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ART & DESIGN

Agnieszka Kurant: 'Variables'

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Art in Review

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Agnieszka Kurant's "A.A.I.," in which termites forged mounds from colored sand and crystals.

Art, science and philosophy seldom converge as felicitously as they do in [Agnieszka Kurant's work](#). One of Ms. Kurant's most intriguing themes has to do with what she calls "phantoms": entities whose existence is uncertain but that nevertheless impinge on consciousness as if they were real.

“Phantom Library” is a shelf of paperback and hardcover books produced in collaboration with a book designer. Each purports to be a literary work by a fictional author — e.g., a phantom — mentioned in a book by a real writer: Kilgore Trout, for example, the science fiction writer made up by Kurt Vonnegut.

“The End of Signature” features an [autopen machine](#), a device used to replicate a signature for multiple copies. Visitors may sign a piece of paper and feed it into a slot, where it’s scanned and integrated by a computer into other signatures, creating an illegible scrawl that the machine repeatedly prints on new pieces of paper. The work also includes glass tubing in which clear liquid repeatedly turns

black, forming the shape of the composite signature as it moves from left to right, as if a giant phantom hand were writing it over and over.

For a set of six glittering colored mounds displayed on a low platform, Ms. Kurant worked with entomologists at the University of Florida. For each piece, termites were placed in a container of colored sand, gold glitter and crystals, and then left to their own devices. In effect, the community of termites acted in concert to create a kind of sculpture.

This raises a cosmic question that Ms. Kurant doesn't make explicit: Might humans, like termites, be unconsciously engaged in the production of a tremendous collective project, the likes of which no one is even remotely aware of?