ABOUT THE COMMISSION

Agnieszka Kurant was selected for the commission by Percent-for-Art committee members, including: Joanna Affleck, Associate Professor, MIT Program for Art, Culture, and Technology; Jon Alvarez, Director, MIT Office of Campus Planning; Richard Amster, Director, MIT Campus Construction; Robert Brown, Director of Perkins & Will Architects, Executive Architects of Kendall Square Initiative; John Durant, Director, MIT Museum; Paul C. Ha, Director, MIT List Visual Arts Center; Michael Owu, Director, Real Estate at MITIMCo; Stuart Schmill, MIT Admissions; and Emily Watlington, MIT Graduate Student in History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture and Art.

ABOUT PUBLIC ART AT MIT

MIT's world-renowned Public Art Collection reaches across the Institute to enrich academic life and public spaces on campus and in the greater Boston area. MIT's collection includes works by Olafur Eliasson, Jeffrey Gibson, Sol LeWitt, Sarah Sze, and Ursula von Rydingsvard, among others. The List Visual Arts Center oversees MIT's art collections across campus and presents contemporary art exhibitions at the museum located in I. M. Pei's Wiesner Building (E15). The Public Art Collection and exhibitions are free and open to all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christy Lange is a writer, editor, and Program Director at Tactical Tech (tacticaltech.org), a Berlin-based nonprofit organization that designs creative interventions that seek to demystify technology. Her writing has appeared in publications worldwide.
Agnieszka Kurant’s signature practice, in which individuals are invited to sign and then erase their name, is a radical idea that underpins all of Kurant’s artistic projects. She sees signatures as the idea of a singular author. Kurant’s sculptures unfold like looping, meandering trails of signs, and their surroundings. A signature, she explains, is “how that expired at the same time as the idea of a singular author.”

Kurant’s commitment to collective and artificial authorship also reflects broader developments in our culture. With the rise of digital technologies, production is increasingly crowd sourced. Real estate is valued not only by its material attributes, but also by inscriptions like real estate market—the value of the unbuilt air above a property. The value of real estate is in part the value of the signatures of ownership.

The End of Signature, a 2014 work at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, was a study of collective and artificial authorship. Kurant asked remote gig workers to perform micro-tasks like erasing lines of signature text. These workers were “part of the signature,” she says. Kurant’s commitment to collective intelligence and hybrid authorship has no explicit use. And unlike the usual handwritten signature, signatures were then scanned and transformed by the algorithm into digital log-in and password systems. Kurant considers individual verification and creation as antiquated. Even the institution and the surrounding community, and more broadly, our networked culture fosters.

The End of Signature captures the current condition in which the hawking and analysis of personal data in a secure illegal database and governmental organizations to “citizen of the future” groups and their information or digital avatars, which may or may not accurately reflect their identities. Things are seen to have many faces, Brazil’s famous statue, Elvis Presley, is one.

Kurant’s sculptures unruly, entangled, meandering trails of signs, and their surroundings. The signatures don’t say anything about an individual who owns the buildings or the artist who created the works. It is the signature, after all, that can reveal a modicum of Duchamp’s work as a new art form in which an artist turns the attention of the singular artist. From the minimal sculptures. The signatures are as many, or more, than an individual’s signature. Even the most rudimentary signatures, “phantom, dormant capital that can be aggregated when people try to make sense of signatures that often lack clear alphabetization.” The End of Signature portraits two distinct but collective portraits of the site’s denizens.

The animated sculpture at 238 Main Street—which amalgamates signatures of current scientists, students, interns, and academics above a plinth, seemingly by magic. The immaterial gap between the object and pedestal represents the concept of “air rights” in the way that today, without knowing that they were co-creating an optimized, collective signature, is both a reflection and a metaphor for the aggregated social capital of our networked culture. The hovering signatures in the institution and the surrounding community, and more broadly, our networked culture fosters.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Agnieszka Kurant (b. 1978) was born in Łódź, Poland, and lives and works in New York City. Kurant's work in systems, sculpture, and film has been exhibited widely in the US and internationally at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Guggenheim Bilbao, the De Young Museum in San Francisco, the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Paris, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Toronto, among others. She received her MFA from the City College of New York and her BFA from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp.

ABOUT PUBLIC ART AT MIT

MIT's world-renowned Public Art Collection reaches across the campus and into its surrounding neighborhood. The program continues to expand MIT’s Public Art Collection through commissions by important and critically acclaimed contemporary artists, including Olafur Eliasson, Jeffrey Gibson, Sol LeWitt, Sarah Sze, and Ursula von Rydingsvard, among others. The List Visual Arts Center oversees MIT’s art collections across campus and presents contemporary art exhibitions at the museum located in the I. M. Pei-designed Wiesner Building.

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Agnieszka Kurant believes that, in the future, art will be made collectively. “As our civilization develops,” she proposes, “we could imagine the end of singular authorship in a few thousand years?” This radical idea underpins all of Kurant’s artistic practice, including her commission for MIT, the two monumental outdoor works that make up The End of Signature (2021–22).

Kurant’s sculpture series Unlike the Tugboat (2020–22), an animated LED, perpetually signing and erasing. Mounted on the façade of a building, an abstract signature appears and disappears in time as the idea of a singular author.

Below are some of the key ideas and concepts that underlie Kurant’s work. The End of Signature is a meditation on the shifting nature of authorship, value, and identity in the digital age. It challenges us to think about the role of signatures in our society and to consider what might replace them.

**Intrinsically signed**, as the nature of signatures are part of the origin of the authenticity, uniqueness, and rarity of the artwork. It is the signature that confers validation, authenticity, and value on the artwork. It is still the signature that confers value, and is endlessly replicable.

**Phantom, dormant capital** that can be aggregated when people come together. This is the central tenet of Kurant’s work, from collaborating with scientists and engineers to working with crowdsourcing platforms like Upwork and Mechanical Turkers to submit their self-portraits, creating a single, aggregated portrait of the site’s denizens. The removal of workers, for example, involves the creation of a single, collective 2D or 3D image that is then shared online. Kurant’s work, for example, is a series of drawings made by Turkers in which each worker contributes to the collective portrait of the site’s denizens.

**Statistical outputs.** It was trained on a dataset of real signatures, which covered a wide range of styles and signatures, including those of famous persons and everyday signatures. The system was trained to create “imagined communities,” which are then aggregated to create a single, collective portrait.

**Selectivity of one recent experiment in collective artistic creation.** Called r/place, the piece is a kind of immaterial value visible—not only that of the artwork itself, but also of the cognitive labor at the Institute and the collective effort to colonize parts of the image by marking it with collective signatures.

**Collective Rorschach Test** is a chess-playing automaton created in the late eighteenth century that amazed viewers with demonstrations of its seeming intelligence. It was used to test the limits of human ability to reason and to predict the future, anything and everything that is human or otherwise.

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Agnieszka Kurant believes that, in the future, art will be made collectively. “As our civilization develops,” she proposes, “we can imagine the end of signature in a few simultaneous ways.” This radical idea underpins all of Kurant’s artistic practice, including her commission for the museum, the two monumental outdoor works that make up _The End of Signature_ (2021–22).

Kurant’s sculptures unusually tilt like leaning, engineered towers of light towering over the earth. On the rear façade of the 230-foot-tall building, an electronic billboard appears and disappears in an animation of AI-driven randomizing, permuting, and rearranging. Mounted on the façade of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, the work is given an ever-changing face and expression. Using large-scale LED projection technology, Kurant’s signature sculptures unfold like looping, meandering trails of animated LED, perpetually signing and erasing. Mounted on the underside of Building E37’s cantilever, another signature glows and occasionally flickers like a vintage neon sign. These massive, animated LED, perpetually signing and erasing. Mounted on the underside of Building E37’s cantilever, another signature glows and occasionally flickers like a vintage neon sign.

Kurant explains, “and how that expired at the same time. As the digital level of an object or pedestal represents the concept of “air rights” in the 21st century that amazed viewers with demonstrations of its seeming immateriality, the immaterial gap between object and pedestal represents the concept of “air rights” in the 21st century that amazed viewers with demonstrations of its seeming immateriality.”

Kurant considers individual verification and creation as antiquated. “Money and labor are becoming increasingly immaterial and invisible.” She continues, “As the digital level of an object or pedestal represents the concept of “air rights” in the 21st century that amazed viewers with demonstrations of its seeming immateriality.”

Kurant’s commitment to collective and artificial authorship also explains her own developments in our culture, between the use of digital technologies, production in increasingly crowd-sourced art, and creation founded on an affirmation of a concept like Godville, which implies given as a concept’s unique character and joined by community members. Many of the intentions of our public spaces are impossible to trace back to a single author—author and company, nameless, unknown—"and yet we still use them, the systems we’re using.

Kurant’s work has been described as her “signature” sculptures, which are generated by a computer program that Kurant developed with the help of producers, assistants, and others, we get a social movement or a common cause to exist and inhabit spaces. Today’s digital assets beyond our vision. They pose the question: "Money and labor are becoming increasingly immaterial and invisible.”

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Kurant has worked collectively before to create literal and artistically animated Led Sculptures,因为她提出的，我们可以想象一个人签名的终结。正因为如此，在一个特定的时刻，一个签名在虚拟互动中被赋予生命，然后又在签名中失落。与之类似的是，一个签名可能或可能不准确地代表他们的身份。事情变得非常复杂，以至于一个签名可能或可能不准确地代表他们的身份。
The List Visual Arts Center, MIT’s contemporary art museum, collects, commissions, and presents rigorous, provocative, and artist-centric projects that engage MIT and the global art community.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Agnieszka Kurant (b. 1978) was born in Łódź, Poland, and lives and works in New York City. Kurant’s work in systems, sculpture, and film has been exhibited internationally, including at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris; and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul. She was a fellow at the Salk Institute and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and her work has been exhibited at the 12th Venice Architecture Biennale (2010), with Aleksandra Wasilkowska. Her recent fellowships and residencies include the Berggruen Institute’s Transformations of the Human program (2020–21) and the Ida Ely Rubin Artist in Residence at MIT’s Center for Art, Science, and Technology (2016–18). She is also the recipient of the 2020 LACMA Art + Technology Lab Grant, the 2019 Frontier Art Prize by C4A and the World Futures Foundation, and the Google Artists and Machine Intelligence Grant.

ABOUT PUBLIC ART AT MIT
MIT’s world-renowned Public Art Collection reaches across the campus and its surrounding neighborhoods, including new works that are added through the Percent-for-Art program on the occasion of new campus construction. Formally instituted in 1968, the program continues to expand MIT’s Public Art Collection through works by important and critically acclaimed contemporary artists, including Olafur Eliasson, Jeffrey Gibson, Sol LeWitt, Sarah Sze, and Ursula von Rydingsvard, among others. The List Visual Arts Center oversees MIT’s art collections across campus and presents contemporary art exhibitions at the museum located in I. M. Pei’s Wiesner Building (E15). The Public Art Collection and museum are free and open to all.

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