RUNNING THE NUMBERS: AN AMERICAN SELF-PORTRAIT

Photographs and text by Chris Jordan

The images in this series look at contemporary American culture through the austere lens of statistics. Each image portrays a specific quantity of something: 1.14 million paper supermarket bags (the number used every hour in the US); 106,000 aluminum cans (30 seconds of can consumption) and so on. My hope is that images representing these quantities might have a different effect than the raw numbers alone, such as we find daily in articles and books. Statistics can feel abstract and anesthetizing, making it difficult to connect with and make meaning of 3.6 million SUV sales in one year, for example, or 2.3 million Americans in prison, or 426,000 cellphones retired every day. This project visually examines these vast and bizarre measures of our society in large, intricately detailed prints assembled from thousands of smaller photographs.

Chris Jordan is an internationally acclaimed photographic artist in Seattle, Washington (www.chrisjordan.com).
Depicts 65,000 cigarettes, equal to the number of American teenagers under age 18 who become addicted to cigarettes every month.
BARBIE DOLLS, 2008, 60” x 80”
Depicts 32,000 Barbies, equal to the number of elective breast augmentation surgeries performed monthly in the US in 2006.
In the US every hour, 1.14 million brown supermarket bags, the number used, depict 2.4 million brown paper bags.

PAPER BAGS 2007 60"x80"
SHIPPING CONTAINERS 2007, 60” x 120”
Depicts 38,000 shipping containers, the number of containers processed through American ports every twelve hours.