

Project Description

August 2024 by Ian Moore

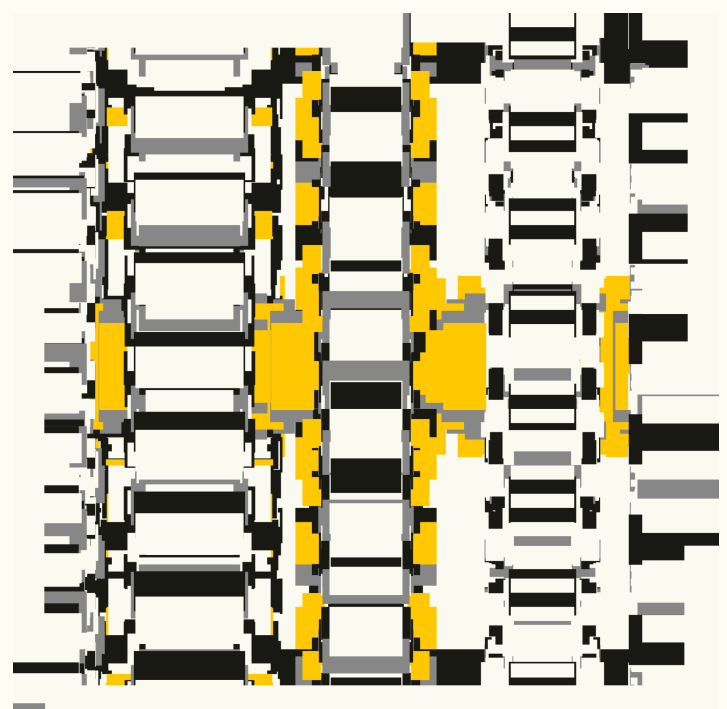
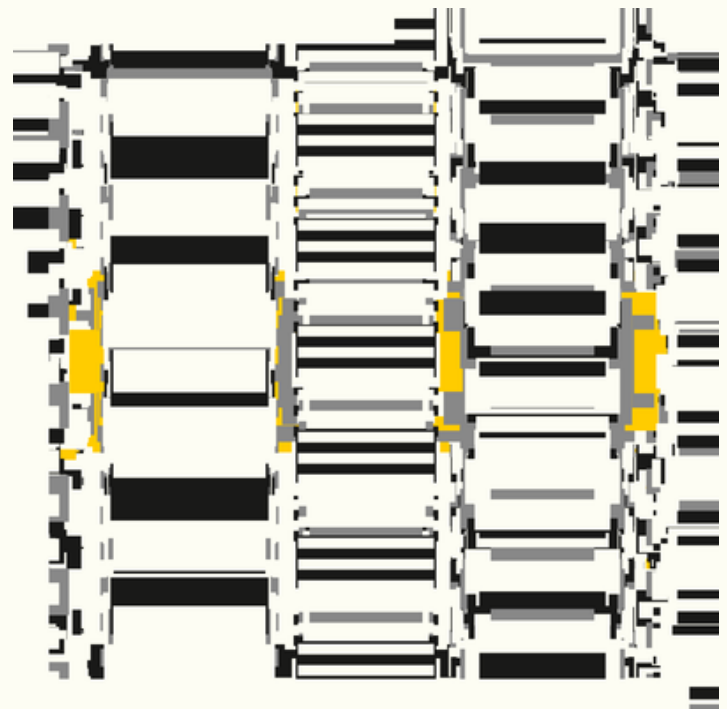
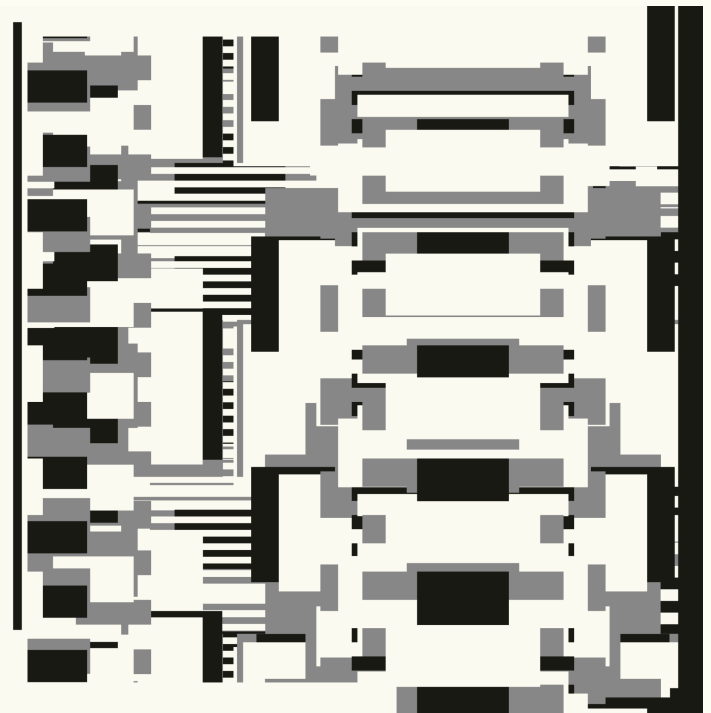
When Mags, Kathy, and I began developing this artist residency, we were intentionally vague about what it was we wanted the final product to look like. We tried not to clarify.

This was, in part, to allow Kathy latitude in her exploration. Mags and I wanted to give her the opportunity to meet with library staff, discuss their work with them, and consider the library's spaces and functions as they fit within our academic community. It was not — is not — for us to be prescriptive as we support Kathy's work. Our goal is to facilitate her exploration as best we can, giving her the space to develop and iterate her work as she learns the library, its staff, and its community.

Artificial intelligence was also a spur for our lack of prescriptivism. Here, now, as I write this in 2024, many of us are tired of talking about AI in its many new forms. We are tired of AI, but we are also tired of the discourse around AI, the unending rehashing of the same points over and over. We know that the voice of AI is the voice of confidence. Confidence in the sense that it projects certainty and security, but also confidence in the sense of the con. It is orderly, it looks professional, it knows nothing at all.

So yes, Kathy's work is messy. It has iterated, morphed, changed in the several months since Kathy started her residency. The mess is intentional. The mess is the point. Take, for example, Kathy's interest in citations. The citation is, for Kathy, a signifier and the signified, a representation of human interaction and human curiosity. A citation represents order, too, the ability to return to a piece of knowledge in the place where it was found, but overlaid on that order is the idea that knowledge as constructed by humans is not a perfect thing, not a thing that matches neatly with the confident projects created by artificial intelligence.

Sometimes I think the mess is part of the point. Sometimes I think the mess is the point. When Kathy's exhibit started, there were just a few monitors in her corner of the library's second floor. The monitors displayed images generated by code that developed, an unending parade of shape and color. Now, a few months later, the monitors are not alone. They have been joined by fabric, by string, by bound books, by images, and by Kathy's writing. They are of a piece and not of a piece, a messy alternative to AI order.



Kathy would tell you, I think, that her writing is not the strongest part of her work. I want to disagree with her on that. I love the images Kathy has created, but I have connected to them more strongly because of the words she has paired them with as the work has developed. When she spoke with library staff a little while ago, a phrase jumped out at me: personal polyphony. Kathy's work is her personal polyphony, a multiplicity of voices examining, interpreting, and ruminating on the ideas she has come in contact with as she has explored the library. Her words, from her introduction of herself to her rumination on citations, add poetry to the mix.

Kathy's work lives on the second floor of the library, in the middle of a space students, faculty, and community members use to collaborate, to work, to be. I love that we are able to house this very human work in the middle of a human space, with Kathy's work offering a respite from all that AI confidence. Here, now, in this moment, the mess is the point.

