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An installation view of "Sujeto Cuantificado: Quantified Subject,"  
by Ignacio Gatica. (Vivian Doering/Von Ammon Co.)

The world is distilled into colored dabs of electronic light in the art of Yu-Jung Chen and Ignacio Gatica. But where Chen draws inspiration from geography, both natural and built, Gatica takes his cues from commerce.

Ever-changing patterns dance across LED strips in two of the four pieces in "Dynamic Loop-Modulating Algorithm," Chen's show at IA&A at Hillyer. The Taiwanese artist is also a musician and composer, and he has outfitted a septet of LED strips with a whirring soundtrack. Its whooshes seep into the room, neatly complementing the motion of a computer-animated, widescreen video projection, "Lightscape of the Silence." This 10-minute loop tracks through abstracted locations that variously suggest the rustic, urban or cosmic. They're rendered mostly in black-and-white but occasionally blossom into bright red.

Chen's goal is to "try to create a hazy boundary between natural and man-made objects," his statement explains. In this, he joins many contemporary artists and musicians who use inherently precise digital technology to simulate imprecise human experiences. The terrain he seeks to explore is inside your head.

Photographs of desolate Manhattan luxury boutiques are among the few items in "Sujeto Cuantificado: Quantified Subject," Gatica's stark show at Von Ammon Co. But the blingiest objects are two LED strips, one vertical and the other circular and suspended from the ceiling. They scroll real-time data of, respectively, debt owed to the World Bank and the share values of major multinational corporations.

Gatica is a New Yorker who grew up in a Chile ruled by dictator Augusto Pinochet, whose economic policies were under the sway of U.S. policy and free-market absolutists from the University of Chicago. Gatica's work can be seen as an act of retrospective resistance against that era, and an inquiry into capitalism in general.

The artist has plenty of ideological allies, notably urban graffiti artists. That circular stock-market ticker is interactive: Visitors are invited to swipe a Gatica-designed corporate-logo credit card through a digital reader, a move that temporarily replaces the market data with a protest graffiti found in New York or Santiago. The Prada card, for example, recently yielded "All currency is fake."

Gatica was captivated when the pandemic lockdowns suspended Manhattan's high-ticket retail trade. So the artist made those photos and a video of shops with their facades boarded up or their merchandise removed. It turns out there are global forces that can be more powerful than money. – Mark Jenkins, 21 April 2023

*Ignacio Gatica: Sujeto Cuantificado: Quantified Subject Through May 7 at Von Ammon Co., 3330 Cady's Alley NW.*