

ARTPULSE

INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART
SUMMER 2012 | ARTPULSEMAGAZINE.COM

ARTPULSE

NO. 12 | SUMMER 2012 | WWW.ARTPULSEMAGAZINE.COM

ART AND FEMINISM

ZACKARY DRUCKER

MARTHA ROSLER

AUDREY CHAN & ELANA MANN

ANGELA STRASSHEIM

FEMINIST ART AND POP CULTURE

TALES OF MOTHERHOOD

PRO-SEX FEMINIST ART



DATA DELUGE

Ballroom – Marfa, Texas

Curated by Rachel Gugelberger and Reynard Loki

By Cara Despain

“Data Deluge”—the current exhibition at Ballroom Marfa in Marfa, Texas—assembles work by artists who make information and raw data physical. Though the remote locale of Marfa makes the constant stream of invisible information canvassing the world at an exponential rate nearly forgettable, it also provides a unique contrast. Drawing inspiration from a 2010 article in *The Economist* that pointed to “a new kind of professional...the data scientist, who combines the skills of software programmer, statistician and storyteller/artist to extract the nuggets of gold hidden under mountains of data,” exhibition curators Rachel Gugelberger and Reynard Loki examine the way data is communicated and adapted visually by artists. It represents several different variations on how it is interpreted for the use as subject in contemporary art—for informational purposes, as a one-to-one presentation of data in an alternate context, as an underlying concept for an art object, or an abstraction on diagrammatical formats used in other media to convey data. The participating artists include Rebeca Bollinger, Jon Brunberg, Jennifer Dalton, Anthony Discenza, Hans Haacke, Scott Hug, Loren Madsen, Michael Najjar, Roberto Pugliese, Adrien Segal and Anna Von Mertens.

Two of the works in the show were created specifically for the exhibition at Ballroom Marfa and use information pertaining to the location itself. Jennifer Dalton, whose other work also uses meticulously collected, organized and retold statistics and facts, created *Marfa Info Station*—an interactive informational kiosk with hand-made scrolls that viewers turn to read different Wiki-esque, handwritten and painted standard data about Marfa’s population, median age and geographic location culled from online sources, in addition to perceptual, more informal information acquired by the artist via travel review websites. An invitation to fill out a questionnaire can also be found at the station. This collected information (where visitors are from, their reason for visiting, their impressions of Marfa before and after visiting) asks viewers to insert themselves into this piece relating to this specific location and time and allows an inclusive and personalized perspective that data of this type often does not incite. It also allows them to reflect on their sojourn to Marfa and their motivation for doing so—a very pointed and relevant rumination in regards to the identity of the town itself, whose primary source of tourism seems to be art-related attractions such as the Chinati and Judd foundations despite its perhaps unlikely location (geographic and cultural) in dusty West Texas.

Roberto Pugliese’s *A Voice in the Desert*, commissioned by Ballroom Marfa, adroitly converts streaming data into an alternative form using custom software. Positioned outdoors in the courtyard, a series of speakers plays a constant audio soundscape that is updated continuously using the current weather conditions in Marfa. The result is tense pitches that fluctuate slightly and at times sound almost orchestral, at others piercing. It contributes to the strangeness of the environment and landscape, and also evokes Marfa’s history as a site for filming movies. This constant soundtrack for the desert is directly rooted in reality and reflects its status in a symmetrical way that also appropriately recalls screeching feedback from audio equipment. Though the arrangement of the speakers on the structure creates an encompassing sound tunnel,



Jennifer Dalton, *Marfa Info Station*, 2012. Kiosk: painted wood, steel and rubber mechanical components, 78" x 84" x 30." Drawings: acrylic paint and pencil on Masa paper, looped into a circle (2), 80" x 24" each. Commissioned by Ballroom Marfa. Courtesy of Ballroom Marfa. Photo: © Fredrik Nilsen.

its attempt to function simultaneously as a sculpture that nods to Judd falls a little flat. The sound itself seems strong enough to create the environment without underscoring the location of its source. In light of today’s fast-paced delivery of information, it’s a task to stay current, and Pugliese’s piece is curiously the only one in the exhibition that utilizes that aspect of the nature of data in contemporary life to its advantage.

Although they are not specific to Marfa itself, the other works in the show also assert themselves as effective conveyors of information that alter how that information is received. Though many at first do not make evident the sourced data that inspired them, they ultimately provide an interesting subtext, such as Adrien Segal’s topographical sculptures that convert graphs into wooden and steel forms, and Michael Najjar’s photographs, which fuse the jagged skyline of mountain peaks with stock indices. More direct are Scott Hug’s Color-aid collage works that use polls from a website to create pie charts reflecting percentages that relate to the queries in the titles. They are simultaneously engaging directly with the data itself and the aesthetics of modernist painting—making them effective and legible as didactic charts, as well as unique visual works. Many pieces in the show fuse design, form and information in a way that repositions the artist as an authority who relays bits of data that might otherwise disappear in the ether. This phenomenon—the visualization of information—is at the core of “Data Deluge” and provides a pertinent look at the collision, even struggle, between raw information and physical artwork, which are intrinsically separate; the artists give body to the non-tangible. ■

(March 2 – July 8, 2012)