

Tony Oursler: *template/variant/friend/stranger*

30 January – 7 March 2015

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This solo exhibition of Tony Oursler – the artist's first of new work in the UK for over five years – centres around his fascination with the evolution of identity via techniques of facial recognition technology. Oursler explores the nuanced ramifications of these tools increasing ubiquity in daily life. The artist's interest in the face as the locus of communication and identity, through features, movement and expression, is central to these works. A series of seven imposing photographic visages looms over the spectator in the main gallery, all but one punctured by video screens of eyes or mouths. One of part of this installation is an endlessly shifting projection of 150 algorithmically produced Eigen faces, revealing the beautiful yet distinctly non-human qualities of biometric analysis. One of the artist's intentions is to "invite the viewer to glimpse themselves from another perspective, that of the machines we have recently created". Each of these giant portrait heads bears the network of marks or nodes associated with different facial recognition systems, used by border controls, law enforcement agencies and even ATM machines. The images, staggered maze-like throughout the space in the manner of theatrical props, present themselves as potential police mug shots, closed-circuit camera stills or anonymous faces in the crowd, albeit magnified in scale and distorted by their mediation through surveillance technology.

This main installation reflects an ongoing body of multimedia works by Oursler related to mimetic technology and its effect on contemporary psychology. Another new parallel series situates these reconfigured faces squarely in the undefined context of the 21st century. Nine wall-hung, stainless steel panels contain traces of now further abstracted facial features, with the latticeworks used to recognise people here transposed into etched silhouettes constituting the altered identities we are increasingly forced to assume by the strictures of modern life.

The pursuit of biometric data in facial scans, iris patterns and fingerprints all add to our burgeoning and invisible electronic profiles, amounting to a sinister accumulation of personal information on databases that capture and categorise humans according to outward appearance, unique bodily traits and even DNA sequencing. Oursler himself has studied and written about various methods of facial recognition, ways to circumvent such means of detection, as well as the phenomena of physiognomy, anthropometry and *pareidolia* (the mistaken appearance of faces in nature or everyday objects): "The illusory face triggers part of the brain that is used in pattern recognition – long thought to be important to the evolution of the species. Without it we would not learn from the stimuli around us. So keen is our ability to find patterns that it is more important to the species to make false positives than not." Tony Oursler, *On Chance and Face*, from *Vox Vernacular*, 2013.

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About the artist

Always rooted in the medium of film, Tony Oursler conjures sculptural and immersive experiences using technologies that hark back to magic lanterns, Victorian light shows, camera obscura and auratic parlour tricks, but that also look forward to the fully networked, digitally assisted future of image and identity production. As a pioneer of video art in early 1980s New York, Oursler specialised in hallucinogenic dramaturgy and radical formal experimentation, employing animation, montage and live action: "My early idea of what could be art for my generation was an exploded TV." From performative and low-fi beginnings, Oursler has developed an ever-evolving multimedia and audio-visual practice utilising projections, video screens, sculptures and optical devices, which might take form as figurative puppets, ethereal talking automatons or immersive, cacophonous environments. His enduring fascination for the conjunctions between the diametrically opposed worlds of science and spiritualism have allowed him to explore all kinds of occult and mystical phenomena, employing not just smoke and mirrors, but playing the role of circus showman and extricating the sham from the shaman. Oursler's aesthetic and interactive technomancy reveals not only the ghosts in the machine, but the psychological impact of humanity's headlong dive into cyberspace.

Tony Oursler lives and works in New York. Born in 1957, he graduated from the California Institute of the Arts and collaborated on early works with artists such as Mike Kelley. His museum exhibitions include Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2014); Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev (2013); ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Denmark (2012); Helsinki City Art Museum, Finland, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2005); Kunsthaus Bregenz (2001); Whitney Museum, New York (2000) and Kunstverein Hannover, Germany (1998). In addition to participating in prestigious group exhibitions such as Documenta VIII and IX, Oursler's work is included in many public collections worldwide, including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Museum of Osaka, Japan; Tate Gallery, London; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and ZMK/Center for Art & Media, Karlsruhe, Germany.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, as well as those of significant British sculptors. In addition to its two spaces in London, one in Milan and a fourth to open under the High Line in New York, the *Lisson Presents* programme also extends a legacy of curatorial innovation beyond the galleries, working with institutions and artists to present new initiatives around the world.

Exhibition Facts

Opening Hours: Monday-Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 11am-5pm

Location: 52 Bell Street, London, NW1 5DA

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Website: <http://www.lissongallery.com>

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