

# AGNES DENES

## *Pascal's Perfect Probability Pyramid & The People Paradox — The Predicament — PPPPPP, 1980/2016*

### THE PHILOSOPHY AND THE ACT, THE TRANSFER

#### THE PHILOSOPHY

*Pascal's Perfect Probability Pyramid &  
The People Paradox – The Predicament – PPPPPP, 1980*  
India ink on silk vellum, 32 x 43 inches  
Collection of Agnes Gund, NY

*PPPPPP* depicts a society composed of individuals who stand in protected isolation, alone but without privacy. They cannot escape the structure yet seem to be fooled by illusions of freedom. Representing alienation in togetherness and uniqueness in uniformity, they assume the journey of a living paradox. Although each figure is different, carefully drawn to represent distinct individuals acting out countless lives, ultimately they all seem identical and indistinguishable. The dissimilarities are almost imperceptible yet become quite noticeable at close scrutiny. The pyramid they form is a society of visual mathematics in which they are but patterns and processes, number components of a mathematical system who believe they are unique entities.

The endless contradictions they seem to accept into their lives, their ability to know so much and understand so little, makes them very human. They are emotionally unstable yet manage complicated technological miracles and do not seem to realize that their great advances have interfered with their own evolution.

The magnificence of their collective accomplishments and the insignificance of the individual components are unmistakable. Not a single tiny figure can walk away from the structure—they ARE the structure. They are the anatomy and the form and it is their illusions of freedom and the inescapability of the system that forms the ultimate paradox. They span a delicate balance between universals and the self, between the moment and eternity, and with great courage proceed to build the Perfect Pyramids.

Agnes Denes, 1980

#### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Agnes Denes (b. 1931, Budapest, based in New York) is a leading figure in American conceptual art and a pioneer of environmental/ecological art who rose to international attention in the Sixties and Seventies. Her works, often monumental in scale, forge a powerful dialogue between art, nature, science and social practice.

Denes has shown in over 500 solo and group exhibitions in international galleries and museums; she is the author of numerous publications and the recipient of prestigious awards. Her work is in major museum collections worldwide.

Commissioned by The New School Art Advisory Group, 2016

Production:  
Tyler Auwarter, Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects;  
John Cason Digital Productions;  
Shamus Clisset and Tom Hurley, Laumont Labs;  
Vadim Rabinovich, Steven Szabo, Atomic Signs

#### THE TRANSFER

*Pascal's Perfect Probability Pyramid &  
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vinyl film, 216 x 218 inches

It's been an exciting and challenging project to take my drawing of the People Pyramid and make it into a mural for The New School where I used to teach. You give up control of your work, others take over, and it becomes public art. The story of the Pyramid series, of which this work is part, is written elsewhere. It's an exciting story as is its transformation to the wall.

It took almost two years to draw the thousands of tiny figures with the finest silver-tip pen available—careful not to make a mistake as any erasure or correction was not possible, especially in those so close to each other on top—using black ink on silk vellum. It went into a private collection before being seen by the public. Now that's remedied.

In the transfer, a lot of the subtleties of the drawing got lost. Hand gestures, a leg, or neck could disappear. Even though at first disturbing, it is part of the process of it becoming public art. The figures now stand strong minus the nuances of the drawing—strong and unadorned as we stand in life.

I dedicate this work to the refugees of the world, the homeless, misplaced and unwanted whose wellbeing depends on human kindness and compassion.

It is also a gift to the students. Read the figures, they are you.

Agnes Denes, 2016