

THE MAGAZINE OF DIGITAL ARTS & CULTURE

# art+baste

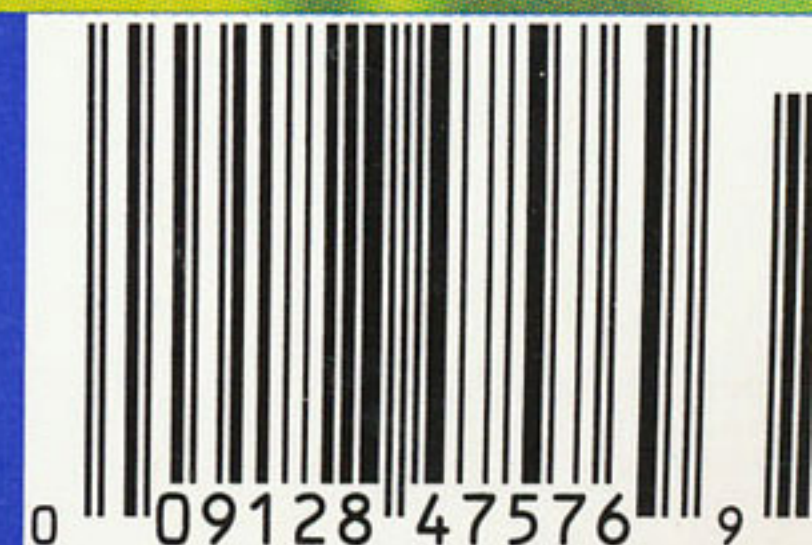
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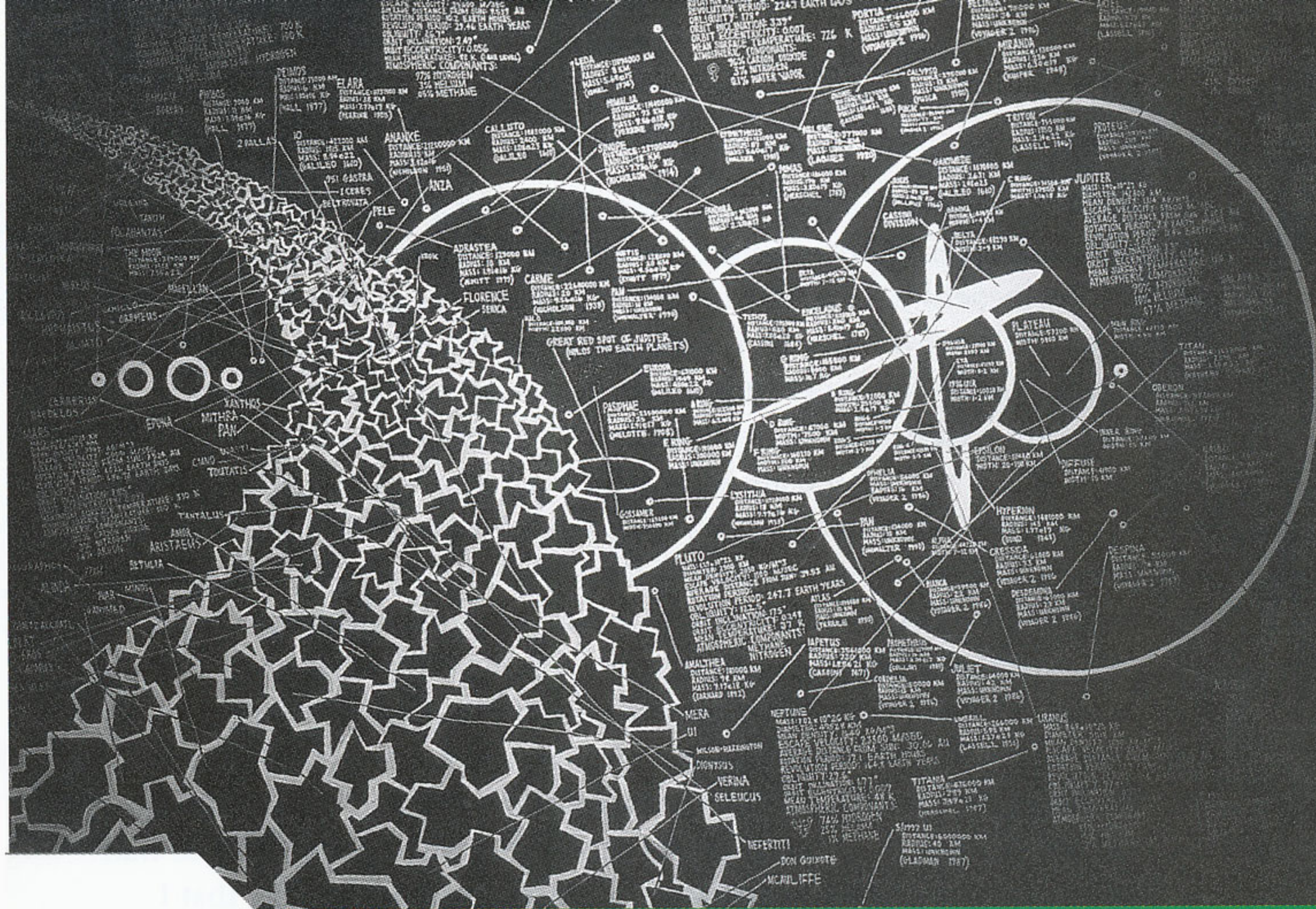
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"System Chart" (above) and "The Truth Will Be Far Stranger" (below).

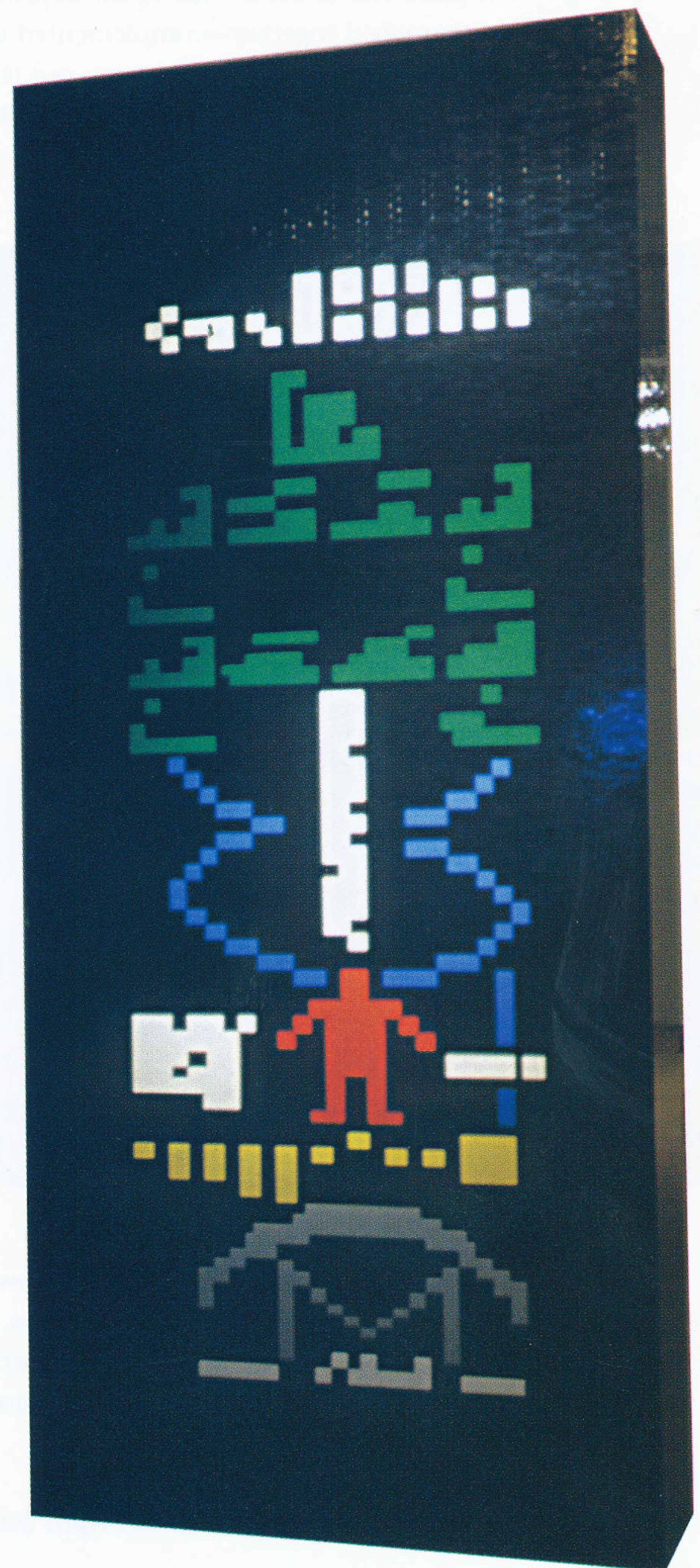
## YORGO ALEXOPOULOS / BRONWYN KEENAN GALLERY

by randy d. gladman

A nine-foot-high, shiny black obelisk stood majestically in the center of New York's Bronwyn Keenan Gallery last month. Made from 33,000 Lego pieces, "The Truth Will Be Far Stranger" uses the exact dimensional ratios of Stanley Kubrick's monolithic symbol of alien intelligence, but the smooth black surface of one side of the replica is interrupted by embedded color pieces. A visual interpretation of the "Arecibo Interstellar Message," a radio signal sent to a cluster of galaxies 25,000 light years away by the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico in 1974, this code describes Homo sapiens, and where we can be found in the galaxy. Like much of the work in Yorgo Alexopoulos's debut show, "The Truth Will Be Far Stranger" is part homage, part deconstruction, revealing the extent of our dependence on the fictional imaginings of men like Gene Roddenberry, Stanley Kubrick, and George Lucas for what we choose to understand about the extraterrestrial universe.

Alexopoulos, 30, has mined years spent watching science fiction movies and television shows to raise this pulpy genre to the exclusive domain of vanguard art. Blatantly lifting iconography and stylization from film and television, the artist's slick fabrications are most effective at delineating the fictional Hollywoodness of popular conceptions of the universe. Spreading the blocky, Atari-like scientific code across the surface of the ultimate science fiction icon suggests that Hollywood often employs elements extracted from real science for fictional purposes.

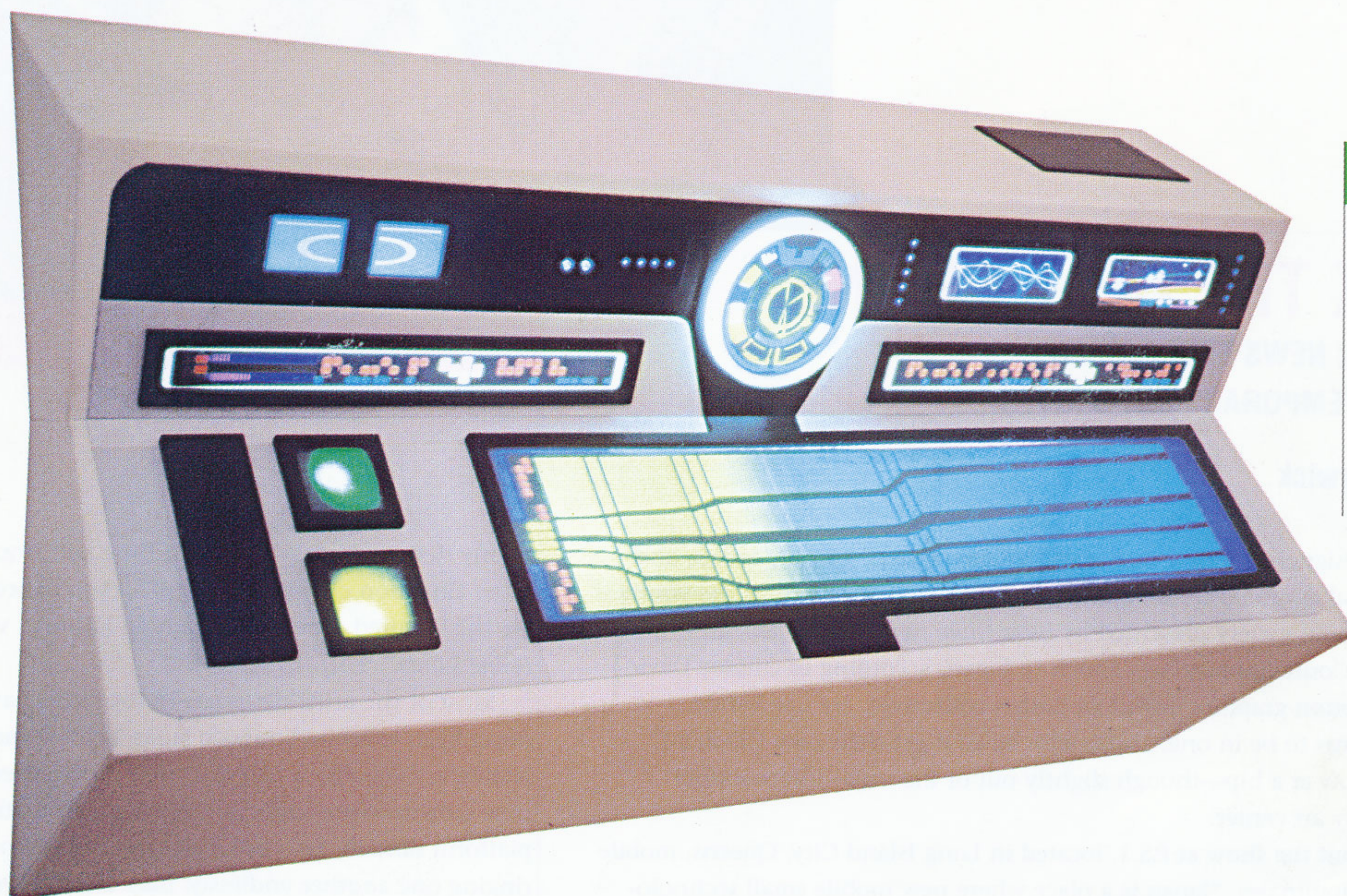
These audience-specific works speak to the artist's own explosive generation, for whom Han Solo was the ultimate hero and *Star Wars* was more than just a movie. On first viewing, what comes across is a fascination for video game aesthetics, Discovery Channel-style spongy explanation of the cosmos, and space-travel fantasy. The pieces' slick, manufactured quality balances an obsessive sci-fi affection that is heavily loaded with a geek chic sensibility. "Journey to Cydonia" closely resembles the kitschy types of control panels used by the characters in *Star Trek*, but its life-size presence in the gallery, mounted on the wall at a user-friendly height, offers a dynamic sense of being on Captain Kirk's Enterprise bridge. The highly finished surface and accomplished level of craftsmanship makes the viewer wonder if the piece was pilfered from a film set.





"Astral Astray" is also skillfully crafted; a swirl of motion, color, and culturally allusive iconography experienced with a visual immediacy that holds the viewer's attention. Sunk flush into the wall slightly above eye level in a manner similar to departure and arrival timetables in airport waiting lounges, the screens flash with grids, moving maps, and binary codes of ones and zeros, all created with Adobe After Effects sequencing. It soon becomes apparent that the rapid display of information, although seemingly important, is actually meaningless. Here, Alexopoulos mocks how science fiction uses indecipherable scientific jargon, presented in a dramatic and visually arresting manner, to lull audiences into suspending disbelief and push forward story lines. Like the flashing lights and joystick controls in the cockpits of fictional spacecrafts such as the Millennium Falcon, the information racing across the screens hides its fictional construction in a cloak of scientific mimicry and technical usefulness.

These works parallel the way ancient storytellers explained the unknowable



The control panel in "Journey to Cydonia" could have been lifted from a *Star Trek* set.

through a cosmology of the stars and the Gods they represented. Here, sparkling stars are replaced by blinking buttons and warp-drive visual displays familiar to us from our own cinematic mythologies. Just as the Ancient Greeks used the starry night as a fabric from which to weave stories explaining the origin of the universe, modern science fiction writers and filmmakers use fictional conceptions of space, starship control panels, and moving video displays as tools in their mythmaking. Alexopoulos, who was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, but grew up in Athens, Greece, delves into the duality of his Greek and American cultural heritages to reveal how science fiction myths are constructed today.

Yorgo Alexopoulos, Bronwyn Keenan Gallery, June 21 - August 3, 2001.



A Whole Lot of Nothing: "Astral Astray" mocks how science fiction uses jargon to fool viewers.