The art of dispatching a chicken is all in the wrist action. Stretch and twist. Any variation and you've got a mess on your hands. Murray McKeitch recounts the story of an over-enthusiastic childhood mate wanting to do the business and making a complete balls of it. This killing floor vignette tells us something about the metaphysics of the McKeitch image and the process of its making. The psychic trace of this acaphalic chook and its convoluted dance of death have clearly stayed with him and are suggested in the title of his most recent series of generative images, p-zombie (2006). A zombie, like a headless chicken, is animated but not animates, a body that has succumbed to the will of another. It is a metaphor of control and response, and the relations between part and whole. The concept of the zombie represents a pseudonymic yet potent image of the creative process within generative art practice.

McKeitch is referring to the "philosophical zombie" of cognitive science, developed as an acid test for distinguishing between a human and its artificial replicant. But don't go reimagining here for visual allusions to the work of p-zombie theorist Daniel Dennett or glimpses of Haitian trickster spirits for that matter. If there are any cultural references to be found in the p-zombie images they perhaps resonate with the textures and modes of Mereti art form unconscious influence McKeitch has, to his great surprise, identified only in retrospect.

This work asks questions rather than makes philosophical or spiritual statements. The p-zombie series explores the aesthetic implications of human agents interacting with technological smartness. How do we reconcile traditional concepts of authority and aesthetic choice in the context of generative art? Generative art is a practice grounded in the database and the algorithm. It can be described as the semi-automated creation of infinite variety without repetition and is far removed from the sensibility and artistry of an individual.

For a number of years McKeitch has been generating considerable output from his vast libraries of scanned images and objects.

Establishing a particular compositional arrangement in the single aesthetic action be initiated (for example the head for p-zombie). A secular Papa Legba (god of crossroads and mediator between worlds). McKeitch sets the parameters or rules that will determine the number, resolution and site of images to be assembled from the database. This is the extent of his "control over randomness" as the artist puts it. Time-based software does the rest, forming shards of "nested compositions" that can be output as discrete images or looped as morphing animations. McKeitch's formal invocations are instructions to the host and omitting machinations of code, propping into being unknown "visual intelligence". 142 images were produced from this process and 96 were selected by McKeitch for the p-zombie series.

As revolutionary as generative processing may appear, it is merely an perverse variation on the familiar historical roles of master and studio assistant, creating, in this case, a collaborative, syncretic relationship between artist and technical apparatus. Who, however, signs the work? The same McKeitch seems to realize their final selection rather than claim responsibility for the creation of these images. But there is a discernible signature effect here, glimpsed also in McKeitch's essays into time-based media, Justifier (Spaex 2000), Rice Paper Skin (2001) and Madura Square (2004). Perhaps this is the contradictory voodoo of generative practice - the zombie master can't avoid showing his hand.