

Poetic Codings @ San Jose Institute for Contemporary Art

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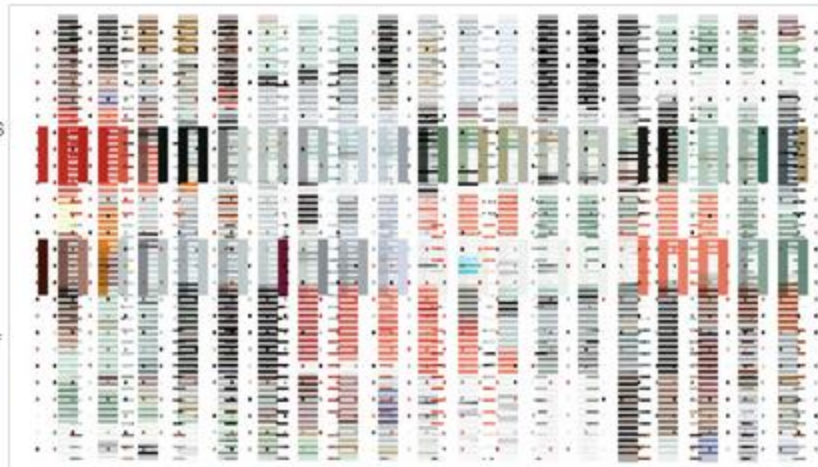


Jeremy Rotsztain: Action Painting (Masculine Expressionism), 2011, custom software and HD video on stretched painting canvas

This all-software show of four wall projections and 28 iOS apps delivers a broad selection of contemporary video art. It ranges from abstract, generative pieces to musical software, and from cyber poetry to games. iPad apps provide intimate reads; wall projections offer bold performances. Together, the two formats tug in opposite directions, succeeding in some places, stumbling in others, and, overall, indicating the still-nascent shift in electronic art to include smaller devices.

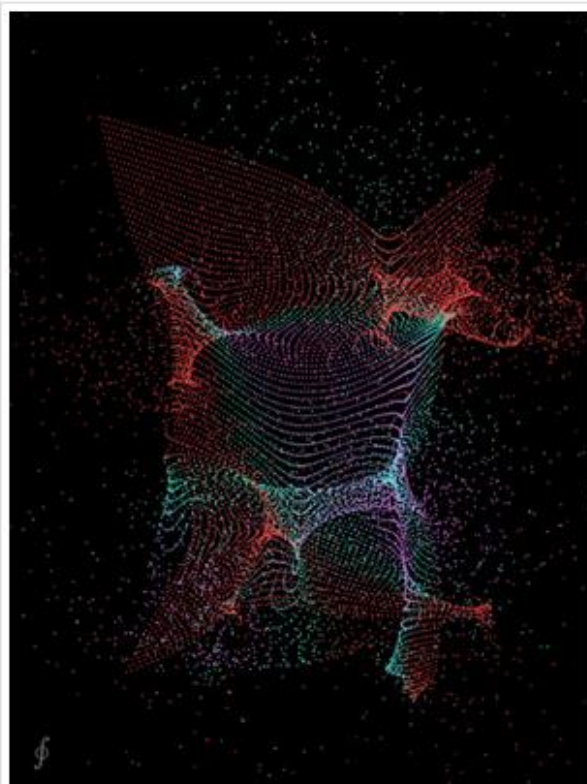
One of the clear highlights is Jeremy Rotsztain's *Action Painting (Masculine Expressionism)*, a send-up of action movies and action *painting*, linking bold gestures to violence. From a distance, and without the headphones for sound, the piece looks like a series of paint blotches projected on and over the edges of a blank stretched canvas. When you put on headphones you realize the images are generated from sounds from pulp action movies: An explosion triggers a nebulous rounded splash; grunts and kicks from a kung fu fight appear as quick blotches; a high-octane car chase produces a cutting, frantic patchwork of color. Rotsztain's computer-processed mark making questions what it means to be authentic, while his use of sound mocks the culture of machismo that surrounded Abstract Expressionism.

In *Signal to Noise* Casey Reas uses a recorded block of broadcast TV as raw data to create moving shapes and colors that look like a cross between video compression glitches and Geometric Abstraction. The source data loops every 30 minutes, a standard block of TV programming, but the piece itself never repeats; shapes cut in and out at roughly one-second intervals, the average pace of camera cuts in American TV. Sometimes figures come into view for a few seconds, but never very clearly. The whole experience is illusive and mildly frustrating, like time spent trying to adjust a rabbit ear antenna only to lose the picture. That "loss," if not the point of this canny act of media sabotage, is certainly a benefit.



Casey Reas: *Signal to Noise* (Software 3), 2013, custom software, computer

Jody Zellen's *The Unemployed* maps global unemployment data onto stick figures that wander aimlessly about a jagged grid. When you step into view of the camera, the figures flock to your outline, turning black and forming a silhouette of displaced people that includes you *and* them. The piece is meant to evoke empathy, but it ends up dehumanizing the people behind the data. Zellen's iPad app *Urban Rhythms*, composed of several interactive vignettes, does a better job of expressing the sentiment behind *Unemployed*. In one vignette you can place a single red figure on-screen among a number of black figures that then chase after it until it is surrounded and absorbed. Whether you view this as an antagonistic "gobbling up" or as an exercise in community depends on how you perceive the figures. As with *The Unemployed*, it's up to you to decide whether they represent mere statistics or human beings.



Among the other 27 apps on view, Scott Snibbe's *Gravilux* is particularly engrossing. It starts as a grid of single pixel "stars" that can be pulled toward your fingertips in the manner of matter being sucked into a black hole, changing color and trajectory as they travel in unexpected ways. The app features multi-touch input so you can play with a partner. Also included are Snibbe's musical apps, *Bubble Harp* and *OscilloScoop*, which, when run on multiple iPads, turns the gallery into an aleatory concert hall, blurring the creative distinction between artist and viewer.

Other apps use text and interaction in ways that link the visual to the literary. Jason Lewis' cyber poem, *Bastard*, sprouts antagonistic phrases ("you from around here?") from the user's fingers that then engulf the screen, suggesting how words do violence. In *Strange Rain*, Erik Loyer uses sound, interaction, and a melancholy story to create a palpable simulation of looking at rain through a skylight.

Scott Snibbe: Grivilux, iPad app

In the end, the show feels polarized. Projections take on an almost religious significance (as in the slow-motion videos of Bill Viola), while the same content on a small screen can feel pithy, but not necessarily rewarding. *Poetic Codings* attempts to push the balance back to the content of the work, not the size of the screen. It doesn't get there, but it's a push in the right direction.

– MIKKO LAUTAMO

"Poetic Codings" @ [San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art](#) through September 6, 2014.