

Mimesis (/mi'misis/) is the imitation, representation, or mimicry of reality in art, literature, and theatre.



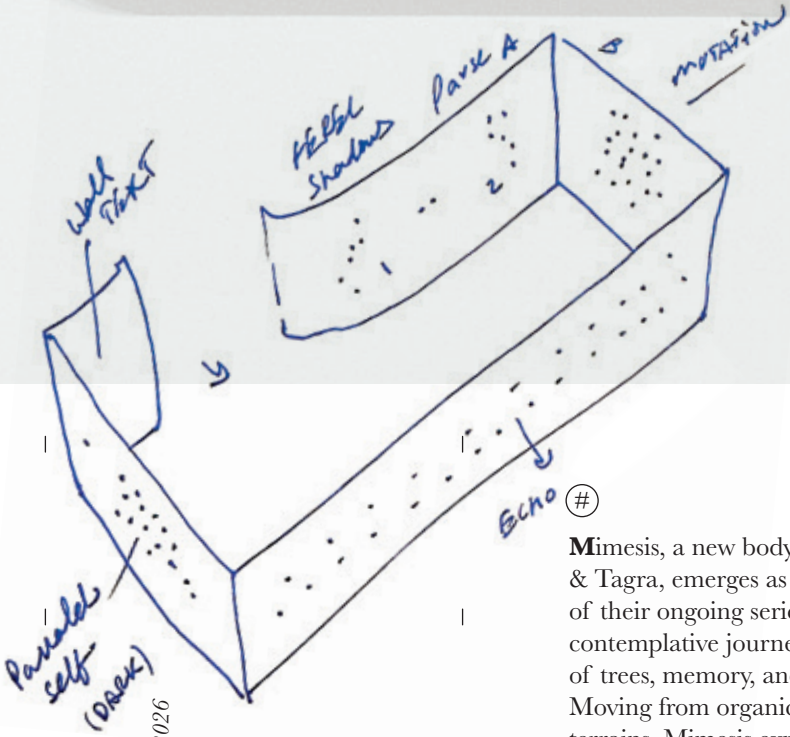
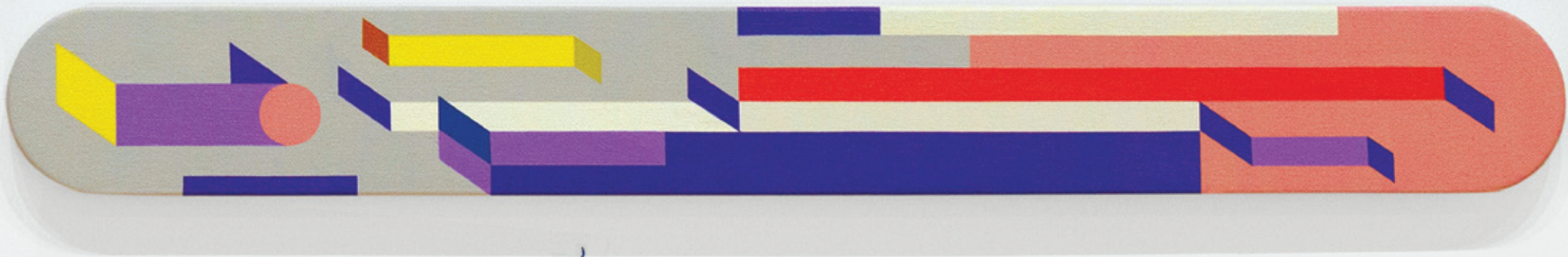
Originating from Ancient Greek, the term describes how art reflects or recreates life. It captures aspects of beauty, truth, and human action through this process of imitation.



ASHIVTAS,
Chennai

Summer 26

MIMESIS



Mimesis at Ashvita's Chennai - sketch, 2026

coded gaze

Mimesis, a new body of work by Thukral & Tagra, emerges as a residue and extension of their ongoing series, Arboretum - a contemplative journey through communities of trees, memory, and living archives. Moving from organic ecosystems to digital terrains, Mimesis explores how lived moments are translated into pixels, bars, and fragmented visual units. Through hundreds of painted canvases composed of imagined data forms, the works examine how the speed and abstraction of digital systems can be grounded in the slowness, tactility, and materiality of painting.

“We wanted to imagine infinite units, each representing a lived moment. For us, time, data, context, and urgency often become ways of seeing. These unique bars read like data sets, each marking the present, while carrying traces of the practices that have shaped our journey over time.”

Living across online and offline realms, our experiences are increasingly archived, measured, and reshaped through algorithmic rituals. In this evolving digital condition, Mimesis asks what it means to inhabit worlds built through data, repetition, and mediated images. Can pixels become the new atom of memory and emotion? Can systems of code hold traces of intimacy, absence, surveillance, or care?

As technology thrives on acceleration and art insists on slowness, the exhibition opens a space for reflection on how we see, feel, remember, and remain human in increasingly digital lives. Illustrating these ideas

through imagined colours and forms through pixels, which are not just technical units. They represent presence, absence, desire, memory, surveillance, affection, all reduced to the dance of light across a digital skin. We speak through them, cry into them, and fall in love with them.

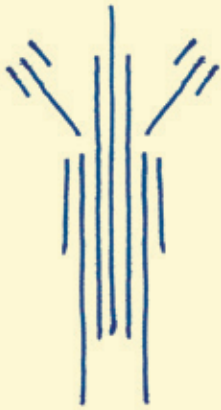
Initiated in 2022, Parts of Mimesis has been presented at Nature Morte, New Delhi; the SCAD museum, Savannah, Jaipur Centre for Art, Jaipur and the Kamal Narayan Gallery, Mumbai.

The exhibition brings over hundreds of fragmented canvases echoing the squares, lines, and dots which are abstracted as coloured pixels depicting graphs, and numbers. Each can be seen as illustrated forms of an array of code, data, and information gathered, which is and merely measured in x and y coordinates.

How audiences should see these is up to them. Is it the latest deleted votes in Bengal? Or the water tables in each district? Can the work exist in isolation from the drone attacks we hear in the news, while we make peace within to resume the next stroke of colour bordering on the other? Can these be an algorithm of a selected demographic or just a day spent and lived in the studio?

The exhibition evolves into four walls, about our present condition, our digital shadows, and what we leave at every stage. It questions what happens to a society when the real is always mediated, when the eye

Mimesis, Summer 26



Have you lost confidence in making a decision without checking with AI?

Ford Shadow 4 - sketch, 2026

never touches the world directly, but only through layers of resolution and refresh rate. Are we both illuminated and lost, each of us a flicker, a square, a node in a vast, glowing network of presence and longing?

The exhibition also provides a series of evolving documents that inform the daily practice within the Thukral & Tagra Studio. Categorised as Recent Memory, these works mark immediacy while bringing criticality to conversations around subjects that demand attention, reflection, and continued engagement. These documents contain numbers, graphs, pie charts, and statistics that frame the exhibition.

Thukral and Tagra Studio

An Anxious Census of the Present^(by) Chirag Thakkar

Mimesis, Summer 26

Chirag Thakkar is a writer, publisher and editor based in Delhi. He has published hundreds of bestsellers and critically acclaimed nonfiction and fiction books in his career across publishing houses in India. Chirag is also a performance artist and is interested in the intersections of dissent, citizenship and the climate emergency.

When you look at the sheer number of countries that the Indian Prime Minister has visited, reportedly about 80 and counting, one cannot help but wonder if he is, in fact, on a personal globe-trotting tour to travel to all the countries that people this world – the Vishwa-guru on a Vishwa-darshan. The self-anointed mother of democracy on a tour of distant, unrelated relatives. The sheer assembly line compulsion with which the dispensation produces images and cut-up reels of the PM travelling to countries and hugging leaders of state is akin to the feverish fevour of a collector.

That by the time, and if he finishes his fourth term in power in 2034, he would perhaps like to have finished visiting all the 194 countries of the world, and 195, should he like to include Palestine in his bucket-list-driven itinerary. This physical exploratory quest of the Atlas, an unsolicited census mission to verify whether countries on the map of the world really exist or if someone drew them up, comes to about hundreds of trips, costing thousands of crores, and counting, funded entirely by Indian taxpayers.

Contrast this with a picture that rarely makes headlines. A picture where India sits, uncomfortably, as the 102nd hungriest nation out of 123 countries in the Global Hunger Index. Or that India ranks 130th out of 193 countries in the Human Develop Index, far below Sri Lanka or China. Neither does the fact that 32.9% of Indians remain fatally malnourished make news. Or that 18% of Indian children in India are ‘wasted children,’ which means they are so hungry and starved that they stand little to no chance to survive beyond the age of five.

What makes news, instead, is a packet of Parle Melody candy being gifted to the Italian PM, Georgia Meloni in a gesture of candy diplomacy. Among other things, PM Meloni was also gifted a Manipuri silk textile piece by PM Modi, who has refused to visit the strife-torn state of Manipur that’s seen of the worst ethnic violence and civil strife since 2023 that killed 260, injured and displaced thousands who haven’t returned home since.

While a chocolate candy makes for cruel and cringe diplomatic gifting, scores and scores of pregnant women, lactating mothers and young children between the ages of six months and six years remain hungry, being denied their Constitutional right to Food. The Women and Child Development Ministry’s flagship and much-touted scheme, the Poshan Tracker, has been failing in facially recognising expecting and existing mothers, thereby depriving them of take-home rations.

Hera Rizwan’s Pulitzer-supported work shows us that the welfare of millions of young children and women has been fatally risked due to disruptions and tech glitches, causing unspeakable digital exclusion. Millions of the awfully undervalued, underpaid and precarious Anganwadi Workers, who are responsible for delivering the government’s many critical services, such as in health, early education, nutrition, family planning, maternal and child welfare, and banking, have repeatedly protested against barriers to rights-based delivery of services. AI-based facial recognition, OTPs on mobile phones that are delayed or never delivered have turned many in India hungrier, poorer and disenfranchised.

The Poshan tracker uses a Google Machine Learning kit, a built-in Artificial Intelligence tool that is meant to detect faces on the device against the beneficiary’s Aadhaar-linked database. AI evangelism that the whole of the world wouldn’t stop eulogising aside, having already forlorn our humanity at the altar of the age of AI, what are we to make of an algorithm denying us our rights, livelihood, declaring us persona non-grata? How

are we to feed ourselves with this promised future we wouldn’t stop heralding?

Much fanfare has surrounded India being one of the youngest countries in the world, what with 70% of its population being of working age with the median age of the country being only 28 years. Yet, underneath a deceptively simple statistic of India being the 6th largest economy in the world, there is data that tells a less monochromatic story.

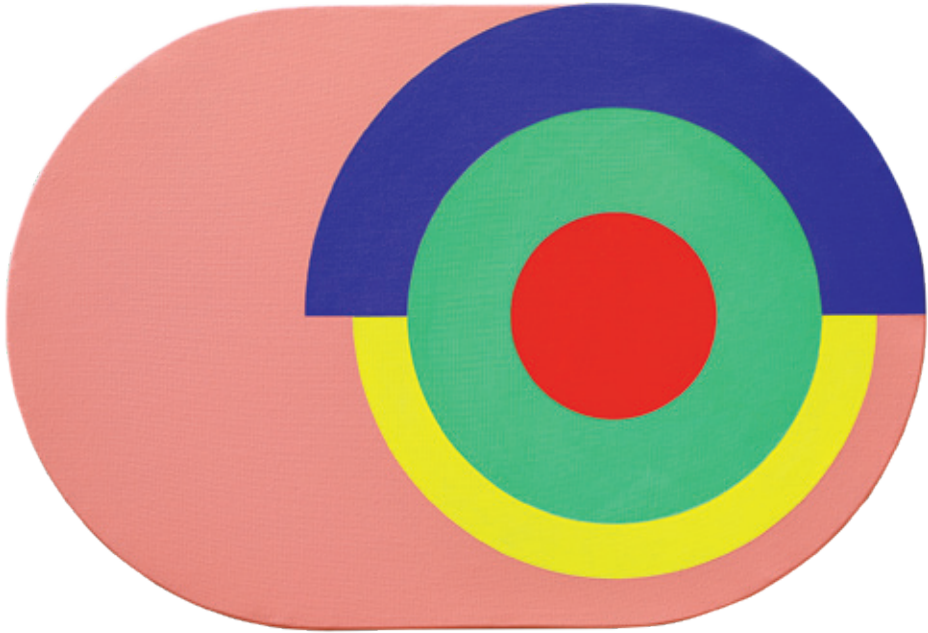
This is a time when a bulk of the country should likely already be employed, if not thriving. Only India has been staring at a dark and dire image of frozen growth, joblessness and young people who have been stolen of their dreams. Santosh Mehrotra and Jajati Keshari warn us in their new book *India Out of Work* that once this highly ballyhooed democratic dividend of India’s dips—sooner than we think—it may well age into an older and poorer nation.

The Azim Premji study, which also did not make headlines, served some cold, sterile but startling pieces of a tattered labour fabric of India. While India

Assam in the bag, one Indian party now rules in 22 out of 28 states, pushing the country perilously close to a one-party system like in North Korea and China or a defunct multi-party system like in Russia with Putin as President for 22+ years.

After winning the latest round of elections, one party currently rules in about 73% of cartographical India and 78% of demographic India, with its total population at 145-crore+ people. Almost the entirety of a country being ruled by one party in government or that successive electoral victories are snatched by one incumbent man as Prime Minister is a spine-chilling indicator for the health of any democracy and for federalism.

The utter magnitude of the SIR dismembering about 91 lakh voters from the electoral rolls in Bengal in round one threw out any notion of a free, fair and unbiased election. While 60 lakhs from these were labelled absent, shifted, duplicate or dead, more than 34 lakh voters eventually remained voteless, aided by, surprise, surprise, an AI software used by the Election Commission that deemed them unmapped, suspicious



Parse B, 2026
Acrylic On Canvas 22x 15 x 1 inches

produces 5 million new graduates every year, only 2.8 million end up finding decent work and salaried jobs, the rest are left scrapping. All the talk surrounding India adding 83 million jobs to the existing 490 employed people, raising it to 572 million, cleverly masks the fact that nearly half of this newly created employment is, in fact, agricultural work or that the many self-employed, self-skilled people that are being counted in this data are less a sign of new jobs being created and more of desperation and choicelessness. What are we do with these new jobs when it makes no real difference to millions of people’s quality of life?

Only a few days ago did the PM warn the nation of the coming economic catastrophe, urging citizens to observe austerity measures such as avoiding foreign travel, destination weddings, purchase of gold or taking flights just slightly before taking off on a five-country tour on a custom-built Boeing 777-300ER called Air India One. The US-Iran war had already set in motion a worldwide energy crisis, with India’s stockpiles reportedly depleting faster than the speed of light. Whether or not the Great Depression will make a comeback remains to be seen, but India had other priorities before preparing the nation for economic belt-tightening.

Of course, the government cunningly delayed admitting to the energy crisis in order to win two out of five federal elections during an unprecedented heatwave that saw millions of voters in West Bengal being denied the Right to Vote in a cruel twist of fate, thanks to the Election Commission’s generous Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise. With Bengal and

or illegal. So much for the age of AI. This broad-day light weaponisation of data—masquerading as some grand exercise in efficiency and sold as an error-free purification drive, has made neat lines between who got left out and who didn’t, divided along religious and caste lines, disproportionately depriving Muslim and Dalit voters from their only democratic ritual – the right to vote. The one day when mantri or kisan, neta or abhineta, udyogpati or majdoor are truly equal in status and power in their ability to make or break a government engineered into a data tragedy.

A good, old weeding-out exercise and a half-cousin of textbook gerrymandering. With so much talk of the techie, erotic wet dream of AI replacing humans, we haven’t perhaps adequately processed that AI is not just replacing humans, it is simply evanescent people, turning them into ghosts that belong to no man’s land, not very different from the pregnant women and young children being denied food because the AI facial recognition tool won’t have it.

Now, to the other half, the cousin of SIR, gerrymandering or pure hijacking, another instance of a data manipulation exercise that has already structurally and permanently eliminated Indian Muslim representation in politics. The state of Assam was the first laboratory for beta-testing the delimitation exercise by the Election Commission, in line with the current ruling dispensation’s dream of reorganising India’s electoral boundaries at a national level.

By merging Muslim-majority constituencies into

¹mantri (minister); kisan (farmer); neta (politician); abhineta (actor); udyogpati (industrialist); majdoor (worker)

²jati (caste); biradri (kin/clan); samuday (community), janajati (tribe) and qoum (community)
³kaagaz nahi dikhayenge (we will not show papers)

entirely new Hindu-majority voting blocks and constituencies, India has fundamentally obliterated the Assamese Muslim vote’s effect over electoral results for the foreseeable future. No matter which way the Muslim population votes, they would still be dealt a Hindu majoritarian representative.

Soon to be proposed in the monsoon session of Parliament, the imminent Delimitation Bill proposes to increase the number of seats in both houses of Parliament from 543 to 850 and proportionally give states with higher population size a greater number of seats. Highly advantageous to North India, where the ruling party is far more popular than in the South, this will, for perpetuity, plummet South and East India’s representation in politics.

Not only is this punitive for the South, which has been far more successful than the North in population control of, for which they ought to be rewarded if anything, it also robs them of having any real and fair role in ever determining India’s political futures. Delimitation will, most certainly and irreversibly, change the very nature of India’s democracy, advancing us even more to a one-party, authoritarian future.

Parallely, the beast of all data beasts, the world’s largest census exercise, is currently underway, which is meant to count 1.4 billion+ people. Costing \$1.2 billion and conducted by over 30 lakh census workers across 6,40,000 villages and 9,700 cities and towns to map not just a country that’s displaced China as the most populous, but also household size, sanitation, internet access, electricity, and identity markers like caste, gender, disability, religion, migration, occupation, and income, among others. Unfailingly held every ten years since 1881, through the worst man-made or natural disasters, the census broke its own record for having been delayed by five years due to the Covid pandemic.

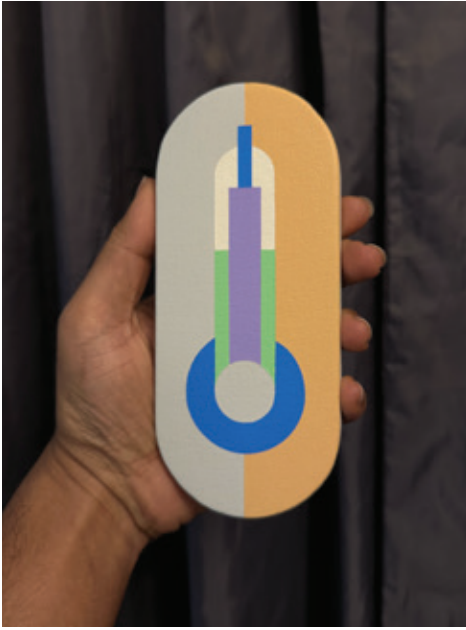
The current census is pegged to change the future of welfare politics. Most crucially, the census is finally going to make public caste, sub-caste, tribe, nomadic and seminomadic data of jati, biradri, samuday, janajati and qom, something that’s not been done since 1931. So volatile was caste data being made public in the ’30s India under the British Raj that it had irked the Nationalists, who feared it would give the lower castes further ammunition to fight for greater representation in politics.

Savarna leadership of the Independence movement at the time resisted the use of caste data in the census by lower-caste groups demanding their share in self-governance, which the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, the Round Table Conference, and the Simon Commission had promised the Indian people. That was that. Caste was never measured in India again for another 80 years, until 2011, but the caste data from that census was never made public due to similar anxieties.

We are finally meant to have a firm grasp on actual inequalities running through castes in India. By every measure, the census will emphatically affect every aspect of Indian life, from reservations in education and Sarkari jobs to welfare schemes. Equally, the same data is feared to be instrumentalised for other exclusionary aspirations of the government. Like any data-gathering exercise, this one, too, cuts both ways.

There are real concerns, for good reason, surrounding the census data feeding into the government’s aspirations to prepare a comprehensive National Register of Citizens (NRC) along with the National Population Register (NPR). Not too long ago, the CAA-NRC protests led by Muslim Women of Shaheen Bagh in Delhi sparked a nationwide movement that had unearthed sharp tensions among migrant, vulnerable and native Muslim communities over their citizenship and residency status.

It is not without cause that the clarion call during the peaceful citizenship protests, inspired by Civil Disobedience, was hum kaagaz nahi dikhayenge³. This refusal to enumerate, to give in to the State’s heavy-handed redefining of citizenship laws, is a resistance practice that makes us rethink the very idea of data-led efficiency in public administration and



governmentality.

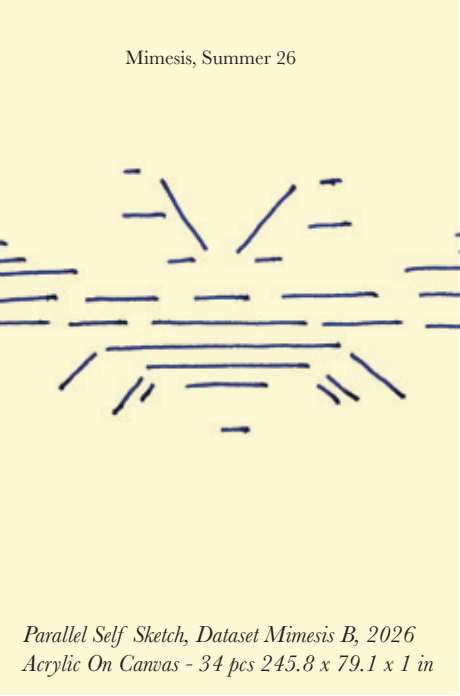
The apparatuses meant to enable and protect life, deliver services of nutrition, welfare, care and community empowerment have, in turn, become structurally alienating and imperceptible to the modern political subject. Molecular, mathematical algorithms have helped bypass our conscious, sentient experience, turning them into a breeding ground for exploitation. What we are witnessing in India is nothing short of Algorithmic Necropolitics, a system that picks and chooses who is allowed to realise their full, thriving selves and who is relegated to deliberate abandonment.

Every data metric that we are drowning in, that we willingly shape and co-produce, is distancing us further and further away from knowing what it means, obfuscating what its real impact on our lives is meant to be. As co-creators of this epoch, where we surrender the smallest gestures, decisions, feelings, interactions for ownership by corporations and the State, we co-author our Necropolitical invisibilisation.

Thukral and Tagra’s work in Mimesis speaks to the baffling paradox of what is happening to life in this age of AI. The paintings in this collection recognise that the old surveillance state that once monitored and crushed dissent like in the Panopticon is in this moment a thing of the past. Mimesis offers us rest and respite from what the new data paradigm has done to our lives on an ontological plane.

Our willingness and participation in signing consent forms, agreeing to the terms and conditions of the age we live in, has led to the creation of autonomous, self-feeding data ecologies. Financial markets, the art we consume, the brainrot our digitally saturated selves are living through, and the politico-legal systems we interact with are generating realities where human consciousness has been de-centred.

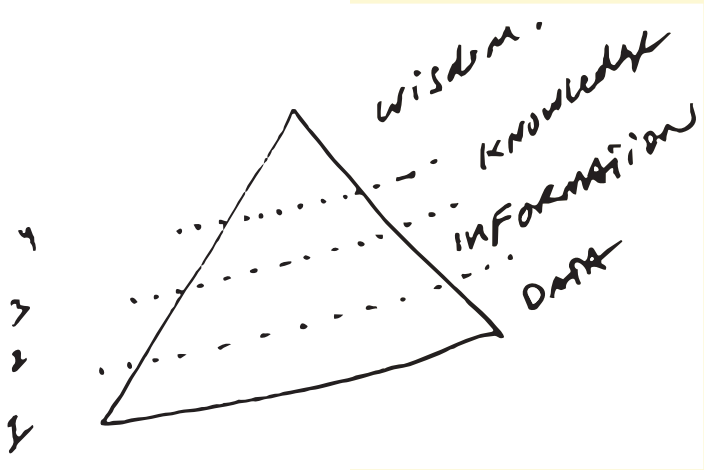
Mimesis could well be thought of as a cautionary tale about the Human, who is on its way to becoming an ancestral meaning-maker as we advance towards a future we will no longer recognise.



Parallel Self Sketch, Dataset Mimesis B, 2026
Acrylic On Canvas - 34 pcs 245.8 x 79.1 x 1 in

Mimesis, Summer 26

THE KNOWLEDGE PYRAMID



part of essay Coded Gaze by Thukral and Tagra Studio

DIKW Pyramid, Where Do We Stand?

The works in Mimesis operate through accumulation, fragmentation, indexing, and repetition, aligning closely with the foundation of the DIKW pyramid: **Data - Information - Knowledge - Wisdom.** Today, artificial intelligence thrives precisely at this foundational layer, continuously collecting and processing raw data, pixels, clicks, gestures, images, language, and behaviour. Yet the question remains: **Does the endless accumulation of data naturally lead to wisdom, or are we trapped within infinite loops of information without deeper understanding?**

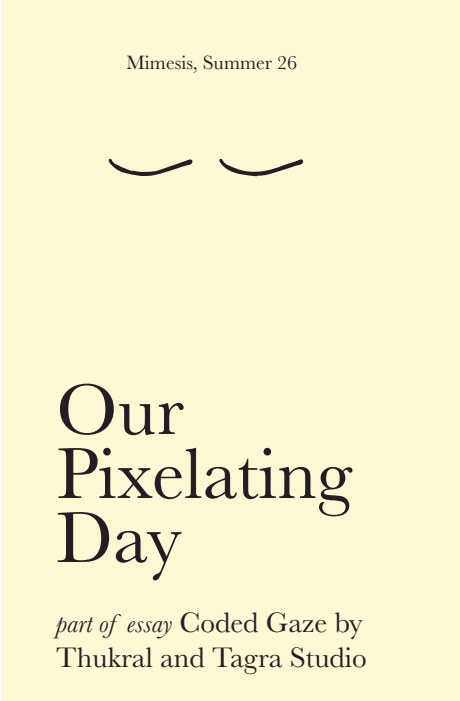
In Mimesis, the imagined pixel becomes the smallest unit of contemporary experience, an atom of data. Individually, it holds little meaning. But through repetition, arrangement, and relation, patterns begin to emerge. Information forms; interpretation follows; knowledge becomes possible. Wisdom, however, remains unresolved, human, emotional, ethical, and spiritual.

Perhaps this is where painting becomes essential. Unlike AI systems optimised for speed, efficiency, and prediction, painting introduces slowness, touch, labour, intuition, and contemplation. These works resist becoming fully “readable.” They hold ambiguity and uncertainty, raising the question of whether meaning can still exist outside systems of algorithmic extraction.

Each technological shift arrives with both excitement and panic. Society often responds first through fear, speculation, and anxiety about misuse before recognising the possibility. With AI, this tension feels amplified. Technologies designed to connect people also intensify division. Outrage travels faster than empathy, while algorithms reward reaction, virality, and emotional intensity. We are living within systems where speed is valued more than reflection, and visibility more than understanding. Has attention has become currency, and emotions become data? Continuous loops of stimulation and response increasingly shape our behaviour.

Mimesis attempts to pause within this condition. Rather than rejecting technology, the works slow down what digital systems accelerate. As a form of resistance, they create space for contemplation, sensitivity, and doubt within a culture driven by constant extraction and immediacy.

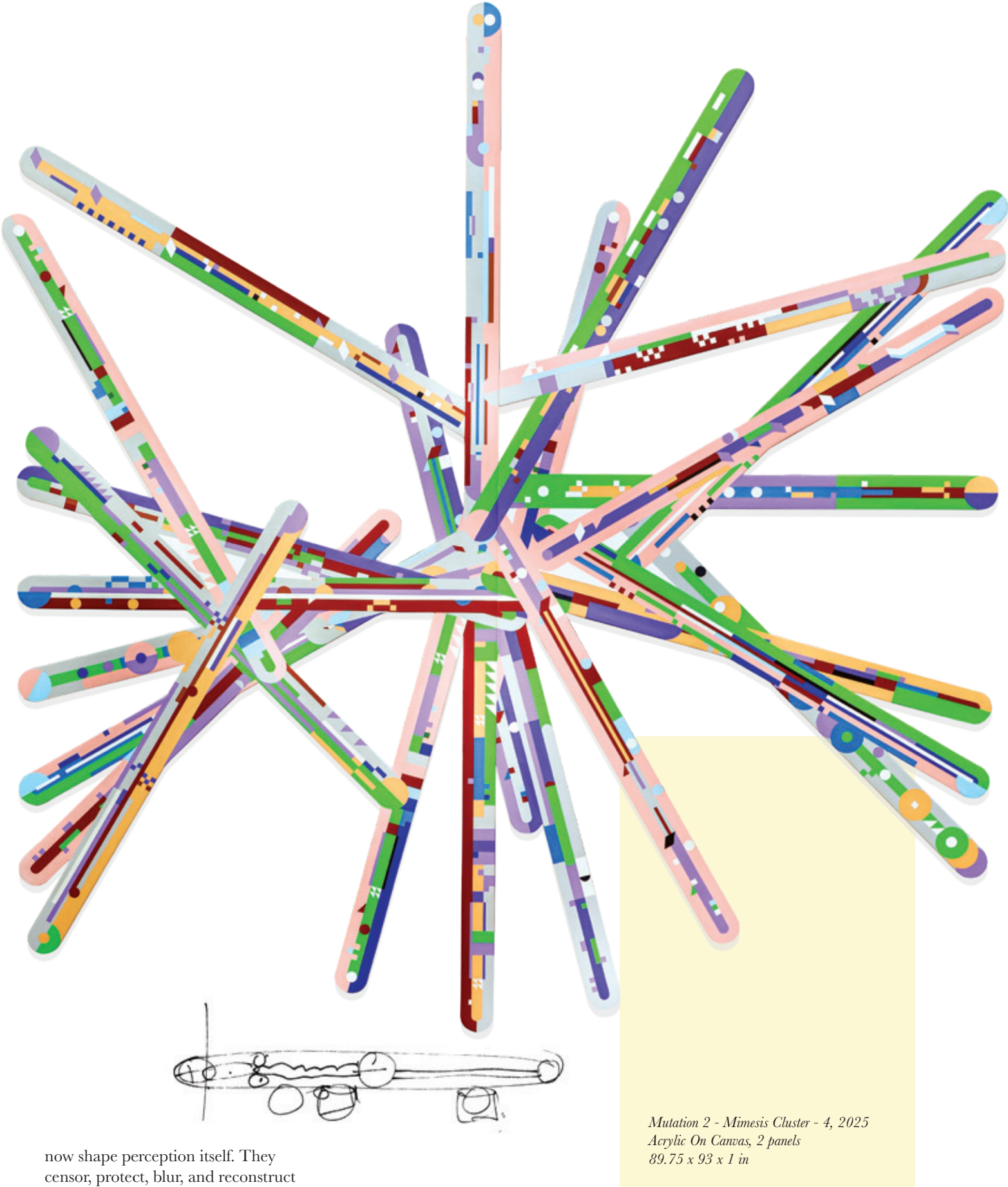
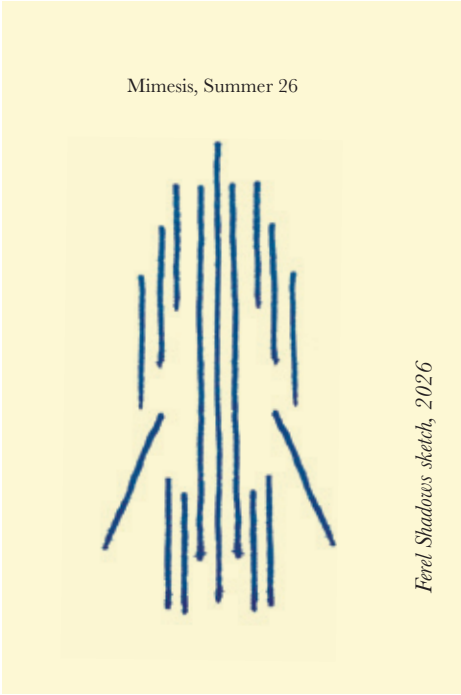
Perhaps every technology ultimately reveals not only its own possibilities, but also the emotional and ethical condition of the society that creates and uses it.



A strange feeling arrives with the first light of dawn. Each time you turn toward the window, peering through the sheer curtains with half-closed eyes, you begin to guess the hour, waiting for the alarm to pull you fully awake. Almost instinctively, the hand reaches for the phone, resisting, if only briefly, the unread messages waiting behind the screen. Time dissolves into a continuous flood of images, and the quiet of the morning stretches into an endless scroll, drifting deeper into the device's white glow. This glow of the device has slowly replaced the warmth of touch. Our days move beneath white and yellow lights, each moment negotiated through screen time, notifications, and digital rhythms.

We now inhabit a pixel society, a world where human connection is mediated through interfaces, glowing rectangles powered by distant clouds, invisible rivers of code, algorithms, and signals moving at the speed of thought. Are these merely machines, or have they become the new oracles of our time, extensions of our nervous systems, endlessly fed by millions of neurons, servers, and streams of data? Before breath settles, and the movement begins, we reach for our devices, portals through which our lives synchronise with the grid. Probably our first words and first emotions pass through code. Replying to the questions and planning the day quickly is guided by algorithms that quietly filter what we see and what we come to know. Even intimacy is compressed into data packets and translated through bandwidth. These pixel-based screens are no longer simply the building blocks of images; they

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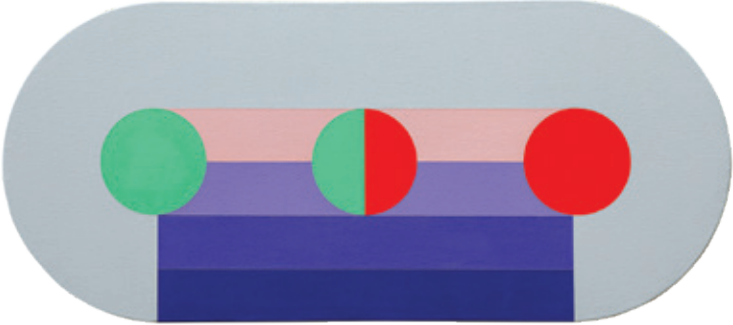
Mutation 2 - Mimesis Cluster - 4, 2025
Acrylic On Canvas, 2 panels
89.75 x 93 x 1 in

part of essay Coded Gaze by Thukral and Tagra Studio

Can these works become coded gaze from the artists to the audience? Formed over time, they carry within them the atmosphere of shifting geopolitical events that increasingly shape our mornings, our screens, and our emotional landscapes. The annexures of reports displayed alongside the works suggest hidden structures beneath the painted surfaces, traces of information distilled into abstraction. The audience may speculate on the links between them, searching for clues, patterns, or meanings. But to attach each report too directly to a work risks reducing its openness, flattening its emotional and poetic charge into a fixed reading. Perhaps the works resist becoming illustrations of information. Instead, they drift somewhere between signal and silence, between evidence and intuition. They ask whether abstraction can still hold complexity without needing to explain itself fully. Can a painting remain free from the logic of endless feeds, hyperlinks, and instant interpretation? Or has our way of seeing become inseparable from systems of decoding and extraction? Mimesis inhabits this fragile threshold. The works can be consumed as data, as an image, as a rhythm, or simply as presence. In that uncertainty lies their freedom.

now shape perception itself. They censor, protect, blur, and reconstruct reality. They can function as a shield, a delay, a veil, or hide a face, obscure a body, or erase a history. It can become a language of waiting, a spinning wheel, a loading bar, a digital glitch suspended between presence and absence.

Unknowingly, they are ghosts of touch. As they speak through abstraction, through fractured palettes, digital noise, and the visual salad of buffering connection, you never fully trust their intention. They feed on the currency of attention, as the vocabulary of a world increasingly untethered from the physical and the tangible. And yet, through these very fragments of light, we continue to construct meaning, memory, intimacy, and connection. Losing our trust and intuition to the infinite information which takes the order of the day.



Parse A, 2026 Acrylic On Canvas 34 x 15 x 1 inches

“Coded Gaze” is a term coined by Joy Buolamwini to describe the bias embedded in artificial intelligence and machine vision systems, especially how algorithms “see” and interpret people based on the data they are trained on.