IN REAL LIFE

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**STEPHANIE DINKINS TREVOR PAGLEN LEO SELVAGGIO
MAIJA TAMMI JOSÉ ORLANDO VILLATORO XU BING LIAM YOUNG**

Maija Tammi,
One of Them Is a Human, 2017

As the powerful technology behind artificial intelligence (AI) grows more sophisticated, machines have developed the capacity not only to capture images but also to "see" them. In Real Life examines the real-world impact of computer vision—from the murky ethics of data collection and surveillance to the racial and gender biases that abound in facial recognition technology. Through works by seven contemporary artists, In Real Life presents photographs, videos, and installations that grapple with the increasingly fraught relationship between humans and technology.

Artists Maija Tammi, Trevor Paglen, and Stephanie Dinkins each produce work concerned with the often-tenuous line that separates humans from machines. In her series *One of Them Is a Human* (2017), Maija Tammi (Finnish, b. 1985) examines the disquieting effects of extremely naturalistic artificial intelligence, presenting photographs of three androids and one human. Tammi does not reveal which image depicts a real person, urging the viewer to search for clues and make their own assumptions. Her works ultimately prompt the question: In the age of cutting-edge technology and disturbingly lifelike machines, how can we distinguish what makes us human?


Maija Tammi,
One of Them Is a Human, 2017

While Tammi's work emphasizes the hyperrealistic physical appearance of AI, Trevor Paglen (American, b. 1974) is more concerned with delving into its innerworkings. In *Behold These Glorious Times!* (2017), he juxtaposes hundreds of thousands of photos and videos that are used to train artificial intelligence to see objects, faces, gestures, and emotions. The flashes of images demonstrate how the AI is taught to interpret visuals, slowly exposing how recognition is shaped, with often blurred distinctions between human bodies, objects, and machines. Paglen's provocative work suggests that the so-called thoughts, perceptions, and biases in AI are not at all random; machine learning is, at its core, dictated by human design.

Stephanie Dinkins (American, b. 1964) also examines the effects of machine learning, in her case choosing to address the intersection of artificial intelligence and race. In *Conversations with Bina48* (2015–ongoing), Dinkins converses with the social robot prototype Bina48, who responds to her questions about life, social equity, and prejudice. Her other work on view, *Not the Only One (N'TOO)* (2017), is a voice-interactive chatbot equipped to converse about the black experience by telling the multigenerational story of the artist's own family. While Paglen's video—with its dizzying visuals and ironically cynical title—underscores the bleakness of the digital age, Dinkins instead suggests that through an ultimately human act—listening and understanding—antiracist artificial intelligence may be possible.

Trevor Paglen, *Behold These Glorious Times!*, 2017
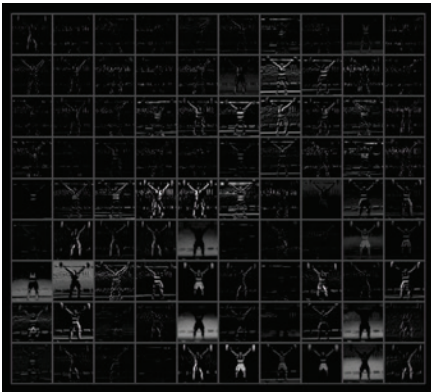
Stephanie Dinkins, *Conversations with Bina48*, 2015–ongoing

Other works included in the exhibition—particularly videos by artists Liam Young and Xu Bing—examine how technology and surveillance inform our daily lives. In his films *Where the City Can't See* (2017) and *Seoul City Machine* (2019) Liam Young (Australian, b. 1976) depicts future cities as places where machines outnumber humans, and omniscient robot surveillance never ceases. The former video is shot with the same scanning technologies used by self-operating vehicles, as members of an underground community adorn themselves in machine-vision camouflage and wear the tribal masks of anti–facial recognition to live freely beyond the bounds of surveillance. *Seoul City Machine* is narrated and scripted by an AI chatbot trained on smart city data: data collected via sensors from citizens and devices operating in urban environments and then used to inform city services and resources. Using contemporary Seoul as a visual backdrop, the film employs visual effects to depict an autonomous world where drones fill the sky, cars drive themselves, and humans and machines have become hyper-connected. While Young imagines the dystopic city of the near-future, Xu Bing (Chinese, b. 1955) uses actual footage culled from surveillance databases and websites to weave together a fictional narrative in *Dragonfly Eyes* (2017). With an estimated 200 million surveillance cameras in China tracking citizens, Xu's film comments on the lack of privacy in a country with widespread and sophisticated monitoring technology and sheds light on image-making, fame, and self-surveillance in the digital age.
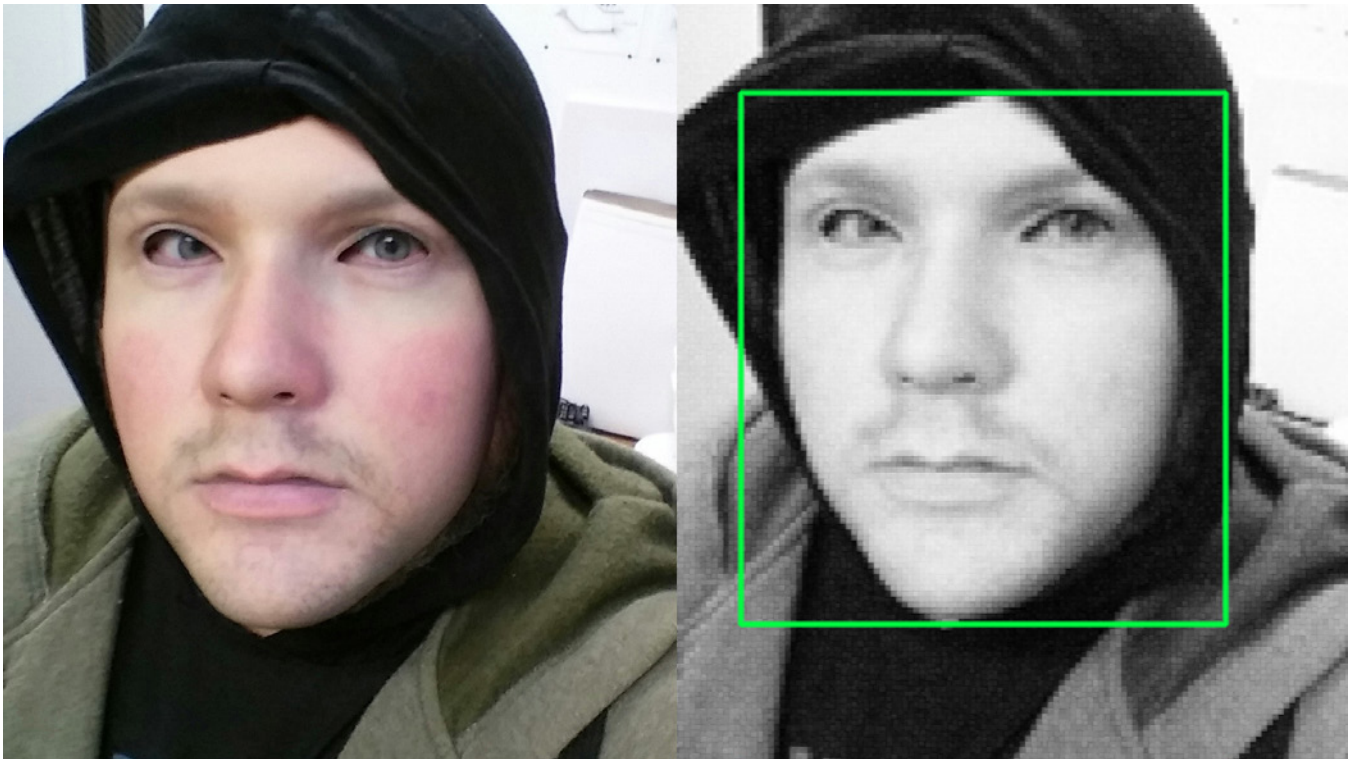
This mode of constant surveillance is not limited to China; Chicago is notably one of the most surveilled cities in the world, with approximately thirteen cameras per thousand residents. Concerned with how such extensive monitoring influences human behavior and expressions of identity in public spaces in Chicago, Leo Selvaggio (American, b. 1984) created *URME Surveillance* (2014–ongoing), a project that slyly critiques the extreme measures one must take to reclaim selfhood in the age of surveillance. The installation—complete with motion-sensor cameras and security mirrors—explores the subversive actions necessary to avoid recognition in the surveilled city. In an act of intervention, Selvaggio has designed 3-D–printed prosthetic masks of his face, which allow the wearer to thwart facial recognition monitoring systems. In Selvaggio's pan-opticon, the viewer must disguise—and ultimately, radicalize—themselves in order to protect their individual identities.

In Selvaggio and Young's fictional portrayals, the future city is consumed—ultimately to its detriment—by AI monitoring. In contrast, work by **José Orlando Villatoro** (Salvadorian, b. 1991) frequently incorporates natural materials and suggests that perhaps there are ways to reconcile cyberculture and humanity. In his series *Código Humano (Human code)* (2019), Villatoro used seeds, coffee beans, and fruit to build large-scale working QR codes that viewers are invited to scan. The codes direct the viewer to online streams of hacked security cameras in different areas of the United States and Latin America, ranging from inside schools and cafeterias to outside in the streets, presenting quotidian portraits of humanity. Perhaps Villatoro is suggesting that the small moments that define daily life make up the true human code.

In early internet vernacular, the term IRL (short for "in real life") suggested a distinction between the digital world and the "real" one. Today, the lines between these worlds, as well as the lines between human and machine, are progressively fraught. As technology grows ever smarter, we must ask: How can we design and program AI to avoid the biases of its human creators? And how can we use technology to advance society, instead of solely surveilling it? *In Real Life* explores these pertinent questions, among many others, ultimately examining how AI has redefined how we visualize the world—and our humanity.

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