

ART AS A CONSEQUENCE

A VOICE WORTH PRESERVING FOR A THOUSAND YEARS

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VOICE GEMS by Reeps100 and Trung Bao

An Interview with VOICE GEMS' Reeps100. The artist opens up a world of vocal compositions and generative systems, in conversation with Dimitria Markou.

Dimitria Markou: You initially rose to prominence as a beatboxer over a decade ago, can you tell us about your background and what attracted you to the arts?

Reeps100: My journey began with an interest in vocal composition and technique. I found the recent advancements in vocal techniques particularly fascinating and dove deep into exploring the peak of vocal possibilities. This led to opportunities such as creating vocal pieces on YouTube, which had over hundred million views, and judging major vocal competitions. I then shifted my focus to exploring the connection between vocal techniques and visual art, experimenting with methods to pair vocal expressions with visual systems, primarily using Cymatics to create voice-driven artworks and sculptures that respond to the human voice in performances.

From Saatchi all the way through to the HeK (House of electronic Arts Basel) and more experimental music festivals.

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VOICE GEMS by Reeps100 and Trung Bao
Physical Vibration Sculpture exhibited at Saatchi

Over the last five years, I began working primarily with generative systems, which are digital representations of Cymatics. My deep love for Cymatics, the physical expression of sound, has led to a combination of exploring the human voice and generative visualization. That has brought me to where I am today.

I've always been interested in the vocal composition and technique, from the history of vocal technique all the way through to the most contemporary possibilities. What I quickly realised is that there's been this strange explosion over the last decade where we are still discovering new techniques. People are finding new ways of using their voices and this is what I find particularly fascinating—that something as old and fundamentally human can still evolve and innovate.



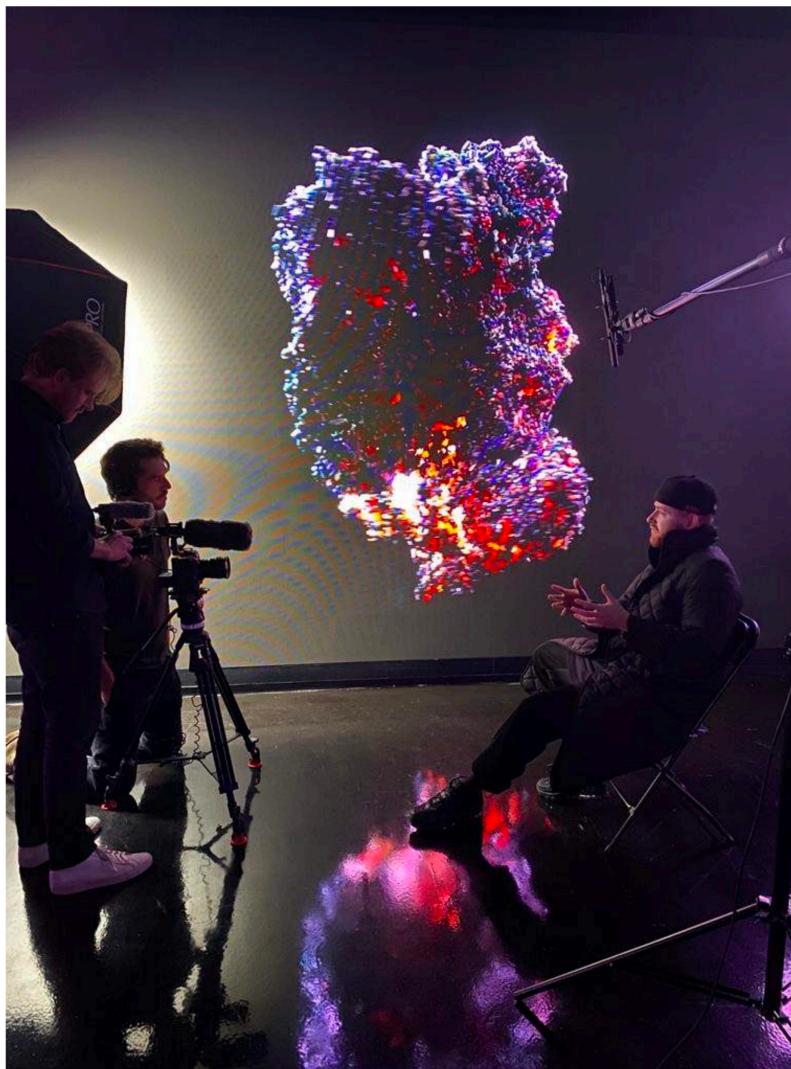
Reeps100's performance at Ars Electronica

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DM: How is the process of working with the voice as a medium?

R: The thing that I love about the voice is that even though it's unique to every individual, as every human on this planet has unique attributes, it also has its limitations. For example, as an adult, you have a certain range and dynamics that you can sculpt and shape, but fundamentally you have a limited palette. It's within those limitations that you seek out beauty and try to create something that stands out to the rest of the world. Especially in the world of vocal composition and technique, I'm always seeking to discover new sounds and techniques and to combine them in ways that no one has ever done before.

Even though there are limitations, there are exciting gems that can be found within them. This is also true in generative processes, where you spend a long time finding simple rules and fundamental algorithmic features, but within those simple rules, you can find something that is both consistent and beautiful that engages and excites people. Sketching and finding the rules tend to come in the beginning phase, where you're deciding your limitations and rules, and aiming for something that is dynamic within those consistencies. The hardest part of designing generative systems is working with the rules, and this applies to both physical (cymatics) and digital forms. It took me about 10 years to find my rules for visualizing voice, and those rules haven't changed since the beginning of the project. The simplicity and limitations are a huge part of what makes working with projects like this so fascinating, and you see the same thing in nature, where profound rules are expressed in vast and complex ways.



Reeps100 being interviewed during the "VOICE GEMS: 1000 YEAR ARCHIVE" at the W1 in London. VOICEGEMS is a project by Reeps100 and Trung Bao.

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I met Trung through the music culture, through beatboxing. I was judging one of the largest battles in the world where Trung was taking part – that’s where we met physically.

DM: How was collaborating with Herbert W. Franke, a self described “dinosaur of computer art” on the creation of the “Astropoeticon” VOICE GEMS?

R: I first heard about Herbert W. Franke when I visited the HeK (House of electronic Arts Basel) in 2017. My work in Cymatics connected me to him. He is a pioneering mind who found a sensibility or a set of ideas that is now prevalent. When we first started creating the VOICE GEMS project, we contributed it to the exhibition “Proof of Art” at the Francesco Carolinum in Linz, Austria.

The curator of the exhibition, Jesse Damiani, informed us that we had a very special guest; Herbert W. Franke with his wife, Susanne. They walked around the exhibition and our VOICE GEMS presentation stood out. He inquired if we could do a set of legacy VOICE GEMS from his poems “Astropoeticon”.

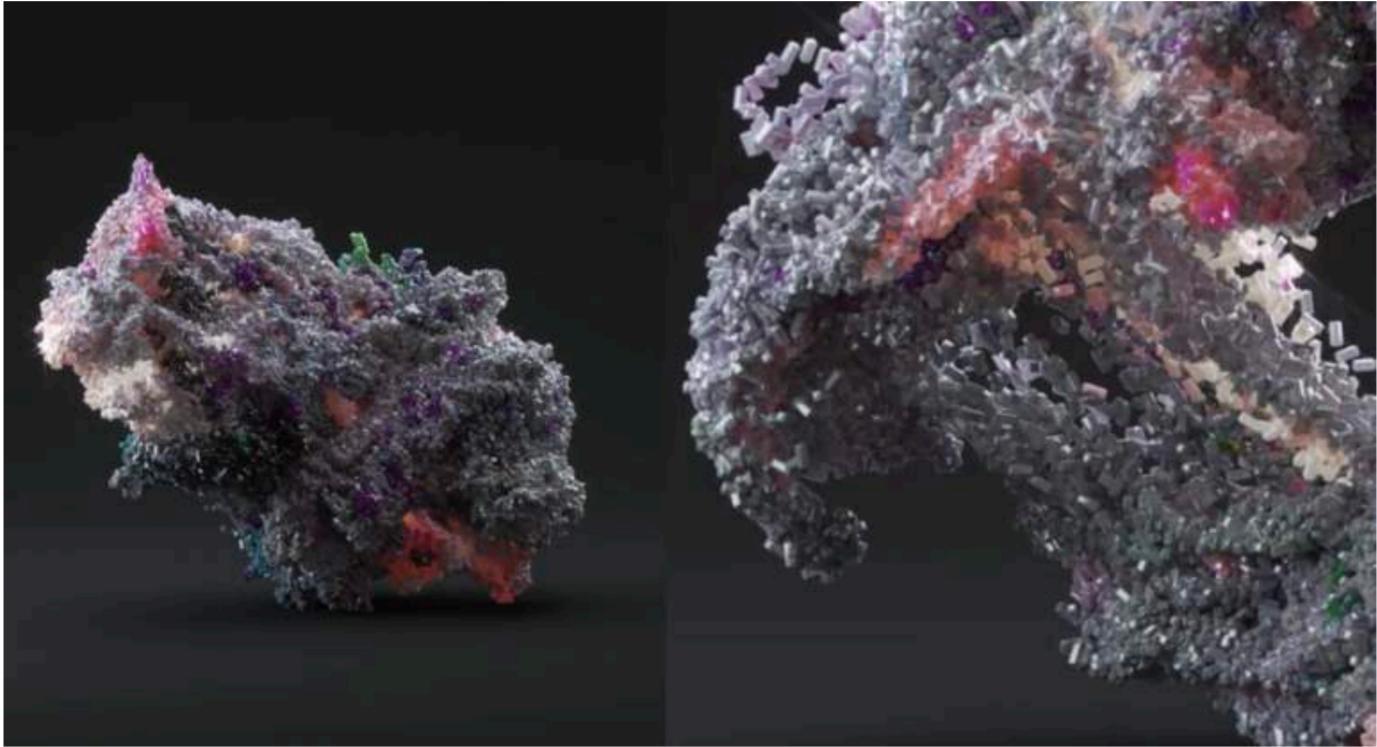


Herbert W. Franke "Astropoeticon" - Voice Gem 1035, by Reeps100 and Trung Bao

The colours, shape, and the actual tonality of his (Herbert W. Franke) VOICE GEMS to this day I think are all my favourites. The kind of power and the concepts of legacy around these works are beyond what I think even we can process. These are such important pieces now and we have four in total.

The opportunity to collaborate in that way and discuss these sensibilities together with Herbert was an absolute highlight of my career so far – for me and Trung it was an absolute honour.

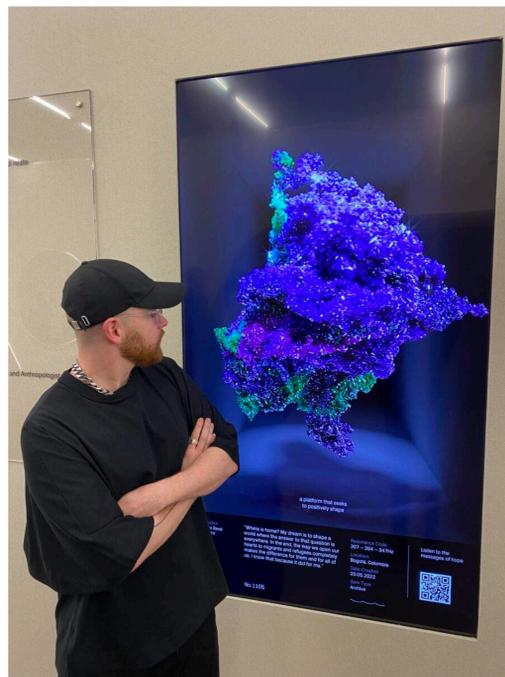
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Clip from Internet Gems (VOICE GEM) as full scale (left) and detail (right), exhibited at the group exhibition “Proof of Art”, at Francisco Carolinum in Linz.

DM: I understand that the “Proof of Art” exhibition was a crucial element in the establishment of VOICE GEMS, especially within the art ecosystem.

Reeps100: The exhibition was important for many reasons. VOICE GEMS is not a traditional new media project. We prioritize a spiritual and ceremonial quality, which slows down the amount of VOICE GEMS we make but that is intentional. Every time we exhibit, there is a curiosity that is kicked up and people connect with us from every exhibition we do. They all have a similar sensibility of looking for something different. We are proud of the human beings that support the project and the institutions that want to partner with us for a long time or collect the pieces. This was set in stone from the first exhibition with “Proof of Art” and meeting individuals like Georg Bak, Herbert W. Franke, Jesse Damiani and Anika Meier. They are all wonderful human beings and we have continued to meet and connect with wonderful minds in the world of digital and physical value.



Reeps100 at W1 London during the exhibition “VOICE GEMS: 1000 YEAR ARCHIVE”

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DM: VOICE GEMS were launched in 2019. Are there any future plans or goals that you're still trying to achieve with this project?

Reeps100: We focus on large-scale physical exhibitions and have created a system for guest curators. Each VOICE GEM we make is numbered and we are selective, but we've also been approached by a number of exciting partners for exhibiting opportunities. As an example, last year we collaborated with the World Economic Forum (WEF) to showcase VOICE GEMS from various artists with the goal of promoting hope during a difficult time. We ended up curating 17 works and all these VOICE GEMS are remarkable voices and the individuals; including Dr Jane Goodall, Will.i.am, Rupi Kaur, Sadguru, who recorded the messages specifically generated the VOICE GEMS for this exhibition. It was the largest digital exhibition that we've ever done. Those are the kind of things that we're really excited by. It helps the arts penetrate new spaces and generate that curiosity within teams.



Clip from Sir Geoff Hurst's World Cup Memory VOICE GEM

We aim to continue working with new spaces and institutions to showcase digital works and preserve them in new ways. We also introduced physical sculptures last year. We're partnering our NFT VOICE GEMS with physical exhibitions to create exciting connections. We're releasing a number of pieces this year and carefully selecting which ones will become physical. We're also researching preservation and discussing partnerships to ensure that our VOICE GEMS archive lasts for over a thousand years.

We're investigating ways to guarantee the preservation of digital files in the long-term and studying why physical objects have lasted so long. We're focusing on this question this year and bringing it under the umbrella of VOICE GEMS from research to expression and art. We're grateful for the support we have.