



CHRIS EUGENE MILLS

CONTROLLED RANDOMNESS

By Hailey Mah

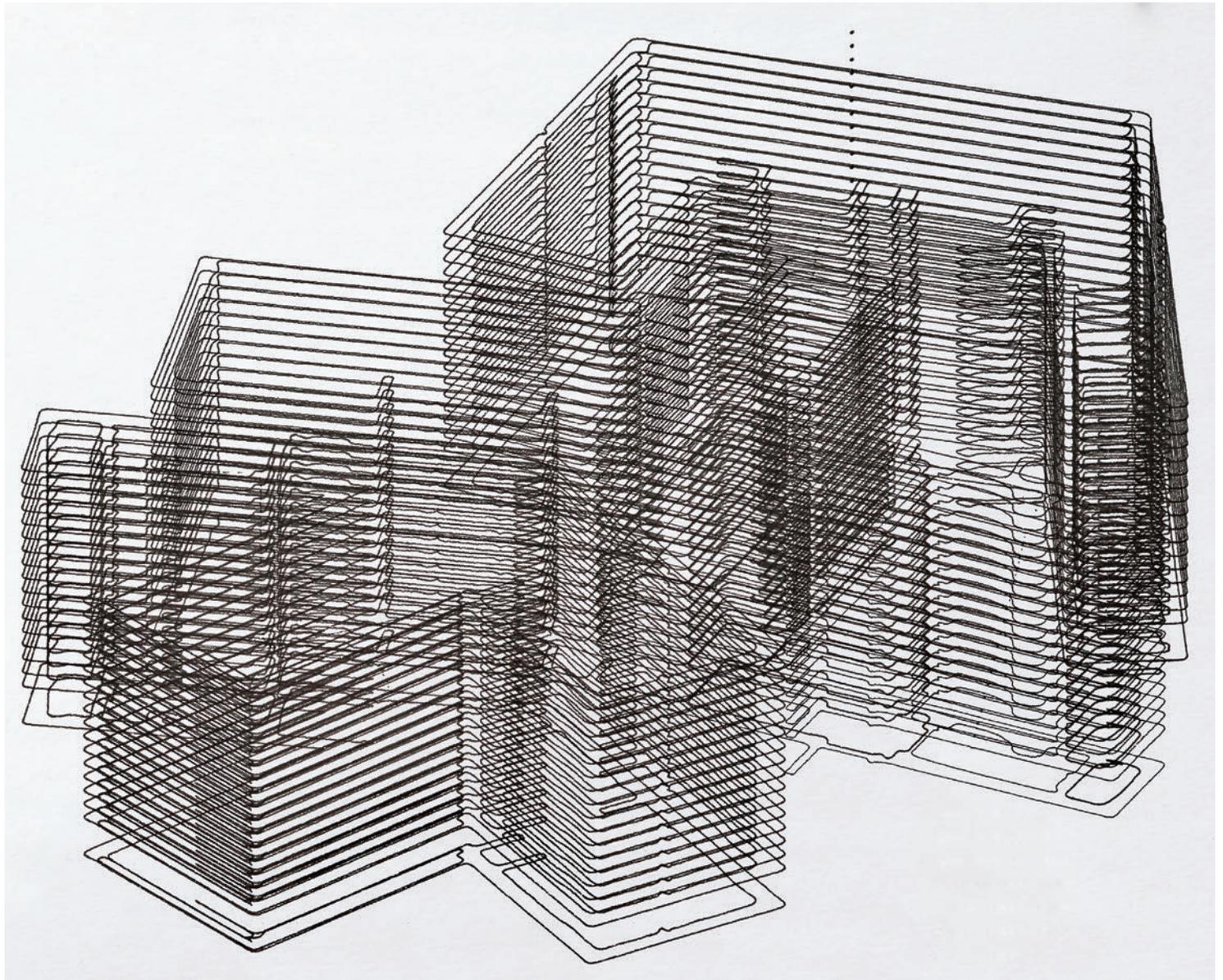
Chris Eugene Mills's educational path has been an aggregation of skills and techniques, culminating in a visual arts major he admits was wholly unexpected. His fixations on repetition and concept have led to a body of work clearly informed by its own modes of production.

Opposite: Chris Mills photographed in studio by Mackenzie Walker

When I meet with Mills for a sprawling discussion in his studio, I find that exploring his non-linear path towards making art helps explain his creative tendencies. Mills began his studies at the University of British Columbia in engineering, where he developed a taste for coding. Later classes in environmental design trained him in design principles and project management. Mills eventually landed on a major in visual art, combining his previous areas of knowledge to create a technique-driven, multidisciplinary body of work.

When initially developing his creative process, Mills asked of himself, "How do I take what I know, which was mostly tech stuff... and move that into making artwork which actually has conceptual backing?" His prior experiences with spatial design and online environments are clear through his art, where themes of technicality and place prevail.

Mills has been formally making art for less than three years; yet, in that short period of time he has amassed a large artistic output.



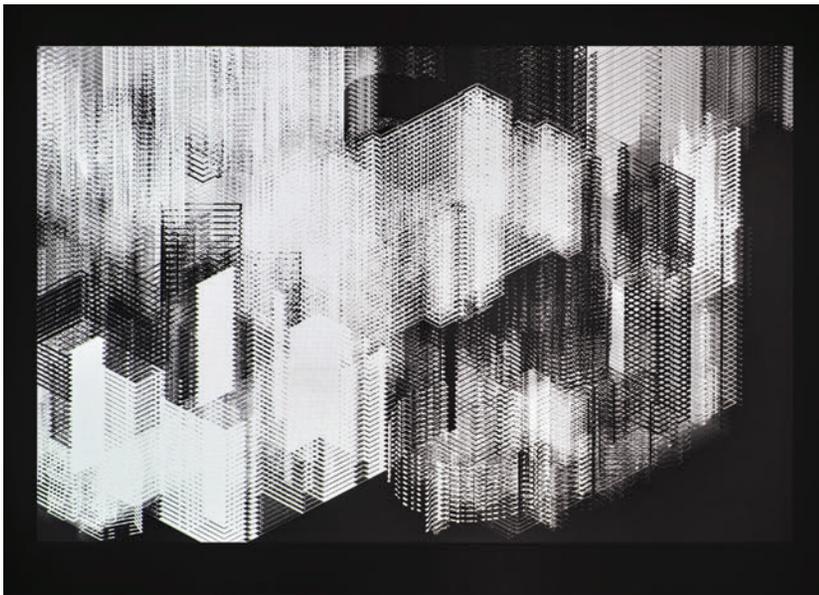
Earthquake Preparedness, machine drawing, 2016

He has produced work in forms ranging from hijacked video stills to site-specific sculpture installation, often working within a new medium or framework for each subsequent project.

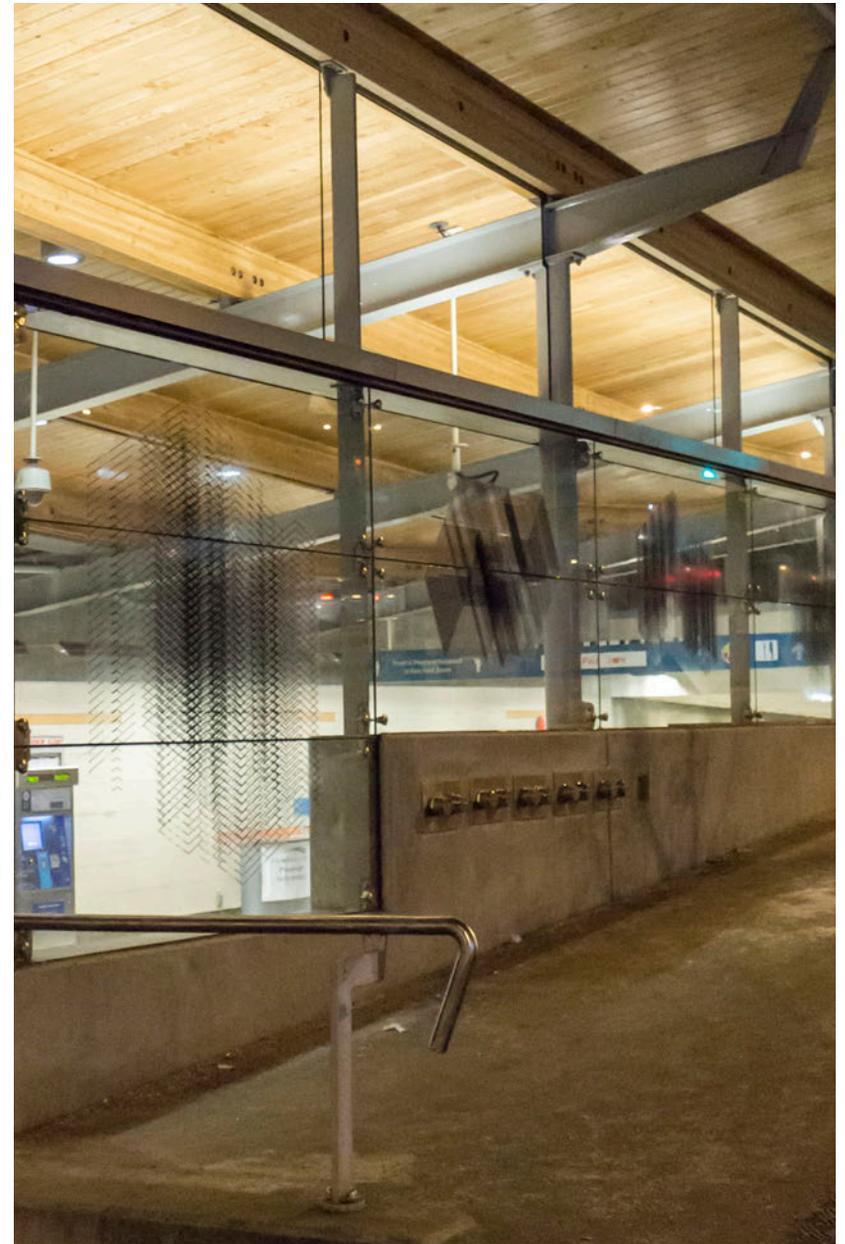
Clearly passionate about the process of applying learned skills to create artwork, Mills draws inspiration from the instruction-based work of Sol Lewitt, and the conceptual artist's introduction of randomization within a set of constrained rules. Mills's work incorporates newer programmatic modes of production, such as coding and mechanical drawing,

yet he applies similar principles of executing formulas to create controlled randomness. Whether it's building (and rebuilding) a wall-mounted drawing machine to functional perfection, or developing code in a bevy of new frameworks, his works are a product of a long-term, learning-based creative process.

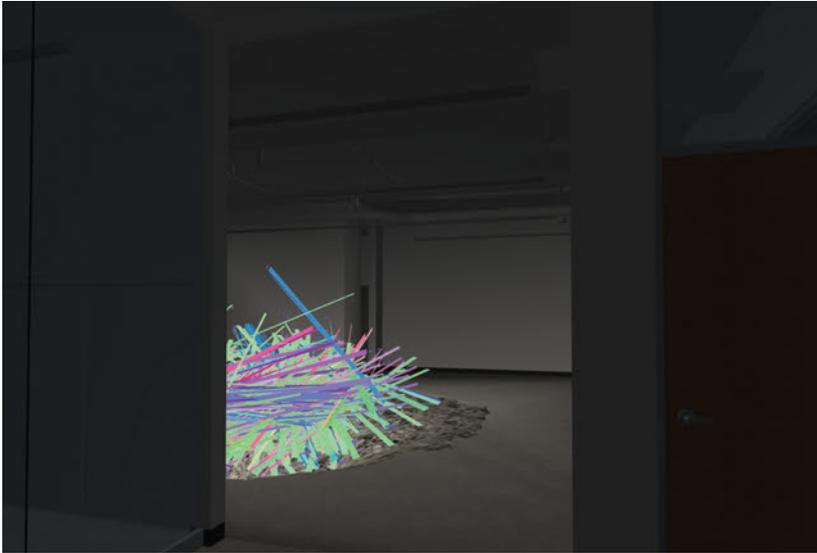
The works in Mills's *Earthquake Preparedness* series reflect his interests in concept and application. These pieces each feature building plans which have been programmatically overlaid upon themselves in elegant repetitions,



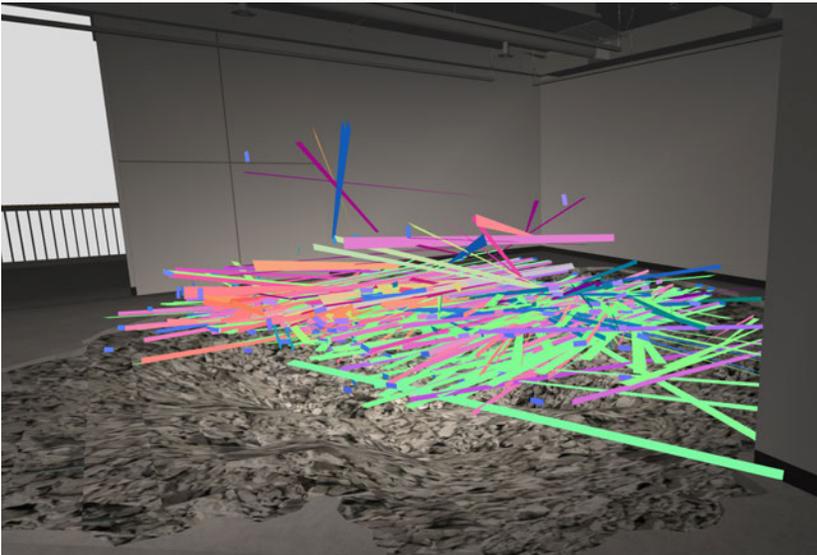
Earthquake Preparedness (Understructures), generative website projection, 2016



Backup (I sold you another false system) (deep apologies), public installation, 2016



Dissipate I (Hatch Gallery), generative sculpture and appropriated model [opening view], 2016



Dissipate I (Hatch Gallery), generative sculpture and appropriated model [interior view], 2016

creating skeletal 3-D skyscrapers. Mills has created iterations of this series in digital, printed, and mechanically drawn form, applying the same conceptual framework across multiple forms of media.

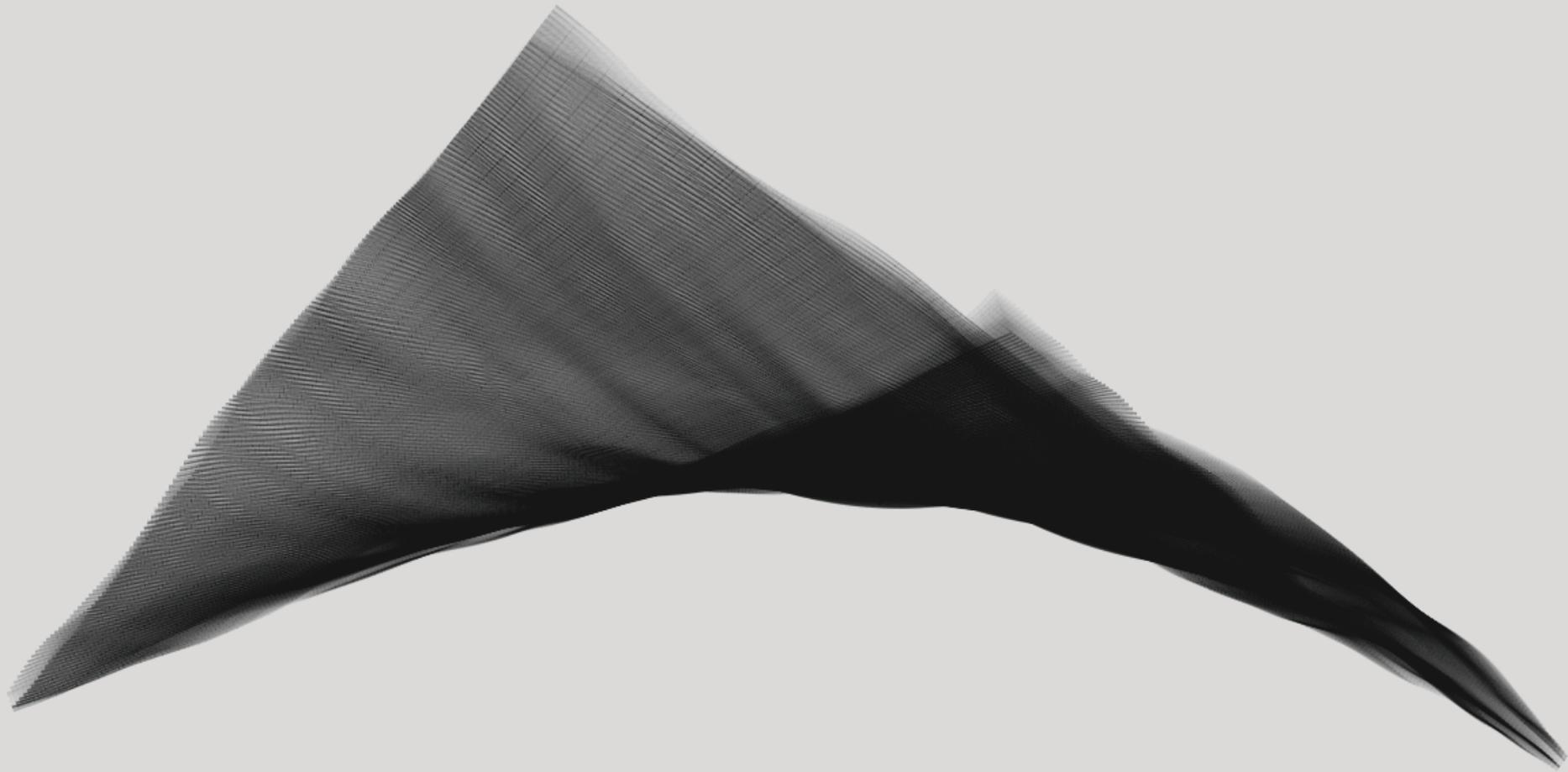
One of Mills's most visible works from the *Earthquake Preparedness* series is *Backup (I sold you another false system) (deep apologies)*, an installation at the Broadway-City Hall Canada Line subway station in Vancouver, BC, Canada. The station's glass walls are printed with a series of blueprints, abstracted from their original function. Digitally replicated into implausible structures, they are assembled in a densely layered, yet ephemeral display of space.

Backup's accompanying text panel provokes passersby into considering multiple simultaneous paths of interpretation. Here, Mills reflects on increasingly converging spaces: the physical world, the endless digital realm, and the interstice between the two. It turns out that these ideas of space, tangibility, and repetition are ones which flow throughout Mills's body of work.

A hyperlocal example of such themes is his work *Dissipate I (Hatch*

Gallery), an online environment where Mills digitally recreated every inch of the Hatch Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia. Viewers can explore the digital space at their leisure and discover the infinitely spinning pile of neon lumber which floats inside the simulated gallery's space. Mills's replication of a physical enclosure within a boundless web environment further explores how navigation between physical and digital spaces has become increasingly blurred.

Mills seems to enjoy the playfulness and reflexivity that come with having multiple interpretations associated with his work. "I'm starting to broaden out into humour, breaking up the seriousness," he says of his current artistic interests, often asking himself, "How many interpretations can I make from one work?" The titles of his pieces often have several parts, contradicting themselves or containing quips; he posits them as an essential form of critical reflexivity in his work. Mills' eagerness to embrace multiplicity is a reflection of both the internet's aggregate nature, as well as his own pursuit to layer many paths of meaning into his works.



Mills's projects and personality reflect the web's equalizing, highly referential nature. He draws on an abundance of digital platforms, whether they be video stills, blogs, or simulated environments, as both a creator and user. Nearly all of his works can be found online in some capacity. "I really want to make everything accessible. If I'm going to show this in a gallery, I'm also going to then show as much of it as I can online in the website format," he emphasizes. "I don't want to limit the viewership of my work."

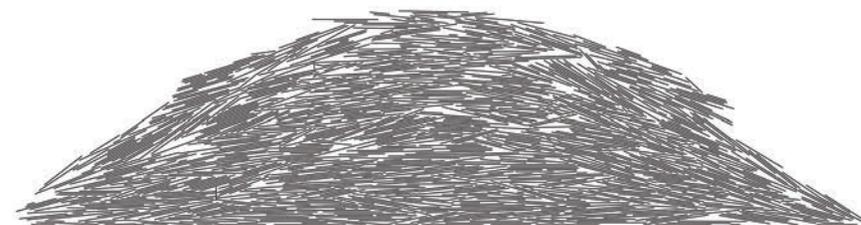
When it comes to upcoming projects, Mills isn't ready to let go of investigating the internet's tendencies. In particular, he is keen on mimicking the messy ways in which surveillance, information, functionality, and aesthetics are all knotted together through online media. "I'm trying to make things dirtier," he states, when prompted about his current aims. "I want [my work] to degrade and have murky and unclear conceptual shifts." This goal, combined with his current work across mediums as diverse as sculpture, video manipulation, and site-specific installation, led

Mills to his current modus operandi of "maximalism over minimalism." This motto is a succinct description of Mills as a creator: somebody whose pursuit of learning new skills has led to an ever-expanding and reflexive body of work across countless mediums. "I don't want to be so concise anymore."

www.chriseugenemills.com

Hailey Mah's interview with the artist took place on February 18, 2017

Opposite: *The myth of superabundance (in nineteen parts) (Dissipate 2), installation [vector], 2016*



As a user/node, every action in the network flows through me. (I feel it all)