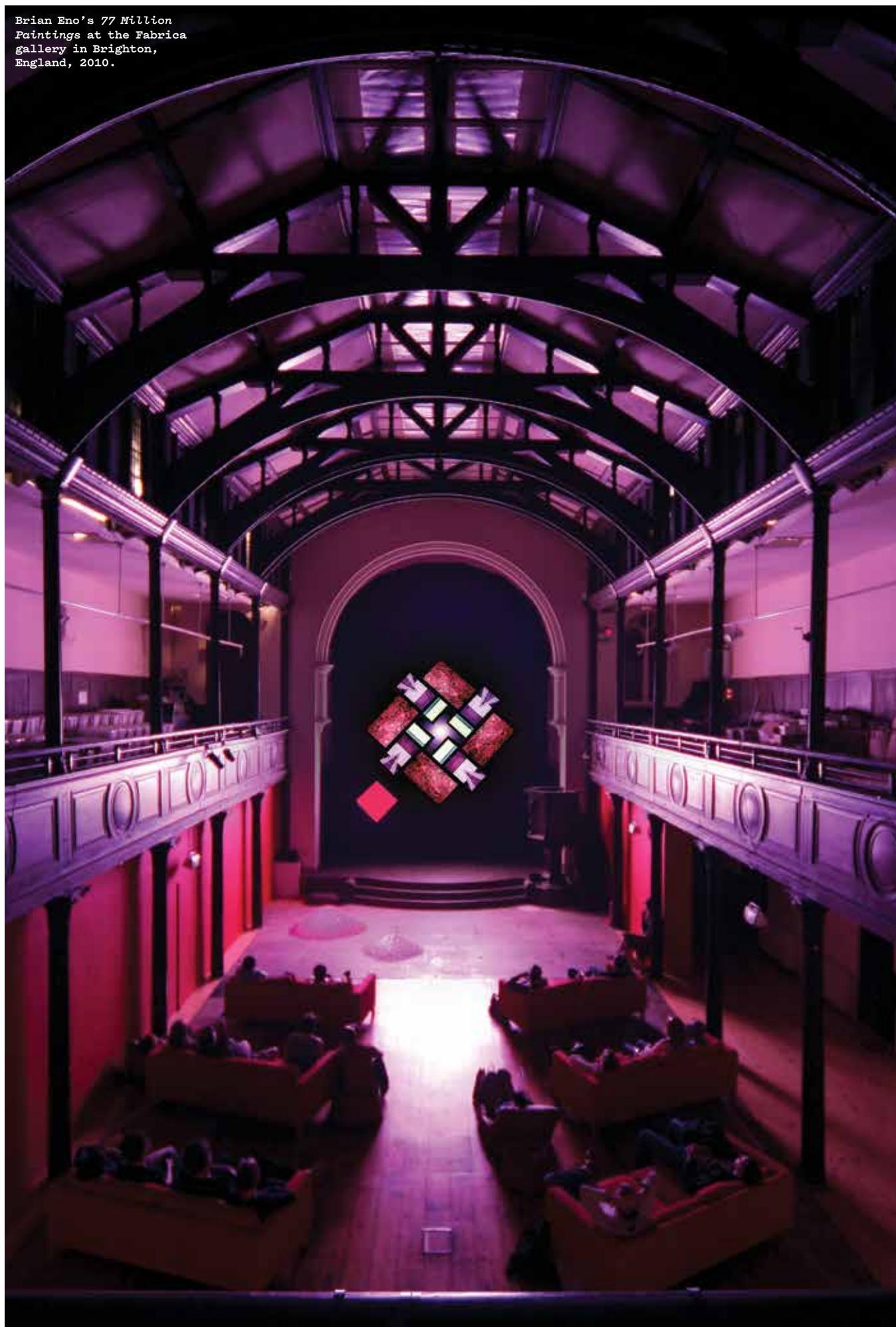


# UPFRONT

Brian Eno's *77 Million Paintings* at the Fabrica gallery in Brighton, England, 2010.



## ALMOST INFINITE

Brian Eno quiets the mind.

AMONGST THE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED chaos that is city life, a moment of clarity or sanity can be hard to find. Quiet time becomes yet another thing to rigorously schedule into your day. It's exhausting. But sometimes these moments pop up unexpectedly—you'll be riding the subway or walking on a relentlessly crowded street, both hyper-aware of your environment and willfully ignoring it at the same damn time.

*77 Million Paintings*, an audio-visual installation by Brian Eno, is a place where New Yorkers can take pause. Showing in the former location of Café Rouge on West 32nd Street, this marks the New York debut of Eno's piece, and is also the largest indoor version that's been produced since the piece premiered in 2006. *77 Million Paintings* is a "generative work"—a term coined by Eno 20 years ago to describe art that makes itself as you watch it—that explores vast combinations of visual and sonic elements. Images are chosen at random and then laid on top of one another, so that the final output is a continuous stream of ever-changing material. There aren't many of the initial "primitives," as Eno calls the original paintings, but when overlaid four at a time, the number of possible distinct combinations is a whopping 77 million.

Eno is fascinated by combinatorial mathematics. His idea of generative art takes "a systems approach to making art," as he explained during his recent lecture at Red Bull Music Academy, "where essentially you are creating a conceptual machine, which then keeps producing stuff." This effectively ensures that the same image or soundscape never repeats.

Despite the constant mutation of the piece, the effect is one of stillness. Eno is known as the godfather of ambient, a genre which, at its most basic definition, is music that creates an environment. With his art, Eno is interested in creating moments of meditative respite, spaces that spark reflection or just inner quiet. "It's slightly religious, perhaps," he says. "It's not dissimilar to the feeling I was having in Lincoln Cathedral in England—a place where people come and sit still. Probably some of them pray but I would imagine quite a lot of them don't. They're just enjoying a place where you can be in that space, and surrender to it. I am concerned with making something that is of some kind of spiritual and even therapeutic use to people."

—OLIVIA GRAHAM

*77 Million Paintings* is open Tuesdays–Sundays from noon to 8pm through June 2 at 145 W. 32nd St., Manhattan.