

Curator's Note + Artwork Description

CURATOR'S NOTE

NODES AND EDGES by Casey Reas

For the last twenty five years, I've shared my time and ideas with artists who write code. The internet has always been essential for us, because the web isn't just a space for documentation—it's the main place where our work is shared and discussed. For many of us, the internet is also the primary place to exhibit work, and be in community. The **Social Codes** online exhibition is a view into this community of hybrid artists/coders in 2021.

Social Codes is an exhibition of software art, also called generative art. All of the work is comprised of code written by artists to create visual experiences. Some works in the exhibition relate to the visual histories of drawing, painting, animation, and video, but all of it is native digital art, in that each artwork is a performance of code choreographed by the artist.

Artists have been working with code since the 1960s, and within that time frame, code has evolved from languages written by engineers to run on room-sized computers to artist-created coding languages running inside a web browser. In 2021, artists are writing code in many languages and environments. Each programming language is like a different material to work with.

As I started working on this exhibition in September 2020, I asked the following on Twitter: "I'm researching 'generative art' on 'social media' with a focus on the ~present. Who's doing the most interesting work in this space? Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, OpenProcessing, etc. What do you think?" Over a few days we created a [public document](#) with a crowdsourced list of over three hundred people. This was the seed that grew into this exhibition.

In **Social Codes**, the artists' works are presented together in an intentional way, instead of spread out across different online platforms and accounts. The majority of the work in Social Codes is related to the coding platform Processing and the JavaScript library p5.js. As one of the co-founders of Processing, I'm tuned into that community more than others, so the artwork in **Social Codes** clearly doesn't represent everything happening within this online space right now. So, if this is your first time seeing this type work, I hope you'll go on to seek out more of it. There are decades of amazing works to explore, all through your browser.

ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Frederik Vanhoutte has pushed his work into a new direction with **Lamia**, an isometric presentation of the poem with the same name written by John Keats in 1819. The work cycles through the 728 lines of the poem, with one line presented every 8 seconds, so it takes 97 minutes for the entire text to cycle back to the start. The selected 3 × 3 pixel font intentionally obscures the text, but with practice, it can indeed be read. Frederik is interested in two interpretations of the poem: first, as a way to express the idea that scientific knowledge doesn't destroy the romantic idea of beauty; and second, as a cautionary tale of misguided cultural subversion.

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