously transformed data. In this respect, the art of the Discursive Geometry trend fits into a collective ritual of content consumption and it is the manifestation of mechanisms, which are characteristic for contemporary societies. The language of geometry, previously associated with transcendent structure of reality and considered as an expression of struggling for utopian concepts, a perfect vision of the world and social order, is now a tool of diagnosis and it presents the fiasco of the modernism project.



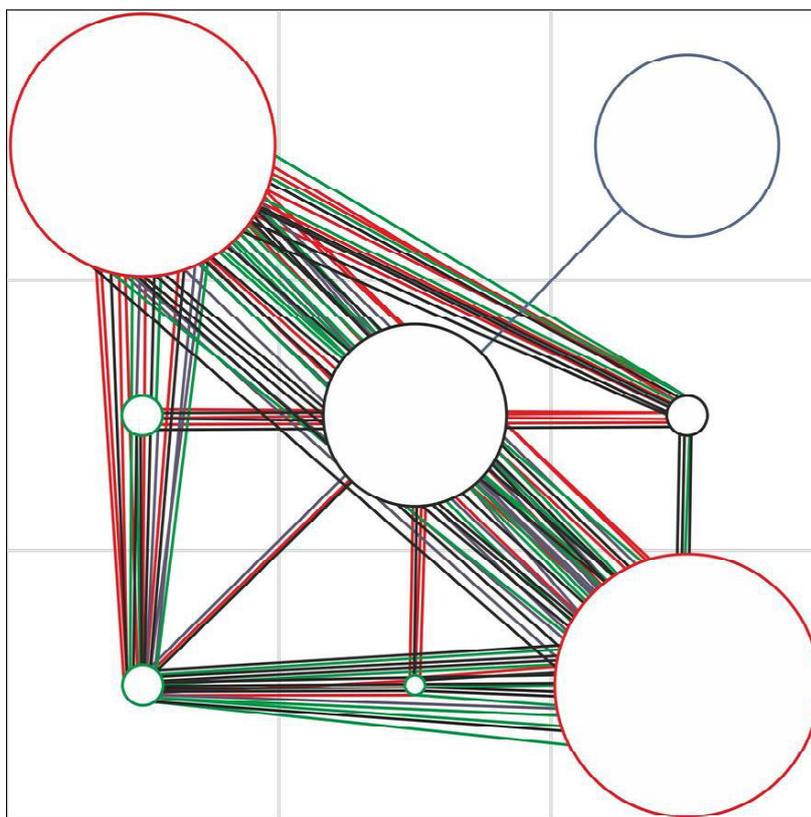
*Wiesław Juczaj, Statisticimages*



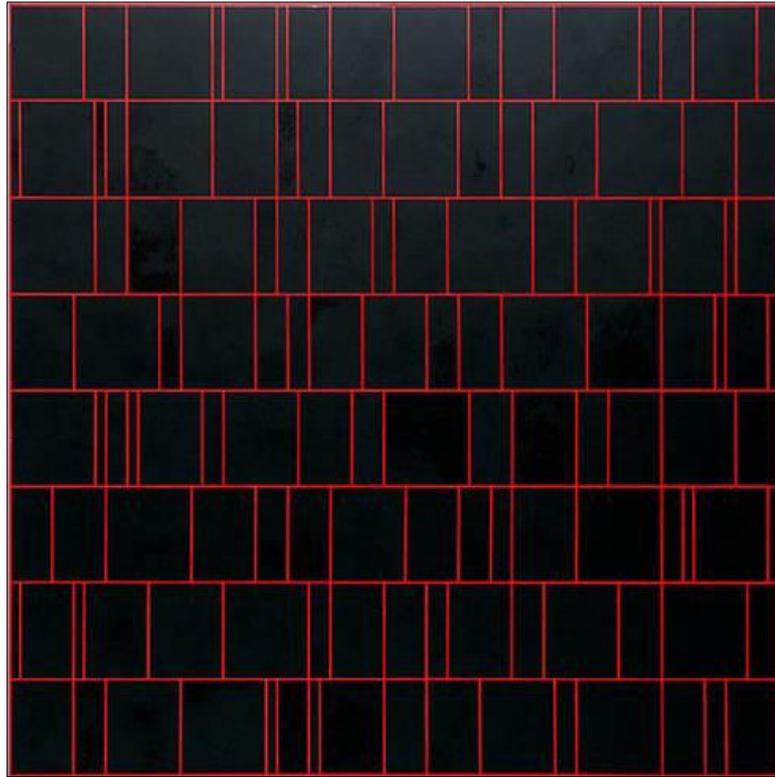
*Wiesław Juczaj, Statisticimages (fragment of exposition)*



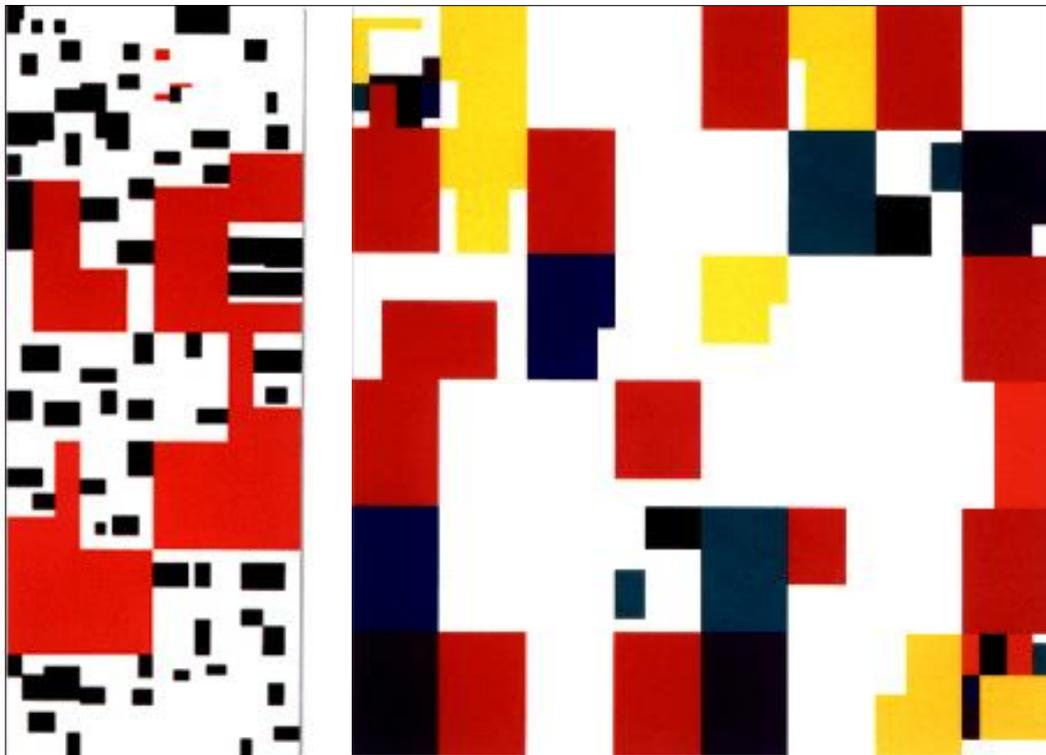
*JoaZak, Joaactivity*



*JoaZak, Joaactivity*



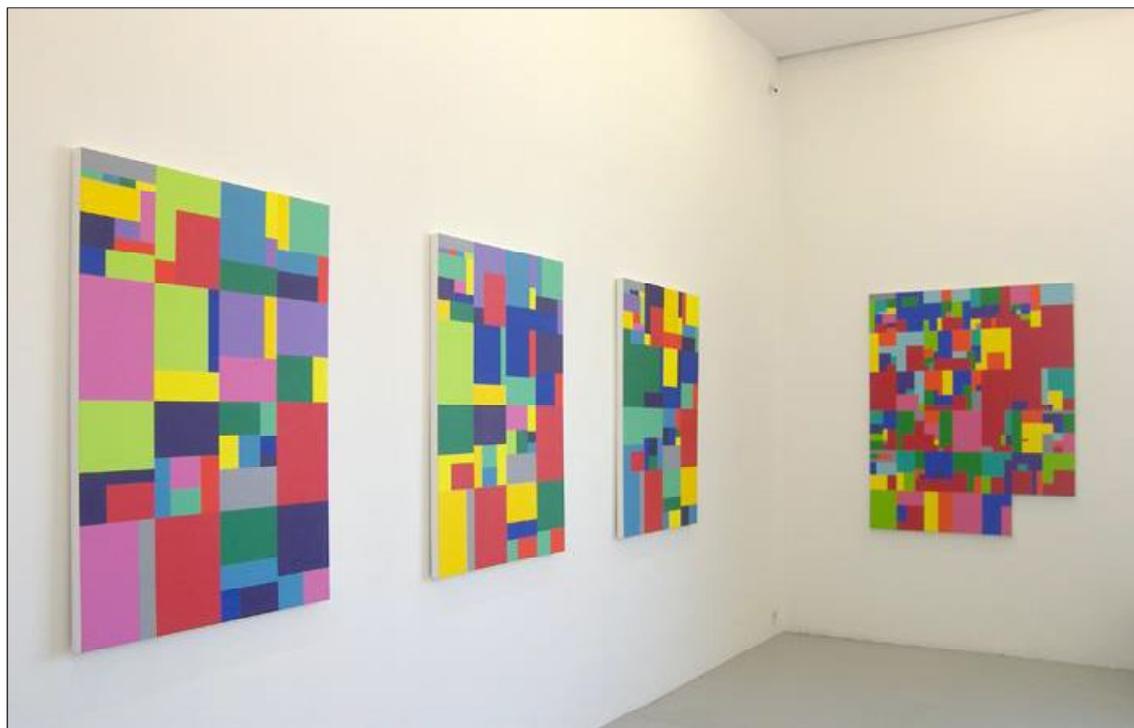
*Gerhard Hotter, Phangor, 2016*



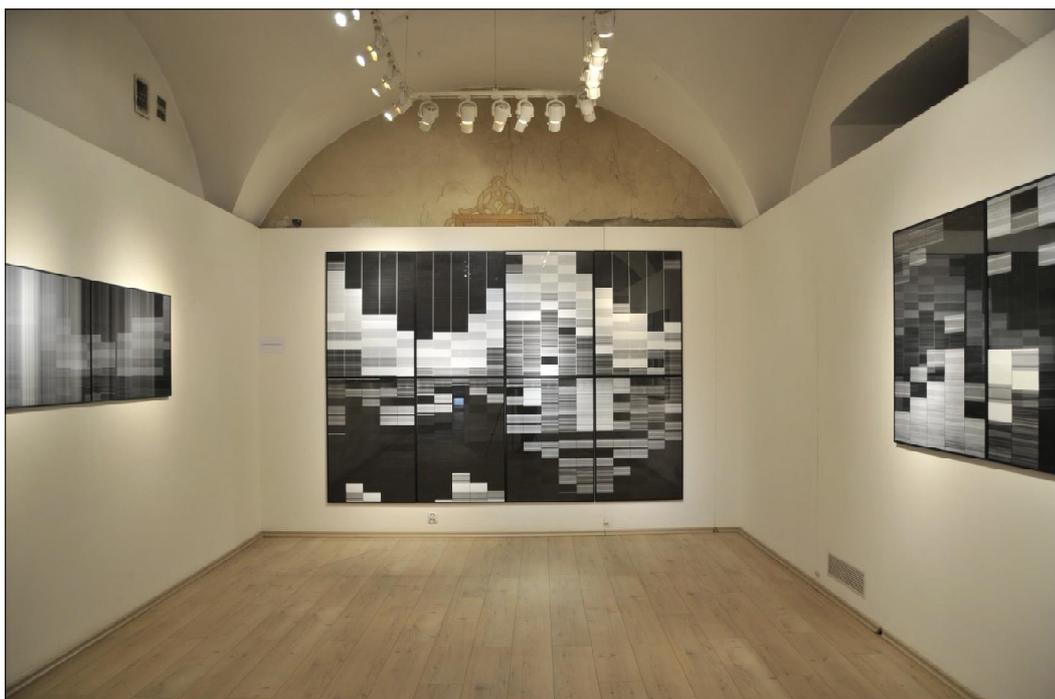
*Jean-Francois Dubreuil, QOF1 -Le Monde N°17086 du 01/01/2000*  
*Jean-Francois Dubreuil, QOF1 -Le Monde N°17086 du 01/01/2000*



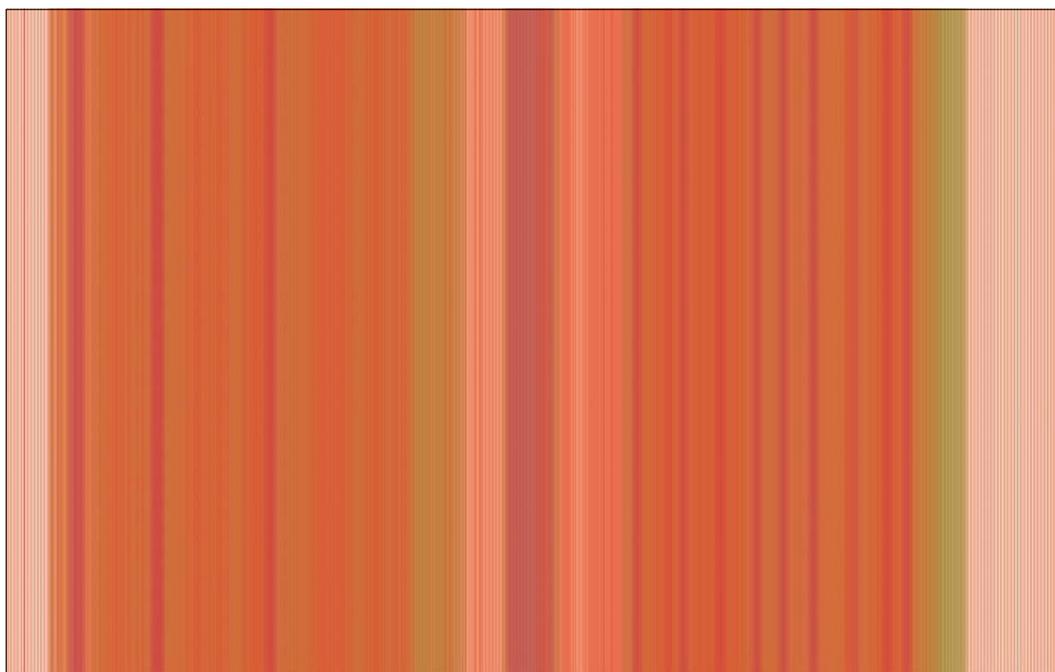
*Jean-Francois Dubreuil, fragment of exhibition*



*Jean-Francois Dubreuil, fragment of exhibition*



*Maciej Zdanowicz, from series Monophonicimages (fragment of exposition), 2015*



*Maciej Zdanowicz, from series Polyphonicimages, 2013*