America in a Single Moment

The U.S. Census Bureau was moving to a new headquarters, and they commissioned Chicago artist Jason Salavon to create an installation to celebrate their work. What Salavon produced was striking—both visually and intellectually. Titled *American Varietal*, the 10-foot tall, 40-foot wide photographic mural is a time map of the American people from 1790 to 2000 created from census data.

The mural isn't merely a representation of the Bureau's records over the 210 years—it's actually made of the comma-delineated files, the data points from every county over the length of those two centuries. Salavon wrote a computer program in C Sharp to model the massive data, and then he rendered the results using the Maya 3D program. The colors weren't randomly selected—they were sampled from the state flags.

The result is a large, three-dimensional image that displays two centuries of American development, with every county heard from. As the image is rotated, there are views that look like open file drawers and others that have the kind of cathedral patterns you expect to find in organic structures. All of it is fashioned out of real numbers from our history.

American Varietal, the 40-foot, two-dimensional slice of the moment, will be installed later this summer at the Census Bureau's new home in Suitland, Md. Meanwhile, you can see hundreds of samples from the image at http://salavon.com/AmVar/AmVarStudy_Stills.php. Use your refresh key to change to the next set of 21 views. Or click the item "dataform anim" on the left. It's an animation that flies you around and into the entire structure.

Other works of Jason Salavon are currently exhibited at the Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Gallery in Soho (New York) and the Tony Wight Gallery (Chicago). ■

Two different views of *American Varietal* are *Calyx* (above) and *Directorate* (below).

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY JASON SALAVON