EXHIBITION REPORT

Exhibition Review of "Creation: Between Art and Mathematics"

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ARTICLE HISTORY
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ABSTRACT
This review examines *Creation: Between Art and Mathematics*, an exhibition at the Maison Poincaré in Paris (9 April–25 July 2026), curated by Élodie Christophe, Rémi Coulon, Edmund Harriss, and Glen Whitney. The exhibition aims to unveil the creative processes behind mathematics and the arts, emphasizing their interplay. While works such as Laura Taalman's Granny Life, Ulysse Lacoste and Rémi Coulon's La surface de l'Envol, and Sylvie Pic's Flächen successfully achieve this goal, others fall short of fully revealing their creative dimensions. Despite these inconsistencies, the exhibition largely succeeds in its ambitious mission, offering a compelling exploration of the dynamic relationship between mathematics and art.

1. Situating the Exhibition

What does it mean to unveil creative processes in a world where both art and mathematics are increasingly produced by algorithms? The exhibition *Creation: Between Art and Mathematics* answers this question with a bold claim: that the creative process, in all its human specificity, can be made visible within and through the interplay of these two disciplines. Yet, as this review will show, the exhibition's success in doing so is as fragmented as the processes it seeks to reveal, with some pieces achieving the transparency it champions while other works remain opaque.

Creation: Between Art and Mathematics is a group exhibition hosted at the *Maison Poincaré* in Paris, running from 9 April to 25 July 2026. Curated by Élodie Christophe (CNRS), Rémi Coulon (Université Bourgogne Europe and CNRS), Edmund Harriss (University of Arkansas), and Glen Whitney (Studio Infinity), with production by Céline Nadal (MuseoScience), the exhibition brings together 14 artists and collectives. As stated in the exhibition catalog and on the exhibition's website, its goal is to "highlight not only the creative process itself, but also the ways in which mathematical and artistic practices, through both their similarities and their differences, can enrich one another."[1] This ambition positions the exhibition within a timely cultural debate: at a moment when artificial intelligence and computational tools increasingly obscure the human role in creative and mathematical processes, *Creation: Between Art and Mathematics* seeks to reassert the visibility of human intervention, exploration, and experimentation at the procedural heart of the intersection of these two disciplines.

By evoking the strong dichotomy between mathematics and the arts, the curators

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[1]https://www.ihp.fr/en/news-science-and-society/creation-between-art-and-mathematics

of *Creation: Between Art and Mathematics* immediately invoke C.P. Snow's "Two Cultures" (Snow, 1959). This is particularly through their use of "between" in the title, which insinuates both a division between the two disciplines and the existence of a middle ground. Later authors, however, have offered alternative interpretations of mathematics' role in this framework. Gordon Gillespie argues that mathematics does not belong solely to the sciences but instead sits between the 'two cultures', acting as an intermediary that can bridge the gap between the humanities (including the arts) and the sciences (Gillespie, 2023). In this interpretation, the divide between mathematics and the arts may not be as extensive as naively assumed.

The curators themselves observe shared goals between the two fields, noting that both "strive to bring into our tangible world concepts and ideas that originate in the realm of thought." By unveiling the processes behind the creation of both mathematics and art, the exhibition aims not only to highlight each discipline's "research[,] (...) exploration, and social practices" but also to reveal "the diverse ways in which mathematics and the arts support and challenge one another."

This review, therefore, focuses on a critical question: to what extent does the exhibition succeed in uncovering these underlying creative processes, and does doing so indeed reveal the interplay between the two disciplines?

2. Structure and Flow of the Exhibition

Creation: Between Art and Mathematics unfolds in the basement of the Maison Poincaré, guiding visitors through a sequence of four interconnected spaces. All spaces are composed of light gray flooring, white walls, and white ceilings. Some reduced ambient light is provided, but most lighting is focused on the respective art works. With one notable exception in the third exhibition space, none of the works provide any sound and the and due to the location in the basement, there is also no ambient noise, which provides a quiet, almost meditative space for the exhibition.

The journey begins with an introductory panel, after which visitors enter the largest of the four spaces. This central space features works by Bardula, Natacha Caland, Pierre Gallais / Vincent Gontier, François Gaudel, Frédéric Jean, and Laura Taalman, with Taalman's expansive hanging installation "Granny Life" commanding attention and effectively dividing the room into two distinct sections. The first of these contains François Gaudel's "Cube arabo-gréco-latin", a $60\times60\times60$ cm wood and paint sculpture that extends Latin squares to the third dimension. From here, a hallway, serving as the second exhibition space, includes the work "Laboratorio de Nudos y Afectos" of Rocío Guerrero Marín and Darío Alatorre Guzmán. Their work comprises of 21 blackly lacquered stoneware knots, each about $22\times22\times4$ cm, mounted on an aluminum sheet. However, their outdoor installation is only represented indoors by one stoneware knot, a photograph, and a video documenting its creation.

The third space branches off from this hallway and showcases works by Pierre Berger, Nancy Reid Hocking, Jiří Minarčík, Ulysse Lacoste / Rémi Coulon, Sylvie Pic, and Gaëtan Robillard. On the left wall after entering are the four engraved brass sculptures of Pierre Berger, placed under two monitors with videos, which forms the work "Sculptures, Vidéos et Théorèmes." From the opposing wall, when entering, hangs Nancy Reid Hocking's "From Diagram to Disorder", executed in pencil and colored pencils on paper, 77×57 cm. Dominating the center of this space is "La surface de l'Envol" by Lacoste and Coulon, while three chairs that blend seamlessly with the geometric aesthetic of the exhibition, invite viewers to sit and engage with Robillard's



Figure 1. Left: The first exhibition space, with the centrally hanging "Granny Life" by Laura Taalman; Right: The third exhibition space, showing the centrally placed sculpture "La surface de l'Envol" by Lacoste and Coulon and the three chairs to view the video installation of Gaëtan Robillard (not shown).

video installation "En recherchant la vague" projected on a wall. The installation is accompanied by eight sheets of embossed paper, 76×55 cm each, showing different equations from fluid dynamics. The wall next to that presents material around Jiří Minarčík's "The Shape of Turbulence," a 3D-printed resin sculpture of $20 \times 20 \times 10$ cm.

Returning through the hallway and passing back into the second section of the first space, visitors get to see the second side of Taalman's installation. This second section holds "Les reflets d'une courbe elliptique" by Frédéric Jean, a $40 \times 40 \times 40$ cm sculpture made from acrylic with paint and digital printing. At the opposing wall when entering this second section stands "Triarchie matricielle", an installation of three LED matrix panels, 65×65 cm each, with lenses. This is a work by the artist duo Bardula. On the wall to the left is the collection "D'un espace... l'autre" by Pierre Gallais and Vincent Gontier. It is dominated by the $81.5 \times 51.5 \times 18$ cm paper and steel sculpture "Compactus n°5" by Vincent Gontier, which is paired with smaller sculputres of Pierre Gallais. Further down on the same wall hangs "Bleue comme une orange" by Natacha Caland, a $85 \times 48 \times 6$ cm wood and acrylic collage.

This work directs the viewers into the final space of the exhibition. Here, the last formally curated piece "Misshapen chaos (of well-seeming forms)" by Vincent Edwards, Edmund Harriss, Jean Schmitt, and Matthew Conroy is displayed. It is a collection of six 3D-printed ceramic pots of varying heights, displayed on round slaps of wood and accompanied by an in-jet printed diagram of 240×30 cm. This last formally curated piece is followed by a collection of illustrations, prototypes, and items produced during the scientific program "Illustration as a Mathematical Research Technique" (January–April 2026) at the neighboring Institut Henri Poincaré. This concluding section includes a table with constructions, several two-dimensional works in frames, and two sculptural works hung from the ceiling.

The exhibition's layout encourages both guided and free exploration. While a suggested linear path is indicated by arrows, the interconnected spaces allow visitors to navigate at their own pace and according to their own interests. Each of the 14 curated works is accompanied by a large printed panel with bilingual text (French and English) and additional visuals from the creative process, where available. The only interactive element is Laura Taalman's "Granny Life," which includes a basket of crocheted *Granny Squares* for tactile engagement and an iPad station for visitors to create their own digital versions.



Figure 2. Left: Backside of "Granny Life" by Laura Taalman; Right: An accompanying basket with process samples for the visitors to engage with on a tactile level.

The organization of the works is entirely spatial, with no explicit thematic or conceptual linkage between them. This approach extends to the final section, where the works produced during the scientific program are less polished than the curated pieces. Far from being a drawback, their prototypical status and visible imperfections serve as a feature, offering unfiltered glimpses into the creative processes and reinforcing the exhibition's emphasis on exploration and experimentation. This insight is also particularly strong on several of the curated pieces, which will be discussed in more detail in the following.

3. Where the Exhibition Succeeds

A select few pieces stand out as exceptions in *Creation: Between Art and Mathematics*. This section examines Laura Taalman's "Granny Life," Ulysse Lacoste and Rémi Coulon's "La surface de l'Envol," and Sylvie Pic's "Flächen." These works do not only achieve the curators' ambitious goals of unveiling the creative process but also embody the exhibition's central thesis of the interplay between mathematics and art.

3.1. *"Granny Life"*

Laura Taalman's "Granny Life" (2026) is a double-sided hanging installation composed of crocheted wool, measuring 185×185 cm, see left of Figure 1 for the first and Figure 2 for the second side. Supported by 89 craftspeople that crocheted the individual squares by hand, the work features a grid of 11×11 granny squares, each exhibiting unique patterns (with the added twist that exactly one motif appears twice). Displayed on



Figure 3. Left: "La surface d l'Envol" by Ulysse Lacoste and Rémi Coulon; Right: Accompanying elements from the generation process, including five copper prototypes that indicate the transition from flat cooper plate (top) to final sculpture (bottom).

a freestanding frame, each side presents a dense array of these squares, their varied hues and designs creating a complex, textured surface. As described in the catalog, the project evolved over several years at the intersection of mathematics, crochet, code, and community, with Taalman employing 2D cellular automata to encode mathematical data into the visual patterns of the squares.

Taalman's "Granny Life" exemplifies the exhibition's goal of revealing creative processes by seamlessly integrating mathematical principles with artistic practice. The work leverages Conway's *Game of Life*, a cellular automaton, but pairs it with the tactile, craft-based medium of crochet, immediately embodying the intersection of mathematics and the arts. The accompanying printed panel further illuminates the process, featuring images of both digital and physical prototypes, collaborative creation sessions, and the assembly of the final piece. An accompanying basket filled with process samples invites tactile engagement, allowing visitors to closely inspect the craftsmanship and materiality of the individual granny squares. Additionally, an iPad station displays a motif generator[2], enabling visitors not only to explore different patterns but also to witness animations of how these motifs emerge from the *Game of Life* through successive generational iterations. Through these elements, every procedural aspect of the work, from conceptualization to execution, is made directly accessible to the audience within the exhibition space.

3.2. *"La surface de l'Envol"*

Ulysse Lacoste and Rémi Coulon's "La surface de l'Envol"[3] (2026) is a steel sculpture measuring $130 \times 130 \times 130$ cm, presented on a slightly elevated steel plate, see right of Figure 1 and left of Figure 3. The work scales up a smaller copper prototype, a 10×10 cm square plate deformed through hammering from its center outward, creating four undulating waves that bring opposite corners into contact, forming a symmetrical shape defined by precise curves, see right of Figure 3. Likely, the 'rising' corners of

[2] `https://mathgrrl.com/granny-life/`

[3] 'The surface of the rise', translation by the reviewer.

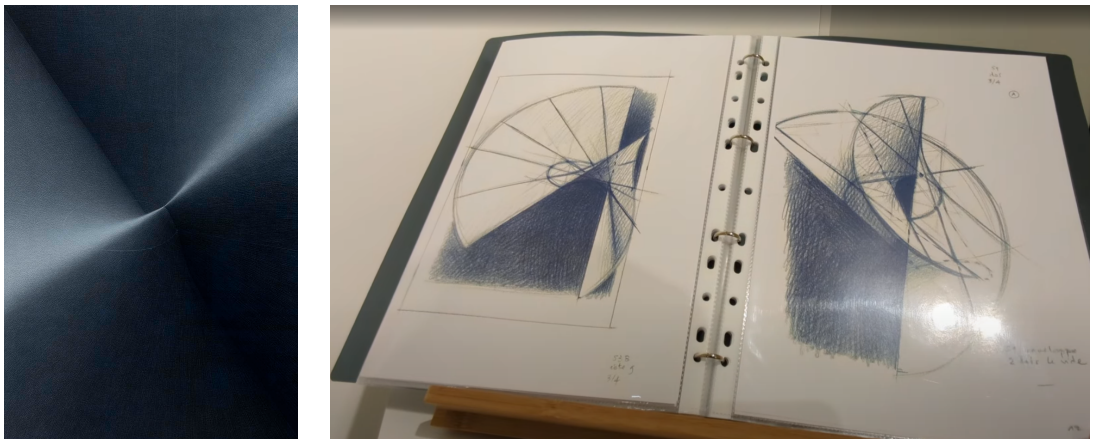


Figure 4. Left: "Flächen" by Sylvie Pic; Right: pages from the exhibited sketch book by Sylvie Pic.

the square plate inspire the name of the sculpture. In contrast to the prototype, "La surface de l'Envol" is made from several steel segments that are assembled into the final sculpture, with visible seams that are even highlighted by lines of holes punctured along the seams.

Lacoste and Coulon's "La surface de l'Envol" reveals its creative process by tracing the evolution from material experimentation to mathematical abstraction. The initial creative seed, the deformation of a copper plate under the artist's hammer, is made apparent through exhibited prototypical stages, allowing viewers to return to the moment of inception. The printed panel further documents the intermediate stages that followed: mathematical calculations, technical drawings, wire models, and digital renderings. The panel also discloses that only the formulation of the form as an algebraic surface enabled its production at the exhibited scale. Through this layered presentation, both the artistic and mathematical dimensions of the work are embodied, and visitors can directly relate the final sculpture to the diverse stages of its creation.

3.3. *"Flächen"*

Sylvie Pic's "Flächen"[4] (2025) is a drawing executed in white pencil on acrylic-coated paper, measuring 110 × 75 cm. The work features strongly structured forms with geometric objects such as lines and a white, central circle. Yet, the execution of pencil strokes on paper provide an almost organic, flowing form that evokes movement, growth, and the impression of fur. The catalog includes an artist statement, in which Sylvie Pic stresses mathematics "as a tool for studying and classifying (...) regularities," which their "[o]bservation reveals (...) in all forms, living or not." The central work is accompanied by five other drawings, all executed with purple pencil on paper, showing similar geometric elements: lines, circles, and arrows on surfaces.

Pic's "Flächen" reveals its creative process through a thoughtful balance of textual and visual elements. Unlike other works in the exhibition, the printed panel presents only the artist's statement from the catalog, with no intermediate process images. This minimalist approach allows viewers to focus on the text itself, which reads as a process description: from the observation of natural forms, mathematics enters as a tool for studying and classifying regularities, while the strong geometric concepts

[4] 'Surfaces', translation by the reviewer.

in the drawings already embody this mathematical foundation. Yet, the work is not without intermediate stages. The generous sketchbook exhibited alongside the central drawing and five accompanying studies offers a glimpse into Pic's observational and procedural practice, revealing how mathematical principles are visually embedded in the work. In this way, "Flächen" echoes the approach of prior works like Allan McRobie and Helena Weightman's "The seduction of curves" (McRobie and Weightman, 2017), who used the nude to illustrate Thom's catastrophe theory, here translating abstract geometric and topological ideas into organic, hand-drawn forms.

4. Unfulfilled Potential

While *Creation: Between Art and Mathematics* set out to unveil the creative processes behind the creation of mathematics and the arts, particularly through works that combine both disciplines, the three artworks discussed in the previous section demonstrate that this ambitious goal is indeed achievable. These pieces not only reveal their own making but also embody the interplay between mathematical and artistic practices. As such, they stand as shining representatives for several of the art works in the exhibition. Unfortunately, some other works from the exhibition are not successful in reaching these goals. This is mostly due to some curatorial decisions on what to include and how to present it.

Few works in the exhibition, while visually or conceptually intriguing, lack the necessary explanatory context or evidence of their creative process. Neither the works themselves, nor the printed panel or the surrounding materials reflect aspects of the work's creation. Without this, these works remain static and opaque, offering little insight into the interplay between mathematical and artistic practices that the exhibition aims to reveal.

Some selections remain firmly rooted in specialized mathematical knowledge, accessible only to viewers already initiated in specific concepts. For these cases, even the respective descriptions printed to the art works' panels can only be followed given suitable prior mathematical knowledge. For those without this background, the works and their accompanying materials offer little means of connection or engagement, reducing the experience to a display of unfamiliar objects that are easily passed by.

Finally, in a few instances, the exhibition leans toward an educational rather than an experiential approach. Monitors and explanatory texts prioritize instruction over immersion, failing to reveal the creative process behind the works themselves. This emphasis on didacticism, rather than engagement or process revelation, undermines the exhibition's stated aim of unveiling the dynamic interplay between disciplines.

While all exhibited works possess inherent potential to reveal creative processes and interdisciplinary connections, a select few ultimately fall short of fully realizing this ambition. Whether through a lack of contextual depth, accessibility, or engagement, these works leave the exhibition's central goal of unveiling the dynamic interplay between mathematics and art unfulfilled. While this is unfortunate for these select few works, it does not narrow or diminish the success of most of the other works in the exhibition.



Figure 5. "Misshapen chaos (of well-seeming forms)" by Jean Schmitt, Vincent Edwards, Matthew M. Conroy, and Edmund Harriss.

5. Closing Reflection

With a few exceptions, where the curatorial decision on how to present some individual works fall short of the exhibition's high standards, the curators have largely succeeded in unveiling the creative process in both mathematics and the arts through the intersection of these two disciplines. While Taalman's installation serves as an initial and immediate eye-catcher, the final work, "Misshapen chaos (of well-seeming forms)" by Jean Schmitt, Vincent Edwards, Matthew M. Conroy, and Edmund Harriss, serves as a fitting capstone, inviting visitors to linger and explore, see Figure 5. The curatorial decision to contrast these intentional imperfections with the prototypical objects from the trimester forms a suitable closing to the exhibition, highlighting the ever-ongoing processes of creation situated between art and mathematics.

Declaration of Funding

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Competing Interests

No potential competing interest was reported by the author(s).

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