JAMES PRICER: DATA ART VISIONARY
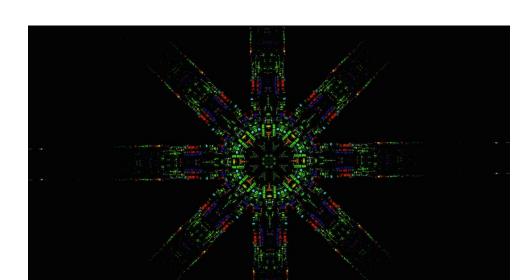

INTRODUCING JAMES PRICER

Working with James Pricer to create some unique works for Klio has been one of the highlights of the project thus far. This is because James's artistry is truly digital, beginning with the art of interpreting data and culminating in the art of generating not only an aesthetic, but a digital tale in the form of what is arguably digital poetry.

Those of you lucky enough to own a Klio will get to enjoy the intended experience because James worked hard not only to create art, but to create art that is "made for" the kind of ambient digital decor experience that a device like Klio enables, somehow straddling the decorative utility of wall art and the mesmerizing quality of a well-made documentary.

The shorter bios that we include in the Klio interface don't do justice to an artist like James, so what follows below is a more in-depth bio written by James himself.

Enjoy!

SUMMARY

My art is about creating more inclusive patterns in our understanding of ourselves and others. From the data they generate, I create individual, group, and company portraits—animated abstractions of these data— for collectors and audiences. To do so, I combine psychology, data mining, programming, and audio/video editing. Data Art, an emerging art movement that is original and innovative, uses data and generative technologies to create relevant reflections on life in the 21st century.

The work naturally appeals to intrepid collectors as well as cutting-edge technologists who are ready to leave their aesthetic mark on contemporary culture. My artwork cuts a new path in data driven, computational, and generative art at the intersection of the human and the machine.

Using a collector's own data, I create animations of the patterns in these data, revealing outliers that do not fit existing forms, and then exposing larger patterns that incorporate these anomalies. Viewers instinctively find their own patterns in this data-driven art, comparing and contrasting what they know about the source against their own interpretations of the abstract imagery. Viewers of this artwork also create their own outliers, which lead to new patterns, and thereby create new ways to enlarge their own view of themselves and others.

To develop my data art, I begin by extracting data from personal sources, such as mobile phones, DNA, web logs, activity logs, health monitors, city data stores, or company data. Next, I perform data mining to discover patterns in the data. These patterns are then used as parameters for algorithms in visualization software. I program graphical shapes and animation, but ultimately, the work is driven by the data of human life. In the final step, I add an audio component to complement and create further forms for the animation.

Viewers instinctively seek out stories within the imagery, perhaps finding patterns of their own, and creating additional unique arrangements. Humans are wired to find order in chaos, to find patterns. This drive ranges from a matter of survival in response to rustling in the brush, to determining the cause-and-effect dynamics of how we influence our coworkers and friends. We also use data to discover, explore, and invent. Observing these animations allows viewers to create their own stories and patterns, as they intertwine with the designs in the data.

INFLUENCES

Influences on my work include:

Mechanically, my art builds upon existing work by Casey Reas, who feeds data through software codes, or rules, to create computational work similar to that of Sol LeWitt.

The work involves a process of emerging layers, similar to those of Gerhard Richter, as I let the data paint the screen in ways that are surprising to me, and which cause me to observe, contemplate, and then continue layering.

Psychologically, I have been influenced by the Early Modernists and Surrealists, because they too faced a changing human/machine relationship brought on by breakthrough machines such as the camera, X-rays, and other new technologies of the early 1900s.

Philosophically, my artwork reflects the representational work of the Impressionists, as they also confronted the issue of what is perceived versus what actually exists. Just as they did, I start with what is, then build abstractions of what is perceived. I look for imagery that both symbolizes and challenges our sensibilities, ideas, and expectations.

My objective to create more inclusive patterns in our understanding of ourselves and others rests on three pillars: the psychology of human pattern-making, computer augmentation of human aesthetics, and fitting this new art form into an historical context.

PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMAN PATTERN MAKING

Humans are wired to receive content and must continually generate patterns of data with respect to their environment. Our brains evolved to imagine the rustling in a bush to be a tiger on the attack. If we instead imagined that this rustling was merely the wind, most of the time this would be true. But the psychological default to assume danger is the key to our survival.

As we evolved into more complex beings and societies, we began to establish patterns of complex internal and external behaviors, both for ourselves and for those with whom we interacted. We learned to make order out of the chaotic data of modern life, and to bring subconscious thoughts and feelings into our consciousness in order to experience life more richly.

This impulse to bring order from chaos and the subconscious into conscious awareness has a downside. These very patterns we invented to better understand ourselves and others become the very working models that keep us apart. Data that does not fit into our established models are used to identify differences between and among us. My art is about incorporating these outlier data into new patterns, to bring new ways of seeing ourselves and others.

COMPUTER AUGMENTATION OF HUMAN AESTHETICS

There is a great deal of media attention regarding the use of computers to augment the capabilities of the human body. Examples include the artificial hand that may be moved with the mind, artificial legs, and cochlear implants. My art is about using data and computers to augment human aesthetics. For example, there are over 16 million colors in the RGB color system.

Using data and computers, artists can enhance their aesthetics by allowing streams of data to select color combinations. Colors and color juxtapositions create patterns that are novel to both the artist and the viewer. Other examples include using data to drive the shapes and the positions of those shapes on the screen. Data can also be used to create camera angles to change the viewer's perspective within the visuals.

In addition, video images allow for a fourth dimension in pattern making—time. Unlike a print, a video can use time to identify more outliers and more opportunities to enlarge the data patterns. Also, moving images can be projected onto a wall with other moving images, visual artwork, and prints taken from the video itself. This composite image of stills, motion, color, and arrangements creates a novel artwork collage.

As described above, I augment my skills and aesthetics with human data as a tool to help generate colors, shapes, perspectives, and camera angles. Pressing data to extremes with powerful computers and software can reveal a sentience in the data, and this data vision and hearing has a powerful role in the augmentation human aesthetics.

COMPUTATIONAL ART WITHIN THE HISTORY OF ART

In the 15th century, oil-based paint emerged as a tool to surpass egg-based paint, resulting in the augmented creativity that flourished in the Renaissance. In the 1820s, the camera was viewed as a scientific breakthrough, but photographers were not considered artists because they created their work with a machine. Later, the acceptance of photographers as artists led the way to what is known as modern art. Around 2001, streaming music was said to destroy innovation. Instead, software emerged that can mine patterns in listener choices to enhance their listening aesthetics by offering previously unknown artists and tunes.

Today, some believe that only government agents or healthcare providers should authorize access to personal data. Meanwhile, owning and self-tracking one's personal data has the potential to create a revolution in human healthcare. Healthcare data are part of the human data that I use in my artwork.

Like the critics of the camera in the 1800s, detractors claim that computer-generated images produced by data and algorithms are merely high-tech gimmicks. But it is not gimmicks we are creating. We are creating a revolution in human augmentation, both conceptually and visually.

Ultimately, it will be the collectors who decide how this data-driven, computational art fits into the timeline of art history, as art collectors are the first champions of innovation.

SOURCES

Besides the creative process, here are some tools that help make this art happen.

DATA INPUT:

Data from Large Hadron Collider at CERN

Jawbone UP activity and sleep monitor

CVS blood pressure monitor

Weblogs

23AndMe DNA analysis

311 data from Austin, TX

krimelabb.com police data

HARDWARE:

Apple MacBook Pro

SOFTWARE:

Oracle MySQL database

LibreOffice

Processing programming language

VLC media player

Pixelmator

Garageband

Motion 5

Apple Final Cut Pro

FURTHER INFO

I am available to do commissioned work based on a collector's own data. Please visit my website at http://www.jepricer.com/

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