

Seen

**Wei-Ling**Gallery

Ahmet Ögüt  
Anurendra Jegadeva  
H.H Lim  
Heather Dewey-Hagborg  
Ivan Lam  
James Bridle  
Ken Feinstein  
Paolo Cirio  
Roger Ballen  
Viktoria Binschtok

## Seen

4 In Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), entire lives and deaths are on display behind uncovered windows in anonymous cities, awaiting the observant eye of the voyeur, whose demonic power relies upon his own invisibility. He is strategically positioned in the dark core of the opposite building, with the mere presence of his gaze transforming the people into subjects to be watched, recorded, and analysed. Much like the characters in *Rear Window*, we too are subjected to the all-encompassing gaze of surveillance. Our personal technological devices mirror the function of the windows in Hitchcock's film, in that they render us as objects of information to be recorded and decoded. These windows of observation shift shape over time, from architectural windows to virtual windows, but their central function of providing a frame that allows the gaze to infiltrate private spaces persists. In today's modern society, however, one wonders what exactly constitutes the private sphere. Boundaries that once marked the divide between the private sphere and the public sphere have now become doors, accessible on command. Surveillance technologies have been adopted to nearly every sphere of contemporary life - medical, commerce, entertainment, national security, among others. CCTV cameras are perched on lamp posts and storefronts, drones are a regular sighting nowadays, smartphones relay an alarming amount of information about their owners, and sophisticated algorithms sift through large amounts of data, prompting social and ethical dilemmas. These widespread and diverse applications of surveillance technologies have transformed our environment into spectacle. In order to navigate the surveillant state of being, we ought to make visual its potentials and effects on our identities and how it alters our relationship to public and private space. While CCTV surveillance has become a normalized and accepted form of mass observation in urban space, citizens are beginning to question at what point should it be considered a threat to the state?

In times where political uncertainty and suspicion is heightened, notions of freedom, privacy, and democratic rights remerge as points of discussion

amongst artists and activists. Within this intensifying and ambivalent society, we wanted to explore how a growing number of artists and activists have interrogated, questioned, or criticised contemporary practices of surveillance. From the overtly political, through the cynical, to the playful, a range of approaches were employed, some of which have referred to surveillance in their works, others have *appropriated* and *recontextualized* images and technologies of surveillance to make art. Many of the artists whose works are considered in this exhibition deal with issues of social visibility and invisibility, and some specifically question contemporary visibility regimes and their impact on urban space.

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5 In approaching this theme, few artists, such as James Bridle, Ahmet Ögüt, and Ken Feinstein have decided to refer to the dissemination of CCTV in social sites to highlight and critique the intricate relationship between vision and power.

British artist James Bridle navigated in *Every CCTV Camera (London)* the degree of asymmetry between the act of looking and the act of being looked. Bridle initially attempted to document through photography the diffusion and the range of CCTVs around the periphery of London's congestion zone, but was soon stopped by the police and questioned repeatedly, forcing an end to his walk. The simple act of *returning* the gaze reflect the deep asymmetry in visibilities. Visibility-as-control demands a separation between the viewer and the viewer, and in contemporary society to be visible is to be under control of an agency that looks at us, but makes looking back an inaccessible and questionable activity. Not only does Bridle's project highlight the tension that politics of looking back, of returning the gaze, but the visual outcomes of his walks understate huge questions about the real aim of surveillance, mainly what is surveillance for? And what type of a visual landscape has surveillance created?

The uncanny feeling of being observed by a machine is again explored in Ahmet Öğüt's *This area is under 23 hour video and audio surveillance*. The official-looking sign is positioned at the entrance of the gallery, on the one hand warning the viewer, on the other hand revealing how normalized citizens have become to the practice of constant surveillance. Because CCTV have become an everyday presence in contemporary urban space, the sign hung up by Öğüt does not stir any fear within the viewer. But it does, however, trigger curiosity regarding the missing hour, which may point out to the privacy or mischief that could take place in that one precious hour, whenever that might be.

In *It's not a vicious cycle, it's downward spiral*, Ken Feinstein engages with the content of CCTV to reveal the emotive reaction they trigger within viewers. The work is comprised of two video projections embedded in a wall, one is footage of military drones, the other is security camera footage of a terrorist attack in Paris. The viewers peep through a small crack in the center of the wall, where they are granted glimpse of the images, but have restricted access to the entire image. The presentation of the extracted footage in this form reveal our inner fears and desire in relation to the content of CCTV. Our emotive reaction to CCTV footage delineate between comfort and fright. At once, they fear and fascinate. However, tension persists in the desire to possess, yet not see their content, trusting that their sole presence is enough to police unsettling behavior in urban space.

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Further approaches to negotiating surveillance saw two artists, Ivan Lam and Viktoria Binshtok, subvert in various guises the 'surveillant gaze' present throughout contemporary social sites.

In Viktoria Binshtok's *Suspicious Minds*, the focus centers on the watchmen and the surveillers-- men with stern-poker faces that lead a life in the periphery,

inconspicuously blending into the background during state receptions, public announcements and speeches. They are encircled with an aura of absence, but in Binshtok's series, they extracted from their original context of the press image and made to be the focus of attention. Binshtok selects section, manipulates point of view and image formation to create compositions that highlight the watcher's suspicious gazes as expressions of power. Yet, a sense of irony permeates throughout the series, for those figures watching over others are also watched themselves by the cameras recording these events. Surveillance figures under surveillance begs the following questions:

*Who watches the watchers?*  
*Who guards the guardians?*  
*Who polices the police?*  
*Who protects the protectors?*

This line of thought finds its origins in the work the Roman poet Juvenal, in his *Satires* (Satire VI, lines 347-348) is the phrase *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*  
*Who will guard the guards themselves?*

Malaysian artist Ivan Lam takes this question as a point of departure, and like Binshtok, subjects the surveillers convex mirrors, the quiet structure of the MACC (Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission) lurks in the background. The function of Lam's series is make visible surveillant structures whose inner workings are largely invisible to the *gaze*. Lam's approach relies on subtle interpretations. In the series of landscape photographs laminated on convex mirrors, in the process, Lam creates a visual vocabulary that anchors the otherwise ambiguous and abstract notion of surveillant state.

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Whereas some artists *referred to, subverted, and commented* on notions of surveillance, other have addressed lived experiences dealing with complex issues such as censorship, resistance, control and state power, civil liberties

and human rights.

Wrestling with these complex issues, Ögüt's *The Missing T* documents a group of recently dismissed police officers of Tulum, Mexico, who lost their jobs after protesting against their corrupt government and its ties to cartels. Ögüt sews the story in a surreal manner from things which can be observed from the daily socio-political life of the community, like the abandoned sign of the name of the town-- the missing T-- and details on how the fired policemen protested for forty five days to gain basic rights for their own safety. The 10 minute video sees the officers in masks, using the Mayan language as a coded tool to discuss how they started the strike, details of how their own safety was at risk, how they were not paid and how they had to resort to buying their own equipment and uniforms. There is a poetic twist to the work in that after the story is told, the original letter T is found by the artist and put back in place. What the *The Missing T* proves is that surveillance and censorship are two sides of the same coin, each thrives because of the presence of the other, and when surveillance permeates any society, self-censorship begins to take root.

In another the hybrid art and social justice project, Italian artist Paolo Cirio deploys strategies that are oriented to problem-solving as a form on Internet social art practice. *Obscurity* engages with law, individuals, corrupt business practices, and invites public opinion to critically explore the provocations against the mugshot industry and the consequent emotional underpinning attached to unflattering personal information exposed on the internet. *Obscurity* addresses a minor industry of websites that publishes and disseminates mugshots and monetizes them by charging a picture removal fee, regardless of the crime, time spent, or if the chargers were later dropped. While some mugshots may profile serial killers, other are related to minor offences, such as driving without a license. In an attempt to highlight this industry, Cirio clones major mugshot websites, shuffles their databases and blurs both the images and the information of 15 million individuals arrested

in the United States over the last 20 years. The project also evokes discomfort and explores our inherent prejudices and biases by allowing the public to face the paradox of judging and forgiving individuals while possessing minimal information on the socio-economic context in which they have been accused of a crime. On many levels, the socio-critical internet project initiates a discourse regarding control and access to information, the right to privacy, mass surveillance and profiling, calls for a system of participation within social dynamics and questions the legal frameworks surrounding public policies on privacy and profiling of citizens.

This form of art making initiates a practical discourse that engages with the aesthetics, functions, and ethics of surveillance that resonate within and beyond the contemporary art dialogue. A similar, critical approach to exploring surveillance is implemented in *Stranger Visions* by American artist Heather Dewey-Hagborg. The 3D portraits are created based on the DNA collected by the artist from various discarded materials, such as hair, cigarettes, gum, and fingernails found in the detritus of the New York City landscape. The sculptures hang on the walls of the gallery, underneath them are boxes documenting the materials, places, and results of the analysis of these materials. The sculptures project an ambivalent gaze, they are strangers formed by the genetic materials they shed unknowingly without awareness as to what it could produce. The rapid development of technological devices, surveillance tactics and machines enable the approaching wave of genetic surveillance.

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The show draws two works that juxtapose one another, each occupying the opposite ends of the gallery space. The first work is by Malaysian artist Anurendra Jegadeva. In *Portrait of Julia* and *Winston and Julia Say Goodbye*, Jegadeva conveys a sense of the saddest narratives of our time, the dystopian displacement of people, who upon arriving in a new land in prospect of

seeking refuge, immediately become the targets of the surveillance gaze. As viewers, we look at them from a position of privilege, seeing them as the most fragile targets. Yet, on the other end of the gallery space, H.H Lim's *Target* featuring a silhouetted figure with a target sign on a mirror that reflects the space behind the viewer, remind the viewer that the surveillant gaze targets all. As the viewer stands before the work, he occupies the space of the silhouetted figure and instantly becomes the target of the surveillant gaze. The juxtaposition of the works serve to showcase how every individual, regardless of their status or circumstance, is bound to be the target of the surveillant gaze.

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*Seen* comes to a close with two photographs from the series *Asylum* of the *Birds* by Roger Ballen. *Lurking* and *Intruder* display a myriad of gazes, some visible, other subtle. Each photograph speaks of the presence of an intruder's gaze and again hints at a gaze that lurks in the background -- a muted metaphor for the surveilled state of being.

Canetti wrote:

*'There is nothing that man fears most than the touch of the unknown.'* In contemporary society, sight has substituted touch. The individual is seen by the unseen-- a visible target of the invisible gaze.

The function of *Seen* was to reveal the deep relationship between power and vision and remind the audience that the act of observing and being observed is always a political act. We hope that the curated exhibition has contributed to the contemporary aesthetic discourse of surveillance that continue to challenge and critique the future of surveillance practices in society.

### **Line Dalile**

Line Dalile is a writer based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. She studied art history and graduated in 2017 with a Bachelor of Arts (Visual Culture) from Curtin University, Perth, Australia.

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## Ahmet Ögüt

*This Area is Under 23 Hour Video and Audio Surveillance*

(Installation) Printed on an aluminium plate

20.5cm x 29cm

2009

Courtesy of Ahmet Ögüt and KOW, Berlin

The work is a set of large photos showing Ögüt placing official-looking signs in several outdoor locations around St. Louis. The signs say “Warning this area is under 23 hour video and audio surveillance.” In the photos, he stops with his tools at various places, mostly public, and hangs the signs without being bothered. It may reference the way that we accept the constant surveillance under which a city dweller lives, or else point out the privacy or mischief that can be achieved outside of the modern grid, in that one precious hour, whenever that might be.





# Ahmet Ögüt

*The Missing T*

2018

Single channel HD video, color, sound

10:04 min

Courtesy of Ahmet Ögüt and KOW, Berlin

When I arrived in Tulum I noticed that on the welcoming monument of the city, the letter “T” was missing. Apparently it had been gone for many months. I was able to find the letter at the bottom of the monument and after hiding a Mayan Black Obsidian Stone in the letter (that was traditionally used to observe the sun) I placed it back on the monument.

The “T” serves the role of a MacGuffin in the video- a plot device that the protagonist pursues, often with little explanation to connect the narrative. In the following I interviewed a group of recently dismissed police officers of Tulum that lost their jobs after protesting against their corrupt government and its ties to cartels. The details they shared were quite alarming and so I decided to use the Mayan language as a coded tool to share their story in the local context (for International audiences subtitles are added). They simply talk about how they started the strike, details of how their own safety was at risk, how they were not paid and how they were even buying their own equipment and how they get by to survive now.





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## Anurendra Jegadeva

Top:

*Portrait of Julia*

Mixed media on canvas

76cm x 102cm

2018

Bottom:

*Winston and Julia Say Goodbye...*

Mixed media on canvas

76cm x 102cm

2018

I love comics books and I love film.

In these Orwellian times of conspiracy theories and fake news; of information overload and abject disinformation; of the return of the strongman dictator and the final death throes of democracy- comics and film offer a fantastical platform that- even so – only barely support the Reality of Living in the Age of Trump.

So I chose 1984 – the book, the film – as the inspiration for these new paintings – using specific scenes from the Michael Radford film to try and convey the state of the displaced, the surveilled and the helpless .... while we sit in front of our TVs.

In *Portrait of Julia* and *Winston and Julia Say Goodbye*, I try to convey a sense of the saddest narratives of our times... the dystopian displacement of people by a few fatmen with cigars who sit in dark rooms and decide the fate of humanity.

Big Brother is watching.



## H.H Lim

### *Target*

Clear sticker mounted on mirror

150cm x 150cm

2015-2018

*"He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication."* - Michel Foucault

Lim plays with the game-like ambiguity and non-accordance between images and languages to reveal the inevitable uncertainty and contradiction in the linguistic function of words and sentences vis-à-vis reality.

In surveillance society, Lim presents the individual as a target. Who gets to shoot?



# Heather Dewey-Hagborg

## *Stranger Visions*

Found genetic materials, custom software, 3d prints, documentation

Dimensions vary

2012-13

Courtesy of Heather Dewey-Hagborg and Fridman Gallery

In *Stranger Visions* I collected hairs, chewed up gum, and cigarette butts from the streets, public bathrooms and waiting rooms of New York City. I extracted DNA from them and analyzed it to computationally generate 3d printed life size full color portraits representing what those individuals might look like, based on genomic research. Working with the traces strangers unwittingly left behind, the project was meant to call attention to the developing technology of forensic DNA phenotyping, the potential for a culture of biological surveillance, and the impulse towards genetic determinism.





**Portrait and samples from New York: Sample 2**

Collected 1/6/13 12:15pm  
1381 Myrtle ave. Brooklyn, NY

MtDNA Haplogroup: H2a2a1 (Eastern European)  
SRY Gene: present  
Gender: Male  
rs12913832: AA  
Eye Color: Brown  
rs4648379: CC  
Typical nose size  
rs6548238: CC  
Typical odds for obesity



**Portrait and samples from New York: Sample 4**

Collected 1/6/13 12:20pm  
Myrtle ave. and Himrod St. Brooklyn, NY

MtDNA Haplogroup: T2b (European)  
SRY Gene: absent  
Gender: Female  
rs12913832: AA  
Likely Eye Color: Brown  
rs4648379: CT  
Slightly smaller nose size  
rs6548238: TT  
Slightly lower odds for obesity



**Portrait and samples from New York: Sample 6**

Collected 1/6/13 12:25pm  
Wilson ave. and Stanhope St. Brooklyn, NY

MtDNA Haplogroup: D1 (Native American, South American)  
SRY Gene: present  
Gender: Male  
rs12913832: AA  
Eye Color: Brown  
rs4648379: CC  
Typical nose size  
rs6548238: CC  
Typical odds for obesity





**Portraits and samples from East Hampton: Sample 1**

Collected 6/2/13

MtDNA Haplogroup: H2a2a1 (Eastern European)

SRY Gene: present

Gender: Male

rs12913832: GG

Eye Color: Blue

rs4648379: CC

Typical nose size

rs6548238: TT

Lower odds for obesity



**Portraits and samples from East Hampton: Sample 7**

Collected 6/2/13

MtDNA Haplogroup: M48 (North East Indian)

SRY Gene: absent

Gender: Female

rs12913832: AA

Eye Color: Brown

rs4648379: CC

Typical nose size

rs6548238: CC

Typical odds for obesity

## Ivan Lam

*Who watches the watchers?*

Inkjet print laminated on convex mirrors, plastic adapters and metal brackets

60cm diameter per mirror, 304cm in length

2018

Found in the work of the Roman poet Juvenal, in his Satires (Satire VI, lines 347-348) is the phrase *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

*Who will guard the guards themselves?*

I take this phrase as a point of departure and set out to subvert the surveillant gaze directed by government institutions towards ordinary citizens.

My medium comes in the form of outdoor convex mirrors, which are usually employed to increase our field of vision around blind corners, obstructed or hidden entrances, exits, and corridors. Laid on top of the mirrors are seemingly unremarkable landscape images taken from a variety of viewpoints. Upon closer inspection, the viewer becomes aware of a building that makes an appearance in all of the images, the building being MACC (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission), one of the biggest anti-corruption complexes in the world.

What does it mean to return the gaze?

What does it mean to make visible physical structures whose inner workings are largely invisible?

The mirror, a medium of reflection, ceases to reflect. Instead, it provokes inner reflections concerning the politics of looking and seeing.

The work is not meant to reveal, but to create a visual vocabulary that answers the question "What does surveillance state look like?"

*Who watches the watchers?*

*Who guards the guardians?*

*Who polices the police?*

*Who protects the protectors?*







## James Bridle

*Every CCTV Camera (London)*

989 digital photographs (112 exhibited)

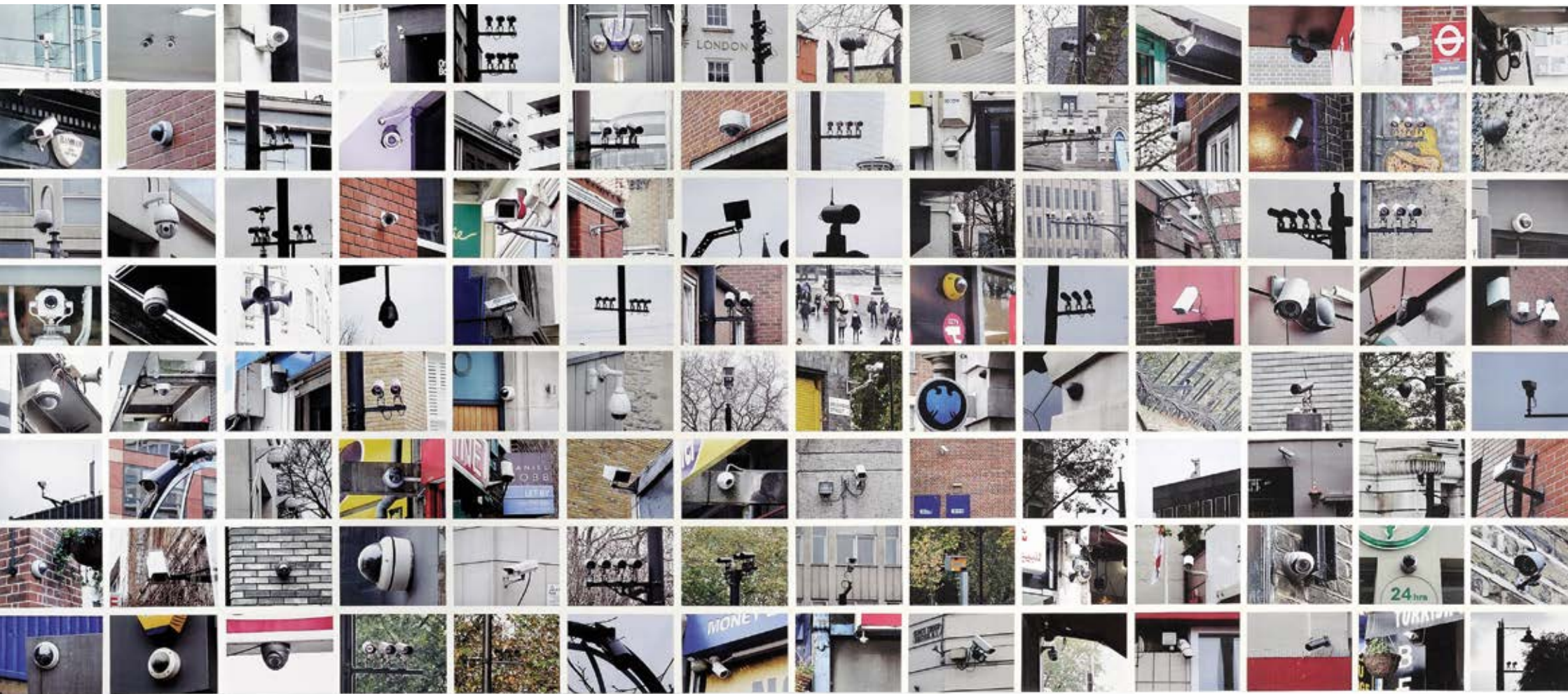
21cm x 28cm

2014-2015

Courtesy of James Bridle

Over two days in December 2014 and January 2015, James Bridle walked around the boundary of London's Congestion Charging Zone, a traffic-and pollution-control measure which also serves as a zone of total surveillance, tracking and recording the movements of every vehicle moving through the city. Along the route, the artist photographed every camera that could see him: several thousand devices, captured in 989 images. For this act of legal looking back, of returning a gaze, the artist was repeatedly harassed and subjected to police questioning.







## Ken Feinstein

*It's not a vicious cycle, it's a downward spiral*

Mixed media(movable wall, projectors, perspex screens and drone and security camera video)

240cm x 300cm x 100cm

2018

We create security images to feel secure. The images are created in the hope to never be seen. This work is about the fear and desire we have in seeing such images. We create them in the hope of preventing the disastrous event. We fear them, yet at the same time they fascinate.

In this work I have presented such images embedded in a wall to emphasise that we feel we need these images to exist, but do not actually want to see them. The cracks in the wall allowing us a glimpse of the images, but not access to the entire image. The images are from military drones and security cameras footage of a terrorist attack in Paris. They were chosen as they also create a dialog with each other. They can be seen as Events on their own and also as part of a long string of cause and effect that is still ongoing.





## Paolo Cirio

### *Obscurity*

Dye sublimation prints on aluminum

10.5cm x 15cm and 15cm x 21cm

2016-2018

Courtesy of Paolo Cirio

This artwork is composed of over fifteen million mugshots of people arrested in the U.S. It obfuscated the criminal records of six mugshot websites by cloning them, blurring their pictures, and shuffling their data. A participatory feature let people judge the individuals arrested by deciding to keep or remove their records from the mugshot websites. The artwork was subject to legal threats from owners of mugshot websites and received support from victims of mugshot extortion. *Obscurity* explores information ethics and the emotional underpinning of unflattering reputation exposed on the Internet. Beyond reporting on mass incarceration, the social experiment, and the performative hack, the artist also designed the Internet privacy policy *Right to Remove*, which advocates for the legal right to remove personal information from search engines by adapting the Right To Be Forgotten for the United States.





# Roger Ballen

Top:

*Intruder*

Edition: 1 of 5

Sold medium Hahnemuhle pigment print on Hahnemuhle photo rag pearl paper

91cm x 91cm

2010

*'Asylum of the Birds'* series

Bottom:

*Lurking*

Edition: 1 of 5

Sold medium Hahnemuhle pigment print on Hahnemuhle photo rag pearl paper

91cm x 91cm

2010

*'Asylum of the Birds'* series



The birds are witnesses to inward exploration. Omnipresent, sometimes as accomplices and sometimes as victims, they are both enigmatic figures and augural omens, real presences and dream apparitions.

The settings inside the photographs are orchestrated. Nevertheless, each of these photos conveys to the viewer a sense of absolute authenticity. One sees a room, not a studio; things, not props; figures, not models; in action, not posed.

The photographs display a myriad of gazes, some visible, other subtle. Each photograph speaks of the presence of an intruder's gaze and again hints at a gaze that lurks in the background.



## Viktoria Binschtok

*Suspicious Minds, Body #12*

Digital c-print, framed

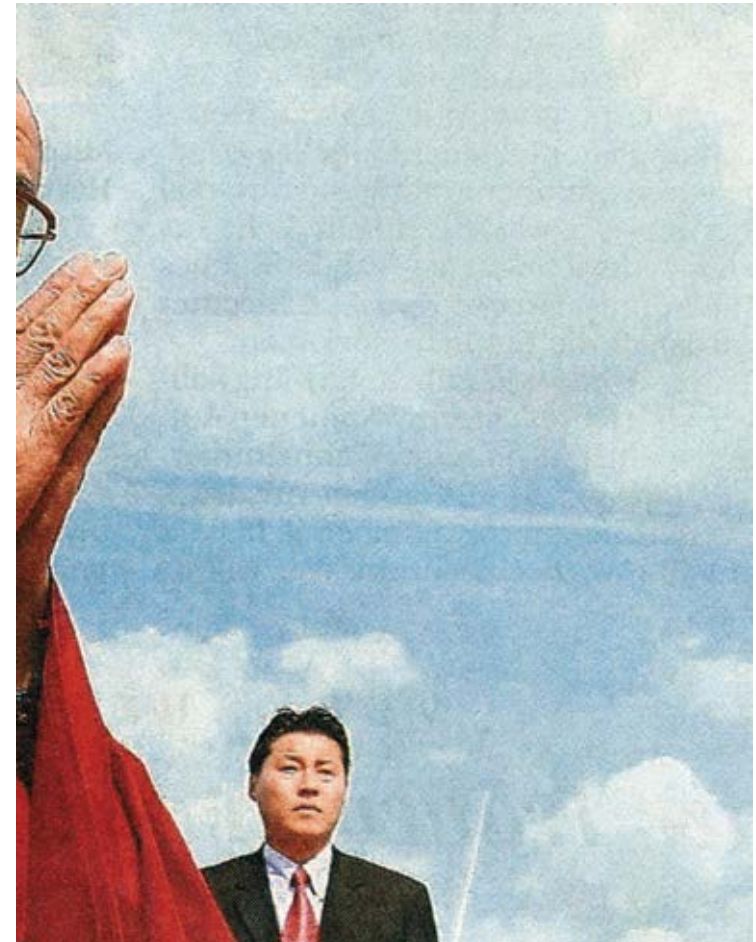
160cm x 125cm

2009

Courtesy of ViktoriaBinschtok and KLEMM's

Composing close-ups from select news reportage images of public figures, celebrities and politicians, *Suspicious Minds* shifts the focus of attention from the main subject of the image to the surrounding characters in the background, caught up in the public eye.

These poker-faced, well-dressed men stand inconspicuously as hidden features in the limelight of public events watching over others, yet being watched themselves by the cameras recording the event. For the series, Binschtok extracts portraits from newsprint images and blows up the rasterized image to human scale. The final images in the sequence are reprinted again as photographs with a new composition, focusing attention on the similar expressions of power and suspicious gazes of these surveillance figures under surveillance.





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Left:  
*Suspicious Minds, Body #123*  
 Digital c-print, framed  
 79cm x 60cm  
 2009  
 Courtesy of Viktoria Binschtok and KLEMM's

Right:  
*Suspicious Minds, Body #125*  
 Digital c-print, framed  
 77cm x 58cm  
 2009  
 Courtesy of Viktoria Binschtok and KLEMM's



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Wei-Ling Gallery

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To accompany 'Seen' group exhibition  
3 May- 1 July 2018

Featured artists:

Ahmet Ögüt, Anurendra Jegadeva, H.H Lim,  
Heather Dewey-Hagborg, Ivan Lam, James Bridle,  
Ken Feinstein, Paolo Cirio, Roger Ballen, Viktoria Binschok

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