

REVIEW

MARFA
DATA DELUGE
BALLROOM MARFA

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DATA DELUGE, an exhibition at Ballroom Marfa curated by Rachel Gugelberger and Reynard Loki, consists of a loosely organized set of works concerned with information and its relationship to time. As the curators outline in the press release, the show is a portrait of artists who work with data to generate art. The exhibition spans the past twenty years¹ with a quick nod to the 1960s when information sciences was an emerging field.²

Attempting to understand financial interactions through geological time, three large-scale photographs by Michael Najjar employ the history of the sublime through an index with the radical fluctuations of the global financial markets.³ While on a climbing expedition on Mt. Aconcagua, the highest peak in the Western and Southern hemispheres, the artist took the photograph *nasdaq_80-09* (2008-2010). The photograph looks up at Mt. Aconcagua from an adjacent and slightly lower point. The land Najjar stood upon cuts across the lower third of the photograph while Mt. Aconcagua rises behind and extends into a series of attenuated peaks. In the background, the surrounding range stretches out before disappearing into the clouds, the grand accumulation of a tectonic history. Because the photograph's title implies the accumulation of nearly thirty years of daily trading (between 1980 and 2009) the main ranges' silhouettes seem to parallel the fluctuations of the stock market. The overwhelming scale of the landscape begins to represent the incomprehensible flows of wealth throughout almost thirty years of recent trading. As we face the sublime impossibility of understanding the billion-year history that led to the mountain's enormity, we likewise face the impossibility of knowing the vast spikes in financial trading that occur within our lifetime.

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Data Deluge at Ballroom Marfa; installation view of work by Rebeca Bollinger (left), Adrien Segal (front) and Michael Najjar (back); photo courtesy Ballroom Marfa.

These works by Najjar, Bollinger and Discenza stand out as exemplary within the exhibition, while others would fare better under less broad circumstances. The two tables by Adrien Segal represent data concerning the San Francisco Bay tides and the Colorado River's water table as it relates to human consumption. Generating furniture whose use necessitates a tactile experience with this data, Segal makes domestic interiors political. The work conflates the place of habitation with the data that describes the home's surrounding natural and social conditions. Yet within the framework of the exhibition it is easy to lose the social impact of these tables, as they appear like the sculptural complements to the videos and photographs hanging on the walls.

Through such effects, the curators' attempt to provide a portrait of data-oriented activity over the last twenty years in a small exhibition space loses traction by being too general in its scope. The exhibition's frequently ranging content—collage, sculpture, furniture, video, photography and

sound—tends to obscure the most interesting aspect of the exhibition. This lack of focus forces much of the work into generalizations surrounding the key language the curators employ: "data," "information," "politics," "technology," and "time." Even so, the works that provide an experience of the dizzying process by which we reorient our sense of time to information remain strong in Data Deluge and will not be lost in their real-time environment.

1. Gugelberger, Rachel, and Reynard Loki. "Data Deluge." Ballroom Marfa

2. The inclusion of a section of Hans Haacke's original *News* (1969) is an attempt to frame the exhibition within post war art practice, to show that artists have been working with information systems for at least the last fifty years. The work is an early fragment of a larger project that Haacke continually updated, first generating the sculpture through a continuous news ticker in a gallery and more recently utilizing an RSS feed. However, presented in the reception space that connects the gallery's two halves, the work becomes an anachronistic footnote to the exhibition's generalization of artistic systems analysis.

3. Najjar references Caspar David Friedrich's 19th century paintings of mountaintops, the most famous of which, *Wanderer Above The Mist*, shows a man on a mountain facing the turbulent alpine landscape below him.

Sam Korman is a writer and curator currently based in Marfa, TX. His book, *Notes From A Young Curator*, was published by Publication Studio last year. He is currently organizing a screening and publication with Casco Projects (Utrecht, ND) of their *Our Autonomous Life?* series to be held April 8th at Marfa Book Company.