Research Grant – Fall 2009

Title or Proposal:  Ground Control

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Abstract:
I am seeking funds to continue the production of “Ground Control,” a series of four goblin tapestry rugs depicting satellite images of the US/Mexico border. This work investigates the socio-political effects of vision technologies on the migration of undocumented immigrants. The process of making this work is inherently collaborative and spans international borders as well as borders between science, art and sociology. Funds will be used to pay for materials and production of the four-part project at Arena México Arte Contemporáneo in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Proposal:
In my trans-disciplinary practice I employ a variety of techniques to interrogate human relations mediated by rationalized vision technologies and investigate the subtle seductiveness of power facilitated by networks of visual control.

I am currently in the beginning stages of a body of work informed by the unique socio-political climate of the US border with Mexico and the imaging technologies used to uphold it. “Ground Control” is a series of four wool Gobelin tapestry-rugs that reproduce images of the US/Mexico border taken by the Terra satellite’s Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer (ASTER) (Figure 1.) ASTER is made possible by collateral exertions of energy, economy, research and labor between NASA, Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) and Japan’s Earth Remote Sensing Data Analysis Center (ERSDAC). This trans-national means of information collection displaces the distinctions of national margins the ASTER images depict, while the electromagnetic ‘red-shifted’ abstraction of the border obscures the image’s political content.

The first piece in this series “Mexicali/Calexico” has already been exhibited at the National Museum of Mexican Art and is currently in a show at the University of Wisconsin. I will show the completed series in a solo show at the Chicago based Thomas Robertello Gallery in 2011 and intend to further promote the work to national and international institutions of both science and art, thereby broadening my professional career and increasing the visibility of USF.

The tradition of Gobelin weaving comes from the 17th century workshop of French dyer Giles Gobelin who was the inventor of a scarlet dye that also bears his name. The pictorial weaving technique was exported to Mexico at the beginning of the 20th century where it assumed a new woolen materiality blending seamlessly into the traditional Mexican craft aesthetic (Figure 2). The Enlightenment-era-trans-national-reinventing history of Goblin weaving produces an interesting vector to the Cartesian/Enlightenment world-view from which NASA’s map-making-red-shifting machine vision stems.

The remediation from immaterial virtually generated satellite image to handwoven wool rug critically examines the representation of the US/Mexico border by machine vision technologies. It also explores the means by which the cartographic form functions to facilitate acts of violence, uphold the assertion of boundaries between cultural and political institutions of power, and reinforce the panopticism of the Enlightenment worldview.
Exhibited on the floor, the four area rugs that will make up “Ground Control” seduce the viewer to literally walk on the art and in doing so break the physical and virtual borders normally imposed by velvet ropes, motion detectors, and gallery mores (Figure 3). This tactic is intended to broaden the scope of critique to implicate the viewer and reflexively question the physical and virtual enforcement of our border with Mexico.