

ARTFORUM

Yvonne Singer

LOOP GALLERY

1174 Queen Street,

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Signs of Life; an intimate portrait of someone I don't know (detail), 2008, mixed media, dimensions variable.

The title of Yvonne Singer's installation, *Signs of Life; an intimate portrait of someone I don't know*, 2008, may at first seem misplaced, as the piece is mostly composed of numerical and bureaucratic documentation. The value of Singer's project resides in the capacity of this impersonal information to speak to the patient viewer on emotive, aesthetic, and metaphoric levels.

Affixed to one wall are three long rows of hand-rendered charts that laboriously trace medication use over the course of over ten years. Scrawled at the top of several of the graph-paper sheets is the word PREDNISON, a steroid that may have profound side effects when prescribed over the long term. Lines indicating levels of dosage generally ascend and descend gradually but occasionally spike—perhaps expressing an attack that needed quelling. Other pages are crammed full of endless streams of tiny dates and medication amounts (4PRED), conveying a sense of *horror vacui* and a frugality with paper that seems irrational to those who have not lived through a war. Recalling Hanne Darboven's series of "*Konstruktionen*" drawings, 1966–68, the sheer accumulation of handwritten numerical data may reflect the ongoing and repetitive processing of a traumatic event and a prolonged attempt to survive physiologically. The images also express a ritualized lifestyle of drug consumption, regimented in some sense by the daily tactile experience of drawing lines and recording numbers.

The notion of trauma is further elaborated in digital prints depicting travel documents from 1945 belonging to a Tibor Josef Vandor. Issued in Vienna, Budapest, and Bern, among other cities, these include identifying data such as nationality, birth date, eye and hair color, and distinguishing marks that help constitute the portrait mentioned in the show's title, as well as another, nonmedical story of survival—that of homeless postwar

diaspora. Singer's enlargement of these documents within a gallery context provokes one into unexpected aesthetic considerations of multihued inks, stamps, written notations, and patterned backgrounds—all designed to prevent forgery but taking on an abstract lives in themselves. This palimpsest of official marks and colors is brought back to the personal realm when the viewer peruses a small vitrine containing two L-shaped pins with attached screws—one made of steel and the other a fragile glass replica. The original steel pin was used to repair a broken hip. When one becomes aware that the pin and all of the documents belonged to Singer's father, who was cremated, the charred black metal object supplies a further profound layer of emotional depth.

—*Dan Adler*

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