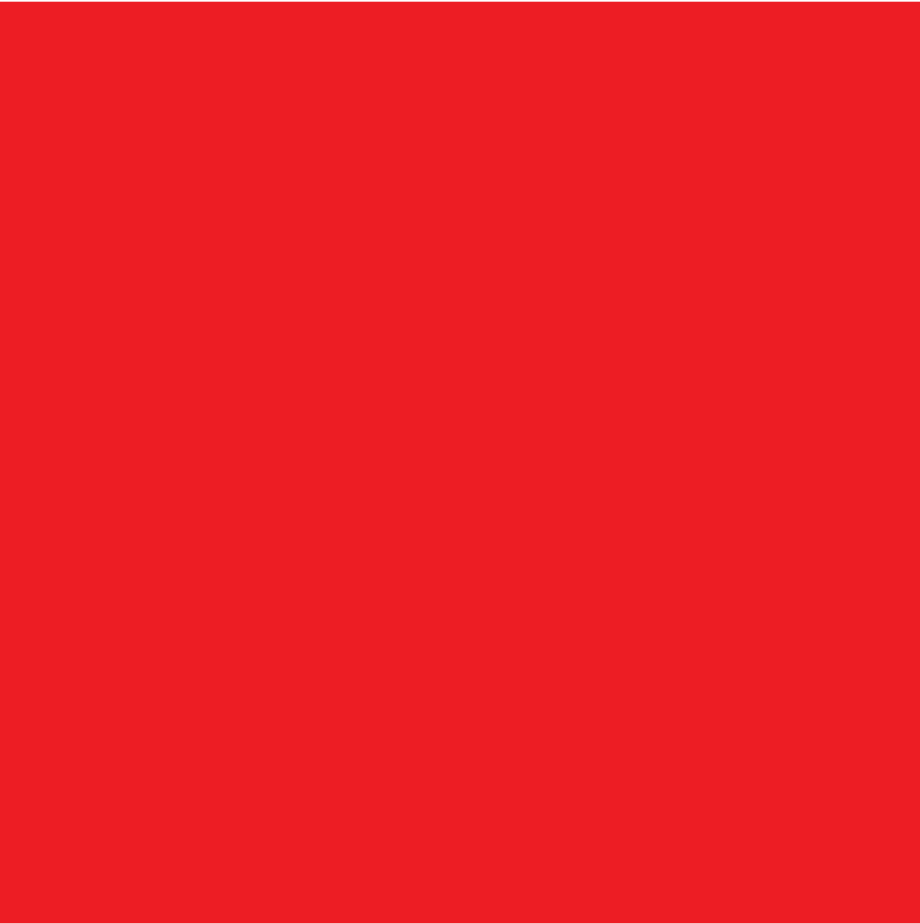


VIA CRUCIS  
exitations



The essence of life remains a profound mystery. Its origins might lie in the divine, the primordial soup of early oceans, the vast universe or even each one of us. Due to the rapid pace of contemporary existence, we seldom pause for such investigations. The currents of our technocentric lives surge too swiftly to accommodate contemplation as we drift under the cosmic gaze or the scrutiny of generative surveillance systems. Confronted by existential threats from nature, nations, and societies, the very fabric of life hangs in the balance of humanity's responsibility. We face the choices of altering our ways, of adapting to new conditions, or of passively evolving as casualties of modernity. A path of "progress" rests on thoughtfully crafted decisions by the agents of control, be they individual, collective, or imposed.

**VIA CRUCIS** uses the Stations of the Cross as an experiential lens to explore contemporary existential themes. Religious art seeks to imbue the sanctity of its subjects into representation thus aspiring to manifest a living presence and a form of absolute truth within the art itself. Staging itself through centuries it frames a symbolic reality and shapes our perception of the real.

The Stations of the Cross, a popular symbol of religious devotion central to Western iconography, serves as a focal point. Regardless of religious affiliations, our existence unfolds in a dramatic narrative intertwining humans with their sins, evils, myths, divinities, saviors, curses, punishments, redemption, and transfiguration. In that sense this project is a portrait of contemporary humanity.

With Via Crucis, the Stations of the Cross undergoes a dual reinterpretation:

### **1. THE THEME**

Modernity acts as a “deus ex machina” perpetually shifting us between states of damnation and salvation.

**The Real:** Originally designed for the spiritual salvation of sinners, today’s Via Crucis resonates with a humanity burdened by a long history of abuse against Nature, with no apparent savior other than itself and the prospect of a “futurist” redeemer. Christians respond by increasingly participating in ecological activism, aligning with Pope Francis’s 2015 *Laudato Si’* and the 2023 *Laudate Deum* exhortations to confront societal ills and preserve the planet. While the Bible encourages drawing from nature, it also emphasizes protecting the “divine creation” we have inherited. In that sense, Via Crucis evokes a post-theological approach to universal and timeless topics of the human presence on Earth, a “theology of the real.”

**Representation:** In the expansive lineage of holy representations and their techniques, creators continuously invent expressions to encapsulate

their contemporary realities. The visual arts symbiotically evolve with the image-making machinery that drives our societies and the technologies that empowers them. Today’s representations, whether as advertising, entertainment, news, science, or personal images, dynamically emerge from systems beyond our physical and conceptual grasp. Image is wildly generative. Via Crucis mirrors the pictorial accumulations of our iconosphere, incorporating images that are seen and revisited, unnoticed, or transformed. These scenes encapsulate our daily dramas in a world increasingly shaped by our deeds, turning our temporality into a permanent existential trial, if not a countdown to self-termination.

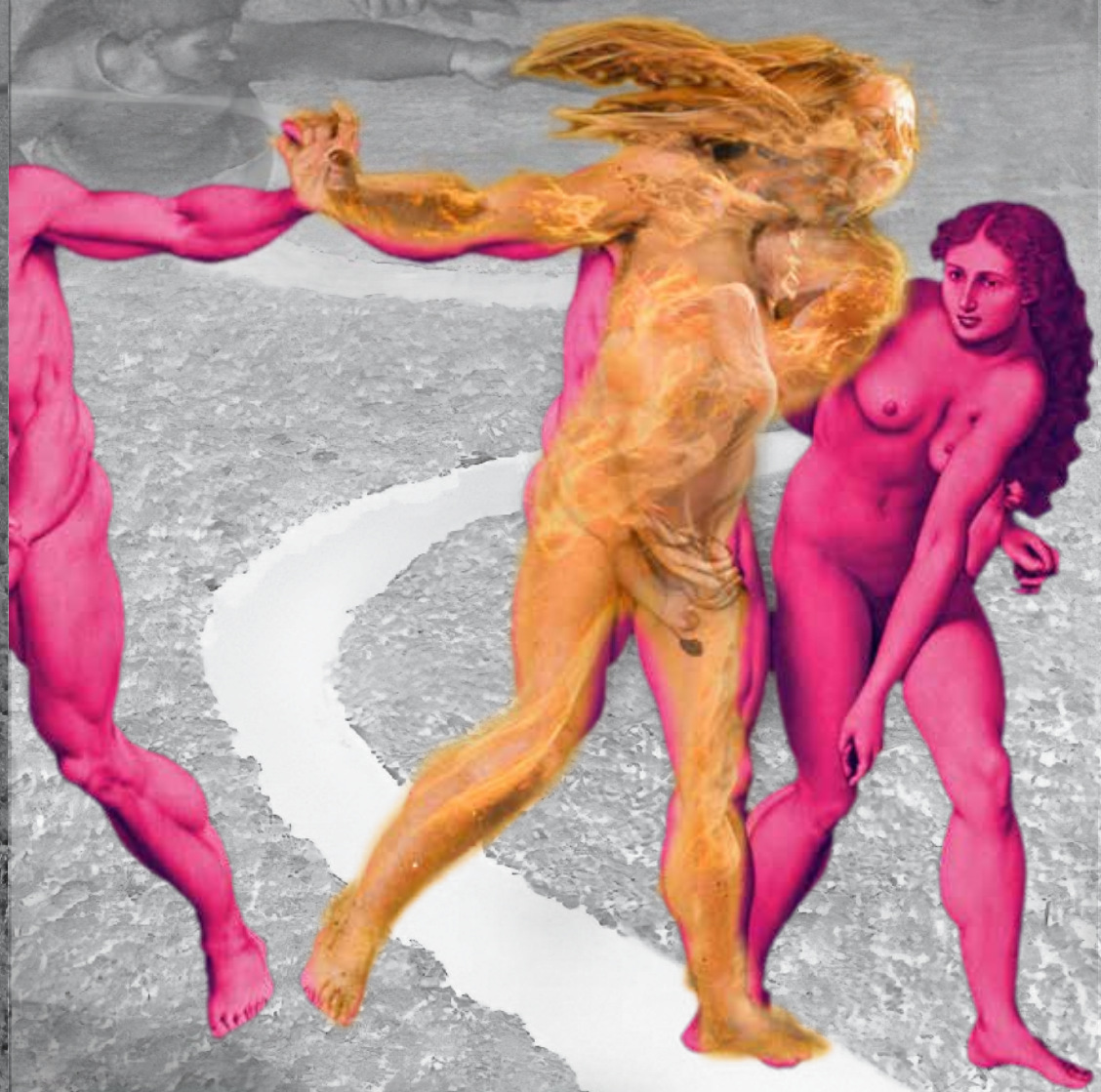
### **2. THE FORM**

In its association with the traditional 14 Stations of the Cross illustrating Christ’s journey to crucifixion, Via Crucis is organized around planetary cycles as 12 scenes, or “stages,” expressed as a series of visuals, words, and sounds, each addressing contemporary themes representing humanity’s misuse of power. It suggests both condemnation leading to a transformative regeneration, or the more threatening prospect of new beginnings spiraling into damnation. It could be perceived as a discursive parcours more than as a spiritual pilgrimage.

Each composition juxtaposes a background of more-than-human perspectives, as aerial or microscopic views, with allegorical depictions. Employing a mix of pictorial techniques, the artworks combine generative AI imagery with a wide array of visual sources. The resulting video uses imagery that could be described as a fusion of historic, mythical inspiration, and baroque digital aesthetics. The musical parts follow suit, and were performed using digital and analog synthesis and sampling.

# I

*In the time before time, we lived without chains or dominion, until an abrupt **expulsion** pushed us out. In the new realm we awakened into fear, as eternity was traded for the intoxicating mirage of identity. As generations now proceed like a series of erratic film reels, we are blinded by the glare of our infinite discoveries, but we yearn for redemption, gazing backwards to our primordial birthplace. When our egos fall away, and we suffer neither nostalgia nor anxiety, we move instead toward **renewal**.*





# II

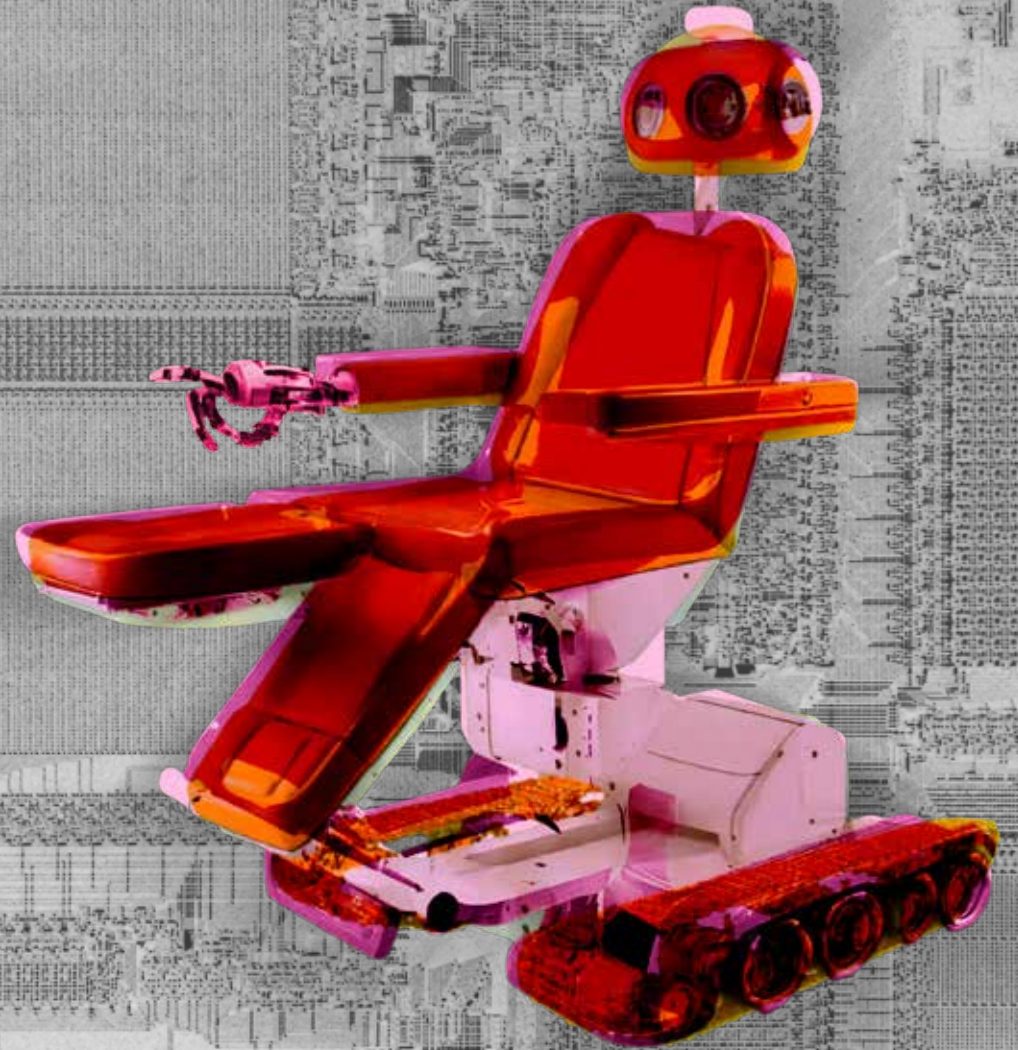
While the arboreal creature is ensnared in the coils of accusation, burdened with the crime of treason that damned us to the exit, it was curiosity that propelled us from Eden's embrace. In the new world we have fallen into, it is we, the human architects, who stand indicted of faunicide, the relentless obliteration of life. Mortality, a harsh teacher, compels us to seek sustenance in the realms of fellow plants and animals, yet our avarice, magnitude, and callous efficacies create gratuitous loss on an unfathomable scale. Within the dominion of the creatures we command, innocence seeks a refuge.





# III

*Where dream and reality blur, **machanic**s emerges like a wraith that both powers and devours life. Tools, wielded as instruments of command, beget might, but this power is harnessed for the pursuits of profit, greed, and addiction. In a ceaseless cycle, these tools of **defficiency** counterbalance with collateral devastation: a switch is flipped and so begins the dance of power.*





# IV

*Our desires, like ravenous wolves, urge our systems and our selves to dominate, to seize, to devour, in a never-ending effort to fill the chasm within. Unchecked, fear constructs cages around our hearts, as the accumularium creates rotten eddies from the flowing river of life. We forget the happiness that lies not in the pursuit of more, but in harmonia, a surrender to enough.*





V

Hinged on the crutch of **addictum**, our existence teeters. Within us, emotional chasms clamor, unsated, while the vultures of commerce circle, offering their facile, pernicious elixirs to our starved desires. Pleasure, an elusive siren, calls to us, weaving through the gratification of our bottomless yearnings. Yet, imagine: In this bleak carnival **joy** – a tiny animating spirit – emerges, in a delicate, foolish dance with the gnashing teeth of avarice.





# VI

*In the current of our journey, we are swept away by the poisoned ambitions of titans, charting courses that drain oceans as well as minds: the vampartheid of the fabric of our reality. With ambitions for prestige, and dependent on ceaseless conquest, we forsake genuine connection, and build dungeons of colonization, in which we have inadvertently trapped ourselves.*





# VII

*In the land of now, we, herein collectively referred to as the first party, solemnly bind ourselves to a pact with the second party, individuals shrouded by their own desires and addictions. We willingly enter into enlightened detention, a self-imposed imprisonment fueled by our ceaseless wants and cravings, forging a spectral alliance with fellow captives in our shared pursuit of perpetual needs. Together, we are bound in a reciprocal covenant, ardently seeking the elusive "time of redemption," an epoch of liberation, thus perpetuating our voluntary servitude in this haunted gavotte of demancipation.*





# VIII

*We unite against the machinations thrust upon us. We rebel against the discord sown by the puppeteers of dominance. Why resist the ease of servitude? The rewards of compliance are rich and require so little effort. Where the lust for resources spawns a cycle of domination, exploitation, and annihilation, we invoke the spirit of resistance. The path of least resistance is lined with gold. Why struggle when you can prosper in chains? We reject those chains of servitude. From the ashes of the gold, we rise anew, for in unity lies the antidote to our collective affliction.*





# IX

*Our residency in this part of the universe was no grand design but rather the fallout of a forgotten blunder. The crashtinum set the stage for this long-running drama of calamity. We've resigned ourselves to a pattern of ongoing misfortune being the natural flow of things. We might have stumbled into this universe by hazard, but the mess we're in? The question now is how we live within airbags.*







*A never-ending buffet appears before us, but instead of eating and sharing, we hoard our discarnation and then toss the rotting grub out of the window and onto our neighbors. The waltz of waste has alienated our earthly families and transformed our own potential into perishability. Is the next pivot deservation?*





# XI

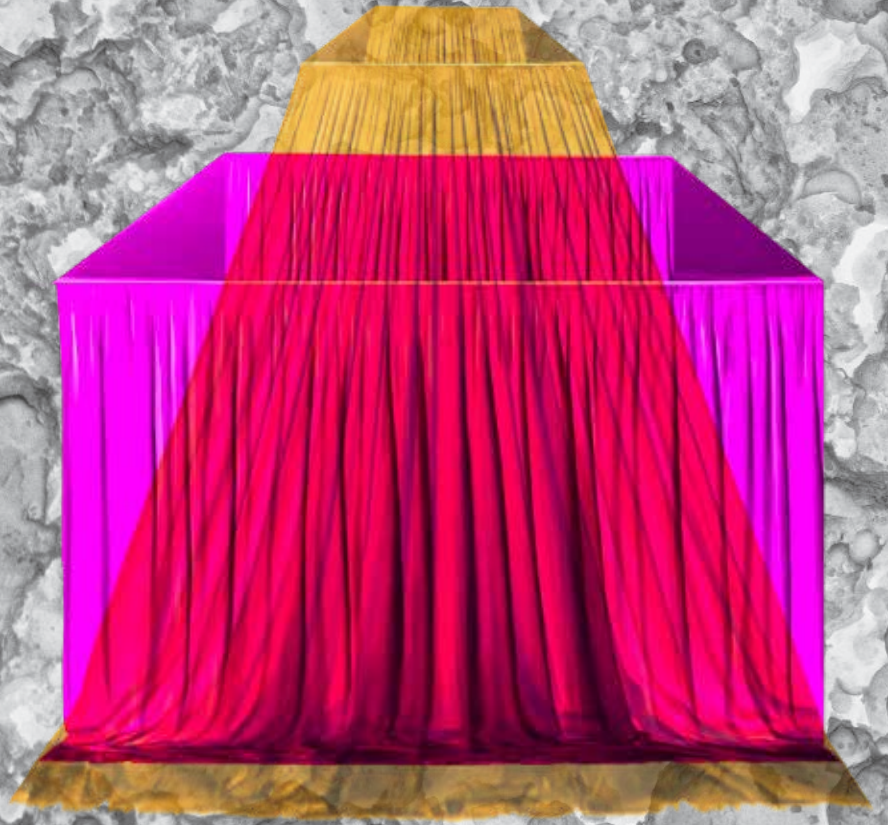
*In the collapse of cosmic pinball we're the silver ball, bouncing off bumpers and slingshots, careening across the board. The gravitational pull of dissipation seeks to trap the orb. Each hit, each rebound, is like another piece of the puzzle falling out of place. In the middle of this wild game, there's a chance, a shot at a new angle, a hidden exit in a maze. The new trajectory is elusive. Luck joins the game, dancing around the edges of our vision, plotting a graceful ricochet.*





# XII

The **termination** sure was a doozy, wasn't it?  
One minute our hero's there, the next—poof!  
Looks like curtains for the guy, but wait, it's  
a classic twist, where the end is never really  
the end. In this strange play it signals a new  
beginning. This end is a mirror and a prompt,  
for **reformation** of our fixed selves, outside  
the cages.







SIMAGE series by Erik Adigard, M-A-D:

/ Framing by Image (w/ Mark Petrakis & Patricia McShane)

/ The Rise of Mass Imaging, conversations

/ Ladder (of life)

/ Simage Terms

/ Simage Visions

/ Axioms for Artificial Times

/ Scenes from Artificial Places

/ Via Crucis, Laudate Deum

/ Via Crucis, Exitation / by Erik Adigard & John Alderman