



## JOHANNAH RODGERS

### *The How Much Project*

Even though numbers—particularly big numbers—are bandied about constantly to “prove the facts,” many of us do not have any way of comprehending what these figures actually mean. I hear about millions of dollars, of people, of hamburgers, everyday, and yet it is doubtful that I will ever in my life see one million objects at one time. What does one million look like? How heavy is it? How big is it?

The How Much Project, which explores these questions, is designed to help visualize and understand the increasingly abstract information that surrounds us. Every fact is a representation, but until facts are translated into everyday realities they are not readily comprehensible. How big is one foot? Well, it is twelve inches, or what is most legible, the fact of someone pointing from here to there. What is a legible fact? And, what is our factual literacy?

In the drawing “one million (1,000,000)” I have assembled one million objects. Each sheet of standard, 8 1/2 x 11 paper, contains 5000 rectangles. Once assembled, this drawing is made up of 200 sheets, 20 sheets by 10 sheets, or approximately 15 feet by 9 feet, and allows a viewer to observe 1,000,000 rectangles at one time.

The drawing “one million (1,000,000)” not only allows for abstract information to be comprehended in a concrete way, it can also be used as a kind of abacus to translate, conceptualize, and compare different facts. For instance:

<i>Fact</i>	<i>Number (#)</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Graphic Translation<sup>1</sup></i>
Worldwide Population:	6400 million	US Census	1,280,000
US Population:	295 million	US Census	59,000
# US Citizens Without			
Health Insurance:	45 million	US Census	9,000
Aetna Net Profit:	\$ 934 million	SEC	186,800
# US Citizens			
Living in Poverty:	36 million	US Census	7,200
# US Citizens			
Living in California:	35 million	US Census	7,000





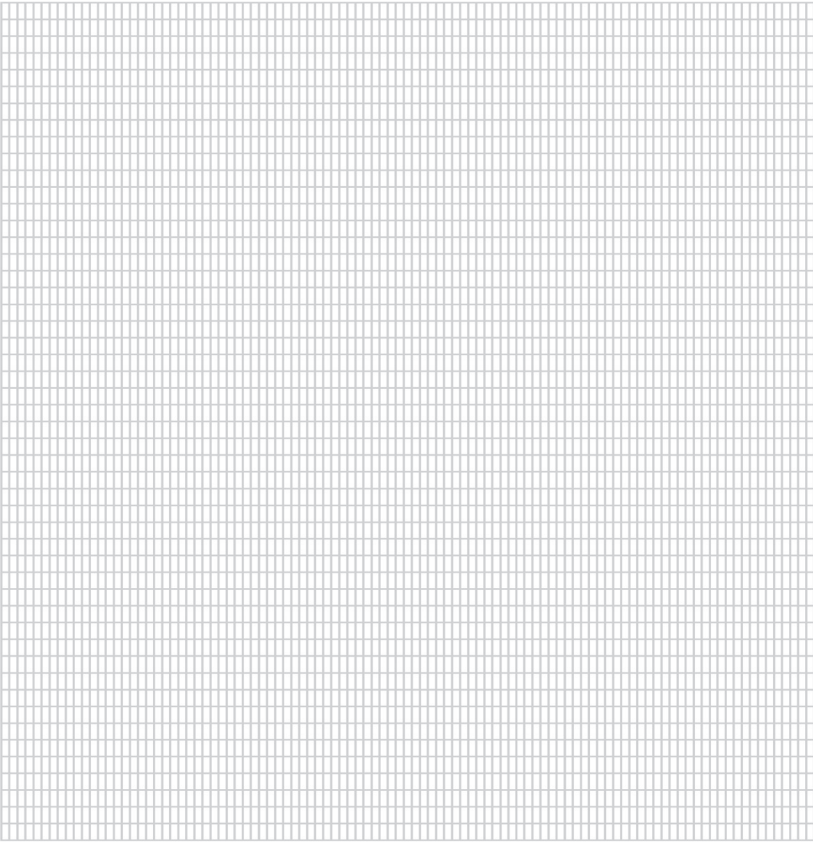
Annual Salary at US Minimum Wage:	\$10,712	calculated	2
Salary of US Citizen Officially Living In Poverty:	\$ 9,393	US Census	1.9
Annual Salary at \$48.08/hour:	\$ 100,000	calculated	20
Salary of Aetna's CEO <sup>2</sup> :	\$ 10.6 million	Forbes	2,120

Note: All figures represent 2003 totals

<sup>1</sup>Includes stock options exercised as well as cash payments. Aetna is one of the largest health insurance companies in the US, providing health coverage to individuals, small businesses, and corporations.

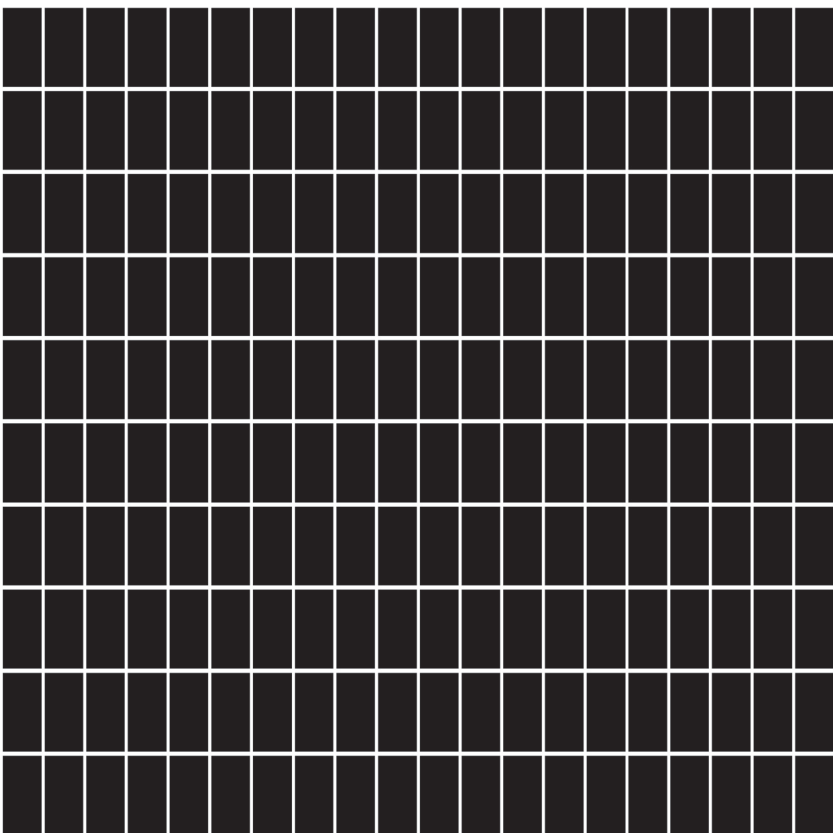
<sup>2</sup>This is the number of 8 1/2 by 11 sheets of paper containing 5,000 rectangles that would be included in a drawing of this fact. I hope to expand this project to include physical objects as well as graphic entities. The issue I am currently struggling with is what is compact enough and inexpensive enough to collect one million of. Pennies (that would be pretty unwieldy and would cost \$10,000)? Paperclips? Pins? Plastic bags? Business cards? Any suggestions and/or donations (of objects) for the project would be most welcome.





five thousand (5,000)





one million (1,000,000)



= one 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper  
containing 5,000 rectangles





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The How Much Project stems from my work as an artist and educator. The project is first a visual one: I am interested in how visually dynamic large assemblages of objects can be and how such collections allow viewers to interact with familiar objects in a new way. There is, however, also a more didactic purpose in this project: I believe that by increasing our collective numeric and financial literacy, we will become better readers of the information that surrounds us: how much corporations are earning every year, how much our government spends on various public services, how much economic disparity there is in the United States today between the earnings of the very rich and the working poor. In other words, I hope to demystify the meaning of large numbers, which people sometimes fail to understand because they are not everyday realities.

