

# ARTFORUM



Luke Murphy, *What Color*, 2016, four millimeter LED matrix panels, Raspberry Pi II microcontroller, custom software, 25 x 20".

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**Luke Murphy**

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When Google debuted its new, sans-serif logo this past September, the tech giant tempered public disdain for its streamlined appearance by calling attention to one unassailable feature: The new design is just 305 bytes in size—tiny—and can be rendered from only a handful of lines and circles. In “Unhappy Users,” Luke Murphy’s paintings and digital animations adhere to a similar visual economy. Thin lines and irreducible symbols cover his milky-white and gray canvases, all huddled on a single wall of the gallery’s front room. Rectangles and arrows collide with dollar signs, capital letters, and aborted tic-tac-toe games. Wobbly circles atop arched lines represent a person’s head and shoulders—a provisional human avatar, in colors straight from a set of dry-erase markers.

Nearby, old PC keyboards cover the floor, ceiling, and walls of a freestanding passageway, *Conversation Funnel*, which leads to a darkened space (all works cited, 2016). Each step forward requires crunching their plastic, brittle keys. It feels like a desecration, but it's perfectly in line with Murphy's treatment of technology—and symbolic output—as pure substance. In the next room, several LED panels flash a variety of primitive animations on loops. The head-and-shoulders figure reappears, shifting colors in rapid sequence, and a stream of smiley emoticons floats across a marquee.

As with most retro technologies, the LED panels' graphics appear quaint, allowing their materiality to come to the fore. Murphy's *Bad Pixel* is a brilliantly self-reflexive illustration of this—a screen that displays a circle and arrow pointing out a few of its own busted LEDs. *What Color* animates one of the Internet's oldest memes: the words "ORANGE," "YELLOW," "GREEN," and so on, gliding across the display in colors different from those they signify. Do all symbols, no matter how elemental, eventually drift apart from their meanings?

— *Juliana Halpert*

<https://www.artforum.com/picks/luke-murphy-58389>