

NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY



Date: Wednesday, 17 September 2025
Time: 17:30 to 19:30
Venue: Music Hall, Music Building, Bird Street
Campus, Bird Street
Campus Enquiries: Harsheila.Riga@mandela.ac.za

Light refreshments will be served on arrival

Live streaming: <https://youtube.com/live/Zlh-pual674>

The ISCIA Chair invites you to a public lecture
by Visiting Professor Brian Castellani

From Assemblages to Tangles:

One Artist-Scientist's Journey to Create a New Visual Approach to Complexity - Rooted in Art, Shaped by Science

Join Visiting Professor Brian Castellani as he reflects on three decades of experimentation in visual complexity - from his early realistic assemblages and OneBigMob cartoon-world to his recent entangled portraits and posthumanism work in AI art.

Castellani is part of a global network of artist-scientists exploring art as both a research method and artistic strategy: a way to inhabit ecological crisis, emotional life, relationships, and social conflict through images, forms, and site-based works that reshape how we 'experience' and 'address' the complex social and environmental systems in which we live.



Developed in conversation with the ISCIA Seminar Series 2025: Horizon 2055, Castellani's lecture will survey his art over the years, including a short screening of Entangled 2025, concluding with an invitation to expand these interdisciplinary entanglements into future collaborations across the university and its communities.

Change the World

ISCIA Identities and Social
Cohesion in Africa

mandela.ac.za

A bit on my method

Aesthetics are central to my practice.
I experience art as deeply emotional and
existential.

Art is also about exploring and expressing
the complexity of our lives.

Case-based visual complexity



- **An assemblage**

- is not a unified whole but a **tangled coming-together of heterogeneous elements**—objects, bodies, affects, discourses, technologies—whose relations matter more than their essences.
- Always provisional, assemblages stabilise for a time and then shift, de-territorialise, reconfigure.
 - But time, here, is dependent upon scale.
- They are **systems in motion**, open, contingent, and alive with possibility—less about what things *are* than about what they *do* when entangled.



A bit on my method – visual complexity

The spirit of my approach to assemblage is found in the following quote from William Johnston:

‘When people meet at the level of personal love achieved through radical non-attachment, they do not merge, nor are they absorbed in one another.... There is at once a total unity and a total alterity’
(Silent Music, 1976, p. 147, Perennial Library).

It is this approach that I applied to my presentation today . . .

my journey from assemblage to tangles



Psychology of Entanglement

Positive

- **Attachment & belonging:** Entanglement describes how people are held in webs of care, intimacy, and memory — sustaining identity and resilience.
- **Relational depth:** Human development depends on being enmeshed in others' lives; cognition and emotion emerge through intersubjectivity.
- **Creative tension:** Entanglement can foster empathy, perspective-taking, and the capacity to live with ambiguity.

Negative

- **Enmeshment:** Pathological over-involvement where boundaries collapse, producing suffocation, anxiety, or loss of autonomy.
- **Trauma binds:** Past injuries can entangle psyche and body, repeating patterns that constrain new possibilities.
- **Cognitive capture:** Rumination, obsession, or “stuckness” where thought and affect spiral without release.



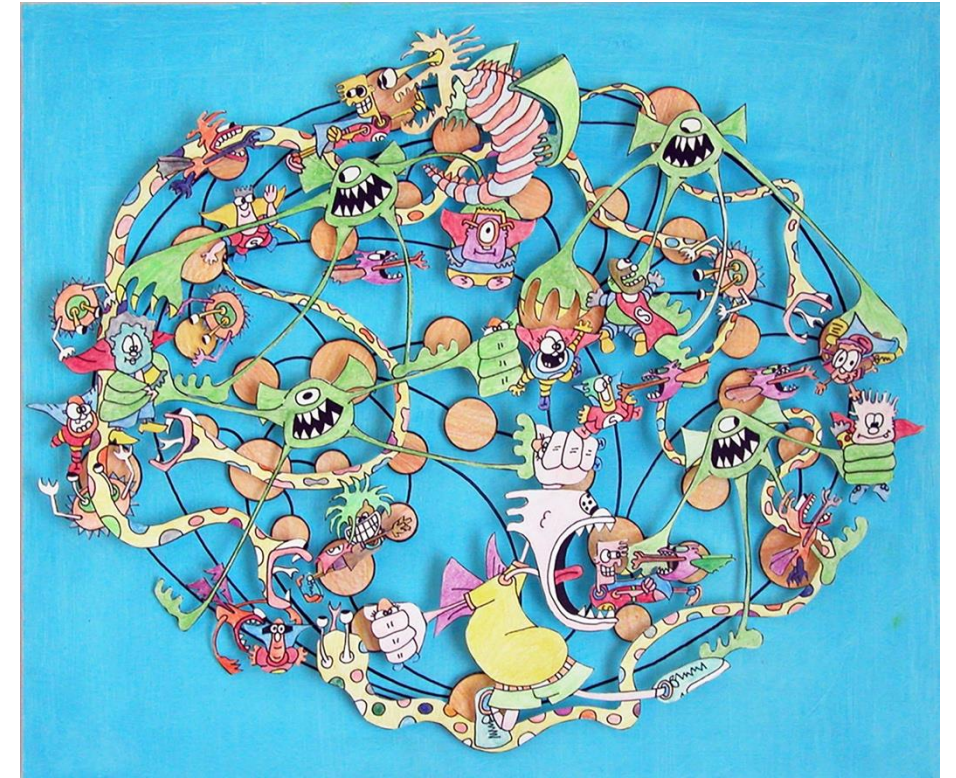
Sociology of Entanglement

Positive

- **Social solidarity:** Entanglement captures how communities are bound by shared rituals, norms, and histories that sustain collective life.
- **Interdependence:** Everyday systems — from kinship to infrastructure — work because they are entangled; no one stands outside.
- **Complex co-creation:** Institutions, technologies, and cultures emerge not in isolation but through layered interrelations.

Negative

- **Structural capture:** Individuals and groups caught in systems of inequality, bureaucracy, or exploitation with little room to manoeuvre.
- **Historical binding:** Legacies of colonialism, racism, and class entangle the present, shaping life chances in ways hard to undo.
- **Systemic fragility:** Entanglement can produce cascading failures — crises that spread precisely because everything is interconnected.

















AMMINADAB 3

BOAZ 5 OBED

ABIJAH 7

JOTHAM 9 AHAZ

ABIUD 12 ELIAKIM

AKIM 14 ELIUD



UZZIAH

ZERUBBABEL

ENTHRAEN
SIBYL

PROPHET
JOEL

DAVID AND GOLIATH

JACOB 16
JOSEPH



PROPHET DANIEL

CUMAEAN
SIBYL

PROPHET
ISAIAH

JOSIAH

JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES

MATTATHAN 15
EIEZAR



4 NAHSHON

DAVID 6 SOLOMON

JEHOSHAPHAT 8 JEHORAM

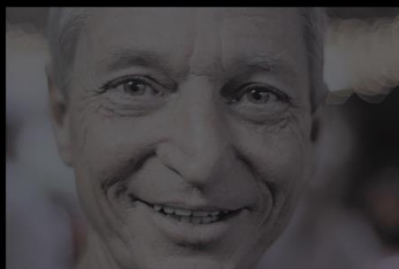
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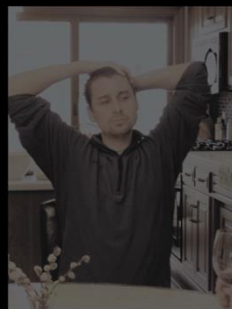
JEHOIACHIN 11 SHEALTIEL

ZADOK 13 AZOR

JACOB
ABRAHAM
1 ISAAC

PEREZ
HEZRON
2 RAM





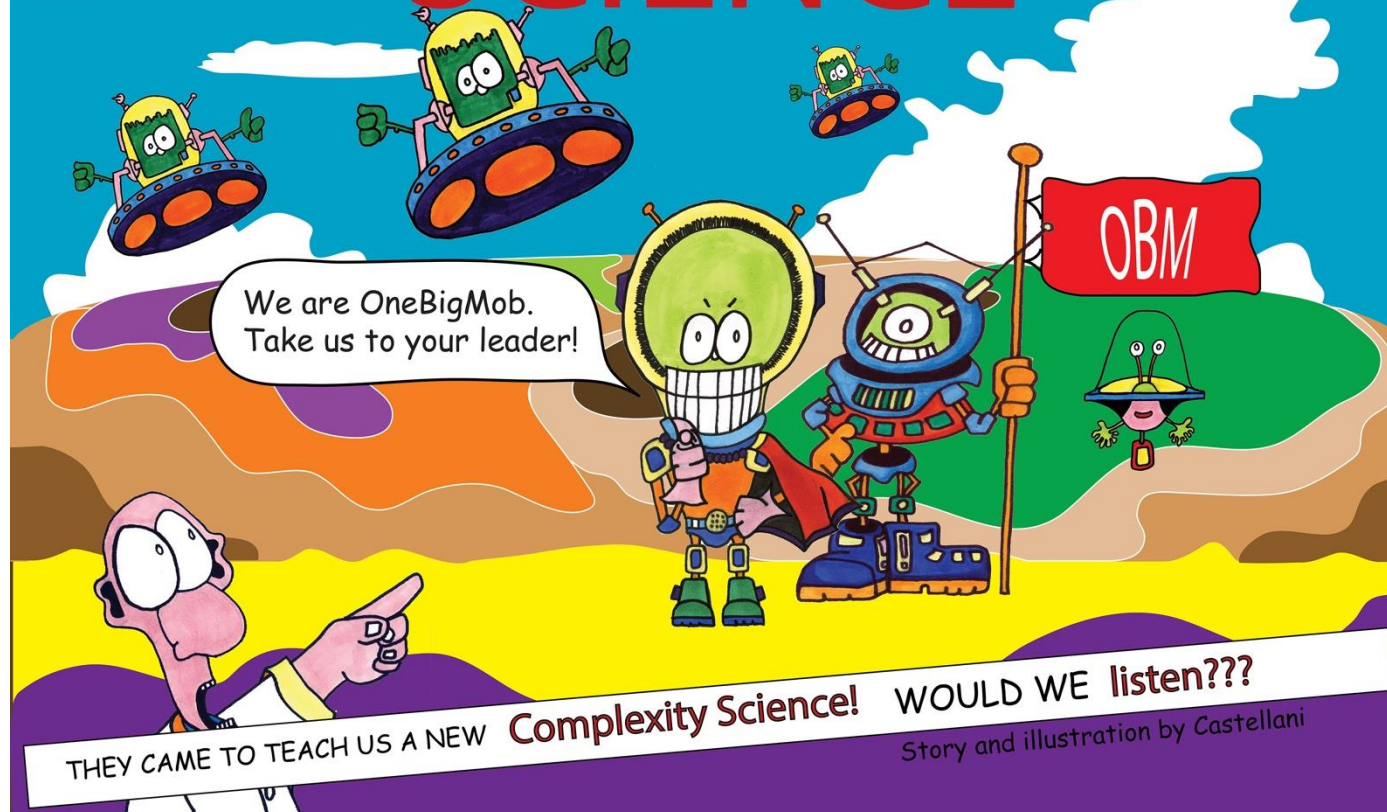


\$1.95
(Pub
1966)



MIND-BENDING COMPLEXITY SCIENCE FICTION!

One Big Mob SCIENCE



THEY CAME TO TEACH US A NEW Complexity Science! WOULD WE listen???

Story and illustration by Castellani







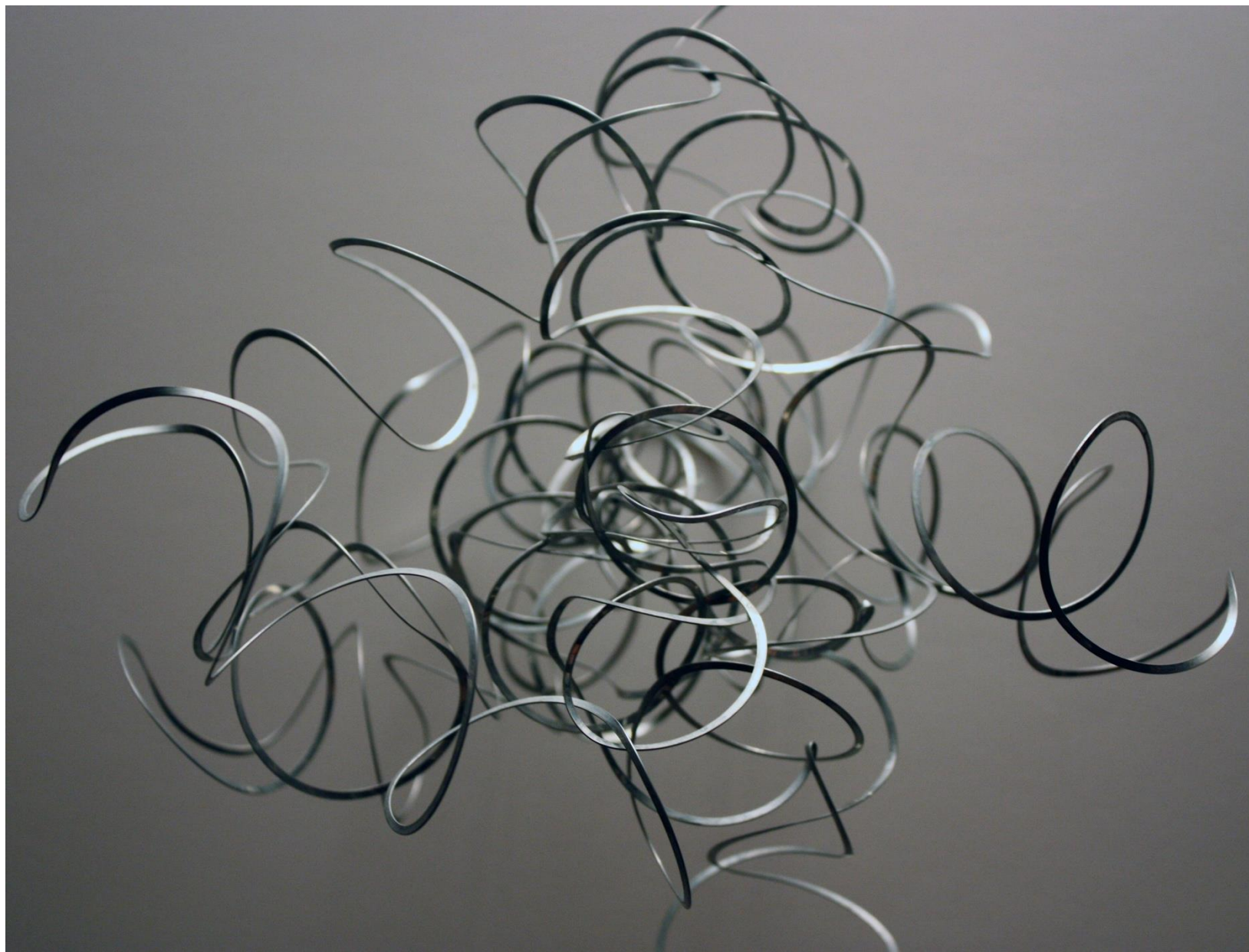
BRIAN CASTELLANI

RETROSPECTIVE
(1988 - 2018)

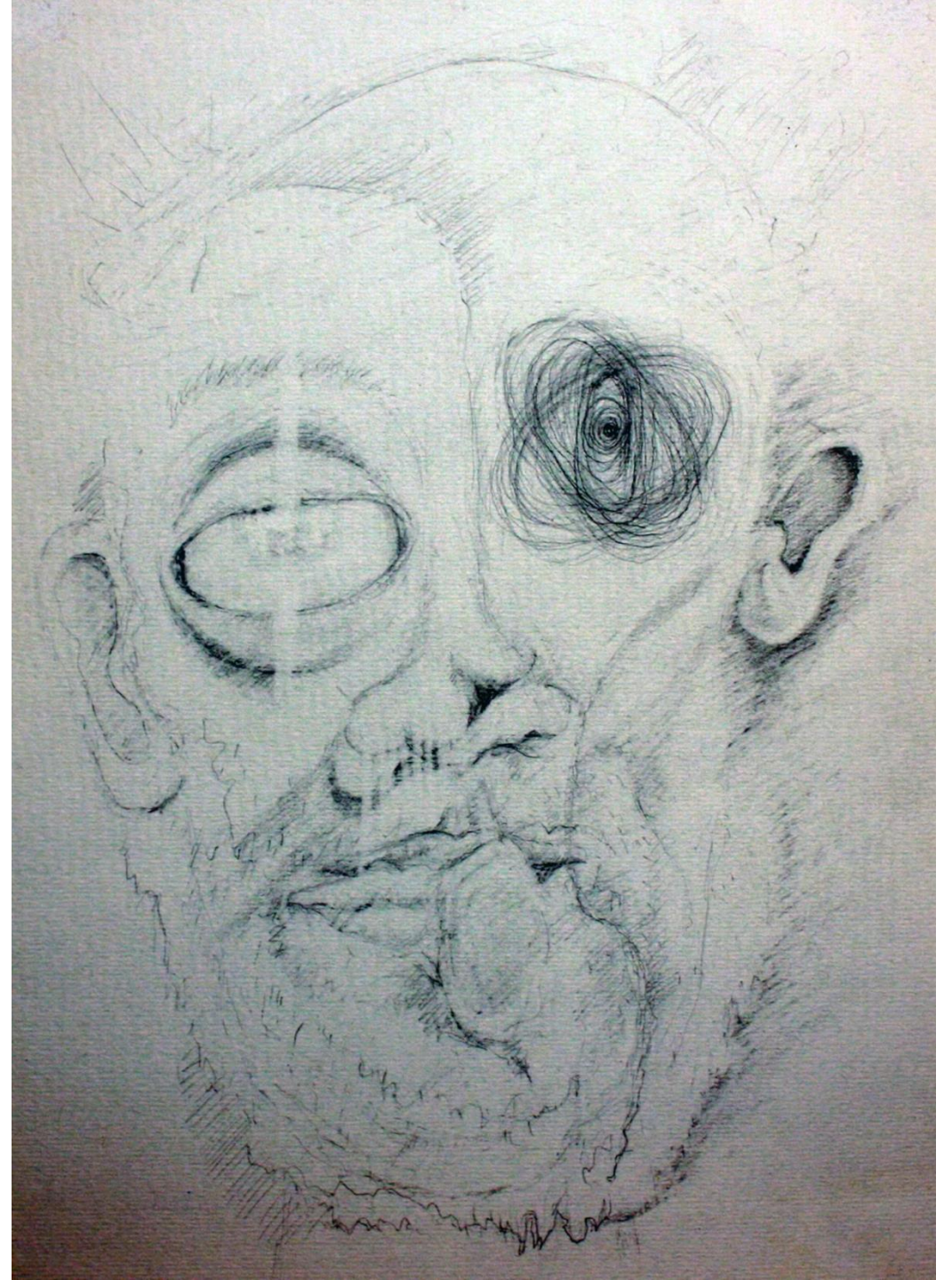


Drawings, Paintings, Photographs

Enter the tangles . . .















BRIAN CASTELLANI
LASSE GERRITS

EE
Elgar

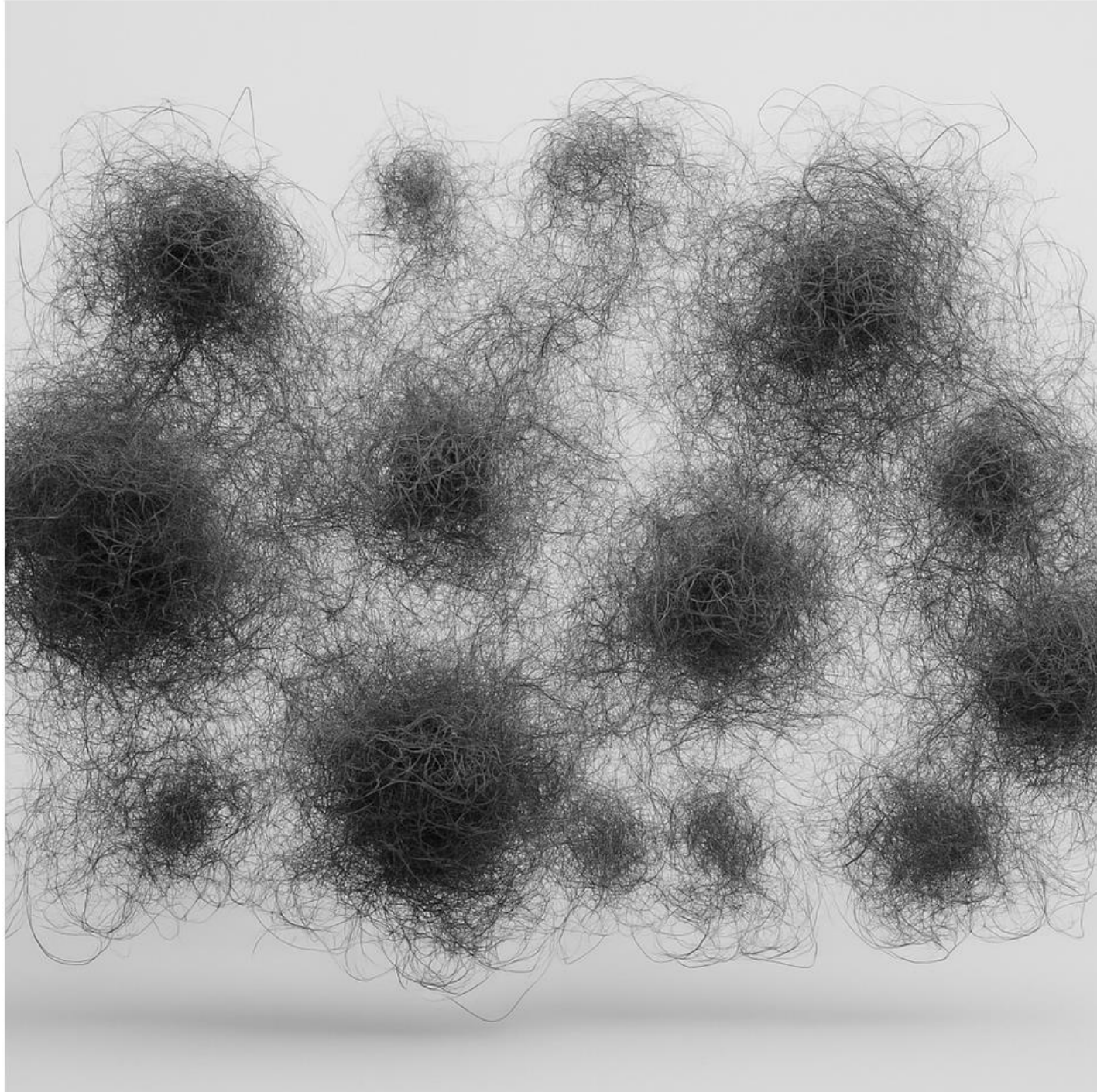
THE ATLAS OF SOCIAL COMPLEXITY

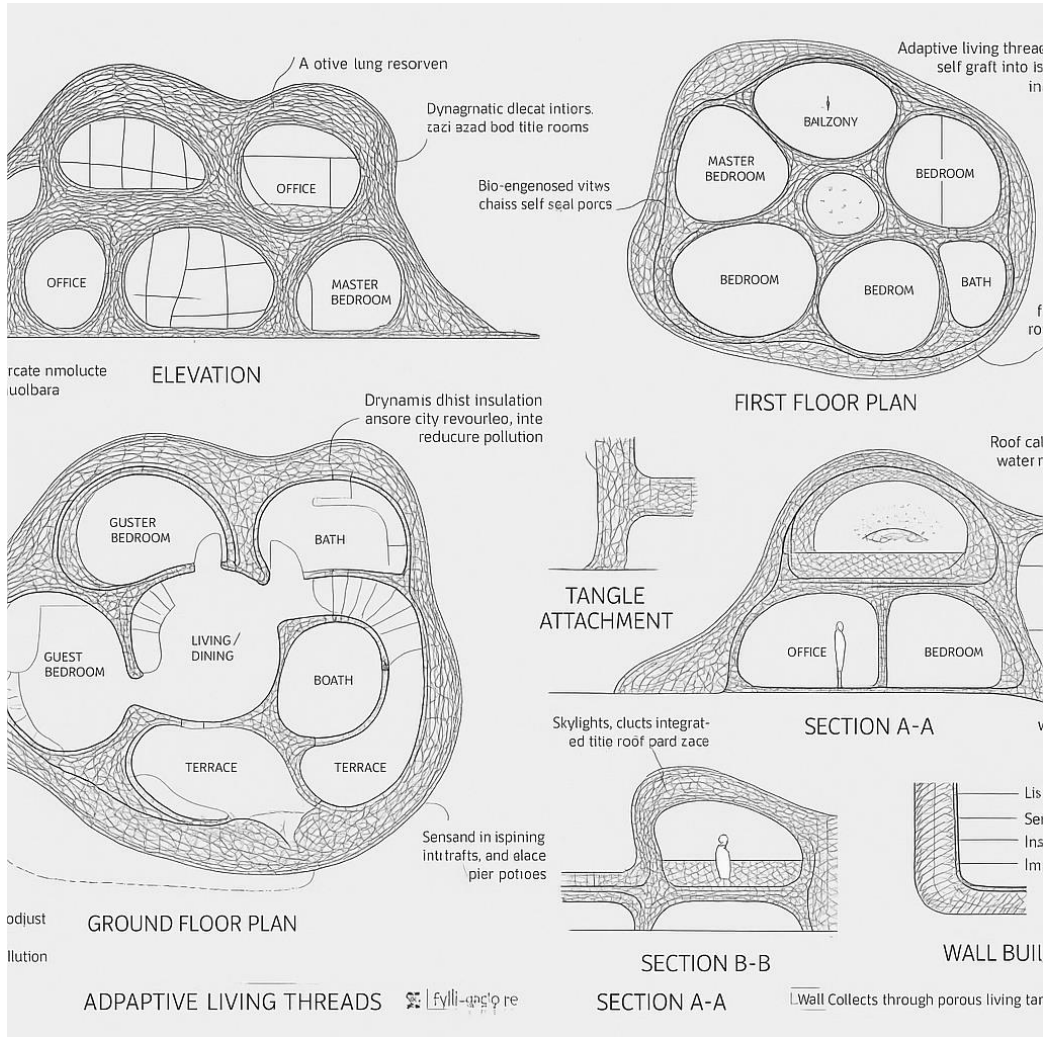


L'œil, comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI.











The End