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## The Quantified Self, behind the Cover Art

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## The Quantified Self, behind the Cover Art

### Abstract

We lead quantified lives. The information we send and receive through our computers, CD players, and smart phones is coded in ones and zeroes. We exist as numerical accounts, license numbers, and login IDs. Anyone who has ever waited on hold for a live customer service representative understands the desire to be treated like a person, not a number. We each want acceptance for our inherent peculiarities and consideration for our circumstance—conditions we believe extrinsic to numbers.

### Keywords

numbers, art, equations, data, painting, nine unknown

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## **The Quantified Self, the Cover Art**

Leslie Love Stone

We lead quantified lives. The information we send and receive through our computers, CD players, and smart phones is coded in ones and zeroes. We exist as numerical accounts, license numbers, and login IDs. Anyone who has ever waited on hold for a live customer service representative understands the desire to be treated like a person, not a number. We each want acceptance for our inherent peculiarities and consideration for our circumstance—conditions we believe extrinsic to numbers. And yet, cholesterol levels and credit scores convey more about our lifestyles and the way in which we conduct our affairs than our names. Mathematicians know that numbers are natural, real, and complex. They can be positive or negative, rational or irrational, but each is discrete, unique, and continuous. What could be more human than that?

Since the 1970s, individual metrics collected through self-tracking technology have allowed us to examine the correlations among our own behaviors, states, and performance. We measure the calories we consume and the number of steps we take; we monitor our heart rates, REM sleep, and glucose levels. Although there are criticisms about a practice that, at times, seems more self-obsessed than self-aware, we ultimately quantify our daily lives in order to improve them. Perhaps, Pythagoras had it right when he admonished, “Know thyself” and “all is number.”

To the quantitatively fluent, an equation like  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$  is as transcendent as one of Byron’s lyric poems, for numbers walk not only in beauty, but also in truth. Numbers are the

great equalizers; they level the playing field by stripping away cultural bias and outward appearance. Like humanity, mathematics is universal, precise, elegant, and infinitely interesting and engaging in its varied expressions.

Just a number, indeed.

### **About the Paintings**

In 1960, Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier published their groundbreaking book, *Morning of the Magicians*. In it, the authors described a secret society founded nearly 2,300 years ago for the purpose of guarding ancient but highly advanced knowledge that might have dangerous results if revealed before humanity is intellectually and morally prepared. Nine individuals, whose membership is known only to the society, protect nine books that contain information detailing subjects from cosmology to sociology. Instructions are laid out for waging psychological warfare, communicating with extraterrestrials, defying gravity, traveling through time, and extending human life. Over the centuries, the members have on occasion whispered in the ear of some wise outsider in order to encourage our curiosity, guide our development, and protect us from catastrophic ends. (Judo is thought to have been an accidental leak.) For me, these nine unknown are the original STEAM team.

The cover art for this second issue of The STEAM Journal features nine quantified portraits. Whether whisperer, whisperee, or trigger, each 6" x 6" painting is a depiction of someone associated with the nine books. The paintings together compose one piece entitled, *The*

*Nine Unknown.* Created specifically for this journal, these paintings are not charts or graphic representations of randomly connected data. Rather, they are part of a larger art practice that examines the models and theories we construct to understand an increasingly complex world. I use mathematics, geometric shapes, and color to abstract and reanimate statistics and other information; I use form and composition to explore the space between what we know and what we don't know.

Like my reductivist predecessors, I use simplicity of form to interpret complicated content. Enough information is given in each painting to tempt viewers to solve the puzzle, fill in the gaps, and work out a structure. Based on real data, statistics are presented in unconventional, often arbitrary ways to best consider and question their viability. The model is assembled with a multilayered system, employing a rudimentary counting routine and color coding to mimic the imperfect ways in which we make connections and assign signifiers. The intersection of disparate aspects of each of the nine unknown is presented as:

$$\text{Quantified Self} := \text{Lifespan} \cap \text{Character} \cap \text{Discipline}$$

I also use color to create movement, control space, and reveal relational dynamics; each color has its own abilities and psychological articulation. Color communicates rhythm, temperature, and an almost mystical capacity for individual expression. I mix a full spectrum (including black) from only three hues to suggest the limitations. Because this trio generates an infinite number of colors, profound possibility is contained in their combination and coded into each painting.

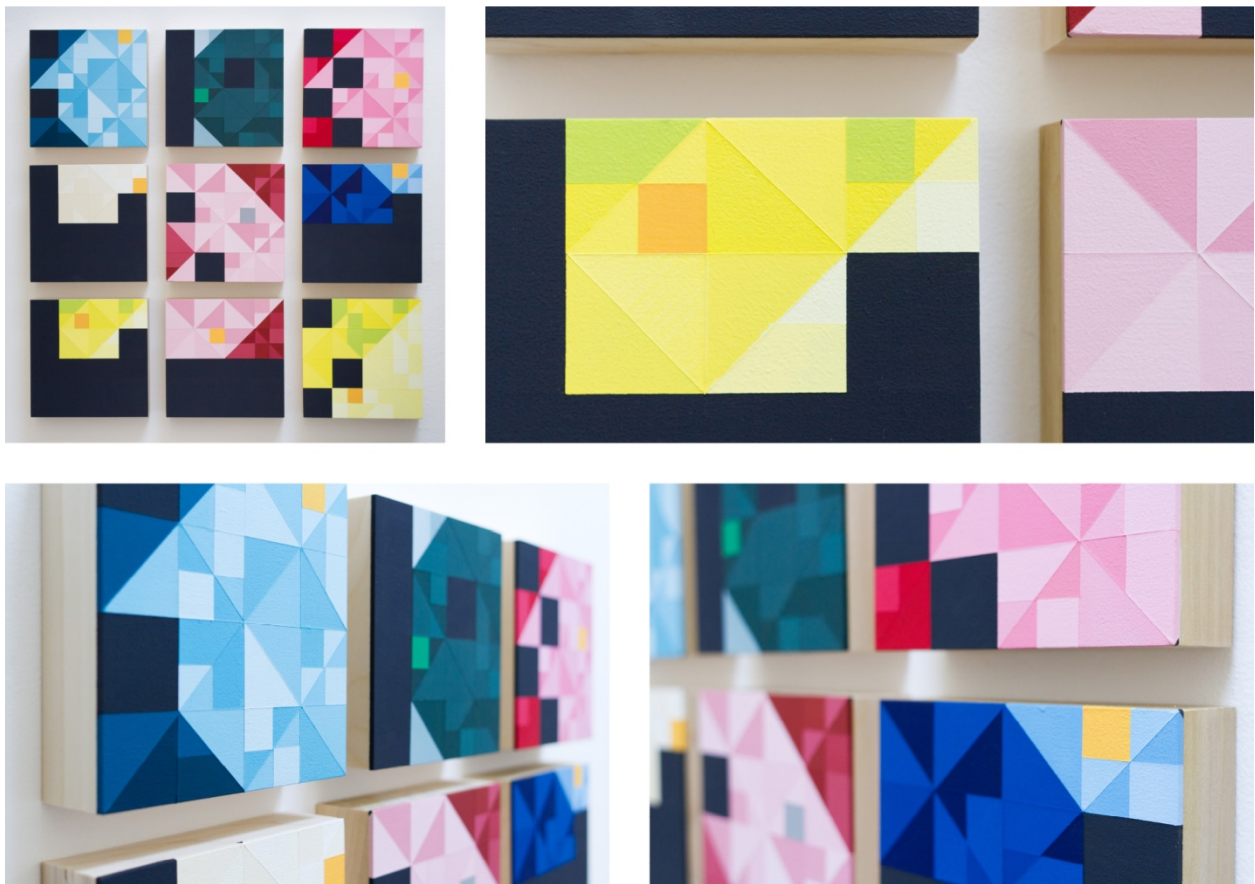
The small size of my paintings speaks to our imperfect frame of reference. I believe our inability to develop clear and accurate models is, at least in part, based on the many limitations we face as imaginative beings living in physically restrictive bodies. Size serves another purpose: like a whisper, diminutive pieces pique intellectual curiosity and pull viewers into a conversation that is contemplative and engaging; they are a knowing twinkle in the eye. The panels are made of wood to remind us that the constructs we create rest on organic, natural phenomenon.

Some of the individuals portrayed in this piece are gone, some are still with us; all are real and have lived during my lifetime. Many are connected to the others if only obscurely; most are multidisciplinary. And it is, of course, strictly speculation on my part that these individuals are somehow associated with the society—if the society exists, it is secret. *The Nine Unknown* are:

<b>Book*</b>	<b>Individual</b>
Propaganda and Psychological Warfare	Jiang Qing
Physiology and Touch of Death	Moshe Feldenkrais
Microbiology	Patient Zero
Alchemy	Charles Thomas Close
Scientific Communication	Carl Edward Sagan
Gravity and Antigravity	Sylvester James Gates
Cosmology and Hyperspace	Kip Stephen Thorne
Light and Speed of Light Technology	Lene Vestergaard Hau
Sociology and the Rise and Fall of Empires	Ernesto Guevara

\* As described in Talbot Mundy's 1923 novel, *The Nine Unknown*.

In life and art, it is the tension between clarity and possibility, between what we know and what we don't know, that engages and enchants us. We replace our theories with better models and more accurate hypotheses because we are driven as much by the search for truth as truth itself. Once we accept that we do not know, that we can only start where we are and work with what we have, life becomes filled with surprise and expectation.



## Resources

Mundy, Talbot. The Nine Unknown. Rockville, Maryland, Wildside Press, 1923.

Pauwels, Louis and Jacques Bergier. Morning of the Magicians. New York, Stein and Day, 1960.

Quantified Self, "About," <<http://quantifiedself.com/about/>>

**Leslie Love Stone** is a conceptual painter whose work often focuses on the models we build to make sense of the world and ourselves. She uses geometry to abstract and animate statistical information, organic objects, and color. The result is a metamorphic revelation that transforms clarity into possibility.

Leslie's work has been included in a number of group shows and she was the solo artist in the Mosaic Gallery exhibition of *They Fill My Eyes, a Tribute to the Children of Newtown*. (For more information, see [http://www.cgu.edu/PDFFiles/Flame/FLAME\\_Spring\\_2013.pdf](http://www.cgu.edu/PDFFiles/Flame/FLAME_Spring_2013.pdf).)

A former banking executive and native South Carolinian, Leslie is a graduate of Claremont Graduate University's prestigious MFA program and recipient of the Karl and Beverly Benjamin Fellowship in Art. She received her MBA from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, with concentrations in marketing and international business, and her bachelor of science degree in finance and economics from the University of Nevada, Reno. She also holds an associate of arts degree in studio art and graphic design from Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo, California. Leslie is a member of Mensa. For more information about the artist, visit her website at [www.leslielovestone.com](http://www.leslielovestone.com).

In consultation with:

Sarah Alkurdi  
Michael Franklin  
Shanna Livermore  
Joe Tawan Roberts

**Sarah Alkurdi** has a diverse background in information technology, client solutions, strategic marketing, and international education. She holds over six years of intense hands-on business training and expertise and combined competencies in staff training and development, strategic marketing, client relations management, visual designs and student services.

A former Customer Relationship Manager at Cisco Systems, Sarah is currently working on her Ph.D. in Information Systems and Technology at Claremont Graduate University. Her research interests include international student education, management information systems, persuasion, and persuasive technology. She also holds an M.S. degree in Information Systems and Technology from Claremont Graduate University and a B.S. degree in Computer Science from King Saud University in Saudi Arabia.



Sarah hopes to be able to use her expertise in Information Technology, customer relations, and student services, as well as her extensive travel, to work with international students and revolutionize their experience when attending a school or program in the United States.

**Michael Franklin** just completed his Claremont Graduate University Ph.D in Applied Mathematics. His research interests include computational fluid dynamics, mathematical modeling, and numerical analysis. His dissertation topic is the mathematical and numerical modeling of electrowetting, which is a microfluidic technology used to manipulate small volumes of fluid. Applications include display technology, variable focal-length lenses with no mechanical moving parts, and lab-on-a-chip devices, which allow the miniaturization of biochemical assays.

When Michael is not writing his dissertation or writing algorithms to simulate fluid dynamics, he enjoys listening to music, playing guitar, and drawing on walls and doors with Sharpie markers (a tradition through his academic apartment-hopping adventures). Michael has always been fascinated with the fusion between science and art and his academic interests have always involved a highly visual component, for example, the visualization of fluid flow or writing image-processing algorithms to detect the edges in biological images.

**Shanna Livermore** is an interdisciplinary-focused professional with enthusiasm and dedicated interest in applied research and evaluation in the social sciences, with expertise in evaluation, health education, database management, survey research, technical assistance and project management. She graduated from Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania in 1999, with a B.S. in Health Science and obtained a Certificate of Advanced Evaluation Studies from Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California in 2008, followed by a Masters in Public Health in 2013. In her role as a Research Scientist with the California State Office of AIDS, she has studied a number of areas including, satellite syringe exchange, HIV counseling and testing, and HIV prevention and education programs. Beyond her research experience, she was the project manager of the Evaluating Local Interventions (ELI) and Local Evaluation Online (LEO) database projects, which are two of the largest databases in public health. She also served as a statewide trainer for these systems since 2000. In 2012, she served as a Project Manager for Men in Life Environments project at the Center for Health Justice which primarily serves incarcerated and post-incarcerated men from the Los Angeles Men's Central Jail. Ms. Livermore is now the Assistant Director of the Pacific AIDS Education and Training Center of the University of Southern California.

**Joe Tawan Roberts** is a Scientific Applications Software Engineer at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. He has over eight years of software engineering and web development experience in several industries including aerospace, healthcare, and IT consulting. Joe holds an MS degree in Information Systems and Technology from Claremont Graduate University and is currently working on his Ph.D. His research interests include geographic information systems, mobile/web technologies, location-based services, and big data. He also has a BBA from the University of Iowa Tippie College of Business and a minor in Music.