



In The 21st Century, Even The Art Is Watching You

By Meg Miller



Thank heist movies for the recurring image of a “surveillance” being an officer surrounded by screens in a back room somewhere, missing a suspicious act with the slightest distraction. In reality, most security cameras today don’t actually need human analysis: they can recognize faces, read license plate numbers, and detect movement through algorithms. And they never fall asleep on the job.



The upshot? Big Brother-esque monitoring that goes almost completely unnoticed. In the exhibition Zoom Pavilion, showing at this year’s Art Basel, Montréal-based artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Polish-American artist Krzysztof Wodiczko render surveillance painfully visible. Using 12 cameras and computerized surveillance systems, the artists have created an exhibition that tracks and monitors visitors, and projects their image on the gallery walls. Think of it like a surveillance camera Jum-botron.



The artists worked with programmer Stephan Schulz, the head of R&D at Lozano-Hemmer's studio, to create software that uses facial recognition to not only detect visitors, but also record their spatial proximity to each other. Instead of identifying those in the room, computers map and record the distances between people and display whether that distance is "suspicious."

"Krzysztof has a lot of experience with surveillance of groups in public, growing up in communist Poland, where three people in close proximity already triggered a suspicion of unlawful organization," Lozano-Hemmer writes in an email. "The piece is right at the borderline between the narcissistic seduction of reality TV and selfies, as you see yourself represented in a colossal scale, but at the same time there is an Orwellian predatory vision that is not unlike the target acquisition footage of smart bombs or drones."

Zoom Pavilion will be part of the Unlimited show at Art Basel, opening June 13.