

poets of
physics

Tertiary Level Study Guide

Aki Sasamoto

Bagus Pandega

David Medalla

Fischli & Weiss

Ian Carlo Jaucian

Pre-Visit

Physics has a myriad of applications in our everyday lives. It is seen in fundamental forces and energy transformations, manifesting in mundane activities such as driving a car, riding a bike, heating food, and using our phones. In conjunction with this, energy and motion are constantly transformed.

Its ubiquitous nature also means that it affects subatomic particles such as electrons, protons, and photons, seeping into how the universe operates on a grander scale. It is seen in natural phenomena such as climate change, and astronomical occurrences, like how gravity and tidal forces are at play in the rotation of planets.

Recommended Media

Interstellar (Nolan, 2014), is about a former NASA pilot named Cooper, whose task is to find a habitable planet to send humans to. The film has dystopian themes, and shows Earth as a ruin, following ecological degradation. After watching the movie, think about the following:

- The Ticking Clock: How does the use of "Miller's Planet" (where one hour equals seven years on Earth) turn the physical theory of time dilation into a poetic metaphor for the loss of childhood?
- The Symmetry of Aging: Cooper remains young while his daughter grows old. Does this physical reality feel more like a scientific anomaly or a tragic literary irony?
- The "Stay" Message: How does the gravity-based communication across time mirror the way poetry attempts to speak to future generations?
- The Fifth Dimension: In the Tesseract scene, gravity is used to "push" information through time. If gravity is the physical bridge, is love the poetic "signal" that tells Cooper where to look?
- Ghostly Mechanics: Early in the film, Murph thinks there is a ghost. How does the reveal—that the "ghost" is actually a physical manifestation of gravity—change the tone from supernatural poetry to hard science?
- Entropy vs. Will: In physics, entropy suggests the universe is heading toward heat death and disorder. How does the poem act as a "physics manifesto" for the human race to fight against that natural law?
- The Dying of the Light: Does the "Good Night" represent the literal darkness of space, the extinction of humanity, or the event horizon of Gargantua?
- Rage against the Machine: Why would a scientist like Dr. Brand rely on a poem to inspire his team rather than a set of data?
- Gargantua was rendered using actual relativistic equations (General Relativity). Does the visual beauty of the black hole make it feel more like a mathematical solution or a work of sublime art?



Preliminary Activity

What comes to mind when you hear the term “poets of physics”?

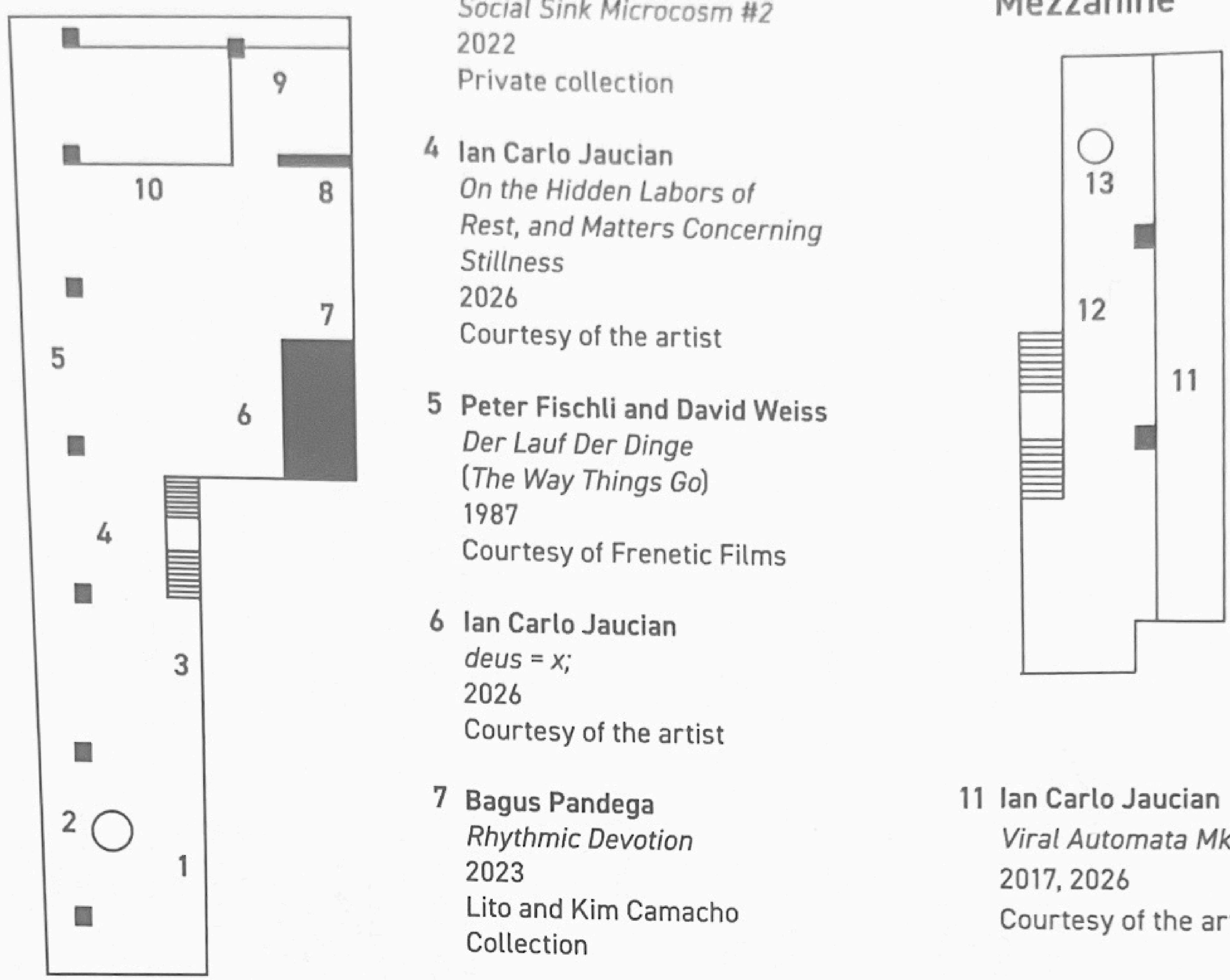
Read [Art, Aesthetics, and Physics](#) by Jean Jacques Trillat and think about what you expect to see when you enter the exhibition. Keep these notes to take with you when you visit.

Context of the “Poets of Physics”

“Poets of Physics” comes from the theme “Extension of Nature”. David Medalla’s 1946 work called “Cloud Canyons” follows suit, continuously generating foam or bubbles to create a dynamic sculptural form, only existing temporarily in its habit of dissolving and reforming. Following numerous iterations of his bubble machines, he explored works of the same kind by using active materials such as sand and mud. Being “a poet who celebrates physics” is central to his corpus of work.

Visit

Exhibition Layout and Artwork Information



The diagram illustrates the exhibition layout across two levels: the Ground Floor and the Mezzanine. The Ground Floor is a large rectangular space with a central vertical corridor and a smaller section on the right. The Mezzanine is a smaller, narrower space above the ground floor, also with a central vertical corridor. Numbered markers (1-13) are placed throughout the spaces to indicate the location of specific artworks. The Ground Floor markers are: 1 (bottom left), 2 (left side), 3 (left side), 4 (left side), 5 (left side), 6 (right side), 7 (right side), 8 (right side), 9 (top right), and 10 (top left). The Mezzanine markers are: 11 (right side), 12 (left side), and 13 (top left).

Ground Floor

Mezzanine

- 1 Bagus Pandega**
(L-R)
Indecisive Things #4
Indecisive Things #3
Indecisive Things #2
2018
Courtesy of the artist and ROH
- 2 David Medalla**
Cloud Canyons No. 31
1964, 2016
Private collection
- 3 Aki Sasamoto**
Social Sink Microcosm #2
2022
Private collection
- 4 Ian Carlo Jaucian**
On the Hidden Labors of Rest, and Matters Concerning Stillness
2026
Courtesy of the artist
- 5 Peter Fischli and David Weiss**
Der Lauf Der Dinge
(*The Way Things Go*)
1987
Courtesy of Frenetic Films
- 6 Ian Carlo Jaucian**
deus = x;
2026
Courtesy of the artist
- 7 Bagus Pandega**
Rhythmic Devotion
2023
Lito and Kim Camacho Collection
- 8 Ian Carlo Jaucian**
Still Life
2026
Courtesy of the artist
- 9 Bagus Pandega**
A Pervasive Rhythm
2018
Courtesy of the artist and ROH
- 10 Aki Sasamoto**
Point Reflection
2023
Courtesy of the artist and Take Ninagawa
- 11 Ian Carlo Jaucian**
Viral Automata Mk 2
2017, 2026
Courtesy of the artist
- 12 Ian Carlo Jaucian**
On rigor in science
2026
Courtesy of the artist
- 13 David Medalla**
Cloud Canyons
2019
Lito and Kim Camacho Collection

Joselina Cruz, MCAD's curator and director, explains that the exhibit is about perception as the thread that ties everything together. She writes that the artists use physics as material for poetry, not to teach formulas but to unsettle how we see. Foam, rhythm, imbalance, planetary winds, and viral circulation are presented as ways to make perception visible. This framing sets the expectation that what you encounter will be less about science lessons and more about how we experience change.

Source: <https://www.benilde.edu.ph/mcads-new-exhibit-poetry-of-physics-invites-reflection-on-how-we-perceive-change/>

Visit

When you visit, take the notes you made from the previous section. You can create a new entry and write about what you see in the exhibit.

Aki Sasamoto

Sasamoto's practice revolves around the idea of changes and phases, predictability and unpredictability in life (Queens Museum, 2023). How does his work, *Point Reflection*, convey this?



Point Reflection, 2023

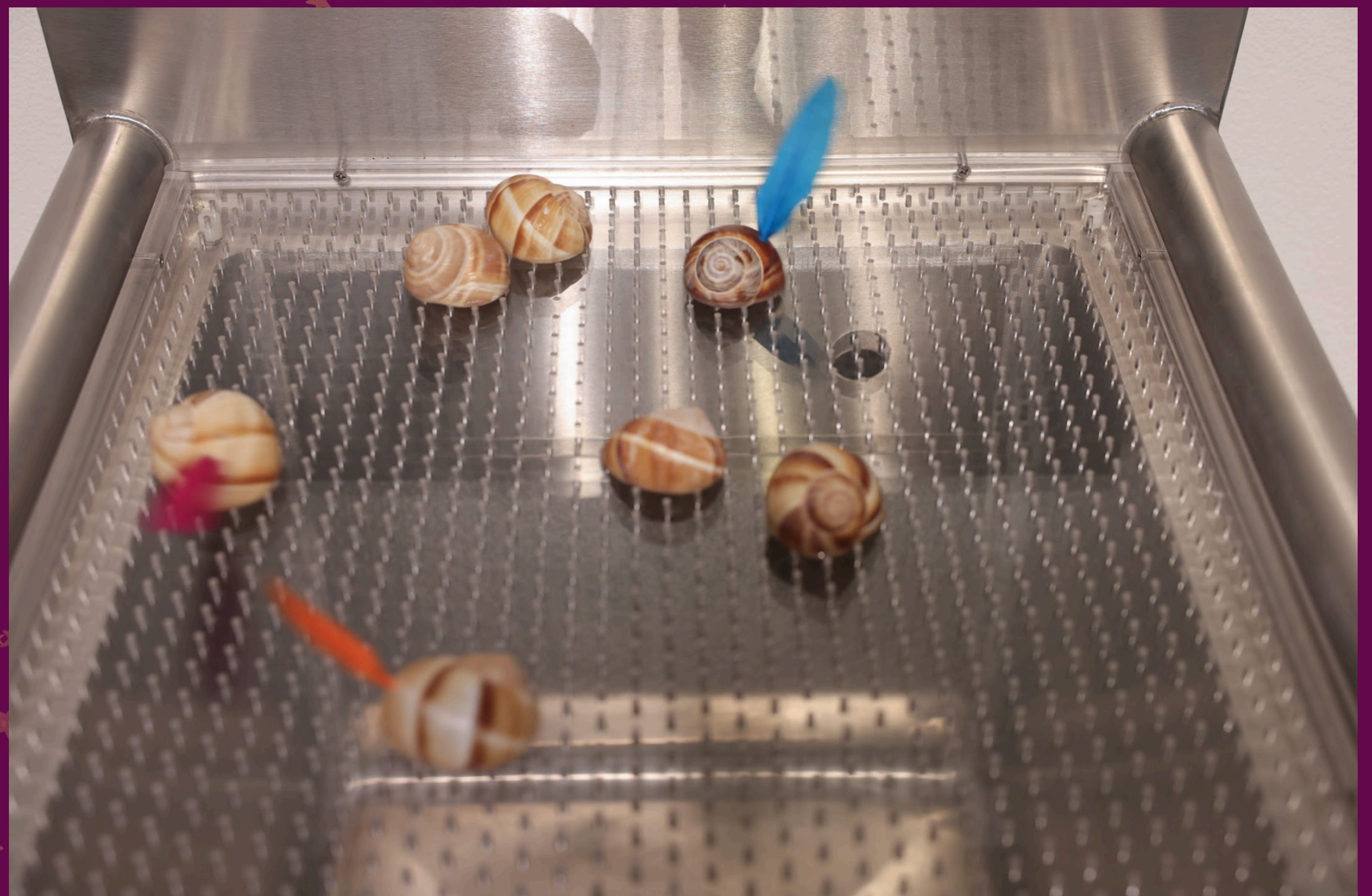
Aki Sasamoto

Single-channel video, color, original soundtrack by Matt Bauder, 23 mins, 29 secs

Courtesy of the artist and Take Ninagawa.

Photography by Akira Watanabe. Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) Manila.

'Aki Sasamoto's *Social Sink Microcosm #2* sets shells on a surface where air blows through small holes. The shells slide across and spin according to their shapes. The counterclockwise spiraling shells can be seen as a way to express minority identity, moving against the usual flow. Some shells carry boa feathers that catch the air, making them spin faster. This creates another layer, suggesting that even within a minority group there are differences, and some move with more force than others. The physics here is simple, air pushing against shapes, but the effect is a microcosm of social dynamics. The piece shows how imbalance and variation exist even inside communities that already stand apart.' ((Benilde Newsstand, 2026).



Social Sink Microcosm #2 (detail), 2022

Aki Sasamoto

Commercial sink, acrylic, centrifugal fan, speed controller, vent, stainless hardware, snail shell, feather, resin, whiteboard, marker ink, plastic straw, nail, magnet.

Photography by Akira Watanabe. Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) Manila.

Private collection.

Guide Questions

- Notice the pattern of the shells in Social Sink Microcosm #2.
- Is there math behind them?
- Is there a uniform pattern in the sticks above the work? What sequence do they follow?
- What are the observable qualities of the sink? How does the material interact with the shells?
- Do the shells move according to their shape? If not, in what direction do they move?

Activity

Go around the museum and look at its different artworks. You can also notice the space itself: the columns, stairs, and interiors. What patterns can be found? Draw them in the box.



Post-Visit

Your Own *Cloud Canyons*

David Medalla was said to have 31 different iterations of *Cloud Canyons*. Knowing how physics can function as poetry, imagine your own version of *Cloud Canyons*. What message do you hope to convey? Will you be using bubbles/foam to sustain the message of ephemerality and dynamism, or do you hope to use a different material to convey an entirely new idea?

Pristine L. De Leon (2019) says:

It is the ever-evolving shapes that heighten the sculpture's power as public art. Columns of white foam rise, curl, and fall, each an exercise in free abstraction that gives tangible form to an immaterial force. What differentiates "Cloud Canyons" for instance from growing trees or billowing fountains may be its capacity to draw on air. Imagine an aircraft scribbling letters in the sky.

Besides material, pay close attention to form, how you would install the piece, and how it represents themes of temporality or your chosen message. How do you anticipate viewers to perceive your work? What reactions do you hope to garner?

Supplementary Artworks

Yayoi Kusama's *The obliteration room* which was at Queensland Art Gallery, was an ongoing interactive work, where viewers could take part in the development of the work. Initially starting out as a white room, visitors are invited to put stickers on the interiors and furniture. The furniture was sourced locally. The result is a visual form for the process of self-obliteration. Besides allowing participation from the audience, the work is also a reflection of the artist's inner world and, to an extent, shows her experience of hallucinations and the flashes of colored dots she sees. She gives visual form to this sight through *The obliteration room*.

References and Further Reading

- Benilde Newsstand (2026). MCAD's New Exhibit Poets of Physics Invites Reflection on How We Perceive Change. Retrieved from <https://www.benilde.edu.ph/mcads-new-exhibit-poets-of-physics-invites-reflection-on-how-we-perceive-change/>.
- De Leon, P. (2019). David Medalla's 'Cloud Canyons': Magic, Machines, and Free Imagination. Retrieved from <https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/arts-and-culture/2019/09/09/1950081/david-medallas-cloud-canyons-magic-machines-and-free-imagination>.
- Nolan, C. (2014). *Interstellar* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Jean Jacques Trillat (1970). Art, Aesthetics, and Physics: The Contribution of Physics to Modern Art. *Leonardo*, 3(1), 47–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1572051>.
- Queens Museum (2023). Aki Sasamoto, Point Reflection. Retrieved from <https://queensmuseum.org/exhibition/aki-sasamoto-point-reflection/>.
- Queensland Art Gallery (n.d.). David Medalla. Retrieved from <https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/page/david-medalla-0>.



Top and Bottom Right Image: Courtesy of Natasha Harth, Queensland Art Gallery

Bottom Left: Courtesy of MCAD, Photo by Akira Watanabe



The obliteration room, 2017-2018

Yayoi Kusama

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Image courtesy of Natasha Harth