

The background of the entire image is an abstract painting consisting of several thick, horizontal brushstrokes. The colors range from deep orange to bright yellow, with some areas showing a fine, porous texture. The strokes are layered, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Michelle Xen  
*Portals*

14 — 22 September  
2023



Side Gallery

## Portals: Agents of Liminality

By Rachael Parsons



[DISCO]MFORT 2022

Neon

23 x 102 cm

**\$2200**

Side Gallery

# Portals are often used in fantasy and science fiction to move protagonists into new territory.

They are technological or magical doorways connecting two distant points in time and space and facilitating a journey, often traversing through a kaleidoscope of light, colour and movement. Think jumping into hyperdrive in Star Wars, stepping through the Stargate in Stargate SG-1, the wormhole in Sliders or falling down the rabbit hole in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. They are the voids that exist between worlds, parallel universes, and alternate timelines. Portals are agents of change. Stepping through a portal is an act of danger and faith, leaving behind the familiar for the unknown... an uncertain future with endless possible outcomes.

It is little wonder that Michelle Xen should feel simpatico with the concept of the portal — as an artist, she has felt most inspired, excited and at home, occupying in-between spaces. Xen's practice sits at a nexus of contemporary visual art, pop music, fashion, and experimental performance. For Xen, it is at points of intersection where these different modes of making collide

and contaminate each other that transformative creativity can begin. It is the inherent tension and discomfort of creating within an interdisciplinary methodology that moves Xen. Sliding from painting colour fields and portals to designing costumes for an electro-pop video to performing a DJ set, every aspect of Xen's practice is interconnected, cumulative actions building and expanding, repeating and mutating. Also, she loves fluorescent and technicolour, all the dopamine sparkle and glitter of a cosmic vernacular — it's so excessive that it hurts... so good.

In this current body of work, portals act as a device to express time and movement through space and to imagine, through a simple gesture, something expansive. Xen describes each portal as "a miniature time tunnel where the mundanity of an A4 sheet of paper could suggest other dimensions."



# Portals: Agents of Liminality

By Rachael Parsons

It is a discombobulating truth that the vastest things that exist, including ideas, are made up of the minute. Infinity starts with one, the universe is made up of matter composed of elementary particles invisible to the naked eye. Newton saw an apple fall to the ground and discovered gravity, and a squiggle on a piece of paper is an expression of the space-time continuum.

Each portal is made from a fragmented gestural mark, quickly laid down on the paper. Xen does not anticipate the form that a portal will take; instead, it links the process to automatism (in psychology, “automatism” refers to involuntary actions and processes, not under the control of the conscious mind), initially explored by the Surrealists. The resulting works are a series of passages of saturated colour. There is an effect of volume or mass. Light resonates from the neon pigment; when seen under UV light, they glow and oscillate. I find the work immediately appealing, seduced by the dynamic movement of the portals, the vibrancy of the colour and the novelty of the UV activation.

There is a bit of the mad scientist to Xen. She dives, headfirst, into creative experiments, and follows accidental discoveries through an obsessive process of trial and error, until something she feels is interesting or worthwhile is revealed. Repetition is a key part of her creative process, and the serial nature of the work builds its meaning (the whole is greater than the sum of its parts). Making is a compulsion and a privilege, but it is not easy. For Xen, the creative process involves a constant tension between pleasure (making) and torment (making something successful). Of the 144 Portals Xen has made, only a small selection have been selected to be exhibited. While a process of editing and selection is common to most artists, the process is perhaps heightened here, where such a simple and deceptively easy process can also be so demanding.

Dystopian science fiction set in future or alternative worlds (my favourite trope) often directly interrogates a present issue or situation humanity faces. They provide an opportunity for us to imagine

the current trajectory of human society, industry, politics and invention and the possible cataclysmic consequences of our collective decisions, actions (or inactions). Unregulated technological development leads to Skynet or the Matrix. Overpopulation, the depletion of finite resources and our inaction to address climate change results in humanity’s need to colonise space, as in *Interstellar* and *Firefly*, or to live on a train in a snowfield wasteland, as in *Snowpiercer*. These worlds are terrible and yet somehow seductive with their neon cyberpunk aesthetics and embodied soundscapes (I’m thinking *Blade Runner*) and they feel at once familiar and fantastic. Of course, utopian science fiction proposes a more optimistic alternative future... but it is getting increasingly difficult to believe in a happy ending for humanity, even in fiction. Disaster feels inevitable, redemption unlikely.

For Xen, the creation of portals is a gesture of resistance (or at the very least an obsessive distraction) from her own anxieties over the future.



*Portal #53 (Pink And Blue)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**





# Portals: Agents of Liminality

By Rachael Parsons



*Portal #65 (Orange And Yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

“Most nights I can barely sleep with the crushing weight of humanity reverberating through me like a rapid anxious shudder. The future collapsing in front of me. And moving forwards through that feeds the recurring idea that one must continue. Perhaps these are small promises that time continues, and light and transformation exist even if it comes from something as insignificant as a small neon squiggle. I am, after all, a child of the 80s.”

In this way, making portals is an attempt by Xen at creating a means for escape — step through the portal to a beautiful new world. One new world where Xen has been a pioneer explorer is the technological financial utopia, (or the most cynical and corrupt extension of the art market to emerge in recent years)... NFTs or Non-fungible tokens. Full disclosure, I do not really know what I am talking about when it comes to NFTs, they make my brain hurt and I have often dismissed them as more a gimmick at best or a con at worst. Talk about a rabbit hole, black hole, no wait, blockchain! NFTs are assets that have been tokenized via

a blockchain. They are assigned unique identification codes and metadata that distinguish them from other tokens. NFTs can be traded and exchanged for money, cryptocurrencies, or other NFTs—it all depends on the value the market and owners have placed on them. For instance, you could use an exchange to create a token for an image of a cactus. Some people might pay millions for the NFT, while others might think it worthless. Simple 😊. Xen has been working in this space since 2021 in various capacities and her portals exist both as physical works of art and as digital artefacts on the Ethereum blockchain. While Xen completely understands that NFTs (like most aspects of the internet and digital technology that promised a more democratic, independent and creative world), has been largely reduced to an alternative commercial market, that feels like all the other commercial markets (dishonest, unethical, indecipherable), she also sees the poetic potential of the blockchain. The video work Mnemonic is a series remixing abstracted music videos by Xen and text selected from a list of 2048 words utilised by the original BIP39

protocol, an encryption used for early Bitcoin wallets. This work, combining text, colour and sound allows the viewer to get swept up in the tangible, knowable aspects of what can feel like an ungraspable concept.

When Xen describes her latest work [DISCO]MFORT to me (it's brand new and I haven't seen it at the time of writing), I get the sense that this work is somehow both a new breakthrough and something that beautifully sums up Xen's interdisciplinary practice and life view... in glorious pink and purple neon. Xen writes, “Beneath the vibrations of discomfort you can find your own cells dancing; disc/disco/discomfort. When I learnt to DJ (disc jockey), I used vinyl records only, and purchased club tracks pressed to vinyl on Indie labels. Ironically, I did not play disco as a DJ, but I appreciate how this underground dance movement has informed house and pop music. The literal translation of the word discotheques means “record library” but refers to a space for dancing, a nightclub. Discs are inscriptions, records.”



# Portals: Agents of Liminality

By Rachael Parsons



The connection to the Portals idea is almost cellular. The Portals drawing series appear to have been constructed by moving discs, like cellular tracings. I have a distinct memory of first learning of the proposition in physics that our cells could hold a tiny black hole, like a stabilised portal. Words like cellular rejuvenation are more familiar as jargon used to sell face cream. I think of cellular rejuvenation through experience and movement, like dancing transforming your biochemistry or light exposure changing your dopamine levels. I've always been aware of these effects as a DJ, a performer and an artist working with colour and light intensities. Tiny transformations matter to me. Accumulated transformations compound."

This work also alludes to both the joy and struggle Xen experiences when making work, the pull and push of an emphatic and exuberant creativity and the little voice in her head spewing uncertainties and pushing for perfection. It also speaks to how Xen overcomes her anxieties in the face of a world speeding towards an implosion of mass destruction... by embracing the chaos and following the surge of creativity even as it is painful. To survive it, you have to find the humour and take things less seriously, to wholeheartedly embrace fashion, pop, disco, sequins and fluorescent colour and all the things that High Art (go fuck yourself) might consider low brow.

It's just art, after all; as Xen writes, "We are all going to die. It's ok; find a path and try, if you can, to find some flow."

*Portal #99 (Blue Orange Yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**





Michelle is a Queensland College of Art graduate, holding a Bachelor of Visual Art in Fine Arts and a Master of Arts in Research in interdisciplinary practice from the Queensland University of Technology. As a visual artist, she was awarded the QAGOMA's Melville Haysom Art Scholarship, which saw the development of the hybrid video painting and sound installation Billboard Communicative. Xen went on to develop a multidisciplinary practice oscillating between visual art, pop music, and the boundaries of performance. Her body of works sits within a spectrum from the contemporary visual art world the independent music industry, to a range of hybrid spaces associated with contemporary experimental sound and performance.

She has exhibited with galleries throughout Australia, including Metro Arts, QUT Art Museum, Boxcopy, Level, Inbetween Spaces and Frank Moran Gallery. Her public art practice has seen site-specific projects developed for Melbourne Spring Fashion Week, the Urban Easels billboards, and Kick Off Video Art at Metricon Stadium. Recently, she developed the hybrid collaborative project LUMEN BODY with animator Paul Van Opdenbosch, choreographer Elise May and the Expressions Dance Company ensemble of dancers. LUMEN BODY was installed at the Brisbane Powerhouse and incorporated site-specific objects, projection, sound performance, and motion capture. Xen has developed projects funded by the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Queensland and Creative Sparks.

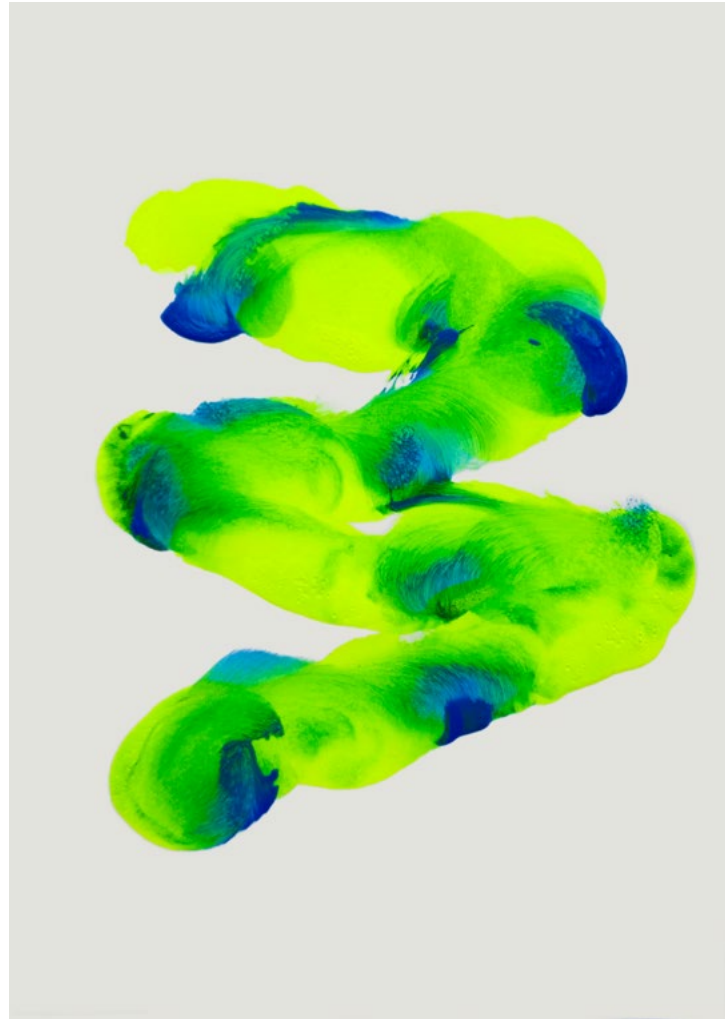


Michelle Xen *Portals*

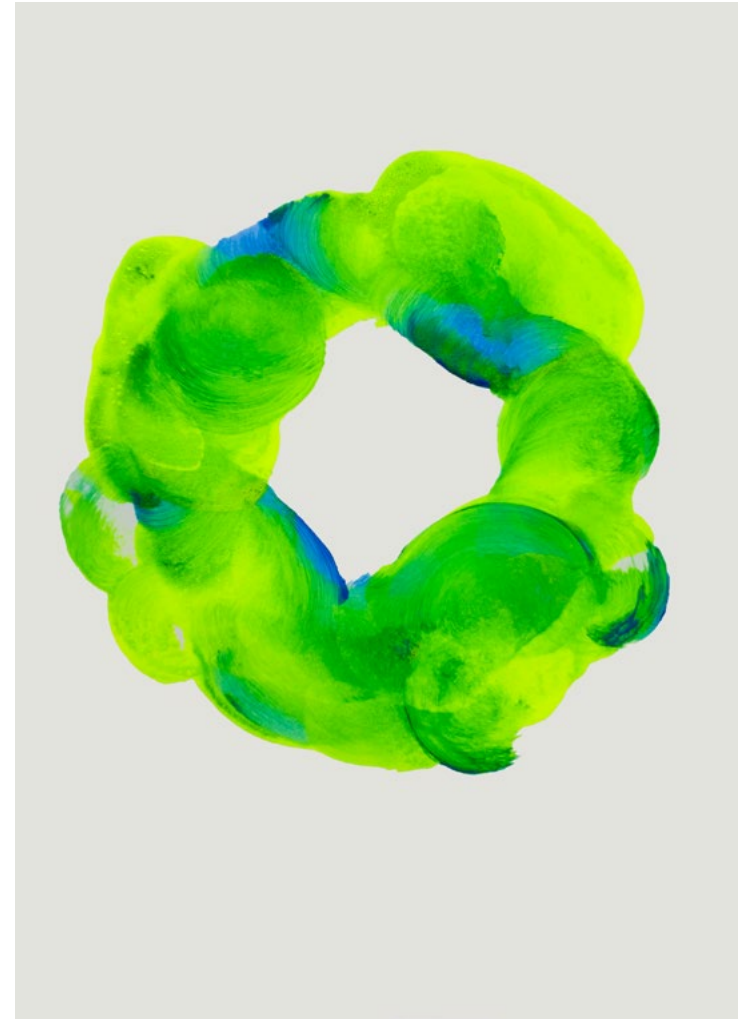


*Portal #31 (Yellow And Orange)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**





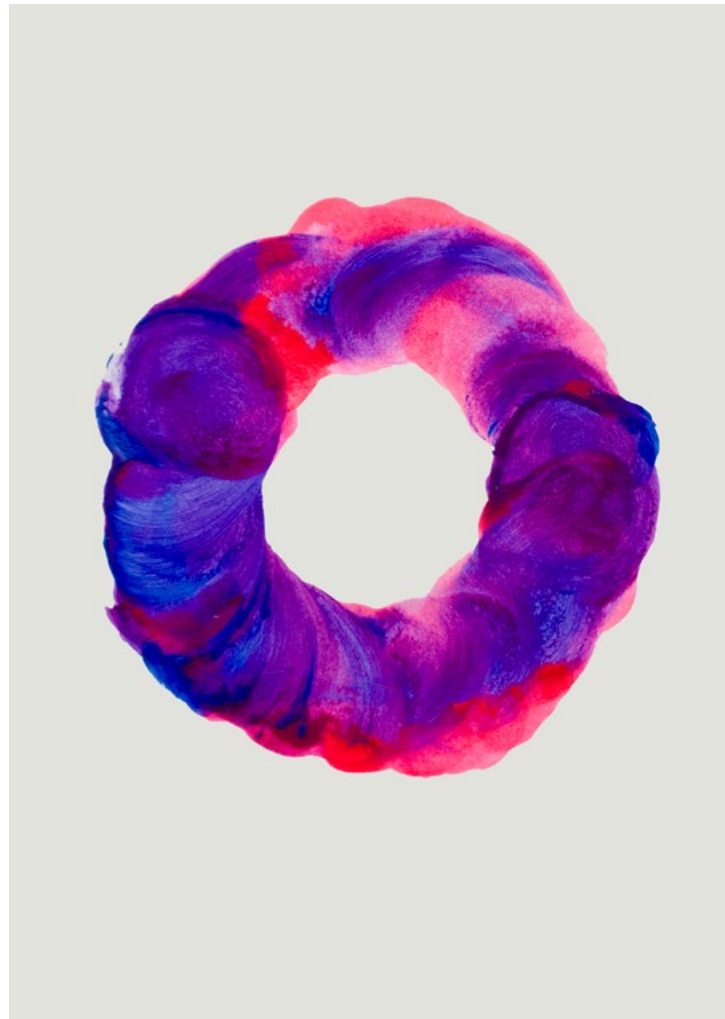
*Portal #37 (Yellow And Blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



*Portal #38 (Yellow And Blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**







*Portal #40 (pink and blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

*Portal #53 (pink and blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

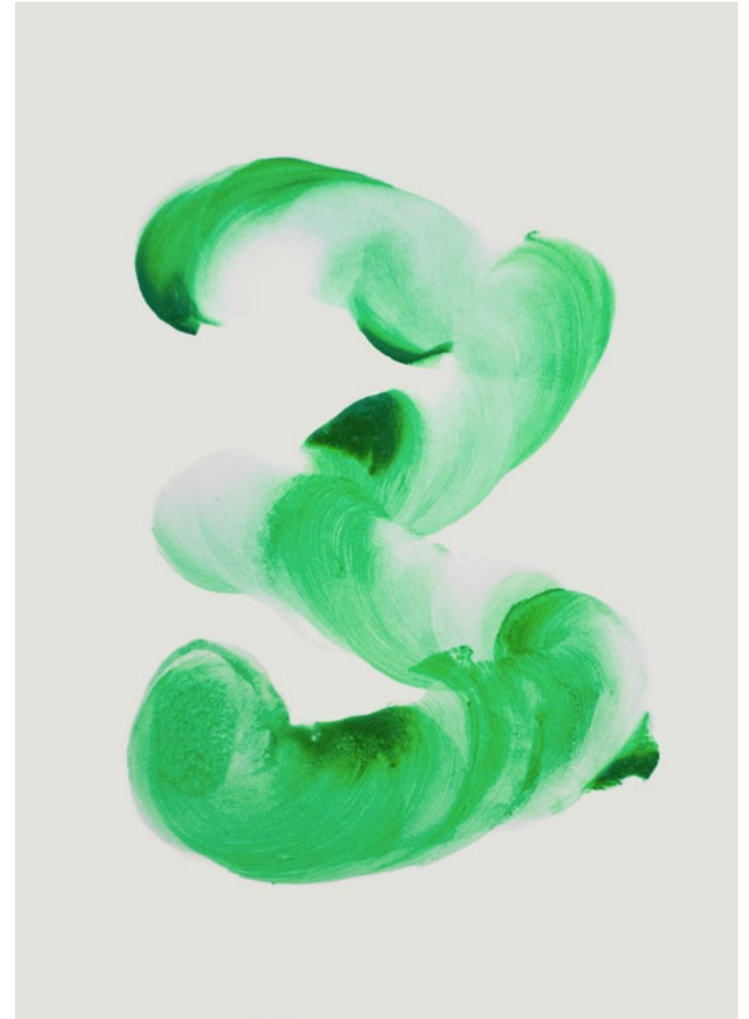


Michelle Xen *Portals*

*Portal #65 (orange and yellow)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

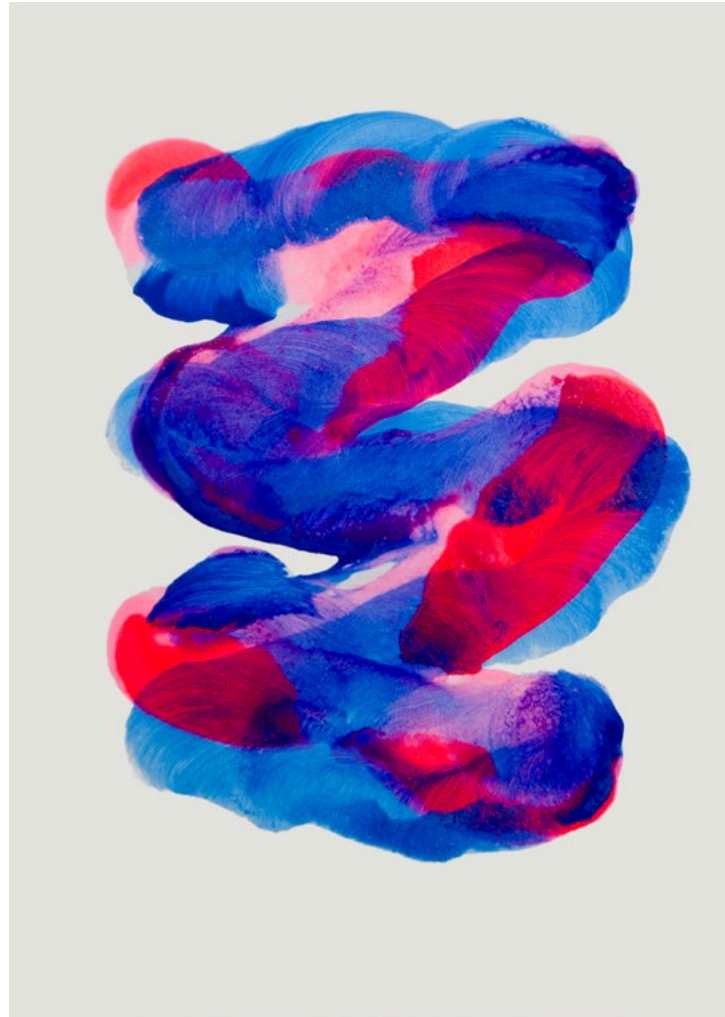


*Portal #71 (green)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



Michelle Xen *Portals*

*Portal #83 (pink and blue)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



*Portal #85 (orange and yellow)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



Michelle Xen *Portals*

*Portal #86 (pink and blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

*Portal #89 (blue pink yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

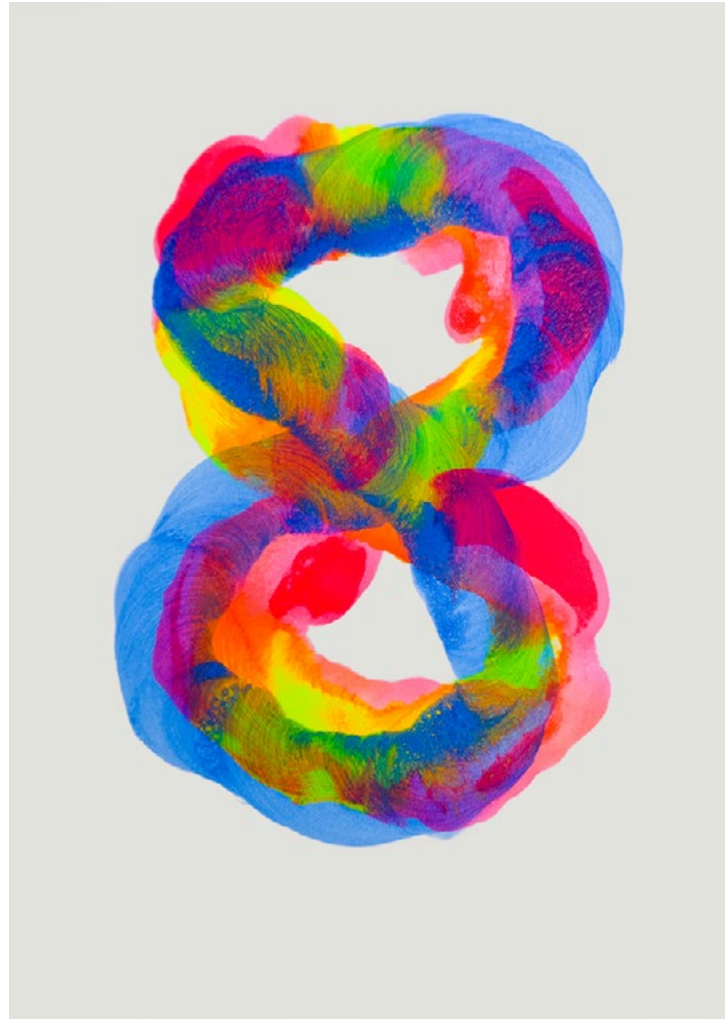




Michelle Xen *Portals*

*Portal #90 (pink blue orange yellow)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

*Portal #96 (blue orange yellow)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



Michelle Xen *Portals*

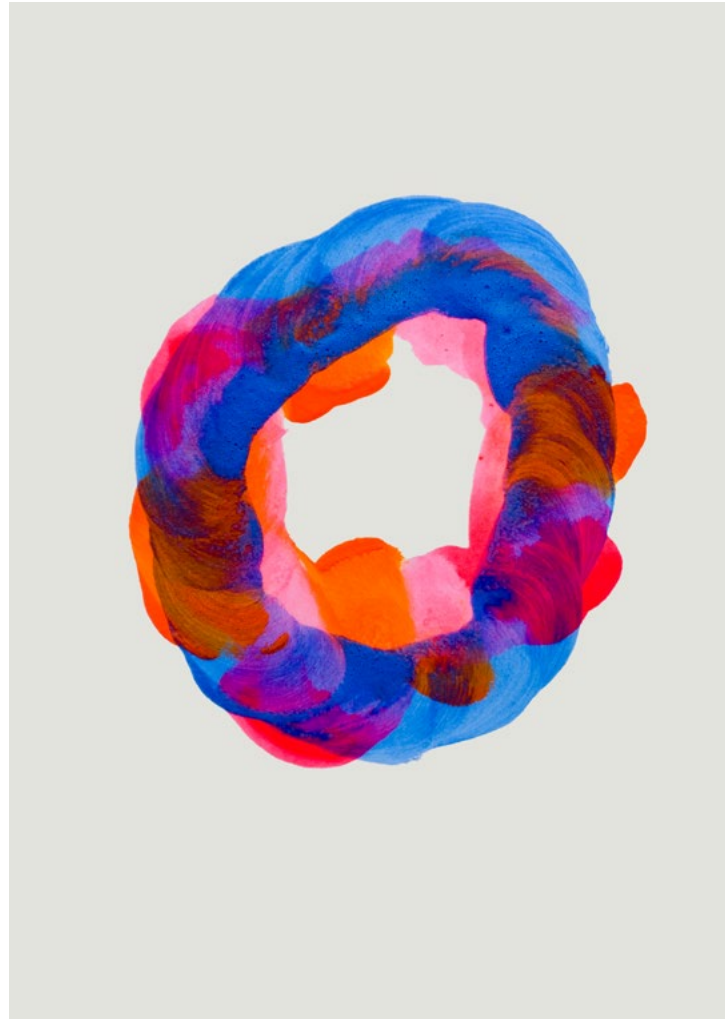
*Portal #98 (blue orange yellow)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

*Portal #99 (blue orange yellow)* 2023  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



Michelle Xen *Portals*

*Portal #102 (pink orange blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



*Portal #109 (pink blue yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**







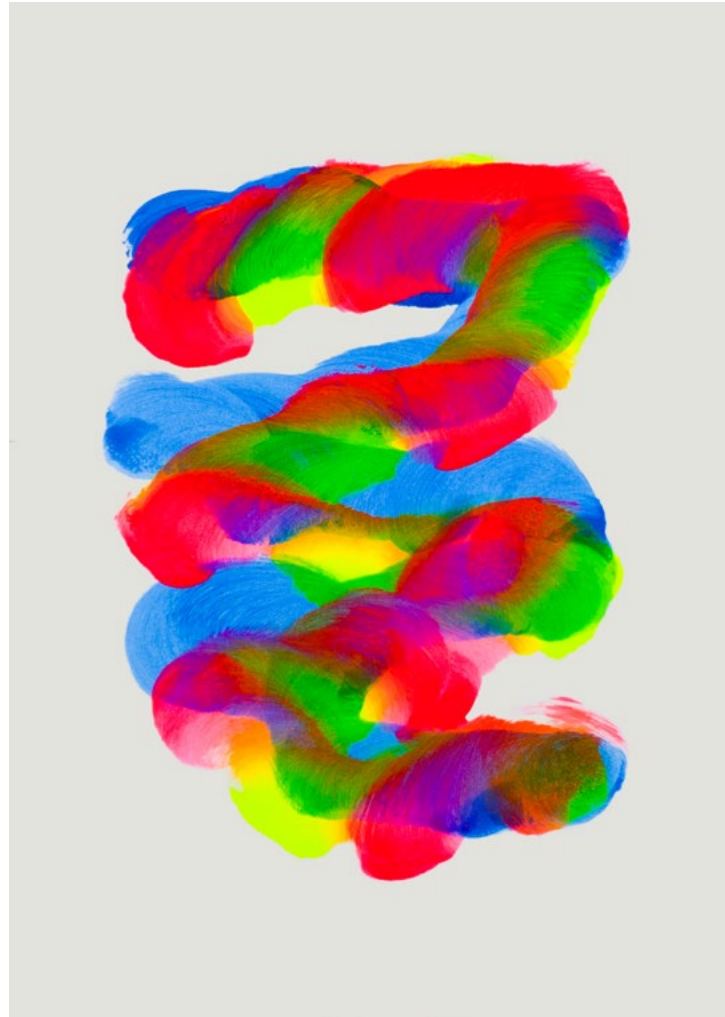
*Portal #112 (pink blue yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



*Portal #113 (pink blue yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**







*Portal #117 (pink blue yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**

*Portal #119 (pink blue yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**



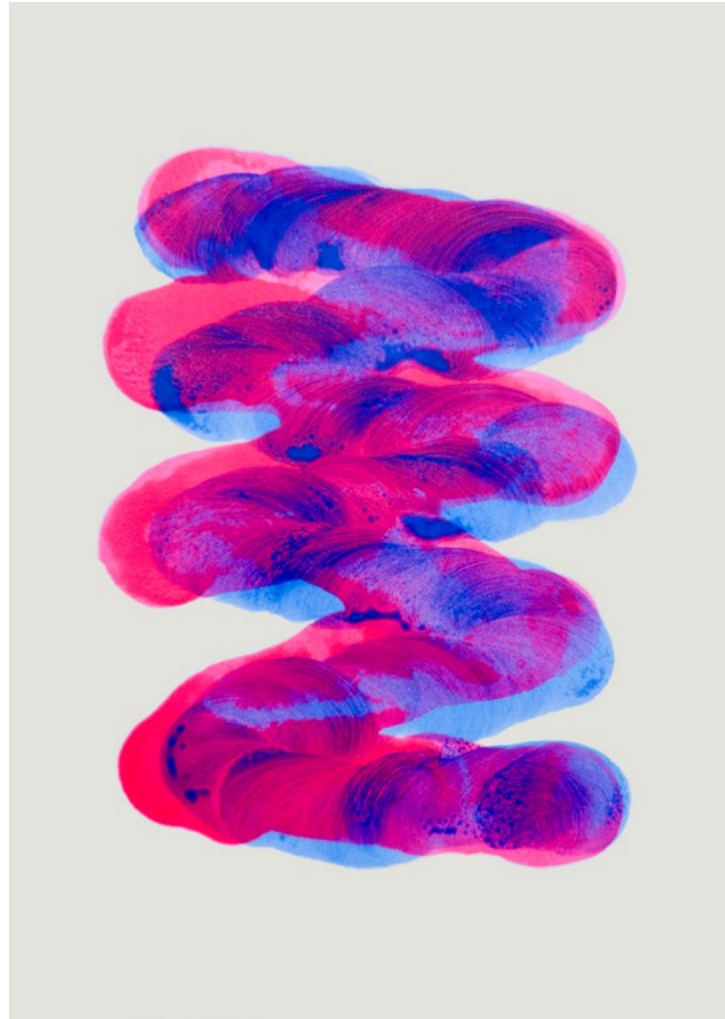
Michelle Xen *Portals*

*Portal #123 (pink and blue) 2023*

Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum

29.7 x 21 cm

**\$220**



*Portal #126 (pink and blue) 2023*

Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum

29.7 x 21 cm

**\$220**



*Portal #137 (pink) 2023*

Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum

29.7 x 21 cm

**\$220**

*Portal #138 (pink) 2023*

Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum

29.7 x 21 cm

**\$220**



Michelle Xen *Portals*



*Portal #142 (pink) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm  
**\$220**





Framed Portals

*Portal #22 (orange and yellow) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm, Framed  
**\$430**

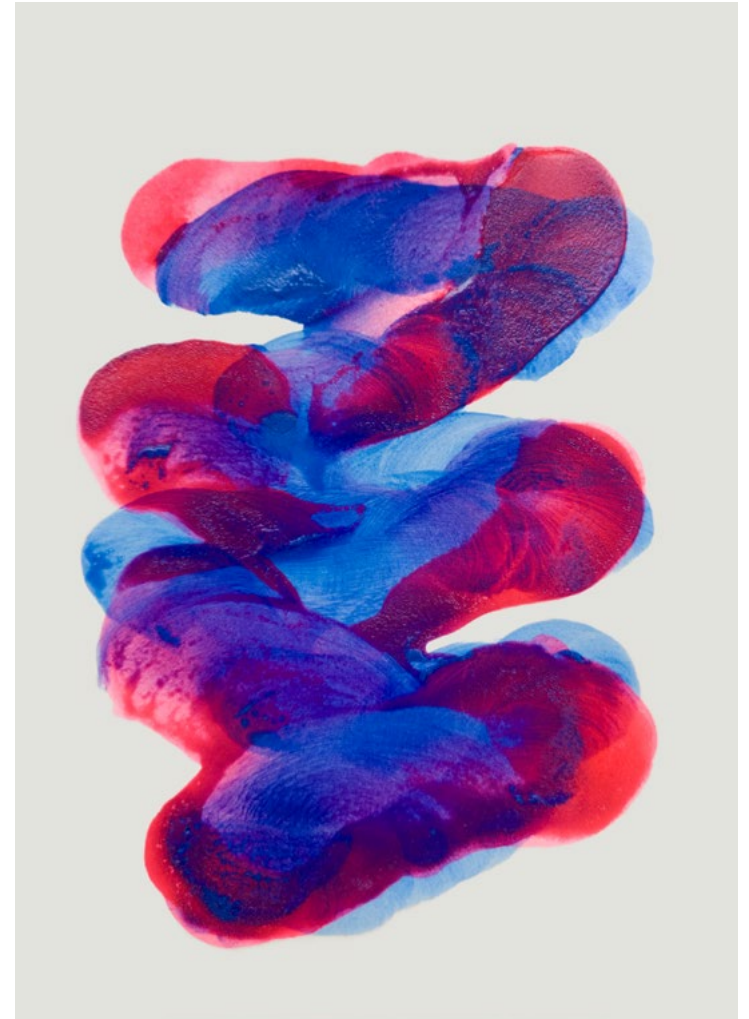
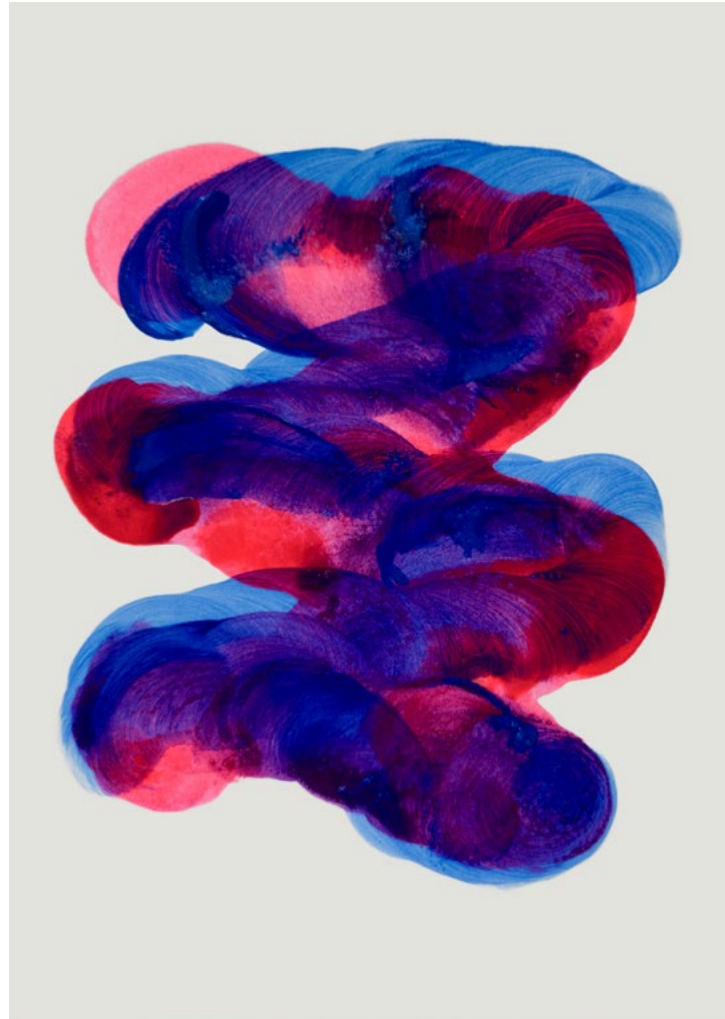
*Portal #26 (yellow orange pink) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm, Framed  
**\$430**



Framed Portals

*Portal #78 (pink and blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm, Framed  
**\$430**

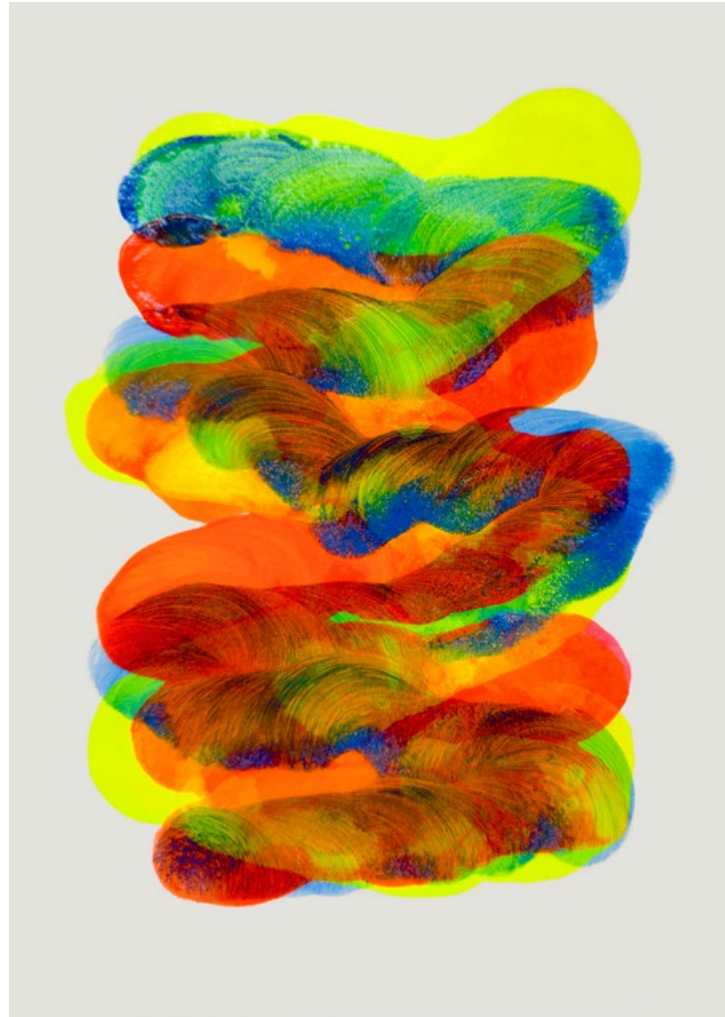
*Portal #82 (pink and blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm, Framed  
**\$430**



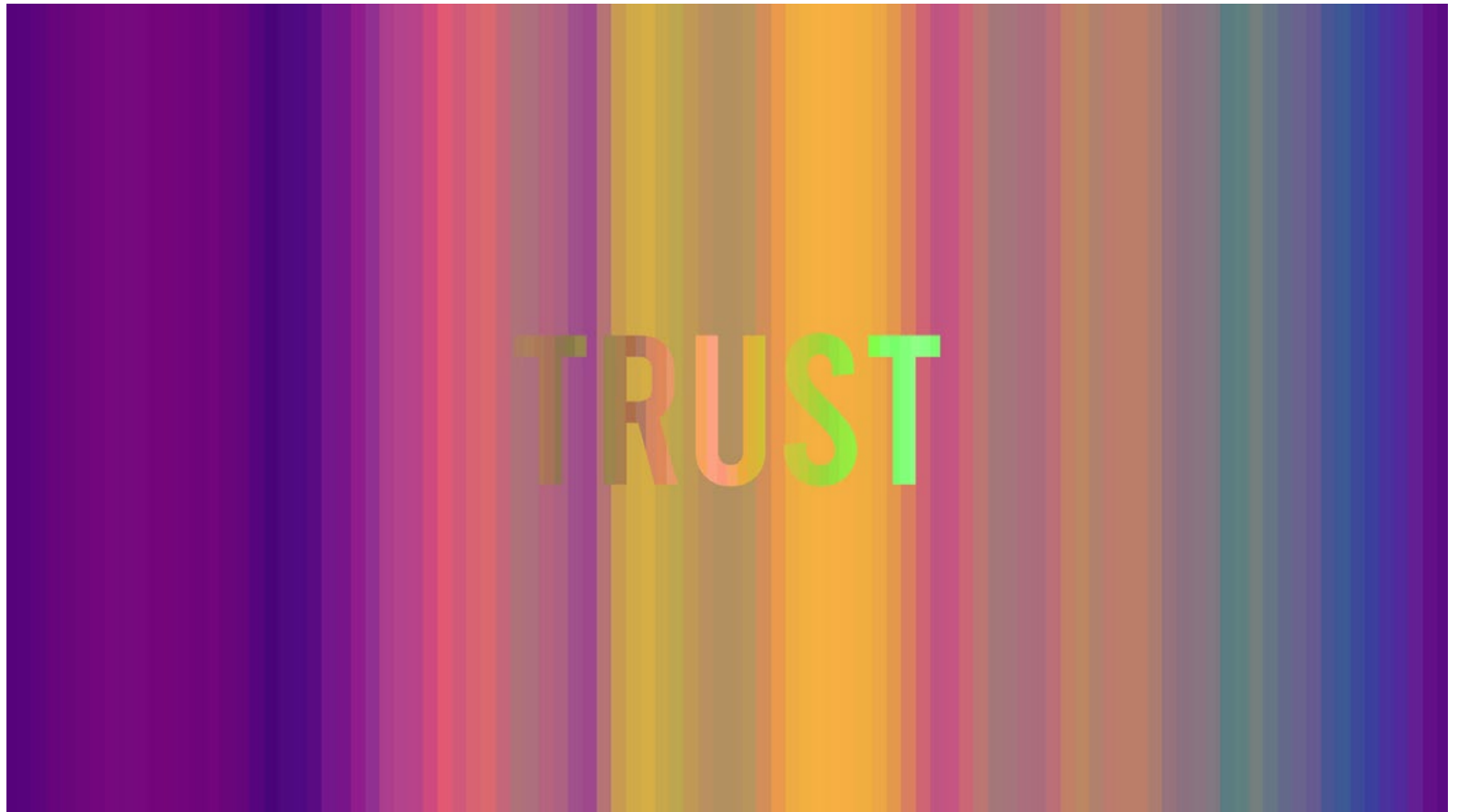
Framed Portals

*Portal #128 (orange yellow blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm, Framed  
**\$430**

*Portal #131 (orange yellow blue) 2023*  
Fluorescent pigment and synthetic polymer  
on cotton rag. Optional inclusion of digital  
edition verified on Ethereum  
29.7 x 21 cm, Framed  
**\$430**



*The video work Mnemonic is a series remixing abstracted music videos by Xen and text selected from a list of 2048 words utilised by the original BIP39 protocol, an encryption used for early Bitcoin wallets. This work, combining text, colour and sound allows the viewer to get swept up in the tangible, knowable aspects of what can feel like an ungraspable concept.*



*Mnemonic* 2023  
Single channel video





DISCOMFORT



MICHELLE XEN PORTALS















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#### **Side Gallery**

The Garden Studio  
7 Emma Street  
Red Hill  
PO Box 515 Red Hill  
Queensland 4059

[info@sidegallery.com.au](mailto:info@sidegallery.com.au)

0409 549 447

#### **Gallery Hours**

During exhibition periods, we are open at the following times:

Monday, Tuesday open by appointment.

Wednesday – Friday 10am – 5pm

Saturday 10am – 1pm

Stay updated by checking our website and social media for exhibition opening dates and times.

Instagram: [thesidegallery](#)

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Yuggera [yug-a-rah]

Turrubul [tor-oo-bull]

We acknowledge the Yuggera and Turrubul people as the Traditional Custodians of the Country we live and work on at Side Gallery. We recognise their continuing connection to the land, waterways and skies, and thank them for protecting this region and its ecosystems since time immemorial. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all First Nations people, acknowledging too that they never ceded sovereignty of the land, skies and waterways.



Thank you

