

# Contemporary Art from Software, Glitches, and Digital Technologies

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by Bushra Anjum (FCA member)

*"It has been a rare pleasure to have a conversation with Chris Dorland. I have been following Dorland's artistic endeavors for a while and find his creative process fascinating; a combination of art, digital technology, computer equipment, and 'chance glitches'. As a member of ACM-FCA, we are vested in promoting the interdisciplinary plane of computer science and art, to make sure the younger generation knows about the many artistic avenues that are inspired by this field, and they can be a part of. Please reach out to me if you would like to contact the artist. Enjoy the conversation." ~ Bushra Anjum*



photo courtesy: Jason Schmidt

the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program. His work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum, The Bronx Museum, The Neuberger Museum among others. Dorland is represented by Lyles & King in NY and Super Dakota in Brussels. He is Director-at-Large at Magenta Plains.

**Chris Dorland** (b.1978, Montreal) is a New York based artist working in video, software based painting and immersive installation. His work examines our increasingly frenetic and invasive relationship to information and consumption caused by digital technologies. Dorland is the recipient of numerous awards including The Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, The Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Artist Grant as well as the Canada Council for the Arts. Dorland is an alumni of the Art & Law Program Residency and

## Let's start by getting to know you and your working aesthetics. What inspired you to become an artist? And how, and when, did computer technology become a part of that creative process?

I wasn't an especially arty child, but I think it would be fair to describe my upbringing as creative and unconventional. My parents are both academics with counterculture leanings and they raised me in a more or less anarchic way – I had a tremendous amount of freedom and was encouraged to explore my interests. That said, as a child, I craved a certain kind of normalcy that I saw represented in television and the movies. The truth is that growing up, the last thing I wanted to be was an artist. I wanted to be a lawyer. Thanks to Hollywood, I had a fairly well-constructed fantasy of what that would look like. But by the time I was a teenager, my interests were increasingly absorbed with visual culture and self-expression. My subjectivity developed out of a mixture of interests that were all at once sub-cultural yet also profoundly consumptive. The late 80s was a time when street cultures like skateboarding were rapidly transitioning away from DIY culture and into mainstream capitalist space. The same could be said of video games with popular second-gen consoles like Nintendo. I was a hyper-consumer of all that stuff and it marked me quite deeply. I was also exposed to lots of violent movies. I remember seeing Robocop in the theater with my Dad at around 10 years old and being blown away.

**So much of my pre-teen and teen years were filled with strange, dystopian visions and dreams of the future.** I loved recognizing fleeting expressions of the future in my everyday – like a J.G Ballard story come to life before I even knew who he was. Sitting in the backseat of a family trip as we drove along the highway, passing derelict Modernist architecture rotting away in the distance as Dire Straits played on the car radio. Early experiences like that were very marking, and wanting to understand why, and how, to express those mixed emotions was probably one of the most important drives in wanting to be an artist.

**You are well known for your creations where images are altered by digital glitches. Please tell us more about your thought and technical process behind this.**

My studio is an image laboratory. Using a variety of techniques and machines, I dismantle and re-purpose images – finding innovative ways of creating something I haven't seen before. **The creation of a glitch becomes an entrance point, or pathway, with which to get deeper into an image.** From a technical standpoint, it's incredibly fun to get to play in the studio and develop interesting and new ways of making pictures.

The glitch is a visual representation of interference. You have an image and a glitch literally disrupts the wholeness of the picture plane. There is actually a long history of this type of visual disruption that exists within the story of painting and completely predates any kind of electronic or technological glitch. Instead it references the construction and artifice of the picture plane. In some ways, a drip could be considered a proto-glitch. I've always been interested in these types of visual interruptions, finding new ways of both creating them and representing them in material form. As my work progressed away from old-fashioned painting and deeper into software-based painting, the glitch started to take on a whole life of its own. The idea of the glitch holds a tremendous ability for metaphoric interpretation – both visually and conceptually.



Untitled (coil whine), 2017, UV ink on AluMacore, 88 inches x 78 inches. Image courtesy the artist, Lyles & King, New York and Super Dakota, Brussels

### **Is it just the computer hardware that you employ for your work, or the direction of technological advancements also galvanizes the art you create?**

It's both. Of course the hardware is a big part of it. As is my access to it. But the world is also changing so quickly as a result of all sorts of digital innovation. I find that very inspiring. In many ways, we are fast moving away from the 20th-century paradigms we've had many decades to process and understand. As the world changes and new technologies continue to innovate and transform our lives, we are witnessing as some of the older paradigms begin to fail us. Trump's rise is certainly an expression of that. As a result, things are changing and we are struggling to adapt. **We find ourselves in a fascinating moment in time and the future seems totally up for grabs ideologically – and technology plays a huge role in who will take the reins.** From that perspective, I think art's ability to tell us things about

ourselves as a species is quite relevant and precious. Honesty, I couldn't be more excited than to be alive and making work than I am today.

### **How do you choose the original images to experiment with, and where do you find them? Do you create them yourself?**

I work from an extensive archive of images and documents that I've been collecting for more than a decade. Some of it is personal content that I shoot or record on my phone. Some of it I collect in books and magazines. Some of it is my own work that I cannibalize and re-purpose. Much of it exists in print form. It all lives in my studio – on bookshelves, in boxes, and on hard drives. That's the raw material I work with that gets processed through different technical and mechanical procedures, and ultimately, gets transformed into new data. The way I arrive at new work tends to be fairly organic and experimental whereby something gets twisted and churned around until it becomes something else.

### **Tell us more about your non-human digital labor co-creators. In what forms and formats do they exist today and where do you see this heading into the future?**

My studio is filled with scanners, printers, cameras, software, and a variety of different LCD and plasma TVs. It's like a junk shop. Each machine has its own personality and quirks. My job is to figure out what each does best and to create situations that allow the machine to do its thing. Ironically my studio is offline and I hate updates. It's like an alternate universe: it's techy and yet it also kind of exists out of time. I guess that's my inner painter that I can't quite shake.

**Beyond interfacing and collaborating with basic hardware as I have been, my real dream is to get to work with deep learning software and AI.** The opportunity hasn't occurred yet but I'm very much hoping that this type of collaboration will present itself in the not too distant future.





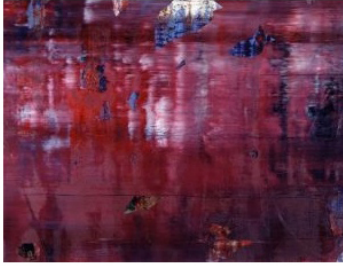
Untitled (corporate cannibal), 2017, UV ink on AluMumacore 94 inches x 46 inches. Image courtesy the artist, Lyles & King, New York and Super Dakota, Brussels

**“Globalization, Technology and Capitalism”, how do you see these three phenomenons working together or against each other? How do they simulate your creative thinking?**

**The Venn diagram where globalization, tech, and capitalism overlap is the nexus for so much of my work.** These three drives are so inextricably connected to one another and together they have created the modern world – in all its glory and its violence. I think of what I do as a form of mapping and exposing – I’m kind of like a cartographer exploring a territory that hasn’t been properly outlined or understood yet.

Right now we are at a strange point because these are the drives that built the modern world and yet they are all currently at a point of extreme stress. Just read any news headlines on any given day: it’s about money, technology, migration, or the ecological effect that all of this is having on the planet. We are literally struggling to adapt to what is happening. And still, here we are, and there are no signs of things slowing down. If anything, things only seem to be accelerating. It’s both terrifying and fascinating. Like a car crash in slow motion. It’s very exhilarating to feel like you have a front row seat to the main event.

Please share a couple of your favorite art pieces, and how do you interpret that work.



**Gerhard Richter**  
*Abstraktes Bild, 1997*  
Oil on canvas  
260 cm x 340 cm

As a young artist, I was looking for visual cues from older artists that I wasn't crazy and that there was enough rigor to my aesthetic and conceptual impulses that it was worth jumping headfirst into the lifelong pursuit of being an artist. Richter's *Abstraktes Bild* series were the first artworks I fully comprehended intrinsically. I immediately understood how he was merging painting and technology together. I loved them at first sight and they gave me the courage to trust my own convictions.



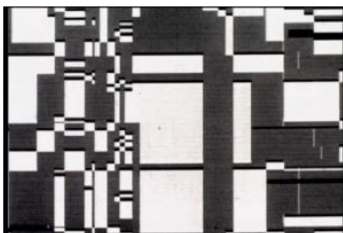
**Gretchen Bender**  
*Total Recall, 1987*  
Medium: 8-channel video installation: 24 monitors, 3 projections, color, sound  
Duration: 18:00 min.  
courtesy the Estate of Gretchen Bender.

I found Gretchen's work much later in life – roughly around 2009. Her work was practically forgotten at the time. She had passed away five years before, and at that point, she existed mainly in books, her work perilously close to not being maintained and historicized. It was too technologically advanced and not commercial enough in her lifetime to have been properly cherished. At the time of her death, her work had no representation or support – commercially or institutionally. I consider it a great honor in my life that I have gotten to champion and support her work and include it in a few exhibitions that I organized. *Total Recall* is an incredibly powerful and prescient artwork and is, in my opinion, one of the great masterpieces of late 20th-century art.



**Gordon Matta-Clark**  
*Conical Intersect, 1975*  
Site specific intervention  
(destroyed – only documentation exists)

*Conical Intersect* was Gordon Matta-Clark's contribution to the 1975 Paris Biennale. It was a temporary project whereby he physically cut into a derelict building that was slated for demolition to make way for the construction of Paris's new cultural center – the Centre Georges Pompidou. More than ever I find myself inspired by Matta-Clark's life and work. He died tragically young but in his brief lifetime he made a revolutionary body of work that was at once socially engaged, generous and collaborative, and formidably inventive and courageous.



**Lillian Schwartz and Kenneth Knowlton**  
*Googolplex, 1972*  
Duration: 5:20 min

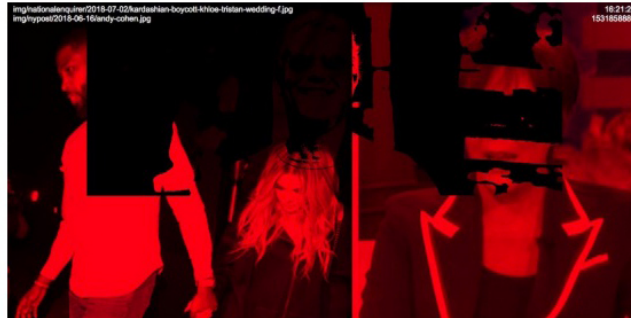
Lillian Schwartz was an early pioneer of computer and digital art. Closely associated the creative innovation that blossomed at Bell Labs during the late 1960s and 70s. With its hypnotic tribal rhythms; pulsating, almost violent, flickering visual white noise; and minimalist graphics, *Googolplex* is a truly visionary and inspiring example of early computer art.

**How do you see art and computer technology inspiring and informing each other? What future do you see for this interdisciplinary area, and how would you like to be a part of it?**

Yes, absolutely! I think the future lies in collaboration. **It's very much a goal of mine to continue to work with creatively minded people outside of my own little universe of culture and aesthetics. The history of computer art is the history of collaboration: artists and computer scientists working together to expand the limits of what is possible.** Most of the early computer art masterpieces happened in extremely fertile and creative places like Bell Labs in the 1960s where innovation and collaboration between disciplines flourished. Sadly much of that golden era ended in acrimony, resentment and, in some cases, even lawsuits. I'm very much hoping to be part of a next generation that can learn from those failures. Artificial Intelligence and virtual reality are just some of the obvious places where I think artists have a tremendous amount to contribute to.

contribute to.

As an artist, I'm fairly limited in what I can do technologically – we don't tend to have research labs at our disposal. I would love to be working with AI and I would love to be working in VR. I would love to be collaborating more with developers, programmers, and computer scientists. Currently my access is much more limited than I would like it to be. But one of the best parts of having more success is that I have incrementally more access to working with really interesting smart people and getting to collaborate with them. **For instance, I just developed a piece called Sun Scraper for FRONT International: the Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art.** They commissioned me to make a new piece which exists in the form of a website: [www.sun-scraper.com](http://www.sun-scraper.com). I worked with Eric Nylund who is an amazingly talented developer. The technical aspects of the project would have been very difficult to implement (or even fathom) without Nylund's contribution. We made something that neither of us would have been able to make had it not been for the collaboration and we had a really wonderful time working together. I hope that the future entails many more opportunities like this one.



Chris Dorland, Sun Scraper, 2018, website, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist, Lyles & King, New York and Super Dakota, Brussels

CHRIS DORLAND

GLITCHES

SOFTWARE BASED PAINTING

SUN SCRAPER