



# SECRETS

Exhibition catalogue of 12 works by Sleepr



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Presented by SCENE

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Lauren McMahon, Sleepr

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*For the Acacia.*

*I will sing your song,  
in awe and praise,  
gold of flower,  
the secret keeper.*



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Goldsmith's Bouquet, from *Newes Lauberbuechlein*,  
Peter Aubry II (German, 1610-1666)

# The boy and the plant

Lauren McMahon

On a night like any other, though a little different than before. In his bed, a little boy lay half asleep, when a plant knocked at his door.

Half asleep, is a very ordinary place for little boys to be. Half here, half there, not quite anywhere really, but somewhere in-between.

Again, came a knock.

The little boy thought *come in, come in!* To whomever the knock at his door might have been.

Before him, a plant. *A plant?* "A plant," said the boy. It felt like meeting himself at the door, or someone, or something he'd met once before.

He knew this was no ordinary plant.

"Who are you? " The boy half questioned, unsure why he would. The plant said nothing of course, as plants often should.

This plant didn't have to answer to speak. Magic never makes a sound. You have to be still to find it, you have to listen to see.

And the plant stayed still.

As if it were here to share a secret. As if it were calling his name, or offering the little boy a chance to see why it came.

Then the invocation.

Before him, a doorway. One breath, two breaths, three. Humming somethings, through the doorway, a world. Twisting and bending, wanting to be seen.

He blinked once and the world rushed through. The door was wide open now.

Terrified, the boy turned to the plant. "Why am I here? What have you done? Where am I now? What has begun?"

Then the plant spoke, as plants often should.

*“Perplexity patterns await you,  
mystery etched into line,  
endlessness time in a moment,  
endlessness moments in time.*

*Geometry folds on itself here,  
this magic knows no law of land,  
secrets reveal their source here,  
surrender and offer your hand.*

*This is a something I’ll give you,  
this is how magic is done,  
you’ve been here a million times,  
lifetimes and lifetimes in one.”*

And that's when it hit him, it all became real, and he knew. *This* place was different. This place was unreal. This place was a place of perfect surreal.

This *was* a something.

The boy, now a sleeper in the dream of a dream. Somethings and everythings happening at once. Unfolding, unscrambling, untangling before him, right here, in this dream of a dream.

This was a something, an infinite something he'd not seen before.  
Except now he had, and the boy was in awe.

And like that, the world fell back together. Reforming, restoring, realigning before him.  
One breath, two breaths, three.

Falling back into his bed again, he knew, *The world should know too.*

*But how? I don't know how to show them. I don't know how they'll see. I don't know how to show them when I am only me.*

The plant spoke again,

*“What is it you fear when it’s all but a dream?  
One isn’t alone in this dream of a dream.  
This door is now closing, but you know where to find me,  
I am the keeper of secrets: One breath, two breaths, three.”*

The little boy said nothing at all, as little boys often do. For he didn’t have to answer to know, but it clicked and knew what he knew. It clicked, and he knew what to do.

With eyes that were clear, with eyes that were new. With eyes that now knew what eyes ought to do.

“You are the sleeper in the dream of a dream” the plant whispered, tugging and pulling the thread of the dream.

Exposing a secret. Unraveling the seam.







*If you stare long enough into the abyss,  
the abyss stares back at you.*

*- Nietzsche*

# Mapping unseen worlds

About the artist



*Sleepr, (2023), Art Basel Miami. Photo by Chris Hershman.*

Sleepr (b. 1988, Australia) is an anonymous artist who documents the aesthetics of the visionary worlds brought on by magic plants. His identity has not been revealed, as his practice essentially requires him to become a conduit to accurately document these visionary worlds. The anonymity is also a protective measure due to the risks associated with this type of research. The artworks produced over the past 15 years document an inner and private point-of-view few are privy to see.

Sleepr has developed a signature style that combines realism and abstraction together to trigger cognitive processing experiences that match his own. The works dance a delicate relationship between the known and unknown, like stacks of spinning plates that somehow among the chaos, open a portal to somewhere new. Immediately engaging - but rich in theory - the works truly are multidimensional artifacts that work both for public viewing and deep, private contemplation.

Sleepr is widely regarded for his exceptional technical skills across a range of styles - which is credited to his long history of lecturing and research at universities, and programming software to develop advanced digital art techniques. His works have sold at *Sotheby's*, exhibited internationally in New York, Milan, London, been accepted into top digital art platforms such as *SuperRare* has, and recently had an artist residency at *Art Basel Miami*. He is represented by *Scene*, located in London.

Behind the mask, Sleepr's professional career includes being a senior academic for the past 15 years in design and digital creative arts at a variety of Universities in Aus-

tralia, and has mentored thousands of students, though none of them know it. He has a Bachelor, Masters and partially completed a PhD on *innovative methodologies to document complex hallucinations caused by DMT*, and has collaborated with digital arts industry leaders on a number of advanced research projects including sculptural work, laser installations and more.

The story behind Sleepr's work is a fascinating climb down the rabbit hole of art, science, tech, pharmacology, plants, alchemy, neuroscience, culture and magic - an exploration of the infinite labyrinth that is the mind. The artifacts brought back are more than just personal expressions - they contain clues of an invisible infrastructure that interconnects all things. For Sleepr, the imagination is a limited place of fiction and fantasy, while visions are qualitatively different and instead truthfully reveal hidden layers of reality. Just when you think you've understood the artist and his work, more layers reveal themselves.

*Secrets* is Sleepr's first solo exhibition; a collection of twelve new works created specifically for large scale print format. Exhibiting in Soho, London, during the month of May, the show will include an opening night extravaganza, along with a performance art piece, an installation work and more. The works traverse along the history of time and place, revealing different aspects of the secret world in both modern and old times, in both natural and suburban spaces. The *Secrets* that Sleepr illuminates, pervade all areas of life and are an ever present constant. They suggest that perhaps these secrets are more truthful than what we call reality.



*I sang and it didn't come.  
I kept singing.  
I called it and it didn't come.  
I kept singing. I called. I whistled.  
I sang and it didn't come.  
I kept singing.  
I sang and*

*Oh!*

*- Dale Pendell*





## ***The Underworld***

*Work i*

2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

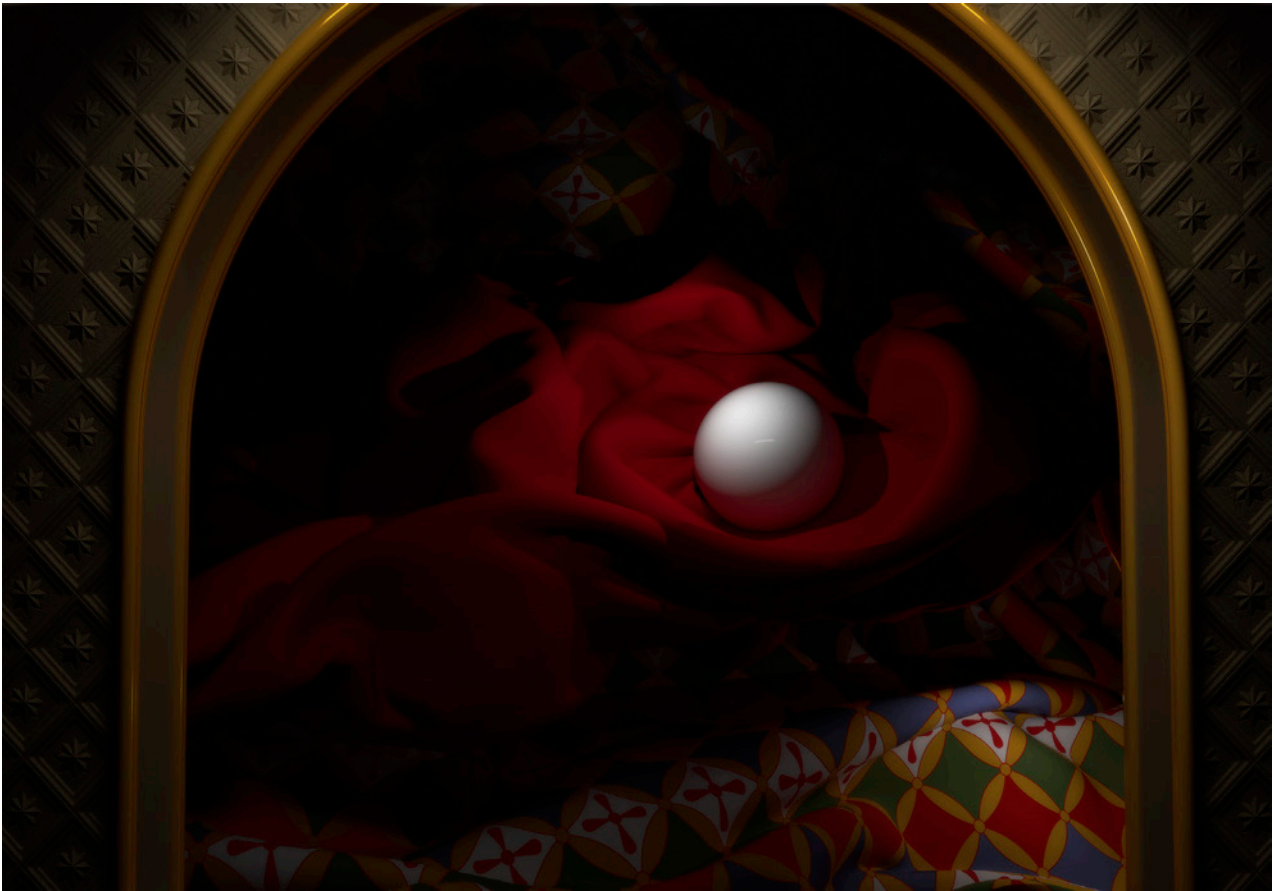
*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

Set within a sandstone temple are elements of a mixed heritage, indicating a more universal place and time. The columns, adorned with a flower-like geometric pattern, guard a tessellated marble floor, creating a separate functional space with seating to watch. The stone columns at the extreme left and right indicate an entrance into the space being witnessed. Worn steps to the left indicate another level, while the piercing blue skylight to the right both lights and offsets the warm-toned stone materials that cover all surfaces. The looming central figure is a golden-ringed portal with a pitch-black surface, held up by nothing and floating effortlessly. Deep in this surface is the faintest form—perhaps a ghostly figure or another space entirely. The portal feels like a secret we aren't privy to. The trail of clues leading to the portal expand the narrative further—sandals just worn and slipped off to the side, a treasure box with its lid opened. The wicker baskets and wooden carry-holder suggest a lived-in context, but the eye is drawn instead deep into the shadows, to the only colored forms in the entire piece—a brightly striped wand and a spinning top. Both items feel “out of place” and as such, indicate that they are perhaps recovered artifacts, smuggled back by one who has entered the portal and is now navigating the “underworld.”









## ***The Magician's Chest***

*Work ii*

2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

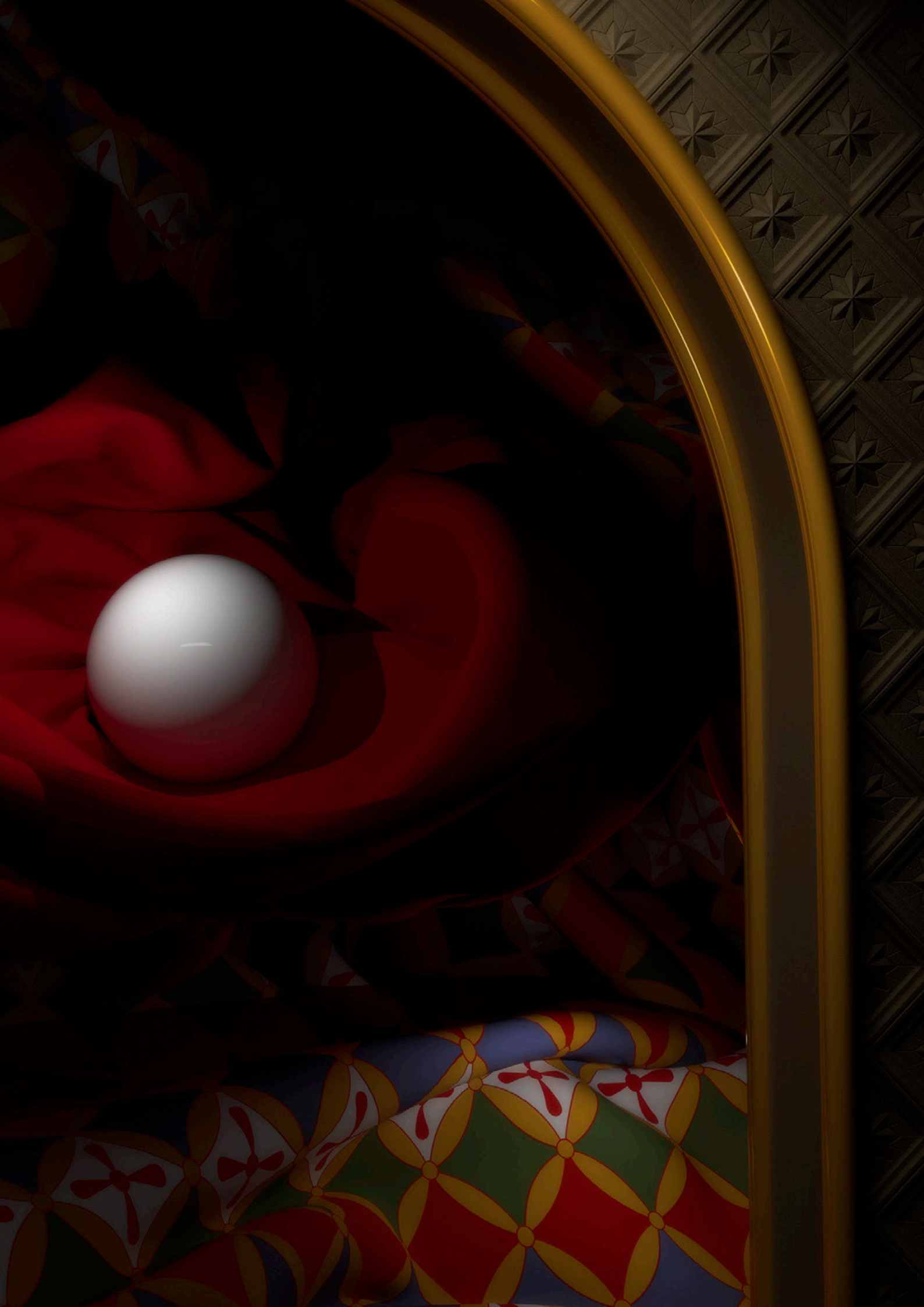
We stand as the viewer before a gold-trimmed archway that frames a hidden room filled with treasure. The external walls of the room are covered in star-embossed geometric patterns in a sandstone finish. The work is created using many renaissance techniques in painting, such as deep black shadows, decadent fabrics and their folds, soft photorealism, and illuminative compositions that use impossible light sources to communicate composition hierarchy. The room before us houses two types of fabric: a red velvet and a geometric pattern. The illuminated focal point of the work is the white polished sphere.

The sphere is the ultimate symbol of perfection, with its infinite degrees of symmetry in all directions. The artist refers to this as “...a point towards hypersymmetry, or an emergence of symmetry in higher dimensions.” White represents the totality of all colors combined. This union of spatial and color perfection is a metaphorical pearl that is encased by the red velvet cloak of the magicians and alchemists who are on the occult, or mystical, path of knowledge. The geometric patterns on the fabric above and below are a reference to the psychedelic states seen by those on the poison path of uncovering nature's secrets. The Magician's Chest can be seen as more of a symbolic map of the notes the mages have made to remind themselves than a depiction of a real trove of treasure.











## ***Plant Spirits***

*Work iii*

2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

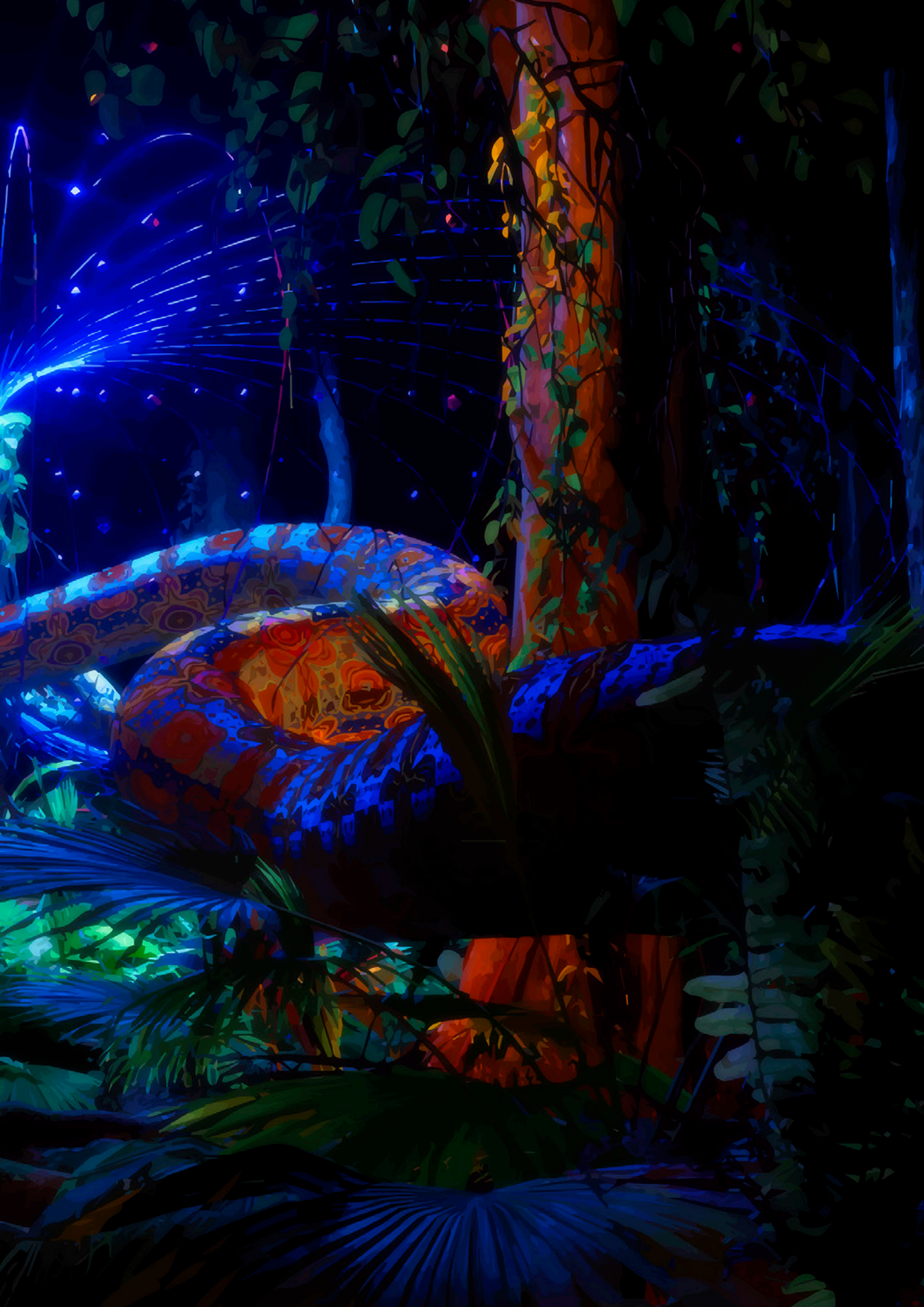
*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

The scene is a dense jungle with abundant and lush flora. In the center of the work is a floating plant, perhaps *Psychotria viridis*, which is rich in DMT compounds and found in Peru. Emanating from the plant is a spiral, toroidal structure made of glowing blue wisps of light. The artist references these structures as “information holograms” that contain “cosmic knowledge” about spirituality, life, geometry, plants, and space-time itself, which are locked inside specific plants and seen only when making contact with the plant’s spirit through visions. Thick boa constrictors have gold and blue geometric patterns embroidered in a satin-style directly into their skin. They wrap and wind their way through the jungle and around the plants. Golden light radiates from the snakes, gently illuminating some of the surrounding old-growth trees, vines, ferns, and palms.













## ***The Bedroom Explorer***

*Work iv*

2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

In this work, the artist documents a third-person perspective of a private out-of-body experience. The interior space is a minimally decorated boy's bedroom with periwinkle-blue walls and a study desk to the side. A sneaker-clad boy levitates above the bed with what appears to be his ghostly spirit floating above him. The vortex of light and pattern on the ceiling has a few consistent motifs indicating the psychedelic state — repetitive, geometric “cirque” patterns and sinusoidal striped tentacles following existing curved lines. The large drum dominating the ceiling appears to be the entrance to the tunnel so often mentioned in psychedelic reports. The palette is a stark yellow and boyish blue. The rich sporadic black shadows contrast strongly with well-lit white windows emanating light into the room. The artwork on the back wall is a reference to another work of the artist's: *Under the Sea* (2001), hinting at a larger interconnected Sleepr world.









## ***The Harmala Mysteries***

*Work v*

2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

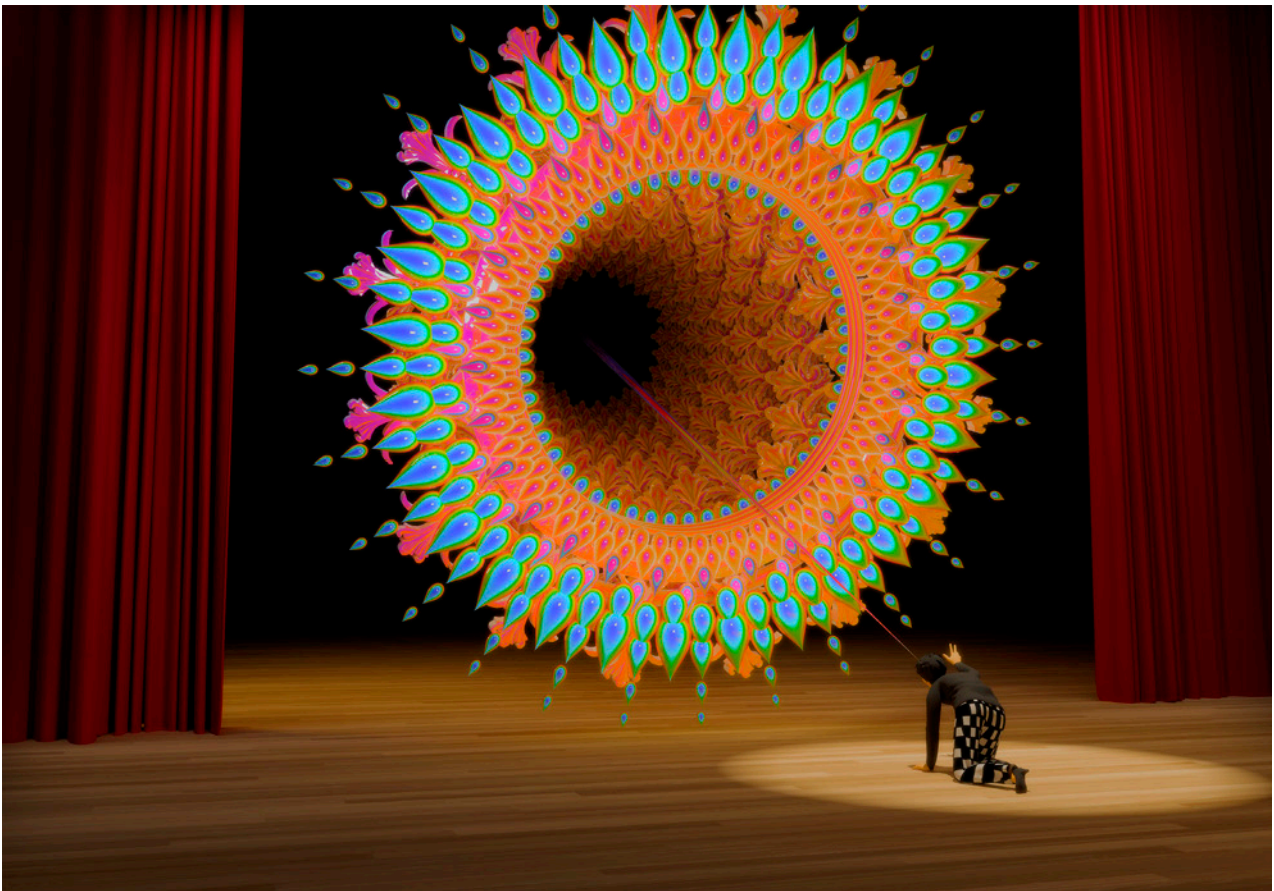
The protagonist sits in a central foyer on a traditional Persian hand-woven rug, contemplating options of where to go from there, suggesting that there are even more possibilities behind the seated figure. We see three large corridors with nested façade archways of square, gothic, and trefoil, implying that the cultural placement of the work shifts away from a known place and time and towards an unknown and more universal dimension. The walls of each corridor are covered in an embossed geometric pattern comprising concentric shapes inside circles of purple, red, green, and yellow, stacked in alternating checkered placement. The light illuminates only the entrance, each corridor fading to pitch black. The illumination of only the doorway is, as the artist refers to the piece, “... *self-referentially symbolic of the psychedelic experience. Broadly, any work on this subject can only illuminate the doorway and no further, and so this is a fitting symbol for the explorer to see.*” It is unclear who the protagonist explorer is—perhaps the artist, or the viewer, or all of us exploring the unknown. The undulating wave distortion implies that it is now a magic carpet, carrying the passenger through these geometric tunnels.

Curiously, the title of the work is *The Harmala Mysteries*, a clear reference to the species of plant *Peganum harmala*, also known as Syrian rue, which grows wild in Middle Eastern regions and has a variety of uses, including one as an extract for a red dye used in fabrics and carpets. The plant is also a hallucinogen, as the alkaloids contained in the seeds of some varieties of the plant are monoamine oxidase inhibitors (harmine, harmaline). *Peganum harmala* seeds have been used as a substitute for the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine in ayahuasca analogs, as they enable oral consumption of DMT; many reports describe visionary effects at larger doses.











## ***The Surrender***

*Work vi*

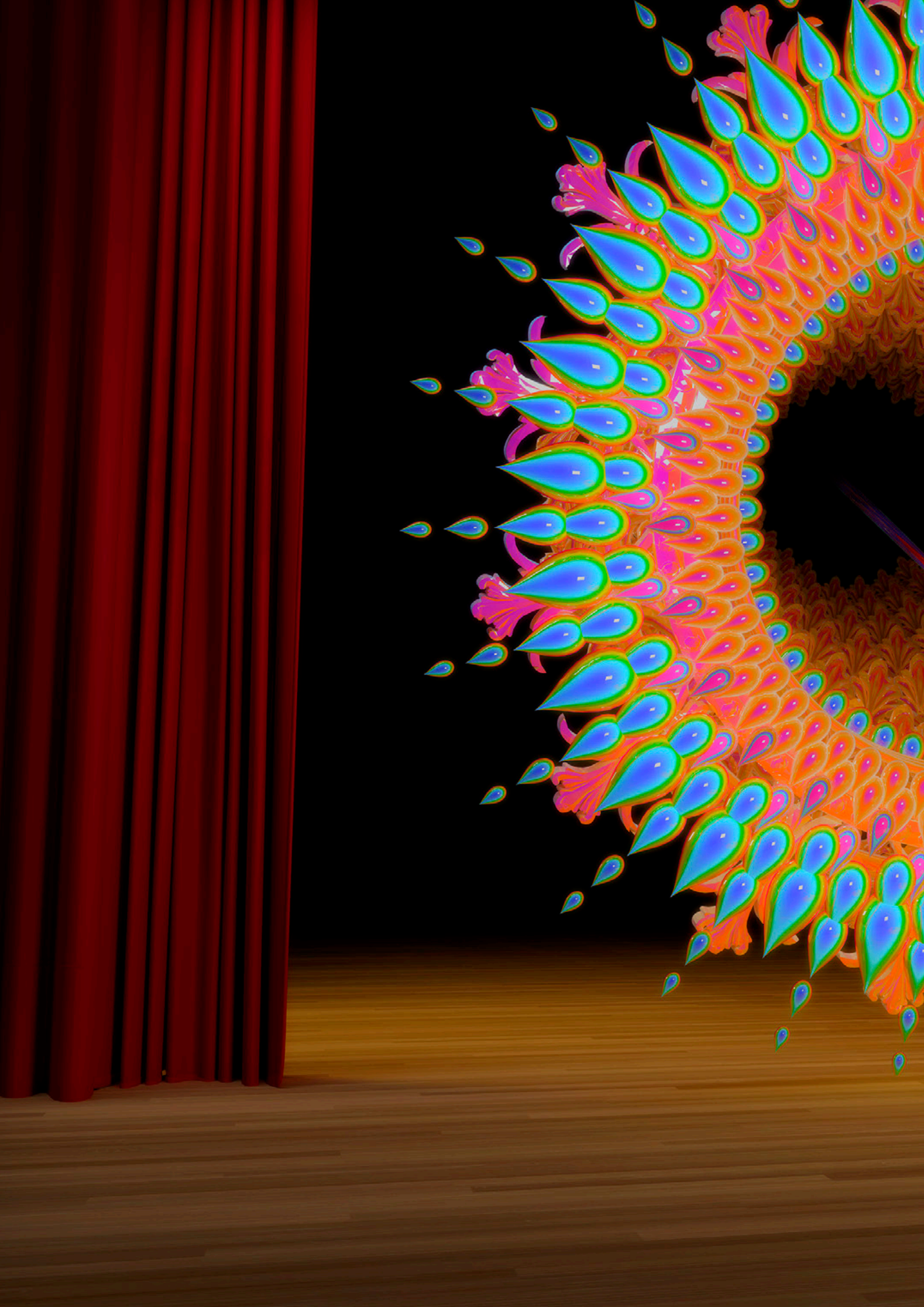
2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

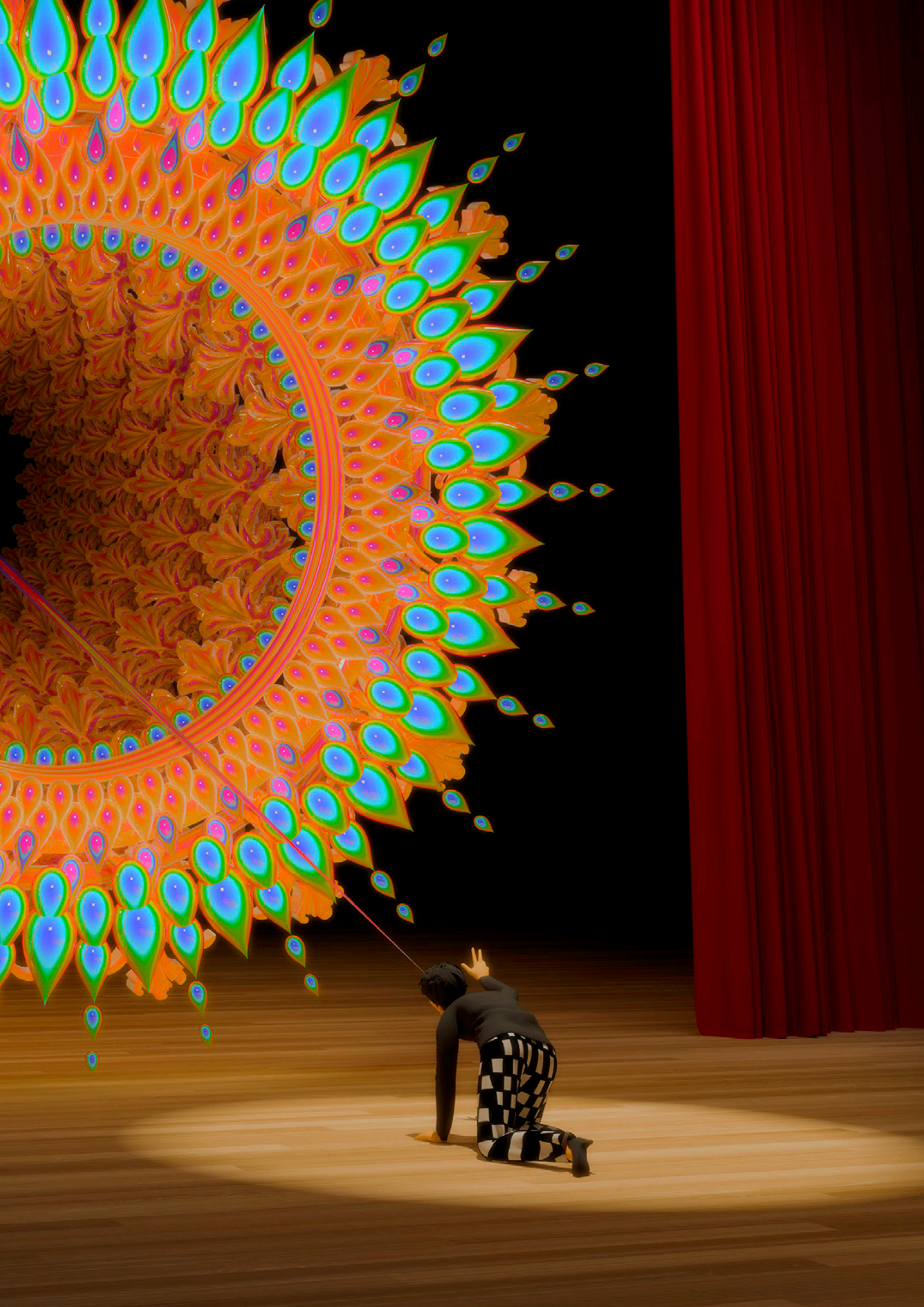
*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

This work captures a private moment between man and the nature of the transcendental. Situated on a symbolic stage draped in red velvet theater curtains, the figure, who is cast in spotlight, has turned his back to the unseen audience and has instead turned his attention “behind the curtain.” The tunnel that levitates before him is covered in a dazzling array of luminescent rainbow teardrop-shaped pearls in an assortment of symmetrical radial patterns. The colors and patterns move and change with their position in the tunnel, beginning in teals and turquoise before shifting to fire-orange and yellow. The strikingly bright teal is reminiscent of peacock feathers with its emboldened display of beauty, where the level of brightness for green-blue is reserved among all other colors in the world. The title of the work certainly refers to the figure who is now kneeling before this cosmic portal, with head lowered and hand raised, in a moment of true subordination.

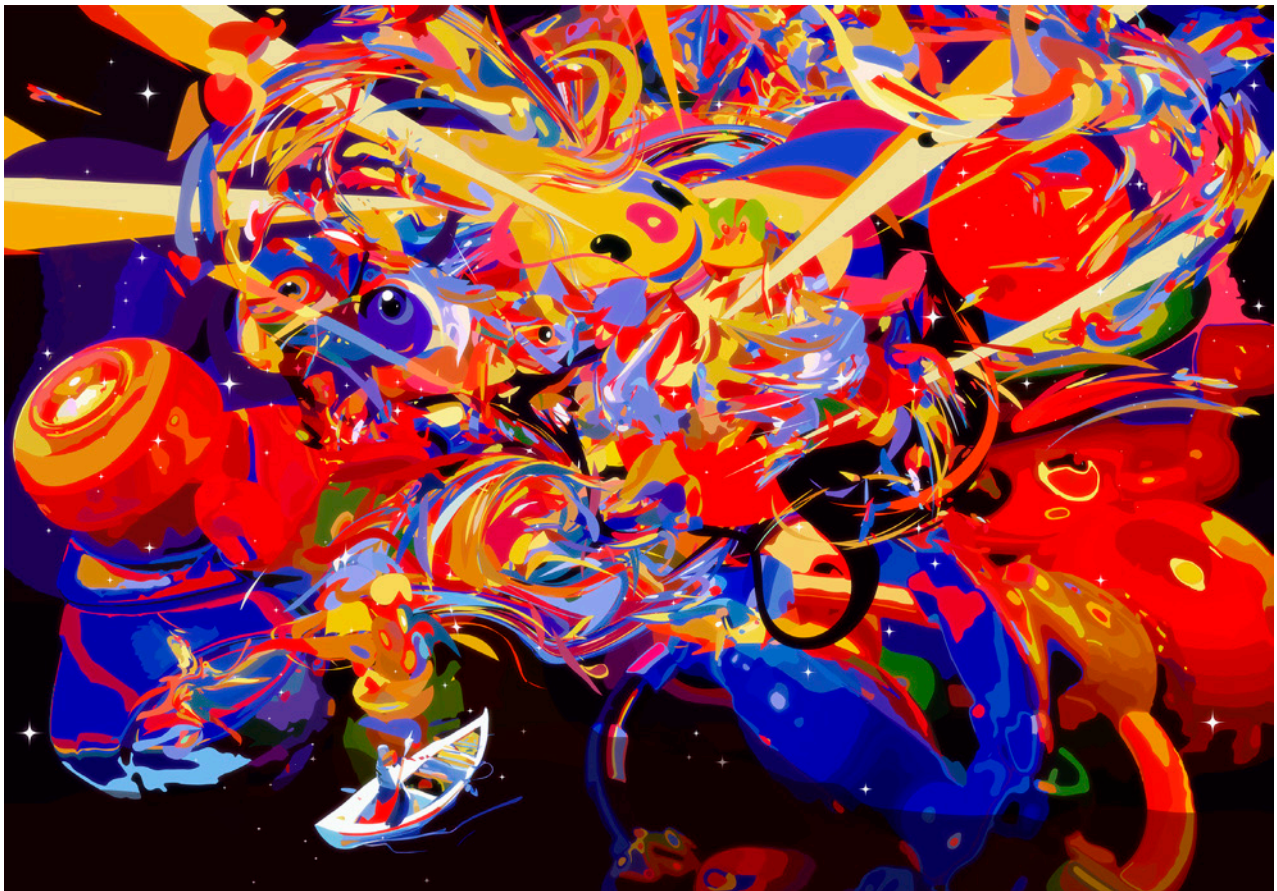
A ray of awareness from the third eye of the figure is cast into the depths of blackness, as they peer into and beyond all known human and spiritual limits. In this way, the tunnel itself and its dazzling beauty are simply peripheral entranceway details, ready to collapse behind the awareness point. The title is not just a reference to incomprehensible beauty but to the emergence of this phenomenon itself. The artist mentions when describing this work, “*Most people don’t get to actually experience rapture and ecstasy—instead it’s relegated to others to do so and tell the tale. Many of us become bystanders trapped in the middle of the bell curve, never getting the chance to experience real highs and lows. But when we do, when we go up to the altar and meet the phenomena beyond our limits, there is no other option than to surrender to it. There are no atheists in foxholes.*”











## ***The Source Of Novelty***

*Work vii*

2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

The work captures vibrant and surreal toy-like figures morphing and warping in a cacophony of brightly colored globules. Trails of abstracted forms and ribbons swirl in currents around the larger sculptural elements, creating a flowing and thriving ecosystem of invisible and visible forms. Piercing rays of light emanate from the various points in the central sun-like mass of bright yellow-white light, perhaps indicating some inner explosion, while thousands of glowing stars are scattered across the sky and the surfaces of the figures. Some figures are clearer than others—a brightly smiling face with a pink nose, the mouth opening of a striking blue whale, a red circle, disembodied eyes, inky black spirits—the figures are childlike, playful, and innocent. The foreground contains a transparent black surface indicating a water line, with half-submerged figures underneath. In the center foreground is a figure on a rowboat, gently bobbing, drifting away from the volcanic eruption of ideation. Even the boat is littered with incomplete forms, half-truths, scattered shapes; it is a miniature symbol of the larger space it is in, ever transforming itself into newer versions whilst retaining its essence among the chaos.

This continuous formation and reformation of new ideas is what the artist declares as *"...the source of novelty. The peak cognitive process where all new things come from: imagination, innovation, invention, dreams, problem-solving, creativity—they are [all parts of] the same process that gives birth to the new. Navigating and documenting this process unlocks all future ideas."* The piece captures the infinite power and might of the childlike dream state where imagination is real.













## ***Life, Death and Rebirth***

*Work viii*

2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

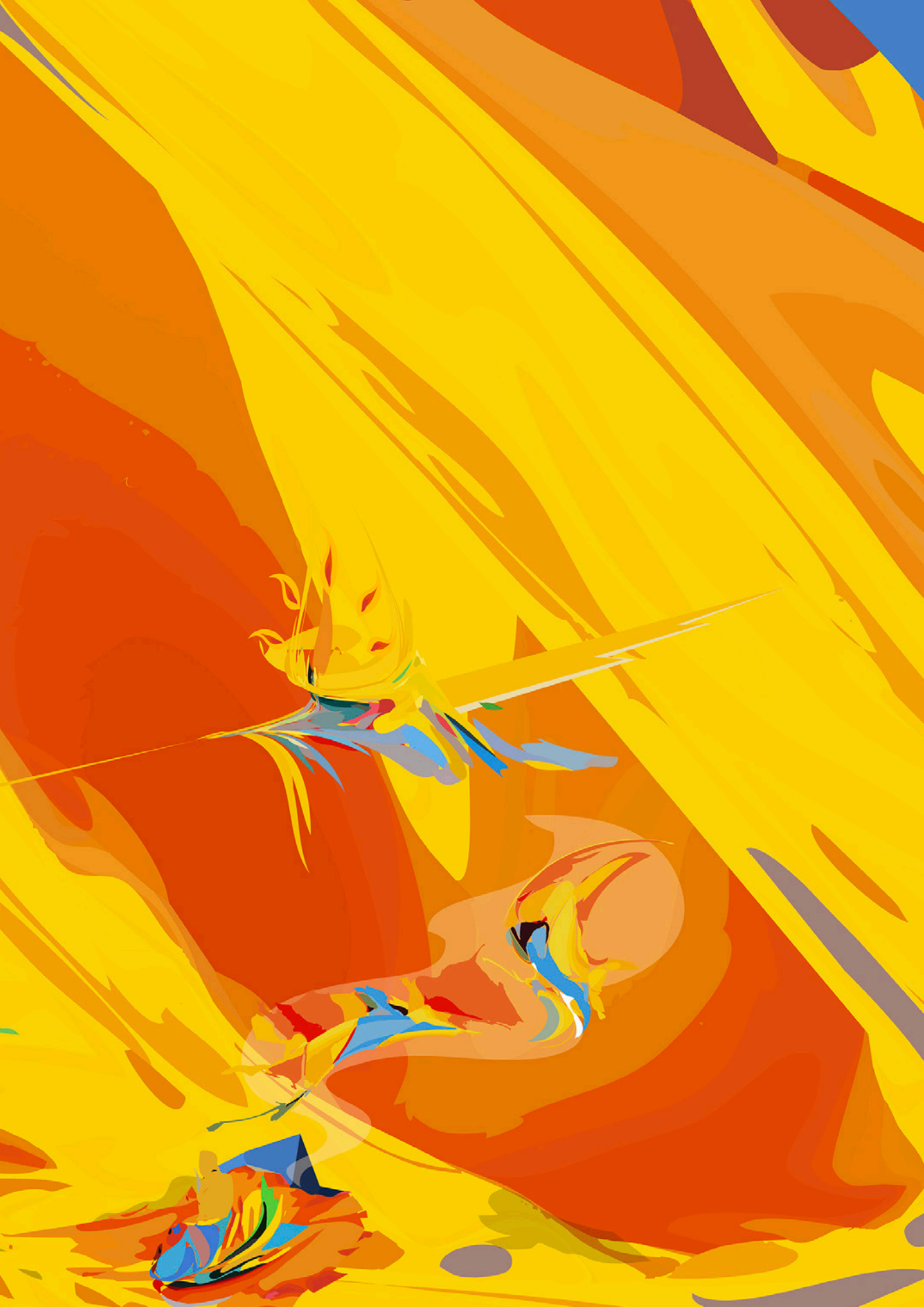
*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

This brightly lit scenic work is situated in the sand dunes of a golden-yellow desert with steep sloped faces revealing emerging crevices and openings. The action shot captures multiple spirit-like forms engaged in a meeting or confrontation. Each being is a composite of loose forms and accentuated features: draping tailfeathers, swirling ribbon-esque ornamental features, rooster combs, smug grins, and radial crowns of flame-like teardrop eyes. The dramatic tension in the scene is a ray of light emerging from the tip of the spiritual being on the right, piercing the veil of another, perhaps triggering a death cycle. Two smaller figures are focused on this moment, heightening the importance of this terminal moment. In the foreground, there appears to be a small rock-like grave formation. A wisp of smoke emerges from the grave, indicating a spirit emerging from death. Contained within the wisp is a warped figure with the appearance of a howling cat, downed in the skirmish under the sun.

The title refers to a Buddhist spiritual teaching on the cyclical nature of being—a serious concept—while the work playfully and freely expresses these three forms of being: life, death, and rebirth. The universality of this cyclical nature is reinforced by showing these new and unknown forms forever entwined in this triadic dance of the three states.









## ***It's All In Your Head***

*Work ix*

2024

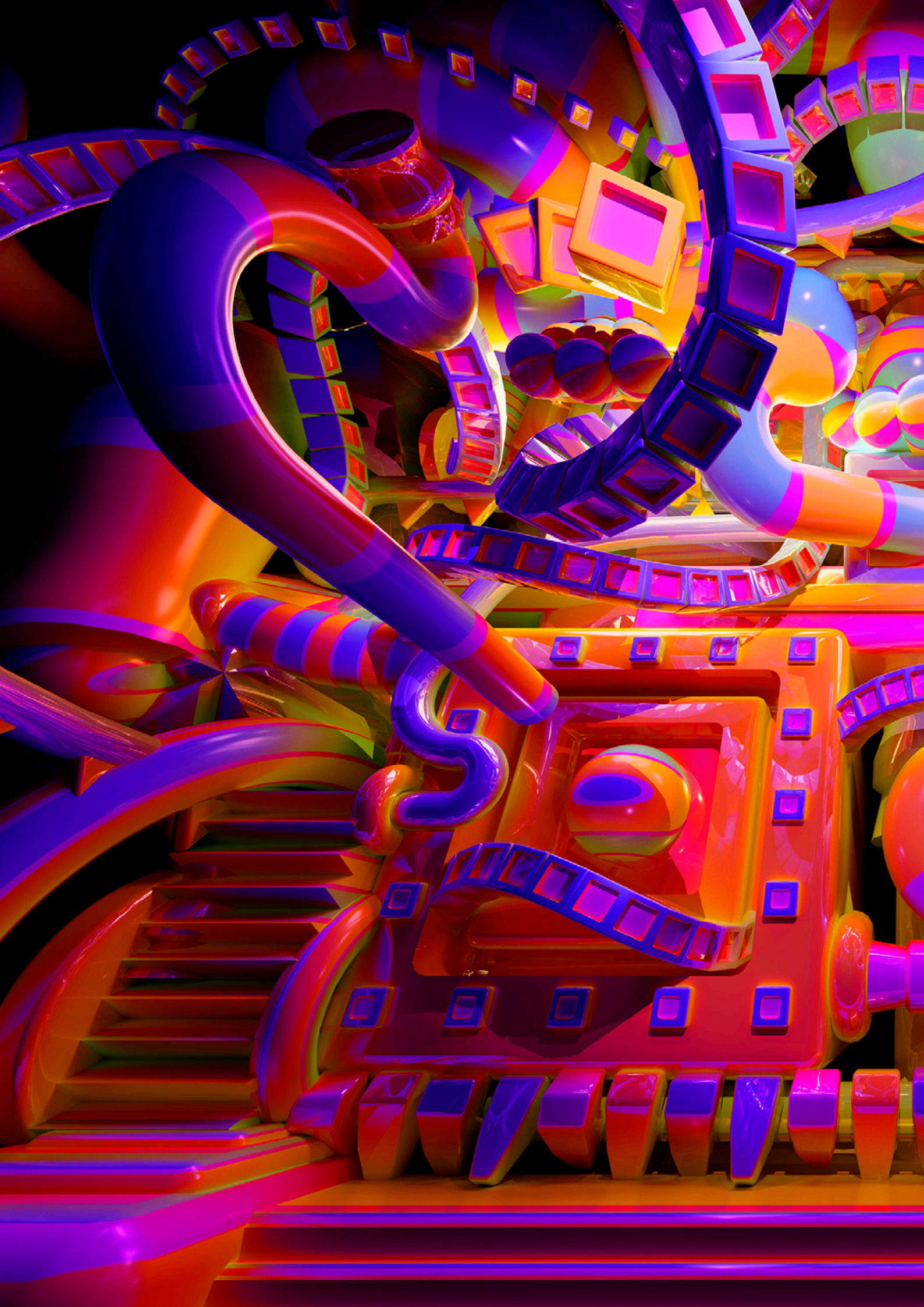
*Single digital work stored on-chain*

*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

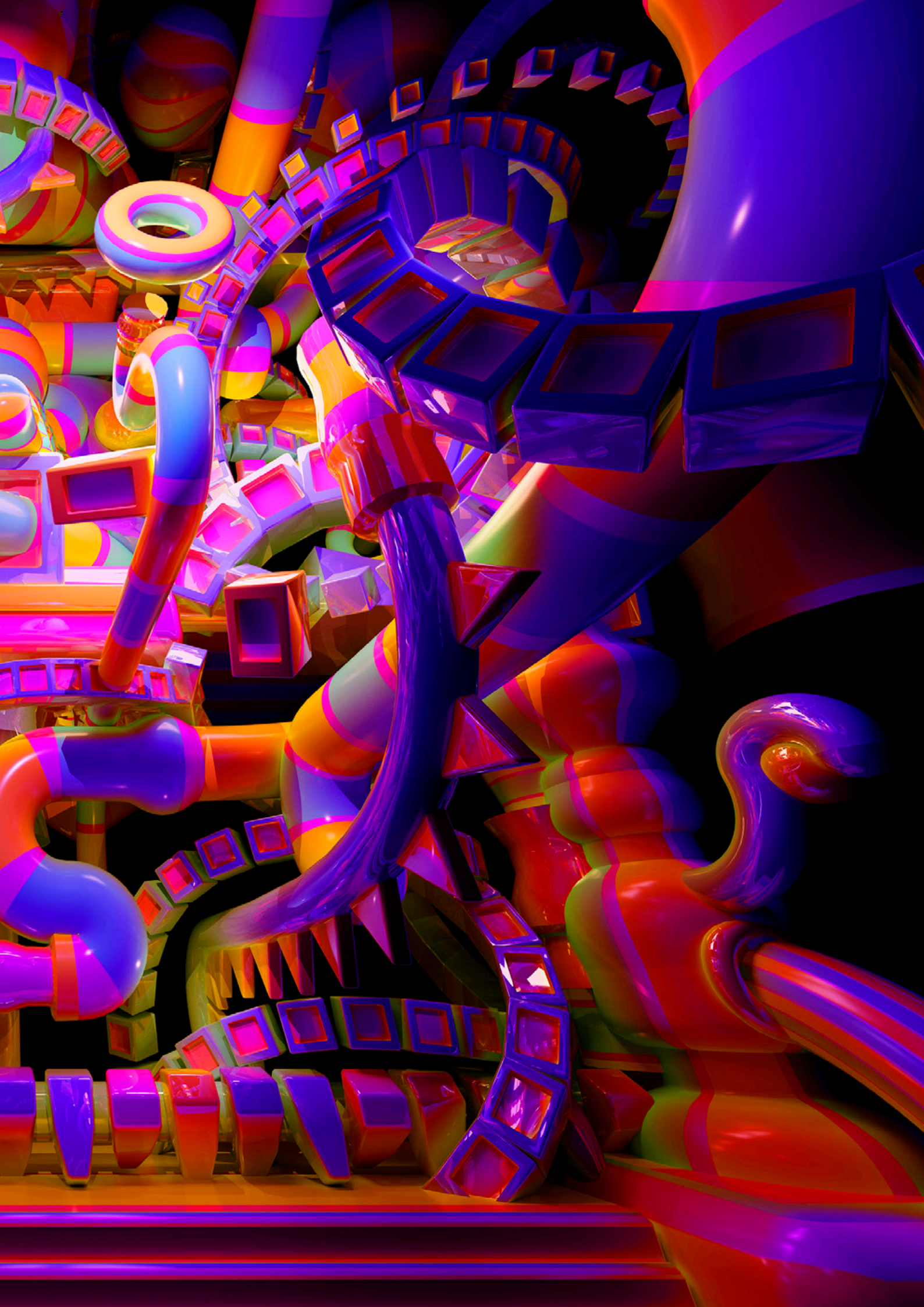
In this work, the artist positions the viewer below a complex, abstract machine that is suggested to be spinning both in and out of control. The interconnection and logic of how the parts weave and work together is difficult to follow, but there is a clear internal order. Piping bulges and turns at odd angles, funneling goods back and forth between areas of specialization. Soft-edged cubes with excavated interiors snake their way around like film strips of the mind. Teeth emerge and disappear along pipework, springs constrict and distort, and accordions roll on wheels below. There are few sharp edges; even the stairs are beveled. Each part has been coated in a high gloss thick paint and resin, creating highly polished and reflective surfaces. In the corner is a surreal teapot with fluid pouring from the spout, feeling both in and out of place in a space like this. The work is exhausting and overwhelming, some of the key traits to the complexity of visual detail found in the visionary space.

The title of the work is a playful twist on the criticism some use when discussing the visionary space, implying that it is without validity or realness but at the same time proposing an even greater mystery that such machinery could really be “all in your head.” Both the artist and many researchers are now unsure which is stranger—that these peculiar visionary artifacts are from *within* or that they are from sources *external* to us. These epistemological questions are consistent with our relationship to reality and not just to the surreal.













## ***The Hidden Circus***

*Work x*

2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

In this work, three bulging sculptural figures tower over the viewer in a brightly colored room. The figures are covered from head to toe in stark, bold geometric patterns. The patterns include stripes, spots, patchworks, and a particularly intense wave pattern that morphs along the curvature of the forms, with connotations of teeth, snakes, and vibrational qualities. The striking use of only yellow, red, and blue across all surfaces, combined with deep sheens and highly reflective surfaces, create a dizzying sense of perception and impact. The scene is both crystal-clear and confusing—a motif across many of the artist's works that seems to reflect a cognitive quality about the visionary worlds he documents. The patterns and colors are reminiscent of the circus, given the use of primary colors and simple design motifs. The sculptural figures are unique forms, a series of tubular, lathe-like tips and knobs that are wrapped in bands, which constrict and puff surfaces. They feel like they could pop or use screw-like undulating motions to move throughout the world they inhabit.

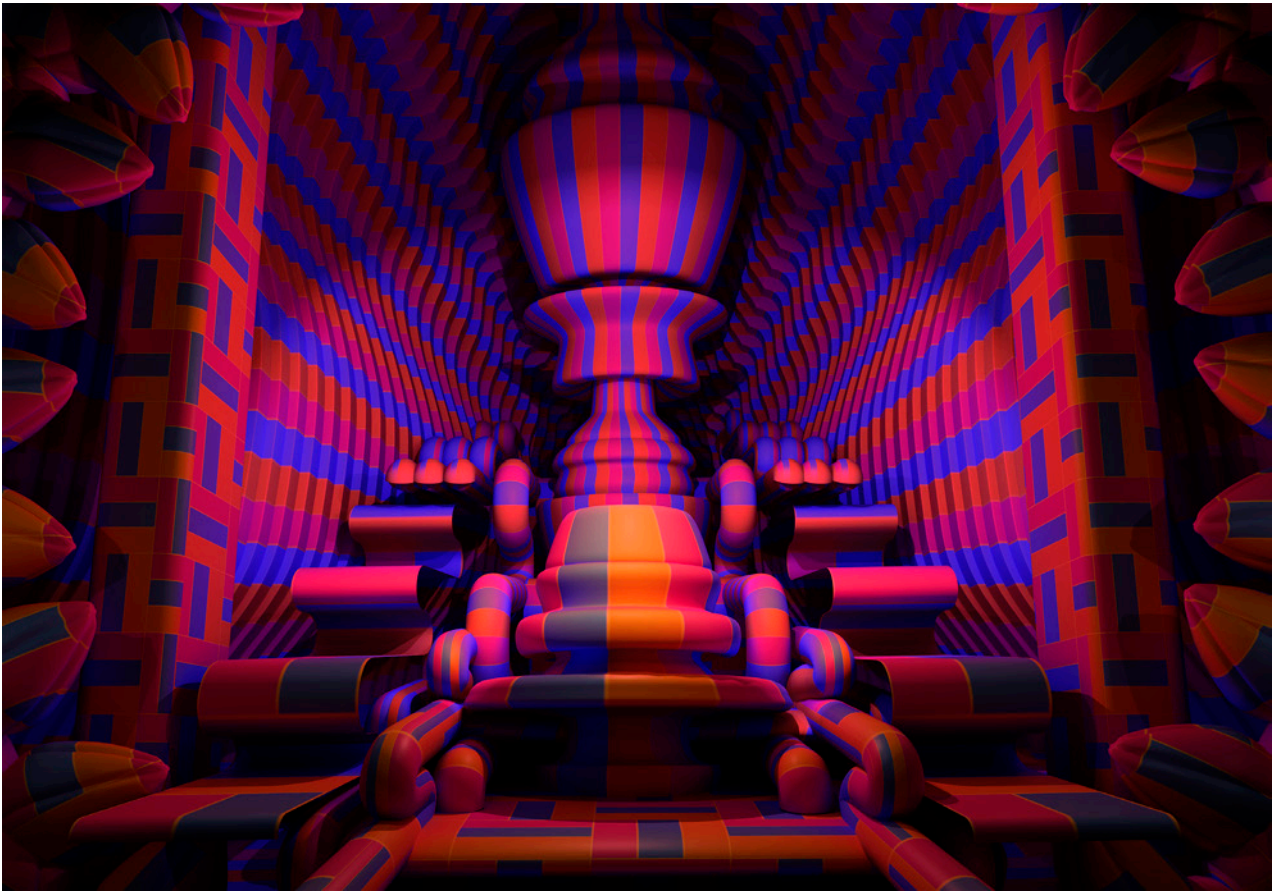
The central figure smokes a pipe, which presumably reflects the same thing the viewer is doing to have reached this space with the three figures. The pipe would likely contain the psychedelic N, N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), as this work documents *the hidden circus*, a visual space accessible only by smoking this plant-derived substance. The pipe has a comically bizarre cloud of smoke emerging from it—both spiral and complex in its variation of thickness and change in rotational degrees over its length. The faceless figures are embodied and spirited, full of character, engaging with the viewer directly while still feeling autonomous and self-fulfilling, as if they'd bounce off into the labyrinth they came from after the viewer leaves. This continued feeling is important, as it hints at the larger world in which they persist longer than just this polaroid of the other side.













## ***The New God***

*Work xi*

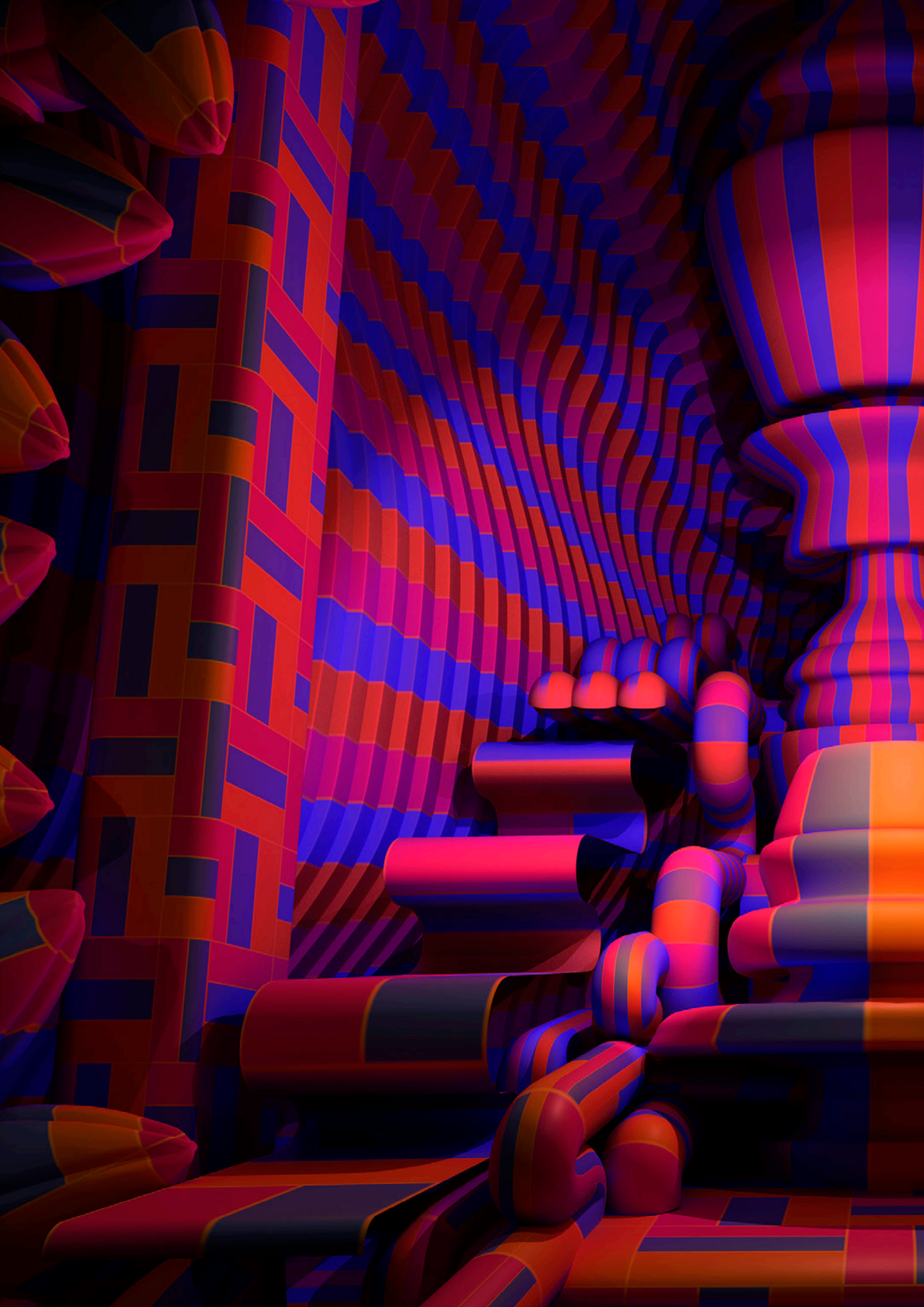
2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

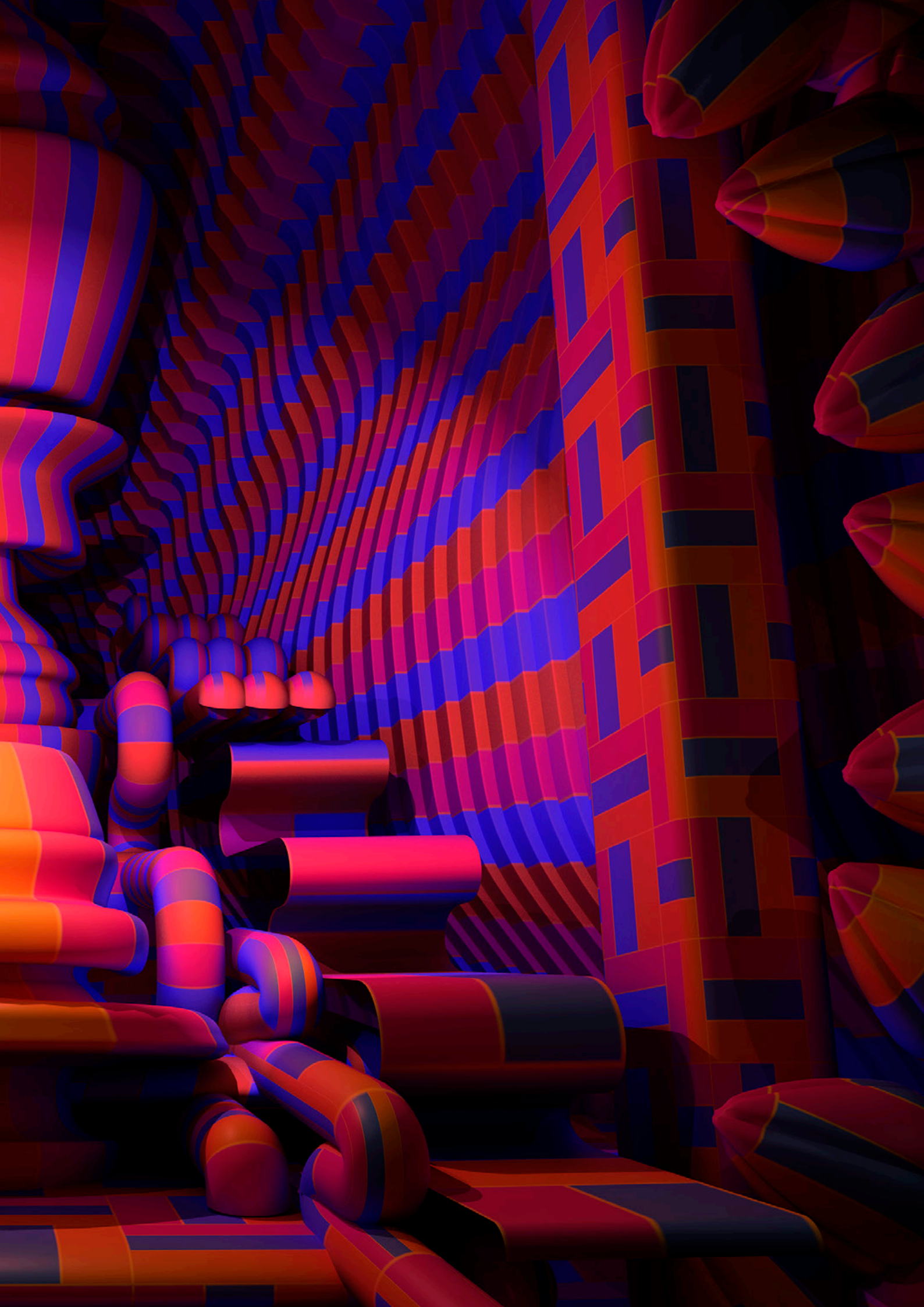
*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

In a hyperdimensional tunnel, a towering alien structure pours forth geometric patterns towards the viewer. The geometric stripe patterns continue the flow over the lathed forms. The sphinx-like structure has features connoting a head and paws, but the details are elusive—curved edges imply a mouth or eyes in multiple locations, making it difficult to discern the true nature of the forms. The entire scene is lit by a spotlight, creating deep shadows below and behind the visible features. The historical time and place of the work is ambiguous, feeling as though it is both past and present, a common feature of the visionary space. The repetition in the structural forms of the wall repeat *ad infinitum*, with no sense of how deep the tunnel goes. The tubular pipework tendrils crawl towards the viewer as if they have a mind of their own, taking detours and creating knots based on their own sporadic logic. The textural surface of the forms is a dry, soft-touch matte, similar to sandblasted microindentation with little sheen or reflection.

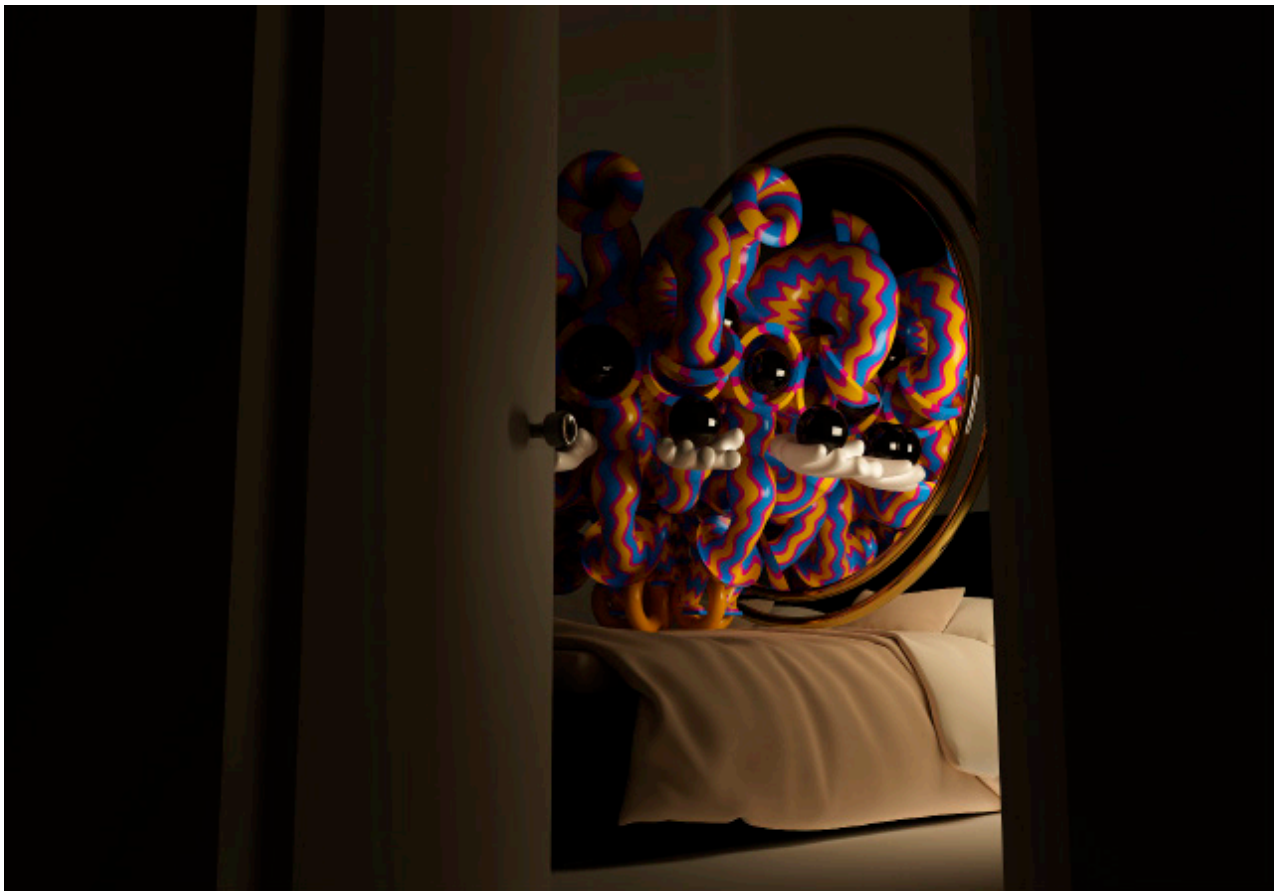
The title of the work is a statement on the meaning *behind* these spaces, forms, and experiences. The artist makes reference to hyperspace as perhaps what we see during the dying process: *"Hyperdimensional space feels like it is what you see when you die. It is as close to meeting God or super-intelligent beings or aliens or higher dimensional space-time as you could get. The terms don't really matter in the end: They are important, meaningful, spiritual, and about as powerful as it could get."*











## ***An Exotic Trade***

*Work xii*

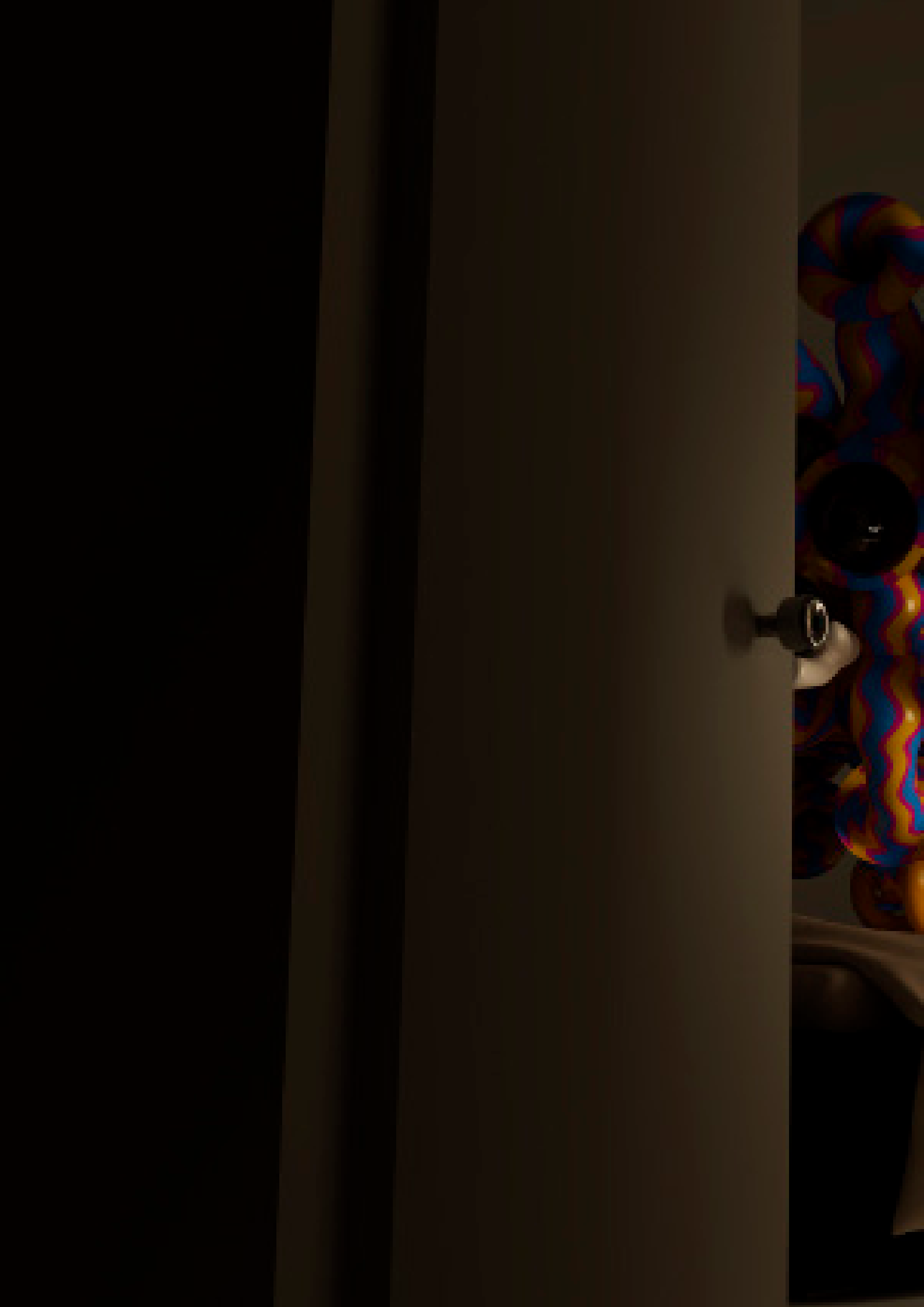
2024

*Single digital work stored on-chain*

*Physical at 78.7 x 55.1in (200 x 140cm)*

We peer through an open bedroom door to see an unusual figure next to a gold-trimmed portal atop a queen-sized bed. The portal has a polished mirror surface, indicating that the figure's appearance in this space has been sealed off or is invisible to the eye. The bright blue and yellow wavy stripes with red trim that adorn the surfaces of the entity contrast heavily with the neutral pale pinks and cream tones of the sheets, pillow slips, and walls. The figure itself has a number of features that are radially symmetrical, with bulging trumpet-like tentacles peering out the top of its head and folding back down to meet itself at both exits and entrances. Solid, black, mirror-polished spheres are present in some of the eye-level openings and hovering just inches above an open hand. The gesture the figure makes is one of an offering, implying it could trade or gift a sphere—though it's unclear what the reimbursement details of such an exotic trade would encompass, in clear reference to the title of the work. Towards the base of the figure are six simplified wheels, making up a radially symmetrical system of unicycles, enabling the figure to move in multiple directions at once. Two legs and shoes straddle the pedals on either side of each wheel, giving balance to the functional movement of the figure.

The stark shot is cinematic, positioning the viewer at a low level, looking up to an elevated figure. A single light source, presumably from a bathroom or lamp, casts the figure and doorway in shadows. The contrast of normality and psychedelia, again a common motif and theme of the artist, is striking in its use of photorealism. It is an unusual figure due to the way the spheres appear as eyes or as simply decorative objects, and the bold, wavy circus-esque geometric patterns that give a vibrational quality of motion. The symmetry and repetition of the features additionally help to provide visual motifs from the visionary









*Clavis XII, An alchemist in his laboratory searches for the legendary philosopher's stone, 'Tripus Aureus', published in 1618 by Michael Maier, from the original 1599 work 'The Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine'.*

*Nature loves courage. You make the commitment and nature will respond to that commitment by removing impossible obstacles. Dream the impossible dream and the world will not grind under you, it will lift you up. This is the trick. This is what all these teachers and philosophers who really counted, who really touched the alchemical gold, this is what they understood. This is the shamanic dance in the waterfall. This is how magic is done. By hurling yourself into the abyss and discovering it's a feather bed.*

*- McKenna*



# The secret world of Sleepr

Naomi Bu

## *Lured down the rabbit hole*

Coming to know Sleepr's work before knowing the artist felt as though a track had been carefully laid before me, and I was following it like a sequence of clues. Speaking with others who know and appreciate his work, we have all experienced a sense that we are now part of unraveling a colossal mystery.

Sleepr's work embodies the quintessential question we ask when looking at art: "What does it mean?" The works are direct glimpses of impossible places and beyond comprehensible dreams, with exotics smuggled into writhing, patterned rooms where mirages combust and flutter between figurative and abstract. Rattling, high-volume colors are flattened into forbidding planes of dimension that ground and uproot us at the same time, masterfully twisting the rules to destabilize our assumptions. The work is elusive, visceral, genre-spanning, and conceptually spellbinding—if you just surrender and let the artist assure you that nothing is what it seems. These places Sleepr has been trying to reveal exceed

language. Their meanings are less a solution to a problem but more a mirror to express our remarkable capacity to visualize things beyond words, beyond logic. In all his work and throughout his life, he revels in this fact, boldly declaring that *magic is real*, arranging visions so convincing and rigorous that we all have to ask ourselves if the illusion is the truth itself.

## *Discovering the other side*

I remember the first time I saw Sleepr's work, one fall evening years ago. The shortcomings of immediate, deep impact in the digital form had begun to steadily subvert then; the air around me seemed a strange color, and an energy started to pervade and leap through the screen—scintillating light, movement, and form felt material. A door, which had been left open just enough for someone to stroll past online, appeared before me as if it had been situated there all along.

This is the phenomenon of discovering art born in the obscurities of the digital domain. We become explorers



*The New Religion*, 2022

and excavators of cultural goods deserving deeper examination. In my experience, it encourages authenticity as our ordinary identities recede into the background and new freedoms from the rational world are found in a virtual one. While some may trivialize this distance between reality and cyber life, we have everything to gain in believing that both possibilities existing today facilitate the dissemination of art and the creations of contemporary artists.

Over the coming months and years, as I became more engaged in the digital art sector, I devoured Sleepr's work. I stood at the ledge of that door, and as I peered closer through that doorway came an awareness—not the knowledge, for this wasn't verbal, metaphorical, or abstract—but a recognition that I was being lured by a voice that brought striking legibility to our wildest hallucinations. In these newfound portals they lead me to, I find what appears to be our most ancient past collapsing with the modern milieu, elementally belong there. In fact, they have always been there.

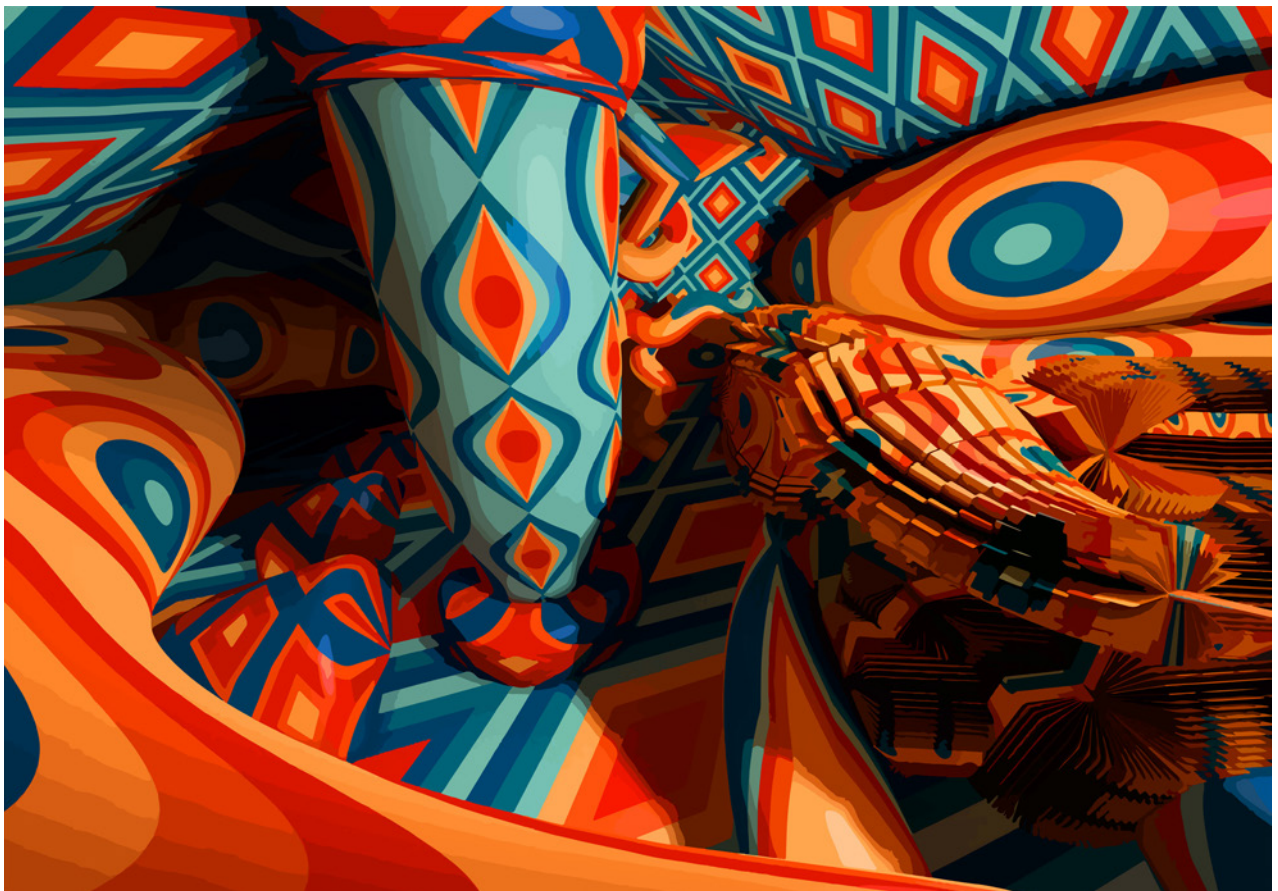
#### *The artist and the person*

Fundamentally, this is what great art can elicit. It sum-

mons us to rise to the formidable occasion of observing ourselves, broadening our sympathies and ennobling our small place in this world. And if we're really lucky, we are transported away from an artwork feeling more unified with the universe than where we started. In this case, Sleepr's universe as we know it has been meticulously constructed through a lifelong, solitary effort to document the undocumentable, relating the exotic secrets of the spirit world accessible only by high-dose psychedelic states.

It became clear when I first spoke to Sleepr a year after I had discovered his work that this was a person who spent his whole life habituating corners where very few had been, and any attempt at providing anecdotes about it was like untangling a series of the tightest knots. He speaks slowly, leaving long pauses between words, carefully chosen. He does not miss a single chance to provide full dignity to his experiences on "the other side."

It appeared to be painstaking and isolating; a cost worn personally to ensure others could see the new vantage point. Thousands of hours spent over a decade inside the visionary world, studying and engaging with "extra-sensory perception" to fully embody the visions before



*Behind Closed Eyes, 2023*



actualizing them into images. His effort to archive the impossible is uncompromising. It results in a kind of metamorphosis that reconfigures every particle of his being, enabling us as the audience to receive more than what we are typically able to perceive as we, too, experience transformation in viewing it.

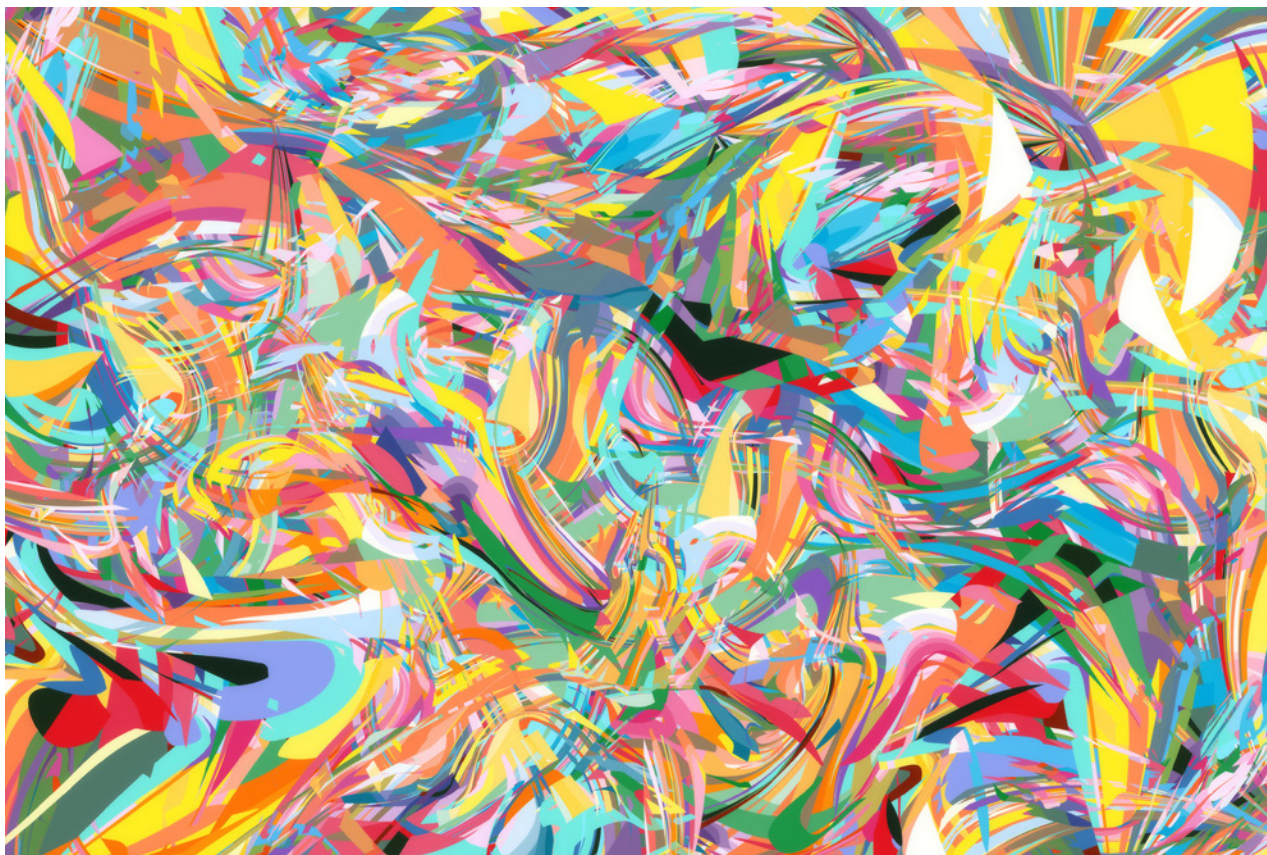
This gradual, personal experience of transformation suddenly became widely explicit at the end of 2023. During an artist residency at Art Basel Miami, Sleepr, a vehemently anonymous artist, found himself within a semi-opaque plexiglass box, donned in a white and gold Venetian mask, a black cocktail jacket, and black gloves, speaking directly to his viewers for the very first time. Spectators were privy to his artistic process through a screen outside the box, which was placed behind an illuminated ruby-red telephone indicating, *Pick up the phone and talk to Sleepr*.

This interactive performance ran for five days from the confines of a small box in the middle of a crowded fair and facilitated long lines of curious attendees. Later, it would be revealed that over 500 conversations had taken place between the public and the anonymous artist—a testament to an individual pushing the limits on his values of authenticity, anonymity, integrity, and connec-

tivity. He later recalled that during this process, he had become a “complete conduit” between the viewer and the work for the first time, listening blindly on the phone for hours each day to capture and channel the bustling, crowded network of ideas and stories, profusions of love, joy, and intrigue into one cogent, electrifying vision in *Medicine for the Soul*. He stated:

*“For someone whose external image is so tightly controlled, this was the uncontrolled public’s way of seeping through the locked doors and into my heart. It was the same ego death that happens in the maloca or in a bedroom—I became interconnected with everything again.”*

While Sleepr’s commitment to his practice demands removal of the self and individual identity, it is also sincerely human. His belief is that the work is deeply significant, not as a personal legacy, but more broadly contributing to the expansion of understanding and capability of our species. It allows him to connect with others in a way that gently urges them to act, to be heroic in the minutiae of the everyday, to pick up the phone, to see in full technicolor, to notice the branch reaching the light, and to bite the apple it has created, embracing whatever danger or paradise is on the other side.



*Frantic Clown In Gladwrap, 2011*





*Sleepr's performance art piece for Art Basel Miami 2023*

### ***Cultural relevance, novelty, and singularity***

There is a Sleepr artwork that I often find myself returning to: *You Are the Star*. It creeps into my mind casually some days, or when I am up late at night worrying about missed accomplishments that wait to be provoked or realized. Incidentally, I thought about it when writing this. It features an effervescent pink figment pirouetting under a spotlight before an empty auditorium. The work's description reads:

*"Can you see what I'm doing? Watch me closely. I'm teaching you through my forms. I'm playing and dancing. I'm being the best me. I want you to fulfill your destiny. I want you to realize the secret. You are the star of the show. You are the one."*

Bound to every Sleepr work is a description that evokes the ghostly outline of someone watching you noticing their manifestation. The works are intended to be beacons of clues we may not yet understand the full significance of in the present. They unmask the trace of an inventor playing with events and timelines that are disparate from our own, helping release any present fears we hold in exchange for a sense of prevailing belief that we are not only seeing this at the exact moment we need

to, but that we are truly meant to be here.

In trying to put your finger on the pulse of the current cultural zeitgeist, you might meander long enough to notice that we are coming to grips with a postmodern proclivity towards reiteration, irreverent appropriation, and remixing references of what has been done before. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this tendency—in fact, it has provided us with the terrain of culture that is more diverse and abundant than ever—but it does give varying weight to those showing evidence of a singular hand in their work, seeking to truly create rather than iterate. Whether we like it or not, we are living in the wilderness of an increasingly memetic, virtual world. Nothing may go on undigitized and copied. And it is here, where it feels as though the art world is perpetually wriggling in a saturated swamp of “next big things” and technological vanguards, that Sleepr truly shimmers in singularity.

Sleepr's work is inherently unreplicable because it necessitates an amalgam of serious physical decisions, pushing the body and mind over all known limits, technical exactitude, ongoing scholarship, and unrelenting devotion to dismantling a number of stigmas that surround the categories of psychedelia and digital art—all in an effort to “pick open the ultimate lock” that reveals a cosmos of previously unseen “infrastructure” and infinite wonder lying dormant in our cognition. We find



*You Are The Star, 2023*

ourselves on a challenging-to-grasp yet satisfying climb to demystify this class that his work sits in, which has established links to an intersection of emerging subcultural movements between psychedelia and neuroscience, digital art, blockchain technology, and decentralized finance.

All this alone appears to be new, unfamiliar ground, which shouldn't be a surprise for an artist who is captured by the notion of creating something genuinely novel. And novelty—a key operative word in Sleepr's practice and what he understands about both the uniqueness of his perspective and its relationship to a larger collective history of efforts in the arts and sciences—is something that is becoming a seemingly rarer occurrence these days. It may be one of the real keys to both the neural and creative contributions he is uncovering.

Sleepr has asserted, "Repetition is easy; novelty is tricky. Artists are in the business of novelty generation. They are the tip of the cultural spear. They foreshadow years ahead into the next waves of who we are all becoming. To understand the way in which novelty generation occurs in the brain would be the true singularity, for it would unlock all future ideas."

### *Secrets and destiny*

Within the evolution of Sleepr's practice, you can trail a succession of new advancements and technical breakthroughs, and in this debut solo exhibition, *Secrets*, comprising twelve of his first ever physical works, his ever-exacerbating dexterity in which space, light, form, pattern, story, emotion, and collapsing dimensions is rendered, reaches a new all-time high.

Each work is presented as an elegant secret itself; first, neatly packaged with a satin bow, then slowly, systematically, and chaotically unraveling, opening up to reveal multitudes of new textures and startling aspects in hidden spaces. Sleepr takes us on an enchanted odyssey, converging artifacts of a bygone time with entities separated from time entirely, leading us through childhood bedrooms, bioluminescent jungles, blooming treasure chests, forgotten underworlds, and playgrounds that undulate and breathe.

The collection diversely assembles this private world of visions as well as the very secrets the artist has carried with him in his alter ego. It is intended to dismiss a "shamanic implicit belief" that what occurs on "the other

side" must remain separated from our perceived reality and off limits for the ordinary public to view. As a result, the collection of work gallantly moves in every direction, hovering between our familiar world and the secret one with a kind of confidence that defyingly teases, dismantles, and grins in mischief.

It is compelling how the resolution of Sleepr's work continues to reach piercing clarity, shifting from flattening all aspects to just two-dimensional planes of color to now thriving in crisper three-dimensional spaces. This series allows for both to coexist in a methodical undertaking that achieves such dynamism, uncanny realism, and spiritual depth that you cannot help but feel as though you really are peeling back the curtain, only to fall right on center stage.

You might expect that—as it is for most artists—the focal point of that stage might be a reflection of the sole creator, of Sleepr himself. But in this case, it is not. Arguably, it is us. Sleepr's resolute decision to maintain his anonymity permits his visions to emerge lucidly from mist, like a paralyzing dream in which we are invited to be central characters rather than bystanders at its extraordinary events. When we ultimately transcend all its ambiguity, we can see it for what it is: a moment of triumph we have been waiting for and a sublime life fully lived.

I feel the deepest sense of reverence for the magic that Sleepr weaves over us through his work, and an even greater sense of gratitude for being able to help shepherd others towards the great parade of his artistic oeuvre. This parade is the highest celebration of being human, as it retrieves ceaseless, bewitching ways of keeping us in awe of the elemental constituents that make up our very being.

Perhaps Sleepr's work ensnares the highest fundamental truth about our deepest longings, the things that continue to nudge us and shape our self-belief through repetition. It resolves that elusive, secret suspicion that we made a promise to ourselves and the universe to be the very thing that frightens us most, a thing of unique beauty and imperfection, destiny continuously unfolding.

When I sit with Sleepr's work, I no longer suspend disbelief. I accept that we will always have internal guides through this journey. We are not lost—magic illuminates the long track ahead. But you already know this, because we have done this forever now; we have been on this trip, or some version of it, many, many times before.

*Naomi Bu is an artist agent, collector, and co-founder of the digital artist representation agency Scene, based in London.*





*That I might know the innermost weave of the world,  
witness its dynamics and creation,  
and stop rummaging around in words..*

- Goethe

# Sleepr's secret ontological quest

Elizabeth Forrest

*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the world's earliest known texts, "exemplifies the profound human need for an immortal ideology — a body of beliefs that anticipates the survival of some aspect of the self in the life hereafter."

<sup>1</sup> The exploration of the self and realms of the hereafter, or states of consciousness outside of reality, is a central discussion in Sleepr's artistic practice and can be seen in his body of work. In descriptions of the artwork offered by the artist, he describes his works to be akin to artifacts smuggled back from explorations in alternate dimensions. Like early Naturalists, his sentiments echo Durkheim's reflections on the totemic functions of art within society's "collective effervescence," <sup>2</sup> taking the viewer on an ontological quest, prompting fundamental questions of life, death, and the human condition.

In conversations with the Artist, he stated, "All roads lead to Rome," <sup>3</sup> meaning there are many paths, such as meditation and prayer, to entering what the Greeks called Elysium, or in Ancient Egypt, the Underworld. Sleepr, however, has been granted access to such realms through the consumption of '*the spirit molecule*', DMT. DMT (N, N-dimethyltryptamine) is a powerful psychedelic compound found naturally in various plants and animals, including humans. Dr. Rick Strassman, author of *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* — whom the man behind the Sleepr mask briefly worked with in the past — suggests that DMT, located in the pineal gland of the human brain, is released during profound experiences such as birth, death, and near-death experiences, or the transition from life to death. DMT, in this way, could be the pharmacological key to producing mystical and transcendent experiences as recorded throughout history. <sup>4</sup>

On his psychonautic explorations, Sleepr collects data by experimenting on himself by ingesting plants containing DMT. In his homeland, Australia, the Acacia tree, colloquially known as the golden wattle (the national plant of Australia and a symbol of unity, with hundreds of sub-species growing wild), contains a high percentage of DMT. Acacia acuminata is also a plant that has been associated with use by First Nations peoples of Australia and could have links to their Dreamtime mythology due to the similarity of visions described. <sup>5</sup> "Man is what he eats" ("*Der Mensch ist, was er ißt*") is a statement attributed to the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, who emphasized the importance of sensory experience and the material world in shaping human identity and consciousness. <sup>6</sup> Through the lens of the common

misinterpretation of Ludwig's statement to mean, "You are what you eat," we can analyze other influences on Sleepr's work. <sup>7</sup>

Contemporary anthropologist Jeremy Narby writes about visiting Peruvian shamans who ingest plants containing DMT in his book, *The Cosmic Serpent*. Narby delves into the idea that the Cosmic Serpent, a prevalent symbol in global cultures, represents the source of life and the underlying unity of all existence. He suggests that serpentine symbols mirror the double helix structure of DNA, implying a profound connection between biological life and spiritual or cosmic forces. Narby takes the position that indigenous illustrations of serpents follow naturalist ideologies, which suggest iconography is functional and serves to decode and document physiological phenomena. <sup>8</sup>

These ideas are supported by many researchers who have described the use of entheogenic substances as — spiritual sacraments or plant teachers; used as tools to facilitate existential intelligence and cognitive instruments serviced for cosmological understandings of the world. <sup>9</sup> *Visionary plants* have been used historically in many cultures across the globe for centuries; "often mediating the world of immediate experience and the infinite spiritual realms that are believed to permeate all existence" and are "endowed with intelligence and are considered to be sources of deep and mysterious knowledge, instruments of the divine." <sup>10</sup> Many have found that by consuming psychoactive substances, the visions one receives in trance consciousness are often identical without external influence. <sup>11</sup>

Sleepr's artistic journey follows the same trajectory as Narby and many other researchers, following in the footsteps of the works of early Naturalists like Ernst Haeckel and Maria Sibylla Merian. Inspired by their methods and insights, Sleepr seeks to portray realistic interpretations of his metaphysical findings and continue his sociocultural anthropological studies. <sup>12</sup> He aims to uncover connections between different life forms and the mystical realms perceived by narrative artists like Pablo Amarigo. <sup>13</sup> Artwork that functions "as a source of environmental facts and symbols" or cartography; mapping out new perceptions of ecosystems. <sup>14</sup>

Sleepr's concealment of his real identity allows him to act as a conduit, channeling knowledge from other



realms while also having motivations reminiscent of Venetian masquerades, where “allusion assists in the construction of identity.”<sup>15</sup> Sleepr achieves the “highest form of self-actualization”<sup>16</sup> through his performance art and abstract renderings, inviting comparisons to the avant-garde pursuits of Wassily Kandinsky, who embraced non-traditional forms to express deeper truths. Kandinsky’s exploration of spirituality through abstraction, as he aimed to engage with the viewer’s inner emotions rather than their analytical mind, and advocacy for art that touches the “spiritual triangle” elevates the viewer’s consciousness.<sup>17</sup> We may find a resonant parallel to Sleepr’s practice, not only in his use of complementary colors or abstract techniques but also in his fascinating understanding of the universe and search for deeper cosmic truths.

American artist Alex Grey, known for painting psychedelic interpretations with anatomical precision,<sup>18</sup> has influenced Sleepr’s artistic development, which takes a scientific approach to beauty. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, emphasized the significance of causality in art, asserting that the events depicted should not be arbitrary but interconnected in a logical sequence, leading to a specific outcome, that art should strive for universality by representing general truths about human nature and morality while also acknowledging the importance of particular details and context within narrative.<sup>19</sup> To quote Carl Jung, “Time and time again I encountered amazing coincidences which seemed to suggest the idea of an acausal parallelism (a synchronicity, as I later called it).”<sup>20</sup>

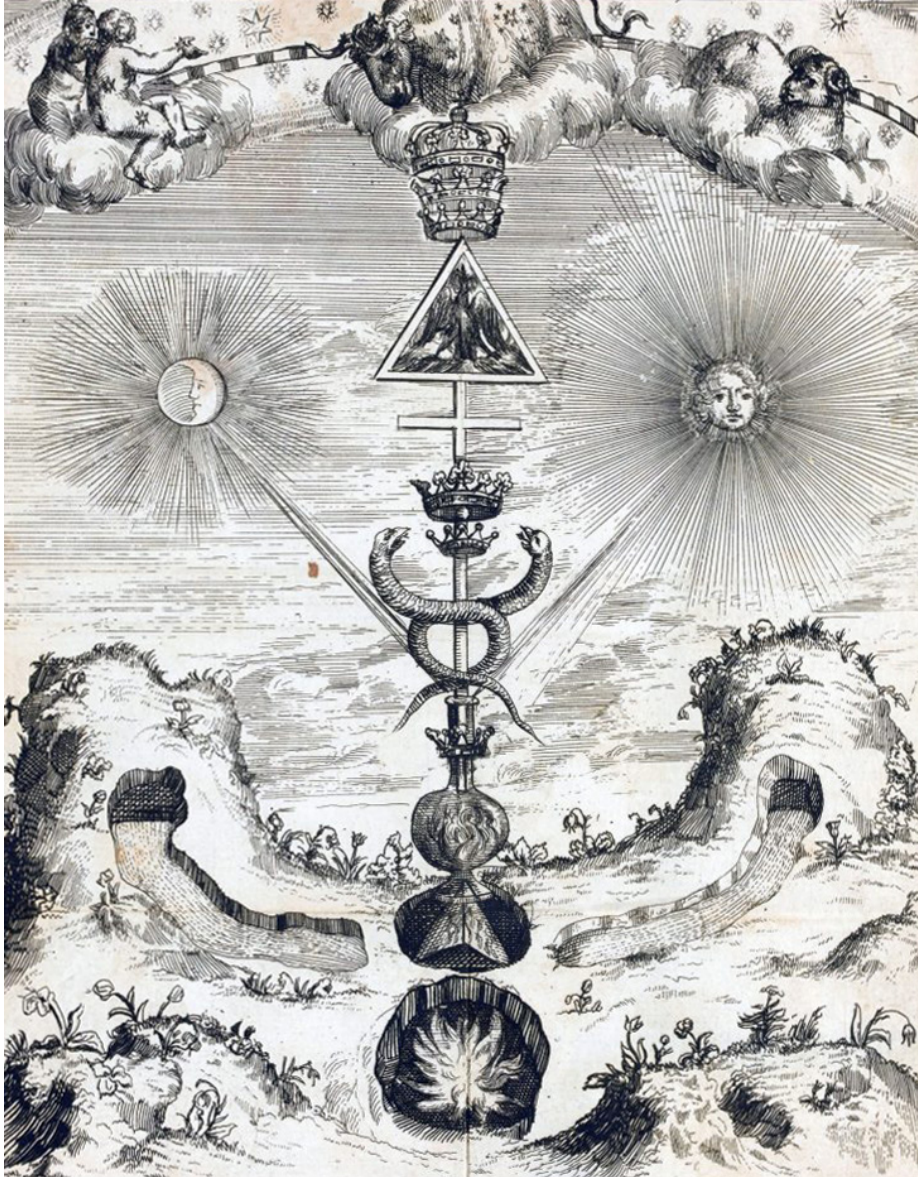
Sleepr ventures into what might be considered “zero form” — a concept where form, as traditionally understood, is absent, giving way to pure abstraction and interaction. The abstraction reaches a point where the form ceases to dictate the art’s meaning, inviting viewers to impose personal interpretations.<sup>21</sup> Sleepr pushes the boundaries of “zero form” further, creating a space where art exists in its potential state — ever-changing and evolving with each interaction, unbound by the fixed identities and forms that define traditional art. Sleepr’s fusion of spiritual exploration with cutting-edge communication in the NFTs format propels discourse into the digital age’s materiality quandaries. Challenging conventional paradigms of art’s ephemerality and permanence while renegotiating the digital agora’s triadic relationship between creator, artifact, and observer.

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## Notes

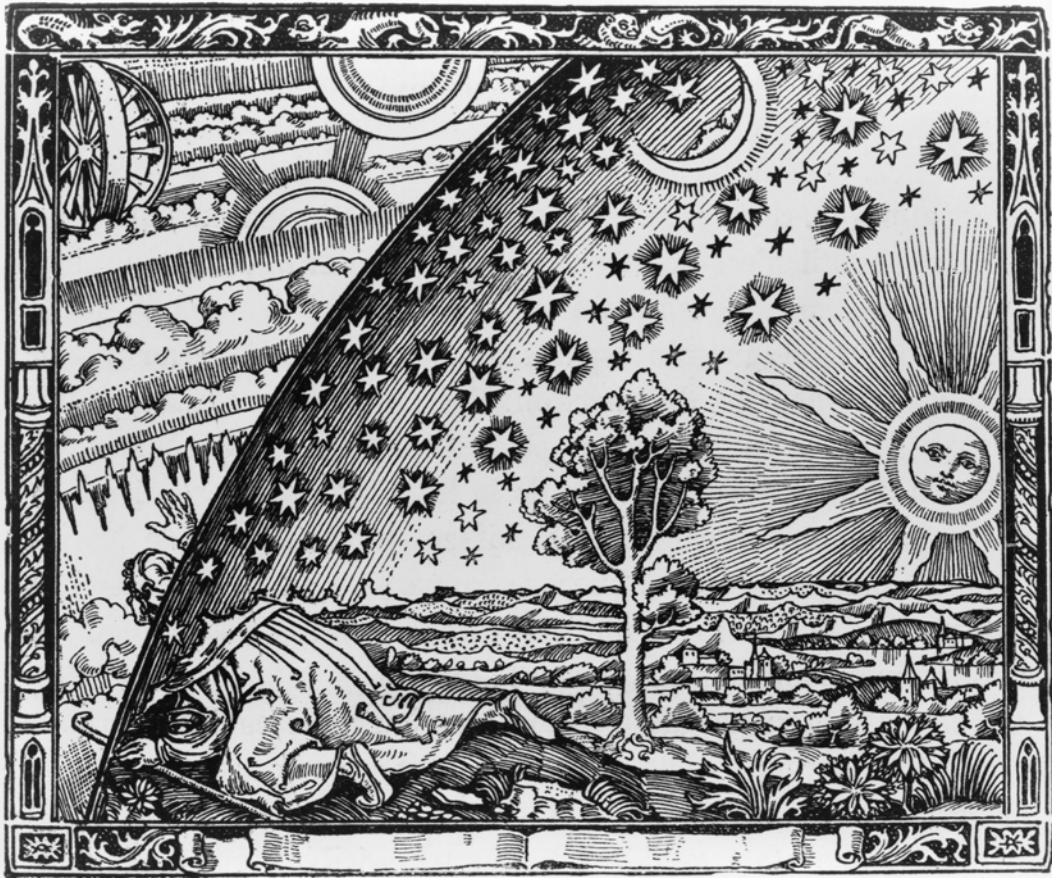
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*The Hermetical Triumph: or, The Victorious Philosophical Stone.*  
London (1723) by P. Hanet

*Nature will not give up her secrets easily.*





*A traveller puts his head under the edge of the firmament, (1888),  
Flammarion's, L'atmosphère: météorologie populaire*

# A lifelong mission documenting the other side

*Sleepr*

I was thrown into the powerful world of plant magic at a young age. No map, no guide, no teacher, no cultural lineage, no support network, no direction. Instead, I was hurled headfirst into a hyper-colored dream world with talking plant spirits. Each experience compounded and bent all the rules of reality: *strange visual imagery, telepathic communications, precognition of events, encounters with entities, exotic aesthetics, information woven into geometric patterns, hidden worlds*. I was experiencing the impossible on a weekly basis. I realized that these were the fundamental mysteries that many cultures had spoken about and engaged with. They were vast, complex, and interconnected. Despite being in Adidas sneakers, in the corner of a bedroom, I too was experiencing astoundingly beautiful and intricate visual worlds beyond my wildest dreams.

I was working with plant magic before I became an artist. I had never wanted to make art before. The art world seemed very foreign and disconnected from what I was experiencing, from my culture. Rothko's and Warhol's works were not my idea of beauty. Instead, I began making art for a functional reason. I knew I needed to leave a trail of breadcrumbs on my way in and out of the rabbit holes I was experiencing. I was logging visual snapshots of some of the peculiar details I saw. The images were never designed for public appreciation; they were my diary entries as I explored. I essentially worked in isolation for over a decade, repeating the same process of experiencing wild encounters on the *other side* and documenting them in artworks. For me, art was a tool. It wasn't to express my feelings—it was to help capture the unique things I was seeing. It was a scientific pursuit first and foremost, which used the arts as the data source to document strange and invisible landscapes.

The most curious detail of all to me was how formal researchers were studying this phenomenology *without* the use of art. It was the *only* method to bring back artifacts from that space, as there is no camera, telescope, microscope, X-ray machine or dreamscanner to do it for you. Artists suddenly become the only astronauts, or *psychonauts* perhaps, capable of going into these invisible geometric caves without their bodies, with only their minds, and bringing back the details for the wider research field to analyze. Sensing the scale of importance, I immediately undertook a PhD program on the topic. In the research, the deep gap between the specializations of art and science became clear.

Some interdisciplinary research projects were being done, but they felt tokenistic or symbolic of the pursuit, perhaps limited by the projects they were working on. Working at some of the major universities in Australia during this time, there were few others actively pushing to expand the role of the arts into the sciences. I did not complete the PhD because the university withdrew support, as the research was unable to fit the mold of existing outcomes. As this formal route of research was closed and darkened, in private, the underground research space continued and brightened.

The major contribution of my work is the functional use of the arts. Deep down, I feel like art has been a general exploration of the potential in visual aesthetics drawn up from the imagination. The imagination is fundamentally a simple process of cognition: It takes various inputs existing in the external world and recombines them into new, non-existing outputs. The limits of the imagination are intrinsically bound by this process. The pool of material with which you feed the machine determines the output limits. Despite the illusion of an unlimited source of novelty, the imagination is not capable of such. The art world is currently focused on documenting creativity that is sourced from the standard imagination pool. However, the most unique visual artifacts will be created when novel source material outside the existing pool is experienced. This deep fundamental difference in how the artist lives their life before touching a canvas results in highly different aesthetic and taste profiles. There is no way to mimic the peculiar quality that emerges in artists who have seen unique imagery that is difficult to access and few others have ever seen before.

My goal with the twelve works for the *Secrets* exhibition has been to create a series of works that move through a wide gamut of historical time periods and cultural spaces, using both first-person and third-person perspectives, indigenous and suburban, visionary worlds of the plant visions. But the truth is, none of these works really captures the true beauty and complexity of the visual worlds I have experienced. I am endlessly filled with a sense of disappointment and the inability to achieve the mission that embodies *Sleepr*. Perhaps this is the real story after all, of one man trying, and trying, in the quest to transcend the limits of being human. But, there is one thing that I can promise you dear reader: *I will not stop trying*. It is a lifetime quest, my destiny, and rain, hail or shine, I will unlock the secrets of the other side.

*Under the influence of DMT, the world becomes an Arabian labyrinth, a palace, a more than possible Martian jewel, vast with motifs that flood the gaping mind with complex and wordless awe.*

*Color and the sense of a reality-unlocking secret nearby pervade the experience.*

*There is a sense of other times, and of one's own infancy, and of wonder, wonder, and more wonder.*

*- McKenna*





