

## Cooper Hewitt to explore facial recognition at the London Design Biennale

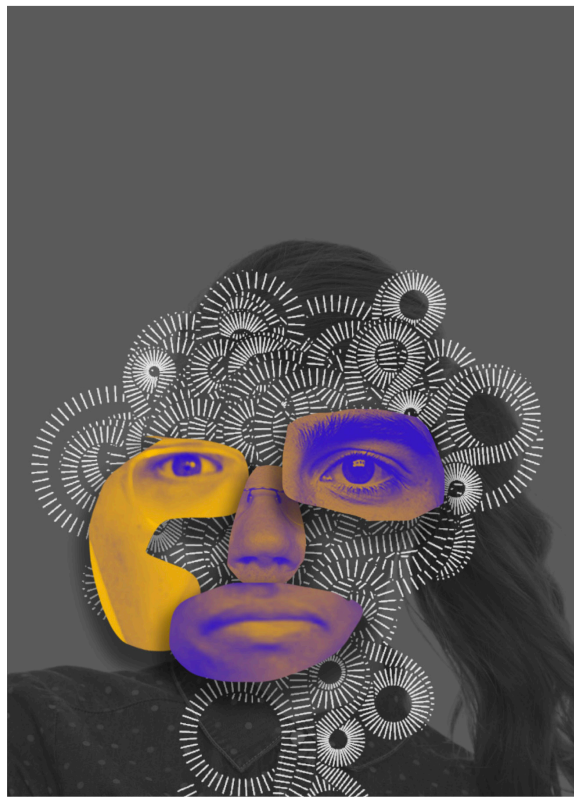
by Jonathan Hilburg



Installation view of *Face Values* (David Levene)

The United States is returning to the London Design Biennale, and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum will once again represent the U.S. in 2018. In *Face Values*, the Cooper Hewitt will bring an interactive installation about facial recognition technology to London and will confront participants with the knowledge that their faces have become commodified data.

The London Design Biennale 2018 will run from September 4 through 23 at Somerset House in central London. This is the design festival's second year, and exhibitors from all over the world have been invited to explore this year's theme of "Emotional States." Thirty-six countries contributed to the 2016 Biennale with pieces that scrutinized or subverted the idea of "Utopia by Design."



Rendering of Zach Lieberman's piece

Zach Lieberman's piece will mash up visitors' facial features. (Courtesy Cooper Hewitt)

In 2016 the Cooper Hewitt projected 100 digitized wallpapers from the museum's archives in The Immersion Room, converting what was once a physical skin into easily changeable digital versions. For Face Values, curator Ellen Lupton has taken a similar approach to a different topic: the conversion of a physical signifier into easily transmissible code. Face Values will feature original work from designers Zachary Lieberman and R. Luke DuBois inside a pavilion designed by Matter Architecture Practice.

Visitors will be able to use their faces to control the installations and learn how corporations and governments are able to track, catalog, and monetize facial data and emotions. Both installations will create collages of visitors' faces and mash up their facial features. Lieberman's work will mix the features of visitors together to create new faces, while DuBois's piece will walk participants through a range of emotions and create a portrait that averages all of the features together. A monitor will also display how each emotion is cataloged in the face tracking system. Matter Architecture Practice has designed a backdrop of intentionally synthetic-looking reeds for the installation that's supposed to blur the lines between the natural world and the digital.

"In representing the United States at the London Design Biennale, Cooper Hewitt will be furthering the Smithsonian's goal of catalyzing new conversations around issues of global importance," writes Caroline Baumann, director of Cooper Hewitt. "While underscoring design's purpose to address complex challenges and advance empowering solutions. Illuminating the potential of facial recognition technology to quantify, read and control our moods and movements, Face Values encourages participants to consider the vast capabilities and unforeseen consequences of this rapidly evolving field of digital design."

After the Biennale's opening on September 4, Face Values was awarded the London Design Biennale 2018 Emotional States Medal for "most inspiring interpretation of the 2018 theme." The jury panel was composed of 14 well-known designers, architects, educators, and artists from around the world.