

Theta

Violet Dennison

Freak Like Me

June 9 - July 17, 2021

Theta is pleased to present “Freak Like Me”, Violet Dennison’s first solo exhibition at the gallery. The show features a group of four new translucent woven works and a light-based installation. In much of her work, Dennison explores connections between self expression and the infrastructure of technical systems that often function unseen.

Computers compress and activate data through the encryption and instruction of binary language—0s and 1s. The data is activated via machine code instruction and eventually creates the user interface. These works function similarly. Through a series of steel-framed weaves made primarily of pneumatic airline tubing and aluminum, the artist extracts encoded language and imposes it onto vivid skins that span the space of the gallery. Each weave is a piece of writing. Each knot is a word from the English language that has been encrypted.

In 2020, Dennison commissioned design engineer Sam Wolk to create the “Knot Application,” an evolved model of the knot formation work she first developed in 2018. The program employs two key techniques. First, a lossless data compression algorithm called “dictionary coding” and a polyalphabetic cryptography algorithm called a Vigenère Cipher. The artist inputs text, then each word is assigned a numerical value, encrypted, and spit out as knot instruction. The knots are woven according to a binary: over or under. An example instruction for one knot is: UO, Ou, UU, U.

The texts encoded in the works vary from seed phrases, personal writings, and poems. *Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt* contains an excerpt from J.D. Laing’s book, *Knots*, which outlines common human thought patterns. For instance:

“What one has
Has been given one
Therefor everything one has
One is entitled to.
The more one has
The better one is
Because the more one has been rewarded
For being good
Therefor I get better and better
Through ‘making’ more and more
The more I make
The more I have
The better I am
The more I am”

Neither the encrypted content nor the physical artworks are pure expression, but rather, a sensitive collaboration. The weavings both generate and model the artist’s data set, blurring the separation between content and form, prayer and affirmation. So much self determination is carried out by putting a thought into the universe and hoping it returns a reward. The subjective process of encrypting one’s ego creates an unstable space of abstracted potential that determines everything and promises nothing. As we slip evermore into the realm of a machine-guided mirror, we catch ourselves now and then, questioning whether our discomforts and desires are really our own. Working in tandem with the machine, Dennison steps into the rhythm of the binary, the hypnotic lure of the projection, and presents works that give form to encryption, material to the value of faith and structure to our innermost thoughts.

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Violet Dennison (b. 1989, Bridgeport CT) is a sculptor and multimedia artist based in New York. She has held recent solo exhibitions at the Kunstverein Freiburg, DE; Kunsthall Stavanger, NO; and Jan Kaps, Cologne, DE. Her work has been included in the 2018 New Museum Triennial and the Main Project of the 6th Moscow Biennial for Young Art . She has also exhibited at David Zwirner, New York; The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, CT; Bureau, New York; and Kunsthaus Kollitsch, Klagenfurt, AT. She received her MFA from Bard College in 2019 and BFA from New York University in 2011. She co-founded and co-operated the art space Violet's Café in Brooklyn (2013-2015). Her work has been reviewed in the New York Times, The Washington Post, Mousse Magazine and ArtForum.