

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Art historical references have been an integral part of Salavon's work and used in making both abstract and representational images that reference an artist's body of work or color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.

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