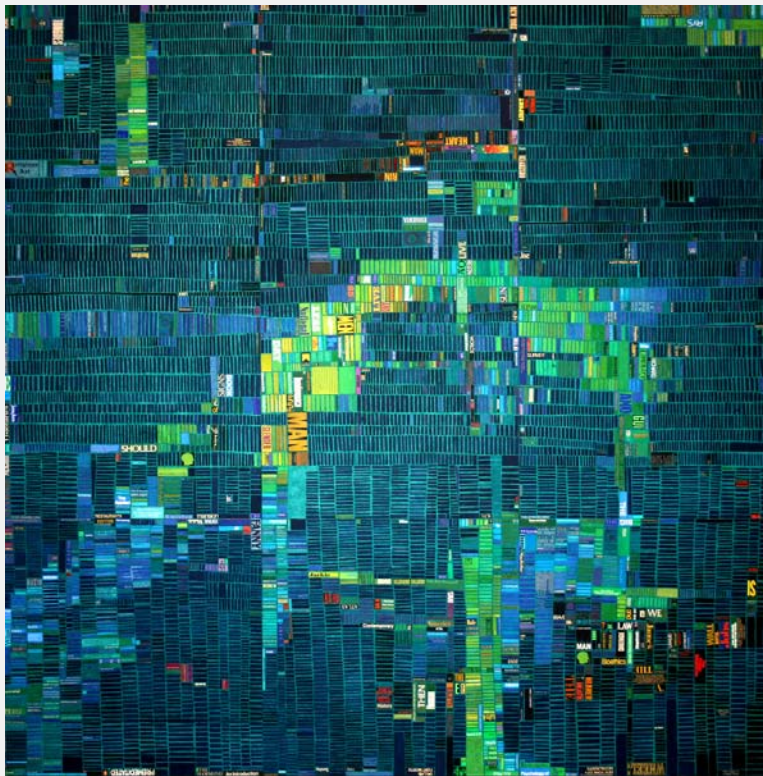


“If we could map the topology of memory”

-- A conversation with the artist Laurie Frick on the holy isle of Patmos

by Kevin R. Brine

“What the artist tries to do (either consciously or unconsciously) is to not only capture the essence of something but also to amplify it in order to more powerfully activate the same neural mechanisms that would be activated by the original object.” --V.S. Ramachandran



Man-Men, 2009 | 72" x 72" | Cut paper on 9 cradled hardpanels

Laurie Frick finds inspiration in diverse areas from new discoveries in cognitive science and information processing to nineteenth century color theory and the workshop practices of the Sieneese artists during the Renaissance. This is not surprising. The consumer experience of information technology was the province of her former career in the tech industry, before she became the visual artist, she is today with studios in New York and Texas. Frick’s life journey has taken a singularly unexpected turn.

Frick spent decades participating in the creation of the computer products by which all of us address the on-line content appearing on our laptop screens. Her career brought her from Hewlett Packard, to Compaq to Vignette. Then, to our benefit, Frick stepped away from engagement with consumer technology and took on the challenges of creating a contemporary art-practice. Frick commits to her art with the same intensity and drive as this former high-powered Silicon Valley executive once pursued new technology markets.



Seven, 2008 | 72" x 96" | Cut paper on 12 cradled hardpanels

This pursuit has led to the creation of extraordinary -- beautiful and complex -- visual fields built as collage with their elements sourced in the quotidian ephemera of contemporary print culture: paperback book covers, magazine spreads and newspaper pull-outs. As Frick told me, *"I started using magazines for collage, and then paperback book covers because I both liked the intense color, and could use color that was different than colors you could mix with paint. I thought if these are the colors that you see constantly, why not use these directly?"*

Frick's art-works, large and small, shimmer with actual (not digital or analogical) rectangular, oblong and polygon "color-bits" drawn from her collected inventory which she gathers and assembles after carefully appropriating them from discarded printed

sources and ever changing scale. To use the metaphor used by brain science (taken from the process of combustion) the visual field of the Siense painting “*triggers multiple neuron firings*” across the brain synapses, Frick reports. Or as the quote above from Ramachandran suggests, the Siense picture plane “activates the brain’s neural mechanisms.”

Based on this insight Frick builds her picture plane with the conscious intention of engaging multiple parts of the viewer’s visual cortex through the diverse semiotics of color (progressive changes in temperature, hue and transparency), shape (built from aggregates of small rectangular color scales, addressed to the surface like the application of armor plate) and verbal signs, words placed vertically or horizontally.. The introduction of words, perhaps, is a tip off Frick’s strategy to visually activate many parts of the brain in simultaneity. Do the words suggest something to you? The semantic field is left ambiguously open, triggering only by content from the personal cache of the viewer. This is why Frick’s work is not about a memory, but memory itself. In this sense the Frick painting, when meditated upon with the same intensity and perseverance with which the artist created it provides a structure of mediation for pre-conscious memory.



Red Maesta, 2008 | 8” x 16” | Cut paper on stretched linen

Laurie Frick and her husband Mark visited with my wife Jessica Smith and me at our home on the Island of Patmos in the Dodecanese. The island is famous for its cave in which St John composed the Apocalypse, the last book of the Christian bible. Over several days of hiking across fields of Patmanian wildflowers lush from an unusual abundance of spring rain, Laurie shared with me the ideas put forth in this essay. Jessica and I were fascinated to hear about the intellectual journey, which led to her visual meditation on the mysterious process of memory. Interestingly, Laurie commented to us, scientists consider memory’s purpose in humans as more about anticipating the future than recalling the past. The special promise of Frick’s paintings is the offering of an open narrative space, timeless in itself, for retrospection or anticipation.



New York Cool, 2008 | 4" x 4" | Cut paper on aluminum panel

Closing

Neuroscientists even today don't understand how memory works -- really. People often refer to memory as storage files or computers disc drives, and couldn't be more wrong. The best description I've read is that memory operates more like a blender on high speed, where all the little bits get chopped, diced and chemically wired to different places in your brain.

What you can actually remember is triggered by the emotion accompanying the event, how many times you reconsider it, and the oddness or novelty of it. One researcher wrote that during sleep, the brain gathers those things that have been considered, reconsidered and helps cement them into more lucid and clear memory. Forgetting actually helps you remember, by eliminating a big chunk of random bits.

Also, notice that what you actually see, hear and smell is not always up to you, and what you remember is not totally under your control. --Laurie Frick, May 2009

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Kevin R. Brine is an artist, writer and philanthropist living in New York City; Water Mill, New York and Patmos, Greece. Mr. Brine received a MBA in 1981 from New York University Leonard N. Stern School of Business and a MA in English and American Literature in 1993 from New York University's Graduate School of Arts and Science.

A member of the Sir Harold Acton Society, Mr. Brine is active in supporting the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library where he established the Brine Commons and a fund for 18th Century Literature. In the English Department, Mr. Brine funds programs for doctoral students and for graduate English colloquium. In 1999, he was honored with the Alumni Meritorious Service Award. Mr. Brine also served as trustee from 2003-2007.

Mr. Brine's foundation, The Jessica E. Smith and Kevin R. Brine Charitable Trust, founded in 1989, supports cultural education, medical and environmental institutions. Mr. Brine is a co-founder of Artemis IV, LLC, which is a fund for sustainable agriculture. Mr. Brine is a director of Delphi Financial Group, an insurance company listed on the New York Stock Exchange. He is a trustee of SCB, Inc. (formerly Sanford C. Bernstein, & Co, Inc.), The Whitney Museum of American Art, The World Monuments Fund and CalArts. He is also a member of the Chairman's Council of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.