Sierzputowski, Kate. “From Emoticon to Ellen Degeneres, an Index of the Most Popular Wikipedia Articles.” *Hyperallergic*, September 21, 2015. http://hyperallergic.com/238530/from-emoticon-to-ellen-degeneres-an-index-of-the-most-popular-wikipedia-articles/

HYPERALLERGIC

ARTICLES

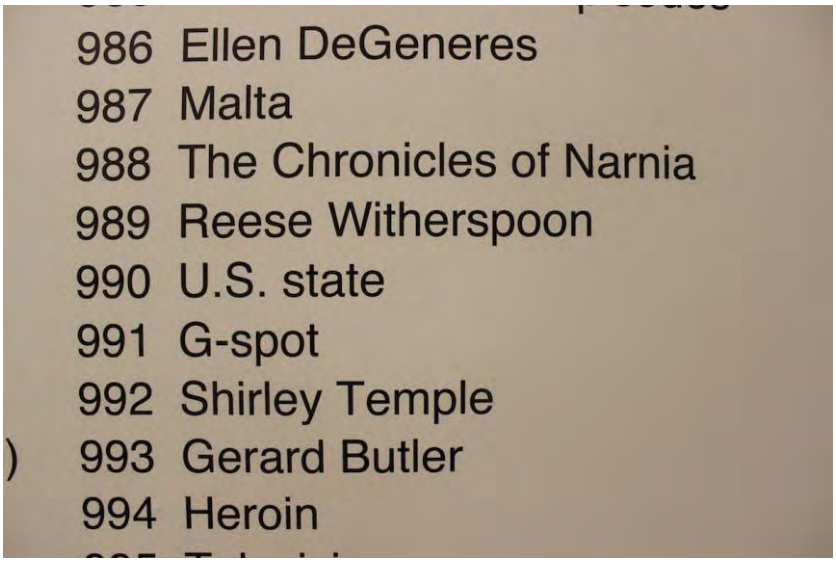
From Emoticon to Ellen Degeneres, an Index of the Most Popular Wikipedia Articles

by **Kate Sierzputowski** on September 21, 2015

Installation of Jason Salavon’s “The Master Index (v.EXPO_Chicago)” at Expo Chicago

CHICAGO — According to Jason Salavon’s “The Master Index (Semaphore),” we are all a little more interested in Kanye West than masturbation, would rather read about Jennifer Aniston than Freemasonry, and have caught up on China’s affairs a few more times than investigating human penis size. Culled by counting the page views of Wikipedia articles, Salavon has created a master list of the five million most popular entries, summing up the internet’s interests in a comprehensive archive.

Curated highlights of this list, along with a video piece associated with the data, were presented by Houston's Inman Gallery in a corner of the Projects section at this year's Expo Chicago. A sheet of white wallpaper on the left featured the top 1,000 most popular Wikipedia entries, and black wallpaper on the right contained the top 250,000 articles in the online encyclopedia in alphabetical order. Although the larger data set was an impressive mass, the pared-down list lent itself to a more poetic interpretation. The meticulously ordered user data appeared as a seemingly chaotic alignment of celebrities, diseases, and cultural artifacts, placing "Selena Gomez" at 36, between "Japan" and "Germany," the year 2012 right on top of "Emoticon," at 451, and "World Population" sandwiched between "Zombie" and "Swine Influenza," at 663.



Detail of Jason Salavon's "The Master Index (v.EXPO_Chicago)"

"The Master Index (v.EXPO_Chicago)" wallpaper was an iteration of the 2013 collaborationbetween Salavon and researchers at the University of Chicago to compile a numbered list of English Wikipedia articles, sorted by page-view counts gathered since 2007. Each time Salavon shows the project, he updates it to reflect the current tally of page-views; most recent revision is from August 2015. The list speaks to our collective desire for bits of knowledge, our need for specific information to guide school projects, solve temporary brain lapses, and settle heated debates. It's an ordered representation of our information obsession, with such funny and chance juxtapositions as "Dog" directly above "Snoop Dogg" and "Scientology" hovering just over "Celebrity

Sex Tape."

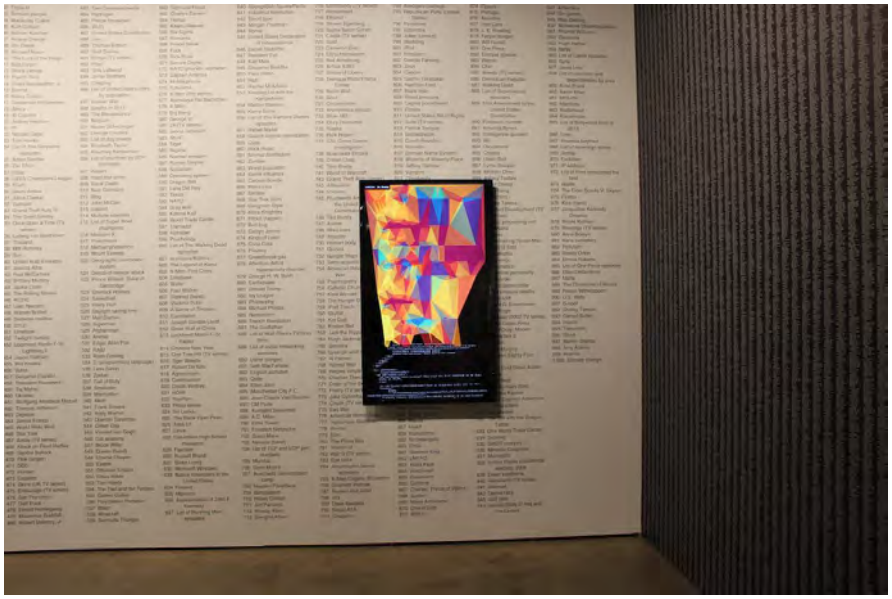
"I knew during EXPO people would be moving fast and have a lot to see. I wanted to explore and accentuate the weirdness of the top 1,000 Wikipedia articles. How do these pages become so popular? What is driving all of that? It is a great topic of conversation," said Salavon. "People are often surprised by the frequent juxtapositions of history and sex. It is so funny that people can pretend to be prude, but then see anal sex appear near the top 100 viewed entries. There is something depressingly truthful about the contents of the list."

Installation view of Jason Salavon's "The Master Index (v.EXPO_Chicago)" at Expo Chicago (click to enlarge)

Situated a few rows to the right of "Anal sex" (on the lefthand wallpaper) was the video piece "Local Index (Tessellated)," which Salavon coded while serving as the very first artist-in-residence at Microsoft Research earlier this year. The piece takes popular art-related Wikipedia entries — museums, movements, artists — and works with their source code to produce colorful, tessellated visuals based on the length and syntax of each text.

"You have this crisp, conceptual wallpaper, and I was interested in using computation and other methods to create an aesthetically interesting piece to relate to that," said Salavon. "I wanted to take this infinite feed and make a geometric pattern with its data — merge video editing and painting into a single practice."

The colors he uses are sourced from user-generated palettes on Adobe's color website, and they're then matched with an entry based on popularity. In the video, each article's code flashes on screen for a moment before a triangulated pattern begins to move down over it, covering the letters, numbers, and symbols like a brilliantly hued virus. Although the list of 1,000 art articles is largely influenced by Salavon's interests (his own Wikipedia page is included), it's interesting to see how the video depicts each entry's source information — how its color choices may or may not align with the colors we associate with specific museums or artists in our heads.



Jason Salavon, “The Master Index (v.EXPO_Chicago)” with “Local Index (Tessellated)”

Displayed together, the projects connect our interests and often taboo research with a visual representation of these very human patterns. The straightforward and clean lists on the walls complement the chaotic glitches of the video, giving shape and color to the odd synapses occurring in each of our brains.

Jason Salavon’s “The Master Index (Semaphore)” was presented by Inman Gallery at Expo Chicago (Navy Pier, 600 E Grand Ave, Chicago) September 18–20.

Franklin, Oliver. “Eye-to-eye with Jason Salavon’s Algorithm-Produced Art.” *Wired*, October 22, 2014.
http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2014/11/play/machine-strokes

Eye-to-eye with Jason Salavon’s algorithm-produced art

22 OCTOBER 14 by OLIVER FRANKLIN

This article was taken from the November 2014 issue of WIRED magazine. Be the first to read WIRED's articles in print before they're posted online, and get your hands on loads of additional content by subscribing online.

These abstract artworks weren't created by an artist -- they were painted by an algorithm. "I tasked myself with building a virtual automaton that would iterate relentlessly though a hyper-accelerated painting career," explains Chicago-based artist Jason Salavon, 44. For Golem, Salavon wrote a script to generate 100,000 such artworks, with the ultimate goal that the work might pass "a kind of Turing Test for abstract painting". The works were generated sequentially -- up to 700 per day, over six months -- with Salavon altering the algorithm throughout the computer artist's

One of Jason Salavon's "Golem" pieces. *Jason Salavon*

"lifetime". Salavon created the project in 2002 but revisited it this year to combine each piece into a web-based map using OpenGIS. The result: an almost haunting representation of a computer artist's career, complete with clearly defined periods of shifting work -- albeit changes made not through experience but code.

The sheer volume of paintings is typical of Salavon, who has crafted a career through amalgamating huge volumes of data into high-impact pieces. His "Figure 1" combines ten years of Playboy centrefolds into a haunting spectre of the magazine pin-up; "The Top Grossing Film of All Time" combines every frame of Titanic into a huge canvas of pixelated colours. "I'd say much of my work occupies a space between cultural sampling and data mining," says Salavon.

Next up, Salavon will spend the next six months as the first artist-in-residence at Microsoft Research in Seattle. Among the ideas he'll be exploring: "What would [Rennaisance painter] Pieter Bruegel the Elder or Hieronymus Bosch do with contemporary computation?" To Salavon, the interaction between art and big data is still in its infancy. "If you imagine what kind of things artists will make in 20 years," he says, "it's hard not to see how algorithmically informed work won't be central." Painters: better get coding, fast.

Cutler, Tess. "Let's Get Animal: Jason Salavon reinvents the [color] wheel." *The Santa Fe Reporter.* July 16, 2013. http://www.sfreporter.com/santafe/article-7558-let%E2%80%99s-get-animal.html

Picks 07.16.20130

Let's Get Animal

Jason Salavon reinvents the [color] wheel

By Tess Cutler

Courtesy Eight Modern

Jason Salavon does complicated stuff.

So much so, that if I tried to explain his process of art-making, I'd probably get verbally tongue-tied. Basically, he isn't your typical watercolor-and-canvas type of guy.

In Chance Animals, a month-and-a-half-long exhibition at Eight Modern, Salavon channels Darwin's geist. In his own words, Salavon says, "I'm referencing the mix of indeterminacy (chance) and order in my work, and also ideas of taxonomy and evolution. But more importantly, the poetics of all those features."

Take, for example, his "One Week Skin" series (which is on display in this exhibition): after watching, compiling and abstracting 168 hours of programming from CNN, ESPN and HBO (that's a lot of network), he reformatted the media into a work of art. I can't say for certain how he did it. But let's just say that Salavon has a knack for technology. With an MFA, a BA in studio art and a minor in computer science, Salavon's background kind of says it all. It's no wonder that Salavon's previous job (y'know, before he hit it big with the whole art thing) consisted of video game programming. Art + Auction (basically, Forbes magazine for the art world) championed Salavon as one of "50 Under 50: The Next Most Collectible Artists."

Lauren Tresp, Eight Modern's gallery manager, says Salavon is the only new media artist who's been featured at the gallery. In order to accommodate the media artwork, windows were blocked out so the projections could be better perceived. "My favorite work of his," says Tresp, "is probably the color wheel" (pictured).

With a Google search of colors, Salavon intended to replicate the color wheel. For example, he googled red and, voilà, chose a myriad of jpegs that qualified as red. But the real kicker (what really piqued Tresp's interest) is that when Salavon searched for violets and pinks, a bunch of pornographically explicit images came up.

"In all his series," Tresp says, "he's drawing pop-culture references…but he's not making any statements."

Chance Animals
5-7 pm Friday, July 19.
Free. Eight Modern,
231 Delgado St., 995-0231

Upchurch, Michael. “Jason Salavon: digital-photography innovator.” *The Seattle Times,* September 13, 2011. http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/thearts/2016196246_digital14.html?prmid=head_more

Jason Salavon: digital-photography innovator

Digital photographer Jason Salavon comes to Seattle's Henry Art Gallery to discuss his work and software wizardry.

By Michael Upchurch

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
Wendy McMurdo's "Helen, Backstage, Merlin Theatre (The Glance)," 1995.

One of the most fascinating figures in the Henry Art Gallery's exhibit "The Digital Eye: Photographic Art in the Electronic Age" is coming to town to talk about his work.

He's Jason Salavon, an artist who pushes the medium into realms where it's hard to call it photography anymore. In "Flayed Figure, Male, 3158 ¾ square inches," he collages tiny bits of his naked body, arranging them by degrees of luminosity rather than anatomical plan. In "Every Playboy Centerfold, The 1970s," he does something similar with the female body, distilling a decade's worth of centerfold spreads to their curving essence without revealing any specifics.

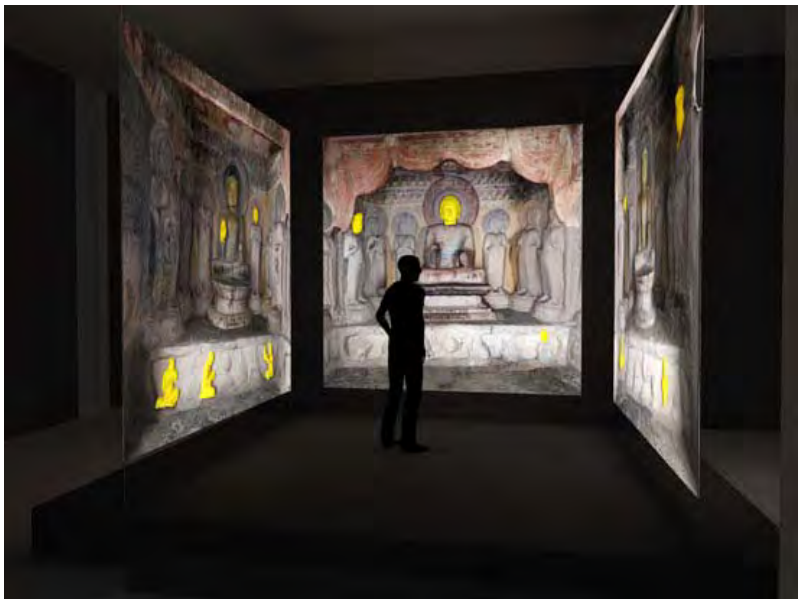
With "Golem (100,000 abstract paintings)," he seems to abandon photography altogether in favor of a painting straight out of the Abstract Expressionist school of the 1950s. But peer more closely at this pigmented inkjet on canvas and you'll see that it's composed not of frenzied brush-strokes but thousands of tiny pixels. The "painting" and its 99,999 companions are the product of a software system Salavon devised. "Each one," he says, without exaggeration, "appears to be the direct product of human thought and touch."

Staff, “South Cave at Northern Xiangtangshan.” *Freer|Sackler: The Smithsonian’s Museums of Asian Art. http://www.asia.si.edu/explore/china/xiangtangshan/southcave.asp*

FREER | SACKLER
THE SMITHSONIAN'S MUSEUMS OF ASIAN ART

South Cave at Northern Xiangtangshan

Like the North Cave, the South Cave was commissioned by the Northern Qi court, but it presents a different plan. Lacking a central pillar, it is an open cubical chamber with three altars on the back and side walls. Each altar originally included seven figures arranged symmetrically: a seated Buddha in the center, flanked by three pairs of standing deities. Images of incense burners, lions, and deities appear on the altar bases. Rows of small seated Buddhas occupy the upper niches and cave walls. The ceiling features a large carved lotus.



Rendering of the Digital Cave video installation. Image Credit: Jason Salavon and Travis Saul.

DIGITAL CAVE

Weaving together archival photographs and current imaging technology, the Digital Cave displayed in *Echoes of the Past* virtually reconstructs the damaged South Cave. This immersive experience allows viewers to visit the site and see removed sculptures restored within the cave's original setting.

The configuration and scale of the three screens of this installation piece, created by contemporary artist Jason Salavon, were inspired by the South Cave's cubical space framed by three altars. Black-and-white photographs show its damaged state in the 1920s. These are complemented by highly accurate 3-D models, created by the Xiangtangshan research team of the University of Chicago as part of its multiyear effort to photograph and scan removed sculptures and the cave's interior. The results made it possible to match missing pieces to their original locations.

Still of screen from Digital Cave with missing fragments in yellow.

The Digital Cave was produced and directed by Jason Salavon, with assistance from Travis Saul, 3-D graphics and animation; Michelle Graves, editing; Larry Smallwood, ESAM, LLC, installation production; and Alexander Dunn and Mark Beasley, technical assistance.

Winnetka-GlencoePatch

Gray, Topher. “Glencoe Harbors Hub for Contemporary Art: The Rena Sternberg Gallery gives downtown contemporary art some suburban exposure.” *Winnetka-GlencoePatch,* November 1, 2010. http://winnetka.patch.com/articles/glencoe-harbors-hub-for-contemporary-art

GLENCOE HARBORS HUB FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

The Rena Sternberg Gallery gives downtown contemporary art some suburban exposure.

By Topher Gray

Credit Jason Salavon (courtesy of Rena Sternberg)

Rena Sternberg is not an artist. She did not go to art school. She cannot paint, she cannot draw, she cannot sing. She says she's not even artistic. But she has an eye for art, and she loves it.

"I like art that's interactive, that kind of makes you think — makes you take a second or a third look," said Sternberg, the proprieter of the Rena Sternberg Gallery in Glencoe. A prominent art piece from her current show, Chicago Collection, is "City (Westward)" by Jason Salavon. A dizzying digital collage of all the skyscrapers in Chicago's Loop, it requires several looks.

"I feel I give suburbanites a better quality of art without having to go to the city," she said. The gallery is in an unlikely spot, tucked around the back of a building and down a flight of stairs at the very west end of downtown Glencoe, on the south side of Park Avenue. Sternberg has kept this space for 23 years.

Her gallery shows only contemporary art, which she defines as work by living artists rather than a specific style or aesthetic. Her current show has mostly photography, but she does show paintings as well. She has contacts with dealers across the Chicago metropolitan area and clients across the country.

"She is maintaining a fine art presence on the North Shore — which is a wonderful thing by itself to do," said artist Scott Fortino, who has several works on show at the Rena Sternberg Gallery.

In the early years, she may have boasted selections from Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman or Nan Goldin. Her current show, "Chicago Collection," features work from established local artists like Fortino as well as more up-and-comers like Jason Salavon.

Her entrée into the art business actually began as a social group she formed that would meet to go gallery-hopping in the city. Sternberg's in-laws had a large art collection, and she gained much of her appreciation for art collecting then. When her neighbors caught a glimpse of her personal collection, they asked her to take them to Chicago.

Early on, one artist let her in on something: "'You don't know it, but you have a business,'" Rena recalled. "I never thought of it as a business." Three years later, she opened up gallery space of her own in Glencoe.

What started with a few interested women branched into a business where she charges $200 for three tours, taking people from the North Shore to galleries in Chicago and Evanston. On the tours, participants get to listen to the artists talk about their work.

The next show at the Rena Sternberg Gallery is called, "Palm Drawings," a series of digitally altered photographs of palm trees taken by Chicago artist Ken Fandell in Venice Beach in Los Angeles. "Something very ordinary can be very peculiar or extraordinary," said Fandell, a 1989 graduate of New Trier High School who grew up in Wilmette.

This is Fandell's first full showing in Glencoe, but he has been showing at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art since 2002, and last year had a large work of altered photographs of clouds from all over the world on the second floor of the MCA.

Sternberg is the past president of the women's board at the MCA, which she considers to be one of the best contemporary art museums in the country. "I like the way it engages with the community," Sternberg said.

How does she know if a piece of art works for her? "I get an exact gut feeling. … I'll be thinking about it the next day."

Kinkley, Jonathan. “Jason Salavon.” *Time Out Chicago* ,no. 226 (April 1-7, 2010).

Jason Salavon

By Jonathan Kinkley
“Old Codes,” Tony Wight Gallery, through Apr 10.

Salavon, *Still Life (Vanitas)* (still), 2009.

Jason Salavon became famous for digitally fusing hundreds of like images—such as *Playboy* centerfolds or high-school yearbook photos—into a single visual “average.” But in his recent work, the Chicago artist largely turns away from pop culture and toward periods of art history that parallel our present.

The 17th-century Dutch Golden Age provides a particularly rich source of material. Two digital prints of skulls riff on the *vanitas* genre of still-life, which reminds viewers of mortality. Their simple symbol is complicated by the fact that it represents the visual average of human, baboon, bear and boar skulls. Salavon goes beyond digital art’s “how’d they do that?” cool factor to ask how one should reflect on the mortality of a virtual being. This period in art history also spread the genre of self-portraiture, which leads the artist to contemplate his own digital existence in *Spigot (Babbling Self-Portrait)*. The installation pulls text and dates from his Google searches into a multimedia display. With or without our knowledge, he reminds viewers, our online queries reveal a good deal of information about us.

The artist also applies his averaging motif to portraits by Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Anthony van Dyck and Diego Velázquez, creating a digital aggregate of each artist’s works. In the resulting chiaroscuro prints, dark backgrounds surround central fleshy masses—capturing the mood of a time defined by a tension between earthly goods and spiritual concerns. Together they evoke the 17th century’s conflict between Christianity and the secular materialism associated with a rising merchant class—a characteristic that resonates with a contemporary consumer culture rocked by recession and religion.

Sardy, Marin. “Color Me Alienated.” *Sfreporter.com*, June 30th, 2010.
http://sfreporter.com/santafe/article-5492-color-me-alienated.html

SANTA FE REPORTER
LOCAL NEWS AND CULTURE

Art Reviews 06.30.2010

Color Me Alienated

This is a portrait of the artist as a parsed, scattered, reiterated man

By Marin Sardy

You are what you google; you just don’t look like it. - Jason Salavon, “Spigot (Babbling Self-portrait)” installation

You are what you do. You are what you eat. Let’s face it, you probably are what you google. But for your sake and mine, I hope you don’t end up resembling Jason Salavon’s **“Spigot (Babbling Self-portrait)”** video and sound installation that, through software the artist devised, reduces a list of search terms into a flat, dizzying array of colored squares.

I face a digital projection of methodically pulsing blocks containing searched-for phrases (“best Smartphone,” “afterlife”) while an adjacent projection shows the terms encoded as nested concentric squares that grow outward in a nauseating,

rainbow-hued rush. Meanwhile, from behind, overlapping computer voices recite the terms aloud in an indecipherable jumble.

This piece rather eloquently expresses the sense of garbled displacement we now contend with every day on this world-wide-web encased planet, but I'm pretty sure that, as a portrait, it doesn't really resemble Salavon. It more accurately represents the internet itself: placeless, depthless, centerless and reaching beyond the edges of the computer screen. This is the work's real strength, and it shines as such in nuanced variety throughout the show.

Salavon created the digital C-prints, light-box fixture and 374page book that contains nothing but colored rectangles from digitized processes that parse, encode and scatter information from sources such as a baroque painting and an IKEA catalogue.

The images range from beguiling, nested squares that evoke color-field stars like Gene Davis to portrait-style human forms so pixelated they're unrecognizable—not only as individual people, but as the work of well-known artists. It's impossible to tell "Portrait (van Dyck)" from "Portrait (Velasquez)." The old masters have become little more than footnotes to an indistinct present.

As a whole, the show comes off as a sort of anti-portrait, which obscures rather than reveals the humanity of its subjects. It's a look at the way reducing and propagating experience via bits of electronic data separates us from the tangible world. These artworks make blatant the extent of that separation. But in living through the portal of the computer screen, we tend to be unable to see it. Instead, we confuse mediated experience with the real thing. We watch a clip of a tiger killing an antelope and we think we've witnessed death. We read a headline about Stanley McChrystal and think we know what goes on inside the White House. We forget that everything we sense through our portal has been cut from its context, angled, edited, retouched, remastered and unceasingly reiterated.

Salavon makes the cogent point that our digital network has the power to absorb us into its massive movement while it also separates us from our own self-understanding. He offers an update on Karl Marx's concept of modern alienation. Rather than a man alienated from himself by his disconnection from his work, Salavon's subject is alienated from himself by his disconnection from unmediated reality. In this postmodern variety, man's relationship to his self-obliterating information system becomes the source of his angst.

This, however, oversimplifies the relationship between humanity and pretty much everything, and the show falls short of revealing substantial insight about the nature of our involvement with all those information bits. Salavon's one-directional process fails to account for our counterbalancing capacity to humanize—to insinuate ourselves into even the most alien environments and reshape them in our own image.

However fragmented our identities become, our minds doggedly insist on constructing unifying narratives. Even when those narratives are incomplete, off-base or flat-out wrong, we embrace them and rely on them. Here lurks a more insidious danger, marked by our apparent need to produce misinformation rather than accept an informational void. This is the ghost in Salavon's machine.

Zellen, Jody. "Reviews: Jason Salavon, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts,"
Artillery Magazine, no. 4 (July/August 2010): 51-52.

JASON SALAVON
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

JASON SALAVON was one of the pioneers in code art and among the first to use computer software to generate images that were composites from specific data sets. Salavon amasses this data — often using images culled from the mass media that reflect trends in popular culture and creates graphic representations from their composite parts. Best known for images that overlay, for example, every *Playboy* centerfold, his film *76 Blowjobs* and yearbook photographs from specific years, Salavon also presents dynamic versions of his software. For his "Generic Mammal Skull" series (2010) he combined different percentages of baboon, bear, wild boar and human skulls. While the static renditions capture one instance of the transformation, the animated versions *Still Life (Vanitas)* (2009) presented on a flat-screen monitor, allow the process to unfold over time. As interested as Salavon is in the process of transformation and the rendering capabilities of the 3D software, he is also invested in reproducing the light and the aura of a 17th-century Dutch still life within these pieces.

Art historical references have been an integral part of Salavon's work and used in making both abstract and representational images that reference an artist's body of work or color palette. He has created representational works that combine portraits by artists such as Hals, Rembrandt, Van Dyck and Velázquez. Here he reduces over 100 different reproductions into a single composite image. In other abstract works using specific artists' paintings as a source, Salavon has determined the most representative color palette for each artists. Those colors are then arranged in a concentric system where the least saturated colors are in the center radiating out to the most saturated. The resulting works, *Baroque Painting* and *Impressionist Painting*, transform the representational into an abstraction that is based on information culled from the actual works.

Jason Salavon, *Generic Mammal Skull (13% baboon, 36% bear, 46% human, 5% wild boar)*, 2010

Perhaps Salavon's work at first glance appears dry and analytical. Yet as works about data mining go, they are among the most seductive and understandable. Working within the realm of contemporary culture, he draws from subjects that are culturally loaded yet also accessible. The IKEA catalog is one of the most widely distributed printed works ever made, thought to have surpassed even the Bible. Salavon has studied its layout and created works of art — both a light box and a booklet that reduce the pages to pure color. The static arrangements of colors and shapes are evocative works, yet when seen in conjunction with the more dynamic pieces, one yearns for more insight into Salavon's process. In *Spigot (Babbling Self-portrait)* and *Spigot (Babbling Self-portrait, Phenotype)* a dual wall projection cycles through Salavon's Internet searches, which have been categorized and colorized and represented as a grid of animated rectangles. This project reconstructs and reformats more than 10,000 of Salavon's queries. According to Salavon, "There are two modes in the piece: In one the literal text and time of a search is displayed, giving a deeply personal, voyeuristic view into my private search habits. Here, the shifting color represents data returned by top pages for the search. The second mode presents the same type of data as endless concentric, psychedelic data-streams." In the gallery the work is accompanied by a voice-over that is a montage of four different people reading the web pages as they are found.

Like all of Salavon's work, the final outcome is mesmerizing and conceptually relevant. How often do we wonder what happens with our Google searches and whether anyone keeps track of that data? Salavon's facility with understanding and reducing the "code" to its essential elements allows him to reconstruct it as art that adheres to the formal ideas in abstract/color field painting, yet loaded with specific content, i.e., data, or other art. When seen together, the static works become too minimal, as they offer a single instance of a generative work. The projection pieces, on the other hand, are always in motion, offering endless combinations and complex relationships of color, sounds and data that are forever mutable.

— Jody Zellen

O;Neill, Brooke E. *University of Chicago Magazine* (March-April 2009): cover, 30-34.

DATA SETS

JASON SALAVON CHURNS RAW FIGURES THROUGH COMPUTER PROGRAMS TO MAKE DISTINCTIVE ART.

BY BROOKE E. O'NEILL, AM'04
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN DRY

"WOW, IT'S SUCH A TINY SCREEN," says Jason Salavon, peering at the old Macintosh he used to create his first digital artwork. It was 1993, and he was a studio-art major at the University of Texas at Austin. With that computer—now shelved in his Hyde Park Art Center studio—and a dot-matrix printer, he produced a 300-page book of repeating black-and-white patterns. Photoshop was still in its infancy, and there were "no real tools" to create this sort of artwork, so Salavon, a computer-science minor, designed his own. Intrigued by the idea of "having software autonomously aid and produce work almost infinitely," he programmed his Mac to generate images while he slept. He'd "wake up in the morning to 30 surprises."

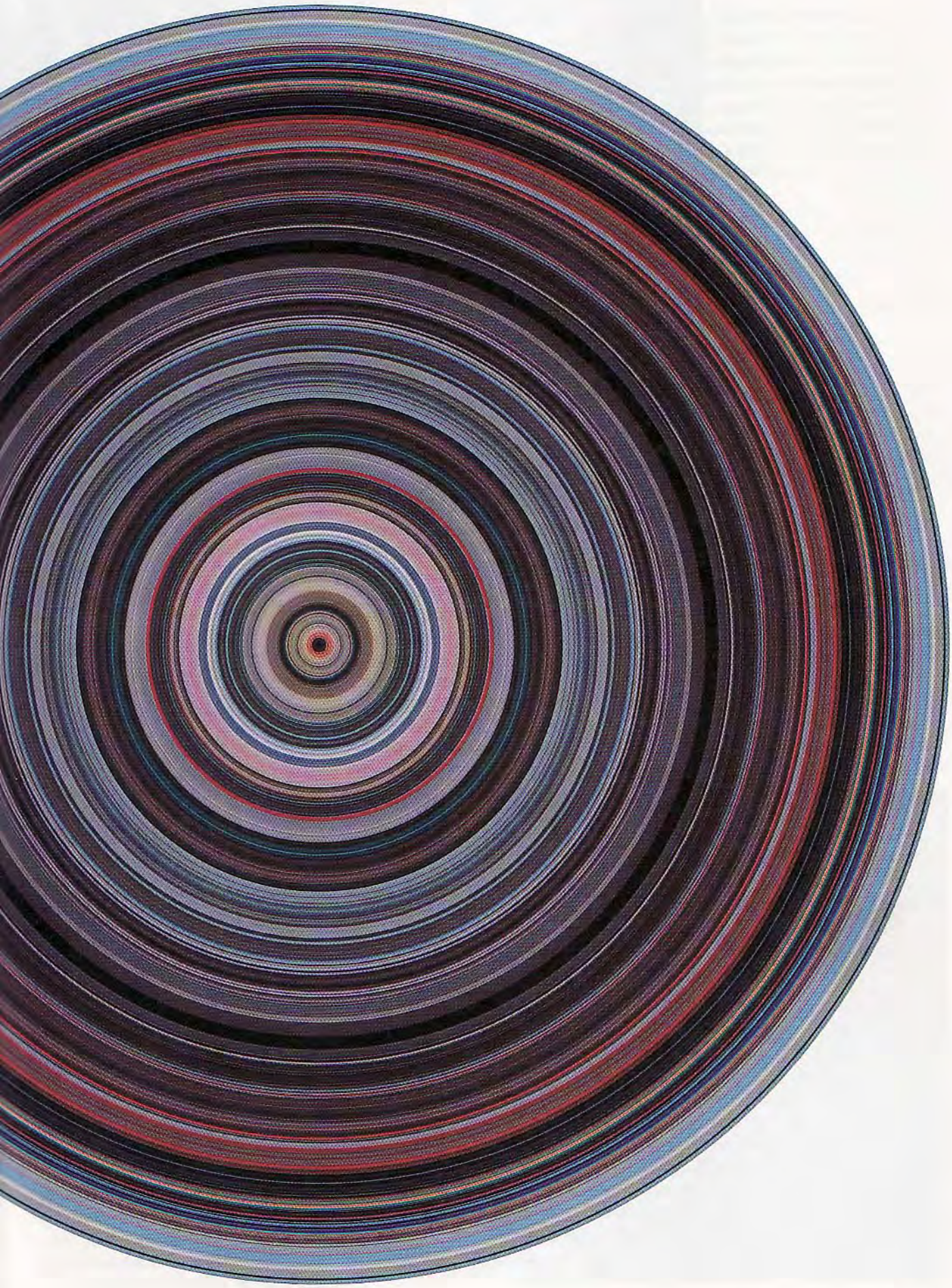
In technology Salavon had found his muse. Since then he's used custom-made software to create art from all kinds of material: U.S. shoe-production data, *Playboy* centerfolds, the IKEA catalog. When Salavon joined Chicago as an assistant professor of visual arts in 2007, he also became the only humanities faculty member with an appointment in the University's Computation Institute. His visual/technological combinations, exhibited in solo shows for the past 16 years, have earned Salavon audiences beyond the gallery and academic crowds. In February he completed a three-year commission for the U.S. Census Bureau, designing an installation at its headquarters in Suitland, Maryland. Mapping more than two centuries of population data from roughly 6,000 U.S. counties, Salavon sculpted the statistics into a 40-foot-long, 10,000-pound piece—part abstract mural, part video animation. The goal, he says, was to "take this raw material and treat it as a plastic form."

To realize his visions, Salavon uses C and C++ programming language, 3-D modeling tools, and other self-created software. "Data in its nature has beauty," he says. Whether the concept involves demographic stats or pop culture, he never neglects aesthetics. "A viewer will often walk in and not know anything about how the piece was made or the backstory," Salavon says. "So if it can't stand by itself as a visual object, it probably won't pass the test for me." This interplay between art and technology is an ongoing theme in his work: "There's real meat on those bones as far as the tension between an autonomous mechanical process and the more traditional human creative process."

Salavon's amalgamations of everyday images such as yearbook photos or house snapshots in real-estate listings attest to this complex relationship. For these pieces he selects a series of photographs, such as 100-plus single-family homes for sale, and then writes code to overlay the images and gauge the mathematical "average" of the set. The result is an impressionistic composite that reveals the norms of the whole. In averaging Seattle homes, for example, a gray sky emerges, whereas the Los

EMBLEM (2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY) 2003

To create this 48" x 48" digital photograph, Salavon designed an algorithm to average the colors in each frame of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Organized in concentric rings, the frames follow the narrative, starting in the center. Along with Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, this piece is part of Salavon's *Emblem* series. All three, he says, are by "auteur filmmakers who are sort of demanding and control-freakish."



Angeles/Orange County compilation is awash in blue. Many viewers say the images—unedited by Salavon—"look like Monet or Turner."

Salavon started blending art while road-tripping across Texas in his early 20s. The radio blaring in his VW Bug, he thought about what makes a hit song, trying to merge No. 1 songs in his head. Although the musical analysis led to only one piece—an audio CD blending 27 covers of the Beatles hit "Yesterday"—it launched Salavon into a multiyear, multiproject investigation combining photographs that resonated with him personally. His yearbook series, for example, averages all the photos of his high-school graduating class into two prints—one using the men, another with the women—called *The Class of 1988*. He also did a set for his mother's graduating class, *The Class of 1967*. His series *Emblem* began by choosing films—*2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Taxi Driver*, and *Apocalypse Now*—"that my dad showed me when I was probably too young" to understand them.

Raised in an "artistic, hippy household" in Fort Worth, Texas, he grew up watching his father, a "classically trained, '70s-style surreal artist," juggle a day job with painting at night. Although the young Salavon sketched and painted, he never wanted to be a professional artist—until he took a college drawing class and "totally got bit by the bug." His first foray into digital art, the 300-page book of black-and-white patterns, confirmed his new direction. "My consumption with the process," recalls Salavon, "overwhelmed another part of me that was like, 'Wow, do you really want to go through what your dad went through?'"

"DATA IN ITS NATURE HAS BEAUTY," SALAVON SAYS. IF A PIECE "CAN'T STAND BY ITSELF AS A VISUAL OBJECT, IT PROBABLY WON'T PASS THE TEST FOR ME."

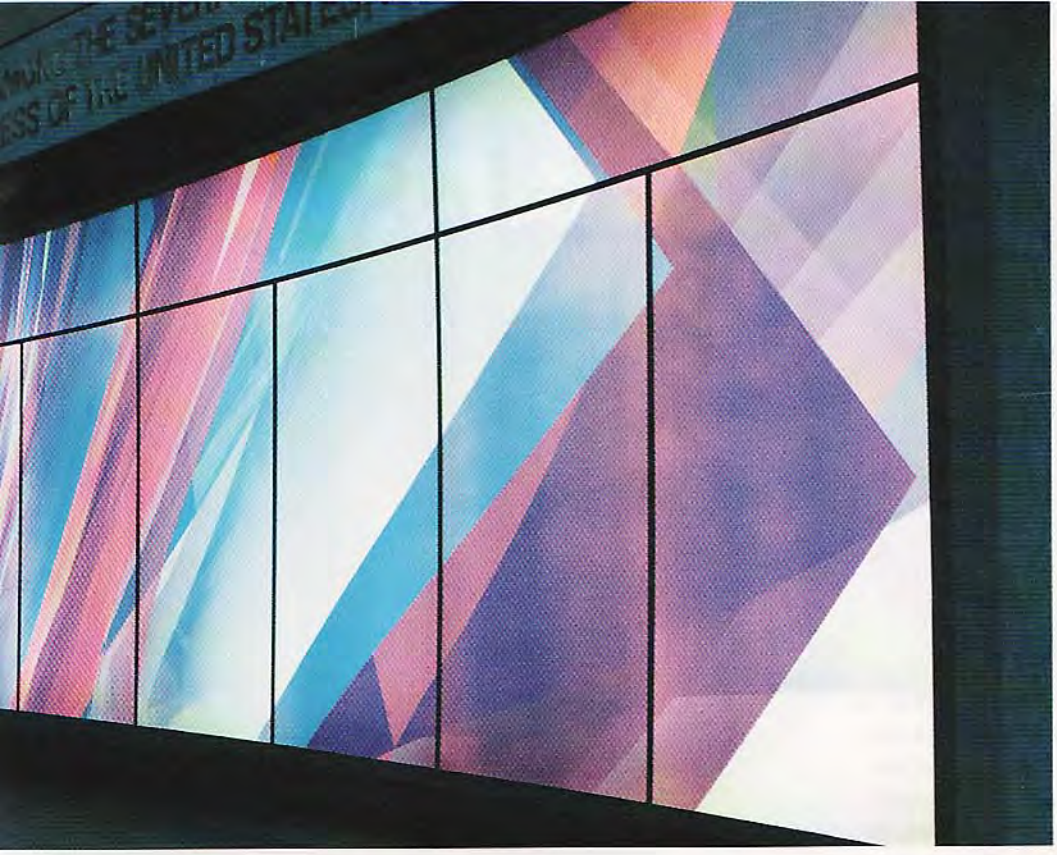
He decided to chance it. Today his digital photography, video, and multimedia projects have been shown around the world at venues such as Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art and New York's Whitney Museum of American Art. What Salavon describes as his "technology-informed, pop-culture–informed blend" may even be changing how such institutions think about art. In December 2007 Washington's National Portrait Gallery acquired Salavon's *The Late Night Triad*, a video triptych showing 64 nights of monologues by talk-show hosts Jay Leno, Conan O'Brien, and David Letterman. It was the museum's first electronic artwork in its permanent collection.

With possible solo shows in Chicago, Seattle, and New York on the horizon, Salavon looks forward to growing his diverse portfolio. "Every project can be significantly different," he says, noting that most of his concepts are easier to describe than to execute. Yet thanks to open-source software—many programmers make their work available for free use—and multiple ways to create his own, he relishes each new project as a problem to be solved. "It's just a matter of figuring it out," he says. His computer literacy is also the reason he insists his students learn at least some programming, even if they don't think they'll use it. "Just a little knowledge of how things work under the hood," he says, "can enable you to have a broader sense of what's possible."

Link to Salavon's video installations at **magazine.uchicago.edu.**

THE LATE NIGHT TRIAD 2003

This three-part video installation features *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, and *Late Show with David Letterman*. Salavon recorded 64 nights of opening monologues, then averaged each show's material. The blended videos reveal the sequences' precision, with a cutaway to the band or Conan's trademark jump occurring at nearly the same time every night. They also highlight the hosts' differences. "Leno is such a whirling dervish on stage that his figure never coalesces," says Salavon, while Conan is regimented: "You can actually see his facial features all lock in." Letterman falls in between.

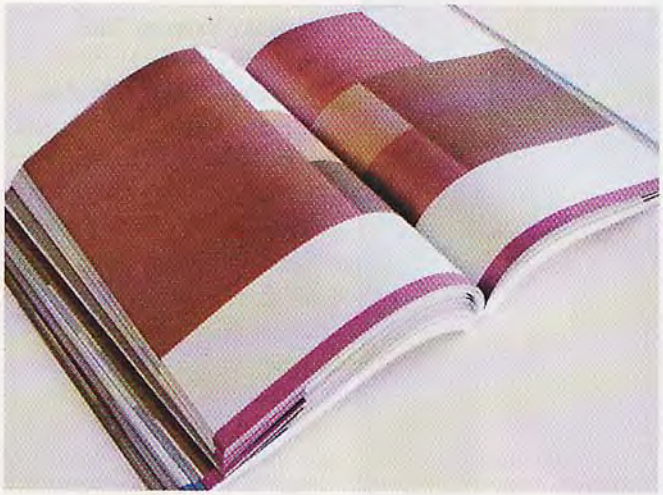


American Varietal 2009

Commissioned for the lobby of the U.S. Census Bureau's Maryland headquarters, this installation draws on national demographic data from 1790 to 2000. Each color skein represents a different county.

The Top Grossing Film of All Time, 1 x 1 2000

This photographic piece took all 336,247 frames of the hit film *Titanic* and "smeared each mathematically to a solid color." Organized in horizontal rows from top to bottom, the frames read from left to right, following the film's narrative sequence. What remains, says Salavon, is the "visual rhythm" of the film, parsed out in pure color. Leonardo DiCaprio's "I'm the king of the world!" scene comes across in bright tones, while the sinking ship plunges into gloomier swatches. The Whitney Museum bought the piece, and DiCaprio purchased one of five limited editions for his personal collection.

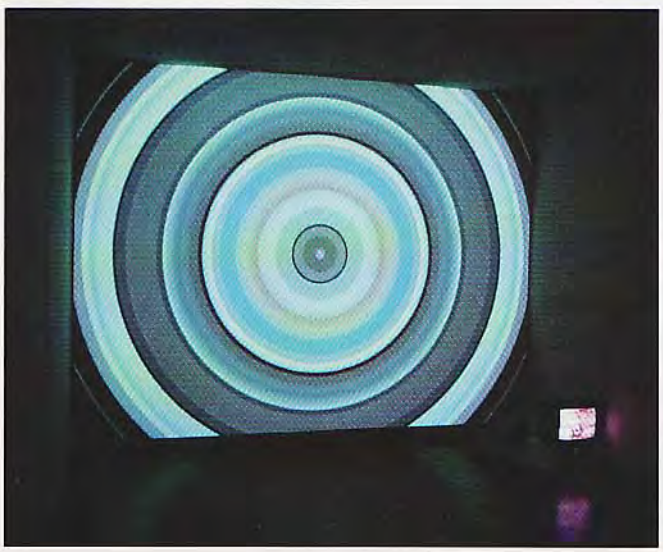


Field Guide to Style & Color 2007

Debuted at a 2008 Columbus Museum of Art solo exhibition, this 374-page book reformats the entire 2007 IKEA catalog as solid color patterns. The world's largest furniture manufacturer, the Swedish company distributed an estimated 198 million copies of its catalog each year and claims it's the most published print object in the world (the Bible comes in second). Salavon, who wanted to explore the relationship between catalog designer and fine artist, was struck by how the pages of his pure color version resemble "certain abstract paintings."

Everything, All At Once (Part III) 2005

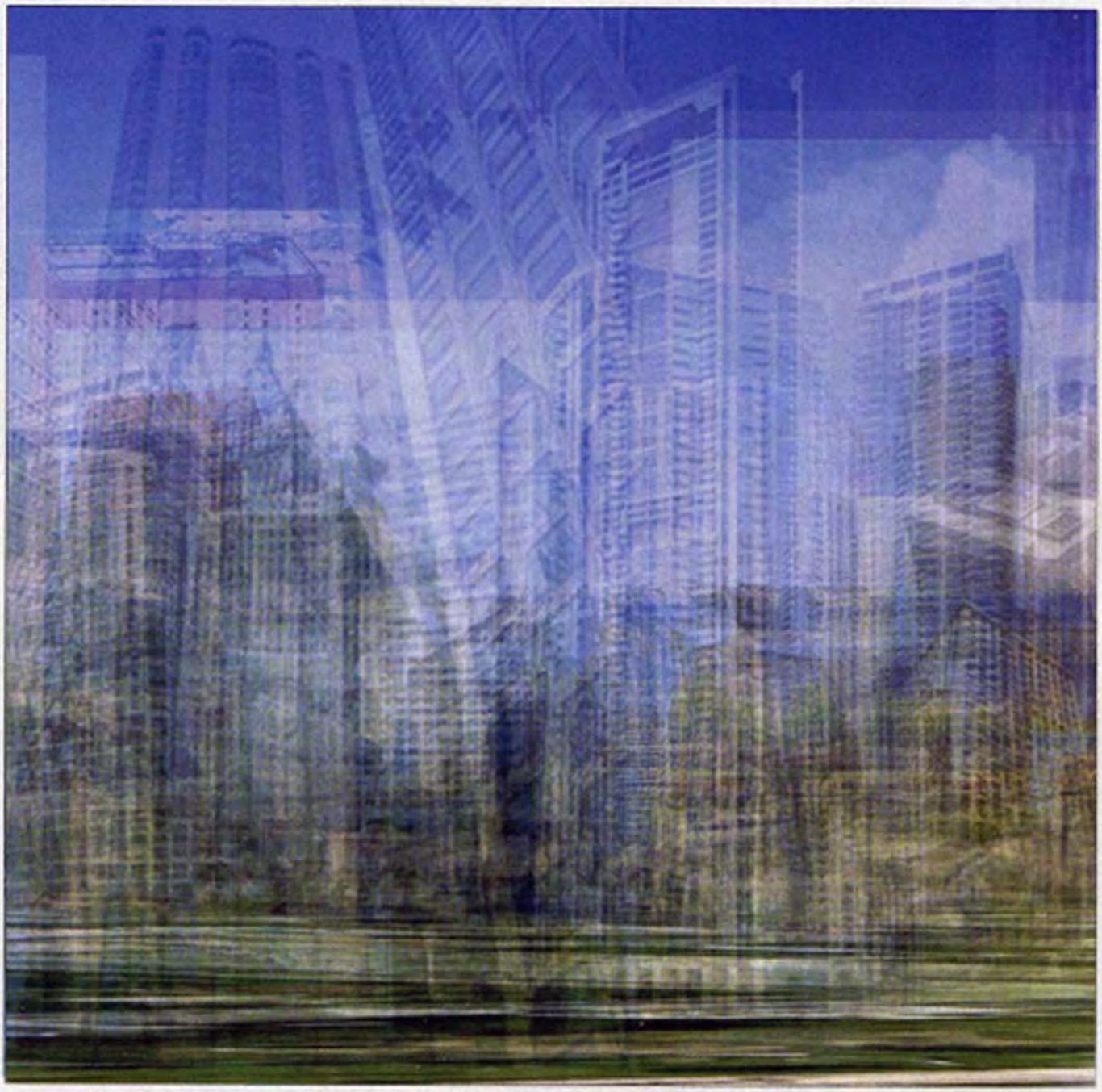
Using a live feed (bottom right), this video installation converts each frame of television content into a solid-color circle. The frames appear as a series of concentric rings, which shift when the channel automatically changes every 30 seconds. The abstract rendering, says Salavon, raises questions about how television works. During a certain car commercial, for example, the circle pattern becomes a pronounced black-white-black-white series of rings. "It's got to be some little subtle hypnosis thing they put in," he says. "It's got to be consciously there."



Every Playboy Centerfold, The Decades 2002

Thanks to this series, Salavon's work was once the first hit to come up in a Google search for "Playboy." Each photo digitally averages a decade of centerfold spreads. The resulting hazy images reveal telling differences among the eras. The 1960s image shows the model's head turned to the side and is "much more demure," says Salavon, than its confrontational 1990s counterpart. The 1970s model shown here, starting to turn toward the camera but still looking away, is a "coming-of-age" image between the two extremes. After Christie Hefner, then-chair and CEO of Playboy Enterprises, saw the pieces on exhibit, the firm purchased a version for its Chicago headquarters.

Bryant, Eric. "The Indecisive Image." *ARTnews*, No. 107, (March 2008).



ABOVE Digital imaging software lets Jason Salavon create a sort of time-lapse picture of the Chicago skyline in this panel from his triptych *The Loop, 1848–2007*, 2007.

mosaics that piece together miniature digital images selected by the search engine to create pictures with often ironic relations to the constituent parts—portraits of millionaires were assembled into an image of a homeless man, for instance. And Bellas Artes in Santa Fe and Aperture in New York have shown his "Orogenesis" pictures, which use a software program that renders three-dimensional terrain to transform selective scans from art-historical works—a Turner landscape, for example—into otherworldly topography. While both series contain recognizable imagery, they call into question the boundaries of representation in the information age.

Jason Salavon takes these ideas a step further in his show at the Columbus Museum of Art, which runs through May 4. For his "Amalgamations" and "100 Special Moments" series, for instance, he converts similar images—of newlyweds or *Playboy* centerfolds—into data sets and compresses them. The fuzzy results, as with so much abstract photography, are at once vaguely familiar and completely meaningless. ■

Jason Salavon

Inman

Houston

The title of Jason Salavon's recent exhibition, "Annex and Catalogue," directly and elegantly signaled his interests and concerns. The sale annex, with its promise of discounted plenty, and the catalogue, bringing consumer temptations to our mailboxes, provided the raw material that the artist transformed into impassive grids of colored rectangles and glacially paced video installations.

In the two videos, *Still Life II (Glassware)* and *Catalogue to the Sun and Moon* (all works 2007), tumblers and goblets and living-room furnishings go through countless variations in the course of more than an hour: the metal coffee table becomes wood; the lamp changes shape, subtly at first, then radically; the large window solidifies into a wall; the sofa darkens and shifts position. None of the tableaux ever existed in reality. Salavon, who is a research fellow at the Computation Institute at the University of Chicago, realized the two videos through state-of-the-art digital rendering software. The compositions offer virtual placeholders for the generic commodities of Ikea, Crate and Barrel, and Pottery Barn; these rooms and their furnishings, as well as the glassware, represent either the undifferentiated taste of that culture or its Platonic ideal, depending on your view.

Salavon creates his ink-jet color grids with software that averages digital values, in this case blending the colors on defined portions of page spreads of an Ikea catalogue to create contentless fields. *Catalogue (20–21)* presents a sequence of earth-toned rectangles. The composition is remarkably balanced, given the somewhat random nature (one might think) of the source material, ranging from a brownish green parcel at the upper right, running through umbers and taupe and a large medium brown field, to a dark brick box at the lower right. But perhaps the balance in these grids, like the basic sameness of the morphing furnishings, manifests the uniformity that underlies our consumer culture's promises of distinction. ***—John Devine***

Jason Salavon, still from *Still Life II (Glassware)*, 2007,
custom software and industrial LCD panel, 1 hour 23 minutes in a continuous loop. Inman.

Knight, Christopher. "Mixed Media Blurs Daily Routines."
Los Angeles Times, October 8, 2004, E20-21.

Mixed media blurs daily routines

If you mixed Allan McCollum's fuzzy photographs of television screens with Chuck Close's portraits composed from inked fingerprints, and then tossed in a dose of Nancy Burson's composite pictures made with computer technology, you might end up with something along the lines of Jason Salavon's video projections and digital photographs. At the Project, which is inaugurating a new space near Culver City after several years in a downtown warehouse, the young Chicago-based artist is having his L.A. gallery debut. It's a mixed affair.

Salavon is a whiz at computer software. Using self-designed programs I couldn't begin to understand, he pulverizes and then reconstitutes digitized images. For example, a target-like abstraction was made by taking apart Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 "Apocalypse Now," frame by frame, and then reorganizing it into a hypnotic, 4-foot mandala. Conceptually appealing, it's visually inert.

More intriguing are four still photographs that began with multiple images of domestic rituals commonly photographed: a department store Santa Claus, a Little Leaguer proudly posing, a graduation and a wedding day. "These are the moments of your life." Salavon blends together the multiple representations of each photo-op event, as if unique examples of a generic ceremony might yield one ur-example. The resulting picture is a recognizable but fuzzed scenario; protagonists dissolve like sugar cubes in tea.

Best is a 3 1/2-minute video triptych in which Salavon labored to create a similarly average example of the nightly comedy monologues delivered by David Letterman, Jay Leno and Conan O'Brien. Digitally aligning multiple monologues, he underscores the comforting routine in comedy routine. Blurred and glowing phantoms buzz softly in the darkened gallery, like something out of "Poltergeist," where demons lurk inside the tube.

Menon, Elizabeth. "The Conceptual Aesthetic of Jason Salavon."
Ciel Variable, (June 2004).

The conceptual Aesthetic of Jason Salavon

ELIZABETH**MENON**

Fuzzy Logic

Jason Salavon employs computers and code to transform material appropriated from popular culture. His work ranges from digital video installations to Web-based interactive works and works on computers to create paintings that blur the line between manmade and machine aesthetic. His photo and video-based print works cultivate a dual aesthetic of painterly veils and minimalist colour-field grids.

Chicago-based contemporary artist Jason Salavon (b. 1970) employs computers and code to transform material appropriated from popular culture and imbues those sources with nostalgia. Salavon's body of work is both distinctive and varied, ranging from digital video installations to Web-based interactive works to collaborations with computers to create paintings that blur the line between manmade and machine aesthetic. In his photo and video-based print work, Salavon similarly cultivates a dual aesthetic, alternately presenting painterly veils and minimalist colour-field grids. In either case, a narrative is simultaneously implied, described, deconstructed, and subverted, as he articulates an aesthetic concept, or a conceptual aesthetic.

Salavon's interest in the merging of the concept and the aesthetic has led him to develop processes that allow him to direct computers to create works of art in a collaborative process. The result is database-driven works that reference the apparent reliability of statistical data. The fact is that statistics do not represent absolute truths, and they are consistently subjected to shaping depending on the context in which they are presented. The works in *Homes for* tographed. Hundreds of images of skin were then digitally divided into more than thirteen thousand half-inch squares and arranged vertically by luminosity from dark to light. Reproduced to scale, the resulting work reveals both more than and none of what the viewer expects from a self-portrait. The tradition of this genre includes everything from Michelangelo's self-representation as St. Bartholomew in the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel to Marc Quinn's *No Visible Means of Escape* (1996) and portrait sculpture *Self* (1991), made from his own frozen blood. The presentation of the artist's body as artwork has been variously designed to document individual points of artistic achievement (Picasso) or as a record of ageing (Rembrandt). But Salavon presents another, equally valid truth in asserting that there is precious little separating the artist and the artwork on some level. Salavon represents himself in terms of a particular vital (digital) statistic arranged in such a way as to reflect formal concerns as a further expression of the conceptual aesthetic that bridges modern and postmodern. As R. L. Rutsky states in *High Techné: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman*, "It is in modernist art that a different conception of

Sale (1999/2001/2002) are amalgams of realtor photos of single-family homes at the median price range in Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles. These are sourced directly from the Internet, a vast storehouse of information and images that is easily the most prolific of current popular culture resources today. Inspired in part by the artist's desire to purchase a home, these works visually reflect the late, form-dissolving style of J. M. W. Turner and the light and weather-effect–driven paintings of the impressionists. This is largely because the same concerns (light at various times of day, weather effects, and seasons, resulting in perceptual colour differences) are manifest in the sourced images, which conform to local particularities (such as lot sizes). Anyone who has searched for a home knows that what is presented in a realtor photograph is unlikely to represent the reality of the property, and that after a while all houses begin to look alike (even more so given the current trend in tract housing). Buying a house, after all, is a romantic dream usually divorced from the realities of home ownership and maintenance. Salavon's works, produced by mean averaging, layering, and justification (alignment of photographs of an equal size or at equal points), remind us that life is driven largely by averages used statistically to obscure individual results, whether for test scores, gas prices, or waist sizes. Salavon shapes statistical data to yield an aesthetically compelling outcome, simultaneously preventing source material from functioning as originally designed. The information in his statistical works has been reframed as art, much as Warhol and Lichtenstein repurposed prevalent popular culture forms of the 1960s. By inserting a perceptual optical phenomenon in place of traditional presentation of information, Salavon creates a visual experience that preferences the aesthetic over the intellectual. Yet, the work remains reflective of and dependent on the original concept.

In the digital C-prints *Every Playboy Centerfold The Decades 1960s and 1990s* (1998) Salavon explores and exploits the tropes of centrefold photography, while simultaneously creating an abstraction that denies their original function as objects of arousal. The individual original appropriated photographs are subjected to a mean-averaging process, resulting in an amalgamation that resembles the shroud of Turin and Gerhard Richter's photography-inspired blurred oil paintings more than the nude

technology begins to emerge, a conception in which technology is no longer defined solely in terms of its instrumentality, but also in aesthetic terms."[1]

Salavon's works might also be seen as a type of artistic interference applied to existing imagery. In other works, he manipulates appropriated video, replacing the original narrative content with pure colour arrived at through mathematical averaging. The resulting works "read" as purely visual abstractions, as the soundtrack that not only underscores the narrative progression but enhances it has been removed. In *MTV's 10 Greatest Music Videos of All Time* (2001), Salavon has appropriated both the ranking and the music videos from MTV, removed the soundtrack and digitized each video's visual content, and simplified each individual frame to a mean average colour, which is then presented in its original sequence. The resulting abstractions (which nonetheless carry what could be called a latent narrative content) exist without the two components that make up music videos: pictures and music. The original "function" of the video is removed, leaving pure aesthetics (art) in its place. In a sense, Salavon has appropriated the content of pop art and the form of minimalism. The appropriated material becomes the site of an exercise in perception and focus, demonstrating not only that anything can be art, but that anything can be formalist, modernist art, arrived at through postmodern means of appropriation and manipulation.

Despite the "popular" and frequently non-aesthetic source material that he uses and the ease with which social or political ideas can be extracted from his works, Salavon's stated approach to his work is aligned closely with parts of Theo van Doesburg's manifesto *Art Concrete: Basis of Concrete Painting* (1930) – in particular, that the work of art should be fully conceived and formed in the mind before its execution and that constituent pictorial elements (as well as the final finished work) have no significance outside themselves.[2] The mechanical, "anti-Impressionistic" technique advocated by van Doesberg is accomplished by the action of the computer. Unlike concrete art (or, more generally, constructivist principles), Salavon's work derives its formal qualities from nature and is presented with sensuality and sometimes sentimentality. Using digital technologies, he has transformed and filtered the reality of his appropriated material, creating meta-fictions for

women that make up their content. At the same time, Salavon alludes to the historical social situation that glorifies the nude as a time-honoured subject of art history while decrying the same subject as pornographic (and thus not art) in a different, more functional context. The four images in this series present a taxonomy of the centrefold, as changes in preferred poses (frontal versus profile), hair colour, and waist, chest, and hip sizes are tracked through four decades in the shroud-like representations.

Salavon also obscures individual identity while preserving anthropological details in the series *100 Special Moments* (2004). Graduations, weddings, and even participation in Little League baseball are all markers of time for specific individuals. Yet the professional portrait photographer imposes a standard composition for these life-altering events. In droves, individuals share these private moments by posting the images in on-line photo albums or blogs. Salavon highlights this dichotomy of the collective personal by removing the functional and documentary evidence of the individual. Through the use of his custom averaging process, a different type of documentation is proposed. As in the *Playboy* series, these works appear lit from within. Bright voids exist where the detailed facial features of the viewer's own loved ones are expected and not delivered. Salavon calls the result "generalized contours of structure and rhythm" or "ghosts of repetitious structures." They could also be called the "deep structures" of contemporary life.

Salavon completes the ultimate disruption and reconstruction of self through digital transformation in *Flayed Figure, Male, 3277 1/2 square inches* (1998/2001). For *Flayed Figure*, Salavon had the entire surface area of his body digitally photographed, the image of his skin subsequently being stretched out over the surface of the work. [continued] viewers to experience in new ways. The clutter of contemporary life is transformed into the rare work of art, a source of abstract beauty and aesthetic contemplation nonetheless reflecting the structures – both deep and shallow – with which society is preoccupied.

1. R. L. Rutsky, *High Techné: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 73.

2. Theo van Doesburg, "Manifeste de l'art concret," *Concrete* (Paris, 1930), reprinted in Joost Balijeu, *Theo van Doesburg* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 181–82.

Elizabeth K. Menon, *assistant professor of contemporary art history at Purdue University, has published in* Gazette des Beaux-Arts, Nouvelles de l'estampe, *and* Art Journal. *Her current research addresses new media and technology-driven art. Recent publications include "Ut Pixel Poesis," in* Selected Readings of the International Visual Literacy Association *(2003) and "Web Installation Art, Interactivity and User Connectivity," in* Image and Imagery *(2004).*

Jason Salavon earned his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and his BA from the University of Texas at Austin. His work has been shown in museums and galleries throughout North America and Europe and is included in a number of prominent public and private collections. Previously, he was employed as an artist and programmer in the video game industry. His web site is www.salavon.com.

Hill, Joe. Review: "Jason Salavon at The Project," *Art in America*, June 2002.

Art in America

June 2002

Jason Salavon at The Project

In "Everything, All at Once," Jason Salavon's first solo show in New York, this veteran of the Whitney's "BitStreams" exhibition unambiguously establishes himself as a leading practitioner of the emerging genre of computer-based art. The show's title work is a video monitor that shows TV programming in which each frame of the input is simplified to its average color. The result is a pulsating monochrome that changes tonality and intensity in conjunction with the real-time, unaltered soundtrack. In this visually reductive world, the emotive trajectory of a television commercial, for example, is nevertheless entirely clear; the averaged colors achieve a symbolic significance as they plot the narrative of the voiceover.

The most challenging work in the exhibition is *100,000 Abstract Paintings*, to which the upstairs back room of The Project was devoted. *100,000 Abstract Paintings* is ostensibly a simple installation in which a series of

In *76 Blowjobs*, Salavon averages 76 fellatial close-ups. The outcome is a beautiful Turneresque abstraction of pinks and flesh tones through which the original source material is nevertheless readable, one close-up blowjob looking very much like another within the standard conventions of pornographic photography.

Less legible but no less beautiful are the images in a suite of photographs derived from hundreds of digitally averaged real-estate photos of median-priced single family homes in different metropolitan areas. The cool, rainy tones of *109 Homes for Sale, Seattle/Tacoma* contrast with the redbrick architecture that lends its color to *117 Homes for Sale, Chicagoland*, but that is about as much of the original source material as one can make out in these inviting Whistlerian landscapes.

Poised between contemporary mass culture and the history of art, and between painterly expression and the raw data of

images, all reminiscent of the Color-Field variety of Abstract Expressionism, emanate from a video projector hooked up to a computer. Like a fast-paced slide show, each "painting" appears on the wall for four seconds; a digital counter tracks the progress through the vast series.

Salavon did not design the images themselves, but rather the software that generates them. In successive iterations of the software code, Salavon refined a wide range of tonal and compositional parameters within which the "paintings" would be created. The results are rife with references to Diebenkorn, Hofmann, Newman and Rothko; this mesmerizing serial saga is both an ironic homage to Abstract Expressionism and a tour-de-force demonstration of the power of the computer in this artist's hands.

digital source material and computer code, Salavon's work is a significant achievement and a promising New York debut.

—*Joe Hill*

Jason Salavon: *76 Blowjobs*, 2001, C-print, 48 by 37 inches; at The Project

Wiens, Ann. "The Message is the Medium."
Chicago Social, September 2001.

CS
chicago social

THE MESSAGE IS THE MEDIUM

Jason Salavon abstracts American culture by finding the common denominator within complex webs of data. But there's nothing average about his creations. by Ann Wiens

Under the pitched attic ceiling of a Logan Square coach house, a motley assemblage of hybrid computers hums quietly, the heat of their efforts palpable even on this crisp, cool day. Motherboards are strewn across a table; rows of mismatched monitors sit darkened—all but two, which display the animated image of a generic suite of furniture being tossed about a room like dice in a cup.

"This is running *so* slowly," complains Jason Salavon, a mixture of frustration and apology in his voice. We are in Salavon's studio/lab, where he commands this fleet of "Frankenstein" computers that he has put together to produce the unique, digital artworks which are quickly garnering him national acclaim. The shaken-furniture animation is part of *The Domestic State Machine #2* (2001), a computer-generated video installation that displays the scene simultaneously from the viewpoint of each of the room's four walls.

After graduating from UT Austin in 1993, Salavon applied to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and began his graduate studies in the fall of 1994. There, he had access to much more sophisticated computer equipment, and, calling on his computer-science background, he taught himself to use it. "It was a cool way to learn it," he says, "because I was always trying to do a piece, and then learning to write the software to do it, which is pretty much how I still work. I don't sit down and play and the piece comes from the technology. I think of what I want to do and then try to figure out how to get there."

It is perhaps for this reason that Salavon's work has avoided the "art-and-tech ghetto" where so many digital artworks languish, slaves to the technologies which created them. His attention to "fine art" concerns like visual presence and conceptual richness has clearly endeared Salavon to many critics and curators. "Jason's work is so simple and yet so complex, with so many layers of meaning," says Leah Stoddard, an early supporter of Salavon and the director of Second Street Gallery in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he had a solo show last winter. "It has an initial aesthetic appeal, so it allows for a bigger audience; it doesn't alienate you with process. Then you start to puzzle through it, and you find many more levels. He poses these rich questions about culture: what we take for granted, what constructs our identity in a mass media culture."

Natalie Domchenko and Peter Miller, codirectors of Peter Miller Gallery in the West Loop, "discovered" Salavon's work on a tour of the MFA show at the School of the Art Institute. The gallery gave Salavon his first major solo exhibition the following year. It included *The Grand Unification Theory* series (1997), for which Salavon wrote a program that allowed him to grab every 13th frame from four archetypal movies—*Star Wars, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, It's a Wonderful Life,* and *Deep Throat*—then sort and redistribute them by luminosity. The thousands of tiny frames were arranged in grids, going from light in the center to dark around the edges, and printed as square wall pieces that have the presence of abstract paintings. The series contains themes—the disruption of narrative, the rearrangement of data, the use of popular culture, and the references within these motifs to both abstract art and abstract science—which continue to run through Salavon's work today.

The gallery also presented a solo exhibition of Salavon's recent work last

April; another show will open at The Project in New York City in October. His work was also included in "BitStreams: Art in the Digital Age" at New York City's Whitney Museum of American Art, one of the first attempts by a museum to survey artistic practice in the nascent realm of digital media. One of the country's most important contemporary art collections, that of Eileen and Peter Norton in Santa Monica, has just bought three pieces. And the Whitney, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the City of Chicago have each bought one. Obviously, there's something going on here.

What's going on is the work.

117 Homes for Sale, Chicagoland (1999), the first of a series of three softly blurred, horizontal images which suggest the romantic, abstracted landscapes of 19th century painters like Turner or Monet, came about when Salavon was "flirting with the idea of wanting to buy a home. I was looking at real estate, home listings," he says, "and they all started to look the same." Salavon took a group of the listings (in this case, 117 of them) and digitally averaged each pixel in each image of each house by color, creating a blurred, generic image that still suggests the general composition of the individual home listings: sky above, ground below, vague house-form in the middle. He put real estate listings from New York and L.A. through the same process, achieving a series of similar images which are nonetheless revealing in their subtle differences. In L.A., the average sky is a pale blue; in Chicago, a light gray. In Chicago, the houses are squarish and reddish; in New York they're taller and grayer. In L.A. they're so horizontal that the real estate photographers apparently have to back up across the street to get their shot, leaving a gray stripe of pavement visible along the bottom edge of the composite image.

Salavon acknowledges the connection to early abstractionists, as well as to more recent conceptual artists. "I thought it was interesting that I'm just performing a pretty heartless mathematical operation on a series of data, where I set up a rule system, but it has a relationship with guys [such as Monet and Turner] who were taking the reality of a situation and bringing something into it that made it bigger than the individual moment."

Salavon's "rule systems" also serve to tell us a lot about the veracity of "scientific" data. As a culture in love with statistics, we constantly support our views with numerical data: the president's approval ratings, the Dow Jones Industrial

Average. The results of a dozen polls, surveys, and studies fill the pages of every newspaper every day, all of it the averaged opinions of classes of individuals—the abstracted blur of the group from which a single voice seldom rises, but from which the basic nature of a culture may be discerned.

His *Shoes, Domestic Production, 1960-1968* series (2001) takes an intentionally "dumb" data set—the production rate of various types of shoes in this country over the stated time period—and turns it into a group of vivid, almost luridly colored prints and a video which resemble fireworks displays or fountains of colored light. This painstaking study, involving reams of statistics put through complicated processes of analysis, reveals almost nothing about its subject beyond the fact that the United States used to produce a lot more shoes than it does now. But the images themselves are beautiful in a nonrational, sensual way, a quality only augmented by knowledge of their origins.

Salavon's *Flayed Figure, Male, 3277½ Square Inches* (2001) is perhaps the quintessentially revealing self-portrait. To create the image—a shimmering grid of tiny, peach-colored squares—Salavon photographed his entire body in 1/2-square-inch increments, then sorted and redistributed them from dark to light, printing them at actual size. The viewer is presented with an image of the artist that is alarmingly revealing (we can see every hair, every mole, every crease, every curl in crystal clarity) yet stunningly oblique: We have no idea what he looks like. It's paradoxical in a way that this work, which so effectively erases the singular in favor of the average, the individual in favor of the group, is able to reveal so much about our culture, and, in our responses to it, about ourselves.

Says Salavon of the thought process that led him to create this piece and each of his works, "I was thinking about individuals within the whole, and how you define that whole. What are the common characteristics that make this a group, rather than one's individual identity within the group? There are macro ways of looking at things and micro ways of looking at things."

Yood, James. "Peter Miller Gallery: Jason Salavon."
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ARTFORUM

CHICAGO

JASON SALAVON

PETER MILLER GALLERY

It might not seem that Internet porn bears any similarity to houses for sale in Orange County, or that American-made shoes have anything in common with the top-grossing movies in history. But these and other categories are equally rich fodder for Jason Salavon's analysis. He constructs computer software that reformats data—whatever their origin or *kind—into intriguing patterns. Sometimes* he superimposes scores of related images, digitally layering them so that ultimately only the amorphous average remains. In other instances he creates complex and multidimensional charts, giving data a pictorial profile far removed from their mundane sources. There is something actuarial about his procedure, a logic or ethic that can relentlessly shuffle input until it becomes nearly mush. Nearly, but not completely; when Salavon's source material is visual, certain core patterns emerge, revealing structural tendencies in how we compose images, and how we live our lives.

Salavon approaches his subject matter results. In *Blowjobs*, 2001, Salavon superimposes quite different images: seventy-six clips of fellatio (like seventy-six trombones, get it?) taken directly from the Internet. What seems a misty haze starts to coalesce around a cylindrical shape at the left and some suggestion of an aperture meeting it toward the right. Eerie and disarming, the work takes exposed and manufactured intimacy and makes it nearly invisible.

Salavon's forays into mass culture include two pieces examining Hollywood blockbusters. In *The Top Grossing Film of All Time, 1x1*, 2001, Salavon created a program to reduce each frame from the 1997 film *Titanic* to its predominant color, then shrink the results into tiny rectangles and arrange them in chronological order in hundreds of rows. The film can be followed by means of its chromatic emphases, if you're familiar with the plot: Sunny blue and tan give way to flashes of white (shots of the iceberg?) and then relentless rows of purple and black. *Titanic* also makes an appearance

with some passivity. The five pieces charting the production of shoes in various categories ("Total slippers," "Women's medium heel," "Men's other than work," etc.) in the US between 1960 and 1998 are deadpan demonstrations that any corpus of data can yield a compelling pattern. Hopeless as industry surveys, these works are marked by the accelerated tempos of Salavon's multicolored graphology, a kind of digital reductio ad absurdum.

In *121 Homes for Sale, LA/Orange County*, 2001, Salavon superimposes recent real-estate photos of houses in the $250,000–$350,000 range: The result is a gray horizontal fog (the ghost of the houses themselves) above a stratum of a lighter gray (121 layers of California street); a hint of green suggests bushes. The image indicates that these are mostly one-story ranch houses—a generalization that is firmly rooted in the specific, as well as an averaging that inevitably tracks the particular toward the *generic*. Projects assessing homes for sale in Chicago and New York had similar in the large video projection *The Top 25 Grossing Films of All Time, 2x2*, 2001. (Salavon did not adjust the box-office receipts for inflation, so the films are all of recent vintage.) Here each frame is divided into quadrants, the colors of which are averaged out, and then all the films are simultaneously projected in a grid of 100 flashing rectangles. All twenty-five sound tracks also played at once, resulting in a kind of assertive babble. As the films vary in length, from 194 minutes (*Titanic*, Number 1) to 88 minutes (*The Lion King*, Number 6), nearly all the quadrants go blank (and silent) before the piece ends, at 140 minutes. Salavon's uncritical investigation of box-office culture is oddly complicit with the spectacle of well-oiled mass entertainment. It is also time-specific, as new films will soon push these from their positions. Like much statistical analysis, the piece is a willing prisoner of the data it rearticulates, offering new and intriguing profiles of what are fundamentally the same old faces.

—*James Yood*