

HYBRID MEDIA

John F. Simon, Jr.
Matthew Kluber

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FAULCONER GALLERY, GRINNELL COLLEGE
9 APRIL – 6 JUNE 2010

HYBRID MEDIA

**John F. Simon, Jr.
Matthew Kluber**

The Hybrid Media of Matthew Kluber and John Simon, Jr.

BARBARA POLLACK

Abstraction is a difficult subject to resolve with technology because most of us appreciate the digital for its content, not its form. We surf the Internet or download applications, solely focused on the information delivered and almost blind to the aesthetics. Matthew Kluber and John Simon, Jr., however, are two artists who have spent a great deal of time looking at 'digital style'—the colors, lines and forms displayed on a computer—imposed on us by dictatorial software. They rebel against and reinvent this formulaic palette. By so doing, they teach us what is really possible from the keyboard, mouse and screen. This is not the type of abstraction practiced by expressionists, no drunken drips or heroic brushstrokes in

sight. But it is a type of abstraction as coolly meditative as the geometry of Mondrian, an artist who found great spirituality in the urban grid and jazzy design of modern life. Like him, Matthew Kluber and John Simon are looking for the very fundamentals of the medium, delving into the intricacies of programming to come up with a new way of understanding these machines.

Both artists build works that challenge our assumptions about digital art. It was once thought—back in the 1990s when Simon and Kluber began their explorations—that digital art would be gimmicky and superficial, unable to hold up in

comparison with the masterpieces of oil painting and sculpture. That was a time when many artists tried to experiment with computers, to create immaterial works that existed only on the internet or montages that smacked of Photoshop. Today, virtually every artist employs a computer in one facet of their artmaking or another. Yet only a few have taken on the fundamental challenge that the digital presents in contemporary art. Even fewer have figured out how to make lasting works that resonate with audiences looking for an antidote to a jaded resignation when approaching computer art.

Kluber experiments with customized software while Simon programs his own. Neither limits his production to the computer itself. Kluber makes multimedia paintings that turn on through projections, edited using advanced software programs. Simon houses his algorithm-based animations in elaborate wall reliefs, created with the help of digital technology. Their artworks do not look mechanical or pre-fabricated, as one might expect from digital art. They are hybrids, combining painting and programming, the traditional with the unexpected, the every-day with the sublime. They

each have their own ideas about how digital art can be presented. Both have come up with inventive ways to make their highly theoretical efforts both tangible and accessible. Anyone who has played World of Warcraft or has posted a video on YouTube can appreciate that these artists have gone well beyond the usual use of digital technology and have come up with their own highly original take on this medium.

Cosmic Lines of Matthew Kluber

New media artists are expected to provide content for a screen, but Matthew Kluber returns his discoveries to the conventional framework of a canvas. More accurately, an aluminum panel that is the actual surface for his works, a material that only heightens the sense that we are looking at something imagined and made by machines, rather than an artist's touch. He was initially inspired to make these works when he tried to load Adobe software on an antiquated Mac. The computer shot out a pattern of lines, just before it crashed, and Kluber retained these glowing stripes on his retina. Now, he experiments with stripes, created in a software graphics program, then digitally cut out in adhesive vinyl with a tool borrowed from sign-makers and often used to create

racing stripes on automobiles. He affixes these vinyl strips as a mask on aluminum panels and then paints in fluorescent pigments, mimicking the glow of the computer screen.

His resulting patterns range from bold and simple to intricate and subtle, all by his nuanced use of color and line. In *Decora*, 2009, dark green, yellow and orange lines zip across the surface of a lime green background, creating an eerie, almost unseeable rectangle in the center. In *No Place Like Utopia*, 2009, he creates the optical illusion of a cool center as the orange and blue lines cancel each other out, framed by yellow and green lines. These are updated versions of Color Field paintings, the art movement that followed Abstract Expressionism, in which artists such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland experimented with acrylic paint and raw canvas. They are also quite reminiscent of the early “pinstriped” paintings of Frank Stella, which reduced abstraction to roughly painted black lines against raw canvas.

But Kluber is not content to leave well enough alone. Instead, he adds another layer to each work, a video projection that flickers across the surface of the painting. The source of the

video imagery comes from various films, from stock footage, YouTube and home movies. According to the artist, it is their formal qualities, not their content that matters. By way of custom software created with programmer Alex Dyba, the projection is cropped to fit the dimensions of the painting and the film is modified in the code so that it compresses and multiplies itself in a looped cycle. This is then projected onto the painting, altering its colors and imparting motion and rhythm to the work—a hyper color field.

In *Half-Day Closing*, 2009, the composition of yellow, blue and orange lines turns into purples and greens under the blueish glow of the projector. A steady stream of colors flow across the painting, evoking the sensation of changing clouds during a glorious sunset. The projection and the painting form a dialogue with each other, surprisingly subtle and complex. It is in these moments when Kluber's entire construction comes together that we can fully appreciate his ingenuity. His goal is much greater than instilling an appreciation of technology, though he achieves that. He offers a glimpse of the sublime in one of the central and most banal facets of modern life, namely the personal computer.

The Cabinets of John Simon, Jr.

One of the few artists who actually knows how to program, John Simon has been at the forefront of digital art since the early 1990s. His experiments have extended the medium, well beyond Internet interactions into fully formed gallery exhibitions. Rather than relying on the iconography of ready-made software, he has a vocabulary all his own, ever changing through combinations of variables programmed into each work that deliver an endless stream of imagery. In Simon's works, biomorphic forms often appear with plants growing into trees and leaves falling into vortices. But he can also celebrate geometric forms, radiating out from his embedded screens.

At the beginning of his career, Simon's original programs could only be displayed on computer screens, often on handheld PDAs or bulky CRTs. Since the technology has advanced, he is now able to explore an endless range of sizes for his screens. But he has not settled for just delivering a computer-generated animation, as many other artists do. He now builds elaborate casings for the screens, like the way television sets used to come in bureau-sized cabinets. His cabinets are designed also with the aid of computers, with CAD software,

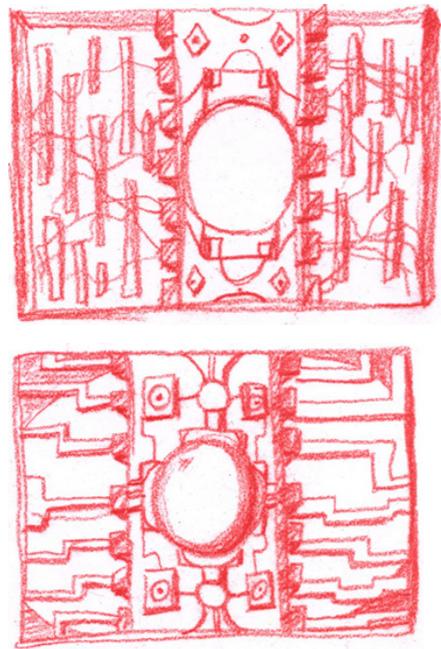
which enables the artist to imagine a wide range of three-dimensional forms and then carve them with lasers. Formica, mirrors, acrylic, wood, paper and hardware are all the materials he uses, in addition to the LCD monitors on which he shows his animations.

The four works featured in this show demonstrate the virtuosity of Simon's technique. In *Thresholds*, 2007, a screen displaying the happy collision of twirling rectangles is housed in a bookcase-like construction whose very geometry is reminiscent of a Mondrian. *Crown*, 2007, is far more elaborate and baroque with a grill of yellow carved moldings framing a single screen split in two by a clever use of mirrors; the patterns of the twin animations are coordinated yet challenging to take in a single glance. If *Crown* looks like something out of a futuristic mosque, *Chip*, also from 2007, could be an accoutrement of a 1950s science fiction movie. In this work, a central circle glows and changes forms, while radiating six three-dimensional lines in two directions. But, by far the most mesmerizing and magical is *Spiral*, 2007, with its giant leaf pattern on the left, cocoon-like skeletal form on the right, framing a screen holding a whirling vortex of tiny flattened

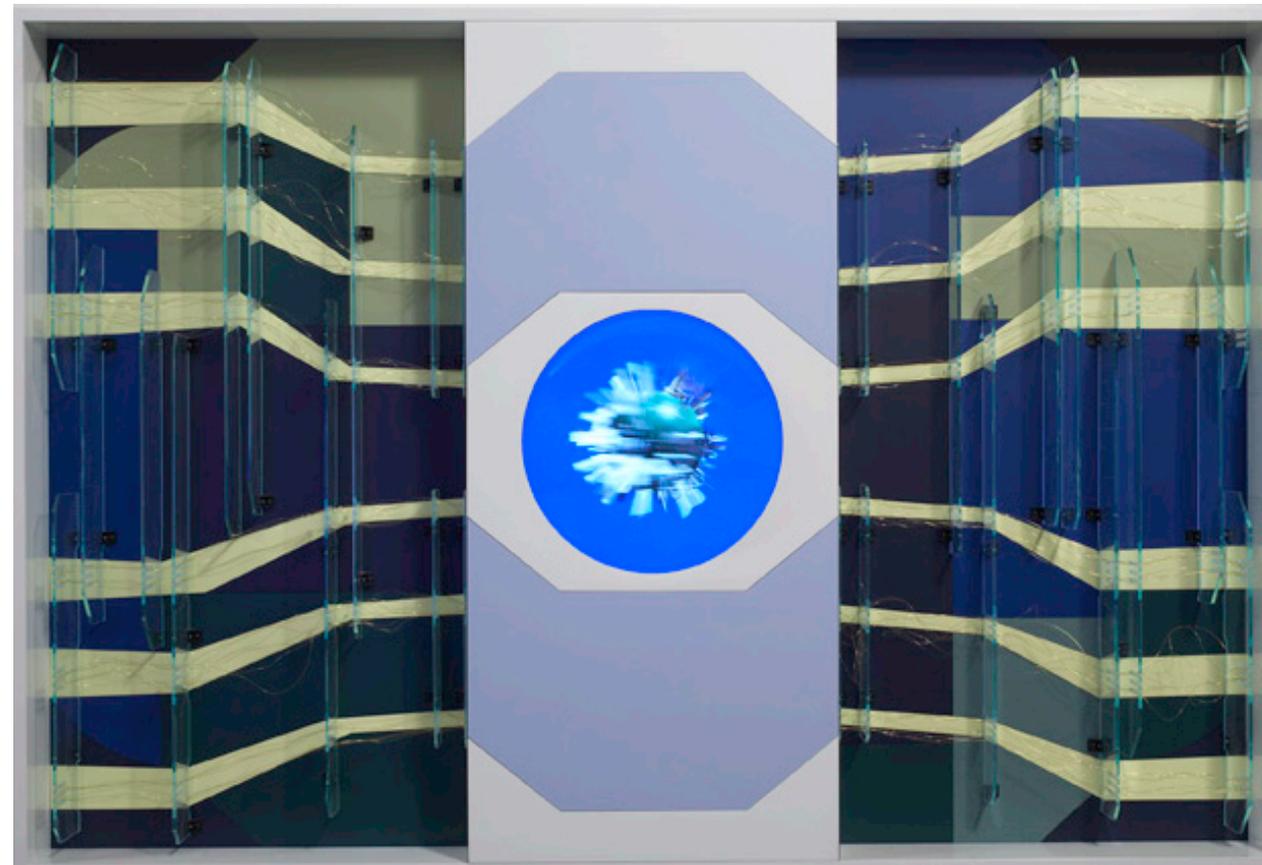
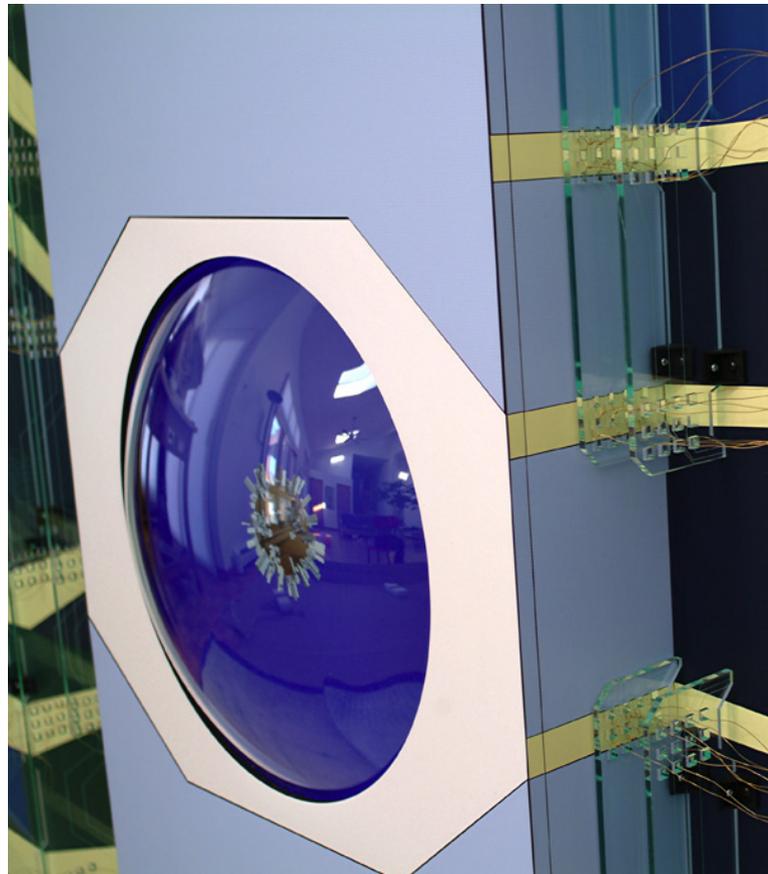
cubes, spinning endlessly. All of these works suck the viewer in, hypnotizing them with their abundance of imagination and creativity.

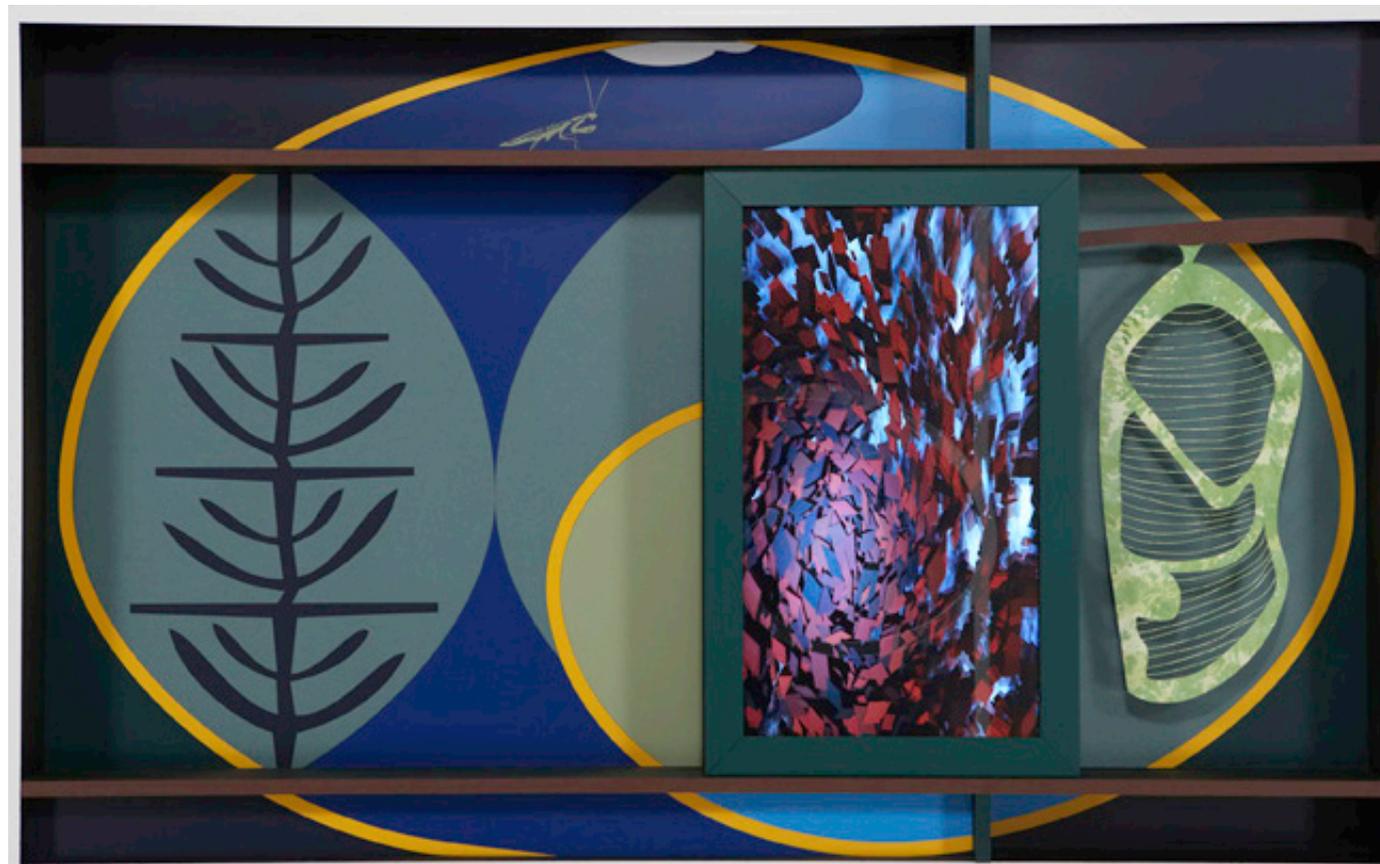
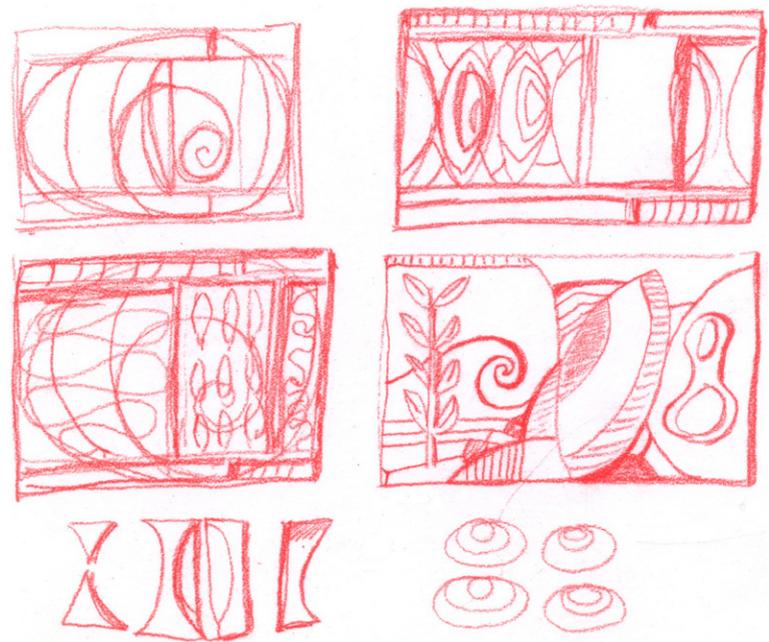
Simon's automated cabinets are a perfect match to Kluber's digitalized paintings. Both are dynamic yet meditative and both reflect the boundless imaginations of their creators. It is wonderful that they serve the purpose of expanding our understanding of digital art. But, much more importantly, they offer a vision of abstract art for the 21st century, one that takes expected forms—simple lines, flying rectangles, baroque curlicues—and reinvents them in ways that are simply astonishing.

Barbara Pollack is a contributing editor at *ARTnews* who writes frequently on contemporary art for a wide range of publications including *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *Time Out New York* and *Modern Painters*. Her book, *The Wild, Wild East: An American Art Critic's Adventures in China*, will be published in June 2010.

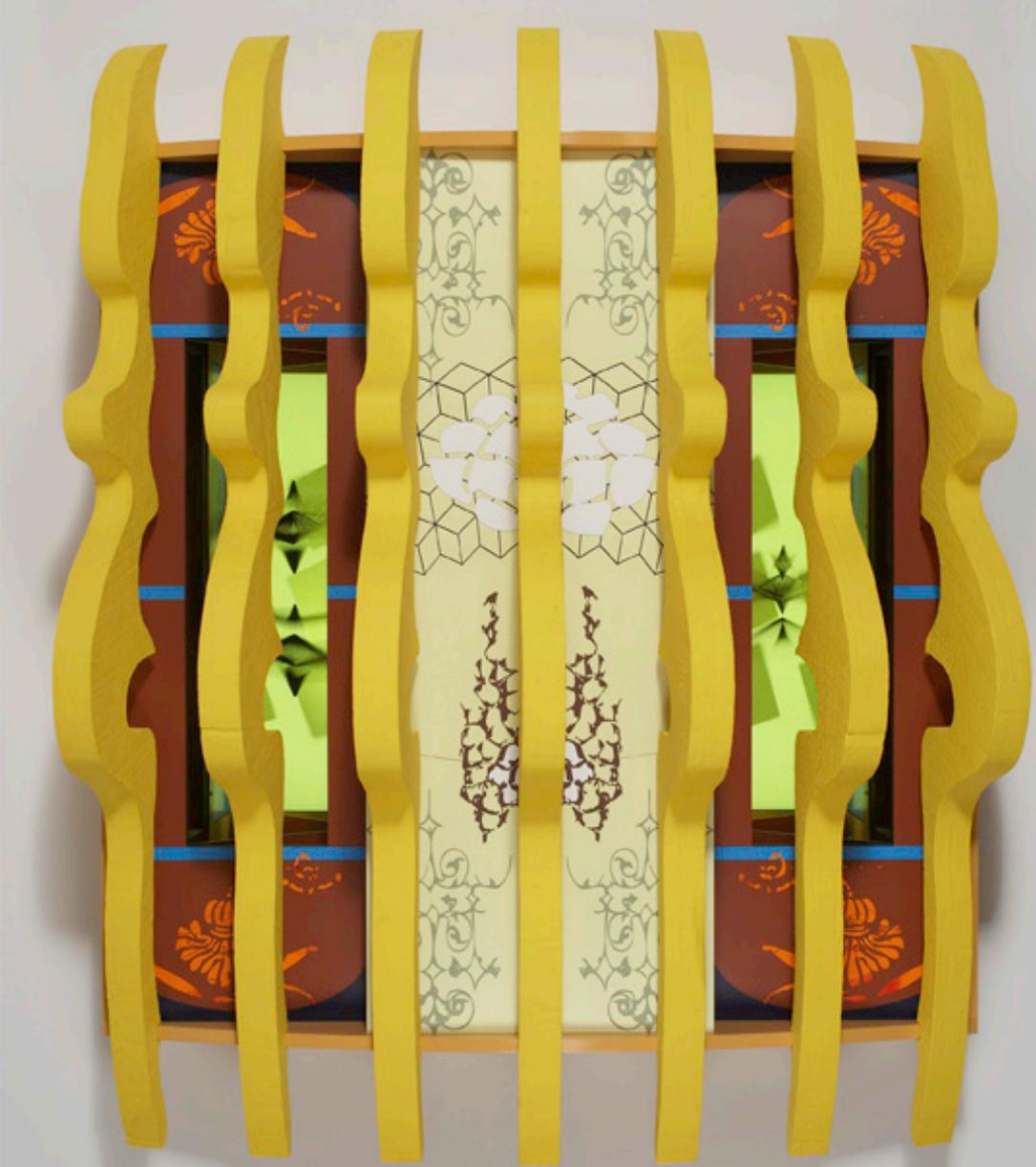
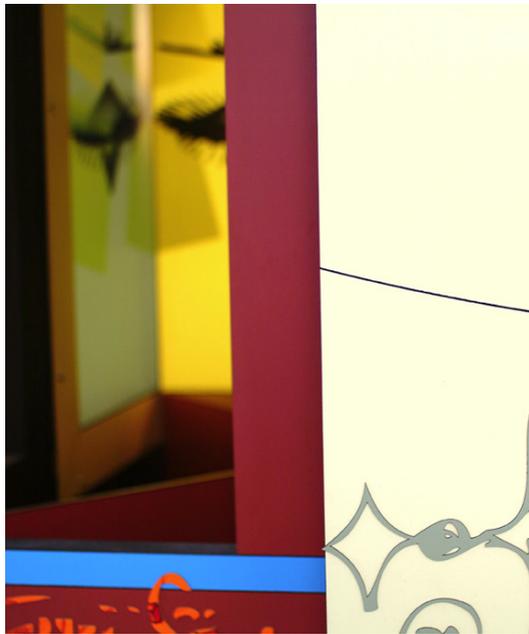
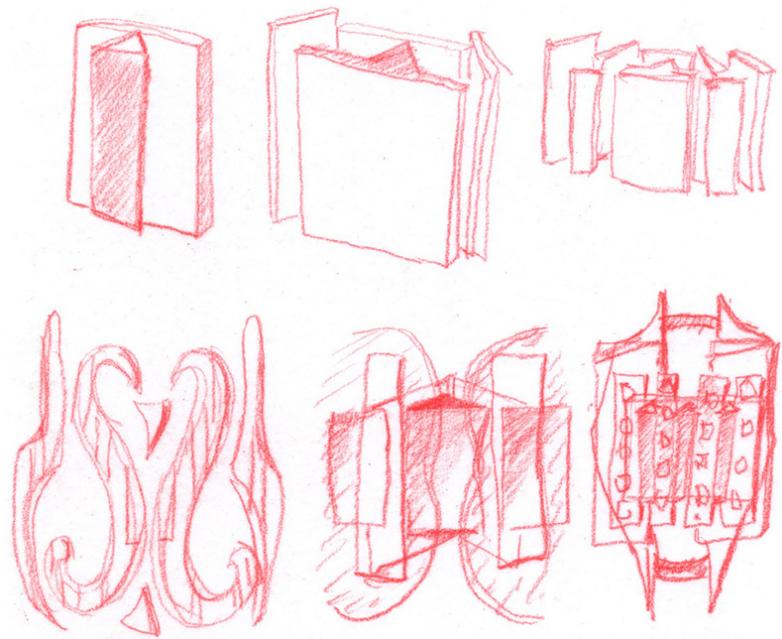


JOHN F. SIMON, JR.
CHIP, 2007
SOFTWARE, LCD SCREEN, FORMICA, ACRYLIC PLASTIC,
GOLD PLATED WIRE, LACQUERED WOOD
49 1/2 X 73 1/2 X 6 INCHES

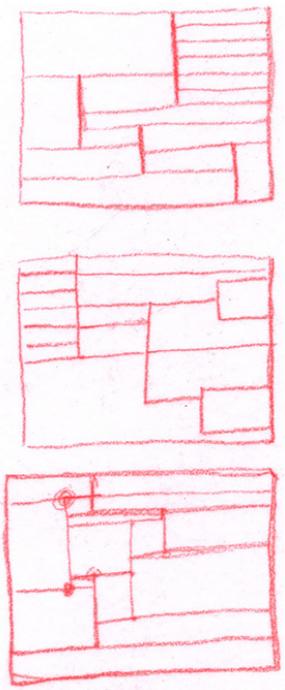




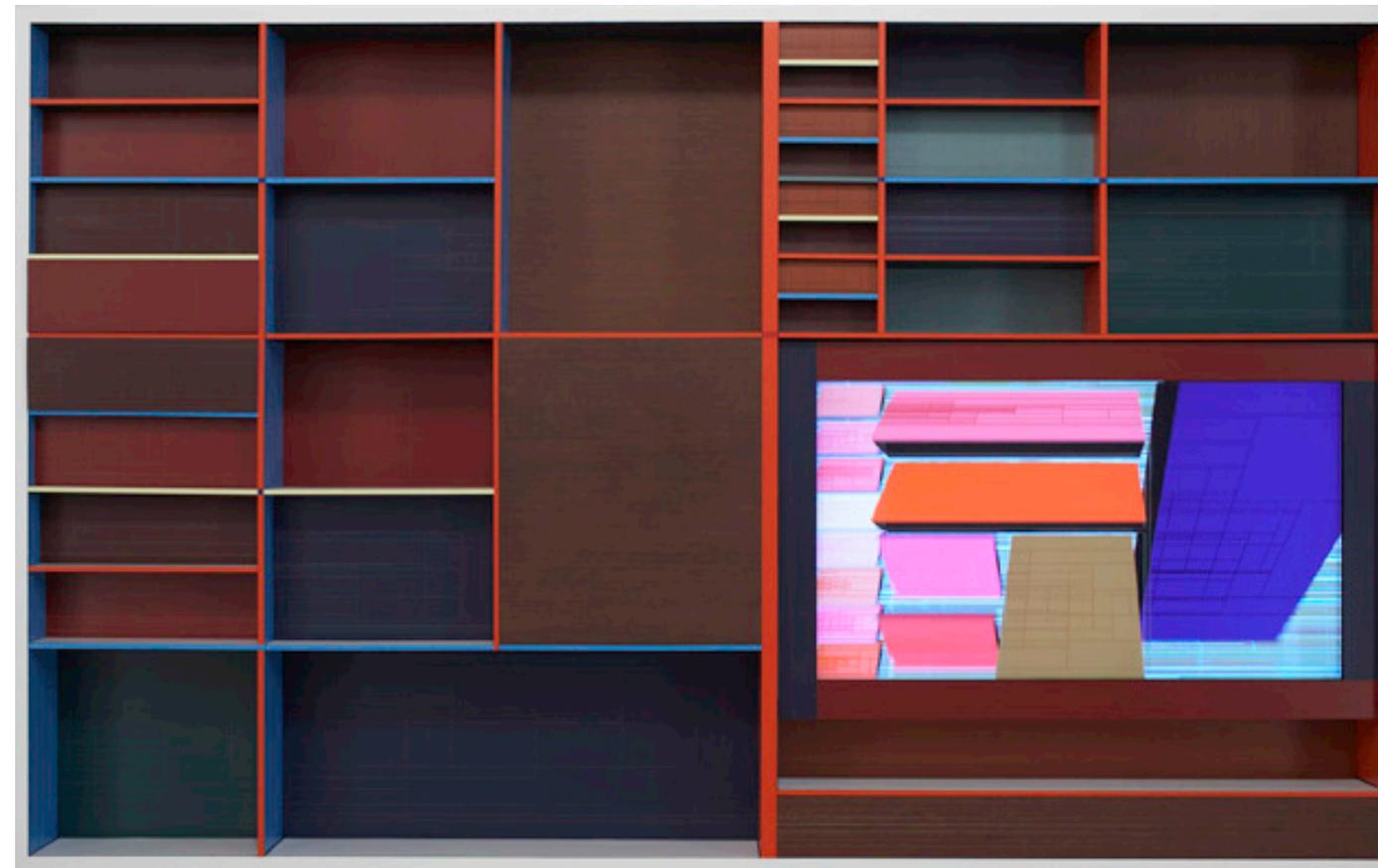
JOHN F. SIMON, JR., *SPIRAL*, 2007. SOFTWARE, LCD SCREEN, FORMICA, ACRYLIC PLASTIC, GOUACHE ON PAPER, LACQUERED WOOD, 44 X 72 X 6 INCHES

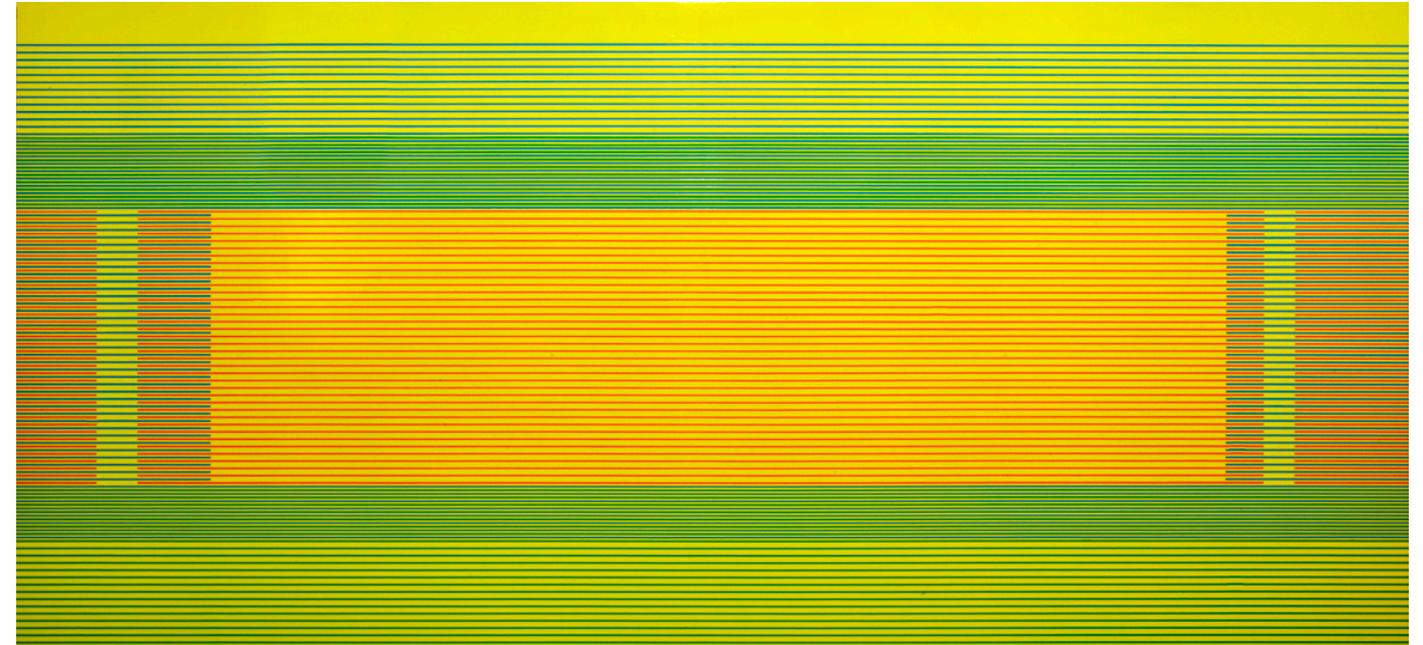
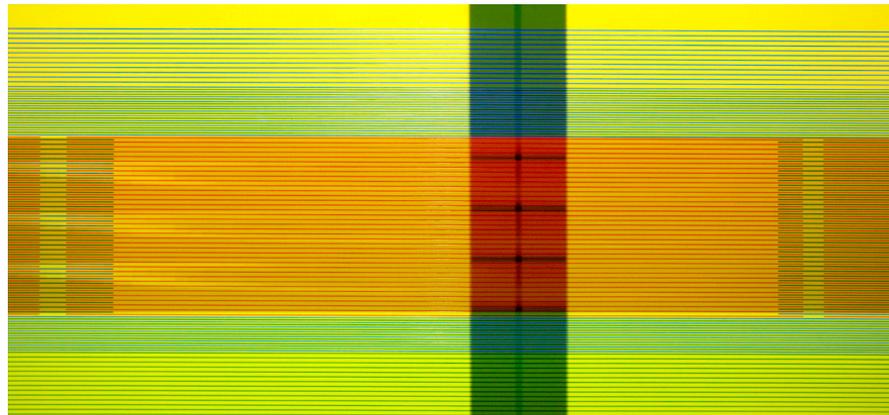
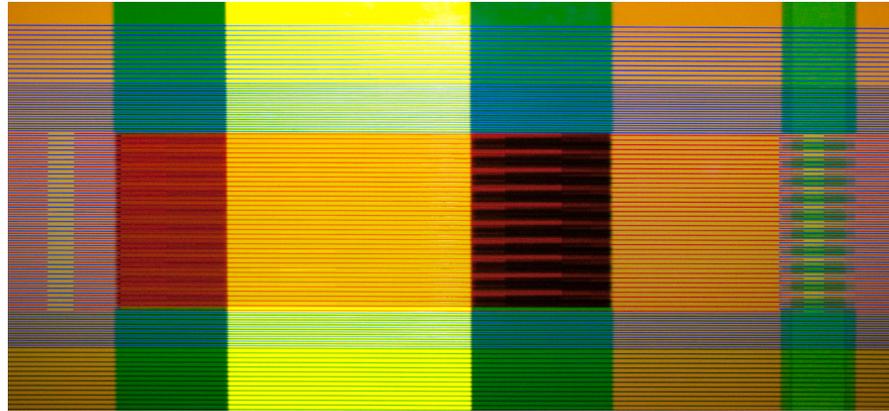


JOHN F. SIMON, JR., *CROWN*, 2007. SOFTWARE, LCD SCREEN, FORMICA, ACRYLIC PLASTIC, GOUACHE ON PAPER, LACQUERED WOOD, 48 X 48 X 14 1/2 INCHES

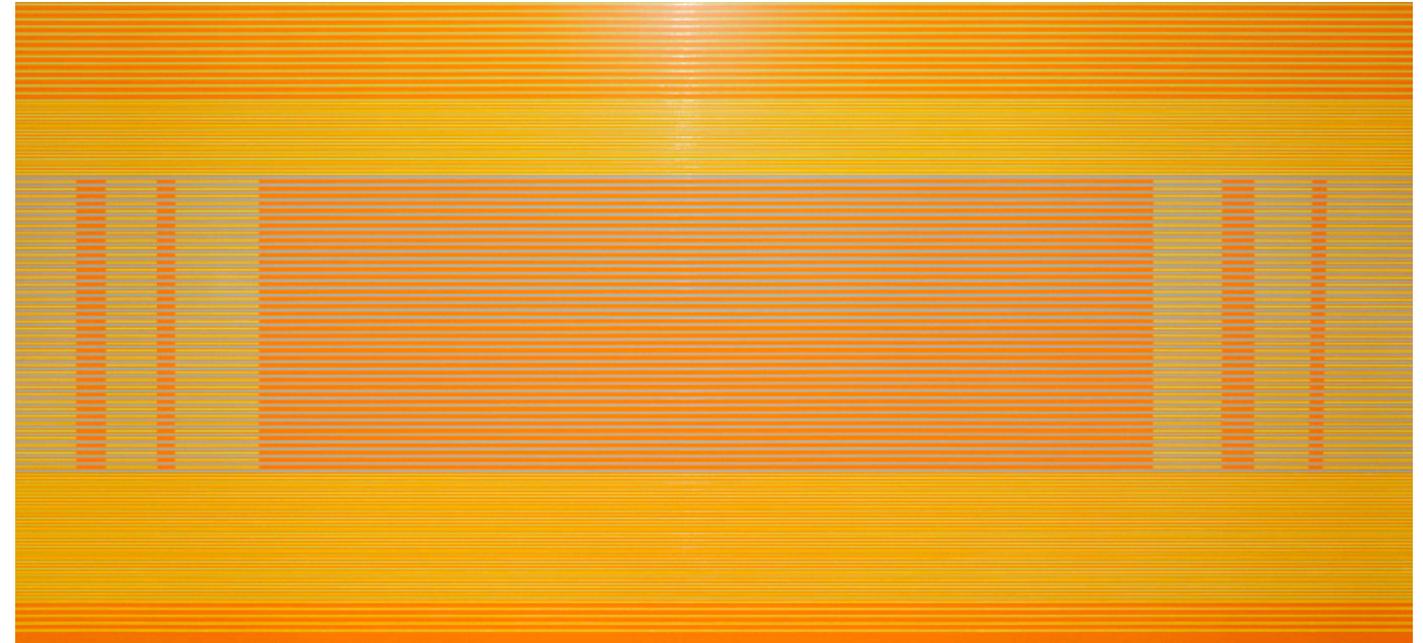
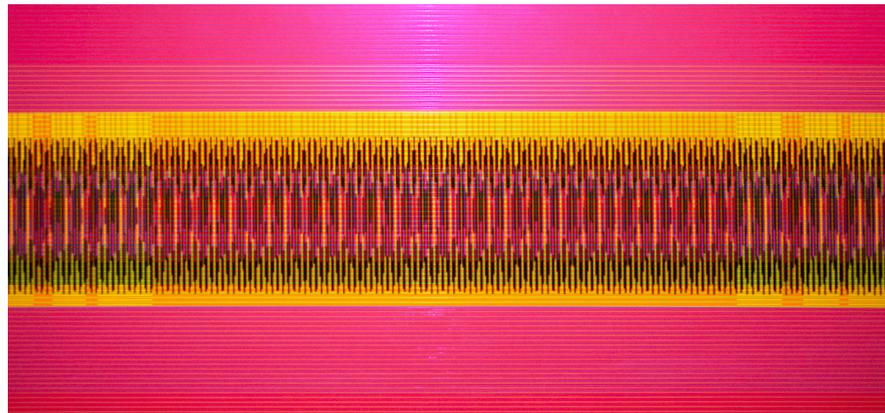
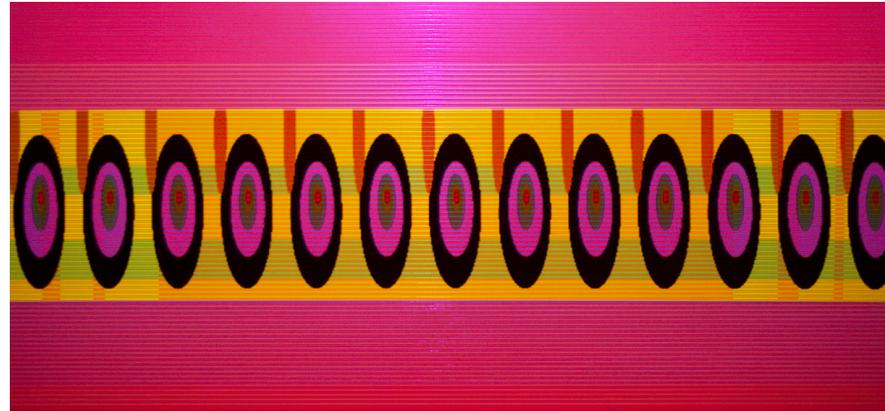


JOHN F. SIMON, JR.
THRESHOLDS, 2007
SOFTWARE, LCD SCREEN, FORMICA,
ACRYLIC PLASTIC, LACQUERED WOOD
44 1/2 X 72 X 6 INCHES

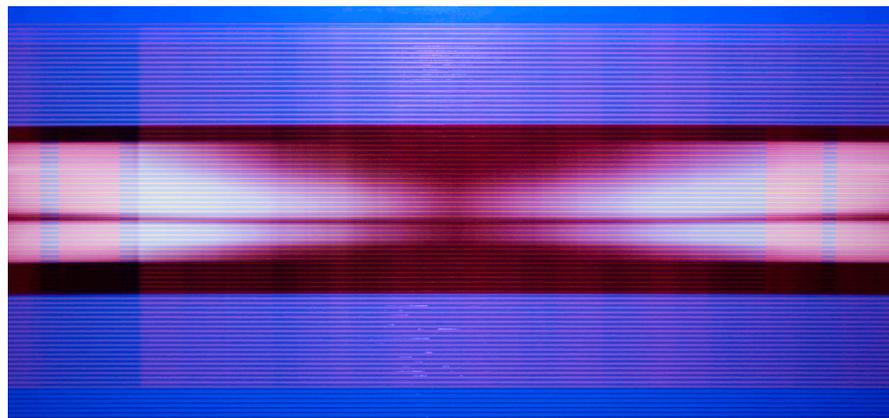
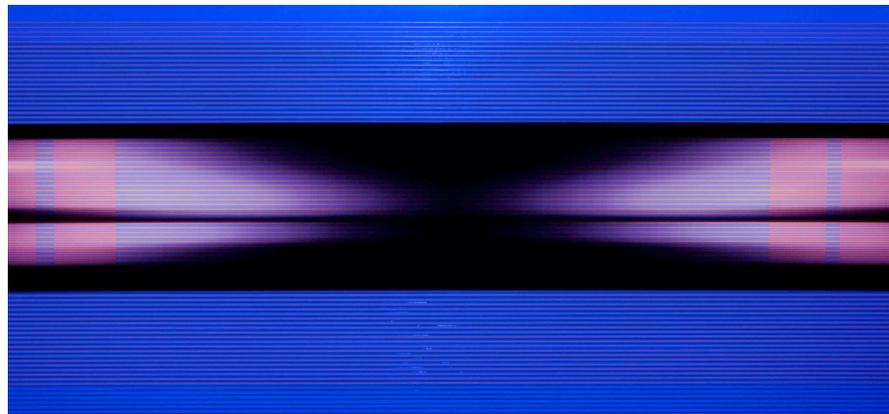




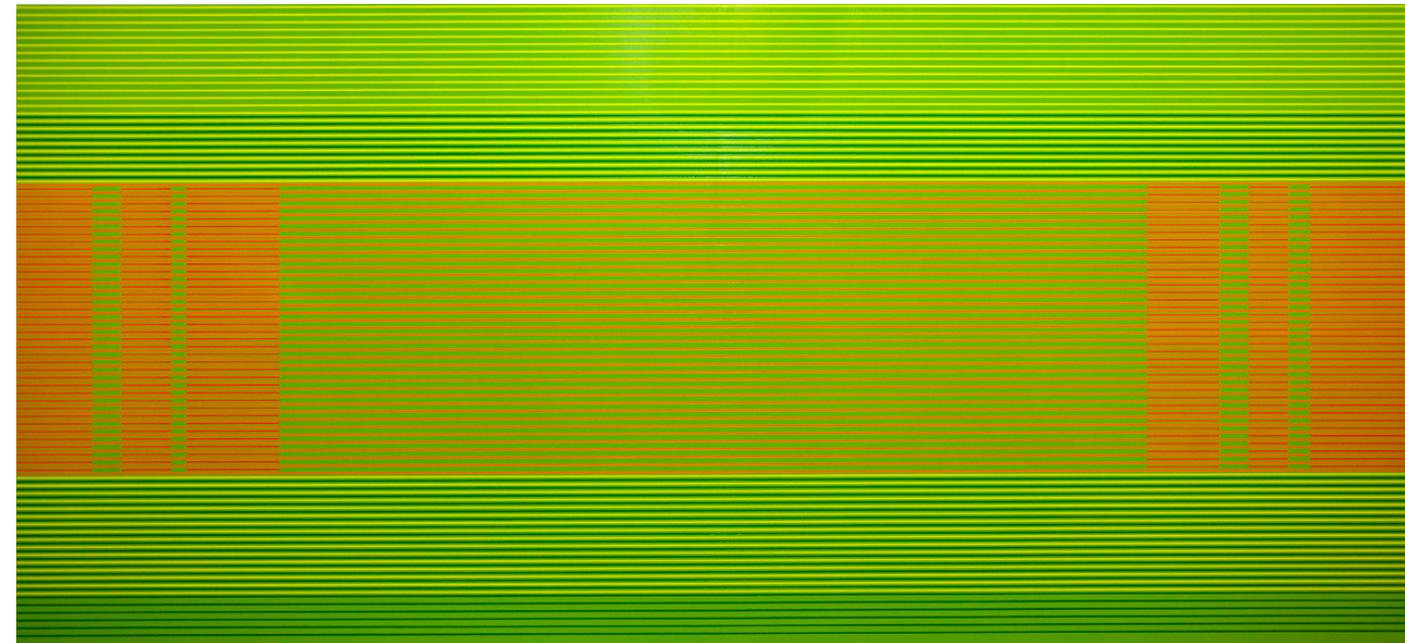
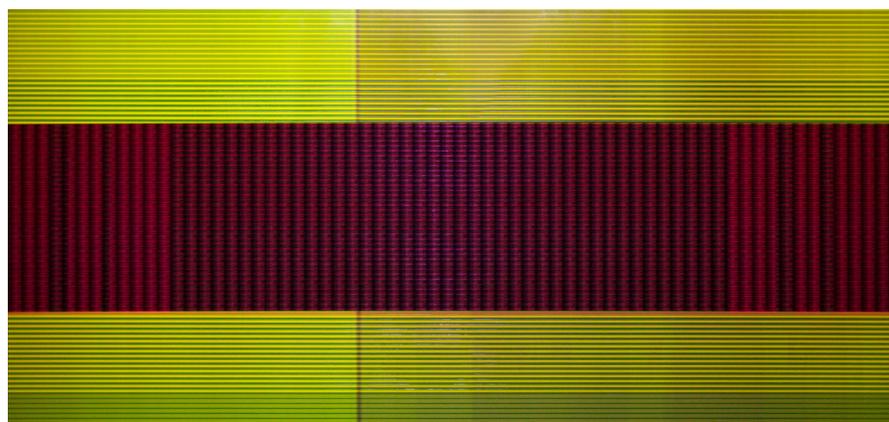
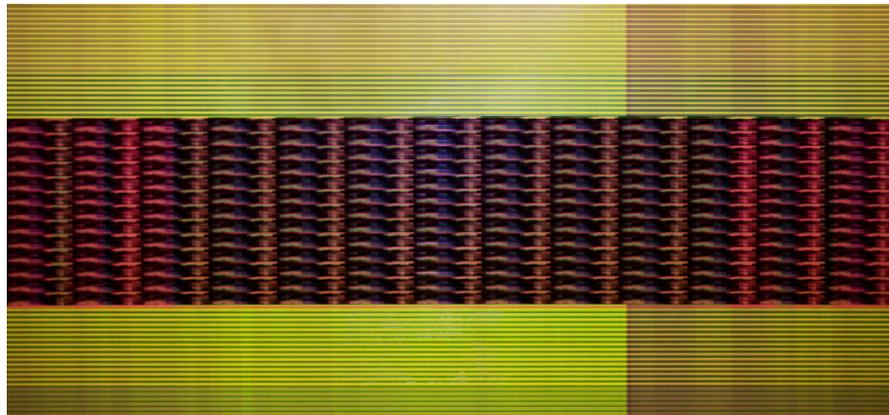
MATTHEW KLUBER
HALF-DAY CLOSING, 2009
ALKYD ON ALUMINUM, CUSTOM SOFTWARE,
COMPUTER, DIGITAL PROJECTION
44 X 96 INCHES
LEFT: WITH PROJECTION (TWO STILL)
RIGHT: WITHOUT PROJECTION
PHOTOS BY JOHN RICHARD



MATTHEW KLUBER
NO PLACE LIKE UTOPIA, 2009
ALKYD ON ALUMINUM, CUSTOM SOFTWARE,
COMPUTER, DIGITAL PROJECTION
44 X 96 INCHES
LEFT: WITH PROJECTION (TWO STILL)
RIGHT: WITHOUT PROJECTION
PHOTOS BY JOHN RICHARD



MATTHEW KLUBER
HUMM, 2009
ALKYD ON ALUMINUM, CUSTOM SOFTWARE,
COMPUTER, DIGITAL PROJECTION
44 X 96 INCHES
LEFT: WITH PROJECTION (TWO STILL)
RIGHT: WITHOUT PROJECTION
PHOTOS BY JOHN RICHARD



MATTHEW KLUBER
DECORA, 2009
ALKYD ON ALUMINUM, CUSTOM SOFTWARE,
COMPUTER, DIGITAL PROJECTION
44 X 96 INCHES
LEFT: WITH PROJECTION (TWO STILL)
RIGHT: WITHOUT PROJECTION
PHOTOS BY JOHN RICHARD

John F. Simon, Jr. is best known for his software and screen based art. His works have appeared in major exhibitions such as the Whitney Museum's Biennial (2000) and Bitstreams (2001). His digital works have been collected by the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Guggenheim Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the University of Iowa Museum of Art among others. In October 2005 the Whitney Museum and Printed Matter published Simon's artist's book and software CD, *Mobility Agents*.

Simon holds an M.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan and a master's degree in Earth and Planetary Sciences from Washington University in St. Louis. He lives in upstate New York with his wife and children.

The artist is especially grateful to Elizabeth Simon, Sandra Gering, Russell Calabrese, Gering & Lopez Gallery, Lesley Wright, Barbara Pollack, Annabel Wimer and Matthew Kluber (for making this show happen and inviting me to be a part of it).

www.numeral.com

Matthew Kluber has exhibited his paintings/projections, films, and drawings at galleries and museums including: the Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, China, FOCUS09/Art Basel, Switzerland; Casoria Contemporary Art Museum, Italy; Micro Museum, Brooklyn; Klein Art Works, Chicago; Rudolph Poissant Gallery, Houston; the Portland Museum of Art, Oregon; the Austin Museum of Art, Texas; the Grand Rapids Art Museum, Michigan; the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art and Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha; the Des Moines Art Center and the University of Iowa Museum of Art.

He holds a B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design and an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa. He lives in Cedar Rapids, Iowa with his wife and children.

The artist would like to thank Dawn, Hadley and Jack Kluber, Alex Dyba, Lesley Wright and the Faulconer Gallery staff, Barbara Pollack, Annabel Wimer and John F. Simon, Jr.

www.matthewkluber.com

