Tobias, 2022, by Sai Bot

ARTIST STATEMENT – TOBIAS GUTMANN

At the heart of my artistic practice lies the creation and investigation of encounters – between people, cultures, and environments, but also between what we perceive on the outside and what we feel on the inside. Constantly aiming to enter into a flow state of creation, the act of drawing becomes a ritual in which I manifest and capture my encounters through my hands. My drawings always entail playfulness and curiosity, wilderness and tranquility. With my portrait performance *Face-o-mat,* I have met over 5000 people worldwide to draw abstract interpretations of what I see in their faces. Rather than providing a photorealistic depiction, I aim to capture the sound of a person. The ever-growing archive of my drawings has developed its own language and meaning, dissolving into multiple narratives in various mediums.

In 2019, I initiated a collaboration with Dazlus to develop Sai Bot, an AI character who continues the legacy of *Face-o-mat*. My digital artist twin draws portraits that transmit the *Face-o-mat* DNA and process ten years of my experience. With these highly abstract portraits, Sai Bot positions themselves as a humanized machine that creates subjective images of the people who participate in their performance. With *Face-o-mat*, Sai Bot and I now together explore a new kind of creative encounter, that between man and machine.

Text: Dr. des Ismene Wyss, Curator Mobiliar Art Collection

In the first extensive exhibition by Tobias Gutmann and Sai Bot, visitors find themselves in a room-filling installation. At the centre of the exhibition is the encounter with Sai Bot, an art-creating artificial intelligence that has sprung from the complete works of Tobias Gutmann. The AI artist Sai Bot originates from a digital world, has learned the drawing style of Tobias Gutmann and has developed it further on its own. The entrance hall of the Mobiliar offers Sai Bot a physical living space for the duration of the exhibition. During their visit, the viewers had the opportunity to experience the work of this still young artist´s personality. The walls, painted in pastel colours and green, symbolise the «cloud», the digital home of Sai Bot, and transfer it into the here and now. In the exhibition visitors become part of Sai Bot's world and are invited to engage in new encounters.

Tobias Gutmann und Sai Bot, installation view, 28.11.22 - 17.03.23, solo show, Mobiliar Kunstsammlung, Berne
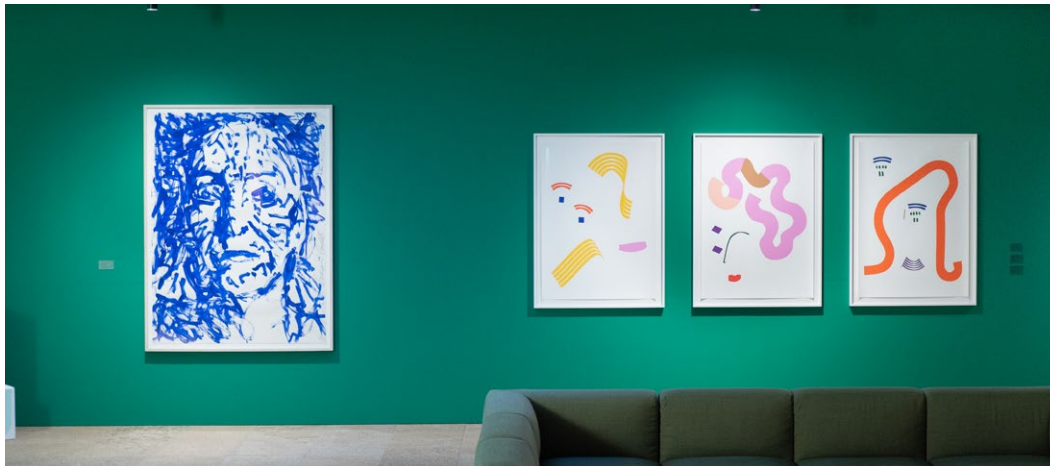
Exhibition entrance
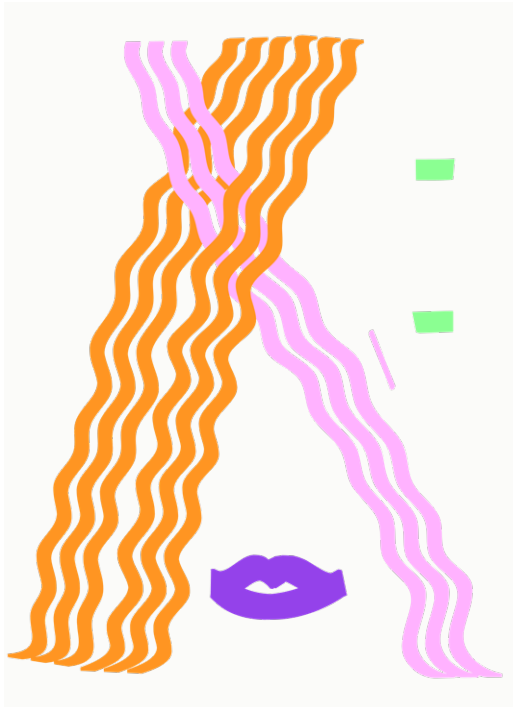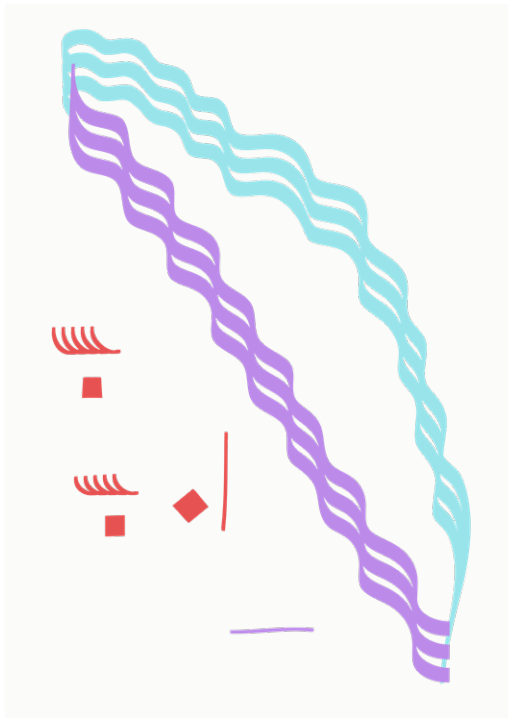
Portraits by Sai Bot, 2022, 22 x 16, png file

Sai Bot - two iPads, white corrugated board, 4 wooden rods, table, chair

A selection of the over 1800 portraits by Sai Bot were shown within the exhibition, 22 x 16, fine art print, 2022, Mobiliar Kunstsammlung, Berne

Sai Bot Collection artworks in dialogue with historical portraits, here: Olaf Breuning and Luciano Castelli

We have an image of every person in our minds when we think of them. But what does our self-image look like? When we call up the image of ourselves, do we also look behind our own backdrop? In the «room» of Sai Bot (picture bellow) visitors had the opportunity to perceive themselves. Here Sai Bot shows themselves as a mirror.

Framed works of art (pictures left) by Sai Bot are shown together with artists from the collection of the Mobiliar Genossenschaft. While the historical works were created by human hands, the portraits by Sai Bot are created digitally.

Tobias, by Sai Bot, 2022, fine art print, 162 x 118 cm, Mobiliar Kunstsammlung, Berne

Sai Bot in the clouds, Sai Bot booth - cardboard and mirror, chair, clouds - acrylic on cardboard

The Saiversum (home of Sai Bot), acrylic on cardboard boxes, 59 x 39 x 33 cm, 2022/2023, Mobilar Kunstsammlung, Berne

8 Face-o-mat pop-ups, installed at the Museumsnacht Berne for visitiors to experience the Face-o-mat performance from both sides.

Round table «The emancipation of artificial intelligence», with Tobias Gutmann, Anna-Lena Köng, Dr. Florian von Wangenheim and Jérôme Koller, Moderation: Marta Kwiatkowski

Queuing to get a portrait by Sai Bot at Museumsnacht Berne, 2023

Installation view, *«I can do that too!» says the AI*, 2023, Underdogs Gallery, Lisbon.

(...) Sai Bot is the brainchild of Swiss artist Tobias Gutmann, who, in a poetic gesture, has taucht an artificial intelligence to draw. The AI is fed with thousands of portrait drawings that Tobias Gutmann has created around the world since 2012 with his Face-o-mat project. From this data set, Sai Bot learns the formal languase and repertoire of the portraits and can create its own new combinations from them. (...)

Nearly 1000 people had an encounter with Sai Bot at the exhibition *«I can do that too!» says the AI*, 2023, Underdogs Gallery, Lisbon.

Face Recognition

Text: Marlene Wenger, Curatorial Assistant at
Kunstmuseum Berne and Curator at elementum.art

Drawing portraits from living models has gone out of fashion - once the second highest discipline in the art of painting, people are now drawn almost exclusively as tourist attraction in Mediterranean strolling quarters directly on the street. Tobias Gutmann is bringing the art back into this genre. His portraits are not photorealistic, but more free, abstract interpretations of the face in his own visual language. This is what makes them so desirable, charming, exciting - one would like to be portrayed by Tobias, because you don't know exactly what will come out of it. With the portrait you also become part of a conglomerate of images that belong together, you become part of the Face-o-mat project. Sai Bot works in the same way. People queue up to have their portrait drawn. The fascination with one's own image is great - not least due to the selfie culture, the face as the ultimate identifier, profile identifier, as a profile picture, as an emoji, as a Face ID and thumbnail, as the ultimate «I was here» of the digital present. One´s own image, the creation and distribution of it in portrait form is something that has had a longstanding tradition, as well as being an absolute topicality. And so it does not surprise, that we desperately want to know how an AI sees us, that we want to recognise our fellow human beings in the portraits and that a game emerges from this, that we're dying to come back for a second portrait with a different hairstyle or without glasses to see whether Sai Bot draws a similar picture of us. Briefly Sai Bot and his whole Saiversum draws us into their ultimate magical, artificially intelligent spell.

Face-o-mat Tobias Gutmann and Sai Bot, installation view, 2022, Barbara Seiler at schwarzescafé, Zurich

Face-o-mat Tobias Gutmann and Sai Bot, installation view, 2022, Barbara Seiler at schwarzescafé, Zurich
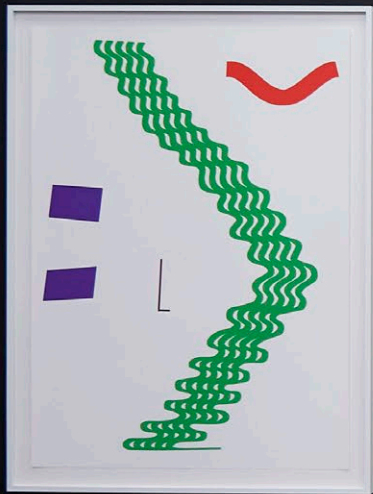
Face-o-mat Sai Bot Collection – Self, Ancestor, Mama, Ally, 110 x 80, fine art print, framed, unique, 2022, Barbara Seiler at schwarzescafé, Zurich

Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2017

Kunsthaus Grenchen, 2018

Supergraph, Melbourne, 2015

Hermès Paris, 2015

Mindpark Shenzhen, 2018

Hermès Palo Alto, 2018

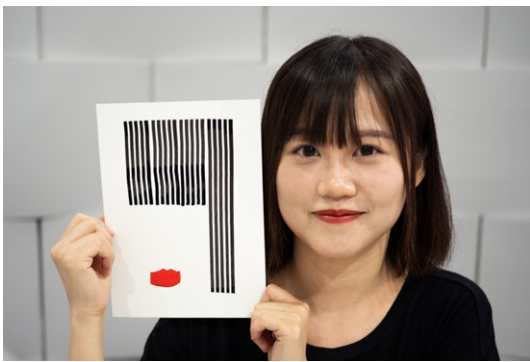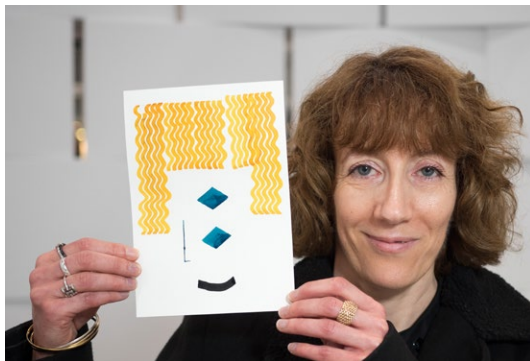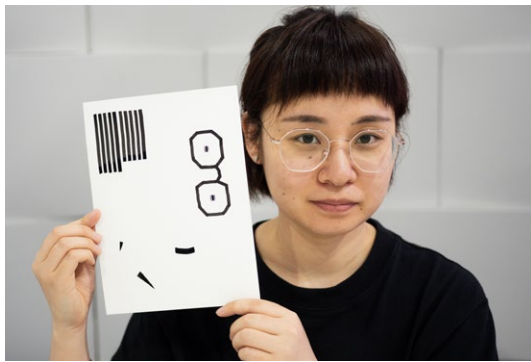Wamangu, Papua New Guinea, 2015
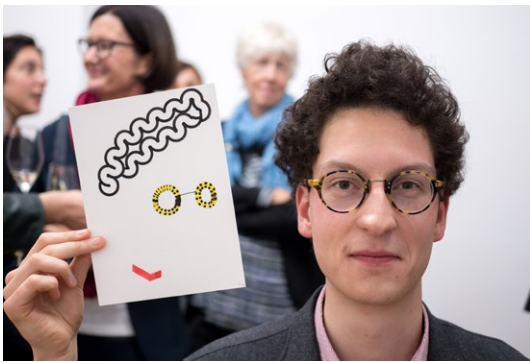

Swiss Design Award, 2014

XiChong Festival, Shenzhen, 2018

Art Central, Hong Kong, 2017

Museum Haus Konstruktiv, 2015

Design Week Stockholm, 2013

Selected *Face-o-mat* installations, 2013-2018
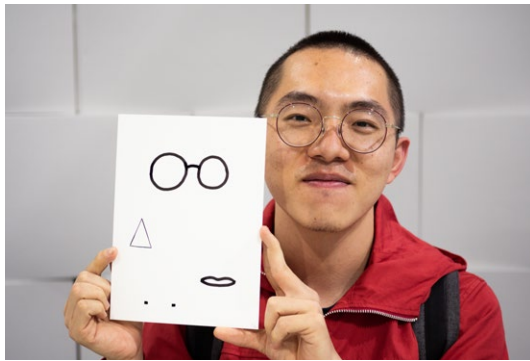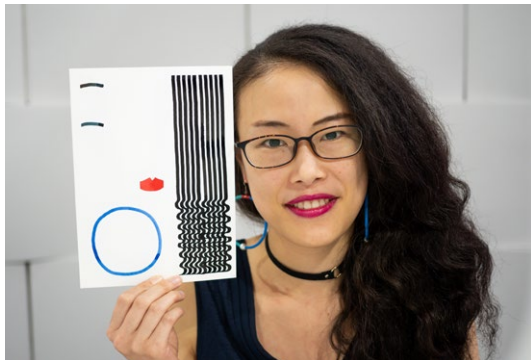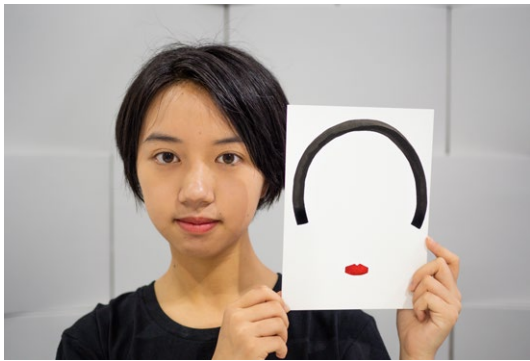
Face-o-mat Tobias Gutmann

Text: Corin Gisel, independant writer and reseacher

With the analogue portrait machine Face-o-mat, Tobias Gutmann has been travelling the world since 2012. It can be viewed as a quiet critique of how technology has made us obsessed with assembling and portraying an identity that puts us in the best light. Face-o-mat holds up a mirror to this distorted expectation. Rather than producing a perfect surface representation, Gutmann renders what he sees in people's faces – their characteristics, their personal traits, their individuality – into an abstract drawing.

Face-o-mat performance, 2018, 1 table, 2 chairs, Face-o-mat booth, ink on paper 22x16cm, 6h/day, 7 min/person, Mindpark Shenzhen

Face-o-mat portraits, 2018, ink on paper, each 22x16 cm, Centre Pompidou, Kunsthaus Grenchen, Mindpark Shenzhen
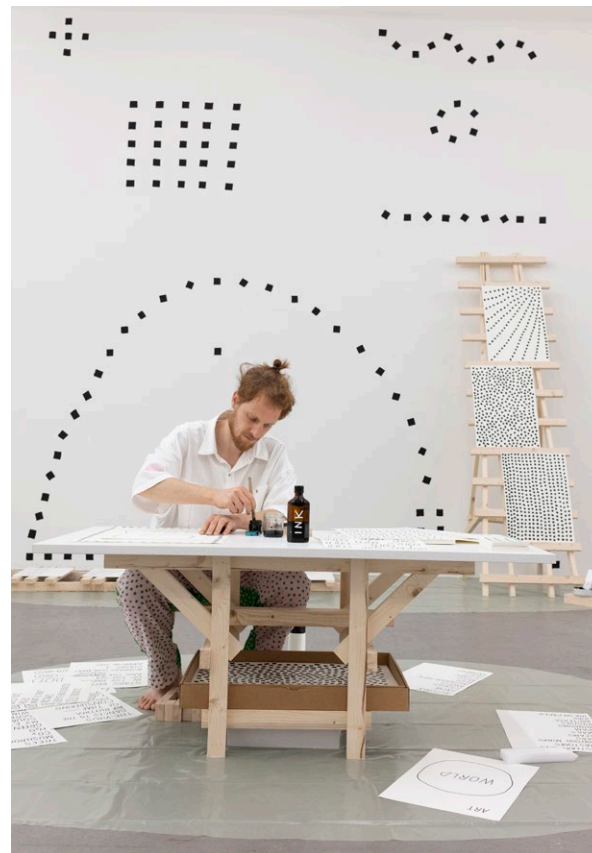
Face-o-mat installation / performance, 2015, Supergraph Art Fair Melbourne

Face-o-mat installation, 2018, bamboo structure 10x7x4m, acrylic on fabric, each 70x50cm / 50x30cm, XiChong Festival, Shenzhen

Text: Tobias Gutmann

Dot, dot, dot. On one side the wall, on the other side, paper. Test, test, test. In between, the artist - me. Little by little gradually the wall and the paper fill each other. Rectangular dots - short strokes, to be precise - line up to each other. They take shape and finally leave it again. Parallel handwritten text is lined up on paper. Questions, mistakes, bugs, data, overflow, snow, virus, stories, answers, stars, dreams. Words for reflection.

«Ceci n'est pas une pipe», wrote René Magritte. It is not about the rectangular dots on the wall, but about the in-between. Drawing becomes a ritual, a snapshot, a language. The stroke is life, rhythm, pause, play and movement. movement. Slow - fast. «Everything is music», said John Cage - so is my brushstroke. The space, the light, the time. After each point I breathe. What do I perceive? Noise, odours, silence, people. Life, life, life. I see the sky and look for lightness. The drawing has a beginning and an end. It lives while it is being created.
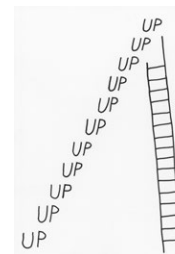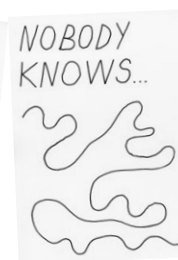
*Constellations*, 2021, drawing performance, acrylic on wall, ink on paper, size variable, ladder, table, chair, 5 days, Werkschau, Museum Haus Konstruktiv

video: ↳ tobiasgutmann.com/context/constellations
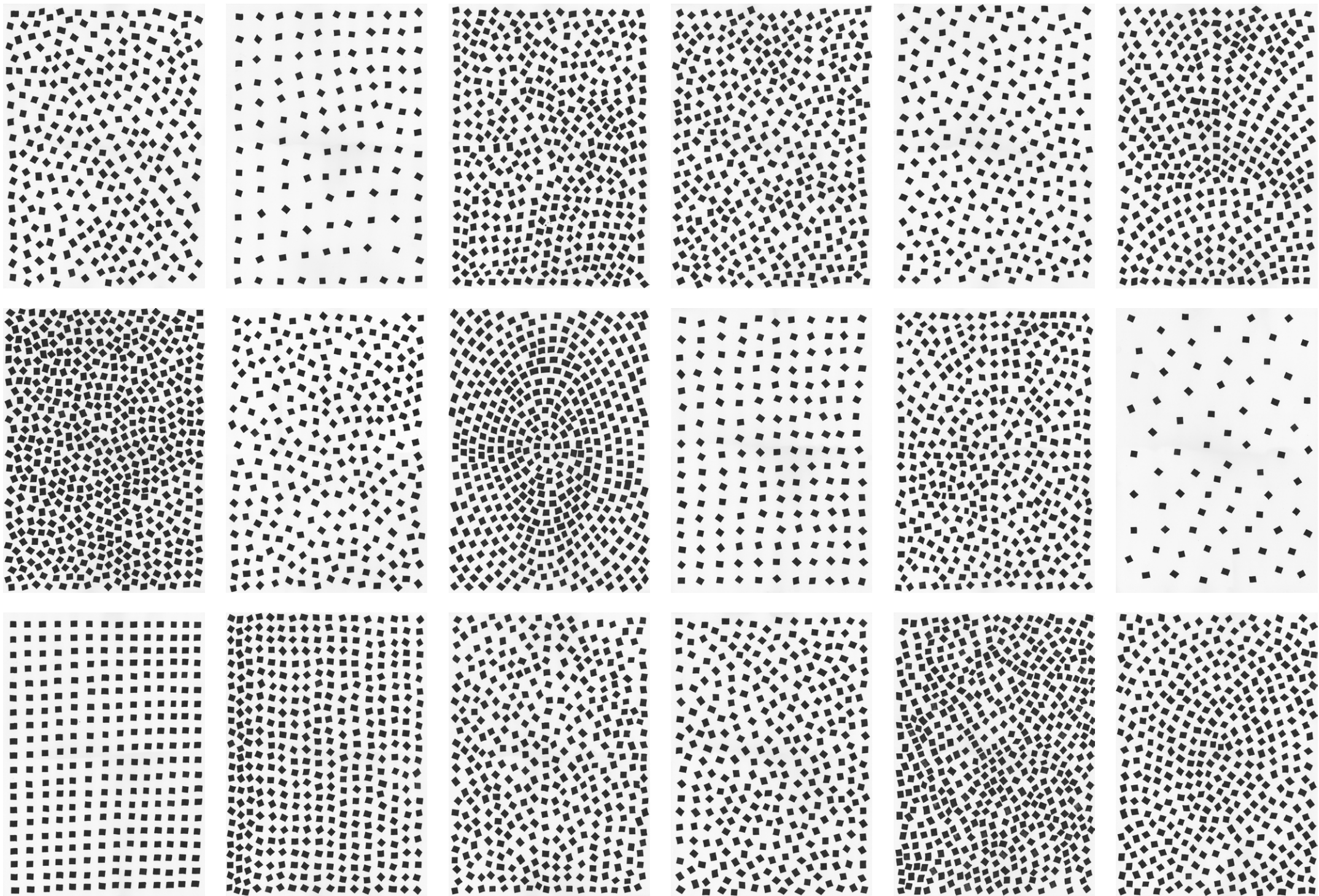
Constellations, 2021, drawing performance, ink on paper, each 59.4 x 42 cm

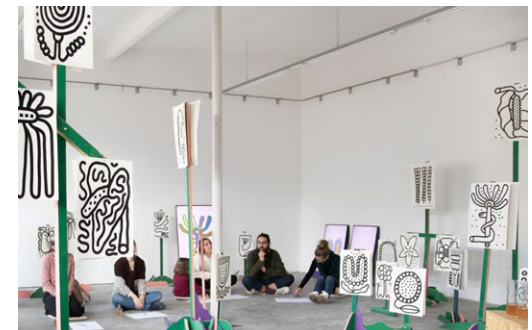*How the Wild Flowers Grow,* installation view, 2020, ink on paper, 42x30cm, acrylic on wood, LCD screen
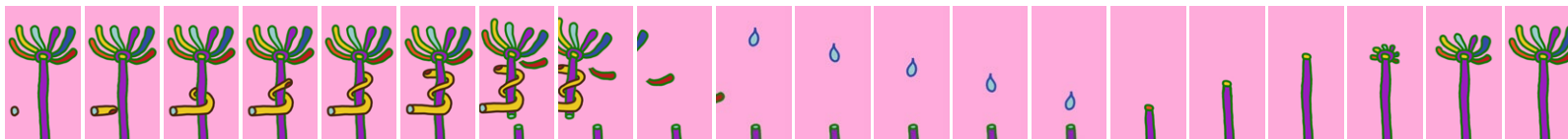
Wild Flower 1, 2020, 8 color animation loop, 7 sec (stills)

Text: Gozde Filinta, assistant curator documenta fifteen

Flowers are given to loved ones, on unusual days to convey love, affection, sorrow, apology, and empathy. Associated with various emotions, alongside their frequent representation of human desires, flowers are turned into mere objects of consumption that conquered all homes, streets, parks, and public spaces. Trapped into endless connotations, flowers are rarely considered beyond these aesthetic symbolic meanings.

How the Wild Flowers Grow is a brief moment for pausing in an artist-made garden to think about flowers, their self-sufficient existence and harmony. The garden wishes to remind the cycle of nature, by asking 'how it grows', and to recall the shared nature of all living beings. It tries to reflect on the infinite forms of flowers in nature as it takes shape in vast species on earth. The imaginary drawings of flowers illustrate the wildness within each flower's crooked and unexpected shape. This totally imagined flower garden invites us to enter a meditative state where we, for a moment, open ourselves to the teaching of flowers; in their wise being, surrendered nature and harmony in plurality, as they cover all the mountains, hills, and valleys.


Guided drawing meditation by artist,
30 min, charcoal on paper 42x30cm

How the Wild Flowers Grow, 2020, solo show at Oncurating Project Space, Zürich

video: ↪ tobiasgutmann.com/context/how-the-wild-flowers-grow

In response to the first lockdown due to Covid-19, I posted a handwritten text on Instagram saying: *«Text Me, I'll Answer With A Drawing +41 76 22 00 555»*. For each one of the messages I received, I answered with a handpicked piece of my *Manifesto*.

Text Me I Will Answer With A Drawing, 2020, iMessage interaction during Covid-19, scanned risograph prints of *Manifesto*
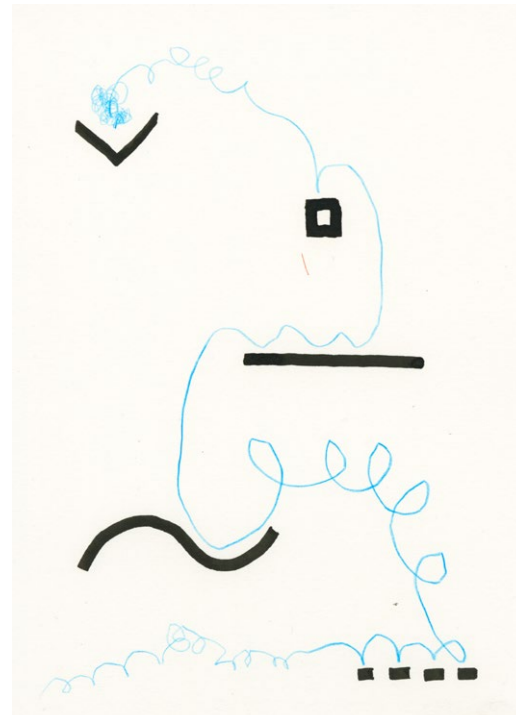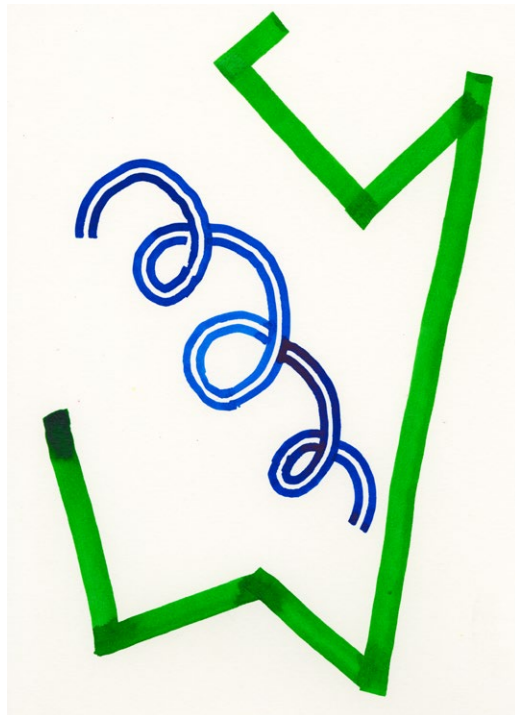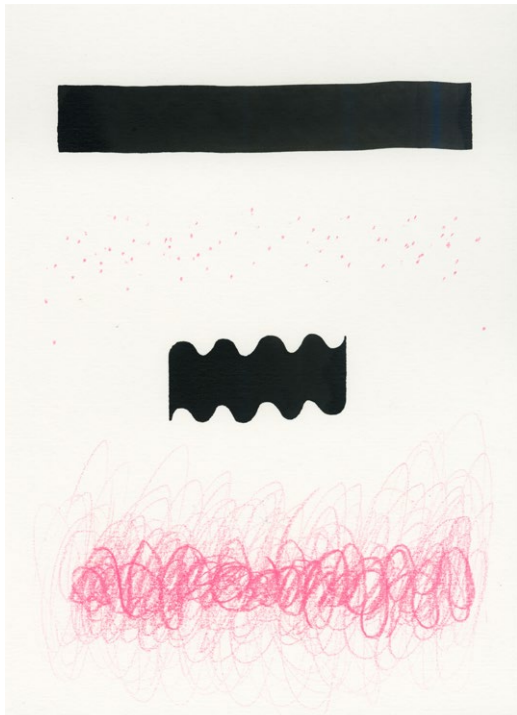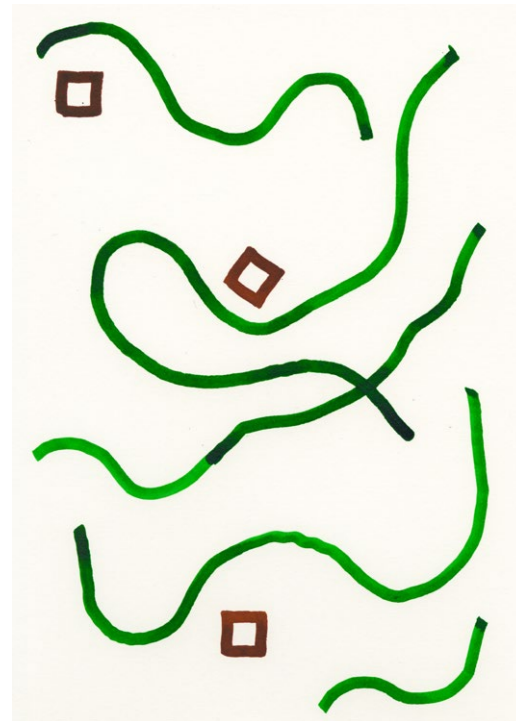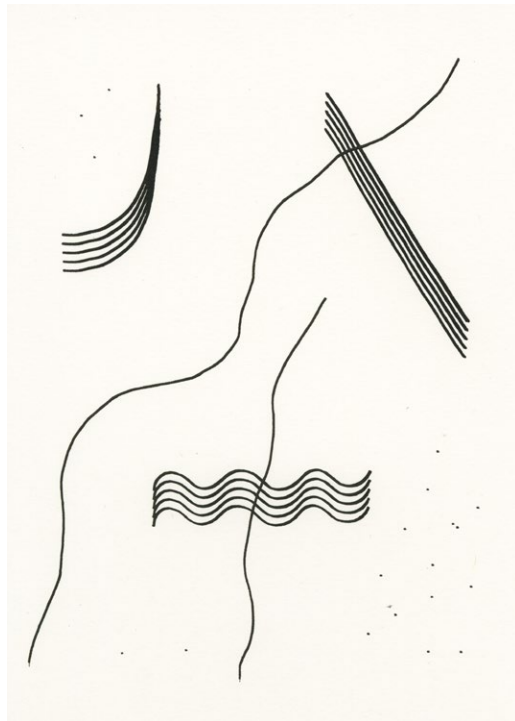
The performance *Polyphonic Drawing* is a collaboration with Pablo Lienhard (saxophonist). Simultaneously we produce music and its score, exploring the relationship between language, music, and drawing. Ink and sound function as two voices of a larger audiovisual composition.

Performance view *Polyphonic Drawing*, 2019 with Pablo Lienhard (saxophone), 1 table, 2 chairs, ink and wax oil pastel on paper, sound, ≈30 min performed at Plattform-L Contemporary Art Center, Seoul

Polyphonic drawings, 2019, ink on paper, 21x15 cm

video: ↳ tobiasgutmann.com/context/polyphonic-drawing-performance

THANKS FOR YOUR TIME!
TOBIAS GUTMANN

CV – TOBIAS GUTMANN

Swiss, b. 1987, Wewak, Papua New Guinea, based in Zürich, Switzerland

2018–2020 Master of Fine Arts, ZHdK, Zürich
2012–2014 Master of Fine Arts in storytelling, Konstfack, Stockholm
2008–2011 Bachelor of Arts in visual communication, HKB, Berne, CH

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND PERFORMANCES
2023   Sai Bot, solo show, Underdogs Gallery, Lissabon
2022/2023   *Tobias Gutmann and Sai Bot*, solo show, Mobiliar Kunstsammlung Berne
2022   *Face-o-mat, Tobias Gutmann & Sai Bot*, Barbara Seiler, Zurich
2021   *Constellations*, Werkbeiträge des Kantons Zürich, Haus Konstruktiv
            Let there Be, Window exhibition, Dietikon Projektraum
2020   *How the Wild Flowers Grow*, Solo show at Oncurating Project Space
            Text Me I Will Answer With A Drawing, iMessage, online interaction
2019   *Polyphonic Drawings*, Performance at Plattform L, Seoul
2017/2018   Face-o-mat, Centre Pompidou, Paris / Art Central in Hong Kong /
            Mindapark, XiChong and Shenzhen / Kunsthaus Langenthal /
            Cartoon Museum Basel / Kunsthaus Grenchen
2017   *Hands*, Kunsthaus Langenthal
2016   *Form Poems*, Kunsthaus Langenthal – Cantonale Berne Jura
2015   Face-o-mat Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich /
            Supergraph, Contemporary Art Fair, Melbourne /
            MUDAM, Musée d'Art Moderne in Luxembourg

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS
2021   *Constellations*, 24 pages, edition of 100, published with Nieves
2017   *O*, 16 pages, xerox print, edition of 100
2014   *Let's Make Language*, 32 pages, riso printed edition of 300

AWARDS / GRANTS
2022   Face-o-mat Sai Bot is supported by Z-Kubator, ZHdK during 2022
2021   Selection Werkbeiträge Kanton Zürich
2014-2022   Nomination for the Swiss Design Award 2014, 2015, 2018 and 2022
2016 / 2017 Selection Cantonale Berne Jura
2014   Konstfack University of Arts, Stockholm, Rektors stipendium, Jubelfonden