Personal Data Surveillance as Modern Portraiture

by Allison Meier on July 22, 2015

Laurie Frick, “Daily Time Slices Dec 15” (2015), laser etched wood blocks and aluminum, 40 x 48 x 2 inches, 21 days of 24 hour time-tracking (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic unless noted)

The constant data collection on our lives, from iPhone usage to subway card swipes, transforms through Laurie Frick’s art into portraiture. Who are you? What day is it? on view through this weekend at Pavel Zoubok Gallery in Chelsea has an installation of some of her recent data art pieces, where the usage of time is visualized into an expression of self.
Data collection on our lives is one of the obtrusive realities of the modern world, but Frick, an artist with a tech background now based in both Austin and New York City, sees taking ownership of that data as a positive way to better understand our lives. Even while NSA surveillance intrudes into privacy, personal data collection is a growing obsession, as demonstrated by the popularity of Timothy Ferriss’s data-conscious self-help books and the spread of wearable trackers like the Fitbit that counts your steps, which may soon be surpassed by the even more advanced Apple Watch.
Frick uses various smartphone apps and other forms of personal monitoring for pieces like “14 Days,” where an assemblage of woodblocks and leather rises and falls in a cascade across several canvases. It’s color coded for activities that reflect technology use, like iPhone use, time on Chrome and Photoshop, reading on devices, email checking, and Facebook, all contrasted against things like eating at home, eating at restaurants, studio work, sleeping, walking, driving, waiting, and even a chaotic moment at the end of Friday where everything collapses on the floor. Although an individual portrait, the pattern is similar to many of our lives, where we don’t often stop to consider how different an hour can feel when devoted to a different task.

The work in *Who are you? What day is it?*, named for the two questions posed to someone with a concussion, is all about these patterns, all chromatically charted with simple materials that capture the complexity of our time. As dual portraits of a woman aged 32 and a man aged 37 show over seven days, where each 24 hours is given a totem of color for its usage, our sleep patterns and waking hours
can vary wildly. Frick's work argues for embracing this data, with all the regularity of arrhythmia, as a modern form of highly self-aware portraiture, giving us a better understanding of our selves through place and time.

Laurie Frick, “Dashboard 8” (2014), cut, faded, and lasercut paper on panel. Self-tracking data (mood, sleep, heart-rate, upset stomach, email), 12 x 12 inches
Laurie Frick, “Daily Time Slices Aug 25” (2014), laser etched wood blocks, pigment, and aluminum on alumalite, 40 x 48 x 2 inches, 21 days of 24 hour time-tracking
Laurie Frick, “7 Days of a Man 37” (2015), leather, wood, and aluminum, 48 x 50 inches;
Time-use data of a man age 37 over 7 days
Laurie Frick, key for “7 Days of a Man 37” (2015), leather, wood, and aluminum, 48 x 50 inches; Time-use data of a man age 37 over 7 days
Laurie Frick, key for “14 Days” (2015), wood block, tacks, leather on wall, and canvas primed panels, 108 x 168 inches; 14 days of time-use tracking, color coded by activity
Laurie Frick, “14 Days” (2015), wood block, tacks, leather on wall, and canvas primed panels, 108 x 168 inches; 14 days of time-use tracking, color coded by activity

Laurie Frick: Who are you? What day is it? continues at Pavel Zoubok Gallery (531 West 26th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through July 25.