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NATURAL LIGHT AND THE COMPUTER-GEN

LAURENT LÉVESQUE, JULIE TREMBLE AND PHILIPPE HAMELIN

On October 3, 2015, the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke, Sporobole, and Destination Sherbrooke provided visitors with free transportation to Sporobole to hear Julie Tremble and Philippe Hamelin talk about their duo exhibition, La Colonne bleue*, and to the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke to attend the opening of Laurent Lévesque's solo exhibition,* aux confins.[1]

It is well-known that a dialogue between two contrary elements can often bring to light their individual characteristics. While Laurent Lévesque puts emphasis on natural light in his images and installations, Julie Tremble and Philippe Hamelin tackle the digital hardcore of pure computer-generated images.

At first, the two exhibitions show an evident contrast, since they seem to operate at the extremes of the natural/artificial spectrum. However, something transcends their opposition, and does so literally, since everything is in motion in the three artists' works. Airborne elements move in and out of the stratosphere, and even beyond, alternating between the material and digital worlds.

Lévesque works in a variety of forms—photography, video, sculptural installation, digital images, interactivity—always summoning the intangible character of the landscape. The exhibition *aux confins*, shown at the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke, presents a series of works about the sky and its light, both natural and otherwise.

The artist's gaze has been fixed on the sky since 2011 with the project *Déséquilibres*, in which he gradually decomposed an image of the sky until it completely separated from the source to become pure abstraction. Chronologically coming after *Déséquilibres*, the ten photographs of *Axis* (2012), the oldest work shown in the exhibition, stage scenes whose subject is not the photographed object (a plastic bag), but rather the exact moment when the bag passes before the sun, eclipsing it for a mere fraction of a second. This blinding instant gives way to the fleeting vision of a meeting of elements and their transient relationship—how does the sky hold its objects? How does light inhabit them?

Lévesque also mixes natural light with artificial light, in the form of bright fluorescent lights. *Daylight 11:06* (2015) is the twelfth iteration of a site-specific project, which consists in placing panels in front of windows; the panels are covered with fluorescent lights and shaped exactly like the windows before which they stand. Faced with the *unencased* windows and light, we consider the perspective from which to approach the installation. If we stand between the panel and window (which initially seems the right thing to do), we quickly realize that different conditions will orient our perception of the work: initially in terms of light, since the time of day or night will determine what we see (a darkened landscape or a blinding reflection); then in terms of space, depending on whether we stand inside or outside the building (observing a single luminous glare or the materiality and mechanics of the installation). Whatever our position, we witness an encounter: natural light coming face-to-face with artificial light, culminating in a full white on white when the sun hits the windows perpendicularly, at 11:06 am exactly (which is what the digits in the work's title signify).

Functioning as a *mise en abyme*, *Daylight.2014: instants 1-25* (2015) revisits *Daylight.2014* (2014), transposing the photographic documentation of the project into 25 slides, arranged on a light box pedestal. Here, the initial work comes into being through this luminous reading, which, functioning as a documentary filter, reinterprets the role played by the project's various elements: natural light, fluorescent tubes, light panels, perspectives on the building. Becoming an image of the work also means becoming a document of the image.

After *Axis*, the plastic bags continue to float in the sky. *Friendly Floatees* (2013–2015) is a technological response to a phenomenological finding. This interactive installation invites viewers to explore a virtual space of hundreds of unwaveringly blue skies containing hundreds of floating plastic bags. To navigate the work, viewers must cling to the bags, in a way. From bag to bag, sky to sky, the space gives us no edges to follow, no horizon to meet our gaze—lucidly, we drift in broad daylight.

In the *Apparent Simultaneity of the Stars in the Sky Today* (2015), the perpetual sky gives way to something else: a background stripped of its substance, an indeterminate space. Used in the transparency function in Photoshop, the gray and white checkerboard pattern is generally interpreted as the invisible surface behind an image. As the symbolic digital sky behind the physical natural sky, this coded pictorial space evens out our perception, in which real and computer-generated images constantly intermingle.

The computer-generated image is the natural realm of *La Colonne bleue*, an exhibition of works by Montreal artists Julie Tremble and Philippe Hamelin, presented at Sporobole. Besides showing their individual work, the two longtime collaborators also co-created a new work, the first in over ten years, for this exhibition. Furthermore, the artists covered their tracks so that, unless we are familiar with their work beforehand, we would not know who created which work and would understand the exhibition as an autonomous cohesive whole.

COMPUTER-GENERATED IMAGE

Julie Tremble, *BPM 37093*, 2014. 2 silent short digital animations. Photo: Tanya St-Pierre.

Laurent Lévesque, *Friendly Floatees*, Site 3, 2013-2015. Video still. Interactive digital installation created in HTML.

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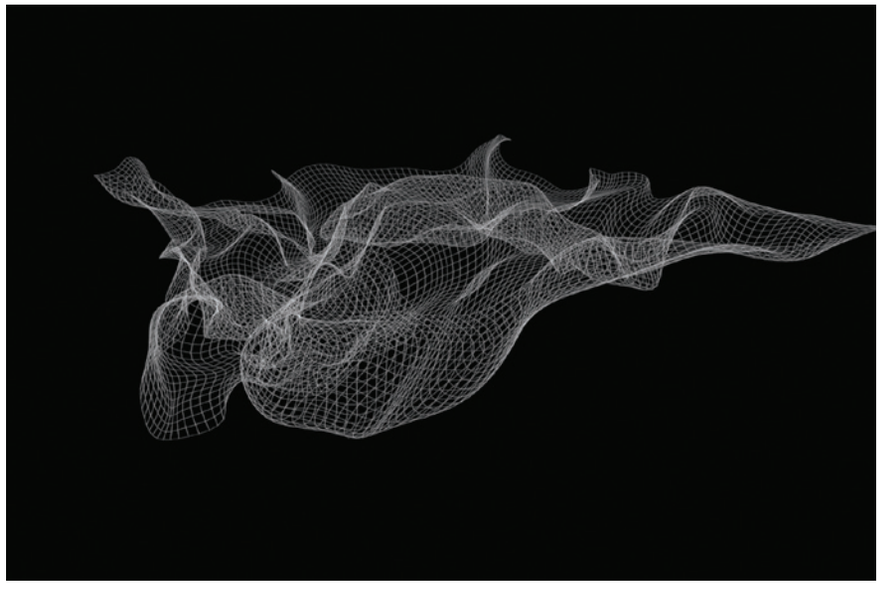
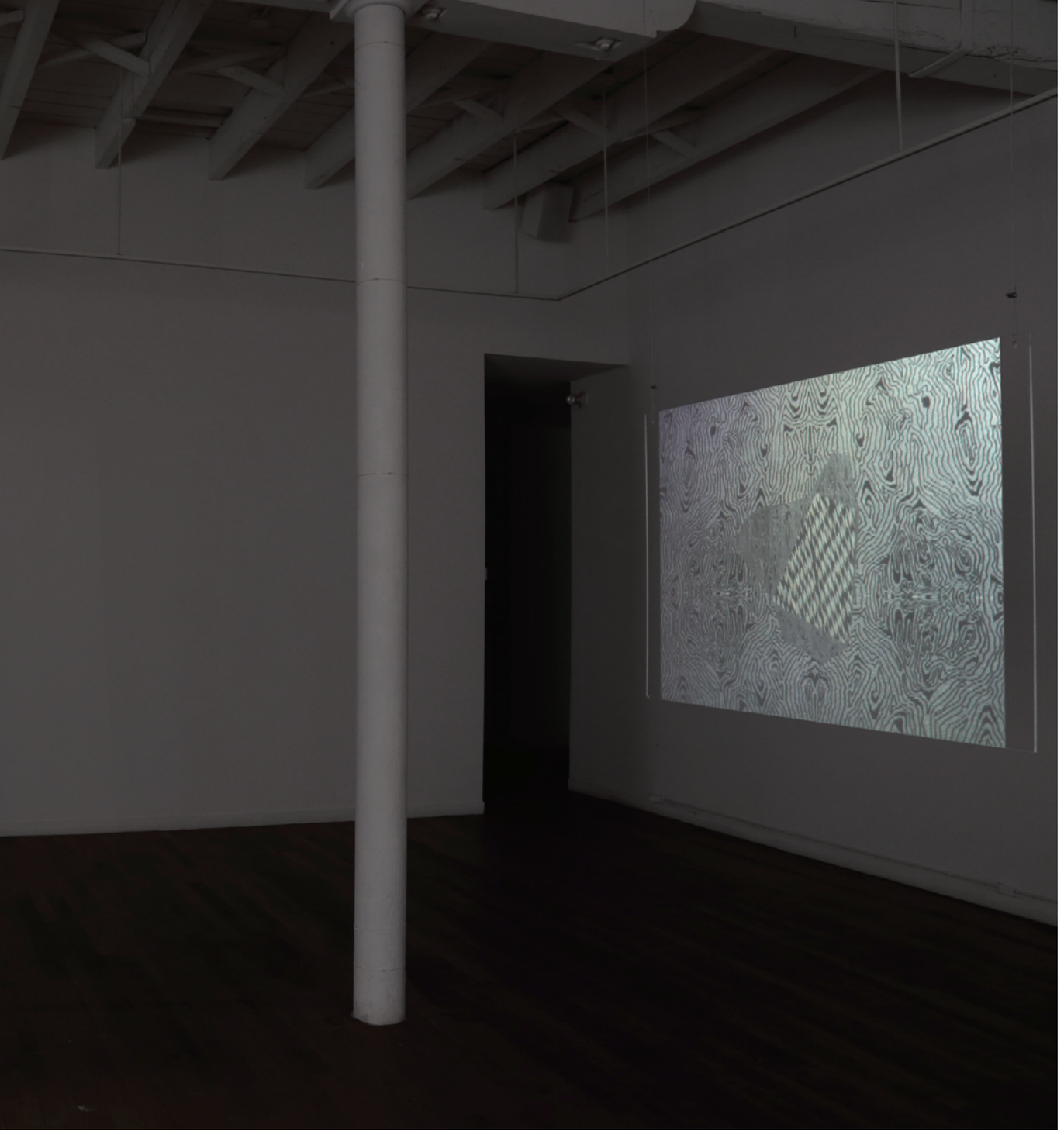
Julie Tremble and Philippe Hamelin,
La Colonne bleue, 2015.
Exhibition view at Sporobole.
Photo: Tanya St-Pierre.



Julie Tremble,
Après Evangelion, 2015.
Photo: Tanya St-Pierre.

The exhibition includes two silent digital animations, *BPM 37093* (2014), by Julie Tremble, as well as a new work, *After Evangelion* (2015). While the first animation evokes a dying star spinning around its axis in an indeterminate space, transforming into a diamond, the second animation represents space and creates a narrative effect based on the interaction between and evolution of formal elements. Both works suggest a form of false rationality, an imagined science based on classic science fiction, such as Carl Sagan's television series *Cosmos* (1980) and the films *Forbidden Planet* (1956) and *Armageddon* (1998). Traversed by the narrative thread of science fiction, Tremble's works open up new spaces of thought that shake up the foundations of reality. As scientific visualizations often use 3D modelling and computer-generated images, we tend to accord them a truth value. At the same time, digital animation comes out of the fantasy world of childhood and its imaginary constructions. Balanced between these two reference paradigms, Tremble's works speak of time and the ways in which the past and future overlap and merge when intersecting at the limits of conceivable space.

The constructed space of a computer-generated image can model hypotheses that might never have been posed otherwise. At once material and metaphysical, these hypotheses are insights into the world's hidden, latent nature. Philippe Hamelin's works evoke this latent aspect by working with the idea of a motif, transposing it from one form to another, one world to another, moving back and forth between the physical dimension and digital space. Through this movement, the particular motif is transformed slightly each time and gradually revealed, unfolding itself like an inverted origami. In French, a *motif* also means a motive, a pretext: if acted upon and given momentum, it can become its own vehicle for transposition. This is how an envelope's interior pattern becomes, in a short 3D animation, a *Camouflage bureaucratique (Prédateur)* (2013), simultaneously referencing *Predator*, the famous 1987 science fiction movie. Returning to the physical world, the initial motif becomes *Jungle* (2013), a large wallpaper print covering the wall and column. The same phenomenon is at work in *Colonne Strip* (2015), an image of a column from the Louvre Museum printed on fabric, which was subsequently



Philippe Hamelin,
Camouflage bureaucratique, 2013.
Photo: Tanya St-Pierre.

transposed into *La Fontaine et la chute II* (2015), a 3D animation the artists created collaboratively during a residence at Sporobole. The animation involves the same method: the motif of water passing through the city gate (represented on a mural near Sporobole) was transposed into an undulating series of graphic aquatic and/or aerial elements. *Translation* (2012), a video and 3D animation of real birds being transformed into 3D volumes, is the key to interpreting the exhibition as a whole, as it hypothetically translates the language of the physical world into the digital world and vice versa. Ultimately, isn't code a DNA performing alchemy of reality?

While most of the work entails some type of suspension, two works stand out from the rest as a form of *sea and earth*: Philippe Hamelin's *Les amis* (2014) and Laurent Lévesque's *Adam's Home* (2015). The first work is a 3D animation projected in Sporobole's window, in which we see "friends" dancing—echoing the active weekend night life downtown. *Adam's Home* (2015) is a 19-min sequence shot framing the office porthole of Adam, a merchant marine officer sailing on the Bering Sea. These two works are not only "grounded," but they also feature two human characters: they speak of human nature, evoking its sociability, on the one hand, and its solitude, on the other. Turning the focus back to ourselves and our social ties and/or their absence, these works help us choose a certain perspective or angle from which to observe the world, what inhabits it and what it contains.

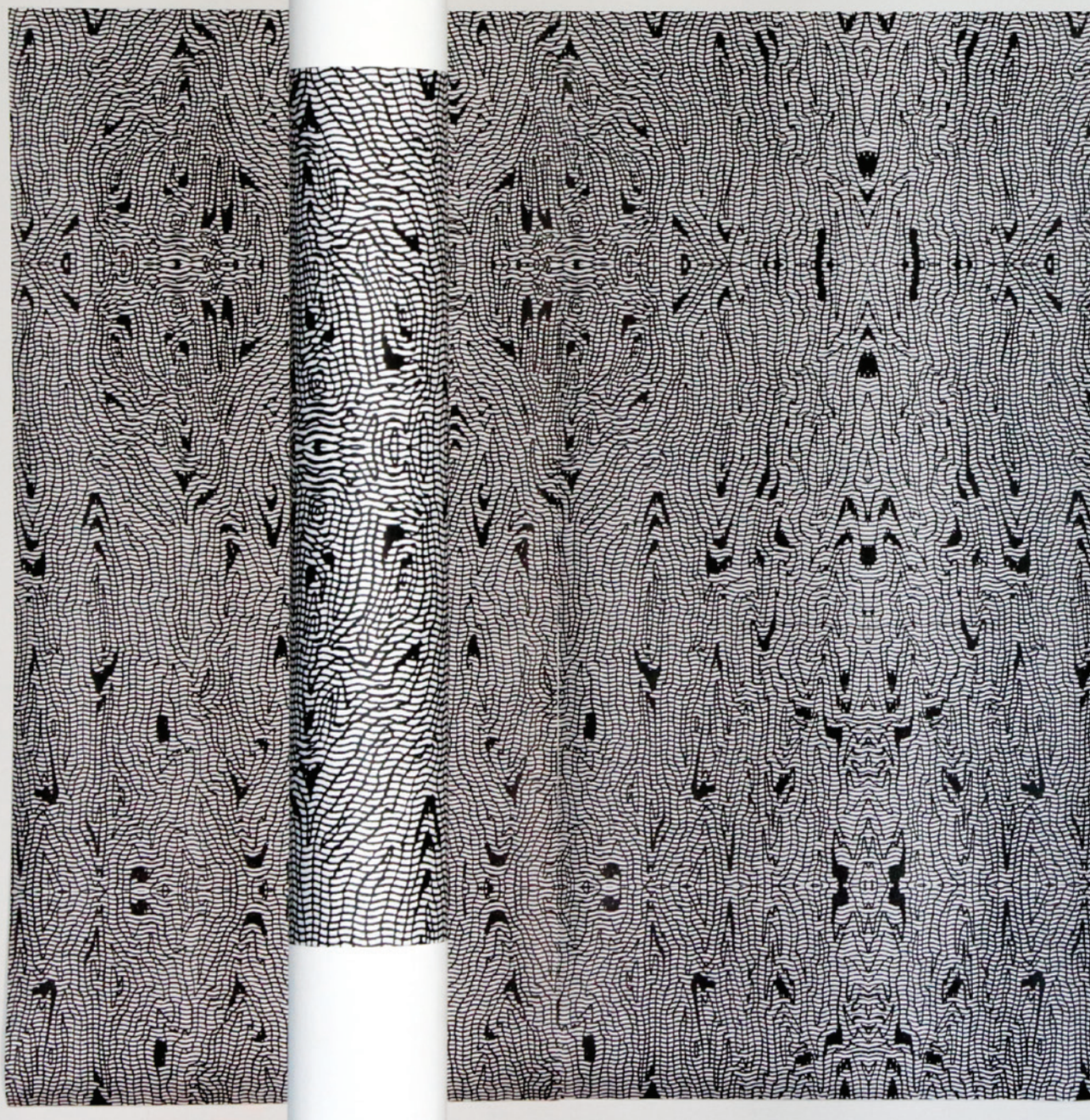
Nathalie Bachand

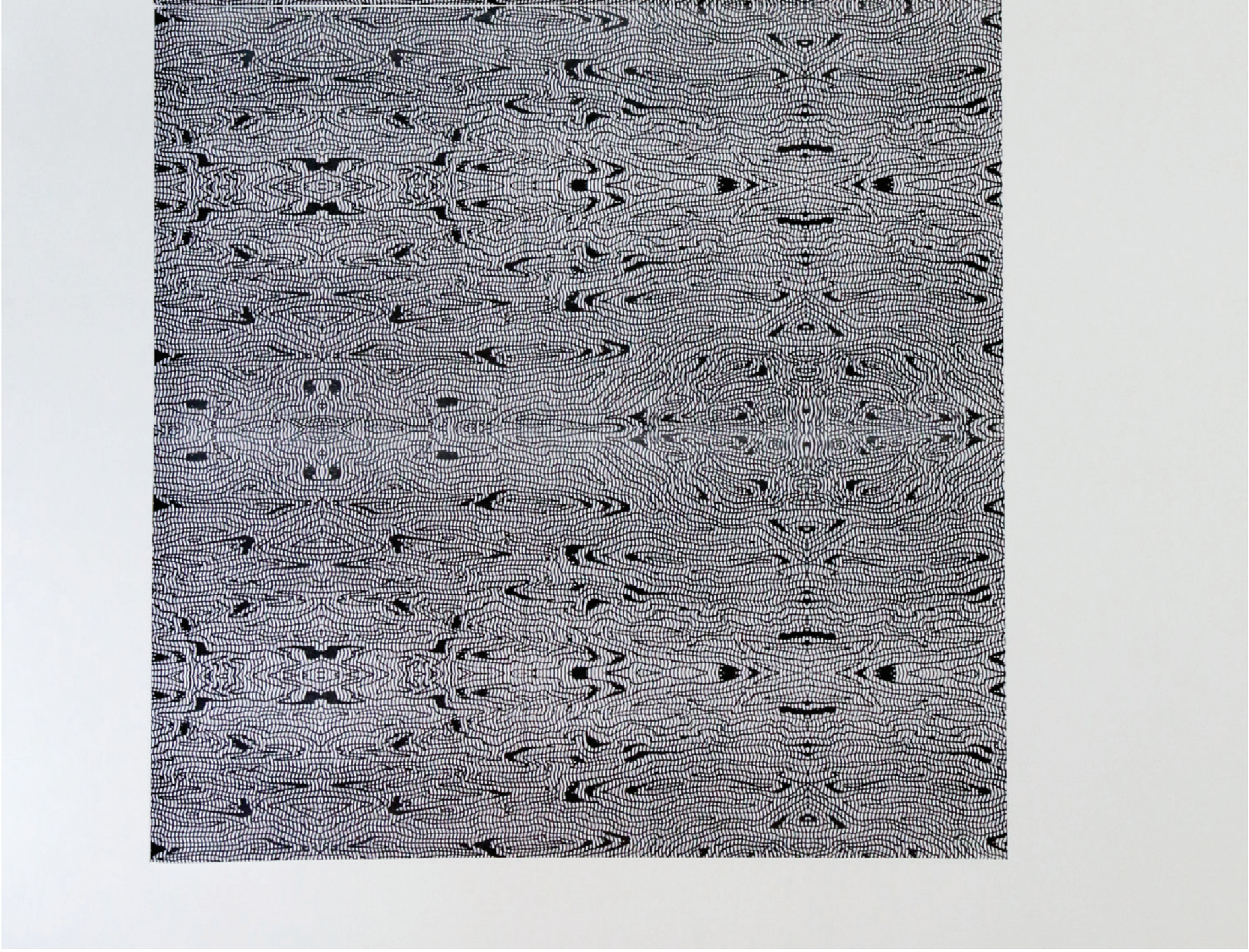
Translated by Oana Avasilichioaei

Nathalie Bachand is an art writer and curator. She is also the development manager for ELEKTRA and the International Digital Arts Biennial (BIAN).

[1] *La Colonne bleue*, Julie Tremble and Philippe Hamelin at Sporobole (Sep. 4 – Oct. 4, 2015) and *aux confins*, Laurent Lévesque at Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke (Oct. 3, 2015 – Jan. 17, 2016).

Philippe Hamelin, *Les amis*, 2014.





Philippe Hamelin, *Jungle*, 2015.