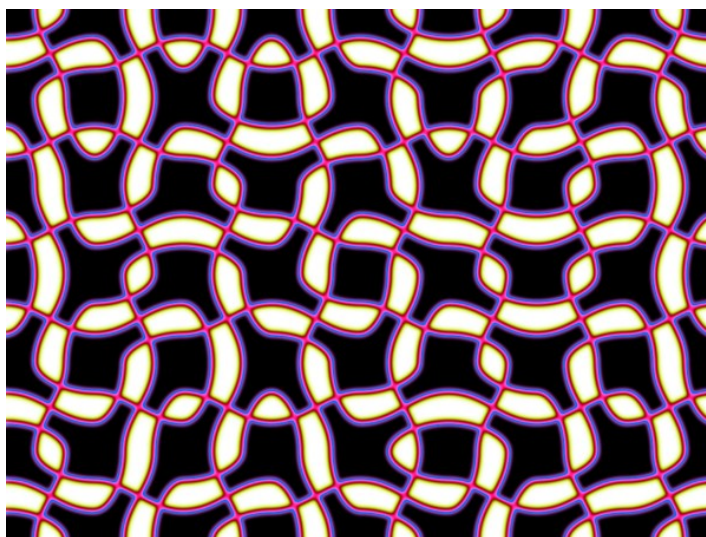


# The Washington Post

## Artists, too, might someday be replaced by machines



Paul Brown, *Gymnasts*, 1997, digital print on view in "Paul Brown: Process, Chance, and Serendipity: Art That Makes Itself," at the National Academy of Sciences. Brown began replacing artistic invention with code 50 years ago.

Review by Mark Jenkins, July 6, 2018

As engineers devise machines to replace traditional human labor, the future might seem to belong to those people termed, uncreatively, "creatives." But computers are coming for their vocations, too, and have been for decades. Paul Brown began ceding artistic invention to code 50 years ago, after seeing a 1968 exhibition titled "Cybernetic Serendipity" at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts. The British artist-scientist's retrospective at the National Academy of Sciences is titled, a bit ominously, "Process, Chance, and Serendipity: Art That Makes Itself."

The earlier of the 10 works are black-and-white drawings of elaborate but static geometric patterns generated by a plotter run by punch cards. Later, Brown (who now collaborates with his son, Daniel) was able to add color, curves, simulated depth and, finally, motion. "Dragon," from 2012, expands to video to

yield a kinetic pixel painting that's forever drawing and redrawing itself.

Brown has designed for specific purposes, including light shows for Pink Floyd. But he stresses that he makes autonomous software with no specific intended result, other than simply to generate imagery. The auteurs of these complex artworks, which suggest biomorphic, art deco and ancient Celtic motifs, are computer programs. They are, in a word, creative.



R. Luke DuBois, *A More Perfect Union: USA, No. 4*, 2011/2017, installation view, four inkjet prints on canvas. DuBois' show, "Love in the Time of Data," is also at the National Academy of Sciences.

Upstairs in the same building, R. Luke DuBois's "Love in the Time of Data" is a more humorous variety of process-oriented art. DuBois, who's best known as a conceptual composer, joined 21 online dating sites so he could find the most popular mating-game word in cities and towns across the United States. (The analysis surveyed more than 19 million Americans who claim to be single, and found 20,000 unique words.) He placed each word on a giant map at the place it's used more frequently than anywhere else in the country.

## IF YOU GO

**Paul Brown: Process, Chance, and Serendipity: Art That Makes Itself** is on view through July 15  
National Academy of Sciences; 2101 Constitution Ave. NW. 202-334-2415. [cpnas.org/exhibitions](http://cpnas.org/exhibitions).

**R. Luke DuBois: Love in the Time of Data** is on view through August 15  
National Academy of Sciences; 2101 Constitution Ave. NW. 202-334-2415. [cpnas.org/exhibitions](http://cpnas.org/exhibitions).  
*Admission: Free. Open to the public; registration and photo ID required.*