

The Boston Globe



Bill Jacobson's photograph "A Series of Human Decisions" at the Robert Klein Gallery.

BILL JACOBSON: Some Planes
At: Robert Klein Gallery,
38 Newbury St., through May 9.
617-267-7997,
www.robertkleingallery.com

In focus

Photographer Bill Jacobson used to make images that were wildly out of focus. Because they were hard but not impossible to read, they sparked longing and nostalgia. Lately, as his show at Robert Klein demonstrates (which includes a handful of older shots), everything is in focus.

In "A Series of Human Decisions," he examines architectural spaces such as therapists' offices and artists' studios. Jacobson attends to the forms of these rooms, and how they guide the eye. "A Series of Human Deci-

sions (1941)" shows a small black metal desk and chair set at a diagonal to walls of cherry cabinets and bookcases. There's a precision to the angles and planes of this scene. They feel empty, calculated.

Then he set out for the desert to study the horizon line. The astonishing second group, "Some Planes," features bleached tones and grand expanses; they're almost abstract, and recall the meditative clarity and horizontality of paintings by Agnes Martin.

Some, such as "Some Planes (204)" are almost without texture, just a curtain of pale, pale blue over a sea of beige. Then there's "Some Planes (436)," in which the eternal white sky looms over a field lumpy with hummocks striated in blue-gray and mauve. These are gorgeous works, crisp and unearthly.

The art of data

"PARSE: Visualizing Data That Makes Us Human" features work by artists who take raw data and turn it into art. Some are more successful than others. The show, at Axiom Center for New and Experimental Media, is presented as part of the Boston Cyberarts Festival, and curated by Axiom's founding director, Heidi Kayser.

"Syntenograph," by Ben Fry and Eugene Kuo, makes drawings based on patterns found among the genetic codes of several creatures. They spring from the viewer spinning a dial that moves the codes around. A random drawing is a random drawing; it lacks human intention. Jennifer Hall gives physical form to patterns of brain waves generated during REM sleep, but here we see an artist's sensibility at work: One

of her pieces is made of sterling silver, and looks like a crown made of dribbling mercury.

It's hard to resist "Flesh-map," by Fernanda Viégas and Martin Wattenberg. It features beautiful images of a man and a woman over which they have charted information gathered over the Internet about what body parts people like to touch, and to have touched. It is fun and yummy, if not eye-opening.

Finally, Jason Salavon finds scores of an iconographic image — such as a child in Santa's lap, or a bride and groom — and digitally mashes them all together. The results are like an early Bill Jacobson photo — all fuzz, but with just enough information that you know exactly what you're looking at — as if the essence of Santa has no detail, but is just something you sense.