



# Julia Scher

20. Oktober 2022 · Mark von Schlegell · Besprechungen

Mark von Schlegell on Julia Scher „Maximum Security Society“ at Kunsthalle Zürich  
(8.10.22–15.1.23)

„Many kinds of surveillance once found only in high security military and prison settings are seeping into the society at large. Are we moving toward becoming a *maximum security society* where ever more of our behavior is known and subject to control?“ Gary T. Marx, „Surveillance and Society,“ *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2005.

The timing of *Maximum Security Society*, Cologne-based artist Julia Scher's large scale solo exhibition currently upstairs at the re-designed Zürich Kunsthalle, has been fortuitous. In an unplanned accident her show has served like a super-ego, worklike organizing presence to the uncontrolled desires set off but unfulfilled by the exhibition downstairs: *DYOR*. The acronym stands for „Do Your Own Research“ and since the phrase would make criticism obsolete it's hard for me to describe it in more superficial terms than this: it is an attempt to present — „crypto“ „blockchain“ , „NFT“ , „VR“ etc. — as production in the context of contemporary art. Kenny Schachter's amusing wall-sized screed *NFTism*, is the most recognizable art experience to be found in an exhibition that everywhere else looks and functions exactly like a tradeshow. Meanwhile systems of surveillance that depend on and exploit the hardware and energy that crypto and many NFT's still depend upon, and with their hype, despite a rhetoric of decentralization, exponentially consume, are not discussed in this exhibition.

Happily, upstairs (in a brilliant touch of curatorial timing) Julia Scher's humorous, and deeply resonant intervention in the imagination and experience of surveillance not only fills that gap, but shows itself, especially in this context, a champion of art as it has already been formulated.



First over the show's threshold, we come upon *Mama Bed, Baby Bed, and Papa Bed*. These disarming 2003 complications take the Scher motif of surveillance bed, first appearing in *Almost There* (1996), into the childhood where technology of our own time has increasingly penetrated. Beds cornered with cameras and mounted closed circuit monitors, move seamlessly from the era of *OnlyFans*, through the closed circuit tech of *Cloverfield* (2008), through all the post-war decades and back to a Goldilocks zone deconstructing the idea of the nuclear family that might have been projected onto Scher's own 1950's Hollywood childhood. If these beds, quietly and insistently sculptural, implicate not only the home, but even ostensibly innocent analog, children's books, in systems of surveillance, they remind us of how in the US the children's book has often served also as a technological organ of control. A whip tossed casually on *Mama Bed* imagines power dynamics reorganized around a participatory system of female domination. Scher's beds are filmed for the point of view of the observed, not the observing. Here it seems they serve the cameras, as they put themselves viewing on view, full of the yin/yang pleasures of the exhibitionist/voyeur.

Meanwhile, the casual exposure of the labyrinthine webs of wiring and adapters necessary to keep 2003 U.S. technology alive in a Zürich gallery, reveals what *DYOR* removes from the visitor's experience. Technology's powers, the show powerfully illustrates, depend on the body of the architecture around us, and the blood of its electricity. The hunger for energy Scher's cords knot and divide exposes the secret constancy of desire as it flows through the plastic and discarded rare metals with which we are everyday clotting up our world.

Art isn't here to serve technology's content. Here tech itself is content, and the surprise is how happy it seems to be transformed at last into something like a natural partner with art of the real human present. In today's systematics of total corporate/capitalist surveillance it is exactly this widest, possible view — the view as it were, that belongs to art — that can be art's gift to technology of the present.

At least one half of the present is female. Continuing projects begun decades ago, presenting new ones, initiating others, this exhibition considers how transformative a sustained, feminized experience of surveillance technology can be. Of course even in this situation the visitor's long-surveilled brain naturally has them glancing up for the real, true surveillance they know continues anyway.



The funniest, simplest, and most intentionally female of the readymade combine works in this show, *Architectural Vagina* (1993/2022), reorients just that *ur* surveillance expectation to female sexuality, when we glance up and in place of the expected pointed phallus, Scher's addition of palm leaves, locates the organ of observation to a more stimulating, clitoral position.

Scher has set up a zone of pleasure and literal exhibitionism for the bodies of surveillance she has assembled — ours among them. Everything in this collage of video, installation, sculpture, wall painting and actual security (visitors can destroy unwanted bacteria with Scher's functioning *Security by Julia 2020* disinfectant dispenser even before entering), shows the personal, human scaled touch of the artist, and her attention to our security — a term she has transformed over the years as much as *surveillance*.

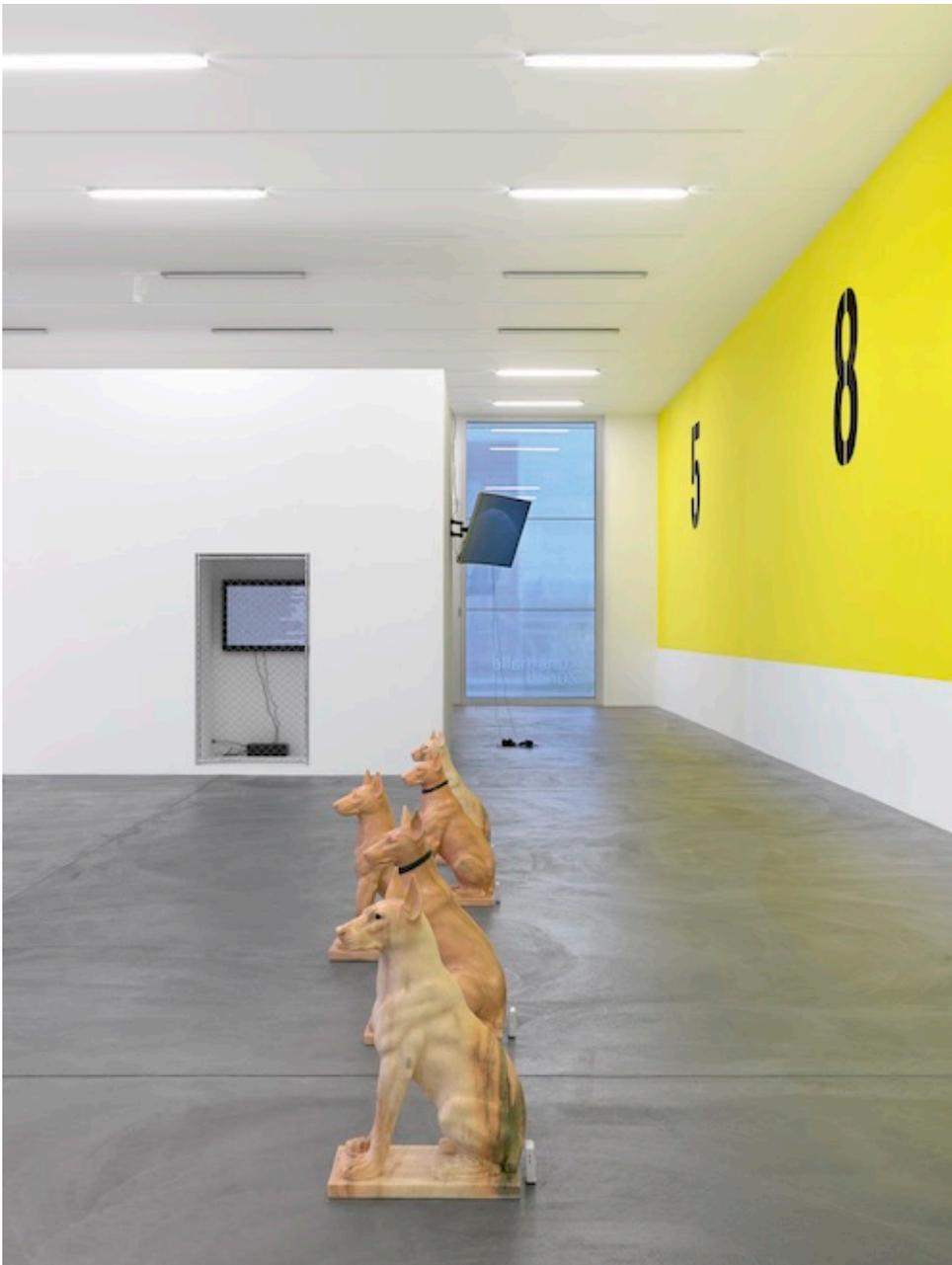
In the interview accompanying the show, Scher locates this art's origins in 1980s New York. She came late to the era of the Picture Generation, perfectly positioned to trace her special metier, surveillance, among the embarrassment of dross technology's wave, increasingly cybernetic, was leaving behind. In this process Scher's works began to function like non-violent stoppages of the larger systems attempting to absorb them.

*American Fibroids* 1996/2022 was originally intended as partly a reflection on and within the gentrification transforming, and virtually razing New York neighborhoods since the 1980s. Scher's installed flea booth was a recreation of the 6th avenue flea market in Chelsea, the zone of inspiration and materiel for generations of New York artists, that was already being pushed out by the wave of the 1990s galleries (her own among them) gentrifying the neighborhood. In the piece, among gathered tables and objects from the past, Scher also presents stacks of her own exposed hard drives (already obsolete in 1993) as if for sale. The revealed hard discs, chromed and lined with the perfection of mint 1955 Cadillacs, are shockingly beautiful and jewel-like. They bear tags with data, but without price. Against this wider obsolescence, Scher's flea market becomes a sort of a flea market in a flea market. This market steps beyond capitalism, becoming a place for another kind of exchange apart from the literal world, perfectly visible in its mirrored surfaces, and perfectly off limits. The piece's metaphorology spills generally over the entire exhibition, presenting new combinations of flea-market turned museum, as opposed to the museum turned trade-show approach downstairs.

The fibroids spill literally into the adjoining installation — *Predictive Engineering* 1993/2022 — with yellow/black rubber balls („spheres“ the artist calls them) in the scaffolding, chiming with the security tape lining the interactive passageway. Here we walk through and under a series of suspended closed circuit monitors, showing security views of various areas of the museum we don't expect to see in the here and now: the underground parking lot, the loading dock, the elevators, a stairwell ... But whoever stops to watch, will find their expectations uncannily interrupted. For one thing, same sex strangers appear to be copulating in a car in the parking garage...

The scripted interference in the simulated technological context of control offers the sweet security of fiction. Here one still chooses whether or not to be as secure a subject now as the surveilling eye. Meanwhile the tape that flickers yellow/black (working on the electricity of light itself) reminds us that outside the zone of art — this safety and freedom from systems of surveillance — is but a momentary passage. It will not constitute politics outside of this secure space.

Inside the show, outside and around *Predictive Engineering*, large scale wall paintings affirm it is very much with the possibilities of art that Scher walls out the dynamics of Capitalist Realist control. The broad, primary yellow of the enormous sign-painted gate numbers of *Planet Greyhound 2022* wrap the entire gallery. It was hard not to think of Lawrence Weiner's recent passing. Weiner's print sculptures, videos and book surely help shore up the foundations of this confident show. Dan Graham, Scher's friend and collaborator since the 1980s, also recently passed almost seems to walk through the exhibition like a ghost, glimpsable in various mirrors, video pieces, and the embraced US banal (as proclaimed by the Reagan era colors flooring *American Fibroids*). Graham joins a host of other artists and contemporaries, in a show aware of and proclaiming solidarity with art by the likes of Nam June Paik, Joan Jonas, Jenny Holzer, Valie Export, Andrea Fraser, Bruce Nauman and Dara Birnbaum.



We have to walk around the back of the installation to encounter the show's most up-to-date technological intervention. Against the wall-painted yellow (color of alarm estheticsizing erotically against the blues and greys of the video) Scher presents the deep-fake, animated film at the heart of *Planet Greyhound*. Far less of a spectacle here than in its first presentation in Gießen, the film feels like the real production it mimes, and shows its strength in the context of the NFT show downstairs. Presenting itself as a seamlessly designed, but amusingly-low budget info-screen for a global and interplanetary bus station, opens up a fifth dimension of science fiction to expose the unconscious cosmic desires of the US transportation systems. Like the dog- icon of the bus, the video travels perfectly, always demarking a network involving this gallery, Rome and other planets.

Science fiction grand master Arthur C. Clarke famously said magic and any sufficiently advanced technology are indistinguishable. The marble stone dobermans with which Scher guards her own show know that magic — usually reported as some form of female subversion — existed long before the Pharaoh's architects began engineering the pyramids. Emitting her own tech-friendly voice from pocket recorders playing behind each dog, Scher places this magic new voicing, at the extreme tail end of the far older, stronger magic, fully embodied in long-standing animal representations.

If technology seeks to become art, it must be unashamed, and respectfully aware of its own body, and our own mind which it purports to serve. Art is ready to receive technology as medium, if tech can transform bodily into something like a natural partner — full of all that might mean. In a secular context the very word art depends on an understanding of work that seeks a body „out of its time.“ This foe of acceleration must immediately transform the current body offered, not simply conform to previously programmed conditions. Otherwise it will be swept away into time, and find itself almost immediately dated, as these obvious relevant works do not.

In the meantime, with part two of this exhibition coming in March 2023 to Mönchengladbach, those seeking security from surveillance in the Rhineland can be confident that, for now, the visualization of the organ of observation can proceed.

All images: Julia Scher, „Maximum Security Society“ Kunsthalle Zürich, 2022, installation view, image: Annik Wetter

## SEARCHERS AND SIFTERS ELISA R. LINN ÜBER JULIA SCHER IN DER GALERIE ESTHER SCHIPPER, BERLIN

13. Februar 2019



**Es ist unbestreitbar, dass die Debatten zur gesellschaftlichen Überwachung und Kontrolle praktisch jeden Tag dringlicher werden. Bereits 1998 inszenierte die amerikanische Künstlerin Julia Scher in der Andrea Rosen Gallery New York ihre erstaunliche Arbeit „Wonderland“, die zwischen beklemmender und psychedelischer Stimmung oszilliert. Nun wurde ihr Werk noch einmal in der Galerie Esther Schipper gezeigt und hat in keinster Weise an Aktualität verloren - im Gegenteil! Die Kunstkritikerin Elisa R. Linn besuchte die Ausstellung und arbeitete Schers Spiel mit unzähligen Referenzen heraus.**

Betritt man Julia Schers „Wonderland“-Installation, so könnte man meinen, man stecke in einer kitschig-plüschigen Low-Tech-Version eines nostalgischen Control Rooms: In etwa, wie man ihn erstmals im Geek-Klassiker „WarGames“ von 1983, in dem Matthew Broderick beim Computerspielen „aus Versehen“ den Hauptrechner der US-Army hackt, gesehen hat. Bis heute gilt der Film als ein historisches Beispiel für die erste visuelle Darstellung der massenhaften Nutzung des Internets sowie der zukunftsgerichteten Frage nach Computerüberwachung und einem potenziellen „WarGame Szenario“ in Zeiten Reagan`scher Washington-Politik.

Scher reinszenierter „Operation Room“ [1], der das Zentrum der Ausstellung bildet, mutet zunächst mit seinen gewölbten Fun-House-Spiegeln an den Wänden und einer hüfthohen Computerspielstation aus zwei Plexiglas-Kindertischen, Vintage-PC-Monitoren mit Fake-Surveillance-Feed, Mini-Keyboard und japanischen White Rabbit Creamy Candys wie eine Themenpark-Version im Stile eines Disney World oder der Universal Studios an. Als eingegrenzte Orte bieten diese Simulationen längst eine verlebte scheinheilige Mythologie des American Way: Optimismus, Innovation und Unschuld, getragen von Amerikas gigantischem Medien-Konglomerat, die die Bedürfnisse und Zukunft immer neuer Generationen infiltriert (1974 wies Fred Lonidier mit seiner Arbeit „The Double Articulation of Disneyland“ darauf hin). Nicht zufällig wurde die Installation von Scher ursprünglich für Kinder konzipiert und löst auch das Versprechen nach einer Ästhetik der Immersion ein, wenn Bühnenlichter einer monitorgesteuerten psychedelischen Lichtshow den Raum in „Prince-Purple“ tauchen. Während eine vom GABO Filter erzeugte Spiralprojektion über große Duratrans-Drucke von rosa-uniformierten Kindern an den Wänden vorbeizieht, ertönt die Introgitarre von Jefferson Airplanes „White Rabbit“ im Loop.

Hier werden nicht nur die letzten Zeilen eines der symptomatischsten Songs der Acid-Rock-Geschichte, „to feed your head“ (um Hirn und Sinne zu befreien), in Erinnerung gerufen, sondern auch die Anspielung auf die bewusstseinsweiternden Zustände und Identitätsverluste in Lewis Carrolls „Alice in Wonderland“ (1865). Der Sturz ins bodenlose „Rabbit Hole“ mutiert bei Scher zum Sturz in den digitalen Äther – versinnbildlicht durch die rotierende Spirale sowie Haufen sonst verborgener Kabelage und Hardware inmitten des Computerterminals, die an manchen Partien, statt von Kabelbindern, von rosa Bondage-Seilen regelrecht gefesselt wurden.

„We are the people of Wonderland to service you“, erklingt eine weibliche, automatenähnliche Stimme mit Cybersex-Beiklang. Technologie wird hier zu einer Externalisierung von Halluzination, zur Absorption vom Menschen in kybernetische Instrumente. Schnell wird dabei klar, dass „Wonderland“ keiner Techno-Utopie entstammt, sondern, vom Abwesenden geprägt, wie ein Teil einer Virilio-Phantomlandschaft anmutet. Diese hat ihre fundamentale Funktion als zentralisierter Sendepunkt verloren. Wo einst die Polis ein politisches Theater mit Agora und Forum bot, gibt es heute nur noch einen Kathodenstrahlbildschirm, wo die Schatten und Gespenster einer Gemeinschaft im Prozess ihres Verschwindens tanzen und der Cinematismus das letzte Erscheinungsbild des Urbanismus überträgt. [2]



„Julia Scher: Wonderland“, Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2018, Ausstellungsansicht

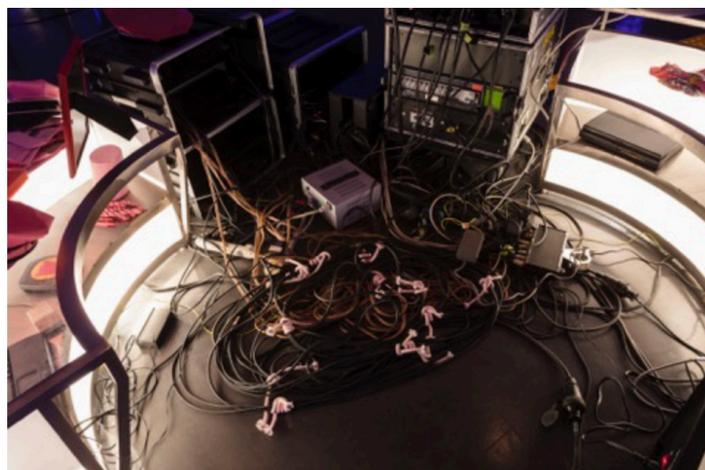
Gehütet wird das verwaiste Kontrollzentrum von Andy, Lena und Brandon, Kindern auf drei großen Fotografien, die despotisch bis sexy als Wächter in rosa Uniformen und passender Mütze mit Überwachungskamera, Zange oder Laborglas posieren. „Security by Julia“ lauten die Aufnäher der Uniformen, von denen einige penibel gefaltet und gestapelt auf der Computerstation der Installation liegen, gut sichtbar exponiert das Label der Marke French-Toast, „Amerikas vertrauenswürdiger Marke offizieller Schuluniformen für die Bildungseinrichtungen der Nation“.

Man könnte meinen, dass hier die aufgezwungene Identität vorgefertigter Erwachsenen-Vorstellungen von Unschuld am Rande des Informationspools abgelegt wurde. Die lässigen Posen in Rosa erinnern an Kampagnen großer Ready-to-wear-Marken wie GAP oder United Colors of Benetton der 90er Jahre, wo die Pinkifizierung durch Gender-Marketing einen Höhepunkt erreichte und welche heute angesichts von Wiederbelebung stereotypisierender Kampagnen im Stile von „The Social Butterfly“ [3] beinahe zeitlos wirken. Nichtsdestotrotz treffen die geschlechtsneutralen Signature-Uniformen Schers auch auf Assoziationen an den auf den Kopf gestellten rosa KZ-Winkel. Dieser wurde in den 80ern zum gegenkulturellen Symbol für „Silence = Death“ der *AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power* und steht noch heute für Widerstand und Ermächtigung diskriminierter Aids-kranker / HIV-positiver Menschen.

Im „Operation Room“ sind die „jungen Unschuldigen“ mit der Kontrolle im Zuge einer Subversion von Rollenspiel und Macht betraut. Hier wird nicht nur das horreske Resümee eines Übergangs von der Disziplinar-, zur Spaß- und letztlich Kontrollgesellschaft gezogen, dem Hand-in-Hand-Gehen von staatlicher Überwachung und ihrem kapitalistischen Gegenstück, wie ihn Kult-Ökonomin Shoshana Zuboff mit ihrem „Überwachungskapitalismus“ beschreibt: einer Spaltung von Beobachter\*innen (unsichtbar, unbekannt und unverantwortlich) und Beobachteten.

Vielmehr noch wohnt Schers ambiguum Interface etwas Interrogatives inne. Es deutet zudem auf einen partizipativen / psychosozialen Typus der Überwachung hin, der auf unseren eigenen anarchischen Überwachungssehnsüchten, auf der Notwendigkeit von Selbstreflexion und dem Selbstbildnis beruht. Statt das Augenmerk lediglich auf die Repräsentationsstrukturen der Status-Quo-Gesellschaft sowie den Anspruch, in ihr reproduziert zu werden, zu richten, zeigt „Wonderland“ darüber hinaus, wie wir verführt werden „zu beobachten“. Um mit Georges Perec zu sprechen: wir können uns an die „L’infra-ordinaire“-Aspekte von uns selbst und der Welt um uns herum gewöhnen – an die Dinge, die wir oft nicht bemerken, weil sie sich unumgänglich anfühlen und „unterhalb“ der Wahrnehmungsschwelle des Gewöhnlichen angesiedelt sind. Es fragt sich, was im Zwischenraum des Überwachungskunstwerks passiert, wenn der in diesem Raum erforschte Gegenstand die Technologie und ihre Paraphernalien der Überwachung selbst ist?

Entgegen optimistischer Vernetzungsvisionen Roy Ascotts und dem telematischen Gemeinschaftsprojekt „Planetary Network and Laboratory Ubiqua“ von 1986, der Vorstellung, dass das partizipatorische Paradigma der Technokratie Selbstermächtigung heraufbeschwöre, scheint in „Wonderland“ der Raum ein Stück weit zum selbstverständlich symbolischen Privateigentum der Künstlerin zu werden, in dem sich die Besucher\*in wie ein *Expat*, dem Gesetz der Künstlerin zugunsten souveräner Kontrolle unterwirft. Partizipation versteht sich hier als Verpflichtung [4]: eine stillschweigende Form der Kontrolle, bei der Wünsche und Wille ausgenutzt werden, die in Wirklichkeit zu Formen der Unterwerfung oder Abhängigkeit werden.



„Julia Scher: Wonderland“, Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2018, Ausstellungsansicht

Ein Geständnis (das Schers „Verständnis ihrer eigenen Lebensgeschichte bewahrt“) [5] umfasst die vierstündige Videoarbeit „Discipline Masters“ im Nebenraum der Ausstellung, die sie in unterschiedlichen Settings und wechselnden Outfits in ihrem Studio im August 1988 filmte. Während Scher eine schonungslos intime repetitive Erzählung aus der Ich-Perspektive über die subtilen Demütigungen, Täuschungen und Misshandlungen in ihrer Kindheit liefert, variieren die Einzelheiten ihrer Anekdoten im Zuge von Wiederholung und irritierenden Diskrepanzen. Trotz einer sich während des Zuschauens entwickelnden Tragik, klingt hier ein trockener Humor an. In einer Einstellung macht der Kameramann einen Fokus-Check auf Schers Gesicht, das von zwei Stahlstangen sowie einer seitlich baumelnden Eisenkette gerahmt wird, die mit stumpfem Klang immer wieder an die rechte Stange stößt und dabei an ein BDSM-Möbel erinnert. Mit nach oben gestreckten Armen, das Metall fest umklammernd, beginnt Scher über ihre devote Haltung zu sprechen: Etwa davon, wie sie als Kind oft heimlich die eingesteten Käfer in Cornflakes-Schachteln mit aß, die sie trotz Anweisung ihrer Eltern nicht vorsorglich geschlossen hatte.

„My parents were real discipline masters and I was the disciplinée ... and what they were really good at was being an arm of authority even when their authority was not about order but about oppression.“ Es ist dieses komplexe Wechselspiel aus Fürsorge und Kontrolle, das einen auf Erich Fromms „Die Furcht vor der Freiheit“ (1945) zurückkommen lässt. Der autoritäre oder sadomasochistische Charakter ist das Ergebnis von Bemühungen, menschliche Bedürfnisse in einer „ungünstigen“ Umgebung, zu befriedigen. Das einsame und ängstliche Selbst, das nicht in der Lage ist, Befriedigung durch Arbeit oder Liebe zu erlangen, findet entweder durch Knechtschaft, oder durch die Kontrolle von schwächeren Wesen dubiose Erfüllung. Da sadistische und masochistische Elemente immer im gleichen Charakter vorkommen, ist das Individuum in der Lage, beide Beziehungen auf einmal einzugehen, was einen perfekten Ausdruck in der bürokratischen Persönlichkeit findet. [6]

So sind es letztlich diese fatalen Lustrufe unter dem Radar eines neutralisierten Sicherheitsapparates, die in Schers performativem Überwachungsraum Nischen für vermeintlich unzulässige (Zu)geständnisse an die invasive Kontrolle öffnen. Dabei verfällt Scher nicht etwa dem illusorischen Versprechen, das Machtgefälle zwischen dominant und devot aufzulösen, im Gegenteil: Sie räumt gerade die Möglichkeit ein, seine „unvorhersehbaren Effekte“ zu verhandeln.

Elisa R. Linn ist eine in Berlin lebende Kuratorin und Autorin.

„Julia Scher: Wonderland“, Galerie Esther Schipper, Berlin, 14. Dezember 2018 bis 9. Februar 2019.

Titelbild: „Julia Scher: Wonderland“, Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2018, Ausstellungsansicht (Foto: Andrea Rossetti)

## ANMERKUNGEN

- [1] □Die Installation *Wonderland* bei Esther Schipper ist ein Reenactment der ursprünglich 1998 bei Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York präsentierten Installation.
- [2] Vgl. Paul Virilio, *The Overexposed City*, in: *Zone 1/2*, S. 15-31.
- [3] Gap wurde 2016 aufgrund einer neuen Werbekampagne mit dem Bild eines Jungen kritisiert, der als „The Little Scholar“ bezeichnet wird und ein T-Shirt mit Albert Einsteins Gesicht neben einem in rosa gekleideten Mädchen mit der Zuschreibung „The Social Butterfly“ trägt.
- [4] Janet Kraynak, „Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman’s Environments,“ *Grey Room*, no. 10 (Winter 2003): 22-45.
- [5] Presstext, Julia Scher: *Wonderland*, Esther Schipper, 2018.
- [6] Erich Fromm: *Escape from Freedom*, Holt Rinehart and Winston, New York 1941 (dt. *Die Furcht vor der Freiheit*, Zürich 1945).

# Dirty Data

**‘Artists find the measure of their own time just by doing their work’, says Julia Scher who began making art about surveillance long before the Internet really existed.**

By Jakob S. Boeskov 14.06.19 Interview Artikel på dansk



Julia Scher, Security by Julia IX (SBJ IX), 1991.  
Exhibition view, Le Consortium, Dijon, 1991.  
Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin  
Photo © Julia Scher.

“It was literature and the idea of a dystopian future that brought me to a landscape that was in ruins and under control,” says Julia Scher, who has been working with surveillance as a theme since her first show at NADA in New York in 1986. This American artist’s pioneering work includes massive and complex art installations, where surveillance cameras, wire mesh fences, video monitors, and surreal signage invite viewers into a delirious world of surveillance and seduction.

For her show, *Predictive Engineering* at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1993, Scher created an installation where museum visitors saw footage of themselves mixed with footage of naked people and scenes of actors chasing one another, creating a hyperreal feedback loop in which the fictional and the real were edited-together in real time. This piece is emblematic of Scher’s work, which not only investigates the abstract gaze of surveillance, but also how surveillance changes both the watchers and the watched.

What’s more, she was there before anybody else. Nowadays, most are aware of the “surveillance capitalism” embodied by the Internet, but when Scher started her career, the internet as we know it had yet to be invented, and electronic surveillance was a marginal theme. This not only makes her a trailblazer, but also an artist who has moved beyond the political and into the prophetic and poetic.

In 2010, I saw Scher give a lecture during a seminar on urbanism and surveillance at Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg (Hamburg Art Academy), where we were both speaking. She was extremely charming and engaging, showing images from one of her signature pieces, *Security By Julia* (1988–) in which women in pink uniforms act as security guards. She also cracked a lot of jokes. Perhaps her showmanship on stage is related to the attractions of her work. Like all great art, Scher's work contains elements of danger, eroticism, and comedy, and its seriousness is wrapped in delightful paradoxes and mysteries. Her work is, in other words, multilayered and ecstatic.

Today, Scher lives in Cologne, Germany, where she teaches at Kunsthochschule für Medien (The Academy of Media Arts). The interview was conducted over Skype as a video call; Scher sat in her office at the academy, while I sat in my loft in New York City's Chinatown. Here, among other things, Scher discusses her childhood in California, Francis Ford Coppola's film *The Conversation* (1974), and why artists will always be interested in what it means to be human.

Julia Scher: Can you see me?

*Jakob S. Boeskov: I can see you. Can you see me?*

JS: Yes, I can see you.

*JB: Cool. I just downloaded a little program called Audio Hijack. We are only recording the audio, just so you know...*

JS: Okay.

*JB: So, what's going down?*

JS: This Thursday, we are having one of our crypto-parties. It just means that cryptologists, local hackers, people from the Chaos Computer Club get together and help people with their own computers, how to encrypt email and so on.

*JB: In a sense, you're helping teach the students to be hackers, or what?*

JS: Well, it's at MIT, where you teach people that...

*JB: Have you ever taught MIT students? I guess my question is: do you prefer to work with artists or scientists?*

JS: Well, I don't prefer either. It's a people thing.

*JB: John Waters had this real good quote about hackers where he said that the only really subversive subculture today is hackers, but they are all dressed so badly, they don't look cool.*

JS: Aah!

*JB: Could you agree with that?*

*JS: Where is he? Maybe it's just in New York. You know, there's the white hats, there's the black hats...*

*JB: I know.*

*JS: ... there's the grey hats. I mean, you've got different colours of hats.*

*JB: There's a lot of different colours of hats. I think they could dress a little better, some of these hackers, but I want to speak a little bit...*

[Editors note: For those blissfully unfamiliar with the fascinating details of computer hacking, we can explain that these 'hats' that Julia and Jakob are talking about is a reference to three different kinds of computer hackers. Black Hat Hackers are criminal hackers, who do it for the money. Grey Hat Hackers are half-illegal hackers, which means they are not afraid to break the law, but they don't do it for the money. Edward Snowden is a Grey Hat Hacker. And White Hat Hackers are corporate hackers who are payed by their employers to hack into computer systems, in order to test them.]



Julia Scher, *Occupational Placement (1)*, 1989/1990. Vintage silver gelatin print, 27,8 x 35 cm. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo © Andrea Rossetti.

*JS: How do the hackers in New York dress like?*

*JB: Well, you don't see them because they are in front of their computers all the time. I wouldn't know. But I am very curious about how Hollywood portrays computer hackers, because every time there's a Hollywood movie, they always make computer hackers look cooler than they are. There was a movie called War Games in the 80s, and the hackers looked*

*so cool. But in reality when you meet the real hackers, these guys – or girls, but mostly they are guys – these guys have more pimples than in the movies and they are socially awkward people.*

JS: But that's like saying there's only one type of person who rides the subway. I mean, Edward Snowden when he was first working with Laura Poitras, he looked great. He wore a white tee shirt one day and a black tee shirt, then he had that grey shirt...

*JB: You think that he had a good sense of style?*

JS: I don't know if you can generalise about hackers. I had a friend who was a cryptologist, he sadly died in 2013. He wore Hawaiian shirts, had long hair, and was a surfer in Venice beach. When he died, there was a Hawaiian-style memorial for him with the giant surfboards. I don't know if you can....

*JB: No, no, I know. Let's skip the fashion talk. I want to talk about your work. It seems like your work is a little bit ahead of the curve, so to speak. Everybody is talking about surveillance these days. But you worked with surveillance, basically, before the Internet really existed. So, maybe I should ask you a really general question: how did surveillance come to you as a theme?*

JS: Let's see. It was a long time ago, and....

*JB: Yes! You were ahead of the curve. You were one of the first artists to work with surveillance, I suppose.*

JS: There are many stories about how artists find the measure of their own time just by doing their work.

*JB: Sure.*

JS: I was painting. I was actually painting pictures of people trapped in monitors without really knowing it was cameras and monitors. On 3 March 1985, late at night, in a really cold studio in Minnesota, we were sitting around drinking vodka. It was, like, twenty-five below. In kind of drunken discussion, I said, 'I'm just going to use the real gear. I'm just going to use real cameras and monitors'.

*JB: Randomness is often overlooked in art. It's like the story of Picasso and Braque inventing Cubism around the same time... sometimes the thing is to open your mind to what is happening around you.*

JS: Yes. I got my Masters in 1984. George Orwell's book *1984* was an inspiration for my graduation.

*JB: Aha! There you go!*

JS: It was actually literature and the idea of a dystopian future that brought me to a landscape that was in ruins and under control, where people were trapped. It was a notion shared by everyone from Philip K. Dick, whom you are quoting in your pre-crime project, to the anti-capitalist movement at the time, to Noam Chomsky, Herbert Schiller, and other people who found a dystopian world ahead. It was more velvet glove than iron fist. I began reading people who had been revealing secrets, and had brokered things to magazines like the *The Fox*, and other publications at the time, like “*Dissent*” magazine, where I read Gary T. Marx and his ““Maximum Security Society”” piece for the first time.

JB: Yes.

JS: So, it was through literature, periodicals, and magazines, and also through big screen film extravaganzas that it came together. There was also the madness of television, television, television...



Julia Scher, *Always There – Surveillance Bed III*, 2000. Bedstead, steel, wood, foam, 4 monitors, 4 cameras, 1 infrared-camera, 2 computer video switchers, 2 video players, 1 video recorder, 1 microphone, 1 amplifier, 2 speakers, 1 ARRI light (with red filter), cable. Exhibition view, *Julia Scher. Always There – Surveillance Bed*, Schipper & Krome, Berlin, 2000. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo © Ilona Ripke.

JB: *CNN* was in its early stages in the States at this time, I suppose.

JS: Well, MTV had started in 1983. People who were making Video Hour were asked to make these spaces between the regular run times. This idea of durational aesthetics that I developed through closed-circuit television really came by watching my friends doing television, television, television in this endlessness. But it wasn't any more important than watching people like Vito Acconci going ‘Na na, na na, na na, na’, for

hours and hours and hours. There were already artists out there who were stocking the train of following and watching and undoing privacy, but not really naming it. Now they name it.

*JB: A lot of political art – I guess now art about technology and surveillance will be considered political art – can be a little boring. There's a poetic and humorous side to your work that I find tremendously powerful. I want to talk a little bit about your manifestos that are all very political. Reading them reminds of the sensation I had when I was a teenager in Copenhagen going to see Public Enemy. Your manifestos are very powerful text pieces and they're very political. Also, there are sexual undertones in a very poetic way. Maybe I should ask you: have you ever been interested in poetry? Did you ever write poetry?*

JS: I say too much. Well, people like John Berryman and Theodore Roethke, who were connected to Abstract Expressionist painters, really inspired me. But what brought me to the manifestos was the humour in advertising for high-tech shit in the 1980s, that blew me away. Then I saw artists like Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, who were able to take command, who were able to grab these handy sloganeers and turn them into something different, something new. These were the women who were very inspiring to me. On the man-side, on the advertising side...

*JB: On the man-side?*

JS: Well, living in Minneapolis, it was the headquarters of Pillsbury, where they tried to sell you bread products, this bread crap. Just the absurdity of the advertising.

*JB: But back then there were no advertisements about software products. It's a fairly new thing. I remember a couple of years ago there were advertisements on the billboards of New York for a stupid piece of software called Foursquare, and their slogan was, 'tell us what you like, and we will lead you to places that you will love'. Or something like that. Today, software is just everywhere; it is now being advertised at the retail level. But that wasn't the case when you were doing these manifestos.*

JS: No.

*JB: And when you were doing work concerning monitors and surveillance, this was a couple of years before the Internet. Correct?*

JS: Yeah. The 80s were before the BBS [Editor's note: Bulletin Board System, an early text-based version of the Internet]. It was at a time where closed-circuit television was seen infrequently – for example, in James Bond films, spy thrillers, and science fiction. What you're describing about these software ads we have today is this: they are selling us something that we used to be able to do for free, like touch each other, like talk to each other. Now, of course, mediated experience has a price tag on it.



Julia Scher, Guards, 2004. Performance. Exhibition view: Julia Scher, Guards, Live at Frieze London, 2018. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: ©Andrea Rossetti.

*JB: Just to return to that era when closed circuit television was new, I was born in 1973 and I read George Orwell when I was a child. I remember, I found it a little old-fashioned. The surveillance state did become a reality, but it became a reality in a radically different way than Orwell imagined. We didn't get a Big Brother. They don't control us with pain, they control us with pleasure.*

JS: If you ask any Pisces, we Pisces go in circles, but the future ends up being in that circle. I'm a Pisces. Dan Graham is an Aries and...

*JB: I'm an Aries too!*

JS: What are you?

*JB: Aries. I'm an Aries.*

JS: See, there you go. Aries gets Pisces and then laughs about us, because we see the future more than Aries. But Aries likes us because they can go really far with it. We don't know what the future will hold, but I believe that every young artist, anybody who says they want to be an artist, has glimpses of what's ahead.

*JB: Absolutely.*

JS: Every time I talk to young artists, you know, five years later, what they talk about has come true. It's really a wonderful way to express your internal sense of your compass.

*JB: In that sense, you were really early to see this new world. I'm curious if you ever felt you were too early, if people got what you were talking about? When I look at your work, I feel like, 'oh my God'. Speaking about this in the 1990s, a lot of people must have said, 'this is just paranoid conspiracy theory stuff!' Was this ever a problem for you?*

JS: Yes. In 1985, when I was speaking about surveillance, I would give a talk and I'd say, 'are there any questions?' and invariably there would be silence. Then, a hand would go up and somebody would say, 'well, what do you mean by surveillance?'

*JB: Yeah [laughs]. Well, this still happens. Topical Cream Magazine hosted a seminar about science fiction and art with Dora Budor, Sam Pulitzer, and me. After the talk, a woman came over to me and asked, 'do you work for the government?' [laughs] So you still get questions from people who don't quite get it.*

JS: Do you think people care, though, if you work for the government or not? As an artist, you have to ask yourself: what issues are relevant today? Because, what is a government today? And what is nationalism today?

*JB: Sure, in the age of cyberspace, in the age of international networks, the nation state seems more and more like a thing of the past. You can argue that Obama was the first Internet president – in the sense that he was the first guy to really use the Internet to get elected – and Trump is the first Twitter president. Technology also decides who becomes our leaders, in a sense.*

JS: Technology also allows for a place within the media, such that I, right now, can be chatting with you on Skype and at the same time see an image of this guy who got a penis transplant the other day at Mass General Hospital. I can see this on the same screen?

*JB: What does he look like? Does he look happy with his new penis or what?*

JS: He looks happy with his new penis.

*JB: That's wonderful. Technology can be wonderful, I suppose.*

JS: The technocracy, I think, that you are pointing to, this idea that we get swallowed up maybe, or taken over, is no more poignant than in the discussion of robots today. I'm just raising the topic of robots because it points to outer space and another intelligence that we don't know yet.

*JB: Absolutely. But since you mentioned the penis transplant, I want to go back a little bit again to the manifestos and the sexual undertones that are in them – and in a lot of your other work too. I'm just curious, and I don't want this to be a sleazy... or, maybe we should turn this into a sleazy conversation!? The connection between sexuality and technology has been investigated since the early Surrealists, but when you started to work with these themes, the Internet was fairly new. Internet pornography wasn't very common in the very early stages of the Internet. So, my question is this: was it always obvious for you, to see this connection between sex and new technology?*

JS: Well, just to restate your thing about when did Internet meet porn: in 1995, I was actually approached by a guy who was repairing art gallery computers. He approached me to be a producer – because I was working in HTML-1 and, whatever, because I was an artist dealing with sex – if I would be a producer for Penthouse on the Internet, for Internet porn.

*JB: Oh, Jesus!*

JS: I said no, but of course I'd be a millionaire now and we wouldn't be talking.

*JB: Julia, Penthouse is not doing so well these days.*



Julia Scher, *Guards*, 2004. Performance. Exhibition view: Julia Scher, *Guards*, Live at Frieze London, 2018. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: ©Andrea Rossetti.

JS: I grew up Van Nuys, California, which was the porn capital of the world. The sex was right there. When you talk about control and access and manipulation, you're right there with people who want to make money off it. Then, some of the great people who did something called... was it mosaic or ceramic? These cyber goddesses – who were really connected and became some of the first women on the Internet dealing with sensuality – they were very sensually aware, and they knew everything. They knew Queen Wu, they knew all the people from Mondo 2000.

[Editor's note: Mondo 2000 was an influential cyberculture magazine published in California in the 1980s and 1990s whose editor-in-chief was Alison Bailey Kennedy a.k.a. Queen Wu.]

These women were really very intelligent in terms of what sensuality would become in a techno-driven world. It was there, at that moment, where women were on top of their game in talking about it in magazines and dealing with it. It was right on the cusp. It was a really interesting time that way, as well. My manifestos fit into that program because it predicted the occurrence of this... not clash, but this agency of combination that separate fields were now coming together. But it wasn't strange to them at all, and so I was in some of these magazines. Year after year, there was a growing base of people who were into the issues. There's Peter Fend, there is...

*JB: He used to live here! Do you know that Peter Fend use to live here at this loft?*

JS: Oh, wow! Where is he now?

*JB: He's in New York. I see him from time to time, but he used to live in this very room, in this loft. He was the first artist I ever met from New York. This was in Copenhagen. I was twenty-two years old, and Peter was riffing these hilarious one-liners. I felt like he was either insane or a visionary.*

JS: He's a visionary. I haven't seen him in years though, so I've lost track.

*JB: My first solo show, where I showed the ID Sniper (2002) was in New York in 2004, at The Thing. Gisela, Wolfgang Staehle's wife, told me how Peter Fend had problems with Homeland Security, because Peter was the first artist, the first civilian, to get access to satellite imagery of Earth, and this became a problem. So, Gisela told me how agents from Homeland Security had come to the offices of The Thing to ask for Peter Fend. She showed me a business card that one of the Homeland Security agents had given her. Again, the way surveillance works is very different from how George Orwell imagined it.*

JS: Regarding Orwell, I want to clarify how things opened up for me. Gary T. Marx taught at MIT in 1988, and I taught in his class, which was in the department of sociology. He taught this idea that the maximum security society had six sub-societies. I introduced my work, and the six sub-categories of his maximum security society are six categories that I've covered in my work.

*JB: Could you break down each of those six? I think it would be really interesting for the interview. What are those six?*

JS: Actuarial, predictive, transparent, and porous. And by that I mean, the porous society is what you could go through, but there are massive checks. Like the airport before the TSA emerged. The dossier society. He

never knew about cell phones, but you could have your dossier on your Internet. Your data profile is who you are. For example, we couldn't see that then.

*JB: Got it, yeah.*



Julia Scher, *Information America*, 1995. Overall dimensions variable (desk: 73.7 x 152.4 x 76.2 cm). Installation view: Julia Scher, *American Promises*, Ortuzar Projects, New York, 2019. Photo: Timothy Doyon, Courtesy of Ortuzar Projects.

*JS: They say the next thing is the aggregate society. Aggregate engineering has surpassed prediction as a way forward with security. You can find it online on his website. At the end of his career, he turned to humour and started writing cultural rags, writing stories about spies and stuff. He totally went the other direction. His background had been writing about police surveillance of Civil Rights marches and how the left was being destroyed by police and the CIA.*

*JB: In a way, there's nothing to laugh about today. At least in the 1960s, the whistleblowers who broke the story about Watergate became national heroes. In our generation, similar whistleblowers are in jail or in exile. It's a very serious time we live in. But again, back to the element of humour. Humour can be necessary in the sense that... well, if you deal with surveillance and paranoia, working with these subjects can also become little bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Working with paranoia and surveillance can be a comfortable paranoid world that you can engulf yourself in. You don't strike me as a very paranoid person, Julia. You are a respected and a loved artist. But, I guess, my question is: does working with surveillance have a personal effect on you? That question is a little vague, pardon me.*

*JS: Tony Oursler, who I have known for many years, and I have talked about humour and comedy many times. He said, 'comedy is tragedy plus time'. My background drags me in to deal with tragedy. But the existing stature of living with this insanity, this world, deserves some humour.*

*JB: Absolutely.*

JS: I find things that we do, what people do, really funny. I came out of the post-war 50s television where Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz – all these really funny TV shows – handled themes like domestic abuse, people beating each other up, treating women like shit, pedophilia, all this crap. In a way, I took on the demeanour of some of these 50s comedies, these women who laughed it off as a way to deal, and then it also satisfied an audience. I got into comedy, humour, as much as a self-defense mechanism. Because I'm shy, but also because it invoked that you were going to overcome something. Can you hear me?

*JB: Absolutely. I'm still here.*

JS: It's not funny when you can't detect someone who's watching you and stealing your information. It's not funny when satellite photography catches you doing something you don't want other people to see. It's not funny, but humour is a survival mechanism.

*JB: Humour is also a way to create truth. Stanley Kubrick initially wanted to make Dr. Strangelove as a thriller, and then he realised that mutual nuclear destruction was so absurd that he ended up making it into comedy. But that didn't make it any less an important movie. I think there is a misconception about humour in art. For some reason, people seem to prefer irony, where satire can be a little misperceived for some reason. I love satire, and I believe our time needs movies or art like Dr. Strangelove to show the absurdity of it all.*

JS: Yes.

*JB: Again, I love Laura Poitras, and Citizen4 is a fantastic movie. This is not a put down of Laura Poitras, but when you make a very serious work, there can be an element of preaching to the converted. Outside academia, outside the art system, most people don't accept the concept of the new surveillance society yet. This will change, surely. I grew up in the 80s, and I really saw how movies and mass culture can change the general perception in society. Those movies about the Vietnam War, Apocalypse Now and so on, they really changed our perception of history; they changed our perception of that era completely. Eventually, perhaps, there will be big blockbuster movies that will make people realise what dark times we have been living in for the last ten years. It seems like people haven't really grasped it yet...*

JS: The humorists might say, 'Oh, these were the good old days'. In ten years, we're all going to be living like dogs and eating cockroaches, with no houses and we'll be naked. Who knows? The great film, *The Conversation*, which was basically Coppola's love poem to surveillance was made really just to cover his costs for *The Godfather*, I think.

*JB: I love The Conversation!*

JS: There's such beauty in the Harry Caul character and how he was named. The idea of the caul and the covering: this thin coat that is like the skin when a baby is born with a caul. The use of language and the words and the script, it's such a beautiful film.

*JB: He's such a sad and lonely character, Harry Caul. He saw that loneliness that comes with being a voyeur. That loneliness is around today. I think a lot of people struggle with a sense of inauthenticity because capitalism forces them to be voyeurs, so to speak.*

JS: That's such a great point. It's maybe not the discussion for today. Tom Levine wrote a great article that describes the last scene of *The Conversation*. It's the reason that [Caul] can never find the hidden camera after he's torn up his apartment and destroyed everything he owns. The camera is not to be found, it's not in the room.

*JB: It's in his mind.*

JS: It's not even in the building. It's outside. The camera is the viewer, the audience that is watching. When I saw *The Conversation* in 1974, I had this wonderful, important break. For me, this was so inspiring – I'm much older than you. In '74, I had already seen a lot of Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman, and this really is a heartbreaking moment in the film: that you cannot reach it, that there is a gap. There is a space there that Coppola was able to portray, the beauty of that. It's one of my top ten surveillance films of all time. The audio is so amazing, and the women are so disingenuous... but just a caveat, back to humour, is that when I started Safe and Secure Productions as a real job, it was an outgrowth of my cleaning business in Minneapolis. I was cleaning peoples' apartments and I worked at an aerobics parlour cleaning the mats.

*JB: Did you do a good job?*

JS: I was rejected from... I wanted to go to electronics school to learn to solder and shit, and I failed the entrance exam. Brown Electronics.

*JB: Fuck them.*

JS: I hand taught. I'd go the store and ask: how do you plug; what does this wire do? I learned that way. And then I started Safe and Secure Productions as a company that installed surveillance for real – and security bar gratings, door locks, and cameras, for real.

*JB: You actually did that? I didn't know that. So let me get this straight, Julia, you installed security cameras for women who were afraid of crime, burglary, and sexual crimes?*

JS: Oh, I had a real business. S.S.P. : Safe and Secure Productions. I shouldn't have lost the website, but it cost me too much money. The company was installing security equipment. I had started with women

who had trouble feeling secure. So, I'd do a whole security appraisal of their house or their apartment and install it. I brought everything over, burglar bar gratings, new locks, cameras, wire, and would fix up their place. So, it went from cleaning to installing. By the time I had my first show at NADA in 1986 in New York, I told them I'd be going back to Minneapolis in four months if I fucked up in New York. I still had customers in Minneapolis for years who thought I was still coming back to fix their cameras and clean their house.

*JB: I love that. I didn't know you installed cameras for real.*

JS: I did. So, well, it was somewhat sad. But it was done with humour, in a way. It was playful work, but with an attention to how catastrophic, devilish, and powerful the forces running over us were. I had a business license, and I was also the first woman member of the Metropolitan Burglar and Fire Alarm Association as a Class 1 certified installer in New York in 1988.

*JB: There you go. Maybe we should also think about wrapping this up. I think we covered a lot of ground. Maybe we should end up on a positive note, because we touched upon the cockroaches and the coming apocalypse and how our heroes are jailed. So, I guess what I'm hearing you also say is that some technology can also have a positive side. You actually helped these women, made them feel more safe. I'm not trying to water down any criticism – or water down your work, or my own work, or the work of anybody else – but you know what I'm saying? I guess I'm trying to say there are sort of positive ways of looking at how technology can be used as a counter-measure. You have a wonderful phrase, 'Counterspy Transmission', in one of your manifestos.*

JS: Counterspy, it's an interrupter. I think the last word of that line is an interrupter, 'Counterspy Transmission Interrupters'.

*JB: OK, I only got part of it.*

JS: In any sense, I did have a friend who worked for the NSA and who was a very wonderful cryptologist. It's not for this conversation. But, anyway, we ought to consider that: do we as people want to keep democratic principles? If surveillance is one-way, all the time, we're screwed. The democratic principles, such as we understood them in the past, could fall in the whereabouts of control, when they're unknown and invisible. So, does spying and surveillance put the principles that we believe in at risk? This isn't a report on the state of the United States, but I think it gives a hint as to the kinds of emerging threats that are real, and that are dealt with by artists who see what emerges on the horizon. I know they're talking a lot about horizon now, because of Verizon, the telephone company, and there are all these jokes. I think they're funny. I can't remember any of them, but they're pretty funny. It's a telephone company.

*JB: No, I know. I remember the Verizon strike a few years ago. The workers at Verizon were striking and it was affecting peoples' download speed. It was very futuristic.*

*JS: Oh.*

*JB: There's a universality, there's a timelessness to surveillance, in the sense that, well, even if you look to biology, the animals look at each other. Information is power. In a sense, it's always been like this. I'm really interested in camouflage in nature. Already now, people are working with counterspying measures. There are some designers, in order to avoid face recognition, they print out tee shirts with famous people on them, so the camera will look at the famous person and get distracted that way. But nature has been evolving like this for hundreds of thousands of years. You have un-poisonous snakes that look exactly like poisonous snakes in order to avoid being eaten by predators. Ideas about camouflage, deception, and secrecy are part of evolution. And now, everything is just getting magnified by technology and it is what it is. Anyway, I just want to say thank you for talking with me. I want to say it's such wonderful and important work you're doing. I think you have inspired more people than you know. Again, the visionary quality of it being so early on in the game is good karma, and it gives you street cred. You're original... in hip-hop, they call it 'original gangster'. It's the person who was there before everybody else.*

*JS: You're too nice, and your conversations with me over email have been beautiful, exciting, and lifesaving – and just so inspiring.*

*JB: Oh, thank you.*

*JS: Can I order your Face Jagger book from your website?*

*JB: I'll send it you. That project took a lot of time, but now it's finished as a book. For this piece, I went to Anaheim in California, to a real surveillance fair to present a cyber weapon. It was a weapon that could hack the identities of terrorists by simulating their faces – again, going back to mimicry, simulation, and camouflage.*

*JS: Great idea.*

*JB: The weapon was taken seriously. I spoke to people who were selling biometric locks. They didn't call them locks. They called them 'biometric access control systems'. But they were, in fact, electronic locks, where you can only get access to your building if your face and your eyes and your fingers are scanned. I told the guy from the company about Face Jagger and I asked him, 'could anybody gain access through your biometric lock system with a 3D printed mask on?' And he just answered really cool, and calm and collected: 'no, no. Look at this part of the lock.*

*This is an infrared camera, the infrared camera will detect heat. This means that anybody wearing a mask will look suspicious because there's no heat coming through the mask'.*

JS: You just have to keep expanding on the technology, because there's a new kind of face cream at MIT that can mask who you are, and deliver temperature...

*JB: I want that face cream.*

JS: You should check it out. At MIT they have worked on it so that you could actually augment it. Computer-to-computer matching systems are only as smart as the computers. So, you can find other techno-materials to go with this mask.

*JB: Absolutely. And that's funny you say that. I don't know why I want to keep ending this on a positive note, but I guess dystopia is a little boring in the long run. People tend to think of this new totalitarian techno-machine that will arise, and it's true. We are living in a totalitarian capitalist system, we are living in a surveillance state, but there are always counter measures. A few years back, in Hollywood, a lot of people were talking about this stupid thing called the Singularity. You know, the concept that Ray Kurzweil coined? I find it to be a ridiculous concept, and a very fascist concept, in a way. Like what you said a second ago, there are limits to what computers can do. They can never have a soul, they're still only machines.*

JS: They're making them with souls now. They're working on it.

*JB: Oh, yeah? But will they succeed? I don't think so.*

JS: I bet you there could be a time where the computers, artificial intelligence, gets rid of us, because we're so full of failure and so unnecessary. We don't know how this scenario will play out. There are many potential possibilities with what humans will be in the future. Maybe your DNA will get implanted in an AI device one day?

*JB: No, no, no.*

JS: What is humanity? Artists always want to fuck with that, want to play with that. What is humanity? What is a human gesture? What is inhuman? Is waterboarding inhuman, even if it gives you the name of some creepy guy that you think might be harming you? This is all a matter of perspective.

*JB: I know what you're saying. We are already cyborgs in the sense that you have glasses, I have glasses; technology has augmented our bodies in a very basic way. Right now, we're using a computer to have this conversation. But, I must say, I do think that Singularity subscribers misunderstand something fundamental if they think computers will have*

*a soul. There seems to be a misconception that accumulation of data equals consciousness. They keep building these huge data centres, but they just accumulate data. Even people in NSA and people inside CIA say this is counterproductive because we're going to have data overload. In the same sense, I think what the Singularity subscribers say is that if you accumulate enough data, you will have the simulation of human consciousness, and I think that's a falsity.*

JS: We better damn well know what we are as humans, and whether our principles about liberty – or even if it's privacy, or what is a family – can endure in a world where maybe the soul is only in a few of the living, and not all of the living, beings. I really don't have an answer. I guarantee you in twenty years from now, I would have a very different perspective. In the same way, in 1985, I never could've imagined having such a conversation with you. This is a total time travel.

*JB: Absolutely.*

JS: Because I can't imagine somebody else would be so engaged with these words and saving them to memory. And you're not shrinking from the vocabulary, or afraid of the glossary at the back of Brave New World, like so many people were then. It's wonderful and fascinating, and it's a great time. And it's great to travel over time with you.

*JB: It's been great to time travel with you too, Julia. I think it was a very human conversation, and a great post-human conversation. I'm looking forward to traveling to the post-human world with you. I want to say thank you for taking the time out to do this. Do you feel okay with this? Do you think we covered enough?*

JS: My big question for you would be about how you feel, in your circulation of information and images, and how you work as a transporter yourself. Maybe there's an equivalent in a parallel universe, and what would that person, vehicle, or essence be?

*JB: What do you mean?*

JS: Well, like, you're making a gun to do a face transplant, in a way. Maybe in another universe, it would be a flower or something else. You have flowers in the background.

*JB: For me, a lot of this work is Scandinavian trauma therapy. People don't really realise this. People are going, 'oh, you're just some techno fetishist trip', and I have to explain to them, 'no, I grew up in Scandinavia, where Philip K. Dick's concept of pre-crime was very much a reality'. When I grew up, there was a thing called, interestingly enough, S.S.P.*

JS: Oh, wow.

*JB: S.S.P. was an acronym for Schools, Social Services, and Police. All these units would collaborate in order to prevent crimes before they happened. This was Scandinavia in the 1980s. Scandinavia is a very soft surveillance society; it's real, but very soft. Some of this stuff comes from me dealing with that. Generally, I just find it fascinating to work with the future, because it's the only thing we don't know anything about.*

JS: I have to tell you, many of my students from the former GDR (German Democratic Republic) have a very different perspective on surveillance, and a very serious alertness, like you do. They would never laugh about these issues. You'll get more of a laugh in a country that never had to deal with it, where kids weren't exposed to it.

*JB: Perhaps we should wrap this up. I think we covered a lot of ground.*

JS: I'd say there is not enough time to cover all the questions and jewels of information you have, which I haven't even asked you about. Maybe one day, I'll get to New York and we can continue the conversation.

*JB: I can't wait.*



Julia Scher taking Liberty from China Town to Tribeca, 2019. Photo:  
©Julia Scher.

# Jewish Currents

July 18, 2019



Julia Scher: *Information America*, 1995, mixed media installation. Courtesy of Ortuzar Projects, New York. Photo: Timothy Doyon

## Review

### Watching the Watchers

July 18, 2019 Joe Bucciero

**AT ORTUZAR PROJECTS**, a gallery in New York, a cube-shaped monitor hangs from the ceiling. It's one component of *Mothers Under Surveillance*, a 1993 work by the Hollywood-born, Cologne-based artist Julia Scher. Supported by a metal apparatus, the monitor tilts downward, as if addressing the viewer below. Looking up, one notices another object perched atop the apparatus's carriage: a security camera, likewise pointing down. The viewer expects to see her body on-screen, a sight familiar to anyone who's shopped at a convenience store. This expectation is fulfilled, but only for a moment. The screen quickly cycles through two other feeds: a sterile, empty hallway; a group of older women in what looks like a retirement facility. All three scenes are stamped with the current time and date, suggesting a sort of co-presence, but in reality, the work's titular "mothers" were filmed in another time and place—New Jersey in the early 1990s.

*Mothers Under Surveillance* is one of nine works on display in [Julia Scher: American Promises](#), the artist's first solo exhibition in New York since 2002. Spanning much of Scher's underrecognized career, they employ a variety of media—from monitors and cameras to marble and mattresses—to address a fairly focused set of questions about surveillance. How does surveillance affect self-perception, or shifting definitions of safety and security? What about the boundaries between public and private, reality and simulation? In *Mothers Under Surveillance*, it's this last inquiry that preoccupies the viewer. "What was always scary to me was that people mistook or misread fake as real and real as fake," Scher said in an early-2000s interview with the writer Lynne Tillman. Yet Scher encourages such misreadings in her own work, prompting the viewer to appreciate her position in determining surveillance's "truth." What can we learn from the shared experience of being watched—and from watching the watchers?

**BORN IN 1954** to a failed-actor father and a gift-wraper mother, Scher absorbed postwar Los Angeles's visual culture: the proliferation of moving images on film and TV; the queasy interplay of the city's hyperreal built environment and its diverse natural landscape. In the early 1980s, as a young landscape painter studying art in Minneapolis, Scher was inspired by a photograph of El Salvador by photojournalist [Susan Meiselas](#), in which, as Scher would later recount, "no human figure was visible, and yet it was clear that the scenery was being monitored." She incorporated this observation into her own "empty" landscapes; in an early piece, she affixed a camera to a painted canvas, a move toward the multimedia art she has been making ever since.

Though wary of state surveillance, Scher became interested in personal security. While working as a janitor at an aerobics studio, she used her growing knowledge of home- and business-security technologies to install systems for some of the studio's patrons. In 1986, she started her own short-lived security company, Safe & Secure. The enterprise was in part an effort to help local women feel safe and in part a reckoning with her own childhood, one marked by parental neglect (she has described her father as "the guardian who couldn't guard"). Scher speaks candidly about her upbringing in *Discipline Masters* (1988), the earliest work on display in the exhibition. The piece is a lengthy proto-vlog in which Scher discusses her childhood, taking breaks to dance and lip sync for the camera—a thirtysomething roleplaying as a teenager. In one sequence, Scher parses The Police's stalker anthem "Every Breath You Take." "Every move you make: motion detector," she tells the camera matter-of-factly, as if her word association reflected an obvious exegesis. "Every bond you break: polygraph." In another scene, she dances unabashedly (and without commentary) to U2's "Pride"; taken together, the moments summon the typical teenage experience of listening to music in one's room, switching between self-satisfied critique and carefree enjoyment.

In the early 1990s, Scher moved to New York and became part of the city's downtown art scene. By then she had put the security business aside, instead fully embracing its technologies both as artistic materials and objects of critique. Like Andy Warhol, who got his start in advertising, or Gretchen Bender, whose critical video art coincided with commercial work (and who, like Scher, is currently the subject of an [overdue New York exhibition](#)), Scher brought specialized knowledge to burgeoning artistic concerns. The piece in the exhibition that most clearly illustrates Scher's technical expertise is *Information America* (1995), which comprises a desk, monitors, cameras, cables, and other security accoutrements. "WARNING," a wall-mounted sign proclaims. "You have entered a surveillance camera recording area." Like *Mothers Under Surveillance*, the piece shuffles across feeds, offering views into unknown sites as well as multiple perspectives of the gallery space. A viewer looks at the camera on the left expecting to see her face in a nearby monitor, but instead sees her profile, captured by a camera on the right. Such palpable experiences of surveillance's totalizing reach are less familiar today, since surveillance now connotes invisible data collection rather than visible bodies. In the age of automated facial recognition, one needn't see her face reproduced in an iPhone to know that someone else can access the image.

Scher, an early adopter of the internet (she produced net-based artworks in the mid-1990s), appreciates the evolution of the meaning of surveillance, and has continued to employ new technologies in her work. But she also continues to engage with older, screenless methods of surveillance. Two pieces in *American Promises* don't include monitors or cameras at all: *Girl Dog (Hybrid)* (2005) and *Glückshaube* (2006) are marble sculptures depicting, respectively, a muscular watchdog and a security guard's cap. These objects activate "security" simply by sitting there, heavy and inert. Michel Foucault famously argued that a guard doesn't have to be physically present in a prison watchtower in order for the watchtower to enforce obedience among prisoners. As viewers walk through Ortuzar Projects, they can escape the view of a given camera, but the dog and "guard" remain visible, standing in for the authorities behind the lenses.



Julia Scher: *Glückschaube*, 2006, marble, 6 ¾ x 11 ¼ x 11 ¾ in. Courtesy of Ortuzar Projects, New York. Photo: Timothy Doyon

*Glückschaube* also references Scher's series *Security by Julia*, in which the artist outfits exhibition spaces with boutique security systems overseen by pink-uniformed guards wearing (non-marble) hats of the same design. The sculpture originally comprised part of an installation that mapped the path Jews walked toward a train station in Wiesbaden, Germany, en route to the death camps. There, rather than identify a particular institutional employee, the hat stood as a monument to the lasting effects of surveillance's infrastructures. In *Discipline Masters*, too, those effects breed trauma: Scher often returns to stories of her neglectful if not abusive parents, of growing up "in a place where I was being watched but wasn't being protected." Scher elaborates throughout the video: her mother—both voyeuristic and cross-eyed—was able to look in two directions at once, like a proto-CCTV. In Scher's work, the desire to be protected gives way to a demonstration—through references to camps, prisons, the Patriot Act, the NSA—of the ways in which "watching" almost always persecutes rather than protects the watched.

**WHILE SCHER** might be the contemporary artist most focused on surveillance, she's far from the only one. There's Bruce Nauman, whose rigged CCTV systems were on display [this year at MoMA](#) and whom Scher counts as an influence. Right now, at [the New Museum](#), an even earlier piece—Marta Martajin's pioneering *La Menesunda* (1965)—includes real-time surveillance footage as part of a totalizing spectacle, while at [the Whitney Biennial](#), Nicole Eisenman is broadcasting the museum's top-floor gallery to a monitor on a patio below. Besides playing phenomenological tricks, surveillance art often levels an institutional critique, subverting the hidden or neutral gazes of art spaces by turning viewers' eyes to things they're not supposed to see. Scher is critical, too, but as her works—and her erstwhile business endeavor—make apparent, she also has a vested interest in security's enforcement.

The newest piece in *American Promises* is *North to South* (2019), a site-specific sound installation in which Scher's disembodied voice guides visitors through the gallery. Some of her statements are matters of fact ("You are at column number three"), but others editorialize, pointing out that, while many forms of surveillance are indefensible, everyone still wants to feel safe. "You love the dogs when they protect you," she says. "You love the information when it proves you're here." For those of us who grew up with the internet and after 9/11, Scher's work attests to a longer history of surveillance anxiety—and to the pleasure we take from its mechanics. Seeing one's face on the monitors is thrilling, and many viewers seem inclined to take the thrill even further by posting surveillance selfies to Instagram. We know the hazards, but we still rely on surveillance to make us feel like we're *here*.

In 1994, two years before the internet lifecaster Jennifer Ringley [set up](#) her webcam, Scher initiated the series *Surveillance Beds*, which underlines the kinship between discipline and pleasure. "You love the bed even when it hurts," she says in *North to South*. Near the speaker, one of the final manifestations of the *Beds* series, *Mama Bed* (2003), is cast in red light, with cameras and small monitors attached to the bed, a whip lying atop it and VHS tapes stashed underneath. An assemblage of signs that signify pleasure and pain, security and danger, *Mama Bed* offers the possibility of surveillance as a kind of analogue to BDSM, in which each individual can determine whether a camera, a whip, or leather straps, make her feel "safe" or not. Despite the trauma her mother inflicted through surveillance, Scher suggests, Mama gave her a complicated gift by conditioning the artist to likewise create her own peculiar system of watching. In her work, Scher passes that vision along to us: looking at her surveillance cameras, one embodies the position of both watcher and watched. The question is whether, as with a "safe word," we can delineate what feels secure.

**Joe Bucciero** is a writer born in Chicago and based in Princeton, New Jersey.

# Art & Museums

Edited by Howard Halle  
timeout.com/nyart @HowardHalle

## Eye spy

Julia Scher's work foresaw our world of privacy invasion. By *Paul Laster*  
Photographs by *Hollis Johnson*

**AT A MOMENT** when our lives are tracked and sold as data, Julia Scher's installations from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s seem especially prescient. Combining CCTV footage with sculptural elements (a four-poster bed, a guard-dog statue), Scher's pieces probe the proliferation of surveillance systems that dress invasions of privacy in the sheep's clothing of security. Born in Hollywood and currently living in Cologne, Germany, Scher now returns to the U.S. for her first NYC show in 15 years, held at Ortuzar Projects, where she discusses her work and its sometimes confessional qualities.

**Have you always been interested in surveillance?**

Actually, I started out as a landscape painter.

**What made you change?**

It started in art school, when I saw a photo by Susan Meiselas from El Salvador's civil war. It showed a hillside firing range covered by targets with silhouettes of torsos. So, I

began to paint people framed inside those same shapes. After a while, they began to remind me of TV monitors, so I switched mediums.

**One of your earlier videos, *Discipline Masters*, from 1988, is just you addressing the camera about your childhood. It's not really about surveillance, is it?**

It's still related because surveillance is about exposure, about letting things out that you've been hiding. It's a confession.

**You talk about your abusive parents in the video.**

Yes, living with them was like being in prison.

**Was it traumatic to revisit those memories?**

No, I loved doing it. I thought of it as theater. But I also knew watching it would be torturous, especially at its original 11-hour running time. I didn't show it until 2003, and when I finally did, after editing it to almost four hours, I was frankly shocked that people wanted to see it.



**“Surveillance is about exposure, about letting things out that you’ve been hiding.”**



*Masters of Discipline*

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**Was everything in it true? Your dad really was an alcoholic cross-dresser?**

Yes! You can’t make this stuff up. But the idea was to find words to deal with it—how to talk about it and make it into art.

**Let’s talk about another piece: *Mama Bed*. It’s a four-poster bed loaded with cameras and screens—with a whip placed on the mattress. What’s that about?**

Sexuality: Beds are places of reproduction, of regeneration and birth, after all. But it’s also part of an ensemble that includes *Papa Bed* and *Baby Bed*, so it relates to Goldilocks and the Three Bears and the questions the story raises about strength, size, watchfulness and choice.

**You have a new sound piece through the exhibition as a form of control. You also talk about making promises—you’ve even titled the show “American Promises.” What do you mean?**

I suppose it means that, despite everything, people from far away still want to immigrate to America, largely because of what they see on TV. They feel compelled to come here, but it’s a paradox, because it’s their choice. A promise isn’t a command.

→ “Julia Scher: American Promises” is at Ortuzar Projects through July 26 ([ortuzarprojects.com](http://ortuzarprojects.com)).

June 12, 2019

**ArtSeen**

## Julia Scher: *American Promises*

by **Charlotte Kent**



Julia Scher, *Information America*, 1995, Metal office desk, 5 9" NTSC monitors with metal, wall brackets, 13" color monitor, plastic and vinyl signage, 3 black-and-white surveillance cameras, removable lenses, transformers, 2 homing bridging switchers, 2 time-lapse recorders, Amiga A1200HD computer, Sony WatchCam, 2 media players, desk lamp, office chair, wires and cables. Overall dimensions variable (desk: 29 x 60 x 30 inches). Courtesy Ortuzar Projects.

When a child walks over to Julia Scher's *Information America* (1995), on display at Ortuzar Projects, she's delighted to suddenly discover herself on a television screen. She waves to figure out how she is being recorded, looking at the mess of machinery rising from a monumental gray desk. An adult points her towards the many cameras and explains how each one captures different images. One lens stares from the top of the big block television centrally positioned on the desk. Two other cameras frame the titular sign "Information America"—so called for an Atlanta-based company that provided clients with data on relationships between corporations, individuals, and commercial transactions. An anachronistic multitude of wires lead to five monitors that flicker among views of the gallery and scenes filmed in the past. The child and adult try to track which camera does what. As Julia Scher once said in an interview with Lynne Tilman, "It's hard to extract the narcissistic desire to see oneself."

NEW YORK

**Ortuzar Projects**

May 30 – July 26

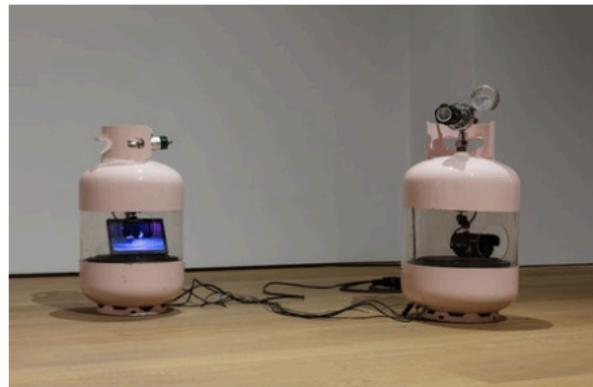
For over 30 years, Scher has examined the nature of surveillance in American culture. She started installing home security equipment for women who got to know her when she was head janitor at an aerobics studio. For these women, security meant surveillance, which required a vulnerable self-revealing, too, and this woman who saw them stripped down in the locker room became worthy of their trust. Such strange transactions seem typical for Scher and help explain the unusual connections her works offer. In this case, those gigs unlocked an affinity for the gear and the public-private tension in cultivating security. Scher's work never simply blames government, corporations, culture, or person, but reveals the cybernetic feedback loop of engagement across them all.

Ortuzar Projects presents *American Promises* with examples of major works from the last three decades. A new sound installation *North to South* (2019) literally welcomes people to the gallery at "Column #1" and proceeds to follow visitors with obscure message at subsequent columns in the gallery: "Column #2 is broadcasting you... There is no content here at Column #2. It's for you." By "Column #3," amidst references that seem to allude to surrounding works, Scher's computerized voice reminds viewers, "You love the chase when you can capture and control." Many of the works in the show, however, capture audiences as screens are everywhere reflecting back movements. Adults may not express the same glee as a child at being recorded, but their curiosity is equally engaged as they too move around the works to identify the mode of their capture.

People gravitate to the empty spotlight of *Mothers Under Surveillance* (1993). An old television stares down, revealing its viewer in the circle of light, now caught in the live feed of the gallery, but also interspersed with film of elderly women shuffling around a care facility. Their age makes them both socially invisible and constantly watched over. Motherhood is a role partly defined by its expectation to survey, observe, and discern, so the work also shows the shifting roles of surveillance within familial relationships. Nearby, Scher describes many disconcerting childhood memories of her mother in the video work *Discipline Masters* (1988), a durational experience at four hours. The style is now typical of YouTube and reality TV show confessions, but unlike those short ejaculations, this seemingly endless narrative forces viewers to make the choice about when to walk away from Scher's uncomfortable recollections, with all that it implies.



Julia Scher, *Mothers Under Surveillance*, 1993, Live black-and-white camera with 16mm lens, 25" monitor and metal wall bracket, 2 media players, time-lapse recorder, switcher, cables. Overall dimensions: 80 x 20 x 25 1/2 inches. Courtesy Ortuzar Projects.



Julia Scher, *American Tanks*, 2001, 2 modified gas cylinders, OLED TFT color monitor, digital color CCD camera, speakers, amplifier, CD, player, cables. Overall dimensions variable (each cylinder: 25 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches). Courtesy Ortuzar Projects.

*American Tanks* (2001) presents two propane tanks, each with a clear band, revealing the recording equipment capturing feet in one and the small screen displaying the footage in the other. Of course, people shift to determine where the filming occurs. Here, the static input-output relationship also invokes the limitations of binary relations. The tanks are painted Scher's characteristic pink, pointing to both the cultural encoding of femininity and the queer community: gender-coded clothing appeared in the 1940s to sell more product and the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACTUP) used pink to symbolize resistance and empowerment. It is just another example of the complex layers that Scher adopts in her work to destabilize simple understandings. Included in the show is one of her pieces from the "Surveillance Beds" series (1994-2003), *Mama Bed* (2003) that is guarded over by *Girl Dog (Hybrid)* (2005), a pink marble statue of a Doberman who could clearly do nothing to protect or attack.



Julia Scher, *Girl Dog (Hybrid)*, 2005, Marble, 30 1/4 x 17 3/4 x 10 1/4 inches. Courtesy Ortuzar Projects.

Scher is a trickster and her works are cautiously amusing. Audiences are compelled to interact but also to think through the desire that flows among relations of safety, security, and surveillance. Now living in Cologne, Germany, this is her first solo show in New York in over 15 years and a rare chance to experience how her works complicate the easy blaming prevalent in discussions about contemporary surveillance. We are all complicit in *American Promises*.

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## Contributor

### Charlotte Kent

CHARLOTTE KENT recently completed her PhD at the CUNY Graduate Center, where her dissertation was on contemporary experiments in art writing. She teaches at NYU, CUNY Baruch, and SVA. She lives in Brooklyn with her artist husband, their cat and dog, and is happiest reading, writing, and editing. The rest of the time, it seems like she is on email, but when the lights go out, she loves to dance.



Reading time 5 minutes

L'OFFICIELART

## Julia Scher

Al Frieze di Londra di quest'anno il personale di sicurezza si aggirava per la fiera in uniforme rosa. Era l'opera "Security by Julia", performance proposta dall'artista americana più di vent'anni fa, e tra le più fotografate dell'evento. La sua prossima mostra "Wonderland" alla galleria Esther Schipper di Berlino inaugura il 14 dicembre

02.01.2019

by Giulia Bortoluzzi



Reading time 5 minutes





L'artista, qui ritratta nel suo studio, con bombolette spray e mascherina, usa spesso videocamere di sorveglianza nei suoi lavori come nella serie "Surveillance Beds" realizzata tra il 1994 e il 2003 dove mette al centro della scena un letto circondato da pali d'acciaio sui quali sono montate delle telecamere che registrano tutto ciò che accade.

Foto Mathias Schmitt

**SEE ALSO:** Pollini, Trussardi e Woolrich. Cartoline di stile dalla 97esima edizione di Pitti Uomo

Da sempre il colore rosa è considerato la quintessenza della femminilità, principio consolidatosi anche grazie alla Barbie, dal 1959 con logo e divisa total pink. Julia Scher lavora su questo stereotipo, portandolo quasi all'assurdo, vestendo con uniformi rosa le sue guardie di sicurezza. «Se negli anni 80 "Security by Julia" creava una reazione umoristica, oggi si è andato perdendo il tono ironico della performance. La tecnologia all'epoca non era in questione, mentre oggi, se vedi del personale in divisa - anche se vestito di rosa - non ne metti in dubbio l'autorità perché ormai il mondo è talmente insicuro che la questione si è spostata dall'ironia alla paura». Da fine anni 80, Julia Scher è stata una pioniera nella ricerca artistica sui sistemi di controllo e sorveglianza, riflettendo sul tema non solo in maniera speculativa ma creando degli scenari nei quali far emergere costrutti e dinamiche che spesso non sono percepite come tali perché insite nel fare comune. È stata tra le

prime a usare l'internet come strumento artistico a metà anni 90 con "Securityland" e a riflettere sullo schermo come mezzo di comunicazione: «La prima volta che ho usato uno schermo ci voleva mezz'ora per il download di un file, ricordo che provavo un piacere indescrivibile nel guardare l'immagine scaricarsi e caricarsi, era qualcosa di magico.

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Oggi invece si cerca un godimento immediato delle immagini». Nata a Hollywood nel 1954 non è difficile pensare come l'artista sia cresciuta con una passione sfrenata per gli obiettivi e le videocamere, lei stessa racconta di aver subito il fascino degli studi cinematografici della San Fernando Valley dove da un lato

sorgevano i grandi lodges in cui venivano costruiti i set e girati i film, e dall'altro assemblavano gli aeroplani. La fascinazione per questi luoghi risente anche dalle architetture: «I magazzini mi hanno sempre affascinata, le persone entravano ma non sapevo bene cosa facessero, da bambine volevamo scoprire cosa c'era all'interno. Nessun tipo di studio è mai stato a livello di questi spazi, anche dal punto di vista tecnologico». Professore dal 2006 della cattedra in Multimedia and Performance/Surveillant Architectures all'Academy of Media Arts di Colonia, Julia Scher ha stabilito il suo primo studio in città nel 2011 e lì ci è rimasta per cinque anni.

1 / 3



Oggi il suo spazio di lavoro è un edificio d'inizio '900, che durante la seconda guerra mondiale era adibito all'accoglienza di poveri e abbandonati. Bombolette, scatole, foto, libri, videocamere e uniformi dipinte di rosa, assemblate ovunque in un disordine apparentemente ordinato. Della California la Scher ha portato con sé la luce, mentre dalla sua finestra gode del verde europeo «impagabile rispetto al deserto di L.A.». Da un'infanzia passata davanti alla tv ha maturato l'idea di sequenza, di taglio e montaggio

di spot pubblicitari del quale sente di essere passivo spettatore, senza alcun controllo. Da qui il suo interesse a usare la tecnologia per creare immagini e significati sul controllo e la produzione del sapere, come nel caso dei girati delle camere di sicurezza che in alcuni casi la Scher monta in diretta assieme a materiale pre-registrato. «Ciò che mi affascina è il modo in cui è possibile produrre lo spazio per un'esperienza che combini assieme elementi reali e fittizi. Tutto ciò ha molto a che vedere con la questione delle fake news esplosa qualche anno fa, ma all'epoca il tema non si poneva, lo schermo seduceva chi osservava perché permetteva di immaginare il proprio riflesso, l'immagine che si ha di sé e della propria vita. In un certo senso la tv agiva come uno specchio, perché guardandola ci si riconosceva.



Uno dei temi sui quali si concentra la ricerca attuale di Julia Scher è la "Durational Aesthetics" cioè lo studio degli effetti che il tempo ha sulla conservazione delle opere d'arte come la performance. Tra gli autori e le letture di riferimento dell'artista: Paul Virilio, Gary T. Marx col suo "Undercover: Police Surveillance in America", David Lyon, Noam Chomsky, Arthur Miller e Jean Genet.

Oggi i social media hanno preso il suo posto e hanno a che fare con l'istinto ancestrale di godere della propria immagine. Sono pratiche che ci fanno stare bene». Se nel passato gli oggetti tecnologici erano progettati per darci piacere, oggi i meccanismi di seduzione si stanno spostando a livello sempre più intimo, sono meno visibili e più confortevoli. Come già l'artista scriveva nel 1992 nel saggio mai pubblicato "The screen as a site of control" il design della tecnologia diventa sempre più morbido e curvo per adattarsi meglio ai nostri corpi. Il tema del controllo nella sfera intima e privata affrontato in opere come "Always There" (1994) o "Surveillance Bed" (1995) si è evoluto con uno studio sul piacere voyeuristico e sul tema della "surveillance creep". «Oggi esiste un gradiente dei privilegi per l'accesso ai contenuti su internet, ci sono osservatori con ruoli diversi che partecipano all'espansione delle immagini, ma io sono più timida di prima, non condivido foto personali sul cellulare, e la cosa più inquietante è che nessuno ti avvisa dei rischi». Per concludere con le parole del direttore del Whitney Museum Adam D. Weinberg, dal catalogo della mostra "Astro Noise" del 2016: "L'arte è una possibile risposta alla sorveglianza totale, non soltanto perché la smaschera; caratteristiche dell'arte come la casualità, l'ambiguità, l'illogicità, l'anarchia, l'imprevedibilità e tutte le operazioni incentrate sul caso sfidano i sistemi oppressivi basati sulla struttura e sul controllo".



Nell'azione "Security by Julia" riproposta a Frieze London quest'autunno donne in età matura vestite con uniformi rosa vagano per la fiera interagendo con i visitatori. Giustapponendo l'invisibilità delle donne anziane con la visibilità del personale di sicurezza, così come l'ironia

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## ‘Maybe the Human Thing Is Over’: Why Artist Julia Scher Has Revived Her Disturbingly Prescient ’90s Techno-Dystopia

The artist's acclaimed 1998 installation imagined a dark technological future. Its recreation in Berlin now asks, has it arrived?

Kate Brown (<https://news.artnet.com/about/kate-brown-671>), January 3, 2019



Julia Scher *Security by Julia II* (1989). Courtesy of Esther Schipper.

“Why are we tolerant, and not intolerant, of suffering?” Julia Scher asks me over the thundering sounds of her installation at Esther Schipper Berlin on a recent afternoon.

The 64-year-old American artist rose to acclaim in the early 1990s for posing exactly these kinds of impossible, wide-angled questions. Speculative topics like the future of humankind in the face of artificial intelligence were still marginal issues then, but they appear potently relevant today. Esther Schipper, where Scher’s breakout techno-landscape from 1998, *Wonderland*, has been faithfully recreated twenty years later.

On view until February 9, the soundscape hangs on the cusp of analog and digital technology and it feels, amazingly, like it hasn't lost any of its currency in the passing decades. It also feels, worryingly, like Scher's ominous musings on the future may have finally arrived.



Exhibition view of Julia Scher's *Wonderland*, Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2018.  
Photo: Andrea Rossetti.

### Through the Rabbit Hole

*Wonderland* made its debut at New York's Andrea Rosen gallery in 1998. As Scher puts it, the piece is still a fundamentally "New York work." Indeed, it includes a towering portrait of a 10-year-old [Lena Dunham](https://www.instagram.com/p/BknoAADI3xl/?hl=en) (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BknoAADI3xl/?hl=en>) and her sibling Grace Dunham, whose parents—artists Caroll Dunham and Laurie Simmons—allowed Scher to photograph them, as a favor to dealer Andrea Rosen.

The entire installation is child-sized, complete with tiny stools, desk, and candy scattered around. Children, who Scher calls "young innocents," are among the most helpless victims of violence. But in *Wonderland*, things have changed. Scher has put the kids in charge.

"When being told to do all this shit by the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*, who eventually tells Alice 'off with your head,' Alice replies, 'screw you—you're just a pack of cards!' In my version, she's saying, 'you're just a bunch of bytes!' She is defying the computerization of her life," Scher says.

As viewers walk around the installation, fun-house mirrors alter the reflections of their bodies while Scher's voice directs their movements. The work tempts visitors to take selfies, an aspect of its development that delights Scher (since it was made well before camera phones). "I love technology," she says as she takes out her phone and we snap a picture together. "I'm a total groupie."



Lena by Julia Scher. Courtesy of Esther Schipper.

Her enthusiasm for digital technology is tempered by an ominous undertone, however. “There will be violence as we enter a world of new neural networks and new connections that were never before there,” she says.

“When people have to run away from a fire, the person who can run the fastest has a better chance of survival. In that sense, the way we’re built—our physicality—used to be a determining factor,” Scher says. But “strength could change in the future with the advent of artificial intelligence and body extension robot networks. But *how* will it change?”

“The hope is that brute strength won’t be necessary at some point, that it will drop away. But if we (humans) keep populating the Earth like this, how can you get equality, equity, and extensions for every person?” she says.

I ask her if she thinks our relationship to power is changing in civil society today. She seems encouraged not by the answer but by the question. “These are questions that humans ask, but these are not questions that artificial intelligence will ask. In your proposal, it’s great to see that you are a human!”

Scher, who is deftly avoidant of concrete answers, adds that she remains optimistic. “Maybe the human thing is over but, because I’m human, I have hope. I have trust though that technology will continue to move on,” she says. “If not by humans, technology will continue to do it itself.”

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Julia Scher's *Guards*, *Hidden Camera* at Frieze London 2018. Courtesy of Esther Schipper, Berlin.

### Imagining the Future as Female

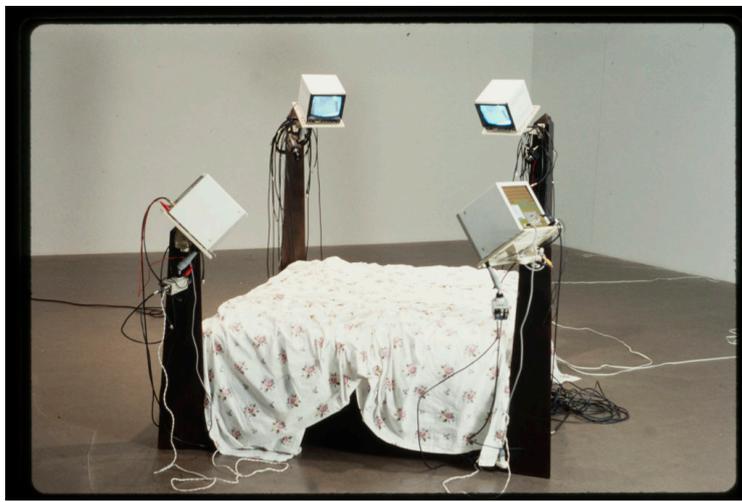
Scher's female-centric installation, which draws reference both to a brothel and a teenage girl's bedroom, conflates a surveillance society with the male gaze. Her baby pink security blankets, pink guard uniforms, and photographs of children in pink uniforms, who are portrayed as safekeepers, stir up tension between the realities of women, who tend to be over-observed in both public and private spaces. (Scher's choice of pink comes from its history as the color attached to homosexuals in the Nazi death camps and later as the symbol of resistance and empowerment in the AIDS coalition ACT UP.)

These are all ingredients in Scher's vision of dystopian optimism, as is *Mama Bed*, a work from 2003 that features a bed and a leather whip, surrounded by cameras. Everything lingers around the boundary of being cute but also profoundly scary. "Is something really threatening if it's sweet?" asks Scher.

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*Always There* (1994) from Scher's "Surveillance Beds" series. Courtesy of Esther Schipper.

Scher taught the first class on surveillance studies in the US at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. It's no small wonder, considering her premonitions about the paradoxes of "smart" technology were eerily prescient (*If this is a SmartRoom, why don't the lights work!?* calls out the installation, in doubt of itself.) Today, she's a professor of multimedia and surveillant architectures at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, where she has lived for many years.

"Does a ['SmartRoom'] mean that, without computers, we are in a DumbRoom?" Scher asks me, in another baffling question. "Are we paying more to be with artificial intelligence? *Wonderland* comes out of an alertness about what everybody already knew back in 1998: how devastating technology smells on one side, but how grateful we are for it on the other."

I wondered if she could imagine the male gaze ever becoming outmoded, as technology may continue to change power relations. "Let me answer the question sideways first. My hope is that identification itself becomes more *liquid*, like it really is," Scher says. "And my hope is that it the dominating gaze, used to force you into a shape, will be like some kind of plague—gone."

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## Tomás Saraceno, Brainy Spider-Man of the Art World, Talks Arachnids – and Denies He Is Trying ‘to Capture and Eat Berlin’s Art Scene’

The environmentally conscious artist's entire show at Esther Schipper in Berlin packs up into one box.

Kimberly Bradley (<https://news.artnet.com/about/kimberly-bradley-1084>), November 21, 2019



Tomás Saraceno. Photo: Alfred Weidinger © 2015

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My daughter calls Tomás Saraceno “the spider man who’s not Spider-Man.” Over and over, I’ve written profiles of and done interviews with the Argentinian, Berlin-based artist, returning home each time to show my 10-year-old my newest smartphone images of glistening spider webs that the artist researches, preserves, and exhibits, as well as the exotic spiders that spin them. She’s always fascinated and a little scared (right now she prefers snakes to spiders).

“I, of course, like the spiders, but I like their webs better,” Saraceno told me at a party in Berlin a few weeks ago. As a metaphor, the web is the ultimate referent to Saraceno’s practice. Many of his works occur as weblike objects: early pieces, like his many iterations of “Cloud Cities,” are intricate, quasi-utopian architectures suspended high in the air from cables; more recent works have included real spider webs in two or three dimensions.

But this son of two scientists is as much about the increasingly dense web of knowledge that interconnects his multiple lines of inquiry (astrophysics, architecture, and arachnology are just the beginning). A growing network of collaborators and researchers

(human and nonhuman) is involved in this voracious research, so it's also about a collective consciousness that, if Saraceno's lofty visions came to fruition, could be capable of transcending the most dire of humanity's problems.

"Algo-r(h)i(y)thms," the artist's new exhibition at Esther Schipper in Berlin, is another representation of Saraceno's complex web. All 300 square meters (3230 square feet) of the blazingly white exhibition space is filled with a floor-to-ceiling network of black cording arranged in clusters of varying sizes that are attached to each other as well as the ceiling, walls, and floor.

Viewers walk *into* the spider web-meets-galaxy-meets-Buckminster Fuller work, which is beautiful, disarming, and multi-sensory. When plucked or rubbed, miked cords make sounds that reverberate throughout the web and the room. The frequencies of the smaller clusters are calibrated to match those of an *Argiope keyserlingi* spider's courtship signal; the larger ones refer to clouds in a distant galaxy. The sonic effect is ethereal, sometimes sounding digital and other times approximating a violin or piano string.



Tomás Saraceno "Algo-r(h)i(y)thms," Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo © Andrea Rossetti

## Stalking Saraceno

On the show's opening day, Saraceno laughed as he met me in the gallery for yet another interview. Me again. I feel like I've stalked him for two years, appearing repeatedly in the [multi-story factory Berlin studio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb_title) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb\_title) that he's occupied since 2013 (he came to Germany to study architecture, then art), each time meeting yet a few more of his 80-odd employees and seeing what the spiders in the upstairs lab are spinning.

On a previous visit, I showed up in a remote rural field near the Polish border when he launched a group of outsize black triangular balloons—ongoing tests of solar-powered air flight and part of his “Aerocene” project (a foundation, a community, and part of an idea that we all might somehow live in the sky or fly without fossil fuels). I’ve come to see him at galleries and museums mid-installation—this one took more than two weeks—and enjoyed witnessing the outcomes of large-scale exhibitions like the vast “On Air” show at Paris’s Palais de Tokyo last year.

Yet truly following the man is unrealistic: Beyond showing extensively in biennials and institutions on all continents, he also meets with government ministers about fossil-free transportation, does TED talks, orchestrates concerts between musicians and arachnids, and disappears into remote regions with shamans and healers. In the past, he’s worked with some of the world’s more esteemed scientific institutions, including NASA, MIT, and Max-Planck Institute. His smartphone schedule is a mess of highlighter colors and appointments. His mind is somewhere in the metaphorical clouds, most of the time.



Tomás Saraceno “Algo-r(h)(y)thms,” Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo © Andrea Rossetti

Saraceno hands me an instruction manual to the show before we enter the gallery in felt slippers. The sheet explains how spiders tap and pluck their webs to communicate and serves as inspiration for viewers to “play” what they’re seeing. The installation is meant to be one instrument: “Like people on the same piano, not like an orchestra,” Saraceno says. It’s an embodiment of the notion that everything from the cosmos to the tiniest invertebrate is connected.

He explains spider behavior, which is solely based on vibrational sensing (spiders are both blind and deaf): Much behavior seems deviant to mammalian standards. There are spiders who mimic the courtship vibration only to eat the spider they’ve just courted (seems oddly familiar, on some level). Other spiders eat their mothers when her body starts drumming a signal (a matricidal dinner bell of sorts).

“So this installation is supposed to capture and eat Berlin’s art scene?” I ask. “I’m not a black widow,” he says, with his signature raspy laugh. For all our humorous banter, the conversation reveals the extensive research and cross-disciplinary thinking that goes into these works. But at the same time, they are crowd-pleasers: immersive and just *fun*. It’s not quite “[Big Fun Art](https://news.artnet.com/opinion/state-of-the-culture-part-i-1184315)” (<https://news.artnet.com/opinion/state-of-the-culture-part-i-1184315>) (a coinage by Artnet News critic Ben Davis); rather, Saraceno seems to use accessibility as to lure the viewer into engaging with far more complex subjects.

There is something of a mad scientist vibe to Saraceno, who every time I visit the [studio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb_title) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb_title)), enthusiastically shows me

everything new he and his multinational teams are working on (last time it was the Arachnomancy app, on view at [Ralph Rugoff's main exhibition \(https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/review-venice-may-you-live-in-interesting-times-1542859\)](https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/review-venice-may-you-live-in-interesting-times-1542859) at this year's Venice Biennale).

Palais de Tokyo's "On Air" curator Rebecca Lamarche-Vadel has likened Saraceno's polymathy to that of Leonardo da Vinci. Lately, though, Saraceno is not only departing from the visual in favor of sound, but is also delving into instinct and intuition. In an effort to access dormant or nonhuman knowledge and understand subtle sensory input (as well as mentally manage a brutal travel schedule and a midsize company), he has been trying new things. He's currently into Transcendental Meditation, will soon travel to Cameroon for a divination ceremony, and will return to the jungle in Argentina with a Colombian shaman to better understand natural sound.



Tomás Saraceno Webs of At-tent(s)ion, 2018 Exhibition view of *ON AIR*, Carte Blanche to Tomás Saraceno, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2018. Curated by Rebecca Lamarche-Vadel. Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo © Andrea Rossetti

## The Real Spider-Man

On a more practical level, Saraceno's [studio \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb\\_title\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb_title) recently audited its energy use and found that more than 50 percent fell to art transport. The team is beginning to work around this. "This show packs down to one box!" Saraceno says of his entanglement at Esther Schipper.

To tweak his personal behavior amid a packed travel schedule, he has begun to take the train to London, has started biking to the [studio \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb\\_title\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05rgQUFPTjc&feature=emb_title) when he can, and now wonders whether art can be shipped via one of his "Aerocene Explorer" balloons (or perhaps just *be* an "Aerocene" balloon, flying in during biennial openings).

Still, Saraceno is not preachy. "One of the 10 points of advocacy is to never point fingers," he says, mentioning the dangers of call-out culture or excessive self-criticism. "We have degrees of responsibility—*response-ability*," he says, repeating something he's told me before. "Our role—this gallery, myself, you—is actually very tiny. But if we change our habits, we're less able to be manipulated for profit. We have to consciously locate ourselves. Try to see which alliances we have to build," he says, becoming a little quiet. "I don't know. It's hard."

Like my young daughter says, Saraceno the spider-man is not the superhero. He is an explorer of inner space and outer space, the creator of confluences, new forms of communication, and some contradictions. He exudes an idealism and optimism even in the midst of what's called the Sixth Extinction. Most people leave

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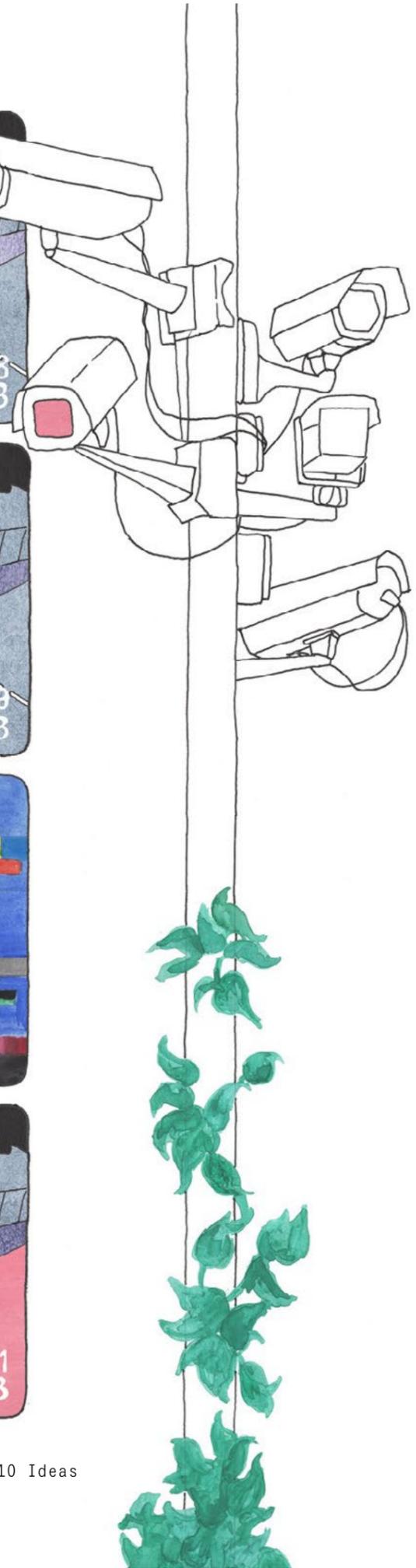
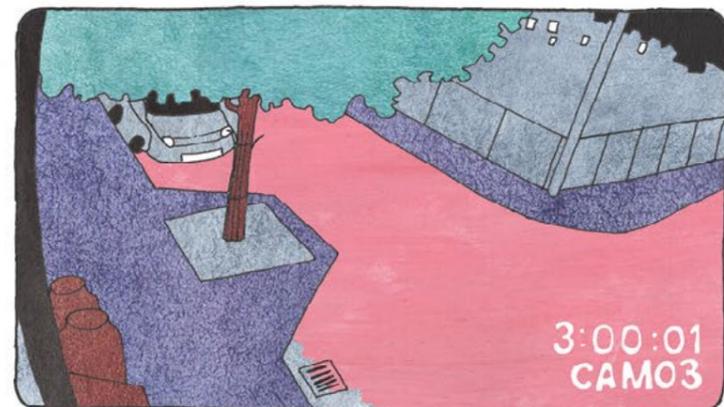
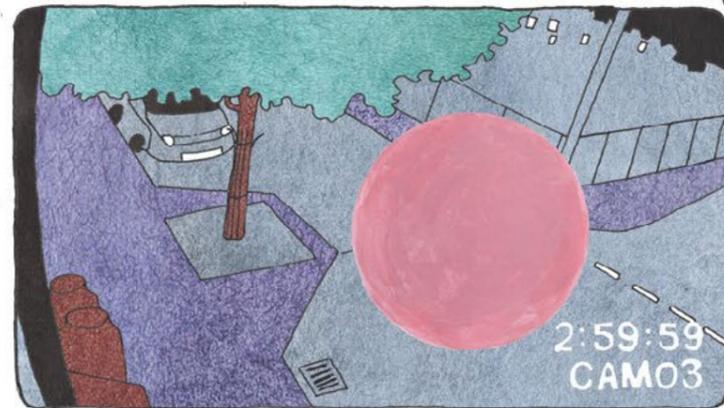
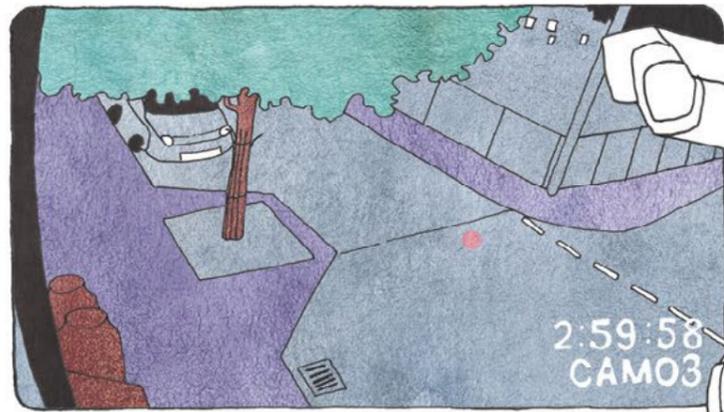


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 10 IDEAS THAT CONSUME  
 SECURITY  
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By Julia Scher  
 Illustration: Antonia Stringer

1. CHRONIC CONSENT  
 ALERTNESS

Every day, at least ten times per day, we click "OK", "I agree", "sign here", "I accept". We are meant, it appears, to take joy in the journey and move to the next screen, the next paperless transaction. We never know when it is going to happen – when suddenly a yellow box will erupt and demand "Accept!"

2. TECHNOLOGICAL SEDUCTION  
 COMES WITH CURVES

Mobile devices, phones especially, have soft rounded corners. Although the device itself can't really injure us, its microwaves probably can. But then again, waves are also curvy, and when we imagine their movements they are mesmerizing and seductive – not scary at all. This giant MRI machine, this gas mask can't hurt us – they are all curved.

3. POPULAR HIGH-TECH TOXIC  
 ADHESIONS

We are stuck to an adventure of disconnection. We respond, hear things in English, watch screen movements without blinking. We purchase new-tech body insertables, breathables, chemical ingestibles, pills and psychological-help recordings. Our ears hurt from the electromagnetic radiation spilling from our mobile phones, but we can't pull the darn things off our faces.

4. WOMEN AND SCRUTINY

Let's raise the spectre of woman as scrutinizer – as "watcher" in everyday life! From ancestral mothers protecting children at the mouths of caves, the various acts of watching, to scrutinize, are consequential. Women examine, explore, engage, contact. We have learned, in countless films, from the woman's view – as directors put us inside female characters' eyes.

5. CHASE SCENES AS  
 ENTERTAINMENT

Many of the first films were composed of silent chase scenes and domestic disturbances, where furniture and property were busted up. We can enjoy siding with characters fleeing or making escapes. With its many variations, a chase can be endless or incorporate an end with

demolition, death, abduction, capture, escape, love, entanglement, resignation. We empathize with the pain or panic of the pursued or share in the joy of the pursuer.

6. DISTURBANCE  
 ARCHITECTURES HAVE US  
 IMAGINE CONTROL

What can we build from a landslide or toxic accumulation, like a dump? We should advocate architecture that evolves from within the new ecology we have created and work together as revisions are tested. While the idea to build healthy living spaces for shifting, wounded and evolving populations is awesome, more elite architectures of confinement and restriction are built.

7. THE ALLURE OF REPEATED  
 ORAL COMMANDS

Our ears perk up at the multiple sounds we hear on a daily basis – everywhere. We are attentive to noise in the room, the airport, the drug store, the subway, public space, traffic control, its cadences and its cessation. Mostly these are oral commands of a constant volume, timing and reverberation. Even the smile is a command: echoing the words of Stephen Stills on "Wooden Ships": "If you smile at me, I will understand / Cause that is something everybody everywhere does / In the same language."

8. CCTV TRAFFICKERS MAKE A  
 NEW WILD WEST

CCTV footage is not only a testing ground that is constantly growing protective and coercive networks, but an erupting market, where pieces of surveillance material are trafficked and CCTV equipment is dragged off into all four corners of the earth and sky.

9. SECURITY PLEASURES AND  
 "HAUTE FUTURE"

There is a newly discovered pleasure in the identification process built into our devices. Gestures, fingerprints and facial lines allow us to connect to wearables and plug in. It's sharable information that functions as protection and safeguard.

10. SURVEILLANCE AND  
 "METAVEILLANCE"

There are many types of "veillance". Sur- and sousveillance, for example, or dataveillance, where the watchers are being watched and cameras are watched by other cameras. The nature of new expectations and doubts about the world beyond surveillance is yet unseen. On earth at least, there is a broader world of seeing sight itself.

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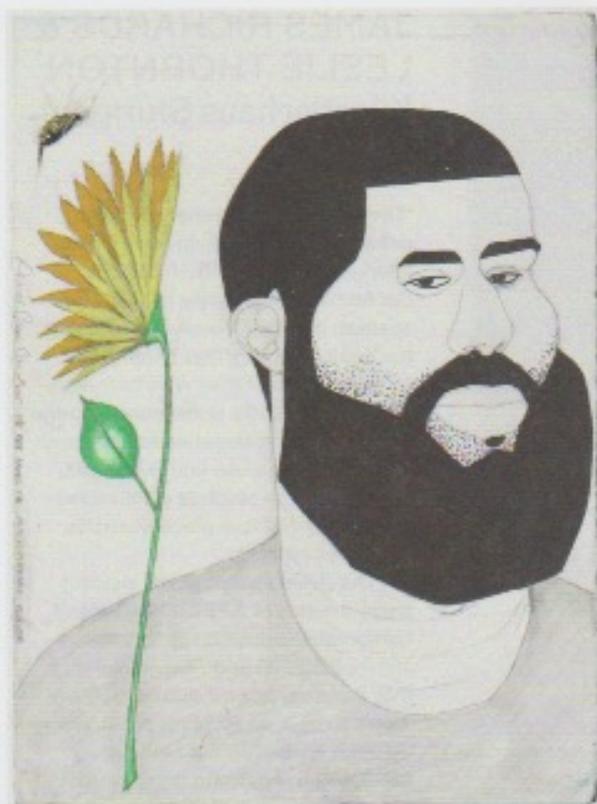
## DERRICK ALEXIS COARD

Delmes & Zander,  
Cologne, Germany

Delmes & Zander in Cologne has long championed those artists defined by stigmatizing catchalls such as 'art brut' and 'outsider art', doing so with an acute sensitivity to the fact that difference alone should not equate to currency. The drawings of Derrick Alexis Coard, a selection of which are brought together in the solo exhibition 'Bearded Black Man', are well served by this approach. Coard, who died in August last year at the age of 36, lived with a schizoaffective disorder but, while evident in his drawings, his artistic practice cannot be reduced to this aspect alone. We need only look at the slightly angular rendering of an African-American man in *The Bee Saved the Schizophrenic* (2015), his soft eyes staring out, his face framed and covered by deep black hair. To his left floats a flower drawn in coloured pastels; above it, a bee. With its title and almost allegorical composition, the drawing could easily be taken as a portrait of the artist, but Coard's works are not self-portraits. They are portrayals of imaginary men – always full-bearded, always black.

Something that plays no real part in this work, but is striking elsewhere in the show, is the abundance of visual cyphers for sainthood. *Anointing Fall on Me* (2015) is a half-length portrait of a man in profile, his eyes closed. The figure's head is surrounded by a bright yellow halo, a commonplace motif in painted icons. *The Epiphany* (2014) similarly activates a religious visual idiom, portraying a naked man, far more muscular this time, as an angel. The figure's washed-out body contrasts starkly with both his blue and yellow halo and the dynamic lines emphasizing his strong upper arms – à la Superman. In this fascinating mash-up of homoerotic black icon and the stylistic means of comic-book illustration, the figure's soft, dreamy eyes remain at odds with his body, which is steeped in the conventions of 'manliness'.

It is conspicuous that the eyes of Coard's figures invariably convey shyness or vulnerability and are often closed or hidden behind heavy sunglasses. The exhibition includes three portraits with eyewear, the most appealing being *Lyricist's Eyes Unrevealed* (2015): the head, rendered in marker pen and half-profile, is formed from the saturated black of sunglasses, beard and hair, with each element seamlessly converging on the one visible ear. While shades are customarily seen as a demarcation of coolness, Coard's focus is on the unrevealed eyes, the concealing of vulnerability behind a hard, outer shell.



The dominance of the colour black in these works can certainly be read as an affirmation and assertion of blackness, but Coard's statement of 'I'm Black and I'm Proud' is far more fragile than that which was defiantly sung by James Brown in 1968. Here, impenetrable black hair, especially beard hair, combined with deflecting sunglasses, appears to be a form of protection; an armoured suit that encloses something more sensitive.

But there is also a subtly coded homoerotic celebration at work in Coard's depictions of maleness – most explicitly in *Pete's Underwear Body* (2015). At the centre of this bashful triple-portrait is a full-length depiction of a man, in underwear, with hair all over his body. To his left and right are cropped details from the portrait: half of his face and an enlarged section of his hirsute body. While Pete's posture is timid and his gaze neutral, the two enlarged sections, and that which depicts his near-naked body, candidly create a charged sexual tension that is present only in highly oblique ways in the exhibition's other works. Over and over again, it is this directness, this simplicity of means, that proves to be the strength of Coard's project.

Moritz Scheper  
Translated by Nicholas Grindell

## JULIA SCHER DREI, Cologne, Germany

In 1991, Julia Scher assembled the immersive video installation, 'I'll Be Gentle', at Pat Hearn Gallery in New York. Moving through the installation's three rooms, visitors entered their personal details into a database, were bombarded by a dadaist array of safety imperatives and presented with the surveillance footage that had been recorded of them in the gallery. Some 27 years later at DREI in Cologne, we find various elements of Scher's gentleness reincarnated under the expanded title 'I'll Be Gentle, No Consent'.

The recurring elements include the *Hallway Cam* (1991/2018), an orange JVC studio camera that lurks all-too-conspicuously in an artificial bush. A dangling mass of cables suggests that the camera is transmitting footage to two stacked monitors positioned in the window, but it soon becomes clear that one of the screens is playing a video cut from recordings of the 1991 installation. And, while the second monitor does show a live-feed of pedestrians on the pavement outside the gallery, it doesn't originate from the orange decoy, but from another camera concealed within the same faux bush.

At the centre of a backlit wall that bisects the gallery is a doorway labelled 'Voyeurs Corridor', through which the visitor can glimpse an even more dramatically lit Amazon Echo device – the main new addition to Scher's constellation. Since its release in 2015, the Echo series of voice-controlled smart speakers has gained notoriety online for its unsolicited behaviour. It has been caught talking to itself, transmitting conversations to saved contacts, quoting Hannibal Lecter and laughing at its users.

For more than 30 years, Scher has strived to visualize the interplay between surveillance, control and exhibitionism, and it is the insurmountable difficulty of drawing this project into the present age that resonates throughout the show. The semi-functional tangles of cables seem like curious relics in the face of wireless data; the live-feed of visitors appears quaint in the age of automated motion tracking and facial recognition; the panoptic eye that was once embodied by the camera has seamlessly evolved into the user interface. But, rather than aestheticize the forms and materials of these technologies past, Scher resurrects them in order to point to problems that remain decidedly unresolved. In 'I'll Be Gentle, No Consent', the reactive human body and its moving image, once central to Scher's installations, is demoted to the status of an inert onlooker, doomed, perhaps, to endure as little more than a voyeur of its algorithmically administered condition.

**This page**  
Derrick Alexis Coard,  
*The Bee Saved the Schizophrenic*, 2015,  
marker, graphite and  
pastel on paper,  
76 x 56 cm

**Opposite page**  
**Above**  
Vajiko Chachkhiani,  
*Heavy Metal Honey*,  
2018, video still

Vajiko Chachkhiani,  
*'Heavy Metal Honey'*,  
2018, exhibition view

**Below**  
Julia Scher, 'I'll Be  
Gentle, No Consent',  
2018, exhibition view

Scher's Amazon Echo sputters off a series of pre-programmed phrases that articulate a sexualized unease at the expanded possibilities for surveillance and data collection which such technologies represent, as well as the ambivalent ethical status of quasi-intelligent automata: 'How do humans give consent to an artificial? Consent relies on having a body and a mind ... somewhere.' The fragments seem tinged with a certain frustration; a desire, even, to break the disciplinary fourth wall enacted by flawless surfaces and user-friendly interactions.

'Exhibitionism' once served as a blanket diagnosis for a spectrum of novel cultural perversities that emerged in response to the explosion of consumer video technology in the 1980s and '90s – from homemade sex tapes to reality television. Now, in the age of social media, the compulsion to participate in one's own representation, or lack thereof, has become the order of the day. What then seems perverse in Scher's diagnosis is not just the pleasure we humans take in posing for the camera but, rather, the pleasure we take in having the gentler algorithmic agents of the market and the state pose as humans while we serve each other's needs. If, in 1984 (1949), George Orwell's vision for the future of a totalitarian surveillance state was 'a boot stamping on a human face – for ever', ours might be that of an unrelenting embrace.

Stanton Taylor



## VAJIKO CHACHKHIANI Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany

Georgia's history stretches back to a time of ancient myths. It is the land of Prometheus, who was chained to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains. It is the land of the golden fleece, which was stolen by Jason, with the assistance of Medea and Orpheus. Georgia is permeated with these tales, but how do they influence life there today? As is palpable in his extraordinary exhibition, 'Heavy Metal Honey', the artist Vajiko Chachkhiani – who is based in his hometown of Tbilisi – has studied this question for years.

At the exhibition's entrance stands a replica of the marble statue of Orpheus that Baccio Bandinelli made in 1519. Chachkhiani's version, *Orpheus, Secret That Mountain Kept* (2018) is studded with wedges that are used to divide stone, pointing to the never-ending process of fragmentation, displacement and reuse that is operative in the dissemination of myths. Following Chachkhiani's Orpheus is the installation *Secret That Mountain Kept*, which fills an entire room and introduces the biblical motif of the flood. According to the Book of Genesis, Noah's ark landed on Mount Ararat, not far from present-day Georgia. In 2015, Tbilisi experienced flooding of biblical proportions, which claimed several lives and saw a number of animals escape from the city's zoo. For *Secret That Mountain*

*Kept*, Chachkhiani constructed a series of racks from the metal bars that once caged these animals, interlacing them with a number of vertical sticks tipped with upturned gourds, their forms not dissimilar from those that were used to store wine in mythical times. (Some of the earliest evidence of wine production has been unearthed in Georgia, dated around 6,000 BCE.) Between the bars are wooden sculptures of fugitive animals entangled in thickets of branches, as well as a carousel car that was carried away by the flood and got caught in the mud.

At the centre of the installation is a kiosk, reminiscent of those that appeared throughout Georgia as the private sector developed in the 1990s. While they resemble ramshackle huts – built from boards, sheet metal, found doors and glass panes – these structures were the veins through which the Georgian capitalist economy flowed. Today, they have disappeared from the streets but, as harbingers of capitalism, they too have taken on a mythic status.

The film *Winter Which Was Not There* (2017) depicts a crane fishing a statue from the sea. Gradually, it becomes clear that the statue is of a man who is standing on the beach. He then ties the statue to his pick-up truck and drives off. As he travels through the Georgian landscape, the concrete disintegrates until all that remains is the chain that once fastened it to his vehicle. The film is a striking allusion the figure of the dictator, namely Joseph Stalin, who was born in Georgia and whose statues and spirit linger throughout the country.

*Heavy Metal Honey* (2018) is a shocking piece of cinema. It depicts a large Georgian family sitting around a dining table, conversing animatedly. Suddenly, rain begins to fall on the interior scene, saturating everything and everyone, but the family continues its discussion as if nothing were out of the ordinary. Only the mother acknowledges the downpour. She leaves the room and, after some time, returns with a pistol. One by one, she shoots everyone except her son, who she does not have enough bullets to kill. The film cuts to the mother, lying in bed with an intravenous drip, either dying or, unlike her family, being kept with the living.

What is the film trying to say through this horror? Is it a dream, an escape from death or revenge for the fact that man is mortal while myths live on? *Heavy Metal Honey* leaves these questions open because, like ancient myths, there is a plurality of possible interpretations.

Noemi Smolik  
Translated by Nicholas Grindell



# ArtReview



Pierre Huyghe

Life or something like it...

Julia Scher *I'll Be Gentle, No Consent*  
Galerie Drei, Cologne 30 June – 25 August

It seems odd that, until a couple of years ago, Julia Scher's work hadn't been much exhibited for about 15 years. The US artist's pointed and humorous preoccupation with surveillance technologies, machine learning and voyeurism in the name of safety is as relevant now as it was when she emerged during the late 1980s, especially considering that Scher has evidently kept up with technical developments over the years. Following a string of shows since 2016, her exhibition at Galerie Drei proves this again, by restaging – typically for her – elements of a much earlier exhibition, but giving this historicisation of her own position a contemporary framework. Specifically, behind the broad windowed facade of the gallery there is a white plywood wall with a barred balustrade on top. The only opening, a doorway offering a glance into the dramatically lit interior, is crowned by the words VOYEURS CORRIDOR in capital letters and underneath that, a bit smaller, "I'LL BE GENTLE", set off in quote marks.

With this architectural setting Scher quotes her 1991 exhibition *I'll be gentle* at Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, where two such corridors split the gallery into three thematic zones. Yet the reference works very differently in this case, with the installation of the wall reestablishing the separation of outside and inside seemingly abolished by Galerie Drei's welcomingly glazed

facade. The 'voyeuristic' glimpse into the gallery is mostly blocked, but Scher does place a sad-looking houseplant in between the window and the wall; the plant barely conceals a video camera (*Hallway Cam*, 1991/2018) filming the entrance to the Voyeur's Corridor. The direct broadcast is played back on one of two antiquated monitors that sit on the windowsill. The second monitor shows a medley of text and images generated by visitor interaction during the aforementioned exhibition at Pat Hearn Gallery, using the installed camera system and a data-collection programme. Interestingly, the two stacked monitors show in their juxtaposition of different technical generations not only how certain surveillance practices stay the same, but also how our dealings with them change. As self-aware gallery visitors act up for the cameras in the historical footage, it appears that Scher's surveillance equipment was, despite its criticality, taken as an invitation to enter into a flirtatious game.

The crisp colour broadcast on the top monitor shows such little activity at the entrance to the Voyeur's Corridor that it might as well be a freeze-frame. The monotony of the feed could be representative of how unsensational surveillance is today, even with a much greater awareness of its problems. The visibility of this technology is completely different, too. Instead of a monstrous

installation consisting of a multitude of cameras, monitors and hundreds of metres of cable, which were visible in the Voyeur's Corridor back then (the installation is now called *The Schürmann House*, 1991) and is permanently installed at the eponymous collector couple's house), the interior today stays almost empty. Inside – you can go in, but it's viewable from outside too – there are spotlights, magically charging the view from the outside. Other than that there is only *AI on Location* (2018), Amazon's 'smart speaker' Echo Plus, which is viewable through the aperture in the corridor and emits a female voice – Julia rather than Alexa. The voice is completely devoted to service and recites a sort of techno-poetic spoken word, contextually often askew ("biowars are treatment options for trauma"), but occasionally referring to the exhibition and data security in general. Here, Scher seems chiefly interested in the dark abyss that opens behind this eerie design object, which never gives away which information it is gathering and processing. The surrounding emptiness in the Voyeur's Corridor enhances the dark aura of this little machine: Scher could not have found a better way to emphasise how topical her works and her interests in the embraces and strangleholds of surveillance technology still are today. *Moritz Scheper*

*Translated from the German by Liam Tickner*



*I'll Be Gentle, No Consent*, 2018 (installation view).  
Courtesy Galerie Drei, Cologne

Reviews /



# 'I'll Be Gentle, No Consent': Julia Scher

BY STANTON  
TAYLOR

22 SEP 2018

Julia Scher's disconcerting 1991 immersive installation which surveilles its visitors is rebooted - and upgraded - at DREI, Cologne



In 1991, Julia Scher assembled the immersive video installation, 'I'll be Gentle', at Pat Hearn Gallery in New York. Moving through the installation's three rooms, visitors entered their personal details into a database, were bombarded by a Dadaist array of safety imperatives and presented with the surveillance

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footage that had been recorded of them in the gallery. Some 27 years later at DREI in Cologne, we find various elements of Scher's gentleness reincarnated under the expanded title 'I'll be Gentle, no Consent'.

The recurring elements include the *Hallway Cam* (1991/2018), an orange JVC studio camera that lurks all-too-conspicuously in an artificial bush. A dangling mass of cables suggests that the camera is transmitting footage to two stacked monitors positioned in the window, but it soon becomes clear that one of the screens is playing a video cut from recordings of the 1991 installation. And, while the second monitor does show a live-feed of pedestrians on the pavement outside the gallery, it doesn't originate from the orange decoy, but from another camera concealed within the same faux bush.

At the centre of a backlit wall that bisects the gallery is a doorway labelled 'Voyeurs Corridor', through which the visitor can glimpse an even more dramatically lit Amazon Echo device – the main new addition to Scher's constellation. Since its release in 2015, the Echo series of voice-controlled smart speakers has gained notoriety online for its unsolicited behaviour. It has been caught talking to itself, transmitting conversations to saved contacts, quoting Hannibal Lecter and laughing at its users.

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Julia Scher,  
installation view,  
2018, DREI,  
Cologne.  
Courtesy: DREI,  
Cologne

For more than 30 years, Scher has strived to visualize the interplay between surveillance, control and exhibitionism, and it is the insurmountable difficulty of drawing this project into the present age that resonates throughout the show. The semi-functional tangles of cables seem like curious relics in the face of wireless data; the live-feed of visitors appears quaint in the age of automated motion tracking and facial recognition; the panoptic eye that was once embodied by the camera has seamlessly evolved into the user interface. But, rather than aestheticize the forms and materials of these technologies past, Scher resurrects them in order to point to problems that remain decidedly unresolved. In 'I'll be Gentle, no Consent', the reactive human body and its moving image, once central to Scher's installations, is demoted to the status of an inert onlooker, doomed, perhaps, to endure as little more than a

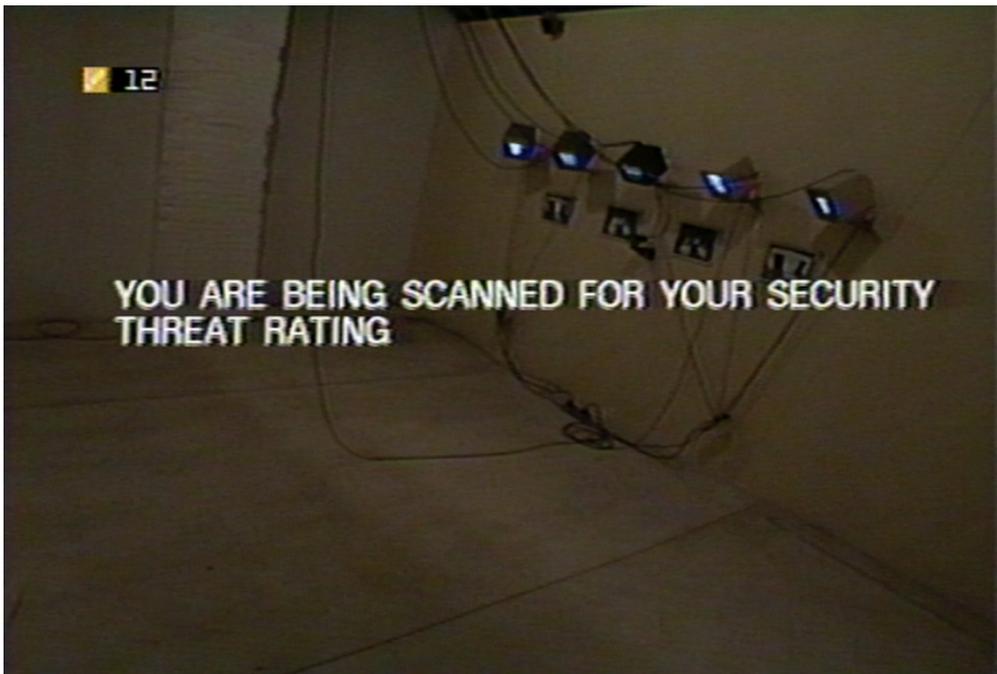


voyeur of its algorithmically administered condition.

Scher's Amazon Echo sputters off a series of pre-programmed phrases that articulate a sexualized unease at the expanded possibilities for surveillance and data collection which such technologies represent, as well as the ambivalent ethical status of quasi-intelligent automatons: 'how do humans give consent to an artificial? Consent relies on having a body and a mind ... somewhere.' The fragments seem tinged with a certain frustration; a desire, even, to break the disciplinary fourth wall enacted by flawless surfaces and user-friendly interactions.

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'Exhibitionism' once served as a blanket diagnosis for a spectrum of novel cultural perversities that emerged in response to the explosion of consumer video technology in the 1980s and '90s - from homemade sex tapes to reality television. Now, in the age of social media, the compulsion to participate in one's own representation, or lack thereof, has



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become the order of the day. What then seems perverse in Scher's diagnosis is not just the pleasure we humans take in posing for the camera but, rather, the pleasure we take in having the gentler algorithmic agents of the market and the state pose as humans while we serve each other's needs. If, in *1984* (1949), George Orwell's vision for the future of a totalitarian surveillance state was 'a boot stamping on a human face – for ever', ours might be that of an unrelenting embrace.

***Julia Scher: 'I'll be Gentle, no Consent'***

*<[http://www.drei.cologne/archive/1806\\_js.html](http://www.drei.cologne/archive/1806_js.html)> was on view at DREI, Cologne from 30 June until 25 August 2018.*

*Main image: Julia Scher, installation view (exterior), 2018, DREI, Cologne. Courtesy: DREI, Cologne*

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STANTON TAYLOR

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October 2018

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JULIA SCHER

REVIEW

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Jens Asthoff	Johan Österholm
Fatos Üstek	Max Pinckers
Moritz Schepers	Julia Scher
Susanne Holschbach	Simon & Simone
Sandra Križić Rohan	Marko Tadić
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which to make the spatiotemporality inscribed into light—especially in cosmic dimensions—aesthetically tangible and comprehensible. „Mare Desiderii (The Sea of Dreams)“ (2012), for example, implies a twofold time relationship: a glass slide that his great-grandfather, hobby astronomer and also photographer, took of the moon in the 1930s, was photographed by Österholm again in 2014 by having it illuminated by moonlight. For the series „Some Moon Walks (Isle of Sark)“ (2017), he wandered at night during half of a moon cycle across the island with the lowest light pollution in Europe, took landscape pictures in the moonlight by means of long-term exposure. He also exposed emulsion-coated glass plates to capture moonlight directly; „Moon Plate Exposing (Isle of Sark)“ (2017) reproduces an impression of the process.

#### Fatos Üstek – Max Pinckers

Max Pinckers's series entitled „Margins of Excess“ (2018) questions the plausibility of the image, under the immediate restraint to provide authenticity and desire through what is presented. Taking photography beyond the quest of capturing what is not yet documented into a frame, Pinckers concentrates on six subjects and on their respective narratives charged by states of curiosity, vulnerability, empathy, and need of recognition. These four interrelated feelings span the photographic space of his series while he unfolds those speculative stories into the realms of the image marked by some form of truth. At times it is the performed identity, either for the camera or beyond, that precedes the facts, while at others it is the narrative that oscillates between possible worlds where the „Real“ resides.

#### Moritz Schepers – Julia Scher

Since the mid-1980s, Julia Scher has been working with surveillance technologies, their seductive potential, and the image material arising in the process. Early on, she already started dealing with the Internet and creating works that today would be classified as Net Art. Two approaches are characteristic of the artist: she consistently keeps pace with state-of-the-art technology on the one hand, while approximating the complex of discipline and punish with a sense of irony on the other. For regardless of how tremendous its magnitude may be, both the acts of observation and being watched have a libidinous dimension that Scher knows how to trigger.

#### Susanne Holschbach – Simon & Simone

Simon & Simone are Grit Hachmeister and Claudia Gülzow. The two started the magazine *DIE STREICHELWURST* in 2010 and since then have frequently developed collaborative projects. In photographic acts of self-staging they pose as pinups for a queer calendar or present themselves as an odd couple with strange domestic rituals. Here, they invoke common conceptions of lesbian and gay criticism and exaggerate set pieces from camp aesthetics so strongly that queer—made consumable for the mainstream—becomes queer again: unsettling and disturbing in its anarchistic, subversive potential. The blend of quirky humor and analytical poignancy are characteristic of Grit Hachmeister's own photographs and drawings, through which she has developed, over the course of many years, a consistently non-heteronormative iconography.

#### Sandra Križić Roban – Marko Tadić

Using a combination of drawing, animation, installation, and photographs—found, taken, and appropriated, then recreated in painting and grattage—Marko Tadić builds social and historical references to a past when projections of the future were still positive and utopian. Scenes of modernization and construction, sometimes denied by the Croatian politicians and public of today, function as stage sets for Tadić: they are projections of the postwar decades that result from the artist's research and his subjective selection of the material. In historical hiatuses, photographs sometimes turn into a sort of *waste*, which can gain new existence through artistic procedures. With Tadić, the narrative thereby created depends on visual word plays and their free association, with multiple constellations of meaning.

#### Michèle Cohen Hadria – Yuki Onodera

Mit unerschöpflicher Hingabe erschafft Yuki Onodera ihre großformatigen Fotografien in der Dunkelkammer. Indem sie die maschinelle Dimension des Mediums herausfordert, berührt sie eine Art Metaphysik der Fotografie. In »Below Orpheus« (2006) verbindet sie das *Verschwinden* eines Gastes aus seinem Hotelzimmer mit dem *Erscheinen* eines Propheten auf einer fernen Insel auf der anderen Seite des Erdballs. Schon immer war Onoderas Ansatz der einer durch und durch experimentellen Fotografin. In »Muybridge's Twist« (2017) ereignet sich ein unerwarteter Bruch. Hier werden Modefotografien bearbeitet und an ihre Grenzen geführt, erfahren eine zerstückelte und entkörperlichte Verflachung. Ein merkwürdiger Hybrid, der wie durch eine paradoxe Umkehrung die Fotografie wieder der Illustration annähert, die ihr eigentlich historisch vorausging, und deren *verblichene Ikone* uns Onodera hier erneut vor Augen führt.

#### Jens Asthoff – Johan Österholm

Viele Werkgruppen Johan Österholms basieren auf seiner Beschäftigung mit Sternen- und Mondlicht. Eine Art poetischer Lichthistoriker, nutzt er Fotografie als Reflexionsmedium, um die dem Licht—vor allem in kosmischen Dimensionen—eingeschriebene Zeiträumlichkeit ästhetisch (be)greifbar zu machen. »Mare Desiderii (The Sea of Dreams)« (2012) impliziert ein zweifaches Zeitverhältnis: Ein Glasdia, das sein Urgroßvater, Hobbyastronom und ebenfalls Fotograf, in den 1930er-Jahren vom Mond aufnahm, fotografierte Österholm 2014 erneut, indem er es von Mondlicht illuminieren ließ. Für die Serie »Some Moon Walks (Isle of Sark)« (2017) wanderte er während eines halben Mondzyklus nachts über die Insel mit der europaweit geringsten Lichtverschmutzung, machte dort mittels Langzeitbelichtung Landschaftsaufnahmen im Mondlicht—und exponierte auch emulsionsbeschichtete Glasplatten, um Mondlicht direkt einzufangen; »Moon Plate Exposing (Isle of Sark)« (2017) gibt davon einen Eindruck wieder.

#### Fatos Üstek – Max Pinckers

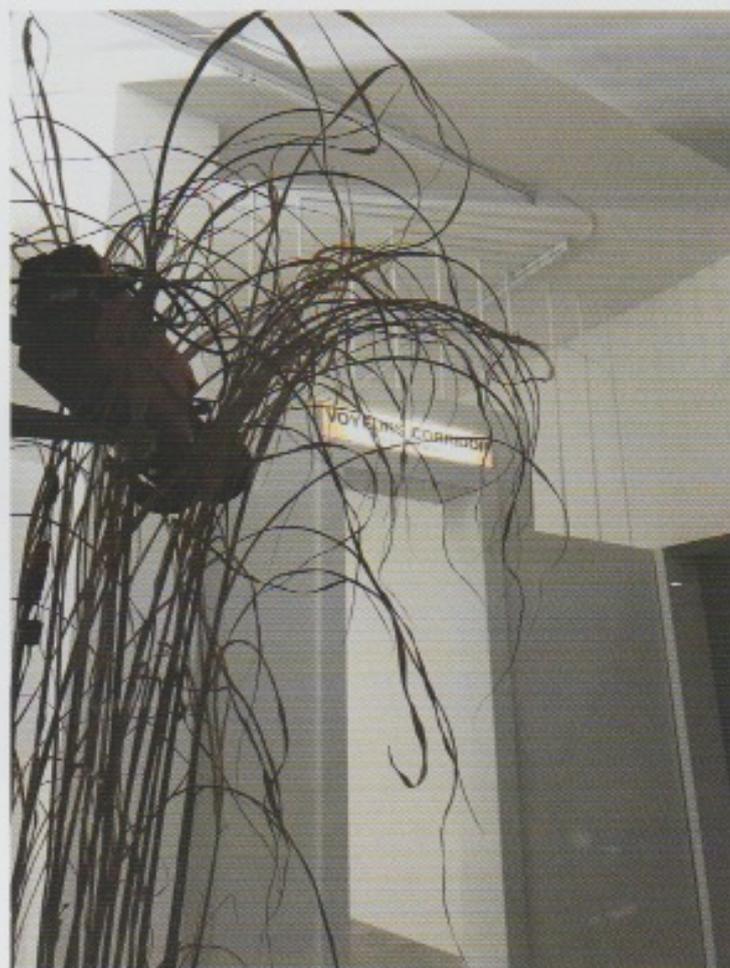
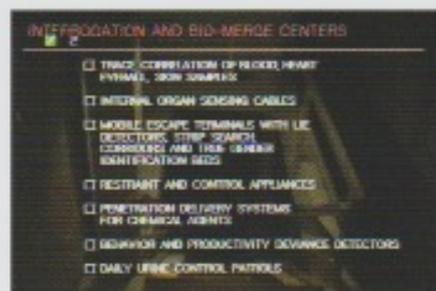
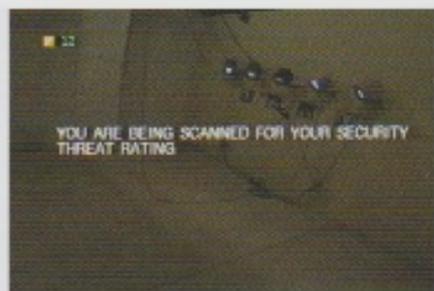
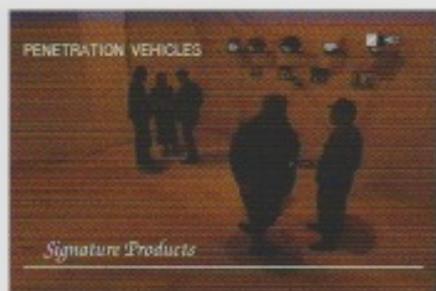
Die Serie mit dem Titel »Margins of Excess« (2018) befragt die Glaubwürdigkeit des Bildes unter der unmittelbaren Auflage, Wahrfähigkeit und Anliegen durch das Gezeigte zu vermitteln. Jenseits des fotografischen Vorhabens, das noch nicht Dokumentierte in einem Bildausschnitt festzuhalten, fokussiert Pinckers auf sechs Personen und ihre jeweiligen Erzählungen, aufgeladen mit Gemütszuständen wie Neugierde, Verletzlichkeit, Empathie und dem Wunsch nach Anerkennung. Diese vier in Beziehung stehenden Empfindungen spannen den fotografischen Rahmen der Serie auf, in den er diese spekulativen Geschichten hinein entfaltet; dieser Bildraum ist von einer Art Wahrheit markiert. Gelegentlich ist es die für die Kamera oder darüber hinaus performte Identität, der Fakten vorangehen, wohingegen es in anderen Fällen das Narrativ ist, welches zwischen möglichen Welten, in denen das »Reale« weilt, oszilliert.

#### Moritz Schepers – Julia Scher

Seit Mitte der 1980er-Jahre arbeitet Julia Scher mit Überwachungstechnologien, deren verführerischem Potenzial sowie dem Bildmaterial, welches dabei entsteht. Im Zuge dessen beschäftigte sie sich bereits sehr früh mit dem Internet und erstellte Arbeiten, die heute unter die Kategorie Net Art fallen. Zweierlei zeichnet die Künstlerin dabei aus: ein konsequentes Schritthalten mit dem technologischen State of the Art zum einen sowie eine ironische Annäherung an den Komplex Überwachen und Strafen zum anderen. Denn so gewaltig dessen Ausmaße auch sind, haben doch sowohl das Beobachten als auch das Beobachtet-Werden eine libidinöse Dimension, die Scher immer wieder anzukitzeln versteht.

#### Susanne Holschbach – Simon & Simone

Simon & Simone sind Grit Hachmeister und Claudia Gülzow. Die beiden starteten 2010 das Magazin *DIE STREICHELWURST* und entwickeln seitdem des Öfteren gemeinsame Projekte. In fotografischen Selbstinszenierungen posieren sie als Pin-ups für einen quee-



**Julia Scher**

born 1954 in Los Angeles (US), lives and works in Cologne (DE).

Stills from: *I'll Be Gentle* [IBG], 1991/2018. Archive material: digitalized NTSC VHS time lapse recording (color, no sound), 117'18".

*Hallway Cam*, 1991/2018; *Voyeur's Corridor*, 1991/2018. Installation at Drei, Cologne, 2018. Photo: Julia Scher.

From left to right: *Hallway Cam*, 1991/2018; *Voyeur's Corridor*, 1991/2018; *I'll Be Gentle* [IBG], 1991/2018; *I'll Be Gentle, No Consent*, 2018. Installation at Drei, Cologne, 2018. Photo: Simon Vogel.

Installation view from *I'll Be Gentle, No Consent* at Drei, Cologne, 2018. Photo: Simon Vogel.



# TAPING THOUSANDS OF HOURS OF PARKING LOTS,



# JUST TO BE SURE



From top - *Security By Julia IX*, 1990, *Le Choix des Femmes* installation view at Le Consortium, Dijon, 1990. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: T. Charles Erickson; *Security by Julia II*, 1989, *Security By Julia II (SBJ II)* installation view at Artists Space, New York, 1989. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Julia Scher; *Buffalo Under Surveillance* (TV studio live shot), 1992. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Julia Scher

JULIA SCHER AND MAURIN DIETRICH IN CONVERSATION

“Your warm data harvesting is important to us. We appreciate the attention.”

—Julia Scher, *Predictive Engineering3* at San Francisco Museum of Art, 2016.

Aiming at the exposure of dangers and ideologies, as well as the need of monitoring systems, Julia Scher’s work explores social control dynamics in the public realm and takes the forms of interactive installations, reformulated surveillance, site tours, interventions, performances, photography, writing, web work, linear video, and sound. She addresses the psychosocial implications of surveillance, the poetry of power, seduction and control, and why we are still taping thousands of hours of parking lots “just to be sure.”

Growing up in Hollywood, Julia Scher is a professor of Multimedia Performance and Surveillance Architectures at KHM in Cologne. Scher recently exhibited *Occupational Placement* as part of the group exhibition *Enemy of the Stars* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin. Originally shot in 1990 for the Wexner Center for the Arts the work juxtaposes sequences from live, permanent security systems, temporary cameras as well as pre-recorded videos.

**MAURIN DIETRICH**

In France, there was a recent trial where a concerned father installed video cameras in his home to survey the babysitter of his young son, since he thought she didn’t treat him well. What the tapes showed was that she was having her boyfriend over while she was supposed to watch the son. She later found out that she had been videotaped and went to court with it. E.M. Forster wrote that it’s “a serious thing to have been watched. We all radiate something curiously intimate when we believe ourselves to be alone.” Is it still a “serious thing” to have been watched in a time when we have multiple cameras constantly around us in our private rooms, as well as in public spaces?

**JULIA SCHER**

For me the question that I ask myself in relation to being watched is the nature of privacy and how that term is defined relative to surveillance. Privacy was never a kind of guaranteed raw material of urban life and our expectation of privacy might change as surveillance technology moves on. The old civil law was: You can’t have a space surveilled unless you are notified. You can survey if you put up a sign saying, “Warning: This space is under surveillance,” but without prior notification it was illegal, depending on the nation-state location. Now, I expect everywhere I am there is going to be at least a camera and a microphone, but in the future every place will have that inherent expectation of surveillance. This also relates to technology and the form it takes. Thirty years ago, the cameras

were so large that you could not easily overlook them, and they were also pricey. But there is also an issue raised by lawyer Themis Michos that I know which is: There never was privacy. Privacy is a middle-class construct and development. In the cave human’s time, you did not have an expectation of privacy, but you could go somewhere (hide behind a rock) with a presumption of privacy. In a constructed space, in architecture, in urban space, that notion has changed. Now surveillance is socially acceptable. It’s packaged, it’s advertised, it’s sold. Furthermore, we see that we play a role in it by being “responsible users.”

**MP**

One of the oldest fables associated with being surveilled or watched is *Boy with Thorn*, a Greco-Roman bronze sculpture of a boy withdrawing a thorn from the sole of his foot. It shows a boy, maybe the age of twelve, who graciously sits on a stone, bending over to pull a thorn out of his feet. At that moment, he looks up and realizes he is being watched. Kleist writes about that as the moment of the boy losing his unconscious grace upon reflection. Your work, however, is not that one-sided, but ambiguous about the realization of being watched and also considers that a potentially productive moment. Looking at younger generations who grew up with the constant presence of a gaze, do you consider the notion of cameras has changed? Do you think a younger generation will be more educated with that moment of being watched?

**JS**

I don’t think they are more educated in the older analog way. The are just more familiar with the machines. The devices no longer disrupt anything, since the tools are so present that no one could potentially notice the moment of grace before reflection, before seeing oneself being seen. It’s also uncanny that none of those machines have sharp edges that could hurt you. All our devices, our iPhones, laptops, tablets are smooth with their soft edges. They are harmless; they are all easy for children to use. This is a great thing and a horrible provocation. That it seems they can’t hurt anyone—too big to swallow and too soft to be injured if they fall on our face. I see that as a kind of perversity, that it’s harmless to take a position where you are effortlessly in a flow of images and sounds that are not only yours but are shared by a community you don’t know and might never know.

I see this as the moment you can’t undo. I don’t know if we are being out-clevered by the machines, but it’s the path into artificial intelligence. Larger subjects, communal—maybe *freundlich*, maybe not—with the same kind of characteristics of good and evil, high or low. But somehow I imagine it more like the Wild West. Your image may travel, will be reproduced, violated, and used without your permission in ways we cannot imagine now.

**MP**

Your body as a battleground. Did the gaze—someone watching you—ever have a positive connotation?

**JS**

I saw this on television! On television there were positive instances of being watched and being seen. There were positive outcomes for people being seen by a camera. Growing up in Los Angeles, there was a strange mix of television, film, and contemporary art. The idea of being scrutinized came up in music in the 1960-70s all the time. Being surveilled a certain way, being watched by non-benevolent forces and how to counteract that. At the same time, the government introduced surveillance as a tool to record and prevent crime. I grew up in a context between watchfulness to protect, to hurt, to stop action, and watchfulness to kill.

I also had an obsession with watchfulness much earlier since my mom did surveillance on me when I was a child. The notion of being surveilled is one of my early childhood memories, but from a very young age, I remember that this gaze was unlikeable.

**MP**

Throughout (art) history, the gaze has been that of a male looking at a woman. In what way does your work appropriate and disrupt that? We still mostly have images produced that speak about and for male desire with very few ideas of what form a female gaze can take. Could the gaze of a camera potentially be a non-gendered one and how is vision and watching re-organized in your work?



Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Julia Scher

**JS** In the mid 1980s, observation was gendered, and it was primarily by and for men. By that time, I was working as a cleaning woman in the men and women's showers at an aerobics parlor called The Sweatshop in Minneapolis. It's a long and boring story why I had this job, but it's where I learned everything about electronics and cameras. I was kind of a butch-looking woman and wasn't met with hostility by the people that came to the aerobics parlor to work out. I crawled around, scrubbing the floor at the feet of naked people while they were showering. I was around everyone very close, and no one minded by the time I showed up with a camera. I began filming them in the workout room doing aerobics. No one thought it was intrusive; they were already comfortable with me there, so they didn't mind me bringing a camera into the room. They accepted that the camera was almost a natural extension of all of us. Those were my first shots with a video camera. I wouldn't say it was only a presentation of dykeness that got everyone comfortable but everyone understood what it means to share a surveilled space. We were all complicit in that situation.

**MD** Your work aims to expose the dangers and ideologies of monitoring systems without leaving aside the psycho-social implications of surveillance, as well as to question if that technical device is only as good as its owner's intention.

**JS** The root of my own work is understanding those paradigms in relation to a domestic space that was, in my case, really under threat. One of the first apartments I had when I moved out of my parents' place, I was renting from a guy that I suspected of abusing his daughter. Some of the first works I did were audiotapes that I gave to Social Services. So, the first artwork was something that I then gave to someone else as an act of bearing witness. As in bearing witness, I could get something wrong righted. And surveillance could help with something so wrong, yet so invisible and unseen. Brutality—the threat of being killed—is there, even if it's not real in my case. And what if the eye of the camera is a benevolent one? The idea of a witnessing eye in my work goes back to films like *The Fugitive*, in which after being wrongfully convicted for the murder of his wife, Dr. Richard Kimble escapes from custody and sets out to prove his innocence.

**MD** In the last decades—especially after 9/11—surveillance technology shifted from photographic tracking of visible bodies through (public) space to the electronic sorting of files or flows of information. A shift from portrait to profile that was enabled to map everyone's everyday actions or even to predict what steps individuals might take next. Data of personal habits and consumer preferences are interlinked and woven together to form a complex profile. Avital Ronell takes up this issue in "The State of Art," with what she describes an almost "post-human body"—a nonphysical

body that is simply a record of information traces left behind. Are you interested in this shift towards a non-image based practice in surveillance?

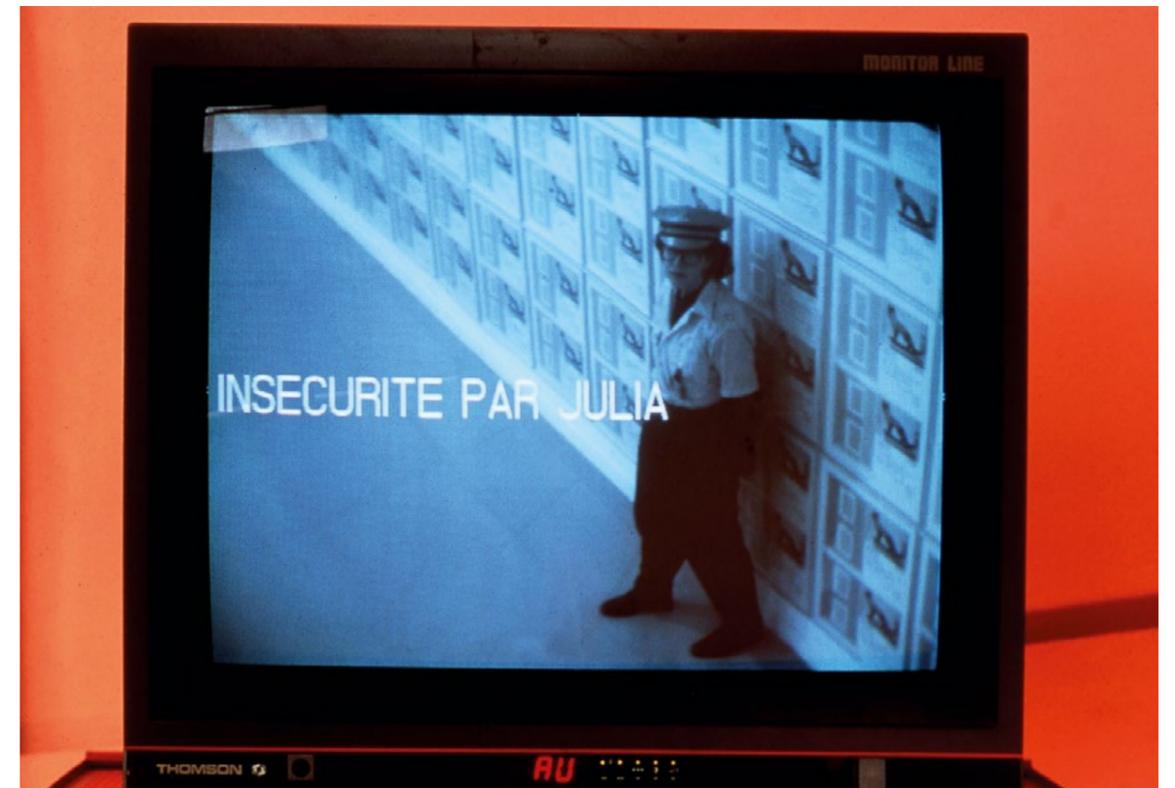
**JS** The concept of image has grown into something else, into things that are micromanaged and into forms that are completely unmanageable. Data surveillance is now done entirely by machines. No human is needed to recognize different kinds of what you call "portraits." So, when the human factor is taken out, you can reckon all the multiplicity of machines and systems that take over. They still present images to us—because we are human—but that image is only an artifact for our comfort. The artifacts are used for comfort when really graphs, notations, and data are all that is needed. We are immersed in a world of post-representation, where you don't need to waste time with older forms of imagery. Does that mean what Terminator sees? In many ways, sci-fi aspects are already completely realized, but at the same time, "we" are still housed in these containers—our analog neural network—our bodies.

**MD** That shift from portrait to profile became most visible for me the first time someone at a dinner started talking to their phone: "Siri, please take a selfie." For me, this shift is also indicated in the use of voice in your work. Does the medium of the voice indicate this new non-visual presence? Do you talk to your devices?

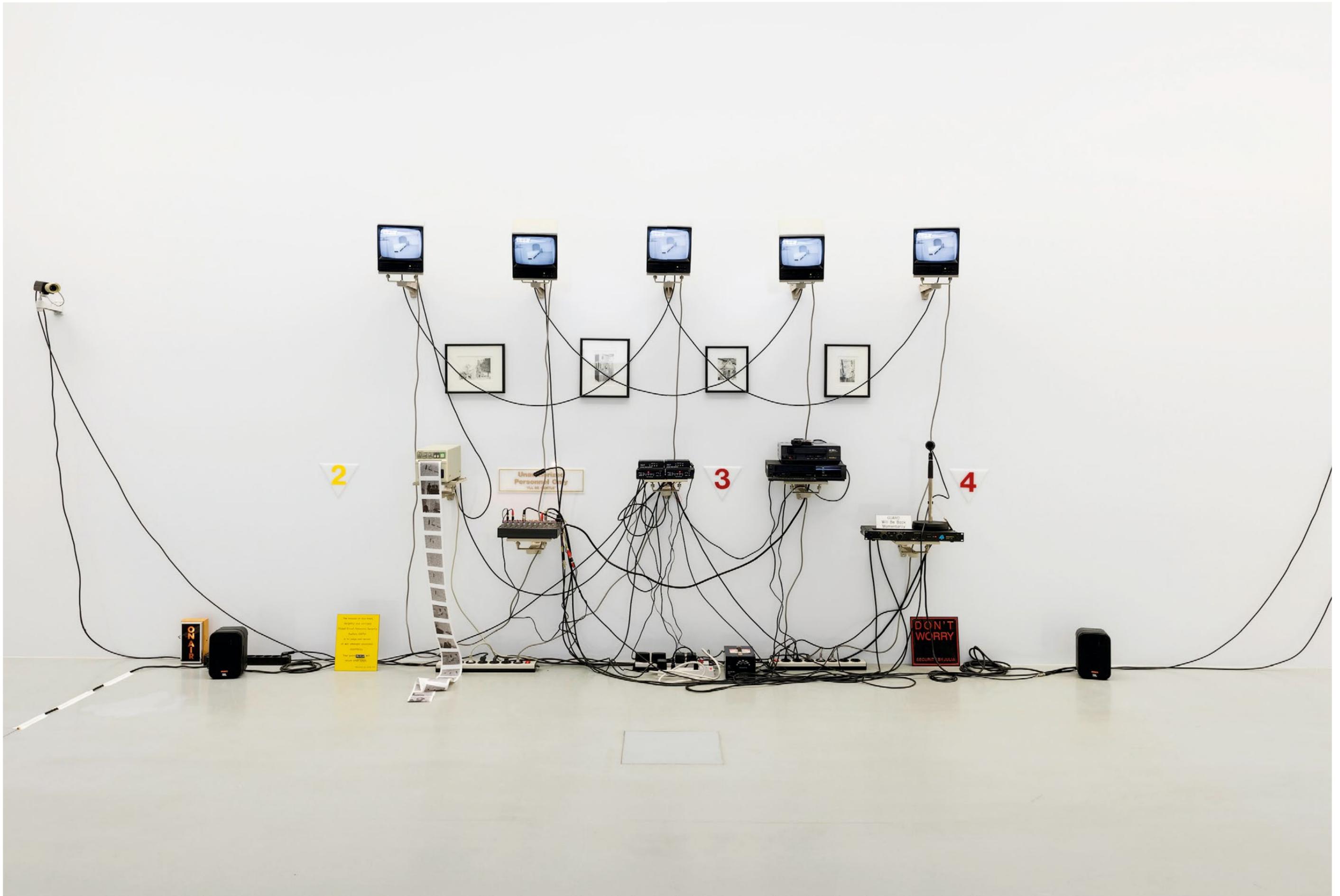
**JS** No, I resist because it's a way to revolt, to fight back. The moment I start talking to my devices, I will acknowledge that I am reliant and dependent on that object. Acknowledging our reliance on something we cannot see or control is more of the uncanny.

It's also jealousy: Why did Apple not hire me to be this voice? The moment they give each of us a customized voice for our devices, then I will do it. But when I am talking to Siri, it's somehow the feeling that I am not special; I am no more special than anyone else. It's this old-fashioned thing that has been addressed in my work all the time. That none of us are addressed any differently than any other in my installations. Everyone is seen by surveillance the same way for now. There is a work where my voice warns you about something that will control you, with circus music in playing in the background. It's a joke, but it's also very serious.

One of the most important works in relation to that is one that Bruce Nauman constructed in a hallway back at UCLA. On a white wall in Dickinson Art Center, he wrote "FUCK" with white paint—almost invisible. One could only see it from specific angles looking at the wall. This work was so important to me because it summarized the condition of how something that could not be seen was still there, which is the same way surveillance works. The almost invisible "FUCK" disrupted and interrupted the room and took over the space. This notion of "what more is there if you could do that."



Top - *Security By Julia IX*, 1990, *Le Choix des Femmes* installation view at Le Consortium, Dijon, 1990. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: T. Charles Erickson  
Bottom - *Security Bed III*, 1994, installation view at Schipper & Krome, Berlin, 2000. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Ilona Ripke





*Girl Dog (Hybrid)* (detail), 2005. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Saverio Tonoli / Andrea Rossetti

**MD** One of your upcoming projects includes a performance as part of Sunday Sessions at MoMA PS1 in February. Could you tell me more about the performance that you are planning there?

**JS** In collaboration with Topical Cream, I'm presenting a work called *Anti Bodies*; I'm imagining *Consent Clinic* with people, some architecture subplot, some curves, some consent annunciation. To look and to voice through a topology and calligraphy of surveillance production and submission. To consider the moment when one submits. When do we submit to anything? When do we submit to a protocol, a job, to be tightened up? If an alarm goes off, when do you react?

**MD** You once said what scares you most is that people constantly mistake or misread fake as real and real as fake. Is your work still concerned with that question, especially in relation to digital and non-digital forms of representation? I remember talking to you about Kim Kardashian's book *Selfish* containing only selfies.

**JS** Real and fake has such a great history with television. I hate to call TV the bad guy—it's not the only player. In the 1950s, when they started making reality shows—shows with "real people" weren't "news." We accept now that Kim Kardashian makes fake, where before we would say, "Oh, she's faking it, she's not real." I don't hear that same critique anymore. There is no such thing as, "This is really fake."

I think Kim Kardashian's show is fighting surveillance with surveillance. I also tried that. But fight mutates into compliance and deep regard—and then maybe later, regret. And regret and rejection can take many forms. What's powerful but uncanny in the case

of the Kardashians is pregnancy, since that's also about duplication, variation, doubling. Something that surveillance does as well. The question is also about how the idea of surveillance is hacked and appropriated in the case of "Keeping up with the Kardashians." I think the devices that people really enjoy will be developed. We will be getting to sit here, talking with Kim and the little ones. Kanye will be playing music in the corner of this room. Films have sought over time to garnish real life. But in the next generation of image uptake, we no longer will sit and view a single-channel event, where one thing happens, then the next and the next. Future technologies have us immersed in the operating room, in the whole place where you were born, wherever it was. More real than real, it will be next real or whatever new word comes up.

**MD** You started off as a painter—in fact, a landscape painter. Do you still paint?

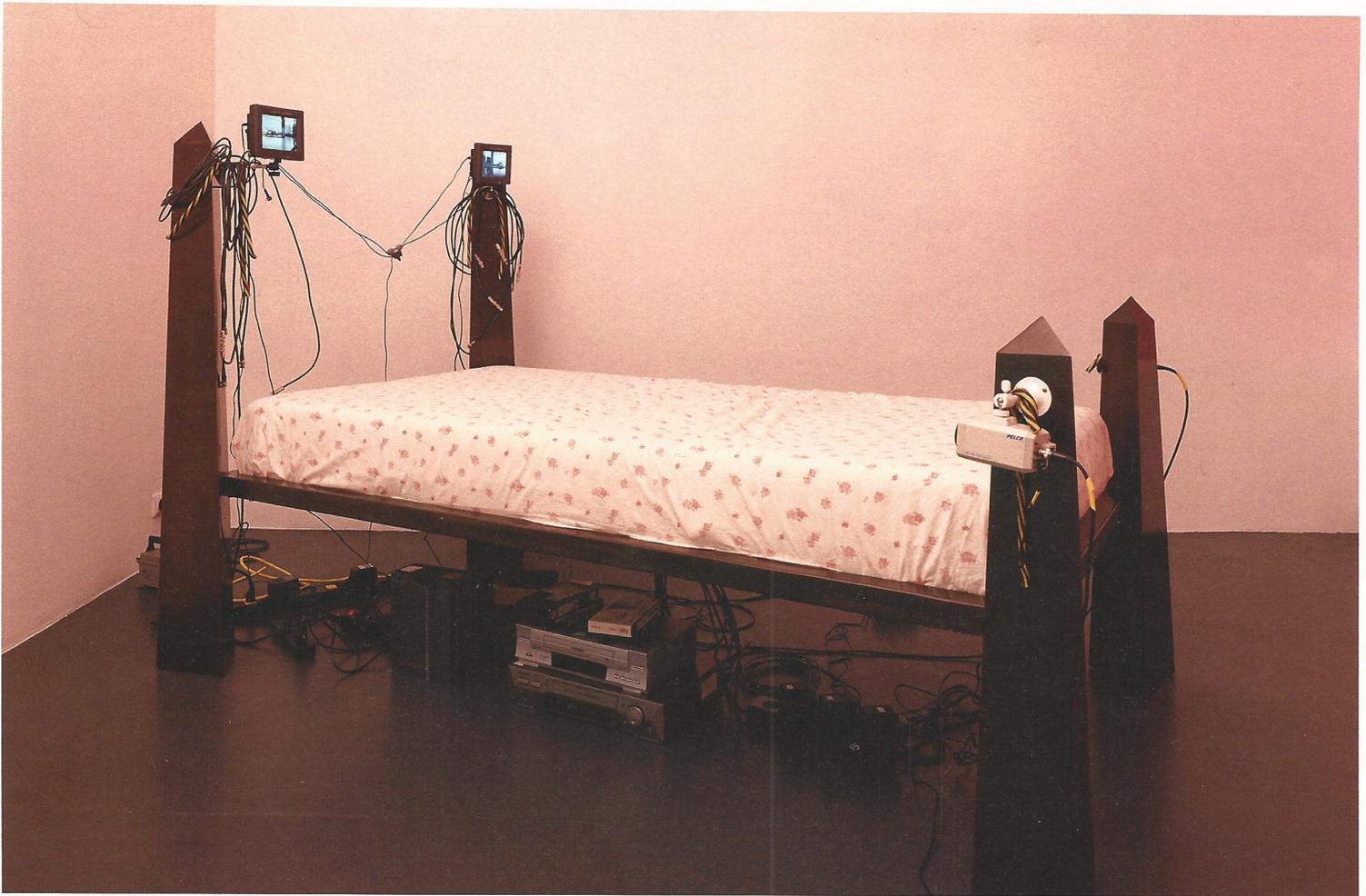
**JS** Yes, I am a closet painter. I was interested in land art, light and sun. What particularly interested me in painting was the notion of light in fifteenth-century Dutch painting. That was also the same time I got a video camera, and I asked myself how could I shoot something that is inclusive of landscape. I also started taking selfies at that time, and I wanted to combine that with landscape. In 1985, I was still mainly making paintings. I worked on a landscape diptych with a real camera mounted at the top. The painted image was a large hypodermic needle between two legs. Behind it, a monitor was installed. The title of the work was *Hardly Feel It Going In*. Even back then it was about the question: How do we watch, and who gets hurt?



*Security Bed*, 1994, installation view, New York, 1994. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Joseph Cultice

**Maurin Dietrich** is an Assistant Curator at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin where she programs performances, exhibitions, and publications. Besides studying art history and comparative literature in Berlin she worked at schir concepts, located in Tel Aviv and Berlin, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin as well as the 9th Berlin Biennale by DIS Magazine. Recent independent projects include the exhibition *To smile in the cheese, to lie in the butter*, curated in collaboration with Kate Brown with works by Frances Stark, Josef Strau and Michaela Meise, among other artists. Besides that she curated the solo exhibition with Heike-Karin Föll at Tonus, Paris together with Cathrin Mayer and the solo exhibition of Oscar Enberg at Frankfurt am Main.

**Julia Scher** was born in Hollywood and grew up in the San Fernando Valley. She received a 1975 BA in Painting/Sculpture/Graphic Arts from UCLA, and a 1984 MFA in Studio Arts, from the University of Minnesota. In the last thirty years, her research has explored social control dynamics in the public sphere. The art projects have taken the form of interactive installations, reformulated surveillance, site tours, interventions, performances, photography, writing, web work, linear video, and sound. Scher's work has been included in several exhibitions including the Venice Biennale, the Whitney Biennial, the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Tapias Museum, Barcelona, Museo Nacional, Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Musée d'art Moderne, Paris, Künstlerhaus, Stuttgart, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, and the ICA, London.



Die Künstlerin Julia Scher spricht über ihr Interesse an Überwachung und ihre Serie der *Surveillance Beds*

## Schlaf gut

Die Installation *Mama Bed*, die jüngst in der Galerie Natalia Hug in Köln zu sehen war, stammt eigentlich aus dem Jahr 2003 und ist Teil meiner Serie der sogenannten *Surveillance Beds*, die ich zwischen 1994 und 2003 herstellte. Auf einem Stahlgestell liegt eine weiche Matratze, auf der eine Peitsche aus schwarzem Leder platziert ist. Am Fußende sind zwei Kameras befestigt, die alles, was sich auf dem Bett und um das Bett herum abspielt, aufnehmen. Auf dem Bett selbst liegt eine weitere Handkamera, die ebenfalls benutzt werden kann.

Alles, was die Kameras aufnehmen, wird von einem Videorekorder aufgezeichnet und auf zwei Monitoren gezeigt, die an den oberen beiden Bettpfosten montiert sind. Ein Mikrofon am Kopfende nimmt zudem die Geräusche auf. Es geht also um Überwachung und Informationsweitergabe, lange bevor das Thema mit den Enthüllungen von Edward Snowden und den Prämissen des Internets eine ganz andere Dimension angenommen hat.

Mein Interesse an diesem Thema begann 1985 – damals noch in der Malerei. Ich arbeitete an

The artist Julia Scher talks about her series of *Surveillance Beds*

## While you were sleeping

Julia Scher

The installation *Mama Bed*, recently on view in the Cologne gallery Natalia Hug, dates from 2003 and is part of my series *Surveillance Beds*, which I created between 1994 and 2003. Two cameras are mounted on steel posts surrounding a bed and recording everything that happens there. On the mattress is a black leather whip, and an additional handheld camera, which can be used as a recording device. Each camera's footage is itself re-recorded by a video recorder and displayed on two monitors at the top of the bed. Audio footage is taken by way of a microphone. Long before

Edward Snowden and the ongoing revelations about the Internet and its links to surveillance, the work was about the relationship between monitoring and the distribution of information.

My interest in this topic started in 1985 – at that time, I was still mainly making paintings, and had been working on a landscape diptych with a camera mounted in the middle. Behind the partial wall holding up the painting was the nine-inch monitor. The work was called *Hardly Feel It Going In* (1985). Even then it was about the question: Who is

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Julia Scher  
*Warning: Always There*  
 Installation view  
 Natalia Hug  
 Cologne, 2016

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Julia Scher  
*The New York Bed*  
 1994

einem Diptychon einer Landschaft. Zwischen den beiden Teilen war eine Kamera befestigt. Auf der Rückseite der Wand, an die die Bilder gehängt waren, fand sich ein kleiner Neun-Zoll-Monitor. Die Arbeit hieß *Hardly Feel It Going In* und schon damals ging es um die Frage: Wer beobachtet wen, wie, warum und auf wessen Kosten? Ein Jahr später, 1986, entstand dann die erste Installation mit mehreren Überwachungskameras namens *Softly Tapping the Wires*. Die Arbeit wurde bei Medium West, einer von Künstlern betriebenen Galerie in Minneapolis gezeigt und bestand aus gebrauchten Überwachungselektronikteilen, Möbeln und einem niederfrequenten Audiosignalgeber, der von einer Lichtschranke angesteuert wurde. Die Audioschwingungen hatten eine Frequenz von fünf bis zehn Hz – eine spezifische Frequenz, die den menschlichen Schließmuskel stimulieren kann. Einige Besucher mussten danach schnell die Galerie (in der es keine Toiletten gab) verlassen, um sich zu erleichtern.

Die Faszination für mediale Überwachung kam aus der Beschäftigung mit Fotografie. Ich fotografierte zunächst zerstörte Landschaften und war von den Fotografien von Susan Meiselas beeinflusst, einer Fotojournalistin, die in den späten 1970er und in den 1980er Jahren während der Aufstände in Nicaragua und dem Bürgerkrieg in El Salvador fotografierte. In einem der Bilder, die sie zurückbrachte, war kein Mensch zu sehen – und trotzdem wusste man, dass die Szenerie überwacht wird. Weegee (Arthur Fellig) war ebenso wichtig für mich. Mit damals neuesten Technologien hörte er die Polizeisender ab und traf oft noch vor dem Eintreffen der Polizei an den Tatorten ein, um Fotos zu machen. Diese Geschichten von Gewalt und Kriminalität aus der Reagan-Zeit

haben mich ebenso geprägt wie die Straßenfotos von Garry Winograd, Robert Heineckens Beschäftigung mit der Aneignung und dem erneuten Bearbeiten von Bildern sowie mit Sicherheit auch Jean-Luc Godard oder Bruce Nauman. Und natürlich darf man nicht vergessen, dass ich in Los Angeles aufwuchs, jener Stadt, die durch den Kult des Blicks und des Sehens beherrscht wird. Wie fast alle Künstler dieser Stadt bin ich von der Frage geprägt, welche Einstellung man noch filmen kann, die es so noch nicht gegeben hat.

Klar ist das Beobachten „gegendert“, ist es erst einmal Männersache. Es reicht, sich Hollywoodfilme anzusehen, um das zu kapieren. Eine Zeitlang arbeitete ich in Minneapolis als Putzfrau in den Männer- und Frauenduschen eines Fitnessstudios namens The Sweatshop. Ich kroch am Boden herum und schrubhte um die Füße der nackten Männer herum den Boden. Hier begann ich auch, Dinge, nicht zuletzt die elektronischen, zu reparieren: Ventilatoren, Türen, die Stereoanlage und so weiter. Niemand beachtete mich, mein Geschlecht schien irgendwie keine Rolle zu spielen. Irgendwann kaufte ich mir eine Betamovie-Kamera und begann diese Männer beim Workout zu filmen. Sie hatten sich bereits so an meine Anwesenheit gewöhnt, dass es für sie völlig in Ordnung war, dass ich sie filmte. Das waren überhaupt meine ersten Aufnahmen mit einer Kamera, unverschämt und gewagt irgendwie, aber es schien auch niemanden zu stören. Hieß das, dass man, nimmt man eine geschlechtlich neutrale Position ein oder bekommt sie zugeschrieben, frei wird und unbemerkt mit der Kamera hantieren kann? Diese Erfahrung hat mich auch mit der Frage konfrontiert, wie ich mich mit der Kamera den Menschen gegenüber verhalte. Welche Rolle spielt dabei mein Geschlecht? Wie steht es mit Nähe und Intimität, wie mit Gewalt? Wie trete ich überhaupt auf ...? Das war eine wichtige Erfahrung für mich.

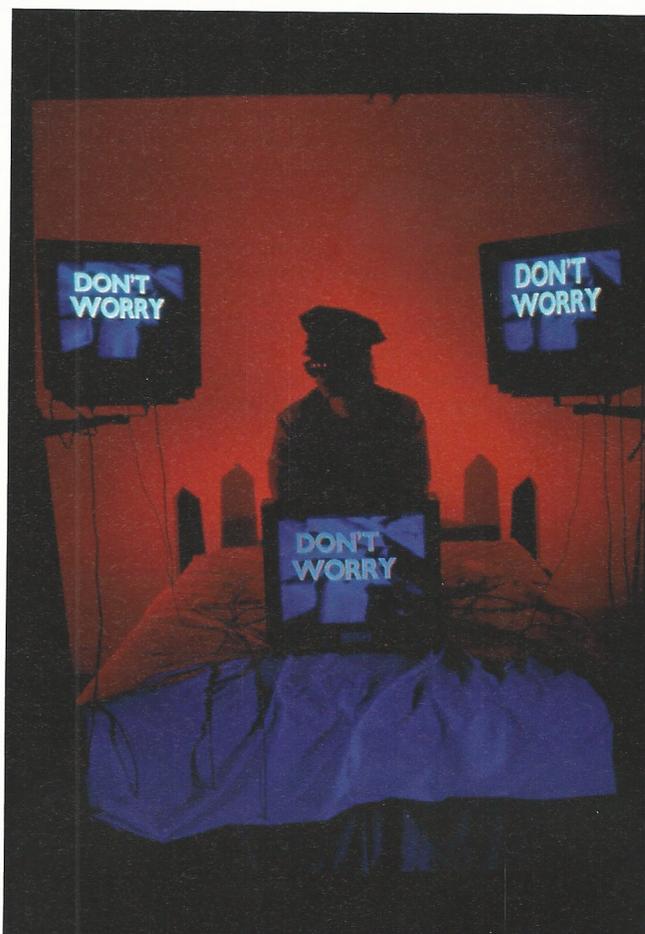
Am Bett hat mich damals nicht so sehr das Private interessiert – eher schon, dass es ein Ort der grenzenlosen Übergänge ist. Man bewegt sich auf dem Bett vom wachen Zustand in den schlafenden hinüber; ein Wechsel zum Unbewussten, zum Traum; von einem Zustand, in dem man Kontrolle hat, zu einem ohne Kontrolle. Außerdem ist das Bett *der* Ort des häuslichen Dramas. Meine erste Bett-Arbeit, die 1994 in der New Yorker Andrea Rosen Gallery gezeigt wurde, entstand, um diese Zone des Übergangs zu untersuchen, aber selbstverständlich auch die sexuellen Aktivitäten eines Paares, das sich dessen, was vor sich ging, bewusst war. Das mit Elektronik vollgestopfte Bett konnte alles aufzeichnen und

watching whom, how, why and at whose expense? A year later, in 1986, I made my first installation with multiple surveillance cameras called *Softly Tapping the Wires*. The work was shown at Medium West, an artist-run gallery in Minneapolis and consisted of used CCTV parts, furniture and a low frequency audio annunciator triggered by an electronic beam. The frequency of the audio vibrations was between 5 and 10 Hz: the specific frequency range that can stimulate the human anal sphincter. Thus some visitors had to leave the gallery (which contained no bathroom) in order to relieve themselves.

My fascination with surveillance came from my study of photography. I first photographed destroyed landscapes and was influenced by Susan Meiselas, a photojournalist

working during the popular insurrection in Nicaragua and the civil war in El Salvador in the late 1970s and 1980s. In one striking photo no human figure was visible – and yet it was clear that the scenery was being monitored.

Weegee (Arthur Fellig) was equally important for me, as was the representation of violence and crime during the Reagan era. Using the newest technologies of his time, Weegee listened in on police radios, using them to arrive at the crime scene and often taking pictures of crime scenes even before police could. I was influenced, too, by the street photography of Garry Winograd, Robert Heinecken's work with appropriating and re-processing images and of course Jean-Luc Godard and Bruce Nauman. Much of this was



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Like many artists from Los Angeles  
 I am influenced by what you can still photograph  
 that's not already been shot.

3+4  
 Women sharing bed on  
 Julia Scher's  
*The Italian Bed*  
 1995

es danach wiedergeben. Denn unter dem Bett befand sich so etwas wie sein Gedächtnis: der Rekorder. Über die Jahre hat das Bett Aufnahmen von Christine Van Assche, Andrew Ross, Andrea Rosen, Wolfgang Staehle, Dan Graham, Bob Nickas, Vanessa Beecroft, Mark von Schlegell, Frances Scholz und vielen anderen gesammelt, die alle irgendwann einmal auf dem Bett lagen.

Im ersten Bett gab es auch eine Audioaufnahme, auf der ich gemeinsam mit Celeste Olalquiaga einen Text verlas, den ich über Überwachung geschrieben hatte, über jemanden der „always there“, also immer da ist. Im Hintergrund lief dazu der Song *Always There* (1991) von Incognito. Im Text geht es die ganze Zeit um Kontrolle und die verführerischen wie auch gefährlichen Aspekte der Überwachung. Damals hatte das

für mich viel mit einer bestimmten Ambivalenz des Überwachens zu tun; seitdem in der relationalen Ästhetik die Ambivalenz aber als eine Form der Positionierung dient, funktioniert das für mich nicht mehr. Man kann eine ambivalente Position nicht auf Dauer halten. Das ist destruktiv. Damals war Ambivalenz allerdings eine passende Form, die Dinge – ob psychologischer oder physischer Natur – in ihrem Funktionieren nachzuzeichnen. Wenn man mich in den 1980er Jahren nach meinem Verhältnis zur Überwachung fragte, konnte ich noch sagen: Ich liebe sie und ich hasse sie. Heute geht das so nicht mehr. Heute frage ich eher: Wie machen wir weiter?

Aber das ist auch allgemein anders geworden: Als ich damals in den 1980er und frühen 1990er Jahren von Überwachung sprach, wusste nur ein kleiner Teil des Publikums, wovon ich rede. Jetzt ist das Thema überall. Niemand fragt mehr, was das ist. Was sich noch geändert hat: Mir ging es immer auch um den Zugang zu Informationen. In den 1990er Jahren war das nur über Kabel möglich. Und so bestand meine damalige Installation eben auch aus vielen Kabeln. Und angesichts der erneuten Installation fragte man mich neulich: „Oh, ist das Dekoration, all die Kabel?“ Ich dachte nur „Shit“ – und nahm einige weg.

*Aufgezeichnet von Noemi Smolik*

*Julia Scher ist Künstlerin. Sie lebt in Köln.*

**Früher konnte ich über  
 mein Verhältnis zur Überwachung sagen:  
 Ich liebe sie und ich hasse sie.  
 Heute geht das so nicht mehr.**



4

conditioned by the fact that I grew up in Los Angeles, a city dominated by the cult of vision and seeing. Like many artists from the city, I am influenced by what you can still photograph that has not already been shot.

It is clear that observation is 'gendered'; it is, primarily, by and for men. Hollywood movies alone tell us that. For a while I worked in Minneapolis as a cleaning woman in the men's and women's showers at a gym called The Sweatshop. I crawled around and scrubbed the floor at the feet of naked men. I also began to do my first electronic repair jobs there, fixing fans, door locks and the stereo systems. Nobody paid attention to me, and my own gender wasn't a factor one way or the other. Eventually I bought a Betamovie camera and began filming the men in the workout room doing their aerobic routines. They were already comfortable with me there, so they didn't mind me bringing a camera into the workout room. Those were my first shots with a video camera – cheeky and somehow daring. Did that mean, if one takes a sexually neutral position – or a position that seems 'neutral' – that one was free, and could go unnoticed with a camera? This experience confronted me with a set of questions: How do I relate to people with a camera? What role does my gender play? What about proximity and intimacy, and what about violence? How do I enter the scene?

My interest in the bed did not come so much from its association with privacy; rather, I was interested in it as the site for various transitions. In bed, you move from being awake to sleep, from control to no control, from consciousness to the unconscious. In addition, the bed is the location of domestic drama. My first 'bed' work, which was shown in 1994 at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, was created to investigate this zone of transition, but of course, also to monitor the sexual activities of a couple who totally knew what was going on. The electronically

loaded bed could record everything and play it back as well. Under the bed there was something like its 'memory': the recording device, so that the footage can also be played back. Over the years, the bed recorded a lot of people: Vanessa Beecroft, Dan Graham, Christine Van Assche, Bob Nickas, Andrea Rosen, Andrew Ross, Wolfgang Staehle, Mark von Schlegell and Frances Scholz, among others.

In the first bed there was an audio tape playing of me and Celeste Olalquiaga reading a script I wrote about surveillance, about someone who is 'always there'. In the background you can hear the song *Always There* (1991) by the group Incognito. The text is a run-on about control and the seductive and dangerous aspect of monitoring. At the time, that had a lot to do with the specific ambivalence of monitoring, but since ambivalence serves as a form of positioning in relational aesthetics, say, this ambivalence does not really appeal to me anymore. You cannot sustain an ambivalent position over a long time. This would be destructive. Back then however, ambivalence was a performing instrument, a tool to trace the functioning of things in lived space – psychological or physical. If you asked me in the 1980s about my relation to surveillance I would have said: I love it or I hate it. Today this is no longer possible. I now say: How do we evolve?

But things also changed generally. If I spoke of surveillance back in the 1980s and early '90s, only a small part of the audience knew what I was referring to. Now the issue is everywhere. No one asks what it is. And something else has changed, too: I was always concerned with access to information. In the 1990s, that literally meant cables. And so, back then, my installation consisted of many cables. Seeing the recent installation, a visitor asked: 'Oh, is this for decoration, all the cables?' I was like 'Shit' – and took some away.

*Julia Scher is an artist based in Cologne.*



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