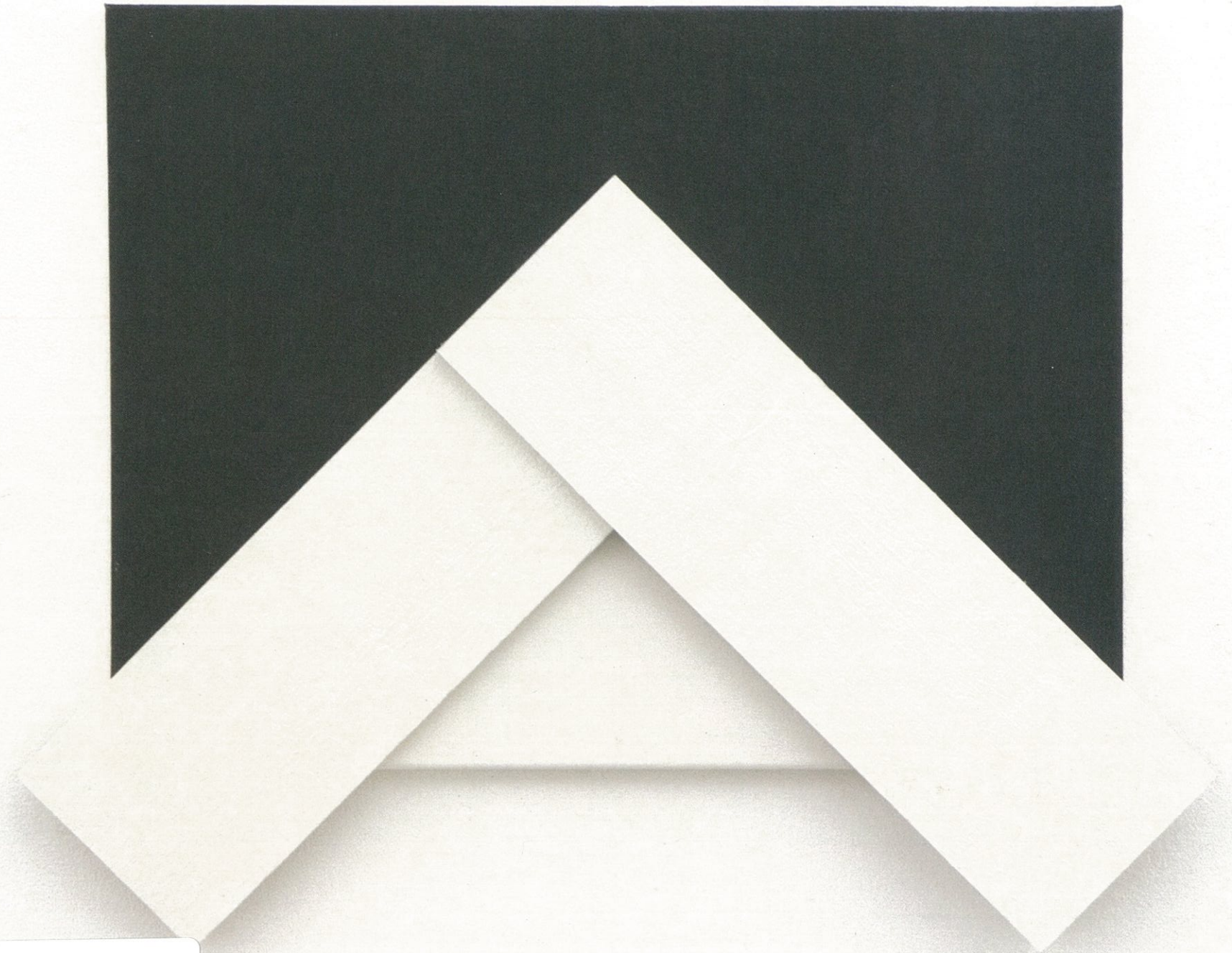


ART · ARCHITECTURE · DESIGN · FASHION

ARTAND

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LOS ANGELES · MELBOURNE · CANDICE BREITZ · SEAN GODSELL
LINDA MARRINON · LUCY MCRAE · LESLEY VANCE · THE PROPELLER GROUP



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Spectra (Tasmania), 2013
Site-specific installation, Hobart
49 Xenon searchlights, 8-channel sound system
Technical partner, Skylight, Paris
Courtesy the artist and Gallery Koyanagi, Tokyo
Image courtesy Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart
Photograph Rémi Chauvin

FIRST YOU FEEL: RYOJI IKEDA

JANE SOMERVILLE

Ryoji Ikeda doesn't like to explain his work. He prefers viewers to experience it in the same way one does music. As Ikeda stated: at a concert 'you don't ask "what is the meaning of the melody?" before you listen ... first you feel'.¹ This engagement with and direct response from the audience is key to the work's completion. Ikeda's contribution is 'only half the work ... without people it is nothing'.

For the Japanese-born, Paris-based artist, site specificity plays an important role, with each installation configured for the space in which it is shown. *Test pattern [no. 5]*, 2013, on view at Sydney's Carriageworks during June 2013,² is the fifth incarnation of the immersive installation that converts large amounts of data into flickering black-and-white barcode images against an enigmatic soundscape. *Test pattern* has been exhibited in various guises. For its first showing at the Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media, Japan, in 2008, the work was displayed on a series of small screens, while in 2011, at New York's Park Avenue Armory, it was installed on two large perpendicular screens, across the floor and floor-to-ceiling. At Carriageworks, imagery was projected onto a 40-metre-long, 10-metre-wide platform placed on the floor, which viewers could walk and lie, even dance, on.

The data that Ikeda collects and reorganises is drawn from vast streams of real information sourced from the internet. *Test pattern [no. 5]* includes data relating to text,

sound, photos and movies; other works use information from flight patterns. Nicole Durling, co-curator of 'The Red Queen' (2013–14) exhibition at the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, where Ikeda's *data.tron*, 2009, and *data.matrix*, 2009, are on show, suggested that Ikeda does not explain his use of this data because it has 'no specific meaning'; it is employed as a 'raw medium'.³

Ikeda's practice draws on mathematics and science and he is in dialogue with mathematicians and scientists who are also his friends. His fascination with these disciplines centres on their use of abstract theories. For Ikeda, 'some mathematicians are more artists than artists'. He views his own practice as similar to the work of a composer, combining sound, image and the visual elements of line and colour intensity into one single artwork – 'like cooking'. Central to Ikeda's process is making these abstract elements – streams of pure mathematics, data, science, quantum theory and nature – tangible.

Reluctant to call himself an artist, Ikeda wasn't educated through the traditional avenue of the art school. Instead his practice is self-taught and his involvement in the collective Dumb Type was formative to the work he does now. Ikeda joined the collective in 1984, working with the group and performing worldwide until 1993. With fifteen members from different creative disciplines, including choreographers, architects,

designers and dancers, 'There was no leader ... it was democratic', Ikeda said. This very practical experience, through which each member was involved in all aspects of the performance, taught Ikeda about the complex elements he incorporates in his works today.

Like most of Ikeda's works, *Spectra (Tasmania)*, 2013, shown over nine nights during June on a hilltop on Hobart's Regatta Grounds, was best experienced in person. Our group stood around in the cold winter twilight near a grid of forty-nine searchlights. White beams of light stretching 15 kilometres up into the night sky gradually became visible as the light faded. A booming alarm-like sound drawn from sine waves rang through the air. Seeing these light beams gradually get stronger and hearing the sounds repeat, we felt like we were part of something a little eerie, perhaps extraterrestrial.

Later, from another part of town, we saw the seemingly infinite white line rising up into the night sky.

The Red Queen, Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, 18 June 2013 – 21 April 2014.

¹ All Ryoji Ikeda quotes are from a conversation with the writer at Carriageworks, 7 June 2013.

² Ryoji Ikeda's work was presented by Carriageworks and ISEA2013 in collaboration with Vivid Sydney.

³ Nicole Durling in an interview with the writer at the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, 18 June 2013.

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