

# Philipp Goldbach's Meditations On Changing Technology



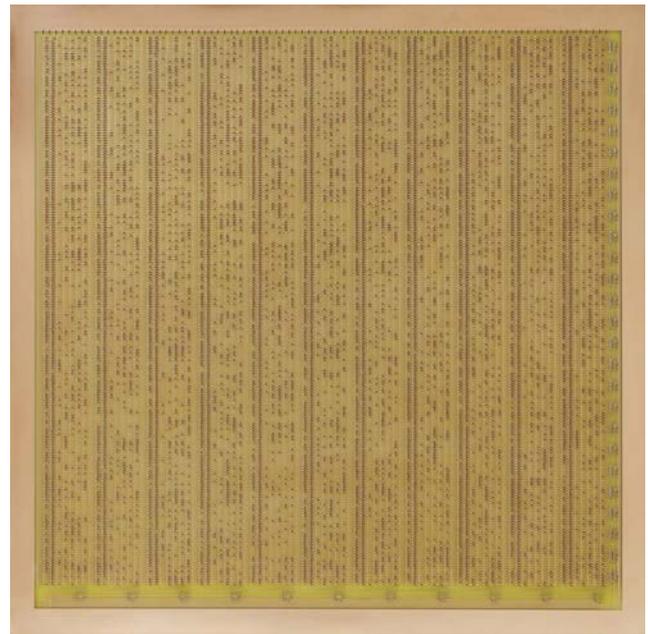
ARTSY  
BY ISABELLA SMITH  
FEB 4TH, 2016 3:00 PM



“Ars Lingua Universalis”: Art is a universal language. German artist Philipp Goldbach’s boldly titled exhibition at Annely Juda Fine Art considers art as language—and so much more. In the conceptually dense and many-layered stand-out piece, *Via Lucis* (2015), for example, Goldbach incorporates some 150,000 slides—the complete archive of Cologne University’s Institute of Art History—into a single tableau, which gives visual expression to ideas around data, communication, codes, and materiality.



Philipp Goldbach  
*Ars Signorum (G. Dalgarno), Read Only Memory, 2016*  
Annely Juda Fine Art



Philipp Goldbach  
*A Common Writing (F. Lodwick), Read Only Memory, 2016*  
Annely Juda Fine Art

Using technology from the 1950s through 1970s, Goldbach has built by hand 12 ROM (Read-Only Memory) boards—square, copper-toned panels dotted with small electrical components. Each contains canonical texts dealing with the idea of a universal language; the encoded text is discernible only from each panel’s title, for example, *The Advancement of Learning (F. Bacon), Read Only Memory* (2016). The works are resoundingly mute, their meanings hidden, leaving the viewer to contemplate the visual aesthetics, the solidity and materiality of this anachronistic media.



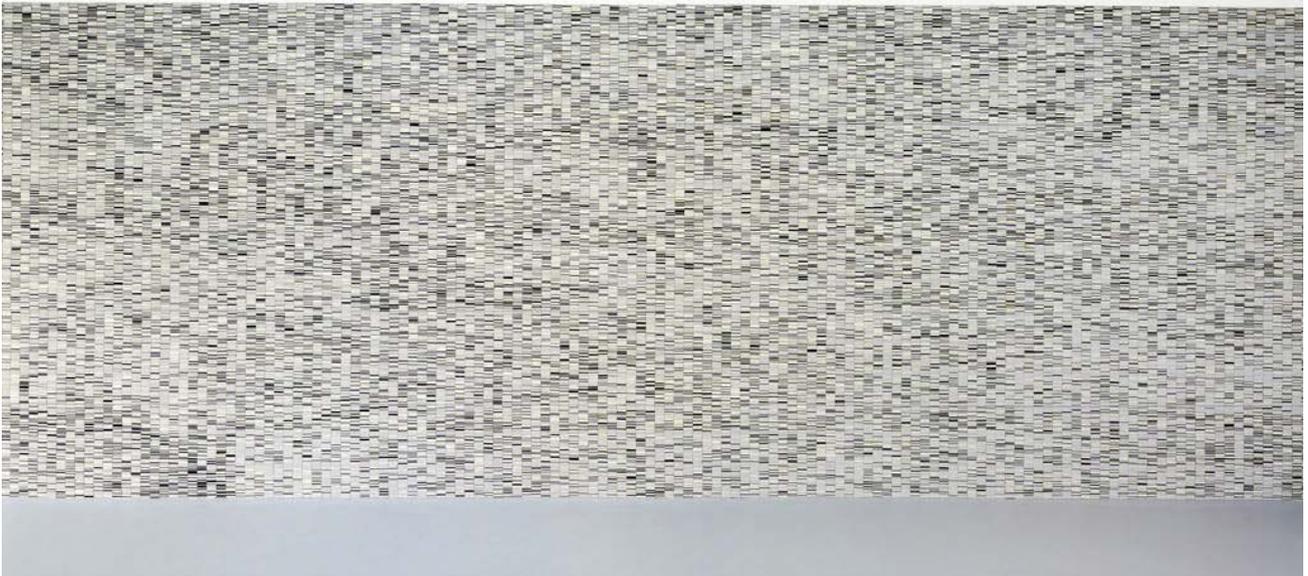
Philipp Goldbach  
*KVz 82 A (Cyan)*, 2016  
Annely Juda Fine Art



Philipp Goldbach  
*KVz 82 A (Yellow)*, 2016  
Annely Juda Fine Art

A new series of photographs likewise features this kind of inscrutable encryption, to question modes of communication. The images features telephone utility boxes, each one vandalized with enigmatic, spray-painted markings. These graffiti tags are, in fact, meaningless, depicting made-up symbols. Rather than presenting the language of tags and signatures that we might expect to encounter on such mundane objects, the artist mimics this way of communicating, overlaying familiar but ultimately incomprehensible scrawls onto the photographs in the darkroom. Drawn with the light of a torch, the symbols raise questions about the veracity of photographs and the information they communicate.

The aforementioned *Via Lucis* is the most spectacular work on show. The sprawling, rectangular wall-piece is essentially made up of 150,000 images, representing millennia of cultural history, stacked flat, making their content obscured. As is the case in the digital landscape (a plane as flat as *Via Lucis* itself), Goldbach's slides randomly juxtapose disparate art historical eras. No longer conveying information, the slides instead form a minimal, monochromatic composition.



Philipp Goldbach  
*Via Lucis*, 2015  
Annely Juda Fine Art

This pattern that the slides create produces a peculiar optical effect: a flickering that poignantly recalls the static of screens—the same screens that have been part of the digital revolution that made the slide format redundant, and this archive (as well as others like it) obsolete. *Via Lucis* is a more refined mode of iconoclasm than Goldbach’s earlier installation, *Sturm/Iconoclasm* (2013), in which this archive was strewn unceremoniously on the floor. Their function thwarted, the slides now form a literal monument to rapidly changing technology. The effect is elegiac and quietly sobering.

In these three new bodies of work, which can be read variously as epitaphs, celebrations, and bittersweet meditations, Goldbach gestures to the materiality of records and communication. In an age of ever-accelerating technological development, his practice is a welcome opportunity for rumination.

—Isabella Smith

*“Philipp Goldbach, Ars Lingua Universalis” is on view at Annely Juda Fine Art, London, Jan. 27—Mar. 24, 2016.*

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