

IT associates only think about numbers? Think again!

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GVO's **Stéphane Rupp**, an Integration Analyst/Senior Developer, presented a piece of his artwork this summer at a Geneva exhibition with an interesting theme: "Le Fil" (String).

Enrollment was open to anyone, but only 80 artists were eventually chosen to present individual masterpieces that symbolized the String theme. Their choice of materials was unlimited. The work of Stéphane and one other artist was selected and appeared from August 22 through September 21 at La Julienne, a local arts and culture venue.

Stéphane uses metal plates as his "canvas." He then treats the plates with layers of paint, water and other substances to trigger chemical reactions—like rusting through oxidation. This converts a blank and shiny piece of metal into a colorful and expressive piece of art.

We had a conversation with Stéphane recently about his process, inspiration and the recent exhibit.

Why have you chosen metal as your preferred element to express your art?

I started building lamps made from old barrels I collected—with the metal structure transformed by fire, rain and time. I was fascinated by the rust and how the material was attacked by the elements. After a while, I moved to painting. I've always felt the need to create something with my hands. This is very similar to working in IT, where you create and build systems, but it's also important to me to create things not only virtually but physically.

What do you use to treat the metal?

Working with metal started off as trial and error, but the more I practiced, the more experienced I became. Sometimes, I find new metal treatment ideas on the Internet. For example, if you add fertilizer to water, it will create a very different effect on the surface. Basically, I was curious to combine metal and paint and see how the rust transforms the paint and vice versa. One of my pieces is a Swiss flag. I painted a square metal plate with red color and a mixture of water, alcohol and 'magic ingredients.' The cross was a different layer of bitumen liquid and paint. The alcohol actually made holes in the paint, and only that part started rusting. Over time, the red paint also changed color, and some parts are now

more orange or even have a touch of green due to the chemical reaction. One of the biggest challenges is to conserve the colors, as air and light continuously change their appearance.

How do you determine that a piece is finished?

There are times when I find it very difficult to stop, and I continuously add little things or even completely change the piece. The beauty of my material is that if I'm really unhappy with the result, I can grind everything off and basically start again from scratch. At the end of the day, the picture I have in my head needs to be aligned with what I see on the 'canvas,' and then I can say I'm finished. Occasionally, I start creating a piece, and the result may look very different from what I had initially planned. Unlike a painter, I can only control the result to a certain extent, as Mother Nature does play a big role. The good thing is that all my pieces are unique. It's almost impossible to get the exact same reaction twice.

Where do you get your ideas?

That can be a real journey. I sometimes find inspiration at work! IT can involve very creative processes, and I often leverage concepts from both worlds. There are days when I come home with a small idea that started hatching during the day, and it slowly grows over time. Sometimes, I start to paint without a particular idea about what I want to do. I just let my inspiration wander—taking different paint and colors and applying them on the 'canvas' using different tools. The result can then motivate me to take another color, add an additional layer, or scratch a part. This creative journey can take several days; I add a new element or layer until I reach the point where I'm satisfied with what I've created...then stop.

How did it feel when you had your first exhibition?

When I first decided to show my work in a gallery, I felt a tremendous amount of stress. You need to choose the right pieces, but you also have to be prepared to be judged by your family, friends and colleagues. You're exposing your art, but somehow you also share a piece of yourself. Luckily, I had already received some positive feedback, so I was quite confident and proud of what I have achieved. But, there's always a certain amount of doubt.

[To conclude, we asked Stéphane whether he could envisage that one day a piece of his artwork could maybe adorn the corridors of a Capital office. His response: Never say never!]

— by GVO reporter [Constanze Sievers](#)