Amy Ellingson
Technosignatures
2023

Technosignature (n.) any measurable property or effect that provides scientific evidence of past or present technology

In her third Robischon Gallery solo exhibition, entitled *Technosignatures,* New Mexico artist Amy Ellingson offers a diverse constellation of works, including paintings, robotic drawings, tapestry, and glazed porcelain sculpture. Ellingson has used digital imagery as the basis for her paintings for over three decades. She is interested in the vast, incalculable effects of the rise of digital technology on both artistic production and on the experience of looking at art. At the same time, she is invested in the practice of painting as a deeply humanistic activity. Her work is a conflation of traditional methodologies and new technologies, of hand-made and digitally produced, of strict protocol and strategic work-arounds, of natural and artificial, and of fast and slow. Her work addresses this moment in time, in which we, as a species, are betwixt and between the analog past and a digitally immersive future.

Ellingson states: "Increasingly, I use the data files associated with my painting process—raster and vector files, primarily—to create related objects that are intrinsic, and also tangential, to my painting practice. The various manifestations of the data, in a range of media, suggest the mutable, trickle-down and omnipresent effects of digital information. The works relay the same basic informational 'code' with varying degrees of digital and material mediation. Together, they address the multiplicity of expressive possibilities within a limited system that explores the nature of formal repetition, image and object-hood. In addition, they question the primacy, as well as the alleged obsolescence, of painting."

The six paintings that comprise the *Loop* suite incorporate visual density and complexity, interlocking and interconnected forms, a tenuous sense of order, and spatial fluctuation. The palette, though harmonious throughout, allows each work to stake its claim. The *Loop* paintings are based on procedural variation within a strict set of parameters. In computer programming, a loop is a sequence of instructions which is specified once and carried out multiple times, either until a desired condition is met or, perhaps, indefinitely. Ellingson often makes groups of paintings that are nearly identical to each other, with slight variations. Elements are reversed, flipped, and rendered in different colors. Thus, each work is part of the group, but also a stand-alone entity, asserting its individual identity through a combination of sameness and difference, much in the way that differentiation is expressed through permutations in genetic or computer code.

The Minerva Chronicles are robotic drawings that Ellingson began in 2022. They are 'drawings of paintings,' that advance her investigation of recursive strategies. The project began with the intent to explore a new way of making that allows for unpredictable and uncontrolled results. Ellingson uses

four different software programs with her drawing robot (an x-y plotter named Minerva). Paradoxically, the plotter works best with traditional fountain pens and archival fountain pen inks. She states, "I love the challenge of working with the wonky combination of high- and low-tech. To make the drawings, I use advanced, sophisticated graphics software as well as more 'democratic,' open-source software, which is often quite glitchy and rather limited. I'm continually compelled to devise work-arounds to get the software to do what I want it to do. In a strange way, the robotic drawings are more free and unexpected than they would be if drawn by hand. Making them is an act of giving up control, in a sense, and surrendering to the awkward process of combining old and new technologies."

Ellingson's *Artifacts* are glazed porcelain sculptures derived from 2D image files. The imagery is adapted for 3D modeling, and the works are 3D printed in porcelain. They are hybrid forms that appear organic and synthetic at the same time. Ellingson views them as "seeds that contain all of the data for the paintings; or, contrarily, as meteoric forms that represent the paintings as compressed, compacted objects." The porcelain works show no obvious signs of 3D printing, and their intimate scale is determined by the constraints of the proprietary printing process of Ellingson's fabricator, based in Ukraine. The artist states, "Although they may resemble seeds, pods, rocks, or other natural forms, these works are sculptural versions of my paintings. They subtly undermine the hierarchies and defining characteristics associated with categories of 'painting' and 'sculpture,' as they would never exist without the paintings. The paintings always come first. They are the catalyst for the production of all related works."

Ellingson's *Grand Loop Variations* are jacquard tapestries, created in collaboration with Magnolia Editions. This project is the fruition of the artist's interest in jacquard weaving; the Jacquard machine, patented in 1804, simplified the weaving process by using punch cards to determine designs and patterns in the weaving process. This early technology is considered an important step in the history of computing. Magnolia Editions' notable innovation within this time-honored tradition involves the computerization of custom palettes, ensuring fidelity to the artist's original design. The tapestries are woven at a small, family-owned mill in Belgium. Ellingson's *Grand Loop Variations* are closely related to the paintings in the *Loop* suite, but are unique designs created specifically for the weaving process. She says, "it's a dream come true to work with the team at Magnolia, with their cutting edge digital expertise, to create works that have such deep, historical associations. Tapestries have distinct tactile and optical qualities, as they are woven in low-relief. Colors literally recede and advance in physical space. And, of course, tapestries represent centuries of skill and craft in terms of their presence as art objects. I appreciate the history of the medium, not least because of its relationship to early computing devices."

Technosignatures represents, through a range of media, a sense of vast potentiality. Ellingson's paintings are the matrix for her broad artistic practice; she is interested in longstanding theoretical, art historical, and philosophical debates about the primacy of painting. She states, "I wish to expand the context for my work— juxtaposing the truths of painting with the unfolding realities of digital technology—in a way that will engage new audiences inclusive of, as well as beyond, the specific discourse of abstract painting."

Amy Ellingson's work has been exhibited widely in the United States and in Tokyo, Japan. She received a B.A. in Studio Art from Scripps College in Claremont, CA and an M.F.A. from CalArts in Valencia, CA. She is the recipient of the Fleishhacker Foundation Eureka Fellowship and the Artadia Grant to Individual Artists and has been awarded fellowships at MacDowell, the Ucross Foundation and the Civitella Ranieri Foundation. Ellingson's paintings have been included in group exhibitions such as *Open Ended: Painting and Sculpture Since 1900* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *Unfamiliar Again: Contemporary Women Abstractionists* at the Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane University, and *Alcoves 20/20* at the New Mexico Museum of Art. Her work is held in various public collections, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Crocker Art Museum, the San Jose Museum of Art, the Oakland Museum of California, the Berkeley Art Museum, the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, the US Embassies in Algeria and Tunisia, and the United States Department of State, Washington, DC. Her 2015 public commission, *Untitled (Large Variation),* is an 1100 square foot ceramic mosaic mural, permanently on view at the San Francisco International Airport. She recently installed a large-scale commission for Sam Houston State University in Conroe, Texas, and has been awarded a commission for a new public work for the San Diego International Airport, which will be completed in 2024. Ellingson was Associate Professor of Art at the San Francisco Art Institute from 2000 to 2011 and has served on the Board of Directors at Root Division, a San Francisco nonprofit arts organization, since 2011. A native of the San Francisco Bay Area, Amy Ellingson currently lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico.