

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

Dave Whyte is in a category by himself in creating code-generated looping animations. Through early machines like the praxinoscope and zoetrope, animation in this style has been created and enjoyed for nearly 200 years—but with his attention to the subtleties of motion and perception, Dave has pushed the medium further than anyone else. His online Bees & Bombs media accounts are deep collections of striking motion studies, and his **Shimmer** software in Social Codes is an evolution of his work that moves it toward direct presentation of the software, rather than as a fixed, looping animation created from code.

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