
Elfriede Dreyer



matrULS

A glowing neon sign in a cursive script, likely representing the name 'MatrULS'. The sign is illuminated with a bright green light and is mounted on a dark background. The letters are stylized and interconnected, with the 'U' and 'L' being particularly prominent. The sign is suspended by thin wires.



Catalogue

SOLO EXHIBITION

Pretoria Arts Association

18 March – 2 April 2022



'matrix'
[mā'triks]

[noun]

[Oxford and Collins Dictionaries]

the environment or context in which something such as a society or person develops and grows

a system of lines, roads, etc. that cross each other

a group of electronic circuit elements arranged in rows and columns like a grid

a mould in which something is shaped

the formative cells or tissue of a specialised structure

In *matrix*, the idea of an 'Other' space is presented: Simulated, embodied, dynamic and different to the experienced, physical real.

The idea of matrix is connected to illusion and it is presented in this body of work as a construction, a space or a place, and as fictional. On one hand, matrixial space could be virtual space that human cyborgs inhabit; on the other hand it could be any other kind of 'world', dream or condition; or it could even embody utopian space. Sometimes a constructed matrix seems so real that it becomes intertwined with the physical real. It is constituted by relationships, wishes, emotions and connections; it is volatile and can change from moment to moment. New matrixes are constantly birthed since human beings continue to create these within the physical boundaries of time.



On René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (*La Trahison des images*), 1929, the words 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (this is not a pipe) are written. The artist makes a statement about the certainty of the observed reality and sets up play with illusionism through the representation that is not an actual pipe but a painted image thereof. Illusion is probably visual art's most fundamental ontology since a depiction represents the physical real in fictive form.

Jacques Derrida has gone so far as to argue that both presence and self are illusions (dealt with in my *Ceci n'est pas ...* series). In matrix creation, the boundary between the projective illusion or virtual matrix and the physical real mostly disappears. Jean Baudrillard (*The Perfect crime* 1996:109) writes the following:

With the Virtual, we enter not only upon the era of the liquidation of the Real and the Referential, but that of the extermination of the Other... . The otherness of death - staved off by unrelenting medical intervention. Of the face and the body - run to earth by plastic surgery. Of the world - dispelled by Virtual Reality. Of everyone - which will one day be abolished by the cloning of individual cells. And, quite simply, of the other, currently undergoing dilution in perpetual communication. If information is the site of the perfect crime against reality, communication is the site of the perfect crime against otherness.



Ceci n'est pas un embrayage (This is not a gear)
Ceci n'est pas un coeur (This is not a heart)
Ceci ne sont pas des poumons (These are not lungs)

2021
Mixed media on canvas, 405 x 305mm each




Sometimes a constructed matrix seems so real that it becomes intertwined with the physical real. It is constituted by relationships, wishes, emotions and connections; it is volatile and can change from moment to moment.

New matrixes are constantly birthed since human beings continue to create these within the physical boundaries of time.

Shifting, 2021
Mixed media on canvas, 600 x 800mm



Matrix of fire, 2021
Mixed media on canvas, 1803x1201mm



In *Cultural Politics* (1991, Volume 3:28-29), Donna Haraway expresses the view that by “the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation.” Grounded in the physical real, the concepts of observation, reproduction, invention and representation underlie the drive to create other and artificial reals, including simulations of the real.

My concept of matrixial space is also vaguely related to Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, describing non-hegemonic (equal) places that exist simultaneously. Although Foucault defines heterotopia as an approximation of an imaginary utopia – and this is certainly built into my conception of the matrix – it remains fundamentally a parallel space that functions in co-option and anticipation of the other more ‘presiding’ space (the real, mostly).

A real, temporarily occupied space induced by circumstantial conditions – such as being in hospital; waiting at an airport; or waiting for something to pass – could be labelled as an existential matrix. Then the matrix becomes a kind of anteroom, often filled with emotions of anxiety, fear or anticipation. Associated words evoked here include buffer, containment, isolation, liminality and projection. In several of the works on exhibition there are areas of separation, dividing lines or grids as anterooms.



Matrixes, 2021
Mixed media on canvas, 300 x 400mm (image size). Grey frame



Reflected, 2021
Mixed media on canvas, 300 x 400mm (image size). Grey frame

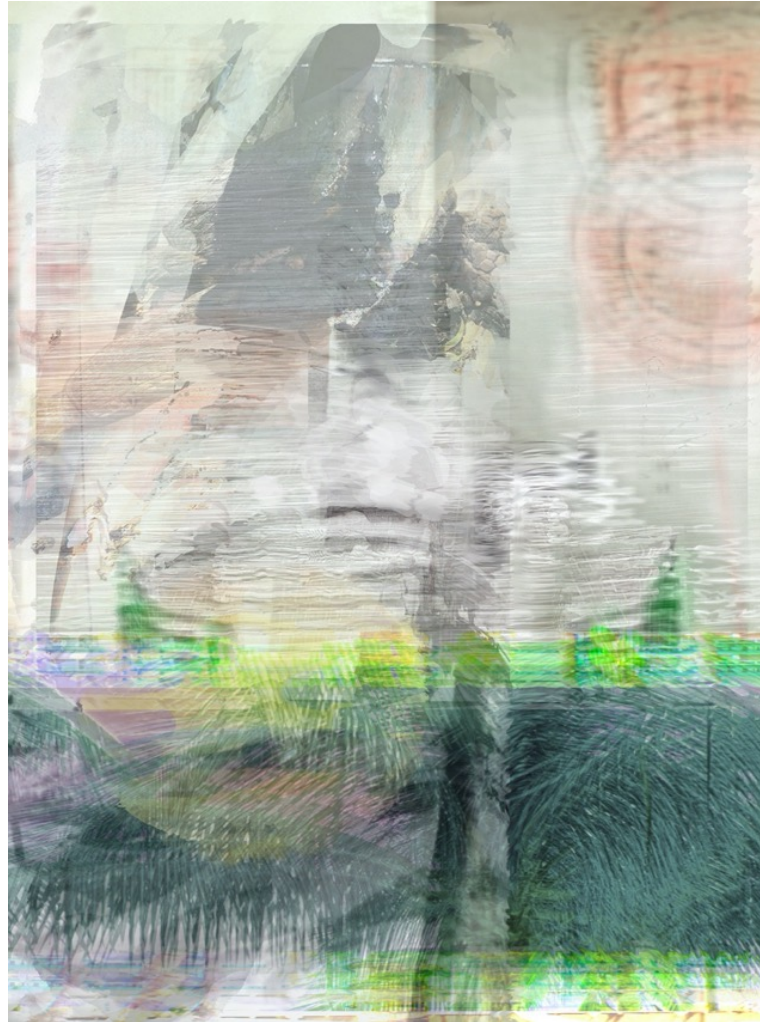


Forgotten, 2022
Mixed media on canvas, 841 x 594mm (each)

Utopia, in essence, is also a fictional matrix, an imagined design in space, time and place.

In the introduction to Ligeia Gallagher's *More's Utopia and Its Critics* (1964) a useful definition of utopia is provided, namely "any place, state or situation of ideal perfection, any visionary scheme or system for an ideally perfect social order." The concept originated with Sir Thomas More in his 1516 publication *De optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula utopia* (Transl. *Concerning the highest state of the republic and the new island Utopia*, generally shortened as *Utopia*). More derived the term from the Greek, meaning 'no place' or 'land of nowhere'.

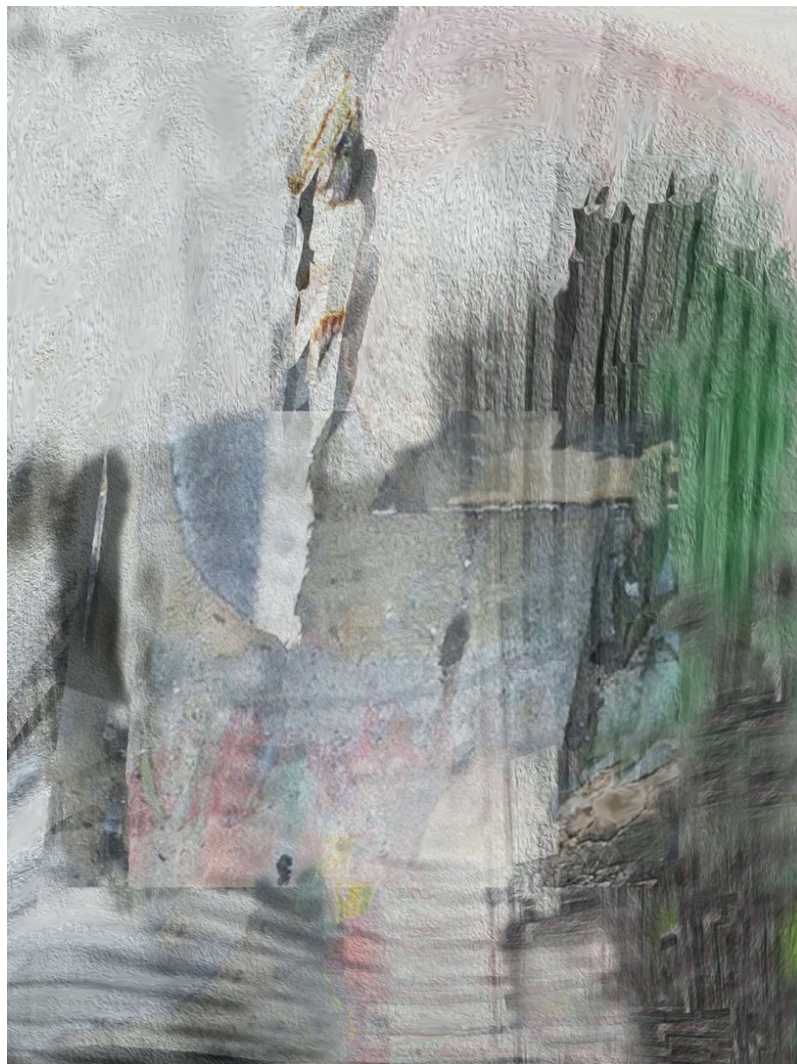
In utopian construction there is a constant pull of the dichotomy between the real and the positing of an alternative reality, a fictional, imagined 'other' world or state, mostly ideal in nature. As entities all forms of alternative reality, including illusion, any matrix has validity only in its relationship to the sensory or physical real. Inherent to matrix construction is the fact that it is created adjacent to another more presiding space.



Good place, 2020
Collage, mixed media, archival digital print on Hahnemühle Museum Etching 350gsm, 1200 x 900mm each (image size). AP. Edition of 5. Framed in white



No place, 2020
Collage, mixed media,
archival digital print on
Hahnemühle Museum
Etching 350gsm, 1200 x
900mm each (image
size). AP. Edition of 5.
Framed in white



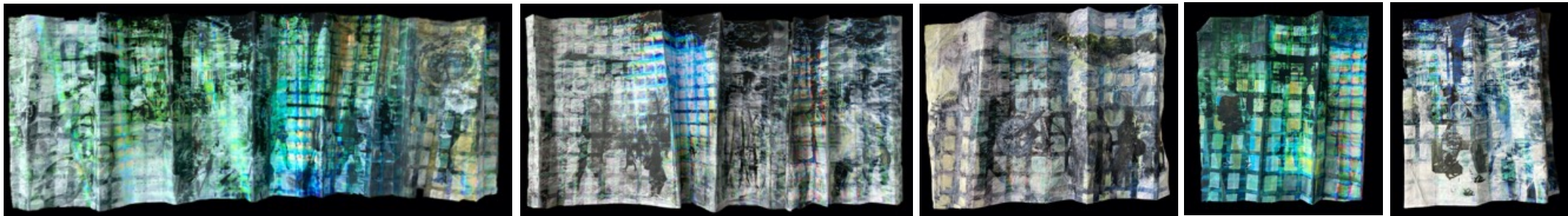
This is the place,
2021
Archival print on
Ultrachrome ink on
Hahnemühle 350gsm
paper, 800 x 700mm
(image size)
Edition of 3. Framed in
white

In matrix construction, the concept of time is of utmost importance.

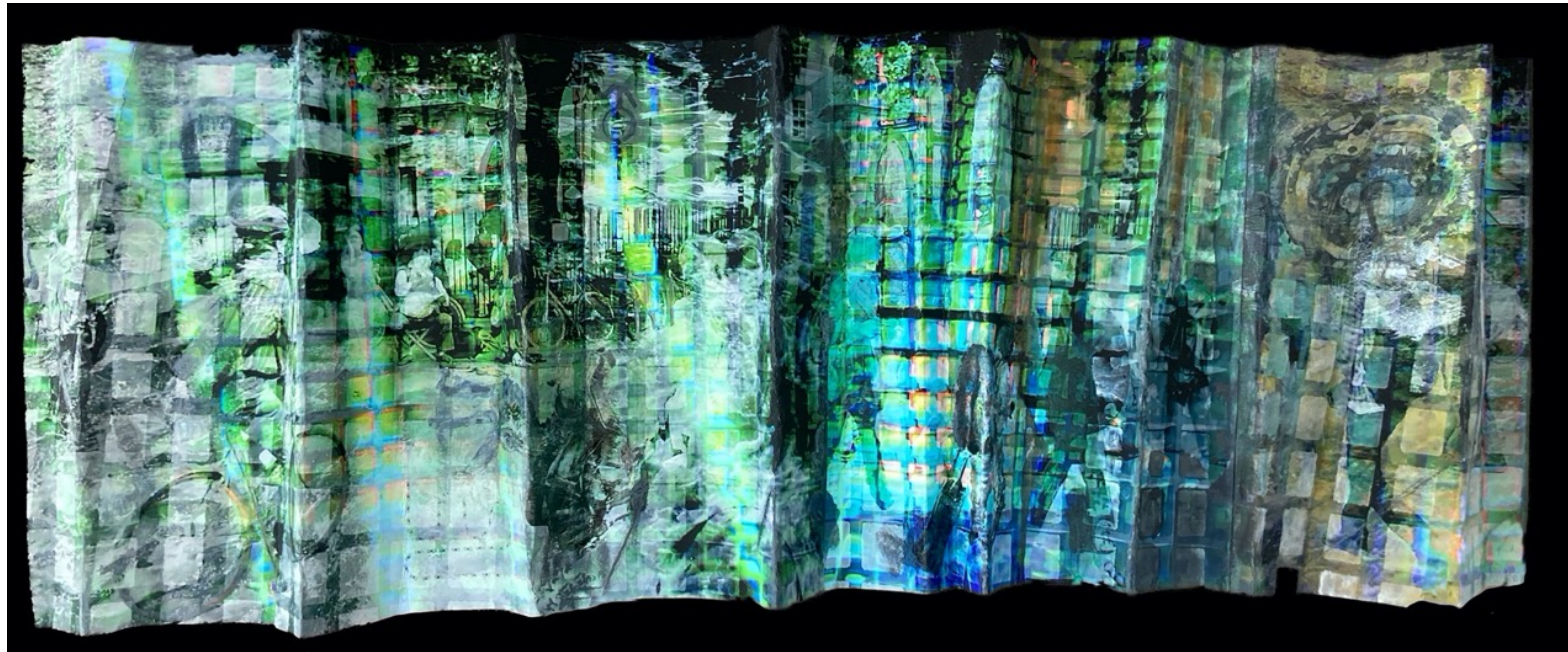
It relates to *both* the idealised *and* the real worlds since the ideal construct is mostly a response to the historical horizon of the real. Matrixes are inspired by the present real, a situation that brings on a type of time-schizophrenia in which the pull to the future is unrelenting.

In the *Time* works the *flâneurs* are present again, operating and active in their individual time zones. They are in a matrix of time, but a matrix can also be a twilight zone of memory – good or bad – or a dream or fantasy or a projection of the virtual self in digital space. All of these relate to time.

Besides a large grid-like matrix occupying the visual space in the video production *Life in the matrix* and the *Time* series, imagery of everyday *flâneurs* is found. Their *flânerie* takes place non-stop against the backdrop of the rhythm of life. The *flâneurs* stroll the city with handbags, backpacks and parcels, and there are bicycles, cyclists and musicians. Caught up in a matrix of linear biological time, the strollers engage in individual pursuits of daily ritual. Their bodily walking movements indicate physical life, existing in time and place on an existential stage

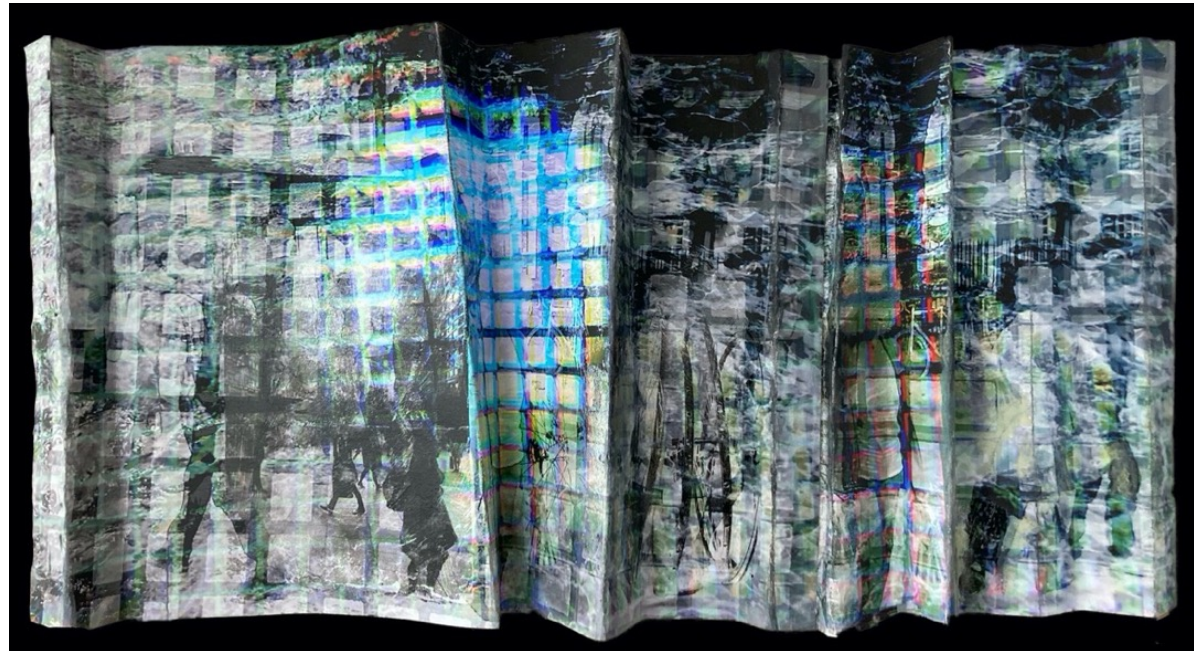


Time series, 2021



Time #1, 2021

Mixed media on Hahnemühle Museum Etching 350gsm, variable image size 340 x 900mm
Black box frame, museum glass



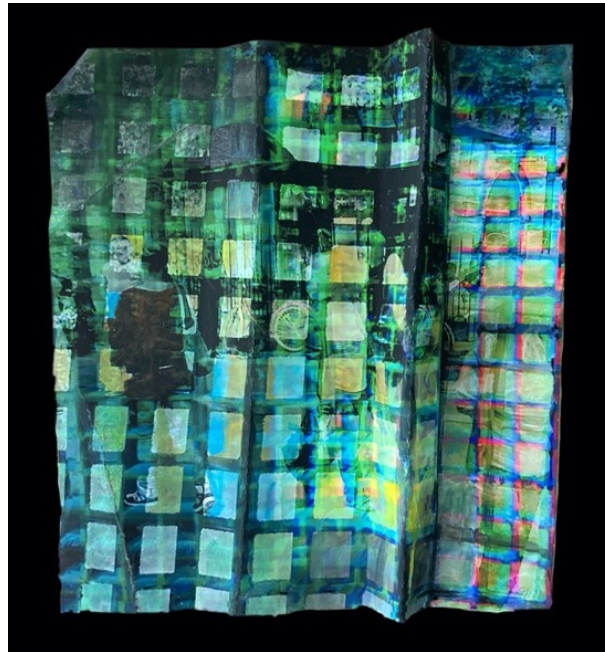
Time #2, 2021

Mixed media on Hahnemühle Museum Etching 350gsm, variable image size 340 x 690mm
Black box frame, museum glass



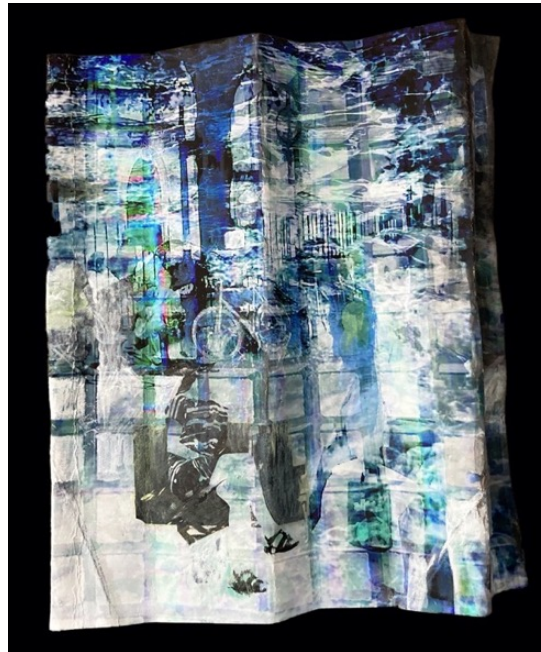
Time #3, 2021

Mixed media on Hahnemühle Museum Etching 350gsm, variable image size 340 x 430mm
Black box frame, museum glass



Time #4, 2021

Mixed media on Hahnemühle Museum Etching 350gsm, variable image size 340 x 310mm
Black box frame, museum glass



Time #5, 2021

Mixed media on Hahnemühle Museum Etching 350gsm, variable image size 430 x 290mm
Black box frame, museum glass






Sunset/Aftermath, 2022
Mixed media on canvas, 500x500mm



Distinctive emerald green is evident in most of the works, conceptually representing an ideal or utopian green place of betterment (as in *Up there is a green patch* and *Beyond*) but also a neon-green virtual space. A red palette is used hand-in-hand with nuances of green in order to reference human flesh and blood (as in *Bodies in space*), but also fire (as in *Matrix of fire* and *Shifting*) as allegory of transformation, process and transition. In the matrix of a virtual world the anchor remains the physical human body and mind: making up visions of other worlds and engaging with virtual worlds.

Bodies in space, 2021
Oli on canvas, 1400 x1220mm



In the *Life in the Matrix* works, depiction of the *flâneur* is central. The origin of the concept of the *flâneur* can be traced back to the writings of Charles Baudelaire and more specifically to its further interpretation by Walter Benjamin, who identified Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) as the basis of the *flâneur* theory. Here the *flâneur* is interpreted as being in a crowd and taking pleasure from being absorbed in the masses of people. The emergence of the *flâneur* coincided with a period of great change in modern history, that of industrialisation and modern capitalism. The arcades – especially the arcades of the Paris city streets, described as passageways lined with shops – provided the city stroller with a delineated setting and were thus influential in the coining of the notion of the *flâneur*.

Since the 19th century, however, the notion of the *flâneur* has been transformed in the face of dramatic changes and experiences in the global urban environment. - Excerpted from Elfriede Dreyer & Estelle McDowall (2012), *Imagining the flâneur as a woman*, *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research*, 38:1, 30-44.

However, the concept of the *flâneur* has undergone major conceptual shifts in the past century due to the massive changes occurring in the global urban environment. It is now

more widely applied than during the 19th c. The Belgian artist Francis Alÿs has worked extensively with *flânerie*. He says: I want “to absorb what already was there, to work with the residues, or with the negative spaces, the holes, the spaces in-between” (From Rhiannon Jaye Vogl, 2007. *Walk this Way: The Urban Interventions of Francis Alÿs and Diane Borsato*). Alÿs' creative focus is more on residual or negative space – the matrixes of history and culture – and he often delineates or routes the circumference of the space he is active in.

The movement of the *flâneur* in an enclosed or demarcated setting is also applicable to personalised matrix creation in a contemporary sense. Movement and activity take place within the bounded space of a matrix, whether a dream, virtual reality or physical delineated space such as a room or house (as during covid-19 lockdowns). Matrix construction as bordered space is related to utopian construction in the sense of the individual's place within the collective, that is, within a larger whole, similar to *flânerie* with a specific space.



Life in the matrix, 2021
Video installation, 6.37 min. Edition of 3



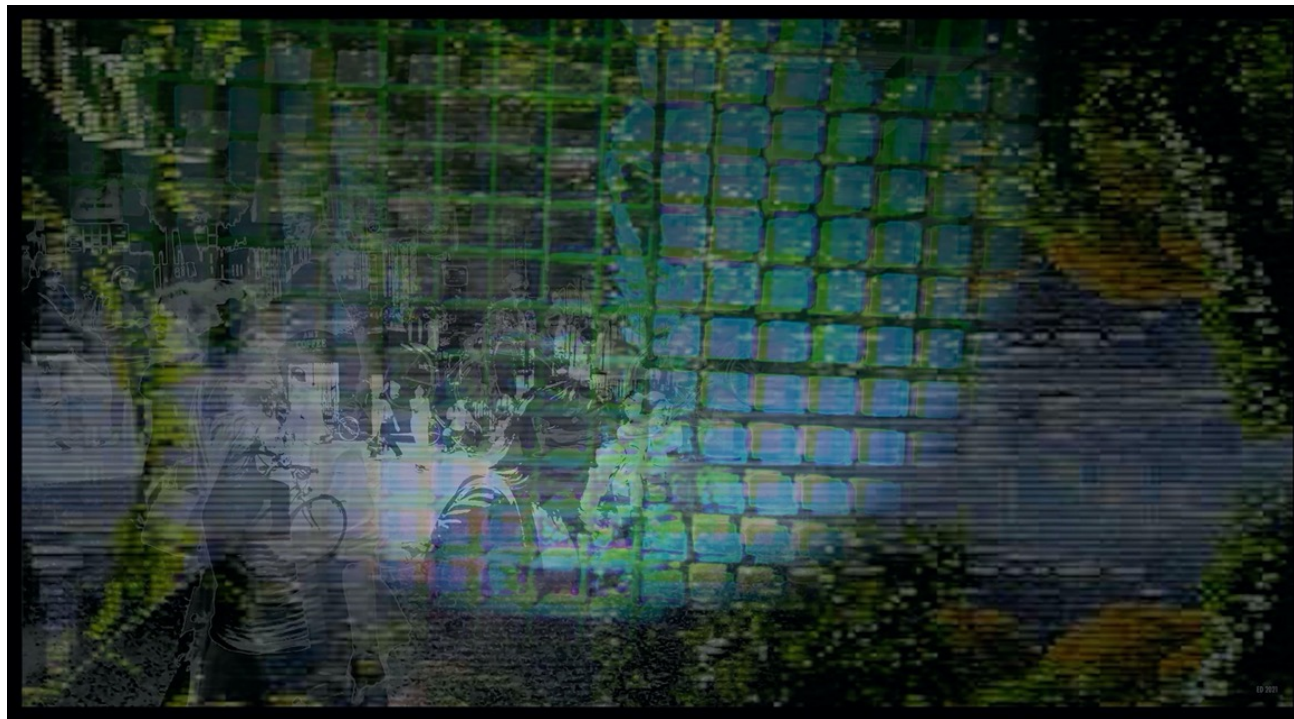
Life in the matrix #3_51_09, 2021 (from the video *Life in the Matrix*)
Archival print on Ilford silk, 260 x 454,45mm (image size). Unique work, black box
frame and museum glass



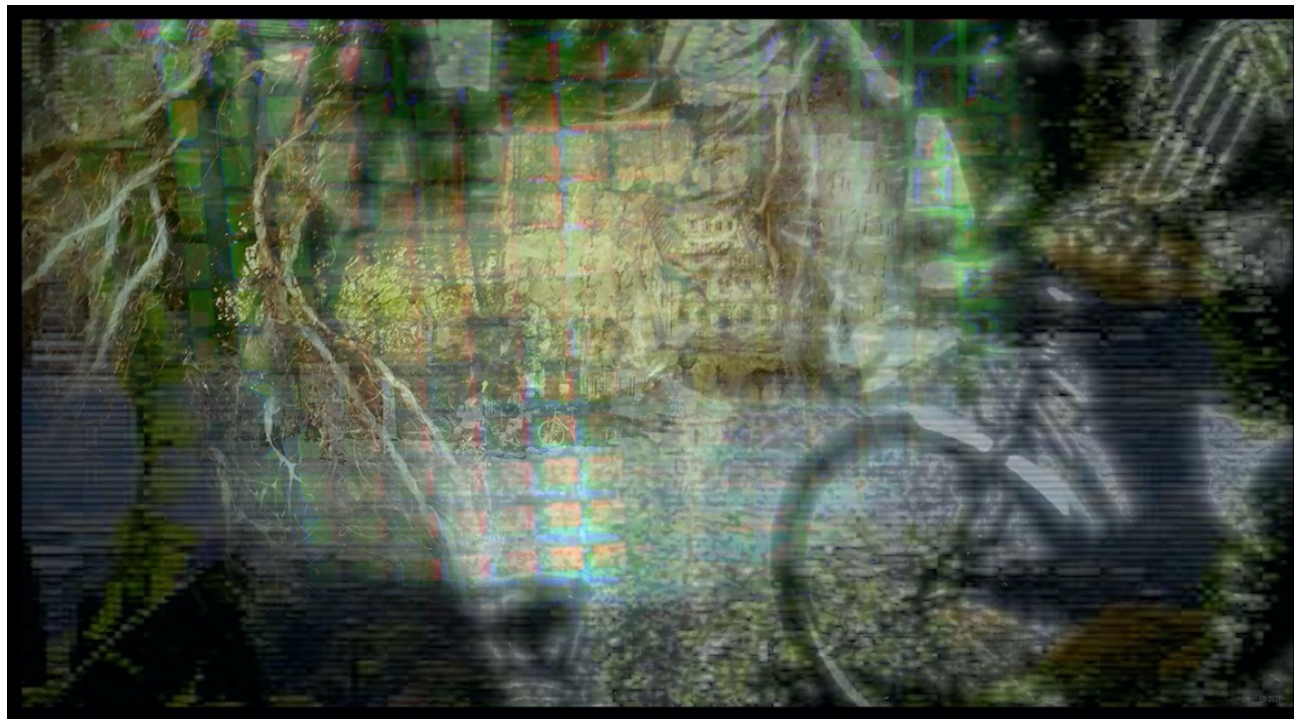
*Life in the matrix #5_12_08, 2021 (from the video *Life in the Matrix*)*
Archival print on Ilford silk, 260 x 454,45mm (image size). Unique work, black box
frame and museum glass



Life in the matrix #5_59_29, 2021 (from the video *Life in the Matrix*)
Archival print on Ilford silk, 260 x 454,45mm (image size). Unique work, black box
frame and museum glass



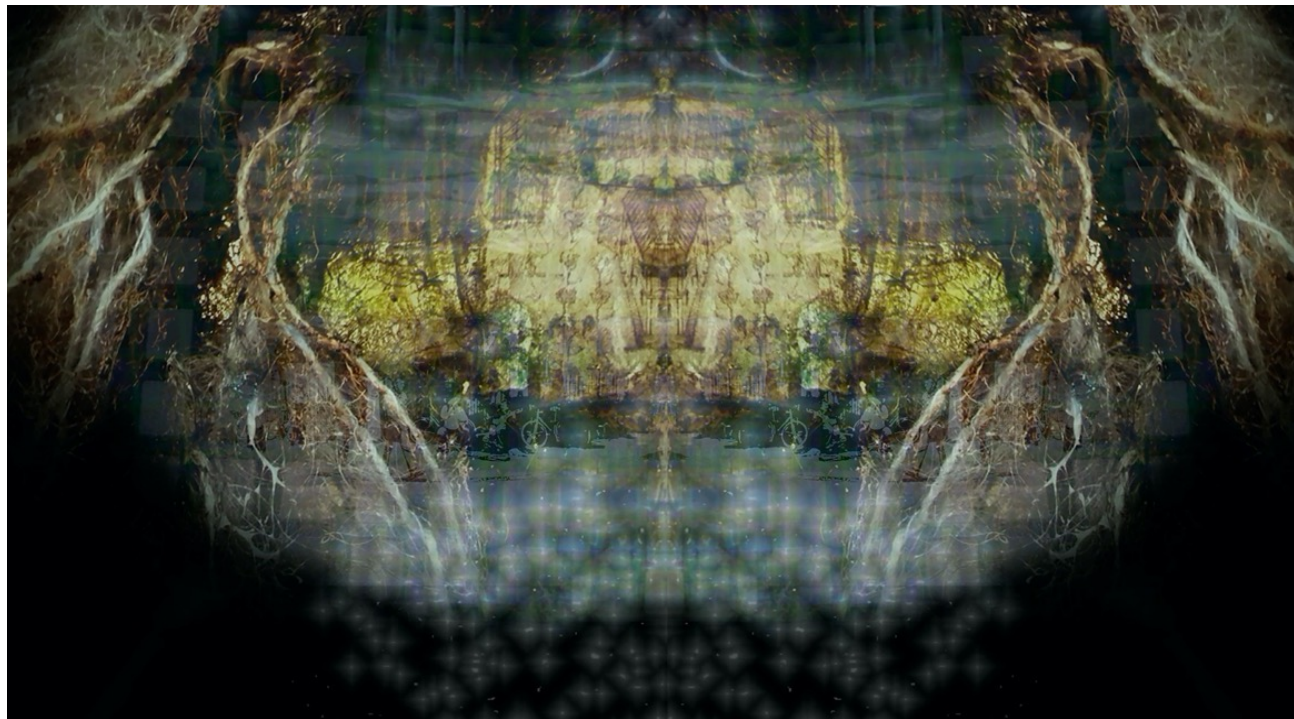
Life in the matrix #2_23_04, 2021 (from the video *Life in the Matrix*)
Archival print on Ilford silk, 260 x 454,45mm (image size). Unique work, black box
frame and museum glass



Life in the matrix #5_31_02, 2021 (from the video *Life in the Matrix*)
Archival print on Ilford silk, 260 x 454,45mm (image size). Unique work, black box
frame and museum glass



*Life in the matrix 3_19_15, 2021 (from the video *Life in the Matrix*)*
Archival print on Ilford silk, 260 x 454,45mm (image size). Unique work, black box
frame and museum glass



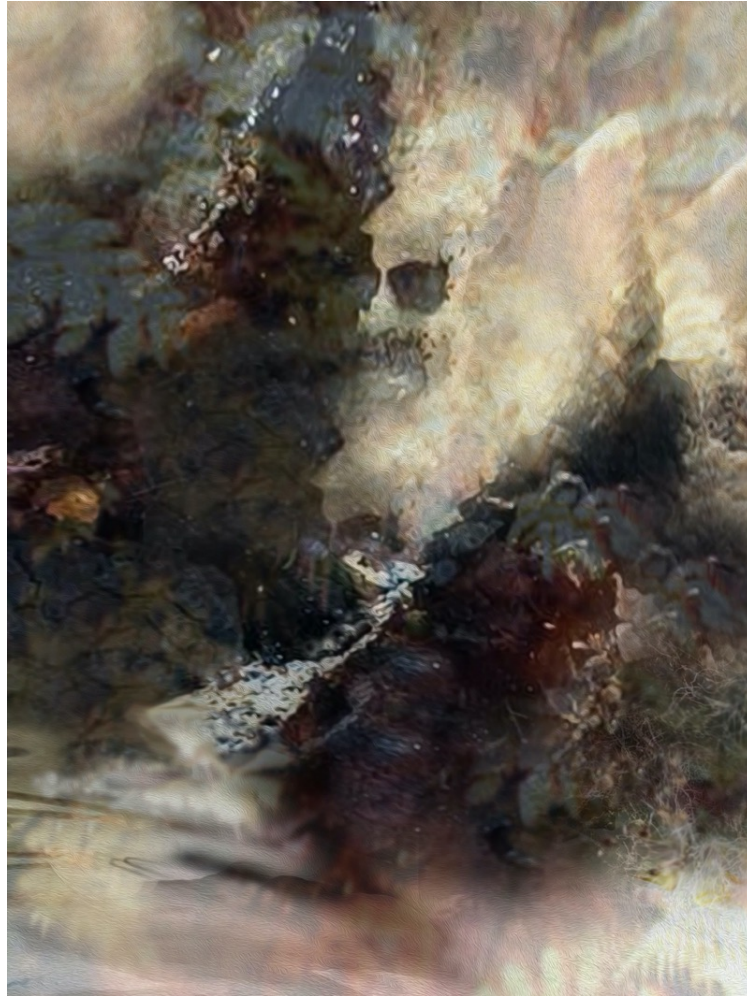
Life in the matrix, 2021 (from the video *Life in the Matrix*)

Archival print on Ilford silk, 260 x 477mm (image size). Unique work, black box frame and museum glass

Although the idea of matrix is not Romantic per se, it does contain reference to transcendence and desire for another reality. In this work, *Towards*, as well as in the next two Perspex works are quite Romantic in character by suggesting a wish for escape (*Sail, sail away*) and searching for a 'better', idealised place (*Up there is a green patch*). The irregular formats of the two works suggest random matrix formation. Other works such as *Beyond* and *Winged* also have Romantic undertones.

Towards, 2021
Mixed media on canvas,
1000 x 1000mm





Beyond, 2021
Archival print on Ultrachrome ink
on Hahnemühle 350gsm paper,
400 x 300mm (image size)
Edition of 3. Framed in white



Artist bio

Elfriede has been working in the South African arts sector for more than 30 years as an artist, curator, gallerist and academic. Her areas of focus in the visual arts are utopianism; space and place; and digital culture. Her work has been taken up in major art collections of the Universities of Pretoria and South Africa; Telkom; the Development Bank of Southern Africa; FNB; and various private collections. She participated in group exhibitions at major museums, galleries and festivals throughout the country; she was a finalist in most national competitions, including the Brett Kebble Award; and she held solo exhibitions in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Paris and Oudtshoorn.

Academic career

Elfriede has been affiliated with the University of South Africa as Extraordinary Professor in Art since 2015. Formerly she lectured full-time at Unisa from 1990 to 2003 where she was also Head of Department for four years. From 2003 to 2014 she lectured full-time at the University of Pretoria as Professor in both Fine Arts and Art History and specialised in postgraduate studies. She was the Academic Dean at the Open Window Institute from 2014 to 2015 and worked as a museum scientist for the Art Bank of South Africa in 2019. She published widely in local and internal academic journals and books; she was a gallerist for 11 years besides ad hoc curatorial projects, nationally and internationally; and continues to adjudicate at most of the national competitions such as Absa l'Atelier, Sasol New Signatures, The Sanlam Portrait Award and others. She was NRF rated in 2012 and again in 2018. More info:
<https://www.elfriededreyer.com/>