

meta|ab

Harvard

FU Berlin

Creative Research

Michael Hemingway - Nov 7 2023

What is it?

An “idea foundry”

- Founded in 2011, metaLAB is a research creation lab at Harvard, with newly opened offices in Berlin’s Freie Universität (FU)
- Part of Harvard’s Graduate School of Design, its focus is that of interdisciplinary data science within scientific, cultural and social domains
- Founder Jeffery Schnapp was CEO of Piaggio’s robotics division, and raced motorbikes.
- Artists’ and faculty projects span a breadth of domains, with particular attention in new web technologies and design vis-a-vis datasets

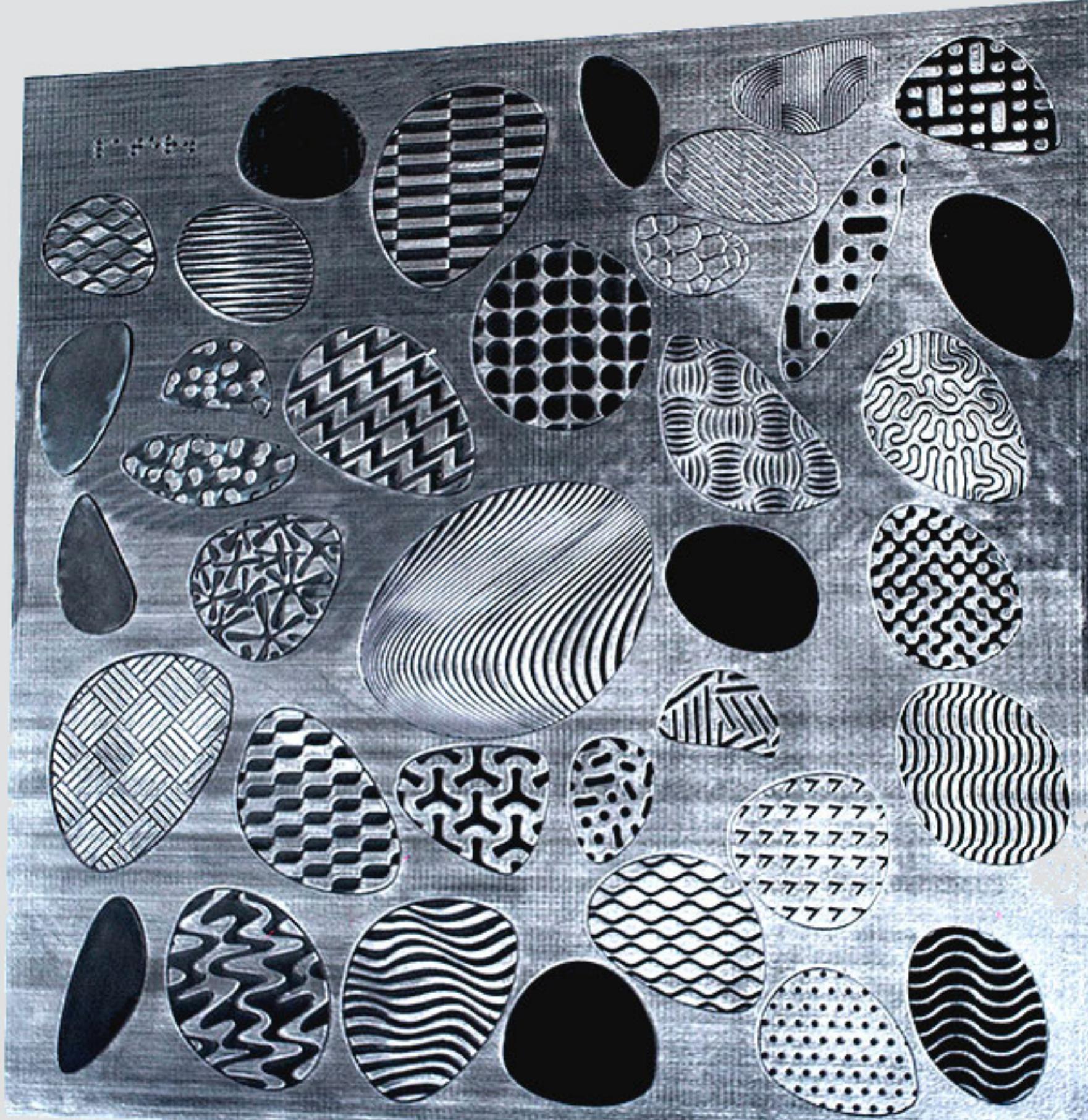
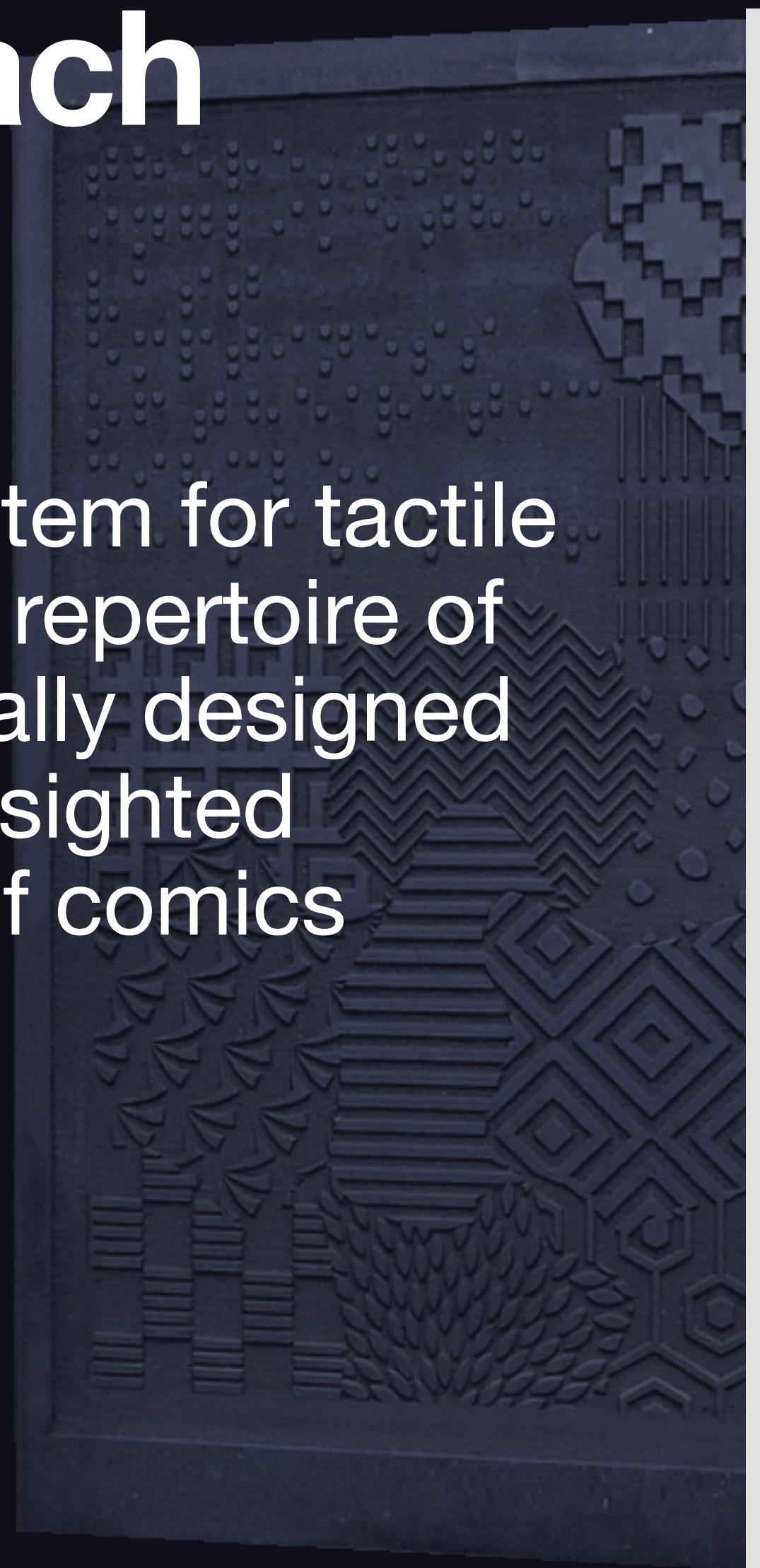
Notable People & Works

Ilan Manouach

Affiliate

Shapereader is a system for tactile storytelling, built on a repertoire of tactile ideograms initially designed for blind and partially sighted readers and makers of comics

Resultant works



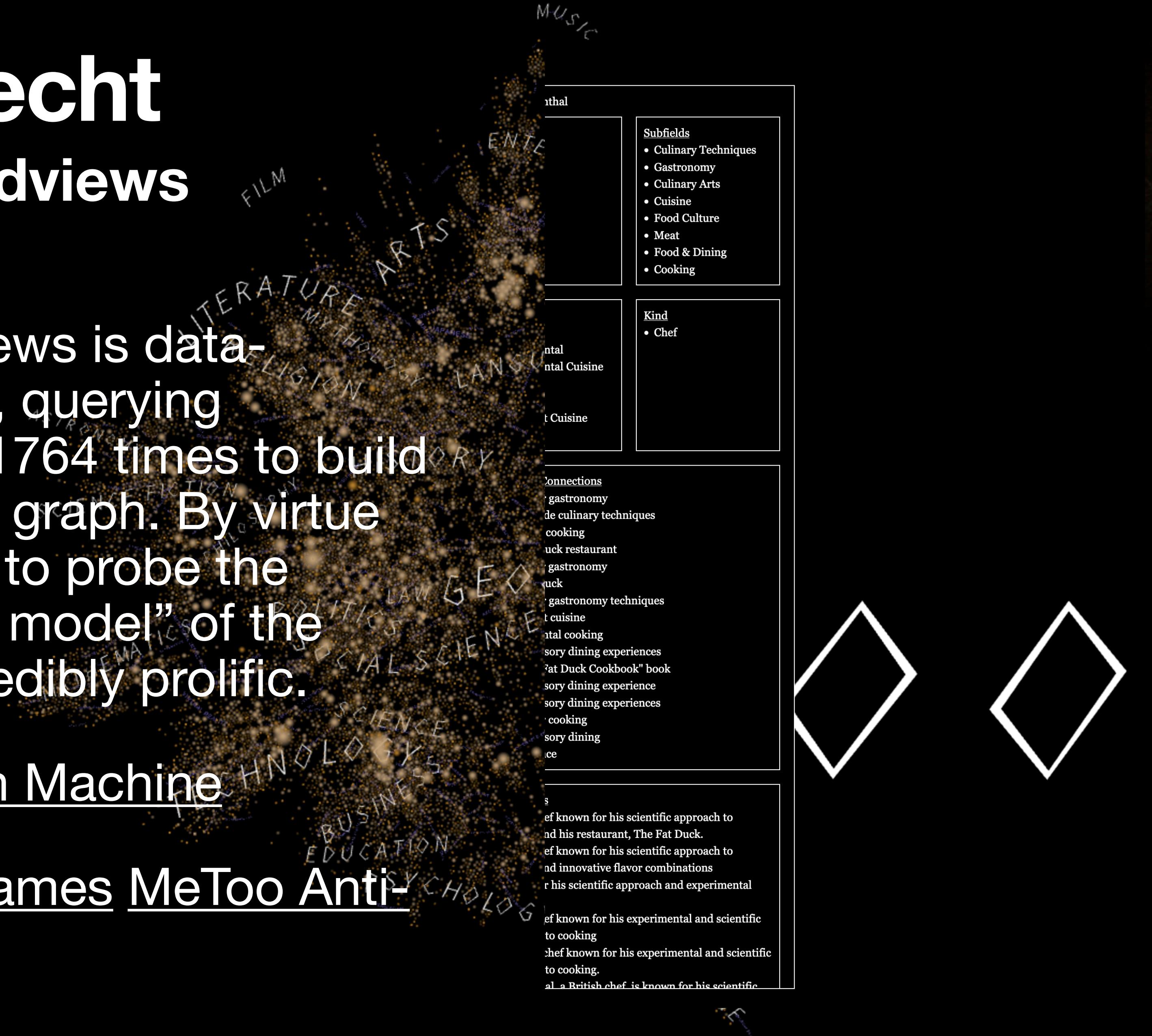
Kim Albrecht

Artificial Worldviews

Artificial Worldviews is data-mapping project, querying ChatGPT some 1764 times to build out a knowledge graph. By virtue of scope, it tried to probe the complete “metal model” of the LLM. Kim is incredibly prolific.

Right: Distinction Machine

Related: Their Names MeToo Anti-Network

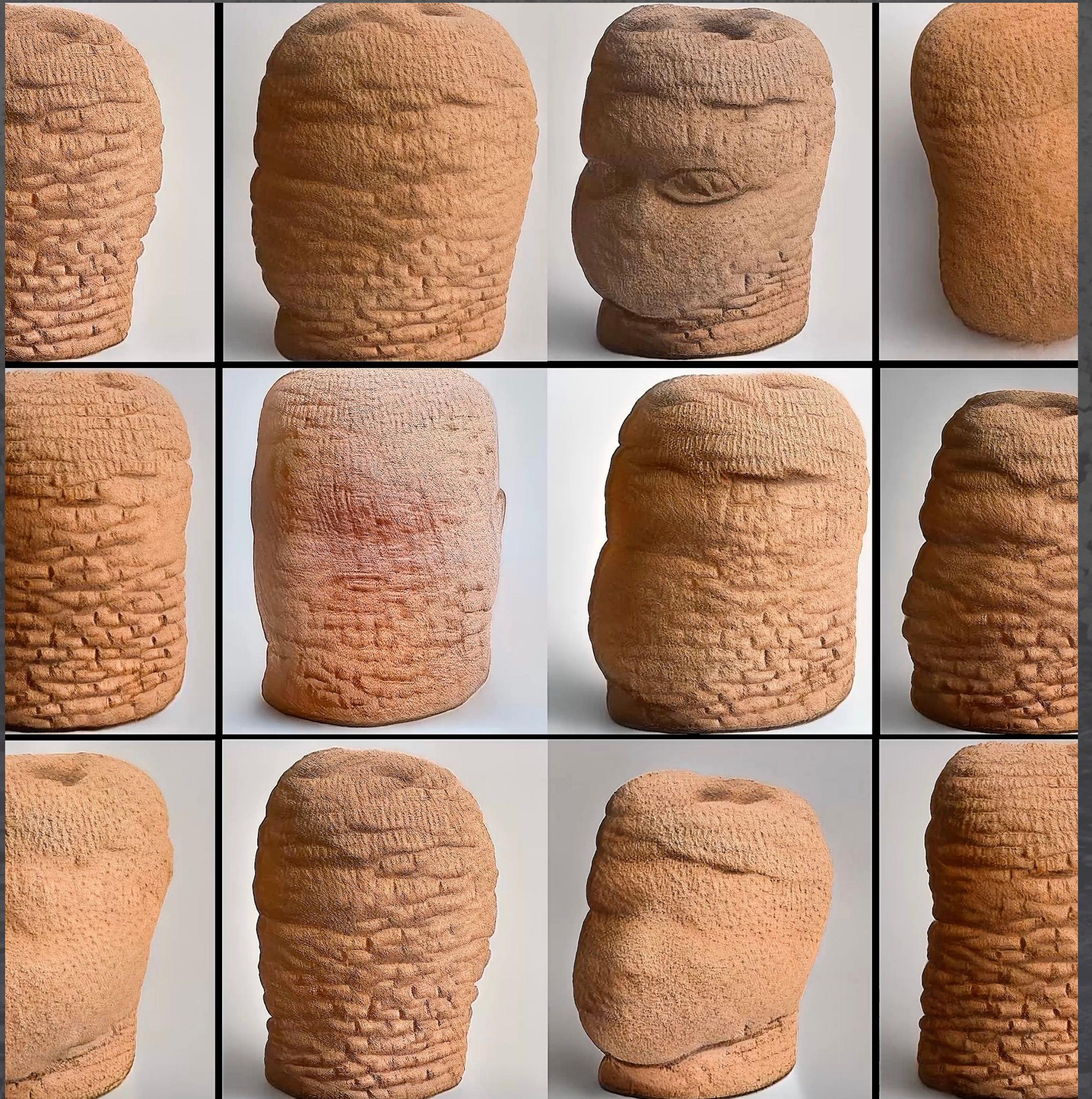


Curatorial A(i)gents

Harvard

metaLAB's turn and focus towards AI agents, classification technologies and data-mining led to this exhibit, which compiles a number of projects dealing with, or primarily authored by, LLMs, classification engines, etc.

More: [A Flitting Atlas of the Human Gaze](#)

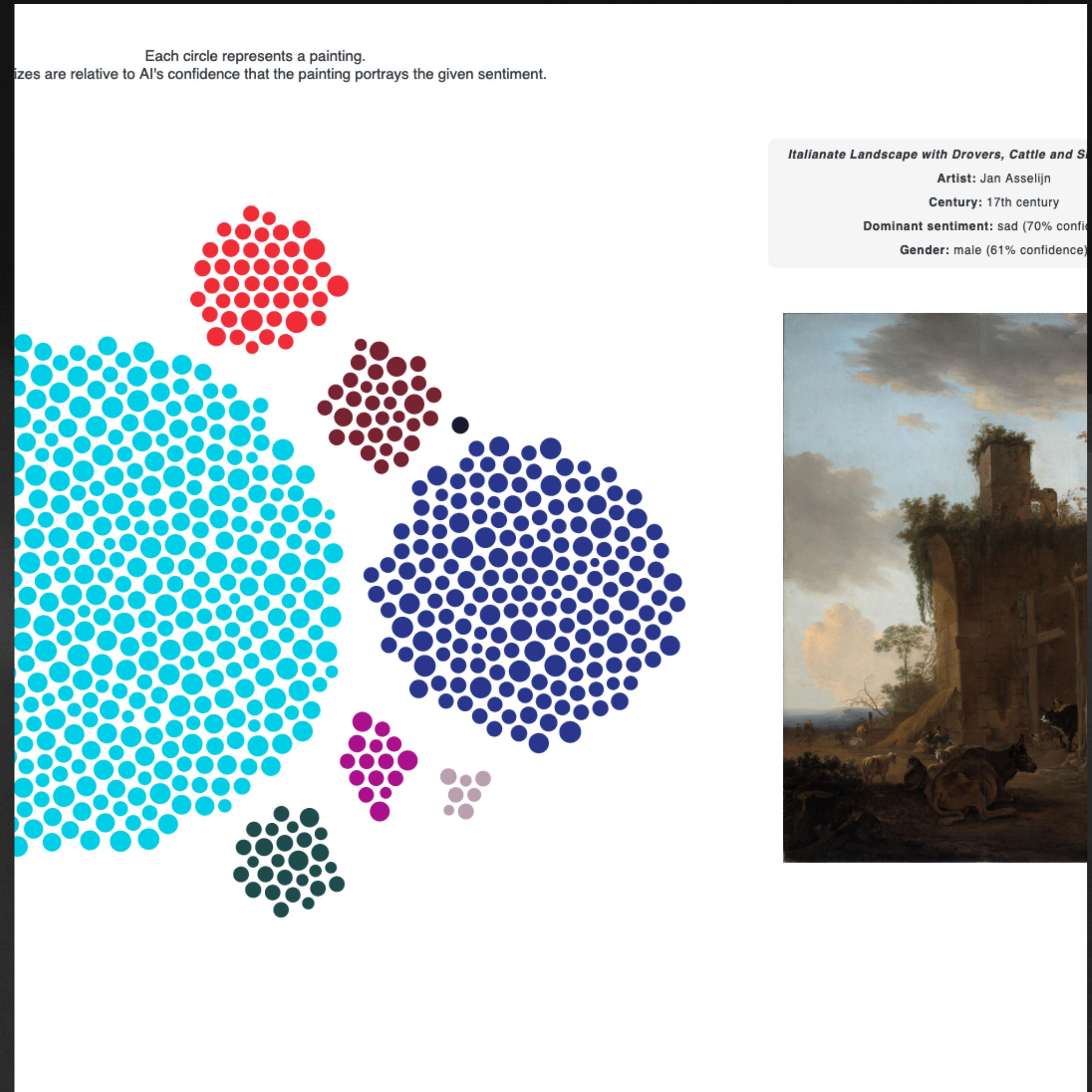


Lins Derry Principal

Beyond a great number of works involving her career as a dancer / choreographer, Derry's work with datasets hopes "to inspire humanitarian responses via performances, in a process she calls data embodiment"

Right: [Second Look](#)

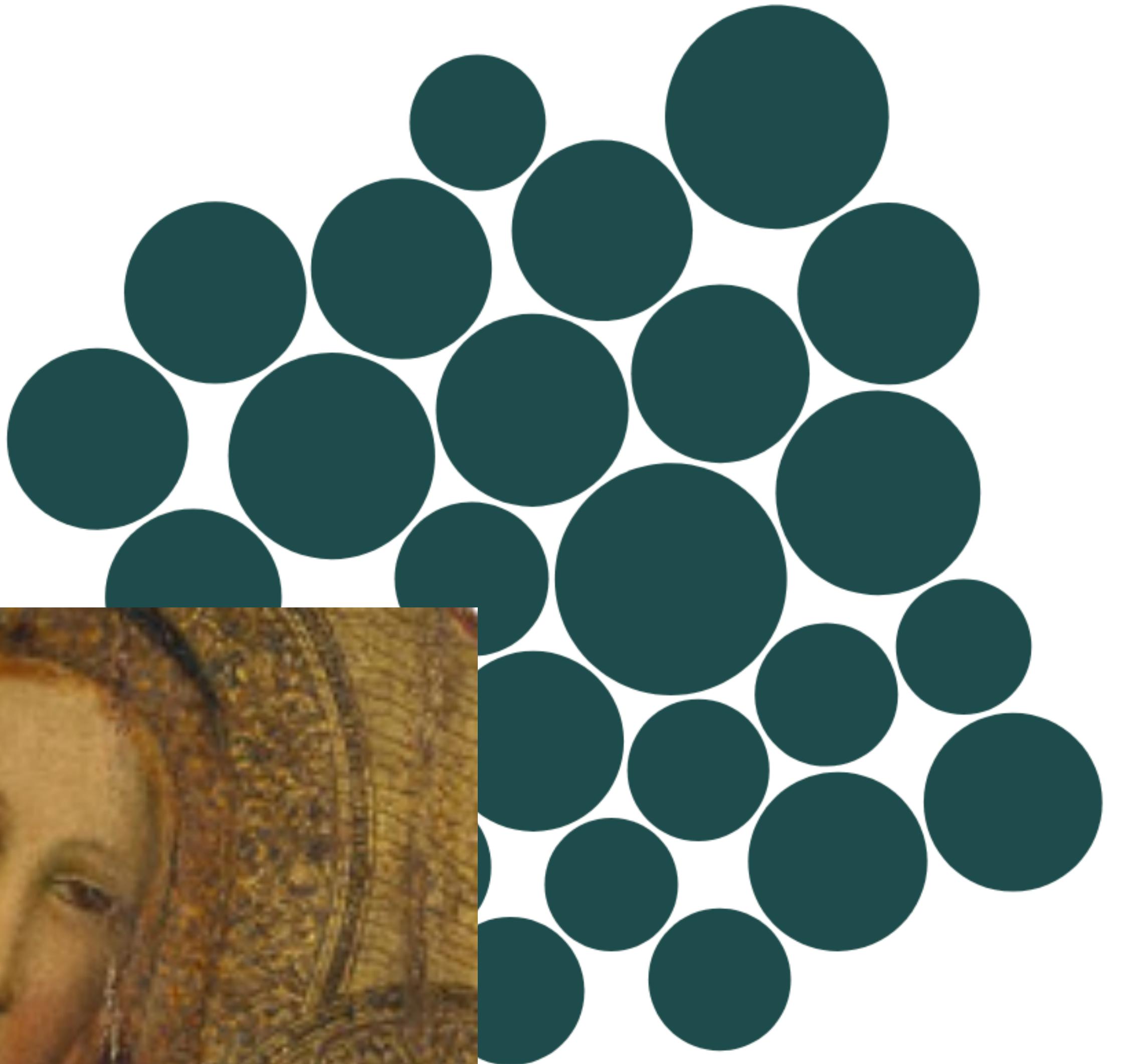
More: [Demo reel](#)



Each circle represents a painting.
Circle sizes are relative to AI's confidence that the painting portrays the given sentiment.

SENTIMENT:

- ALL
- HAPPY
- SAD
- CALM
- ANGRY
- DISGUSTED
- CONFUSED
- SURPRISED
- FEAR



Virgin and Child; Christ Blessing (pinnacle trefoil)

Artist: Unknown Artist

Century: 14th century

Dominant sentiment: disgusted (49% confidence)

Gender: male (78% confidence)



From Think Tank to Thinker

Cory Doctorow

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Who Who Who

Good ideas guy

- Cory Doctorow is a sci-fi novelist, journalist and tech activist
- He's affiliated with the EFF as a special consultant and an MIT Media Lab research affiliate
- Beyond sci-fi and fantasy books, Cory publishes nonfiction activism, like the aptly titled HOW TO DESTROY SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM
- Deeply devoted to the amelioration of the relationship economics has with technology, and by that virtue the betterment of life itself with respect to our relationship with tech

Enshittification

Theme of the decade

- Discussed at length in *The Internet Con: How to Seize the Means of Computation*, the term describes a death process of platforms hosting a two-sided market, whereby rent-seeking by the platform itself finally kills it.
- Right: The post that initially coined the term

valuable as more people use it. You joined Facebook because you valued the company of the people who were already using it; once you joined, other people joined to hang out with you.

Network effects are powerful drivers of rapid growth. They're a positive feedback loop, a flywheel that gets faster and faster.

But network effects cut both ways. If a system gets more valuable as it attracts more users, it also gets *less* valuable as it sheds users. The less valuable a system is to you, the easier it is...

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Solving the internet as if

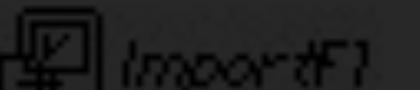
- **The “end-to-end” principle;** where the network delivers what is asked, and not what a platform elects to deliver (bespoke or non-existent algorithmic timelines, recommendations etc)
- **Right of exit;** interoperability and the end of lock-in through network effects. With regard to media, the end of DRM, or the ability to migrate content from one app to another, or off of one completely, without loss in quality or content.



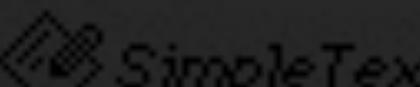
Conversely

Apps

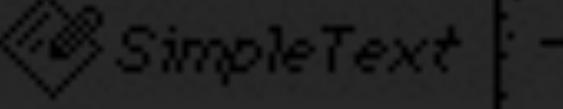
6 items 10.5 MB in disk



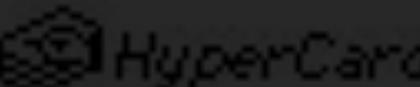
ImportF1



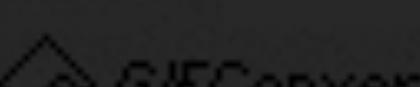
ExportF1



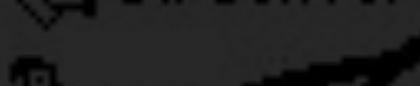
SimpleText



HyperCard



GIFConverter



ReEdit

100 Rabbits & Devine

Script of card button id = "e"

Scripting Language:

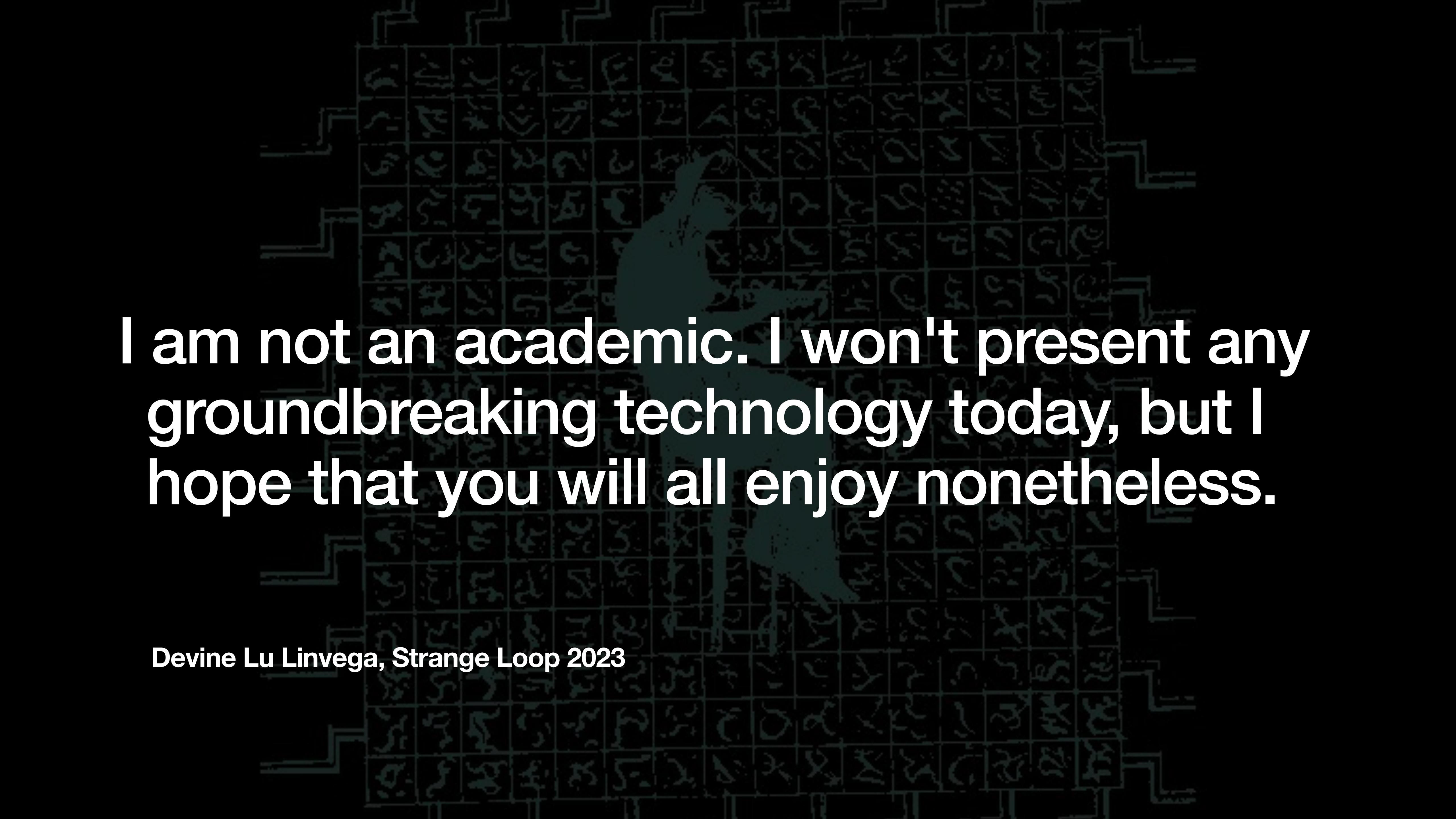
HyperTalk

Handlers:

Length: 103

Functions

```
on mouseUp
    visual effect dissolve
    go to card id 3774
    -- play tone
    play "ambient4"
end mouseUp
```



I am not an academic. I won't present any groundbreaking technology today, but I hope that you will all enjoy nonetheless.

Devine Lu Linvega, Strange Loop 2023

Qui Qui Qui

Devine & Rekka in a boat

- Devine Lu Linevega is a musician, visual artist, activist, games programmer and sailor
- Along with Rekka (illustrator). the two sail the seas making low-tech videogames
- HundredRabbits exists as a container for their work, and a repository of knowledge to further living their values



Sustainable Computing

Live your truth

- Offline First
- Past Proofing
- Freedom

“to make fast software, you need slow computers”

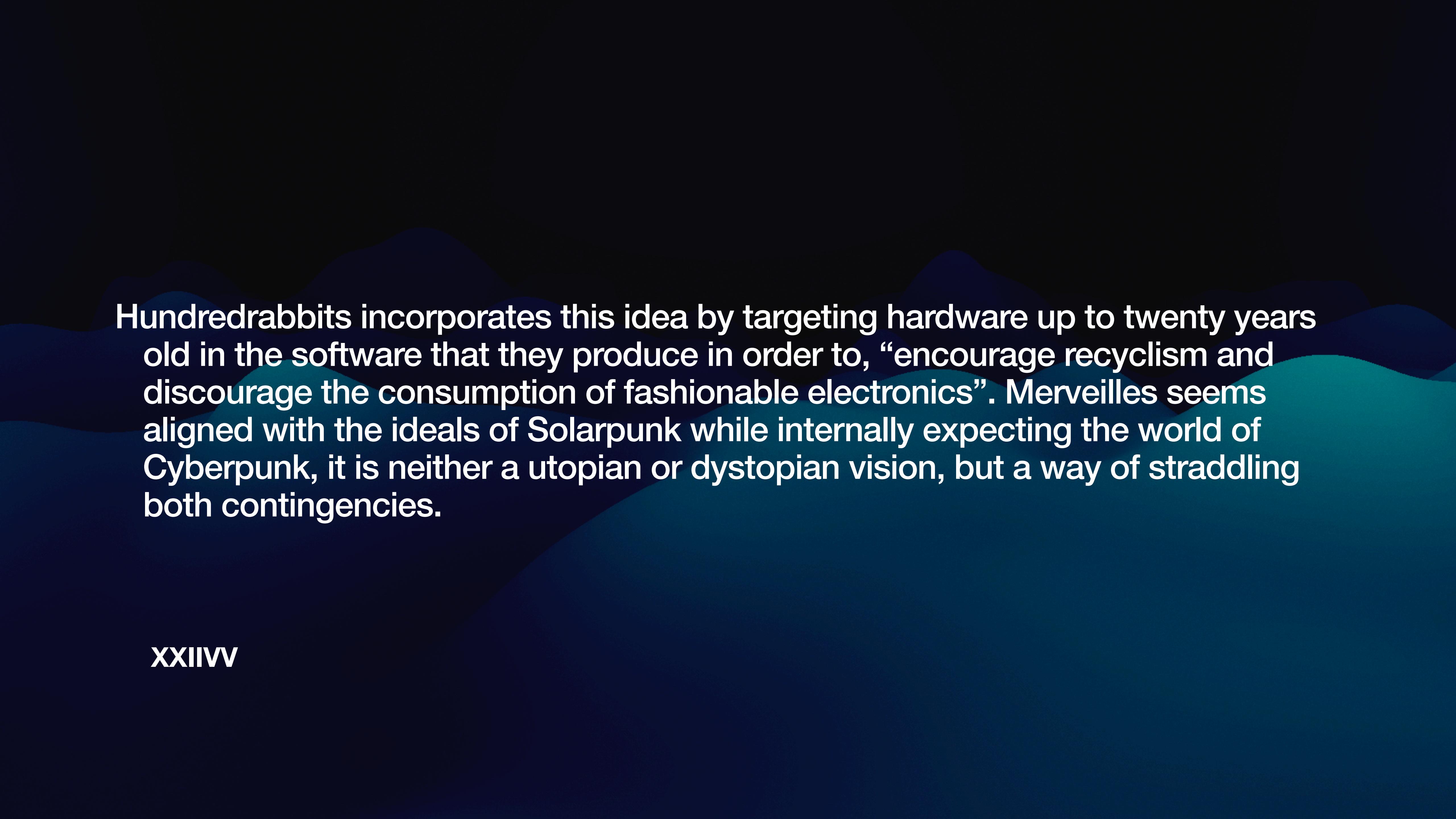


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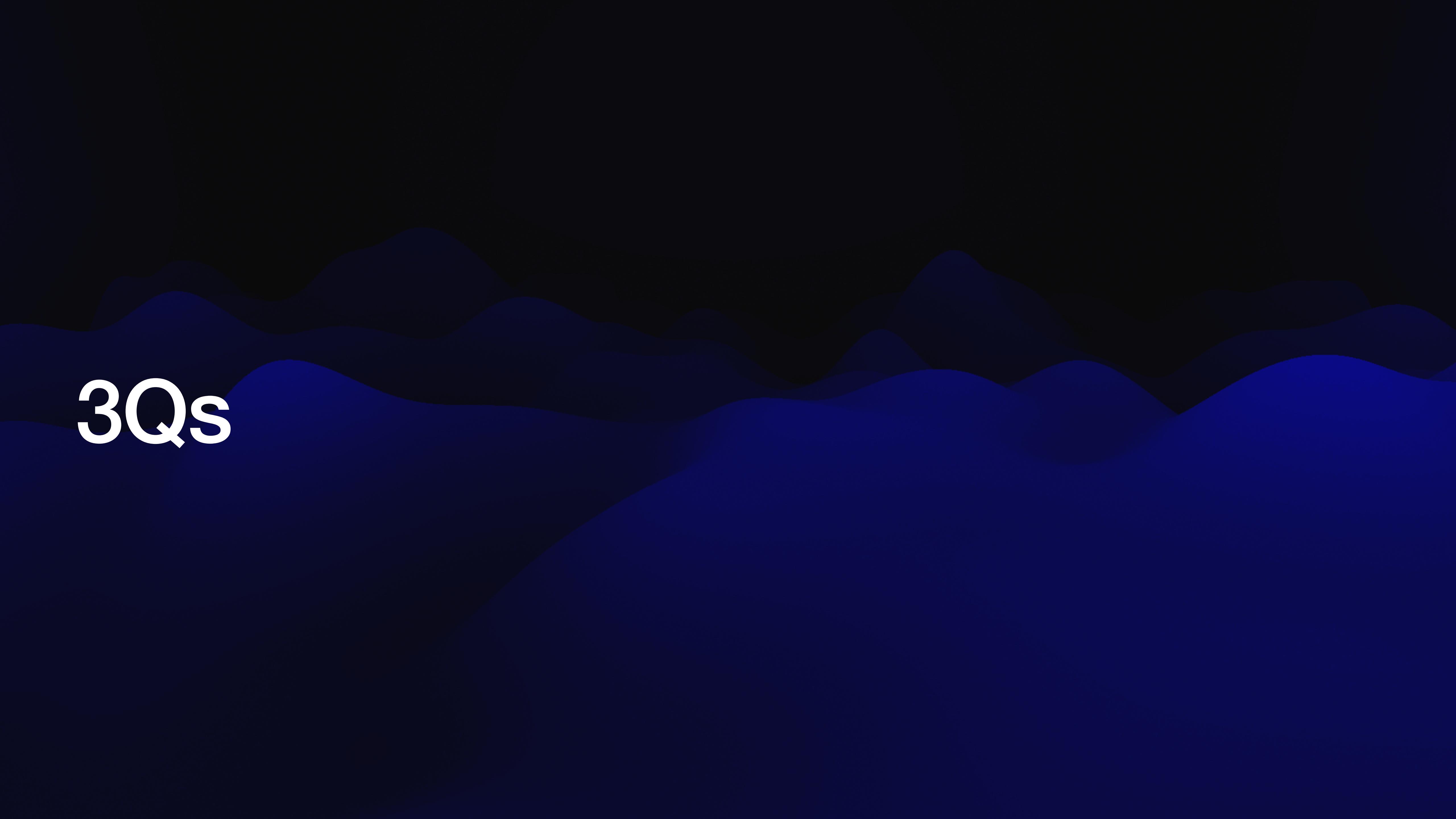
Merveilles

community on the internet

- Enforced aesthetics, lots of freedom
- I found <https://www.yourworldoftext.com/> though someone's site on the webring, which was neat
- Left: The Webring (the most literal illustration of Merveilles)
- More: [Merveilles](#)



Hundredrabbits incorporates this idea by targeting hardware up to twenty years old in the software that they produce in order to, “encourage recyclism and discourage the consumption of fashionable electronics”. Merveilles seems aligned with the ideals of Solarpunk while internally expecting the world of Cyberpunk, it is neither a utopian or dystopian vision, but a way of straddling both contingencies.



3Qs

1. Can honest data visualization seriously participate as political art? To what extent is transparency and completeness at odds with message clarity?
2. How deeply does provenance the artistic integrity of a piece? Is art produced at Harvard *for* Harvard, or can its merits stand regardless of context?
3. As technology permeates the art world, has technical art begun a process of becoming inaccessible to artists themselves? Will the future of digital art creation be so mediated by access and technical sophistication so as to shut itself out from most?

- <https://mlml.io/members/>
- <http://jeffreyschnapp.com/>
- <https://shapereader.org/>
- <https://kimalbrecht.com/>
- <https://www.echochamber.be/>
- <https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-platforms-cory-doctorow/>
- <https://wiki.xxiivv.com/site/home.html>
- <https://100r.co/site/>
- <https://craphound.com/bio/>
- <https://webring.xxiivv.com/>

The background features three horizontal layers of wavy, translucent shapes in dark navy blue and black. The top layer is black, the middle layer is a medium-dark navy blue, and the bottom layer is a bright navy blue. These layers create a sense of depth and motion.

thanks!