David Rosenberg's July 2013 / 2018 Interview with Miguel Chevalier

Flows and Networks

David Rosenberg: Can you tell me what led you, starting in the early 1980s, to use computer applications as a means of artistic expression?

Miguel Chevalier: I was very much interested in the video work of the South Korean artist Nam June Paik and in Man Ray's rayographs. And the work of Yves Klein and Lucio Fontana constituted at that time for me two forms of pictorial absolutism, but I did not yet clearly see how one could go beyond all those avant-garde movements. In the early 1980s, at the Fine Arts School in Paris, several of us young students asked ourselves what was to do done after all these "deconstructions" and negations of the field of art and painting. This was, need it be recalled, a time when, for example, Daniel Buren said he represented the "degree zero" of painting. For my part, I felt far removed from Graffiti Art, from Free Figuration, from the German Neo-Expressionists, and from the Italian painters who had gathered around the art critic Achille Bonito Oliva. I wanted to explore still-virgin territories and create a new form of composition with the help of computer applications.

D.R.: You took a special set of courses in this area?

M.C.: No, not at all. I really approached computers and programming as an artist and an autodidact. During this period, there was no instruction in these areas in art schools in France.

D.R.: And how were your research efforts perceived?

M.C.: With a lot of scepticism. I was always being asked whether I was an engineer, a technician, or an artist. No one, or almost no one, thought that one could be both at the same time. Not to mention the near impossibility of exhibiting that type of creative work. That's where I discovered that the art world harbored, to say the least, numerous prejudices.

D.R.: Not to mention all the technical problems I imagine you had to surmount. . .

M.C.: In 1982, it was nearly impossible to get access to powerful computers in order to create artistic works. All those machines were basically monopolized by scientific laboratories or television networks. Consumer computing simply didn't exist at all. I could produce only still or animated 2D works on photographic media or record my work on magnetic tape. The appearance of microcomputing in the late 1980s allowed me, little by little, to have some equipment of my own at home and thus to create simple programs on my own. Despite the rudimentary, craftsmanlike character of such work, to me the possibilities seemed limitless. The software programs already offered a fabulous catalogue of shapes and colors, and it was

on that basis that I was able to work on images that, already, were in a state of constant flux,

D.R.: Ceaseless flux, variation, transformation, and mutation: one already gets a feeling, in germinal form, for what was going to sustain and orient your investigations up to the present time. Beyond opportunities for modeling and simulation, what has always struck me about your work is this quest for living and evolving "pictorial matter."

M.C.: These computer-processing tools encouraged me to generate perpetual variations and a continual piling-up of different images, each over the others. It was also, paradoxically, a way of drawing close to nature by drawing inspiration from the vital processes of growth and transformation.

D.R.: These processes, which are very complicated to replicate, were to require a phenomenal amount of computing power.

M.C.: Yes, that's true. It came very gradually and then suddenly accelerated. In the late 1990s and in the early years of the new millennium, a new era opened with the sudden appearance of the first graphic cards capable of calculating thousands of polygons for video games. At the time, it allowed me to create totally digital generative works, that is to say, ones capable of infinite changes—like my *Ultra-Natures*, which are virtual gardens that transform themselves over time. Starting in 2005, the increasing power of open-source programs and 3D computer-processing engines (such as Pure Data and Unity) allowed me to create generative and interactive virtual-reality software programs.

D.R.: This growing complexity led you to work with others in a team and to collaborate with various computer engineers and electronics engineers.

M.C.: Yes. I realized that I couldn't continue to work any longer alone. It was then that I discovered some very active communities of programmers who used systems like Linux as well as other ones. I began to collaborate with Cyrille Henry, Claude Micheli, and Nicolas Gaudelet who have from then on helped me with all aspects of the technical implementation of my installations. That's how the software programs for *Fractal Flowers, Trans-Nature, Extra-Natural, Liquid Pixels, The Origin of the World, Fractal Cloud, Vortex, Complex Meshes, Meta-cities, Terra Incognita*, and so on came into being. We went from three to twenty-five images per second and even more! This computing capacity opened an extraordinary space for creative work.

D.R.: In addition to changes in these very complex technical features of your work, a new aesthetic form thus came into being.

M.C.: Yes. And an aesthetic of the virtual realm is now in the process of spreading across the world. It is contaminating or sowing its seeds in all other fields of art (painting, photography, video), as well as architecture. It explores temporal forms and even allows one to hybridize them and sift out therefrom artefacts of the world.

D.R.: I know that you have become very interested in the work of certain artists whom you consider your predecessors and who have anticipated this aesthetic. I am of thinking of Auguste Herbin, for example, and of some other Kinetic Artists.

M.C.: One can also mention Victor Vasarely. The visual-arts alphabets of these two artists, Herbin and Vasarely, are highly modern: it's as if they had been designed for the digital world. Quite naturally, I've drawn a lot of inspiration from them to design *Pixel Waves*, a work that

generates a movement of permanent undertow, a wave that undulates, taking shape and losing shape *ad infinitum* while giving life to myriads of symbols of the digital realm—0s and 1s, which are the representation of binary codes, an On/Off that allows one to turn on computers and light up screens, or else motifs related to flash drives, the representation of our computer keyboards, and the world of mathematics (+ x - / %, etc.). For me, this work is emblematic of the Digital World like Pop Art and the New Realists were representative of consumer society in the Sixties. Such creative activity reconnects with the idea of trompe l'oeil in art and disrupts visitors' perceptions by creating a sensation that the walls are moving, warping, and dancing. Finally, this installation makes reference to the artists of Kinetic Art, of Op Art, and of GRAV (Jesús Rafael Soto, Julio Le Parc, Carlos Cruz-Diez. François Morellet), who conducted research on movement, light, and optical illusions. These artists prefigured the digital universe, with pixel frames, and interactivity, by enjoining the viewer to participate actively.

In another way, with *Liquid Pixels*, I became interested in the legacy of Action Painting: it's an "all-over" of colored pixels, where the body of the viewer, moving in front of the work, becomes like a digital brush, thereby allowing a trail of color, a dripping effect, to appear. I could also mention *Fractal Cloud* and *Fractal Constellations*, abstract landscapes composed of lines that little by little generate clouds that are transformed in real time. Fractals pertain to a specific, non-Euclidean geometry in which each element can reproduce itself *ad infinitum*. The simple initial structure becomes increasingly complex. In this life in flux, everything floats, gravitates, branches out, becoming always different while being interwoven with many lines of colored light, superimposed frames, and various trajectories. Beneath the apparent anarchy of the shapes of these lines are hidden several geometric orders. The lines wander off, delineating beneath our very eyes an endless form of automatic writing.

D.R.: Moreover, your works often get the viewers to interact. The flows [*flux*] and networks of which they are made then become, in a way, creative works executed by several hands.

M.C.: It is very important for viewers to be able to become immersed in my creative works and, for some of these works, to interact with them. Thanks to their presence, and to their movements, viewers then participate in the visual creation going on, amplifying it and altering it. Look as a matter of fact at *Liquid Pixels*; when they move around, they create the streaks of dark colors that mix into the background. Then, the work slowly fades away, awaiting the arrival of the next person who will come by to reawaken it.

D.R.: In another way, in *Magic Carpets*, there is an entirely calm and stable world that, it too, is affected by visitors' footsteps.
M.C.: The shapes react visually, in accordance with their movements that give to this world a fluidity that each time is new. Viewers deconstruct the pictures and the work evolves in an intuitive and spontaneous exchange that involves the viewers' bodies. I like to observe the communication that is then established between the two, the simultaneously virtual and physical dance that starts up.

D.R.: Through the flows and networks you create, you are rendering the invisible visible and revealing the essence of the things that now make up our daily life, in particular through the use of binary language.

M.C.: We are living in a perpetually evolving world in which data are exchanged at the speed of light and weave together our entire environment. I am seeking to render tangible and visual these networks and flows of information that are permanently being created around us and that extend to infinity. I am seeking to reveal, with the help of algorithms and mathematics, the

poetry of our contemporary world, as in the new installation, *Binary Particle*, presented at the Bordeaux Submarine Base. This creative work is a constellation of one hundred 0s and 1s, inflated with helium, that, thanks to the presence of fans, swirl randomly about the entire space. These two numerals, 0 and 1, which make up the binary code, manage our entire system of information. Yet at other moments, things are more metaphorical, as in *Vortex*, where, this time, flow lines are what float about and intersect. Emanating therefrom is a luminous energy that gives figural form to those billions of bytes of data traversing our environment each and every day.

Natures and Artifices

D.R.: Cloning, nanotechnologies, robotics, virtual reality, augmented reality, and so on—all that seems to constitute, all at once, the "biotope" of your creative work and of your thought.

M.C.: Yes, unquestionably. We have entered an era in which artificial life is no longer simply possible but quite real. My virtual gardens constitute a good example of what we are in the process of evoking here. Today, labs are increasingly modeling and simulating the living conditions of animal and plant life. I have drawn inspiration from such research in order to apply it to imaginary plants. The life processes found in each of these works are based on scientific models developed, for example, by the French National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRA). Today, one can speak of *post-nature* or *trans-nature*. Contemporary art, which interests me and on which I work, reflects, reflects upon, and thematizes this world in which the real and the virtual, nature and artificial forms are increasingly becoming interpenetrated.

D.R.: As an artist, you give the impression that you are shouldering several roles at once: botanist, gardener, landscape artist, scientist, and so on. Can you talk to me about these virtual seeds on whose basis you "cultivate" your virtual gardens and make them grow?

M.C.: In the early years of the new millennium, I designed, along with the computer engineers from the Music2eye collective, a software program called "Ultra-Natures." This program included eighteen virtual seeds. Each of those seeds contained very specific intrinsic qualities relating to color, size, and shape. Some plants grew rapidly and had a very brief life span, while others grew much more slowly but branched out, underwent changes, and were constantly being reborn. I also introduced a certain number of random functions that allowed these "gardens" to regulate themselves, going from being teeming and highly entangled worlds to moments when "nature" seems to enter into a phase of rest or hibernation.

D.R.: Some of your worlds are aquatic, as we witnessed in your latest one-man show, at the Bordeaux Submarine Base.

M.C.: I am exhibiting there my latest creative works, which do indeed explore underwater biology and are inspired by some microorganisms, zooplankton and phytoplankton. For example, in *Digital Abysses*, several bubbles of light, projected on the ground, reveal on their surface the development of living organisms. These digitally revisited marvels of nature flourish and then disappear beneath visitors' feet. These sea organisms, with their strange and astonishing shapes, fascinate me: absorbing carbon, they are responsible for two thirds of oxygen production; some are bioluminescent. They are true sources of inspiration for my current creative works.

D.R.: In your work, there is always a back-and-forth between the macroscopic and the

microscopic.

M.C.: Yes, with my latest work, *The Origin of the World*, I invite viewers to immerse themselves within a universe where cells and microorganisms proliferate, divide, and merge at a sometimes slow, sometimes furious pace. I chose this title not in reference to the work by Gustave Courbet of the same name but because of its literal meaning. The viewer is bathed in a sort of "artificial paradise" that oscillates from black and white to a universe within which psychedelic-colored shapes swirl about. This multisensory work has been set to music by two composer-friends of mine, Michel Redolfi and Jacopo Baboni-Schilingi, whose music magnifies and amplifies the effect of these sequential "pictures."

D.R.: This back-and-forth, this dialogue between the outsized and the diminutive, may also be detected in the size of your installations.

M.C.: I like the contrast that is set up between the giganticism of a projection and the infinitely small, which a projection allows one to contemplate. In this respect, technological advances have considerably aided my work. I can now produce such monumental installations, thanks to the strength of today's video projectors.

D.R.: To get back to this image of the landscape artist, I would like to bring up with you the way in which, little by little, you have freed yourself from the frame of the screen in order to project the image of your "gardens" on an urban scale. I have some spectacular memories of the Champs-Elysées in Paris, at night, transformed into a giant garden.

M.C.: There is indeed this idea in my work, which is also to be found among certain Pop Art artists—Claes Oldenburg, with his objects, or Andy Warhol and his wallpapers. Looking at this vast, lush, shimmering nature, you find yourself in the skin of Alice in Wonderland. Sharing your experience with people at large, getting out of museums in order to go into the streets—that, too, is an approach and a desire to be found again among Mexican mural artists (Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, two artists I'm very fond of). I don't often mention these childhood memories of mine, but I went quite often to Siqueiros's studio. Yet, in contrast to those artists, whose works are static or fixed in place, I also wanted plants that would react to viewers' coming and goings. That's the reason why I began to use detection sensors, which allow digital plants to wave and to bend over as you approach them or move away from them.

D.R.: You are creating increasingly complex universes. Your first artificial plants grew up and died. The next set reacted to their environment. Then, you introduced processes of mutation into your "virtual seeds."

M.C.: That's what yielded the work *Fractal Flowers*. They come out of the experience of *Ultra-Natures*, but these flowers are very different. With the help of some new fractal algorithms made on the basis of some very simple elements, it is possible to create some extraordinarily complex forms. I have worked a lot on the generative aspect of this fractal geometry invented by the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. The plant shapes are thus extremely stylized. From the aesthetic and symbolic standpoint, we are, with *Fractal Flowers*, at the confines of three worlds: mineral, vegetable, and animal. These crystal-flowers with wiry structures are reminiscent of the facets of a diamond. They have a real monumentality to them and, at the same time, their evanescent aspect creates, in my view, a stranger, more mysterious kind of world that is both robotic and alive, sensorial. When these plants die, their seeds can mutate, crossbreed, and give birth in a random way to new species whose characteristics I have not necessarily fully anticipated!

D.R.: It is as if you were building up a kind of genetic data bank.

M.C.: Yes, I am currently working on some new types of software programs that will allow people to create on their own some virtual seeds that will eventually constitute a "meta-herbarium." This "meta-herbarium" will be available to all on the internet, thus generating countless participatory virtual gardens.

D.R.: Your plants, which hitherto didn't exist except in the form of pixels or lines in computer-processing programs, can today take on physical forms.

M.C.: From the outset, I have been interested in 3D printers. It's a revolutionary process that allows one to create objects and that should drastically alter the world of sculpture, but also, ultimately, the world of industry and that of our everyday lives. You go from the virtual to the real almost directly and instantaneously. With *Fractal Flowers*, I can at any moment freeze their growth process and extract a 3D computer file that can then be "printed," layer by layer, in resin or in sand, and now in steel, gold, and silver.

D.R.: That is, moreover, what you did for the park of the Clément Foundation in Martinique.

M.C.: Yes, *Silene luminaris* is one of the virtual seeds from *Fractal Flowers*. I executed two different versions: one was installed in 2011 in the Pierredon Abbey, in the Alpilles, situated at the end of a magnificent path lined with plane trees; the other in the park of the Clément Foundation. Starting from *Fractal Flowers*, I have generated a flower in order to obtain therefrom a 3D file. And, thanks to the print technology of powder sintering, this new flower gives material form to one part of my virtual world. This process completely revolutionizes contemporary creative work. It is even a watershed for this aesthetic of the virtual realm that can now mix pixels and matter, thereby abolishing the boundary between the virtual and the real. In this sense, one can speak of a *postvirtual era*.

On account of its reddish orange color, this giant and imposing flower stands out in Martinique among the numerous exotic species located in the park, including royal palms, banana trees, and fields of sugar cane. It has a mirrored double, moreover, thanks to its reflection in the large ornamental pond, and at night, when lit up, it shines forth, creating a sense of mystery within this tropical landscape.

D.R.: Can you talk to us about an atypical work *IN-OUT/Artificial Paradises*, which you had placed for six months in the park of the Chaumont-sur-Loire Chateau?

M.C.: For a long time, I dreamed to doing a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art, hovering between nature and artifice, that would be autonomous and could be installed outdoors. It is thanks to Chantal Colleu-Dumond, who directs the Chaumont-sur-Loire estate, and to the aid of a few collectors, for its financing, and of Voxels Productions, for its technical implementation, that this dream was able to become reality. This creative work involves a wooden architectural structure inspired by Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes. It is covered with holographic films that become iridescent in the sun, like a giant scarab. Depending on the amount of light, this architectural structure can take in all the colors of the light spectrum and draw visitors who are invited to go inside in order to undergo a multisensory experience. They then discover a second dome in which a virtual garden is projected over 360°, and which is reflected on the floor and on the fragmented, mirrored walls. This virtual form of nature, inspired by tree branchings, combines several different species of shrubs, foliage, and 2D as well as 3D flowers that are reminiscent of undergrowth vegetation. The plants twirl about and intertwine in a mysterious plant-like ballet, reinforced by the generative music of Jacopo

Baboni Schilingi. Through this immersive experience set within an enveloping, semispherical architectural structure, the resulting virtual world reconfigures our views of the near and the far, opening us out toward the infinite. *In-Out/Artificial Paradises* was designed to be easily dismantled and transported in a container. Its purpose is to voyage, to create an installation that can roam across Europe and internationally.

Meta-territories

D.R.: In your latest works, nature seems, little by little, to be supplanted by virtual forms of architecture that unfold endlessly, thereby constituting an all-encompassing landscape.

M.C.: Yes, this is in the image of the world as we can observe it today. The city devours everything. It's Babylon on the horizontal level: carpets of individual homes, shopping centers, and high-rises that are in the process of spreading all over the Earth, covering over even deserts and oceans. They are also intruding upon the atmosphere: you need only think of the high-rises of Dubai, for example, or of the large metropolises of Asia and Latin America. Ildefons Cerdà, Georges-Eugène Haussmann, Otto Wagner, etc.: in the nineteenth century, the great urban planners structured the city in line with the principles of legibility, visibility, and the harmonic flow of human beings. Today, nothing is modeled any longer on these overall plans. Space is becoming fragmented, chaotic, plural. There is no longer a single framework but, rather, a mosaic, a set of archipelagos, of independent and connected territories. That's what I wanted to take account of in *Meta-cities*: a virtual city that is inspired as much by the new megalopolises I happen to visit and work in as by some principles of virtual architecture. With no beginning and no end, missing a center or having multiple centers, *Meta-cities* is a virtual city made up of wiry buildings that parade before our eyes. It's a perpetually evolving matrix-space.

D.R.: What you are describing and deploying in this work is a limitless city-world with no beginning and no end.

M.C.: Ultimately, the process seems unavoidable, because these megalopolises join up with one another. *Meta-cities* speaks to us and allows us to experience this immense single network that cannot be traveled through or known in its entirety.

D.R.: And with your recent installation, *New Atlantis*, presented at the Bordeaux Submarine Base, you invite us once again to interpret and experience cities in other ways than we usually do.

M.C.: Yes, I have created an imaginary city, evocative of ancient Atlantis. This island of Greek protohistory is known for having been swallowed up beneath the waves in a cataclysm brought about by Zeus. Before experiencing this tragic end, the island went through a golden age, becoming a conquering thalassocracy whose expansion was stopped by Athens. My *New Atlantis* is a sort of contemporary urban utopia that invites one to rethink the city in its relation to town and territory.

D.R.: Mythology also inspires your sculptures, as with your *Janus*.

M.C.: Yes, *Janus* is a sculpture done by 3D printing in silica sand and resin. With its two faces turned away from each other, Janus is the god of departures and returns, of beginnings and ends, and also of choices. He embodies, in my creative process, the dual aspect of our cities. Beneath his gaze, these cities develop protective refuges as well as spaces opened upon the

world. Also, this head differs from its ancient Greek and Roman ancestors on account of the many voxels (3D pixels) that make it up. It thus expresses the omnipresence of digitalization in our society. From Greek antiquity to the contemporary West, marble has given way to the virtual. It also serves as an affirmation of digitalization as an art in its own right, in a direct line of descent from ancient sculptors.

D.R.: Cities do not colonize physical spaces alone; they also get into our minds and structure, condition what you call our "mental landscapes." That's what's going on in your work *Terra Incognita*, which you presented at the Museu da Imagem e do Som (MIS) of São Paulo in 2010.

M.C.: *Terra Incognita* is a cross section of my brain. It's a materialization of the imaginary territories in which I move. It's a sort of self-portrait done in the form of a scan or a topographical survey. I play with the shape of the two hemispheres of our brains, whose convolutions create reliefs and undulations in the landscape. *Terra Incognita* is a sort of virtual island the viewer/actor can explore, like Robinson Crusoe, discovering, by turns, various works of mine that have already been completed or are still in the project stage.

D.R.: There also are a whole lot of imaginary flora and fauna. It's also the synthesis of all your prior works, which have been brought together here and transformed into a world to be visited. It's a sort of Duchampian *Boîte-en-valise*.

M.C.: Indeed, it's the memory of my work and the memory of my past *oeuvres* that merge here with an entirely reconstructed virtual nature that is not unreminiscent of other creative works of mine, such as *Fractal Flowers* and *Ultra-Natures*. Millions of colored pixels sketch out the contours of this "island" made up of mountains, valleys, rivers, beaches, and a sea—it's a lush universe. And it's also a data base I am expanding as time goes on. Also present on this territory, as I mentioned, are some installation projects or sculpture projects I have not yet been able to complete, such as *Flying Carpets*, *Coral Trees*, *Compass Roses*, *Pixaeolians*, and still others. The totally immersive aspect of this installation was heightened by the curved space of the MIS, with a 280 projection, and also by the generative music of Jacopo Baboni Schilingi.

D.R.: And here again, as a sculptor of the virtual realm, you have been able to draw out physical works from such creations.

M.C.: This imaginary island is a continual source of inspiration. It has allowed me to execute a series of sculptures entitled *Body Voxels*, which represent human figures extracted directly from the work. My *Janus* sculpture comes from this "cerebral" island. Just like *The Walker*, a man who walks with a confident stride and who fits neatly into the tradition of Auguste Rodin and Alberto Giacometti, expresses the advance of the digital culture that has become increasingly omnipresent in our society. This sculpture, nearly 2.2 meters high in full or hollow voxels (3D pixels), thus becomes an embodiment of twenty-first-century man.

D.R.: The immersive character of your works becomes essential to the way in which you envisage your projects today. One increasingly has the feeling of being immersed within a world of images that reminds one of cave art or the womb.

M.C.: I see no clear-cut separation between cave art and digital art as I envisage it. This is what I showed, I believe, with the major installation *Power Pixels* at the a-part Festival in the former underground quarries of Baux-de-Provence, where, over more than seven thousand square meters, viewers moved about in a mobile visual universe—something that can be destabilizing or disorienting. The feeling of being immersed in the images was gripping.

And my fondest wish is to pursue this work in a similar site, still to be found, one in which I could reside, work, and present my work on an ongoing basis. That is what I am now envisaging: a studio-laboratory-labyrinth-grotto in which to stage an art form that touches all our physical senses; it would be a place where I can move around and experiment with the multiple potentialities of the virtual realm that already have enriched and marked my own artistic path over the past forty years.

D.R.: What are, for you, the main aspects that mark this artistic path you are talking about?

M.C.: Various aspects of this work have been developed over the years, the main ones being the creation of generative and interactive works and installations on the basis of a variety of custom-designed software programs: the *in situ* spatial arrangement of the virtual realm, which establishes new connections with architecture and the viewer, through projections of images on the wall, the floor, or the ceiling or on the entire space all at once; through a remarkable reversal, the materialization of virtual works, which engenders postvirtual sculptures; and through the possibility of hybridizing all aesthetic practices, mixing the virtual with the real and vice versa.

Digital Arabesques

D.R.: With the ornamental motifs that inspire you and the arabesques your creative works form, a large proportion of your works are reminiscent of the motifs of Islamic Art. Is this a major source of influence for you?

M.C.: An essential source, even. The art of Islam is characterized by a geometricization of shapes that obeys mathematical laws. In integrating them into my works, the computer software programs I have had developed for my creative works can then be enriched with new forms. Zelliges, mashrabiyas, and muqarnases, these geometric decors manifesting divine perfection, thus offer me a fantastic ornamental grammar. They are motifs from an age-old tradition that are now meeting up with algorithmic art so as to cover the ground with their brilliant colors.

D.R.: Beyond just motifs, you are also seeking to place yourself within a certain artistic tradition, in particular with reminders of ancestral craftmaking practices.

M.C.: Quite so! For example, with *Magic Carpets*, I tried to revisit the tradition of cross-stitch embroidery in Islamic Art. This monumental work, fifty meters long, was spread out over the floor of the former Casablanca Cathedral, a superb edifice built near the end of the French protectorate of Morocco. The installation paid homage to Moroccan craftmaking, where carpet weaving holds a very important place. As with a wool carpet, this carpet, which in reality is virtual, created a world of moving colors and shapes that echoed the stained-glass windows of the site. Visually, the effect is extraordinary!

D.R.: This work alternated its arabesques with a multiplicity of pixels. One could also see in it a gigantic mosaic.

M.C.: Yes, indeed; these *Magic Carpets* spoke two languages. When the contours faded away, pixels appeared that could be seen as sorts of digital tesserae that transform the carpet into a gigantic mosaic. Two key craftmaking techniques of the Arab world were thus honored in the nave of this monument. Yet, beyond carpets and mosaics, it is the whole world of biology, of cellular automata, that marks this work. One could observe therein cells, dynamically

developing microorganisms that fade away or multiply, at an evolving pace, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly.

D.R.: Works like *Magic Carpets* and *Digital Arabesques* are often exhibited in atypical sites. How do you relate to the site that welcomes your creative works?

M.C.: I try to make my installations have an intrinsic meaning, but they might also be enriched by the site that welcomes them. It is for this reason that my interactive virtual carpets have been presented in Morocco in the Dar Batha Palace in Fez as well as in smaller spaces like a *riad* in the Medina of Tétouan and in Essaouira.

For Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, things were completely different. The installation was presented in a public space totally open to the town; a single metallic structure visually delimiting the carpet space allowed video projectors to be held in place above the viewers. This was a completely unaccustomed kind of presentation that allowed one to view the surrounding site, a very family-oriented site with numerous restaurants laid out in semicircular fashion, with buildings in the background and the whole area facing the sea.

D.R.: True, your works are often contemplated from within national-heritage buildings, some of which are quite extraordinary.

M.C.: The dialogue between my creative works and old edifices is, in my view, very important. My *Magic Carpets* installation would never have had the same import, were it installed in another place than the courtyard of the Castel del Monte. This mysterious, thirteenth-century castle is situated in the Apulia region of Italy, and it is rather unique among its kind on account of the mixture of medieval architecture with Ancient and Oriental influences. This edifice is also a "perfect synthesis" of art, science, and mathematics. Everything seems to have been thought out and built up around the figure eight, a symbol of infinity, of the perfect balance between Heaven and Earth. Octagonal in form, the castle is flanked by eight towers at eight angles, themselves also octagonal. This enigmatic building thus enters into direct connection with my own issues and concerns. It was an incredible chance to be able to present there my light carpet, which, at each nightfall, entirely carpeted the octagonal courtyard.

D.R.: The *Magic Carpets* of Castel del Monte thrust the viewer into an unreal and magical world.

M.C.: Yes. Visitors find themselves immersed in the midst of these perpetually evolving shapes and colored megapixels. It was as if they were entering a giant kaleidoscope in order to contemplate a never-before-seen world. That was my objective: while permeating themselves with the memory of the sites that welcome them, my works allow viewers to go off on an imaginary and poetic voyage.

D.R.: So, did the Middle Ages inspire this work?

M.C.: Yes, in part. Here again, the pixels could evoke the art of mosaics, which was highly present in the Italy of the Middle Ages. And even the limestone facade of the castle—whose stones, eroded by time, are stacked up one upon the other—might remind one of large pixels. Yet one could also see in the sinuous and colorful contours projected on the ground an echo of the shimmering of medieval tapestries. A genuine exchange occurred between tradition and what is most highly contemporary in the production.

D.R.: Just like with your *Digital Rosettes*?

M.C.: Yes, indeed. In 2012, for the Chemins d'Art Festival in Armagnac, I was able to install a large suspended inflatable sphere in the Aurens Chapel that filled a considerable part of the nave. When rosettes projected onto this sphere were generated one after another, they reminded one of the stained-glass windows of Gothic cathedrals.

D.R.: A never-before-seen world, to be sure, but one often based upon a collective imaginary, a dreamy, fantasized Orient.

M.C.: Precisely. These architectural structures are at once real and imaginary, as if one needed to create a magical atmosphere in order to rediscover the time of dreams. It's a *One Thousand and One Nights* that is being offered to them; it's an Orient strewn with flying carpets. And while recounting this story, I am always trying to be respectful of the site, as well as of its past.