

PRESS RELEASE

HERBERT W. FRANKE – Pioneer of Digital Art

Curator: Georg Bak

September 17 – November 26, 2021

Opening Reception: Friday, September 17, 2:00 – 7:00 pm

Exhibition space: GERBER & STAUFFER FINE ARTS, Langstrasse 151, CH-8004 Zürich
Section B, 3rd floor | <https://www.gerberstauffer.com>

The exhibition at Gerber & Stauffer Fine Arts in Zurich, curated by Digital Art advisor Georg Bak, traces the evolution of Herbert W. Franke's ground-breaking oeuvre from its analogue beginnings in the 1950s to today's NFTs and presents digital homages to Franke by Reeps100 and the digital art collective CryptoWiener. Several important works in the show were kindly contributed by Kate Vass Gallery, Zurich.

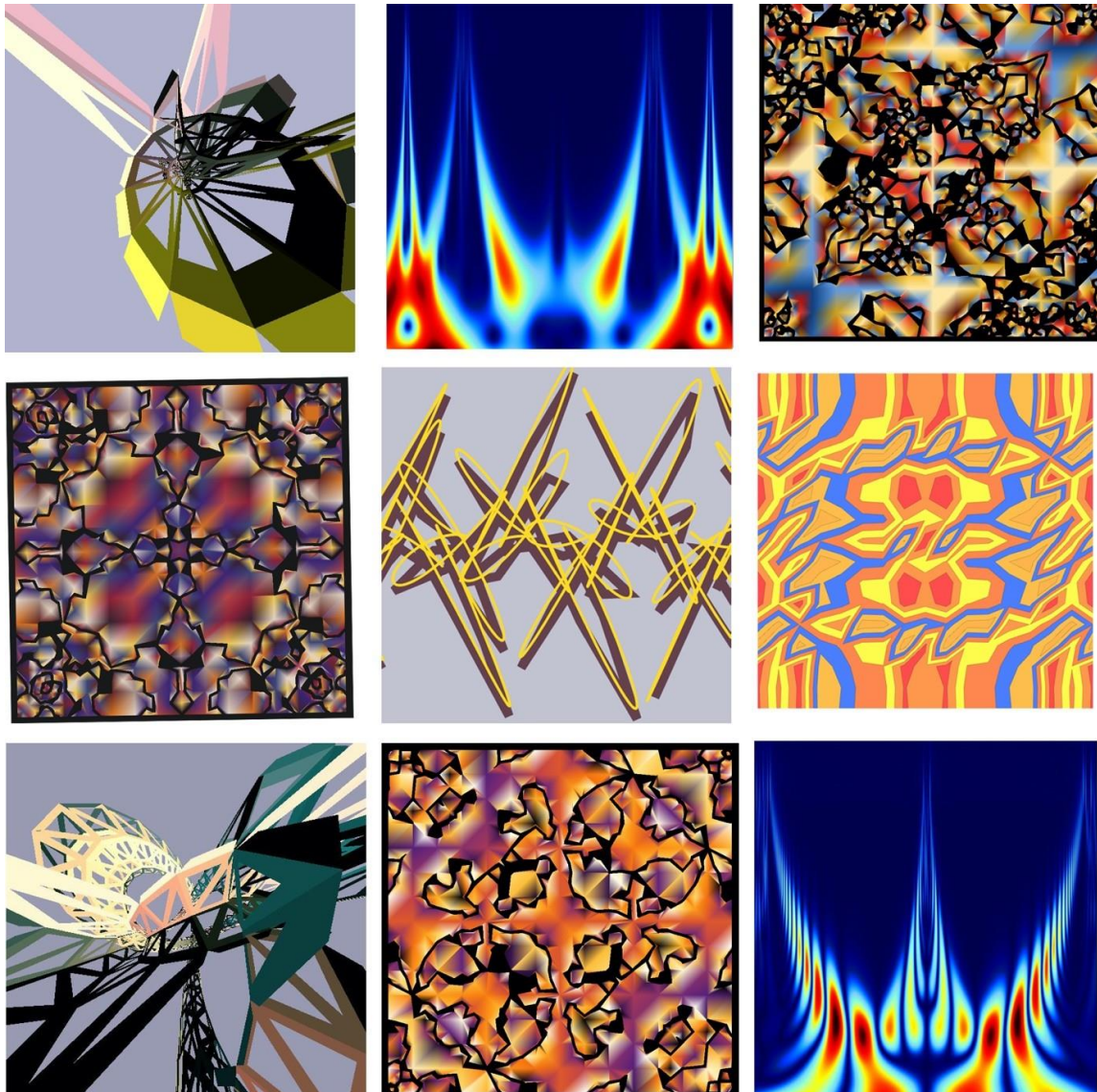
In parallel to the exhibition, 94-year-old Austrian pioneer of digital art, art theorist and science fiction author is launching his first NFT (Non-Fungible Token) project on artblocks.io, a platform for generative on-chain art. The well-known key work "Squares" ("Quadrate"), which was created both as a plotter drawing and as a screen print, serves as the basis for this project. The screen print was shown at the 1970 Venice Biennale in the German pavilion as part of an 8-part series of works and will also be on display in the exhibition in Zurich. In collaboration with the ZKM | Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, which established the Herbert W. Franke Archive in 2017, the algorithm from the 1960s was reconstructed, reinterpreted and adapted for publication as an on-chain NFT for the Ethereum blockchain.

The exhibition includes selected series from the artist's over 60-year oeuvre, starting with analog graphics that were created in the 1950s with a self-made analog computer and an oscillograph as output device and recorded by a moving camera with long exposure. They are among the earliest works of computer art and have made their mark on art history. Particularly rare colored plotter drawings from the DRAKULA series (Drachenkurven überlagert / dragon curves overlaid) and the portrait collage Albert Einstein (1972) round off the artist's early work.



(Herbert W. Franke – Albert Einstein, 1972)

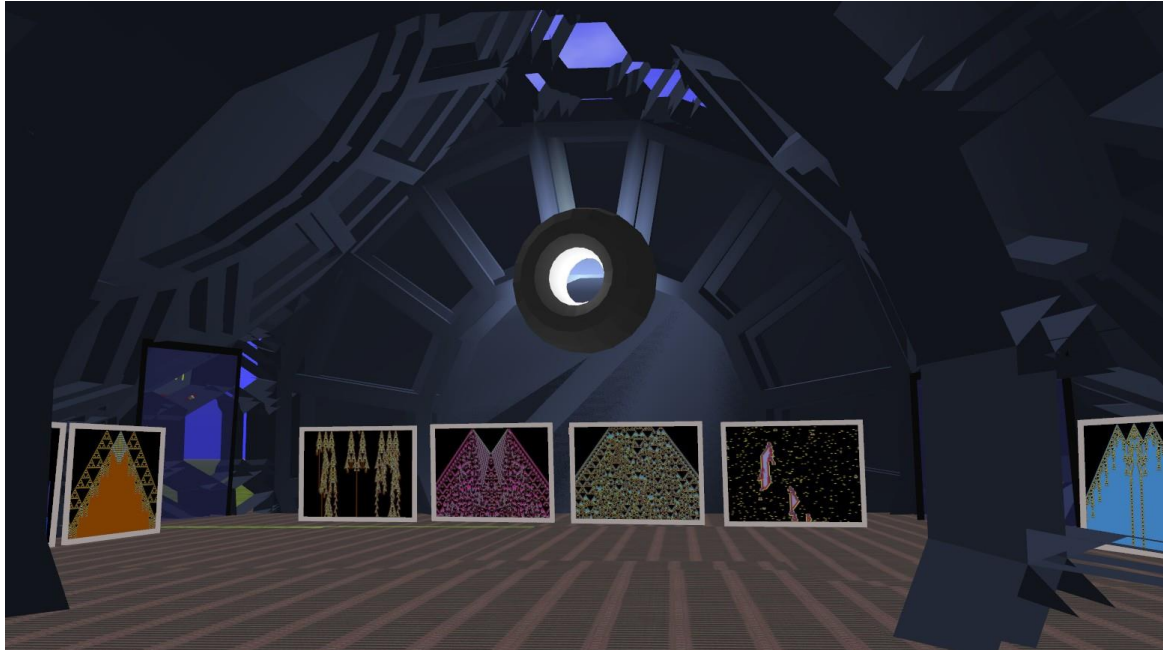
In the 1990s, Franke became aware of the studies and research results of the scientist Stephen Wolfram, who had visualized processes using simple principles of mathematics, so-called cellular automata, and thus tried to establish a deterministic view of the world. Franke countered this theory with his eponymous “Cellular Automata” series, where he reintroduced chance as an important factor and underpinned his own non-deterministic worldview in the non-fiction book “Das P-Prinzip” published in 1995. Wolfram’s influence on Franke’s work can also be seen in the series of works “Mathematica” that began in 1994, named after the programming language of the same name developed by Wolfram. It is the basis for numerous art experiments with structures that can be described mathematically.



(Herbert W. Franke – selection of works from Mathematica series)

In his late work, represented in the show by the series *Fantastic Worlds* (1971-2004) and *Z-Galaxy* (2005-), the artist started exploring virtual space, transposing the science fiction author's inner world into the visual domain. The *Z-Galaxy* is a virtual exhibition with works by Herbert W. Franke - among them his *Cellular Automata* - and other artists on the interactive platform *Active Worlds* that allows the visitor to move about in the exhibition space as an avatar. Franke's cellular automata. The development of *Active Worlds* coincided roughly with market launch of the, at the time, better-known but today all but forgotten game *Second Life*.

Also shown are new works by young artists paying Homage to Herbert W. Franke that were created for the exhibition. Reeps100 (aka Harry Yeff) in partnership with Trung Bao has developed digital transformations of Franke's cybernetic poems into three-dimensional encrypted sound sculptures – the “*Astropoeticon Voice Gems*”.



(Herbert W. Franke – Installation of Cellular Automata at Z-Galaxy)

And the Austrian artist collective CryptoWiener is collaborating on an exhibition with digital recordings of Franke's Z-Galaxy series on the virtual exhibition platform Cryptovoxels, thus creating a virtual reality of virtual reality. These digital works of art are offered for sale as NFT on the elementum.art platform.

Coinciding with the show at Gerbert & Stauffer Fine Arts, Franke has a parallel solo exhibition entitled "Math goes Art" at Kate Vass gallery (<https://www.katevassgalerie.com>). Kate Vass is showing works from the series DRAKULA, Cellular Automata and Lissajous figures both online and physically in her gallery space.

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