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Data + Art = cranium-expanding exhibit

Posted by Christopher Shea February 18, 2009 03:45 PM

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A still from Radiohead's "House of Cards" non-video video

The Shepard Fairey exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art is certainly in the running for the cool urban art show of the moment (read the [Globe review](#), and the [New Yorker's take](#)), but a slightly techier-skewing slice of the hipster demographic might vote for [Data + Art: Art and Science in the Age of Information](#), now on view on the left coast, at the Pasadena Museum of California Art.

The exhibition "explores the hidden stories revealed in data" by surveying recent innovations in its collection and marshaling. A main draw is a working version of the scanning system used to make Radiohead's ethereal music video "House of Cards." For that video, technologist-artist Aaron Koblin used laser scanners and other devices to recreate, in topographic fashion (and utterly sans cameras) a cityscape, party scene, and bandleader Thom Yorke's singing face. In each case, the image was fashioned from data points indicating the distance of solid surfaces -- or fleshy features -- from the scanner.

There are other notable Koblin works on display in Pasadena, too: Strikingly alive graphical depictions of airplane traffic within (and into and out of) the United States. (Watch the East Coast bloom as morning arrives; watch, not without a twinge of discomfort, transatlantic planes missing toward New York.) And the Long Now Foundation contributed a copy of one of its brilliant Rosetta Disks. On it is etched, in text that begins legibly before shrinking to nano-scale, 13,000 pages of information on 1,500 human languages, the whole thing small enough to hold with your hands.

In the vintage-infoporn category, there's a wall-sized version of the famous map by Charles Joseph Minard depicting Napoleon's losses as he marched into Russia -- made famous in part by the information-packaging guru Edward Tufte. A thick arrow, indicating the French army's movements, grows ever-thinner over miles, months, and battles, before an ignominious U-turn. Then it keeps on thinning.

(Via [Spurgeonblog](#))

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