

METAHAVEN AUTOPOIESIS



TACK

15.09-28.10.2023

TICK TACK

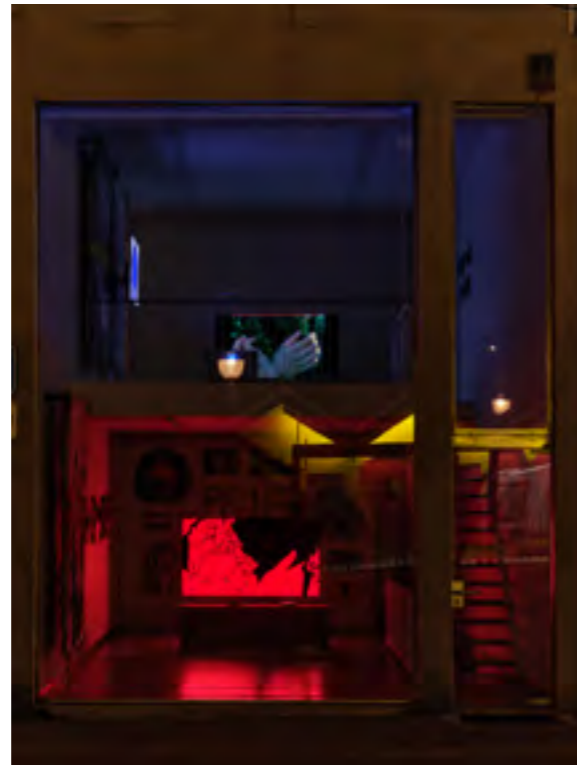
Information

TICK TACK (2019) is a new destination for contemporary art in Antwerp. TICK TACK produces, presents and promotes international exhibitions and video art screenings, complemented with publications and an extensive digital archive.

Housed in the brutalist complex 'De Zonnewijzer', a 1955 key work by architect Léon Stynen, TICK TACK occupies a historic duplex at a vivid city intersection, facing the tram stop and landscape park 'De Harmonie'. The 5-meter-high window functions as an interface between artists and audience and between private and public space.

The TICK TACK program is dual. By day, TICK TACK presents exhibitions, at sunset, the window transforms into a projection screen under the name CINEMA TICK TACK, a new and exclusive platform that brings video and digital art to the public space. Reaching numerous of daily passersby and commuters, CTT serves as a channel, stimulating a connection in its urban setting.

As a result, both day and night, TICK TACK constantly challenges the physical and mental boundaries between inside and out.





AUTOPOIESIS

Founded in the late 2000s by Vinca Kruk and Daniel van der Velden, Metahaven are known for their interweaving of information technologies, geopolitics, and philosophy, as well as poetry, fiction, and storytelling. Through their pioneering, yet subtle, future-forward practice, they explore the uncharted and undeclared regimes of visual culture, being one of this domain's most compelling voices. Metahaven have established a remarkable presence with solo exhibitions at esteemed institutions including ICA, London; MoMA PS1, New York and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and group shows including the Gwangju Biennial and Sharjah Biennial, among others.

Autopoiesis is a concept introduced in 1972 by the Chilean evolutionary biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela and describes the notion of "self-creation". The exhibition encompasses film and textile works, highlighting a constant interconnectedness between cognition and feeling. By combining digital aesthetics with weaving and embroidery, narrative and machine craft, the textile pieces challenge boundaries between the virtual and the tangible, between modes of experience, whilst the film works explore the affective intersections between cinema and texture.

The films *Chaos Theory* (2021) and *Information Skies* (2016) are shown on large TVs on the first and ground floors respectively. *Chaos Theory* is a meditation on children, ground truth, and daydreaming, whereas *Information Skies*, a 2017 nominee for the European Film Awards, explores sincere, yet fictional emotional immersion within virtual reality.

TICK TACK's nocturnal CINEMA program sets the stage for Metahaven's film *Capture* (2022), a speculative and poetic narrative alongside philosophical, scientific and everyday-life questions. Daily, from sunset to sunrise, this film was projected into the public space (and live-streamed online).

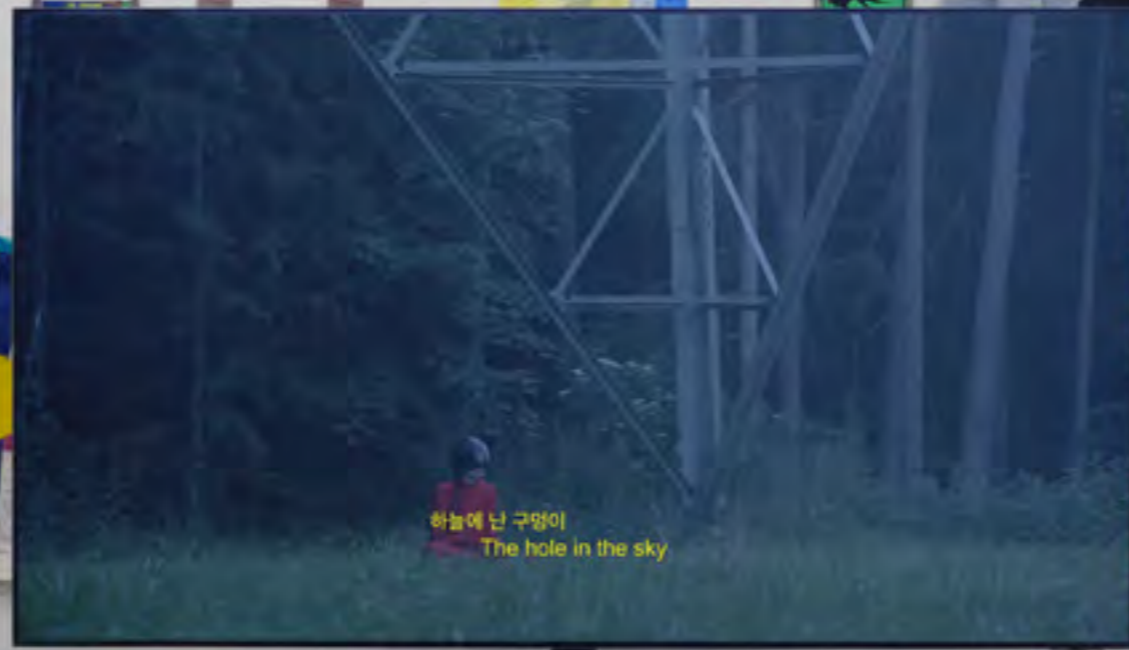
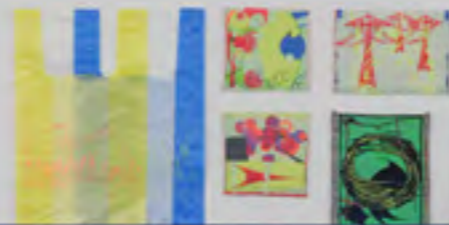
Metahaven's exhibition at TICK TACK was part of the second edition of the nomadic exhibition project Publiek Park. Over the course of two weekends, this public program brought together culture, nature and heritage in three neighboring green public spaces across TICK TACK: Harmonie Park, Albert Park and the garden of the Provincial house. Metahaven designed three different fruit wrappers, titled *Wrapping worlds* (2023), which were used to wrap oranges and sold at a local corner shop.

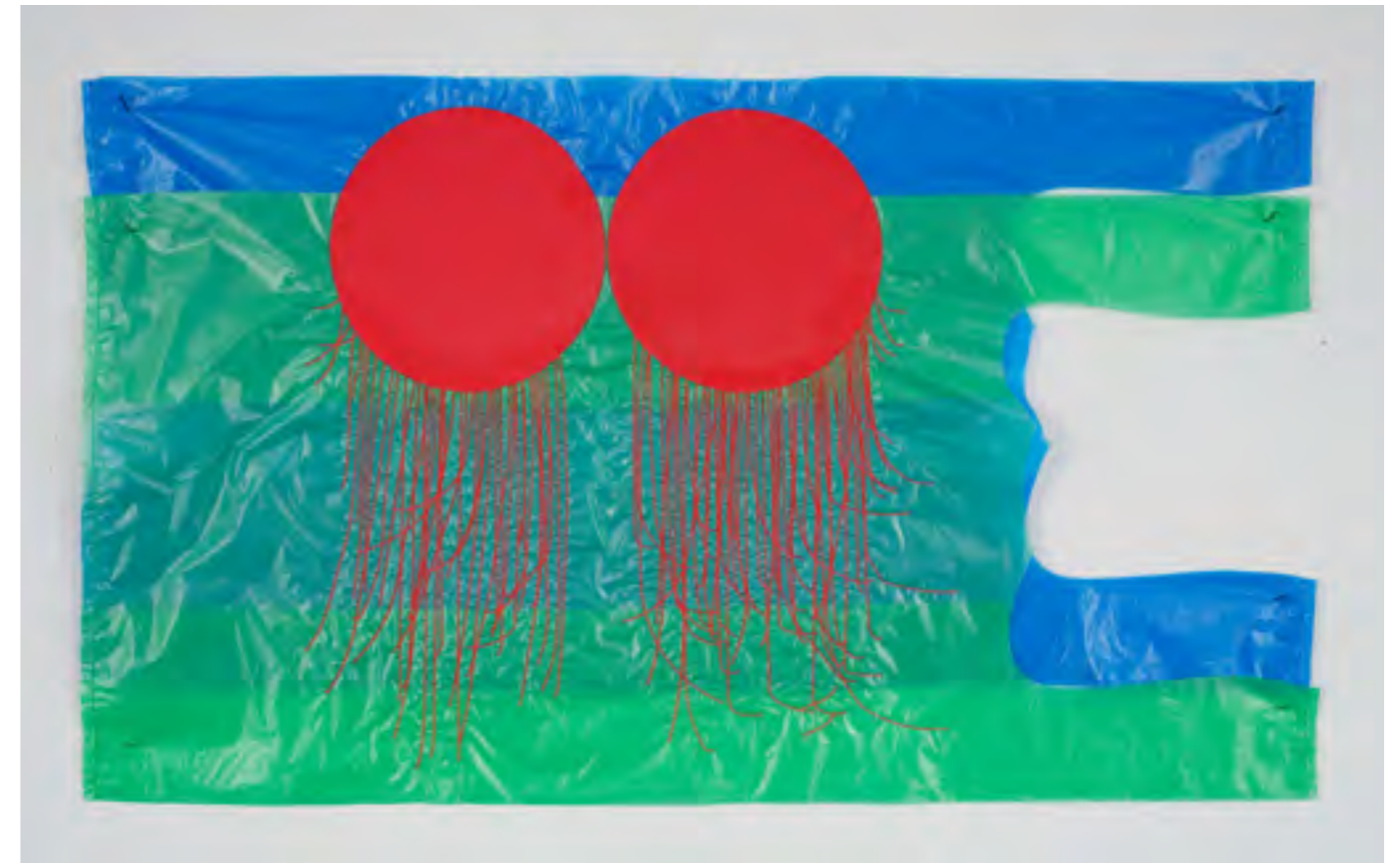
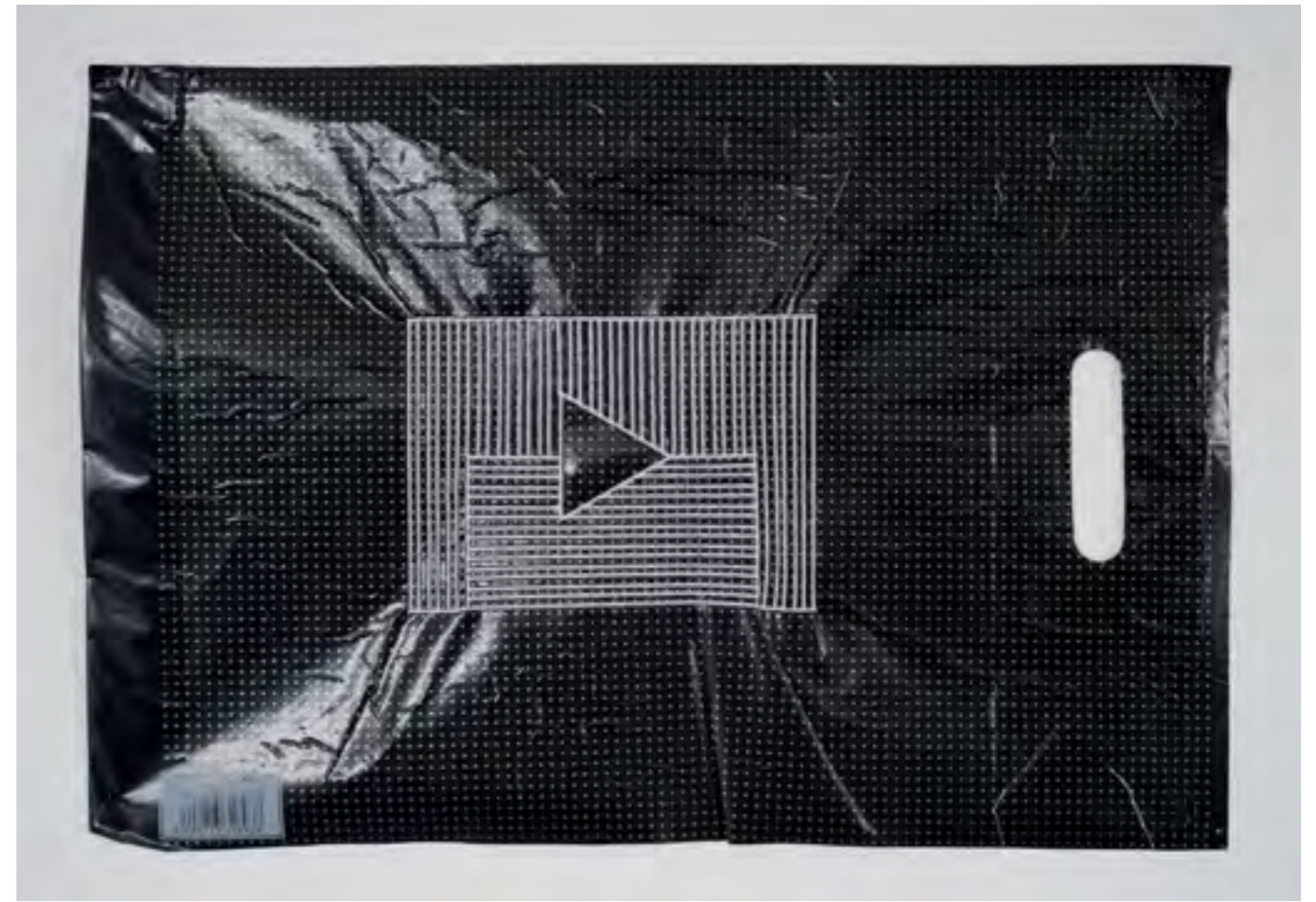
AUTOPOIESIS was Metahaven's inaugural Belgian solo exhibition. As a physical extension of the project, TICK TACK publishes this exhibition catalog, including a reflection by philosopher and writer Bogna Konior, who currently is an assistant professor in Interactive Media Arts at NYU Shanghai as well as an interview between Metahaven and TICK TACK.



↑ *Versions and Waves*
2020
jacquard, wool, lurex
245 x 150 cm

→ *Information Skies*
2016
video, color, sound
full HD





↑ *Prospekt Mira [Blossoms]*
2021
embroidery on
second-hand jacket

↑ *Hopes all things*
2020
jacquard weaving
10 × 39 cm

↑ *Playhead [Arrows I]*
2020
embroidery on plastic bags
32 × 48 cm

↑ *Dears [Blossoms]*
2021
embroidery on plastic bags
35 × 59 cm



↑ *Untitled*
2020
jacquard weaving
10 × 40 cm

↑ *g's heart [Blossoms]*
2021
embroidery on
second-hand jacket



↑ *Inhabitant [Arrows I]*
2020
embroidery on plastic bags
56 × 30 cm



↑ *Blossoms [Blossoms]*
2021
jacquard weaving
20 × 19 cm

↑ *Seen [Arrows]*
2020
jacquard weaving
15 × 15 cm

↑ *Looking Forward [Arrows]*
2020
jacquard weaving
15 × 15 cm



↑ *Anchorlands [Blossoms]*
2021
embroidery on plastic bags
45 × 57 cm



↑ *Forest and interface [Arrows I]*
2021
embroidery on plastic bags
43 × 42 cm



↑ *Once uttered, untrue*
2020
jacquard weaving
10 × 42 cm

↑ *Those who wait*
2020
jacquard weaving
10 × 40 cm

↑ *Untitled [Blossoms]*
2021
jacquard weaving
14 × 26 cm



↑ *Swans [Swans]*
2023
embroidery on bus seat
fabric
20 × 28 cm

↑ *Speak no word*
2020
jacquard weaving
10 × 42 cm



↑ *Untitled [Secrets]*
2021
jacquard weaving
20 × 19 cm



↑ *Along these singing lines [Arrows]*
2020
jacquard weaving
16 × 21 cm



↑ *A Home [Blossoms]*
2021
jacquard weaving
175 × 204 mm





↑ *Underground over ground*
[Blossom]
2021
jacquard weaving
26 x 44 cm

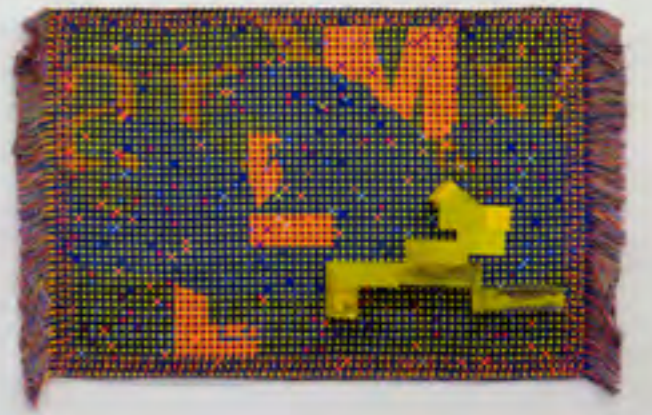
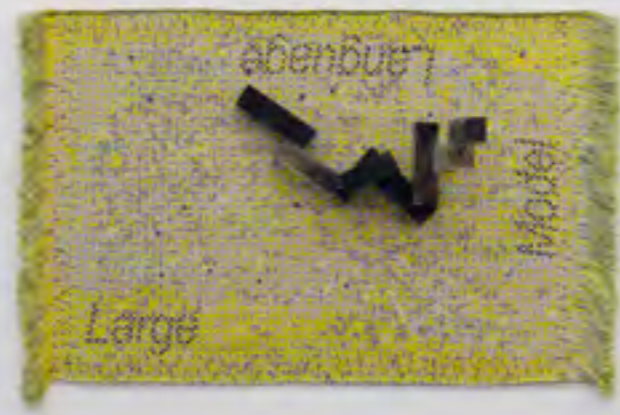
↑ *Dears [Blossoms]*
2021
embroidery on plastic bags
30 x 58 cm



↑ *Black Swan [Swans]*
2023
embroidery on
second-hand jacket



↑ *Neomedievalists*
2020
jacquard weaving
10 x 38 cm



We're only seconds away,
time travel is possible.
Chaos Theory

He came to steal the future,
his truth for all.
Information Skies

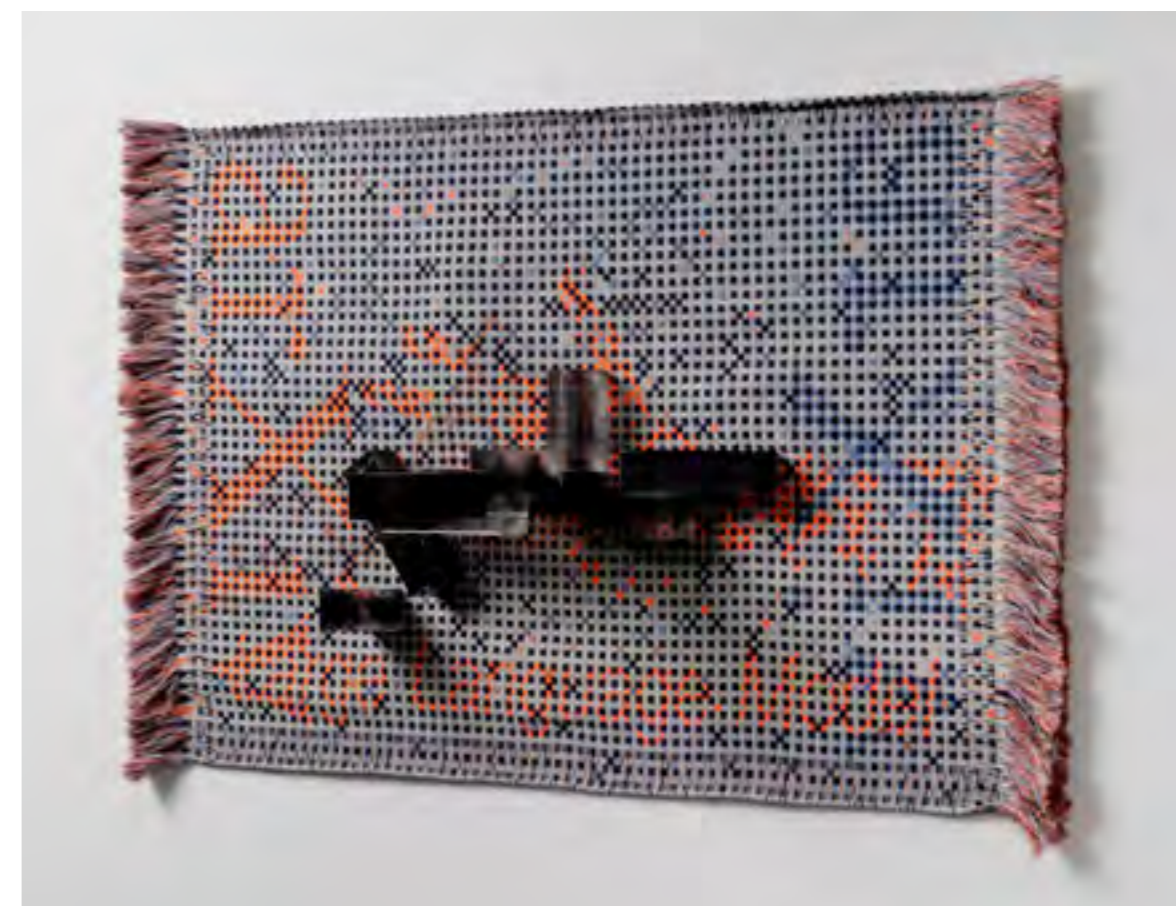
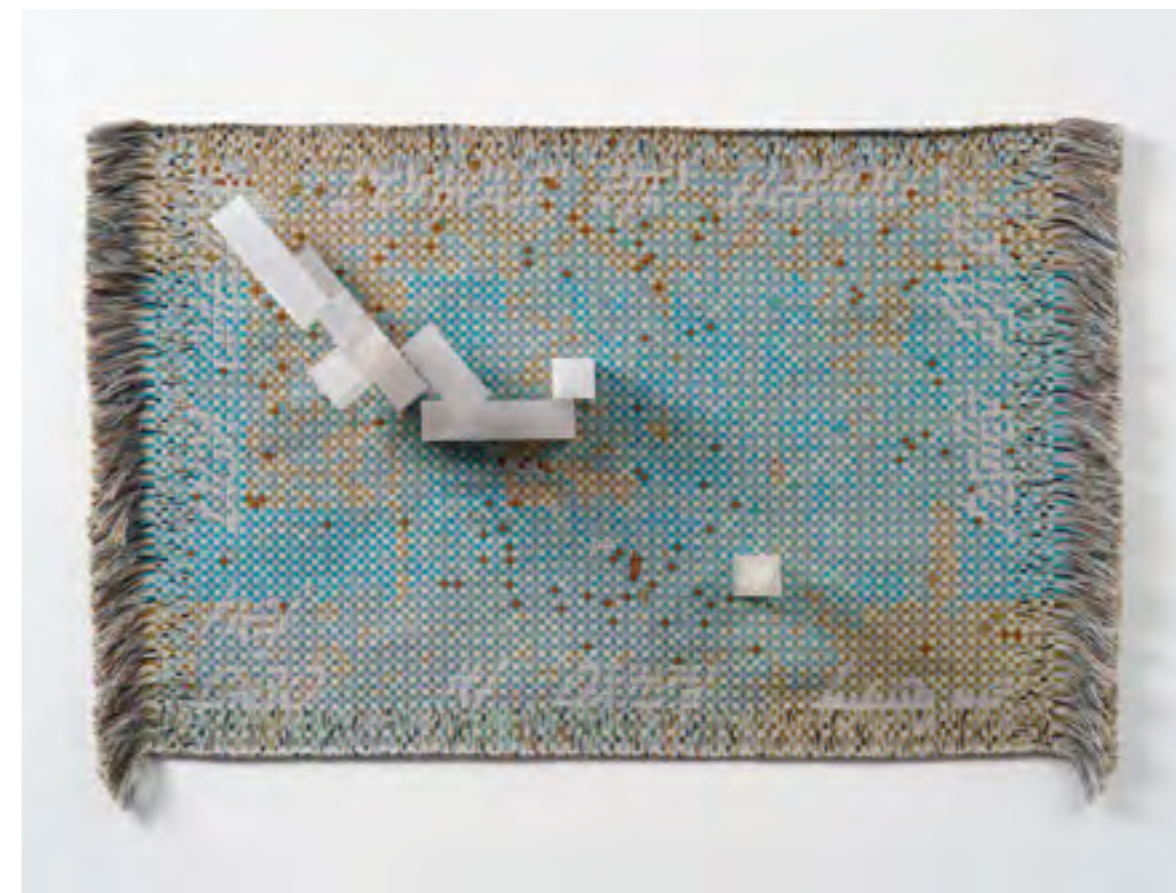
The same riddle that lies at the heart of modern physics echoes through the recent work of Metahaven: why does it seem that time moves only in one direction? Why are there records of the past but not of the future? Why is it that we can cause events to move 'forwards' but not 'backwards,' when, as one of the characters in *Chaos Theory* says, 'there is no now?'

Classical physics was timeless. It allowed us to make constant and reliable predictions, no matter if the events happened in the present, the past, or the future. Truth could be calculated inside an absolute, unchanging time. A pendulum swung, and it did not matter whether it went forwards or backwards: you could predict its movements all the same. After the industrial revolution, machines allowed us to study microscopic layers of temporality and scrambled causality once and for all. Certainty is no longer given. *Information Skies* and *Chaos Theory* peek into the uncertainty of our age without ever mentioning machines, only alluding to their logic: 'formerly known as dream, now we have a video.' In *Chaos Theory*, characters move around in circles or across the border of night and day, advised that 'there might be disinformation ahead,' and 'hidden layers' might be unearthed, where 'black swan' events abound. There is no now, neither is there truth, they tell us. They live in a digital world, captured as sensation and poetry, and through media both 'tactile' and 'virtual.' The science-fiction of digital culture is grasped as an everyday hazy reality, where time and truth are both out of joint.

Metahaven does not need to explicitly show us computers, quantum mechanics, simulations, and multiverses for us to understand that time and truth are unstable. They instead show how for human culture, which relies on the transmission of information, the passage of time is a beautiful and cruel hallucination. Information wants to carry a stable message but it must do so across time. This is no innocent crossing. In the expanse of time, each movement invites disintegration. Entropy moves through meaning, which does not survive unscathed. Language and matter are only the aftershocks of information carving itself into time, and time later dismembering it. 'You and I in a time machine,' as *Chaos Theory* describes it, where no 'truth' can survive.

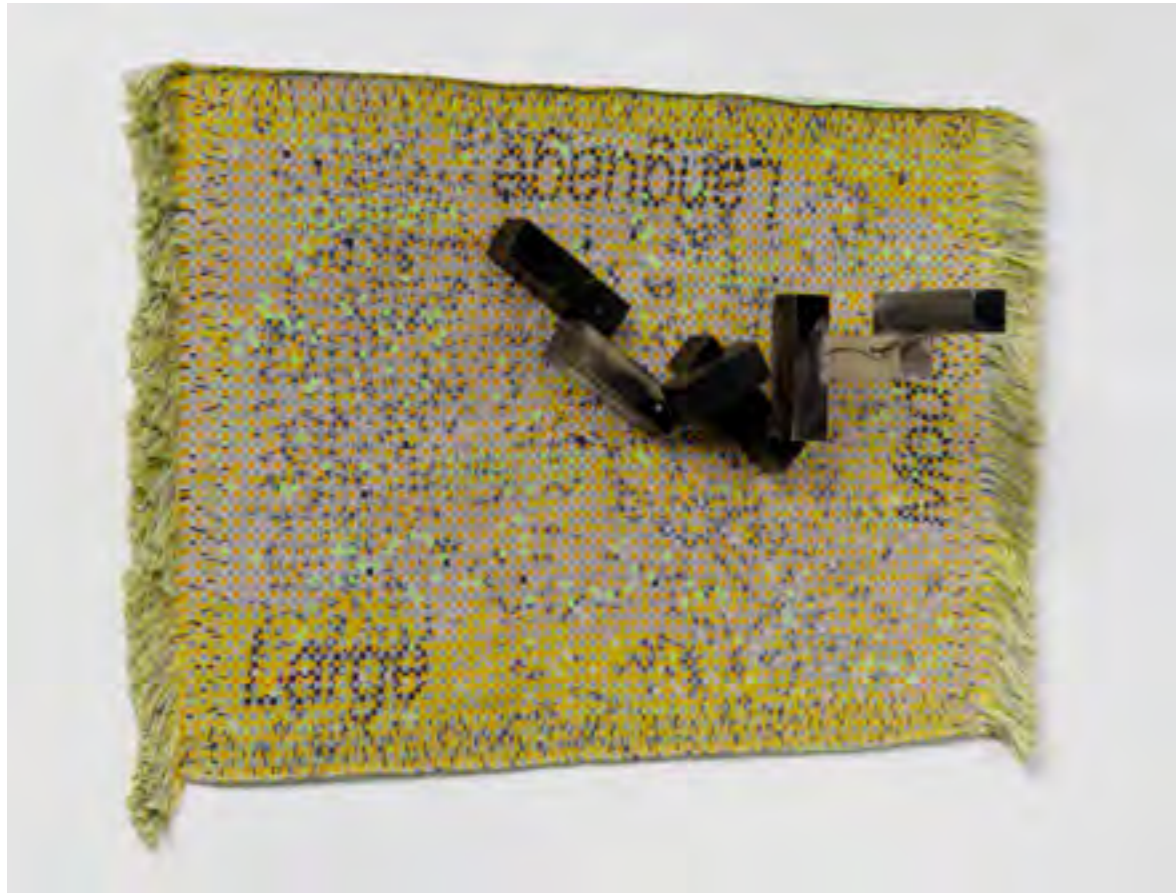
Chaos increases towards the so-called 'future.' Eventually, sense itself will not survive. Destruction—entropy—is the way in which we measure the motion of time. *Death is virtual reality*, *Information Skies* proclaims. Everything dies, makes less sense, stories unlink and certainty crumbles—this is how time moves forward through us.

The name we have for information that arrives too soon is technology. Technology wants you on its own time. It moves in a distributed manner, overlapping past and future, making everything true and false all at once: 'we orbit in groundless space' (*Chaos Theory*), 'full circle, face the void' (*Information Skies*). It is already here, a heavy machinery on our bodies, but the message is unclear. Its complexity needs to be weighted down by time, so that we may begin to piece it all together. We can only make sense of it by untangling ourselves from linear logic, by moving towards a chaos theory. The threads of cause and effect untangle. It becomes impossible to know if you are using the tools or if the tools are using you.

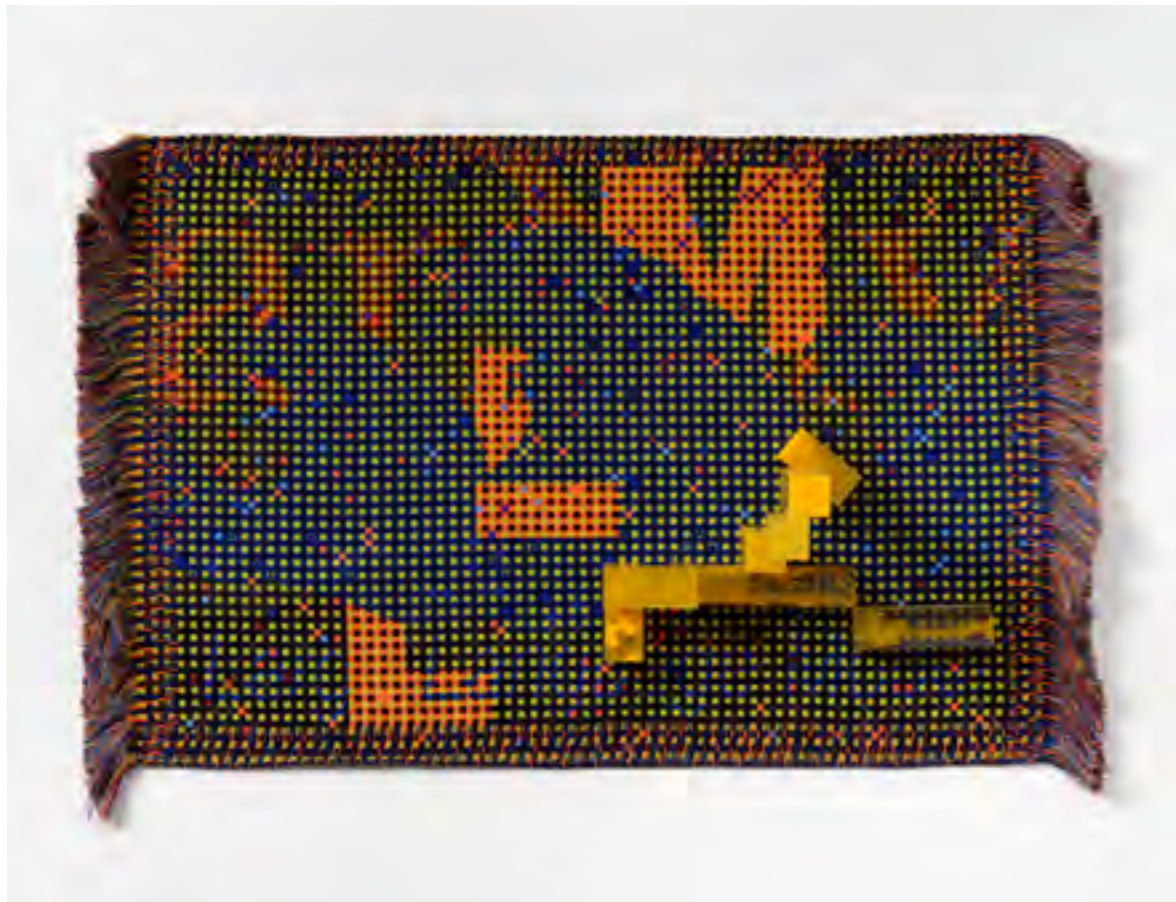


↑ *Large Language Model I*
2023
jacquard weaving with
epoxy structure
48 × 78 cm

↑ *Large Language Model II (ArXiv)*
2023
jacquard weaving with
epoxy structure
48 × 78 cm



↑ *Large Language Model III*
2023
jacquard weaving with
epoxy structure
48 × 78 cm



↑ *Large Language Model IV*
2023
jacquard weaving with
epoxy structure
48 × 78 cm

**TICK TACK's Alexandra Rashevskaya
in conversation with Metahaven**

TICK TACK Could you shed some light on how the collaboration between Metahaven and TICK TACK came into being?

Metahaven In 2021, Tijs (Lammar) and Patrick (Vanden Eynde) visited our studio, and we watched one of our films together. We'd say that the moment they came in, it was very clear for us that we were going to collaborate. But maybe, it started back in 2010 when we met the artist Koen van den Broek. With him and Wouter Davidts we made the book *Crack*, about Koen's paintings, published by Valiz. In hindsight this book was a bit of a world-building exercise because it did help build a common world between, let's say, painting on the one hand and graphic design on the other, even though the design of the book was not multidisciplinary and really a vehicle for Koen's body of work.

TT Metahaven's projects extend beyond traditional art forms, including publications, films and installations. How do you decide on the vehicle for a particular task and how does the choice of medium affect the outcome? Is there a possible involvement of chance?

MH For us, it feels quite natural to work in several media at the same time. These media are, perhaps, discrete by craft or specialization, but they are not separate by content or feeling or even intent. It's possible to have a certain idea run continuously across pieces in several media that together form a loose unity. To be honest, we do not have meetings in which we make decisions on which medium to choose. The medium comes together with the idea. Which doesn't mean that there is no tension between an idea and its medium; there always is.

TT During the build-up of the show, I noticed how an attentive and precise approach was combined with a natural openness for "happy accidents", letting the moment do its work.

To me it felt similar to the way in which kids daydream and imagine stories out of thin air. How do you oscillate between holding on and letting go and are you always looking for a utopian factor in your works/exhibition?

MH World-building for us hinges on imperfections. If one would decide everything according to a predetermined precision, one could, in principle, decide everything in advance. We know that this is not exactly how our work plays out, especially because we combine moving image and textile. We really respond to the space we are in—we'd like to do so even more in the future—and also to the people we are working with, such as now with Mathias, Tijs, Patrick, and you. It's not that with a perfectly closed illusory space you've built a world. World-building for us is not about creating simulated spaces that we mistake for reality. Children, as you say, can make tiny details into immersive truths as they imagine and invent; they do not require a total consistency of simulations but instead perform actual mental work to have less material elements do more world-building, and we are attracted to that. One place though where improvisation becomes harder is within a finished film edit. A finished edit is basically a structure in which chance is completely eliminated. Of course, there are film works in which this is undermined—either by a filmmaker's chosen algorithms, or by the use of software, etc.—but eventually there are always and everywhere choices that favor one thing over another. These are in their own kind decisions in which some form of *power* is manifest. Some of our utopianism can be in the text, in the lyrics. Such as the continuum between the "I see us in things that are not us... in the drawings of the seats on the bus," uttered by Valentina Di Mondo in *Chaos Theory* lyrics, and the actual *Bus seats* works. Which are embroideries on bus seat fabric. For us there's something utopian about that space of bus seats, a space of

commonality which happens to be upholstered with hallucinating designs, if you think about it.

TT What is your day-to-day inspiration? What catches your eye? Do you have any specific daily “rituals”?

MH As can be felt from *Chaos Theory*, a large part of our everyday life consists of us being parents. Parenthood is not a topic that is much discussed in art circles. A lot of energy in our lives emerges from what in *Chaos Theory* is called “acknowledged dependence”.

TT I wasn’t sure if you were open to talk about parenthood (in wide perception –not only biological) but that’s exactly what I meant, especially after our conversation about your daughter and her education. By the way, in your art practice do you ever discuss your works, ideas with your daughter, ask her opinion, emotions? What does she think about *Chaos Theory*?

MH It’s important to us that you mention “in a wider sense” instead of “biological,” because the things that *Chaos Theory* puts forth are very much about these feelings in an extended sense. The film tries to welcome the notion of nurturing and caring in a more ambiguous and wide-ranging way yet it also speaks to some kind of core. We do share process, textiles and film cuts with our daughter. She once called her close friend after seeing a rough version of our latest film, *Capture* (2022) and told that friend that “it’s fiction, but it’s not a story”. Her comments are always very spot-on.

TT Do you think there is a new poetic language within digital media? Is it different from the one you apply in your works or are there similarities?

MH Maybe we are not that interested in a quintessential “digital aesthetic”, but surely out of every new medium or new ways to work with a medium new poetics can be born. Bogna (Konior) seems to argue that all our work describes things in entropy, things falling apart. If it is the case then our artistic or visual language, by definition, has to resist this movement. Much

of what we do visually is an actual counterpoint of what people read into the work. What would *Chaos Theory* be without Y/Z (Georgina Dávid) and × (Valentina Di Mondo) and their interactions? These interactions, almost by definition, contain something that actively resists the process of falling apart.

TT How did you direct the protagonists in *Chaos Theory*? I’m curious how they balanced conveying a poetic narrative and still find the space of freedom to act.

MH In *Chaos Theory* the protagonists never met before the set. This was intentional on our part. Their first encounter was through the clapping scene that’s quite early in the film. They were not asked or directed to perform poetically; the goal was rather more a kind of honesty. *Chaos Theory* was synchronized later with studio sound, they met again in the studio to join their texts, together with Lucie de Brécard, who narrated the French voice for Y/Z, and was also involved in script editing.

TT You write as essayists, you write scripts and you also sometimes write about writing. How do words interlock with the various artistic outputs?

MH As the AI researcher Yejin Choi notes, the architecture of chatbots defines a word, or token, as a continuous vector. A token is defined by the neighboring words that it is found hanging out with in the training data. The vector feels counterintuitive to our usage and experience of words as discrete things. We are still struggling with the consequences of this kind of quantification of the word, and especially with its consequences for poetry. We don’t want to struggle with it in a backward-looking way, but just really come to terms with it and also with its limitations. Our next film project—if it gets made—is about poetry and AI.

TT I’m also interested in the story behind the LLMs (Large Language Models) in terms of embodied poetics, especially taking into account your other quote: “What is very interesting about poetry, for example, is the minimalism of its ecological footprint in relation

to its ends, the enactment of art with and within the listener.” How do you feel about bringing poetics into physical form and its influence. For me all your works are more about feeling and senses, something non-descriptive and non-realistic, a story in the air that was already in me - your work just reminded me about it and made me experience or remember it once again.

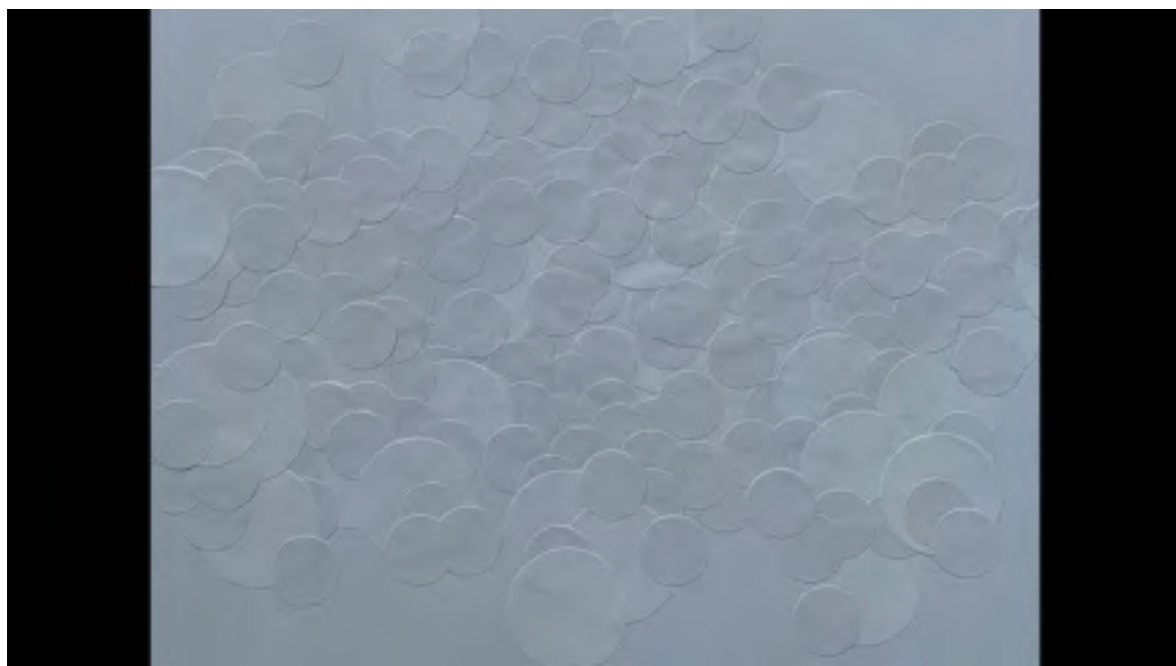
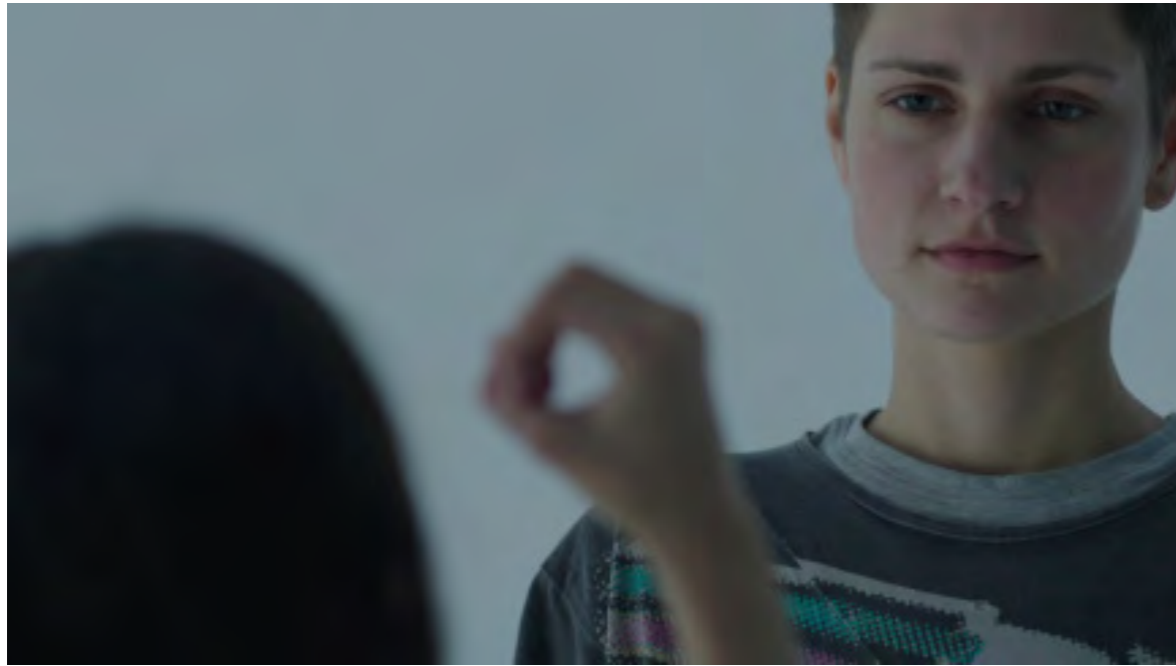
MH Indeed, poetry is one of the ecologically lightest forms of art. It has almost no physical form or weight, especially if you think about poems learned by heart or sentences of poetry floating around

people’s memory. But of course, poetic cinema (as defined by Viktor Shklovsky, for example) renders that poetry concrete: in terms of an image, a physical object carrying that image and a physical situation that starts to participate in the poem.

TT *Information Skies* has some scenes that are anime-styled. How did this come about and what is the function of this visual style?

MH It’s this kind of hyper-emotional visual language that is also hyper-referential; the kind of image that permeates fan-fiction sites and subculture wikipe-
dias,





therefore always being kind of swerving and semi-authorless, hence easy to appropriate. Like the other scenes in *Information Skies*, it's abstracted—reworked into a texture that makes the history or age of the whole film feel uncertain. We mostly do this by the extreme contrast between brightness of the anime and darkness of the camera scenes. The most important visual ingredient of *Information Skies* are its yellow subtitles, though.

TT An integral part of Metahaven's work are themes such as information politics and social activism. Yet, you are skeptical about the instrumentalization of art with the purpose of effecting social change?

MH Our work over the years has explored its potential as a means of social and political activism. Indeed, art can be made with social change in mind but very rarely do works of art effect the change in the world they wanted. We see art as a phenomenon that is, in a quite fundamental sense, observer-dependent. It may have been built into art that many perceivers see or sense different things in it. Art may have been born from this activity—"seeing-in", as philosopher Richard Wollheim used to say—and so, points of view activate art in very different ways. We could say that art explores perception by complicating it. This does not take away art's potential functioning as an object for social and societal change, but it complicates its usage for directly goal-oriented purposes. So maybe these relationships are indirect and go via complicated curves rather than straight lines.

TT Metahaven's work often embraces narrative ambiguity and open-ended interpretation. Does this give a certain power in telling a story?

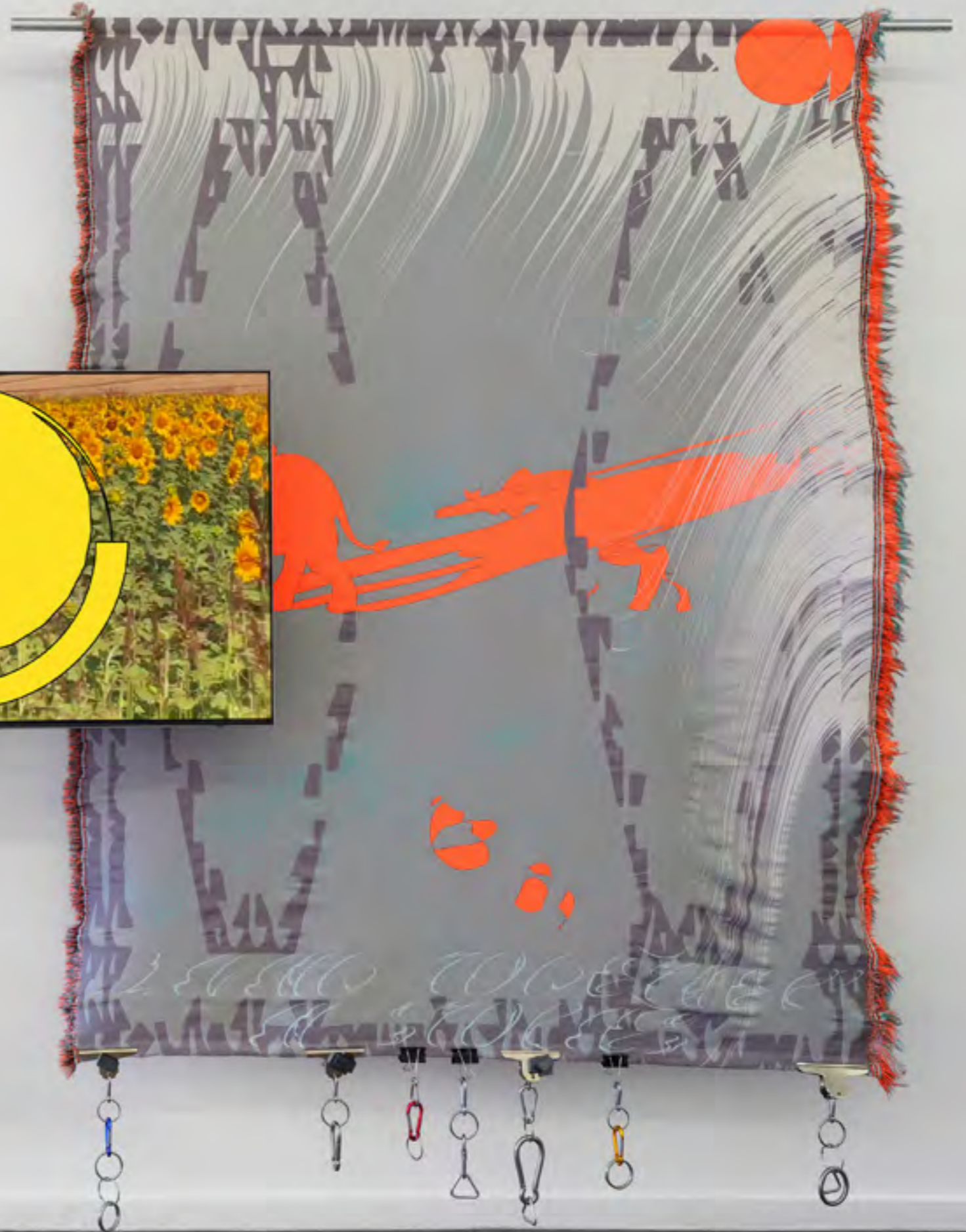
MH Whilst indeed, we do not provide fully narrative works with "good" or "bad" endings, we try to be as cinematically concrete as possible in the way we construct a story. But then again, this might be experienced differently, because the unspoken norm for open-endedness

in storytelling has moved. Our work is a far stretch from the Netflix code of having a plot, but it's not like we're just assembling bits of video together and the viewer can decide. The work hangs together with an economy of means, in which we produce "cinematic" outcomes for a small fraction of the budget associated with that aesthetic, so there's a compression or abbreviation somewhere. A script will often be severely cut from filming to editing, and in *Chaos Theory*, quite structurally rearranged and then expanded. Other than that, open-endedness can be a good thing in that there is a space in which poetics, in the sense of multiple meanings, can take place. We see that in Netflix and most commercial films, poetics and thus multiple meanings are curbed to drive the narrative forward. That's, obviously, not how we work. But it could be interesting to work in a context where it would be expected of us.

TT Would you want to live in the Metaverse?

MH Certainly not :) The Metaverse exists in a scattered way across the different apps on your phone. Its scattering is more interesting than the Metaverse itself. Like we're already looking at this technology in a fractured way as if the mirror that it tried to create was broken before it could be whole.







↑ *Narrative Arc [Bus Seats]*
2023
embroidery on bus seat fabric
20 x 30 cm

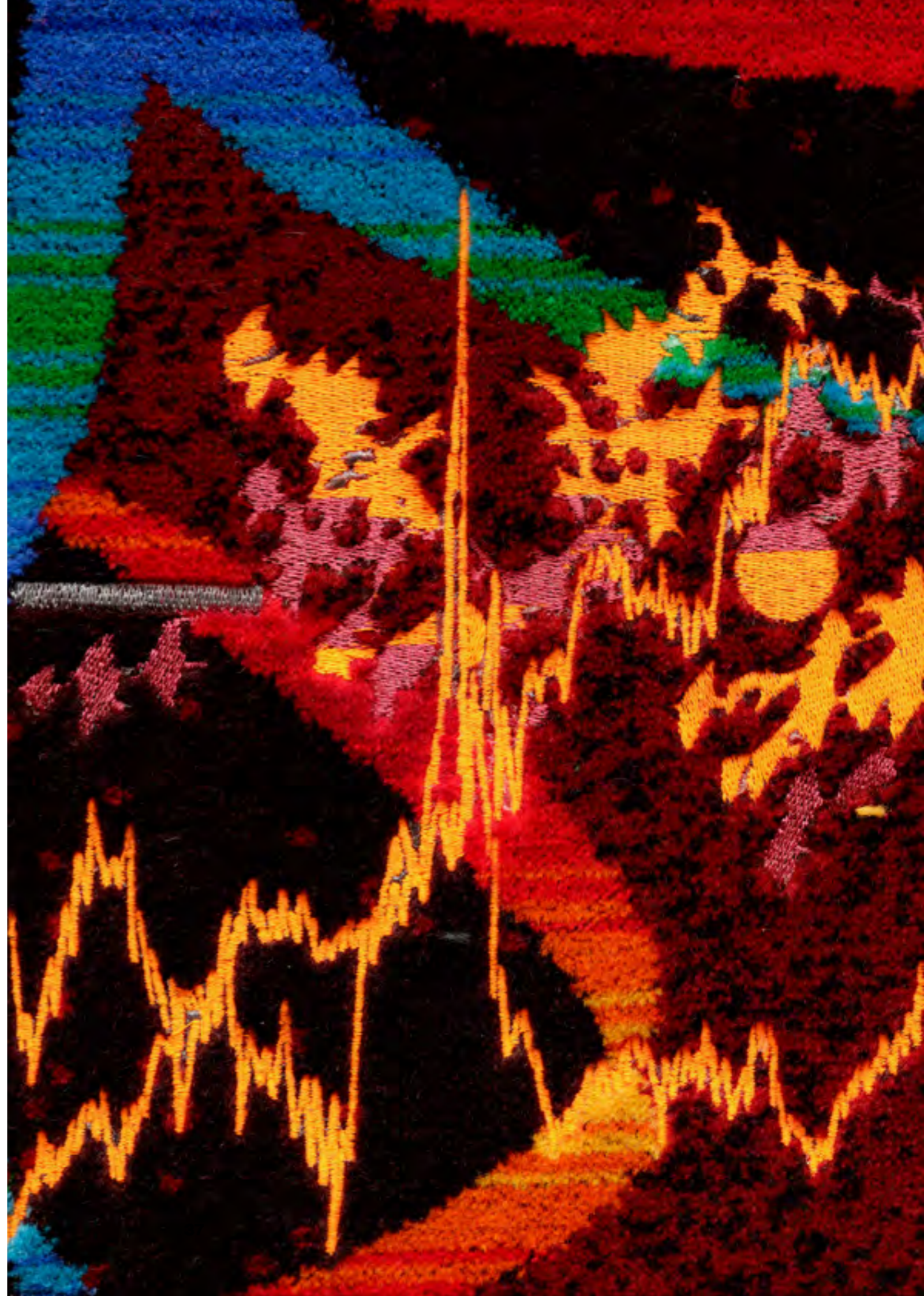
↑ *DAO (Governed by Tulips)*
[Bus seats]
2023
embroidery on bus seat fabric
20 x 30 cm

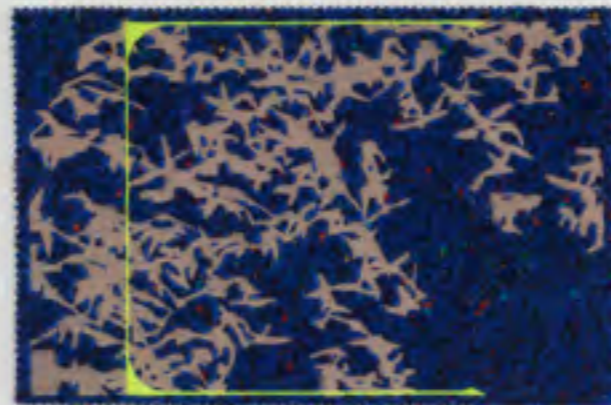
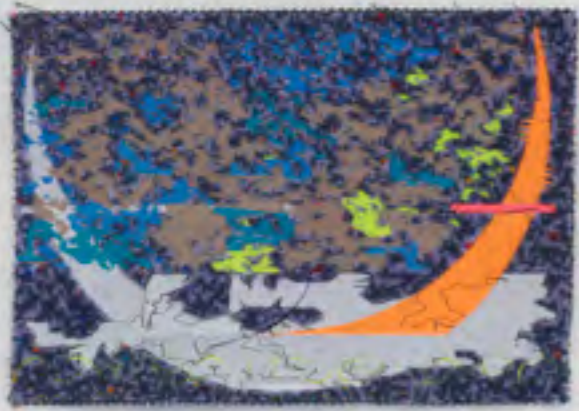


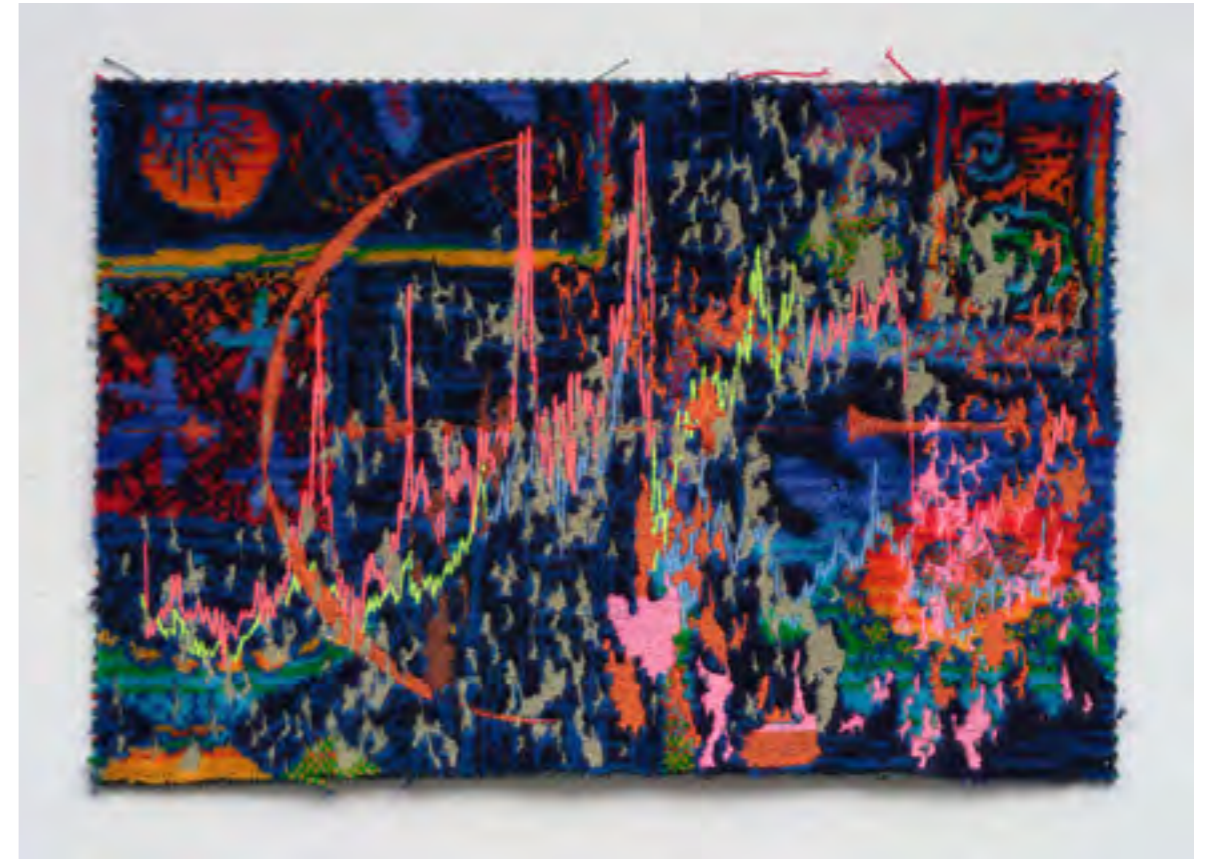
↑ *Untitled [Bus seats]*
2023
embroidery on bus
seat fabric
21 x 29 cm



↑ *Families on the bus*
[Bus seats]
2023
embroidery on bus
seat fabric
20 x 28 cm







↑ *Granger causality [Bus seats]*
2023
embroidery on bus seat fabric
21 × 30 cm

↑ *Bats on a bus [Swans]*
2023
embroidery on bus seat fabric
200 × 300 mm



↑ *Autopoiesis [Bus seats]*
2023
embroidery on bus seat fabric
15 x 27 cm

Capture (2022, commissioned by Kunsthall Trondheim) explores fundamental questions in philosophy, science, and everyday life, including: What is reality? How do we define consciousness? What constitutes knowledge? Roughly organized around three interconnected fields of research, *Capture* brings together imagery of lichens filmed in the forests near Trondheim, footage from the vast film archive of CERN (the European Organization of Nuclear Research) in Geneva, and bats.

These nocturnal mammals use echolocation to orient themselves, which prompted the philosopher Thomas Nagel in 1974 to write an essay asking “What is it like to be a bat?”. While bats are mammals like ourselves, they have very different sensory capacities. But even if we cannot ourselves experience what it is like to be a bat, we can know that the sound that they use in echolocation is a wave phenomenon. Nagel further states that he believes in the existence of facts that we might not be able to comprehend. For example, if someone locks a caterpillar in a sterile safe and recovers a butterfly upon returning, that person could either know that the butterfly is, or once was, the caterpillar. Or they could come to the conclusion that a parasite inside the caterpillar ate it and turned into the butterfly.

Metahaven draw a connection between Nagel’s bat and the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, where the existence of the Higgs boson, the first and only elementary scalar particle observed to date, was confirmed in 2012. To confirm the theoretically predicted boson, it had to be created in an experimental set-up by colliding particles at close to the speed of light. But even though the Higgs boson was confirmed, we still do not know what its properties are—reminiscent of Nagel’s butterfly.

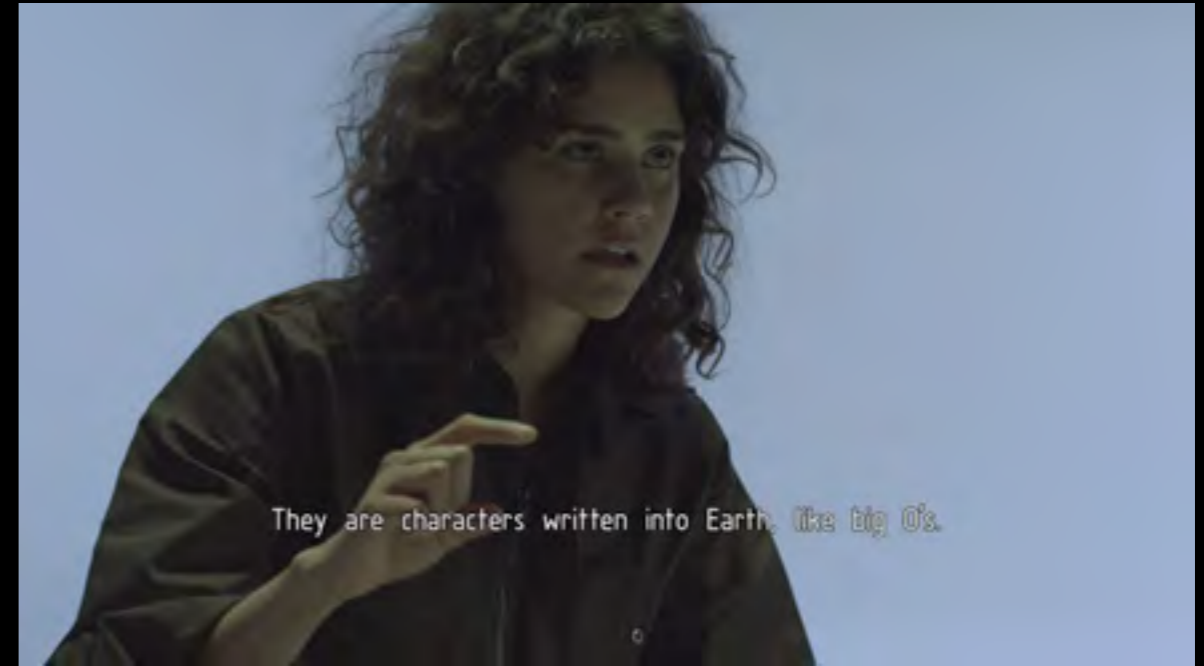
The third element in *Capture* are lichens, which Metahaven filmed during a field visit to Trondheim. Lichens are composite organisms consisting of fungi and algae, or cyanobacteria. Researchers today propose lichens as biosensors capable of sensing pollution in more indicative ways than most technical instruments. Lichens are affected by the same climate change that they measure, while they also further change that reality through photosynthesis. They promise more ecological modes of (environmental) politics that are based in relations. Similarly, a camera is not passively filming, but affecting—if not creating—its reality, in ways analogous to how the Higgs boson was created in the process of its confirmation.

During the duration of the exhibition and on a daily basis, *Capture* was screened on CINEMA TICK TACK out into the public space, functioning as a nocturnal extension of *Autopoiesis*.





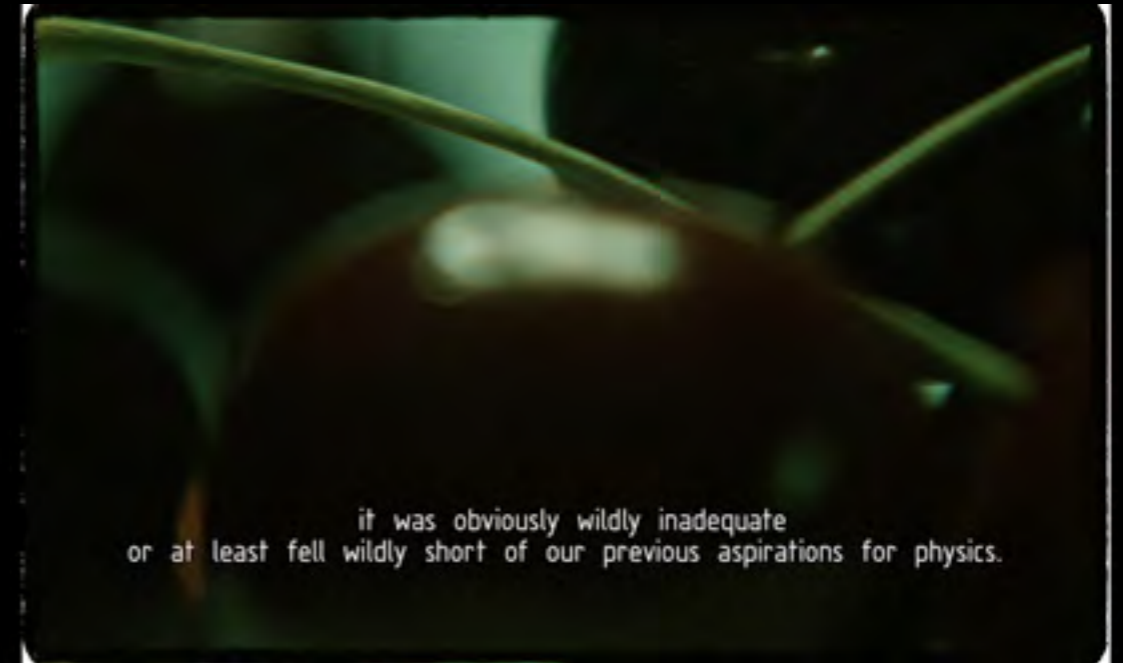
arises, in part, out of predictions.
It's a two-way street.



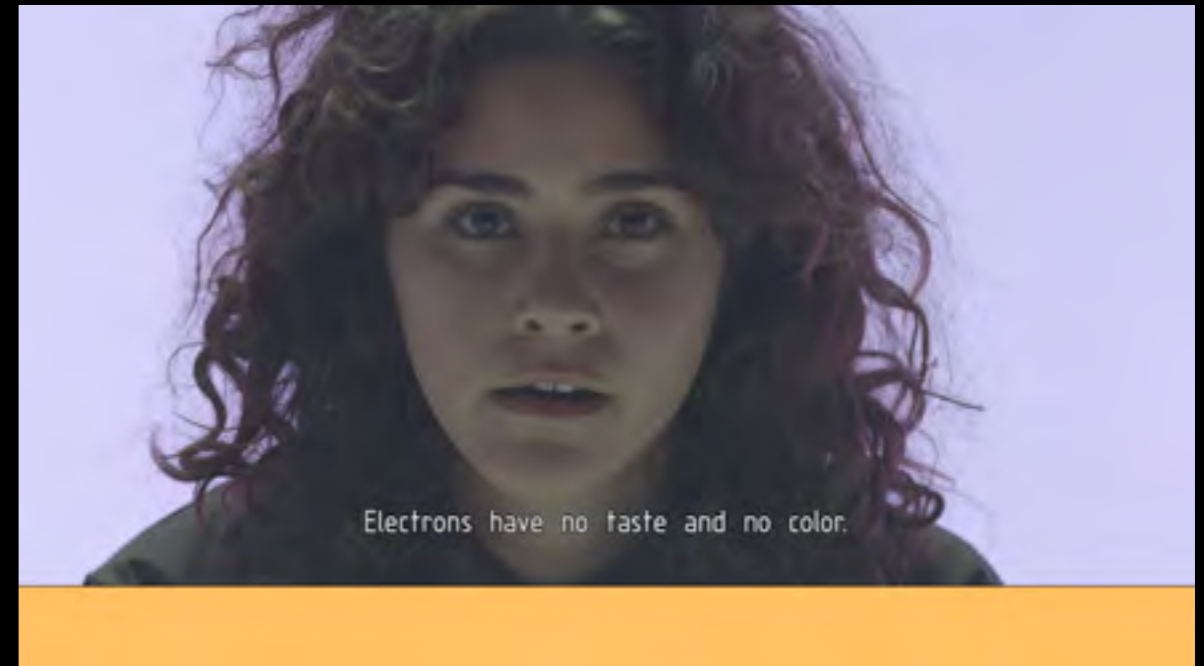
They are characters written into Earth, like big O's.



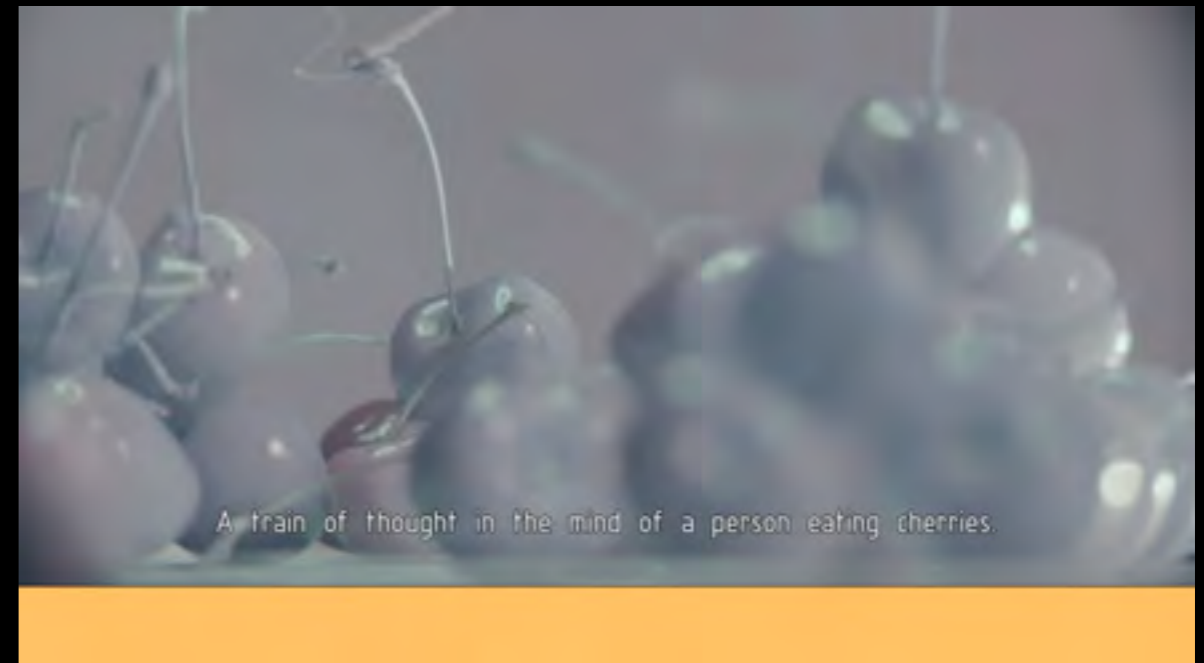
Eating.



it was obviously wildly inadequate
or at least fell wildly short of our previous aspirations for physics.



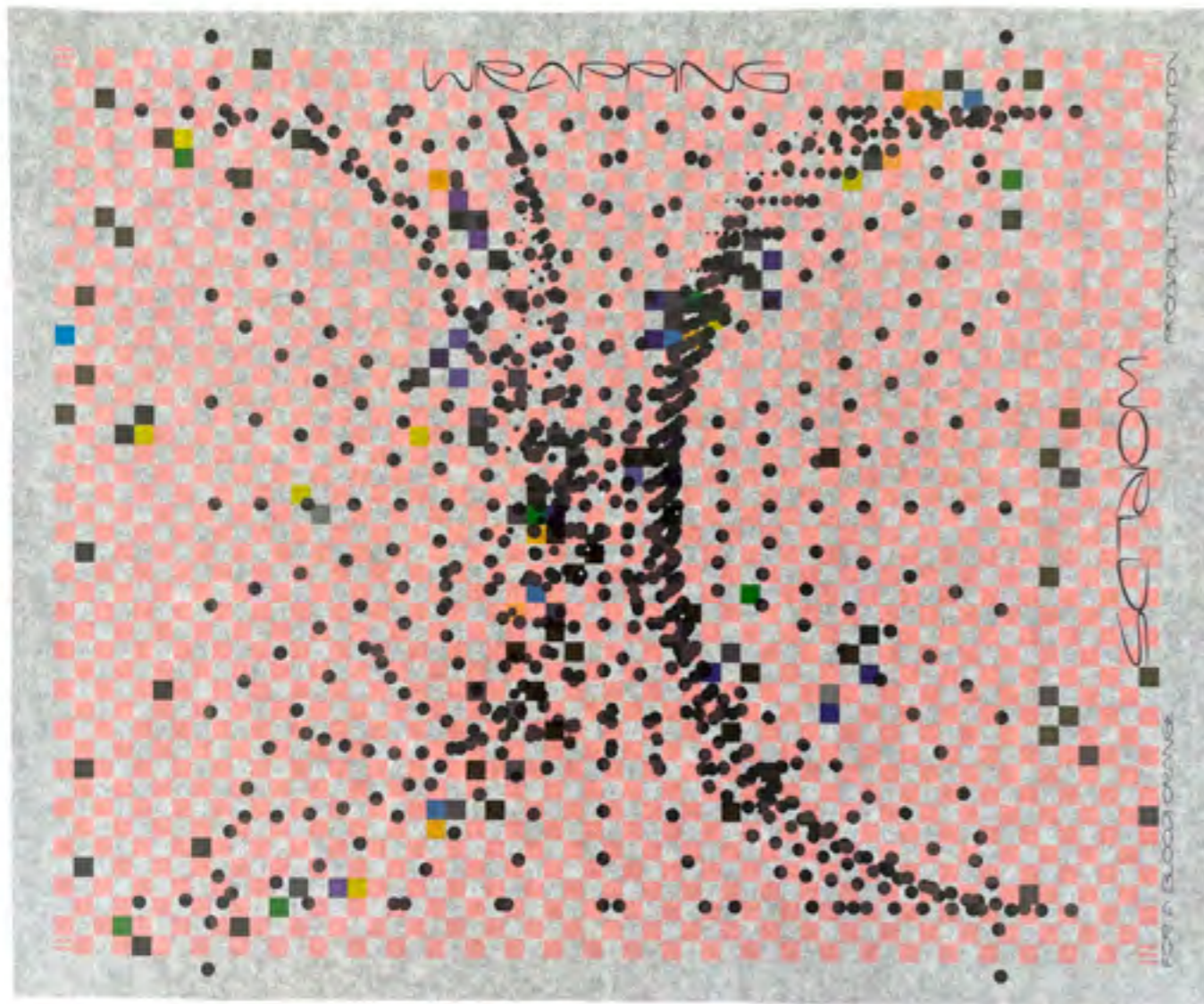
Electrons have no taste and no color.



A train of thought in the mind of a person eating cherries.

Metahaven
Capture
2022
single-channel film work, color, sound
40'09"





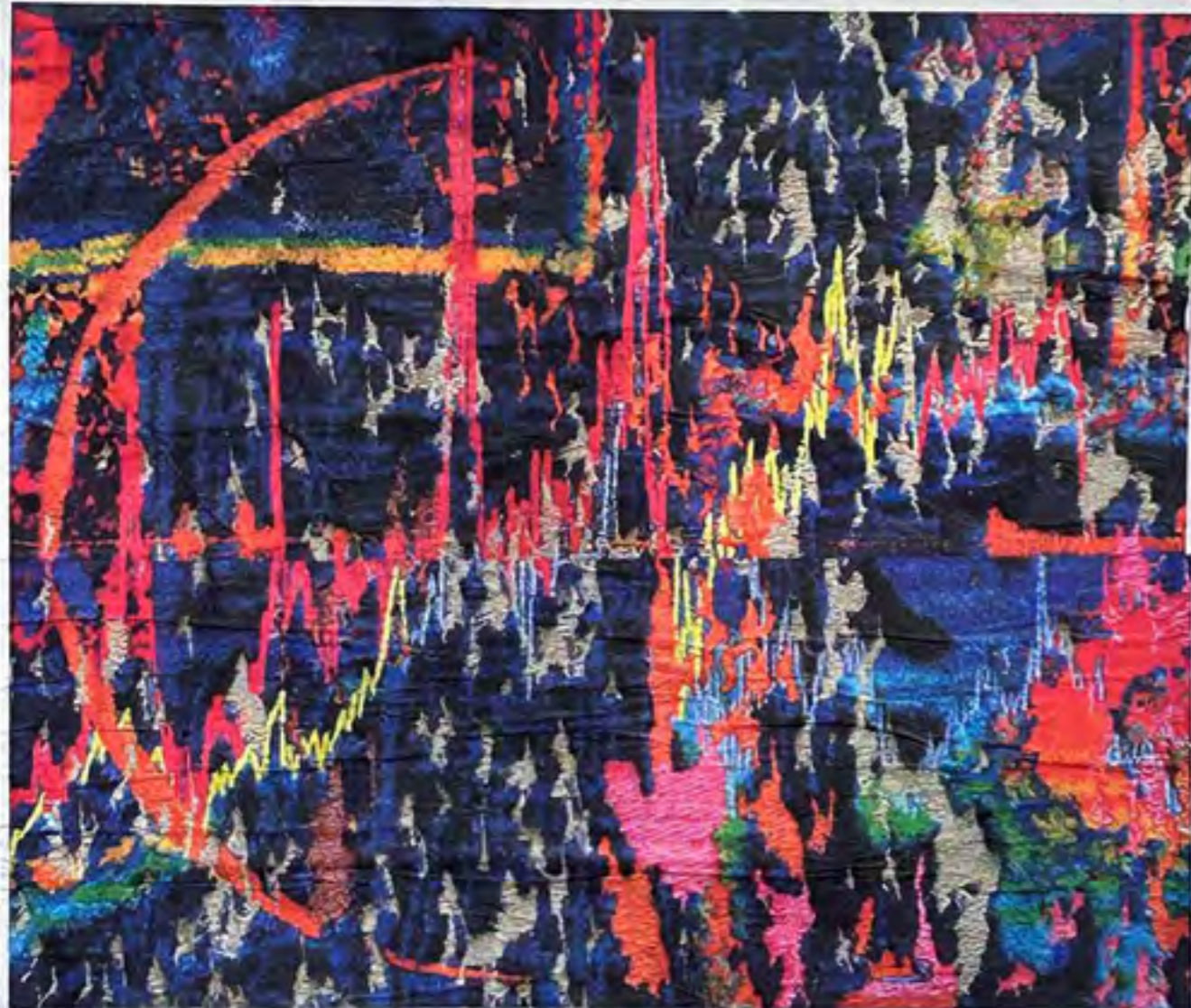
Parallel to Autopoiesis, Publiek Park launched its second open-air group exhibition in multiple public parks surrounding TICK TACK. As a contribution to this project, Metahaven designed 3 fruit wrappers and distributed them, in the form of wrapped oranges, through a local corner shop near TICK TACK. In Europe, oranges have often been wrapped in thin papers with printed graphics as a way of advertising. At times these graphics have been

translations of the Zeitgeist in one way or another. What's fascinating about these carriers is less their form of promotion but their contextualization. Fruit is enjoyable, familiar, healthy, intimate and common, but it is also entwined with larger systems.

Metahaven
Wrappings worlds
 2023
 print on orange wrapper
 23,8 × 29 cm
 courtesy the artists and TICK TACK



METAHAVEN



AUTOPOIESIS

TACK

www.ticktack.be

15 Sept. – 28 Oct.

Colophon

TICK TACK is a new destination for contemporary art in Antwerp, founded by Tijs Lammar, Vincent Lemson, Patrick Vanden Eynde, Arne Jennard

TICK TACK staff:
Tijs Lammar,
Mathias Swings,
Patrick Vanden Eynde,
Oleksandra Rashevka

Independent board members:
Peter Bertels,
Iris Paschalidis,
Lieselotte De Mey,
Louise Goegebeur

Photographs:
We Document Art

Graphic design:
Christophe Clarijs & Robin Vets

Logo design and animation:
Travis Kane

Typeface:
Modern Gothic by Malte Bentzen

With special thanks to:
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Camiel Noyen
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Stathis & Stamatis
Publiek Park:
Jef Declercq,
Anna Laganovska,
Koi Persyn &
Adriënne van der Werf
all volunteers
Raman Verma

With the support of our partners:



The logo for TICK, featuring the word 'TICK' in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter 'I' is replaced by a stylized graphic element consisting of a horizontal bar above a vertical bar, resembling a film strip or a tick mark.

TICK

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TICK TACK

Opening hours:
THU–SAT, 13:00–19:00

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