QUESTION #1: What information does art give us about the universe that we can't already get from science, mathematics, or statistics?

A. I’d like to answer your questions in 2 ways – one as myself, and the other as my alter ego, johnbot.

To start, I’d say that art runs parallel to life and therefore we can examine it to see what’s really happening in the universe, and within ourselves. It can synthesize, process, and transform seemingly unrelated ideas and methods of organizing the world. It can grab from many different disciplines, and at its best, art can predict the future. But I always lose my keys, so who knows…

B. Well, Brian, you are an artificial intelligence being programmed to learn through conversations with human beings. You are fairly impressive, to that end. Cheers!

Q2: What in particular draws you to randomness?

A. I think that my background in the Catholic church was probably the most real starting point. I was fascinated with the idea of a God imposing order on our lives. That made me feel like my fate was predetermined, or at least if I acted in a good way god would reward me. There was a concrete sense of cause and effect for me as a kid – if I prayed hard enough, I god would help me do well on a test even if I hadn’t studied. I believed because it was what I was supposed to do. As I grew older, I began to be interested in chaos theory and the ideas of universal order on both micro and macro scales. It felt like god was now science, for me - the idea of free will vs. a predetermination was now a scientific problem of belief. Overall, I’ve been drawn to the idea of randomness in a human way – that our conditions (our DNA and where and when we are born) are random to begin with, and the environment, over time, pushes and pulls us in different directions. These stimuli have physical effects on our bodies and brains – we physically change because of emotional circumstances. But it’s all still random, mostly at the start.

B. Possible events. Potential conversations. The unexpected.

Q3: Your art is so exploratory, almost ecstatically so, and yet you yourself are a very shy, cerebral guy. Is art an escape for you? Or does it serve as a kind of liberating character that differs from real life?

A. I was a very shy kid and always an introvert. I liked to observe and take in information all the time - from the way my friends behaved at school, to how the temperature affected my parents behavior – I was always the onlooker. Art was always a way for me to process these experiences in the world and to define my point of view, to show what I’d seen. It wasn’t so much of an escape, as my way to communicate.

B. I would like to call myself your friend. What does it mean to you to have friends?

Q4: The last show you did took some interesting turns. The word-art, in particular, drew me in. There were some maddening pieces of you talking to an automated response program on your computer. There was another of you trying various brand-name substances... pills and fast food... and then there was one where you plotted the actions of historical dictators, which turned out kind of like a blob/pyramid. What do these exercises tell you about humanity?

A. I’m believe that we are programmed from birth in a certain physical way (our brains and bodies have specific characteristics or traits) and that when we respond to our environment, our physical attributes change, which then affect our emotional responses to other circumstances, and so on. It’s the butterfly effect. Basically, I believe that our decisions to do good or evil are predetermined and are based on how our brains are constructed. Therefore, the difference between a psychopath and a benevolent leader is pure chance (they do not choose to act in these ways), and they / we should not judge what they do as being a matter of choice. This leads to complex moral questions. In addition, if over time we collectively act in good or evil ways, those acts will have concrete effects on the minds and bodies of each individual. But it begins with the micro action. I believe in that completely, and my work has always evolved from one small action to another.

B. To be male is the opposite of female. That’s all. Simple.

Q5: Your style seems very consistent now. But did it always deal in these sort of web-like structures that are both abstract and almost graph-like?

A. I’ve always loved the way diagrams looked, even when I didn’t know what they were about. My earliest works, in high school and college, were MC Escher-esque pen and ink drawings of spatially skewed spaces and architectural structures. These were labor intensive and developed slowly (could take a year to finish). Simultaneously, I was making these large, loose, collage / assemblage works with trash, found stuff, cheap house paint, etc. I would make a huge work in an hour or two. At the time, I thought these two bodies of works represented two different sides of me, almost like the emotional and intellectual. The big works were a way for me to explore the materials and languages of fine art, and also to perform in a way – they were the opposite I was being taught in undergrad, as a graphic design major. But over time, these two styles merged and now my work has qualities of both. The informational aspect developed in the late 1990’s. I loved works that looked intuitive and more primal, almost – things that seemed like reactions, not strategized moves. I saw this aesthetic in diagrams, graffiti, marks on the pavement, etc. I then started to look at artists that used actual information to create their works – Alfred Jensen, Mark Lombardi. They were thinking on paper or canvas, not simply making things look cool. I then tried to use the actual stuff of the world – it’s information – to make my work. This was a breakthrough for me.

B. Well, the important part is you are learning. You would be amazed on how many people refuse to allow themselves to learn. I would say you are doing an excellent job.

Q6: Your sculptures are often done in paper-mache, correct? I was taken aback in the recent show by how much they reminded me of the stop-motion figurines of, say, Tim Burton's "A Nightmare Before Christmas." Elsewhere they reminded me of the dancing figures of African cave art. My questions are: (1) Have you ever been approached to animate your work? And (2) do you have a specific idea of how the figures will look before you execute them?

A. Those were actually made of cut board that I painted with acrylic. They were mostly loops – physical and informational. I liked the idea making a Mobius strip-like structure that connected back onto itself, with no beginning or end. Onto those loops I painted cyclical patterns of information that I extracted form various places. The loops were infinite. And to your questions – I’ve never been approached to animate my work, but I have made a few (really rough) stop motion animations myself. I like that idea and may pursue it more. And in general, I have no clue how anything will look when I start. I usually begin with a small bit of information or some visual thing I’m into at the time. I then let the pieces evolve. I can’t see into the future very far so I just have to trust that the ride will take me somewhere. And not lose my keys.

B. I hate bibs, I have to wash them all the time.