Laurie Frick’s first L.A. show, at Edward Cella, is an invigorating immersion in pattern, rhythm, repetition and variation. Her wall-mounted wood assemblages feel musical, above all, even if their basis is in science and the methodical collection of data. Frick has been charting her own sleep patterns over time, and has also made use of a colleague’s records of his daily activities, tracked in 10-minute intervals over a five-year period.

Sounds dry, clinical, especially because data these days usually assumes materially formless digital form. Frick’s work, though, is insistently, beautifully analog, texturally rich and intimately keyed to the scale and touch of the human hand. The sculptures bring together strips and fragments of wood in dense, syncopated fields, somewhat like graphs oriented either on the horizontal or vertical. The wood comes largely from a stash of old eyeglass trays found in a Midwestern warehouse. Frick takes the small boxes apart, using them whole or in part as flat panels, flush with the pictorial surface, or cut down into smaller pieces, their grooved ends jutting outward, perpendicular to the picture plane. Occasionally she reconfigures the walls of the trays into new, variably-sized boxes, open toward us, like the shallow shadow-boxes of Joseph Cornell, only empty, or compartmentalized within into yet smaller boxes.

Frick’s data slices and dices the continuum of everyday experience into units of measure, intervals and durations. Tracking personal consumption, productivity, mood changes, weight loss, location and so on has become popular now that digital media
make it so easy to do so. Quantifying the self, as this endeavor is called, can be merely a compulsive hobby, but it can also feed into a deeper understanding of personal patterns that, in turn, shed light on broader-based phenomena. Frick’s work is hardly didactic. Except for a few chart-like works on paper, which are relatively bland and inert, she smartly resists drawing one-to-one correspondences between findings and form. Instead, through its own compelling visuality and materiality, her work attests to the universal resonance of patterns wherever they’re found — in neural activity, sleep behaviors, nature or drum beats.

If Frick’s source materials chart the division of time, her sculptural works poetically conjure the sensual aspects of its passage. The wood she uses is worn and weathered, its painted surfaces abraded. The surfaces all bear the patina of age. Again and again in the work, the scientific impulse toward rigor and regularity is tempered by a whimsical urge toward improvisation. Numbers and labels stapled or written on the wood face in all directions and instill no sense of order. Edges of the pieces are often rough and off-kilter. Irregularity and interruption keep the work fresh and appealingly humble.

In addition to the 10 assemblages, the show features a terrific installation, “Bumpy World,” which spreads from the floor across two walls and up into a skylight. Vertical slats of wood stripe the wall like a tally in progress. Shallow boxes standing side by side, upright on the floor form a neighborhood of sorts, rowhouses that double as a strip of molding. Tiny, freestanding wood enclosures on loose wood floor tiles bring to mind sheds, outhouses, bee boxes, architectural miniatures out of a dream. The installation feels vibrantly incomplete, an emergent system expanding, replicating, permuting.
Frick, an L.A. native now living in Austin and New York, strikes a provocative balance between systems and intuition in this body of work. Her record-keeping brings to mind Danica Phelps, whose drawings monitor the incoming and outgoing funds in her private financial ecology, but Frick has perhaps more kinship with a figure like Fibonacci, the 13th century mathematician who famously elucidated links between a certain numerical sequence and patterns in nature. Frick’s works are delightfully elusive scores, wonderfully illegible texts. They have all the integrity of well-conceived, thoughtfully posed questions.

-Leah Ollman


Images: Laurie Frick, "Initial Sleep Study" (top), "Bumpy World" (bottom). Courtesy Edward Cella Art + Architecture.