



Paolo Cirio. *Monitoring Control*

Curated by
Marco Scotini

From 19 November 2021
to 31 January 2022

FMAV
Palazzina dei Giardini
Corso Cavour 2, Modena

Paolo Cirio, *Iris*, 2021. Courtesy by the artist and FMAV.

FMAV Fondazione Modena Arti Visive presents, starting on 19 November 2021, *Monitoring Control*, an exhibition by **Paolo Cirio** curated by Marco Scotini, which will be on display in the Palazzina dei Giardini (Corso Cavour 2, Modena) exhibition venue until 31 January 2022. The exhibition opening will be on Friday 19 November from 6 to 8 pm.

In addition to gathering a wide and cohesive selection of works produced by the artist in the last ten years in a single exhibition, the show opens with a large installation entitled *Iris*, made for the occasion.

One of the most attentive artistic investigators of the effects of computerized society, for around 20 years Paolo Cirio has been closely surveying the relations between the infosphere and the space of global capitalism, which have come together in what he has recently defined as *Evidentiary Realism*. While Paul Virilio was upholding the derealization of the world by way of the new media, had Hal Foster since the 1990s not already been announcing the return of the real? Through a series of important works (eight of which are on show), Cirio has sought to give visual form to all those forces controlling and capturing our existences (in a pervasive and violent way), which avoid normal perception and remain carefully hidden despite operating in the light of day. As such, realism means overcoming the opaqueness that makes up the contemporary (financial, social and legal) world. Not only by unmasking what is apparent but also by modelling what remains buried.

Hence, the exhibition title *Monitoring Control* alludes to a dual form of monitoring: the one exercised by power and, vice versa, the one that the social subjectivities can exercise on the forms of control by becoming aware of the phenomenon and striking out against it. Taking this point of view, *Monitoring Control* is a sequence displaying the sabotage of various forms of security and surveillance, which opens and closes with a large tower located in the historic octagonal vestibule of Palazzina dei Giardini.



Fondazione Modena Arti Visive

Making a direct allusion to the Panopticon control tower, the structure is put in a central position and instead of the guard, the artist has mounted eight photographs of different coloured irises forming a large octagonal crown.

Through the *Iris* project, Paolo Cirio intends to symbolically defile the control device by proposing “contact lenses” of the future that can upset the identification process and potentially make the monitored subject change identity. Overturning the asymmetry between visual regimes (typical of the Panopticon) like this could emancipate us from its control and allow *us* to monitor *it*.

Sabotaging the urban capture of anonymous individuals by Google Street View, unlawfully taking over Facebook profiles, making incursions into mug shot websites to black out the faces of those exposed as criminals or, in contrast, creating online databases to enable the identification of French police officers. These are just some of the tactics implemented by Paolo Cirio, artist, hacker and activist, who never stops his work of desecration.

Paolo Cirio was born in Turin in 1979. He lives and works in New York. He has had solo shows at the Certosa, Capri, 2021; PAN, Naples, 2020; Galleria Giorgio Persano, Turin, 2019; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, 2019; International Kunstverein Luxembourg, 2016; NOME, Berlin, 2019, 2016, 2015; Bellegard Centre Culturel, Toulouse, France, 2015; Galleria Kasa, Istanbul, Turkey, 2013; and Aksioma Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2013 and 2011. His work has been presented at important institutions all over the world and has won numerous prizes, including the Golden Nica first prize at Ars Electronica in Linz; second prize in the Transmediale award, Berlin; and Eyebeam and ISCP fellowships in New York.

RELEVANT INFORMATION:

Paolo Cirio. *Monitoring Control*

Curated by Marco Scotini

Opening: 19 November from 6 to 8 pm (free entry, admission with Green Pass and face mask)

From 20 November to 31 January 2022

FMAV- Palazzina dei Giardini Corso Cavour 2, Modena (Italy)

Opening hours

From Wednesday to Friday 11am-1pm | 4pm-7pm

Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays 11am-7pm

25.12.2021 / 01.01.2022: 4pm-7pm

Information

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Solo show by Paolo Cirio at the Palazzina dei Giardini, Modena.

Title: *Monitoring Control*

The solo show by Paolo Cirio at Fondazione Modena Arti Visive (FMAV) is centred around the social surveillance and control implemented through new technologies.

Paolo Cirio deals with the media, economic and legal systems of computerized society. His works combine inquests and activism through photographs, installations, videos and public art. Cirio has held exhibitions in international museums and won prestigious awards. His projects have appeared on hundreds of media platforms and he regularly holds conferences and workshops in universities all over the world.

Paolo Cirio's solo exhibition *Monitoring Control* presents works that focus on the technologies of the society of control. Cirio deals with the topics of surveillance and social manipulation in the era of artificial intelligence, the social media and big data. His works are often the material translation of his actions, which aim to overturn and reveal the mechanisms and dangers intrinsic to the new technologies. Cirio creates artistic provocations that promote ethical, legislative and technological progress for better use and greater awareness of the tools that govern every aspect of our society and private lives.

1. *Persecuting US*

During the 2012 American presidential elections, Cirio collected over one million Twitter accounts and profiled their political opinions. Cirio published the database on the *Persecuting.us* website with the users' details and a percentage, calculated by a custom-built algorithm, which indicates how right- or left-wing these individuals are. Lastly, the platform allows visitors to send threatening messages to users from opposing factions. The project reflects on the persecution and political polarization caused by the social media four years before Trump used these same strategies to communicate for political ends. The sound installation consists of a robotic voice that reads millions of tweets archived by Cirio in 2012.

2. *Iris*

The work *Iris* is a study by Paolo Cirio to upset the biometric identification of the iris. Eye scan identification technology is the most accurate form of biometry, even more than the fingerprints and facial recognition. This technology is often used for individuals who are hard to identify, such as migrants and prisoners, and in India over one billion people have had their iris recorded by the government. With this work, Cirio seeks to "hack" the system using contact lenses to prevent identification or even change identity. The installation consists of a Panopticon tower made of eight prints of irises altered by Cirio. It refers to the act of observing and being observed through omnipresent surveillance systems that are increasingly available to all.

3. *Aesthetics of Information Ethics*

In this work, Cirio analyses ethical issues linked to those new technologies with the biggest influence on the political, social and personal spheres of society. "L'Estetica dell'etica dell'informazione" is a short essay by Cirio in which he analyses the ethics of digital technologies and at the same time the ethics of works of art that represent these technologies. In this video, Cirio has collected ethical dilemmas linked to the use of those information technologies that have most changed contemporary society.

4. *Street Ghosts*

In *Street Ghosts* Cirio selects images of passers-by visible on Google Street View and makes life-size prints of them. The posters are cut out around the edges and then put up on the walls of the buildings in the exact spot where the people were when they were photographed. The work recreates a social conflict: the spectral human bodies look like victims of the clash between companies, governments, citizens and algorithms on the use, protection and ownership of public and private data. Cirio, who has already installed these posters in over 50 cities all over the world, has made four new posters for the exhibition in Modena. They are hung both on the outside walls of Palazzo Santa Margherita where the Google Car shots were taken between Corso Accademia Militare, Corso Canalgrande and Via Goldoni, and inside Palazzina dei Giardini.

5. *Overexposed*

The *Overexposed* series consists of unauthorized photographs of high-ranking US secret service officials – from the NSA, CIA and FBI – connected to Edward Snowden’s whistleblowing. Cirio found the photographic material by monitoring photographs and selfies published on public Internet platforms over which the officials had no control. The images were then reproduced using the “Stencil HD” street art technique invented by Cirio and put up on the walls of various cities around the world. *Overexposed* is a satire of the era of mass surveillance and secret intelligence programmes in the time of omnipresent transparency and Internet vulnerability.

6. *Face to Facebook*

In this work, Cirio took possession of a million Facebook profiles and published 250,000 of them on a purpose-made dating site called *Lovely-Faces.com*. The profiles were ordered on the basis of their social temperament, estimated using artificial intelligence to analyse the facial expressions in the photos. Facebook issued a writ against the artist, while a lot of the users threatened to take legal action or sent him death threats. This project was pioneering in its use of artificial intelligence in art to reflect on surveillance, privacy and social media economics.

7. *Attention*

The work *Attention* consists of photographs selected by Cirio of Instagram influencers who promote controversial products without flagging them as advertising. Cirio’s compositions recreate the original images published on Instagram while blowing up parts of the body, expressions, poses and sponsored products. The project deconstructs the way in which influencers implement their particular visual language in correlation with algorithms to sneakily create viral publicity. This photographic language has now entered every pore of our society, dictated by the means of communication itself.

8. *Obscurity*

Obscurity consists of over 10 million mugshots of people arrested in the United States. Cirio defiled the data of six mugshot websites, blurring the faces of the arrested people and mixing up their names to defend their privacy and reputation. The project explores the ethics of free information on the Internet. Many individuals who have been victims of this abuse of their privacy and mass blackmail have got in touch with Cirio to thank him and reveal the damage caused to their lives by the uncontrollable circulation of this information. Lastly, Cirio created a privacy policy and launched a campaign to support application of the “right to be forgotten” in the United States.

9. *Capture*

Capture is a series of photographs of over 4,000 faces of French police officers made using facial recognition. Cirio created an online database to enable identification of the officers and put the photos up in the centre of Paris to condemn police use of this technology. The work was censored by the French Ministry of the Interior, despite the project’s aim to warn against the risks of new mass surveillance technologies also in terms of police protection. As an activist, in parallel Cirio created the “Ban Facial Recognition Europe” campaign which has collected over 50,000 signatures and received acknowledgement from the European Commission.

10. *Sociality*

In *Sociality* Cirio has collected over 20,000 patents filed in the United States patent office. By hacking the Google Patents search engine, Cirio has brought to light and denounced inventions which – through artificial intelligence, algorithms, data mining and user interfaces – use underhand psychological and profiling tactics to manipulate and monitor Internet users. The work immerses visitors in a composition of 1,000 patent diagrams that illustrate the complexity and capacity of social monitoring and “programming” technologies.

1. *Persecuting US*, 2012 Canale audio 26'18", speakers / audio channel, speakers Courtesy l'artista / Courtesy of the artist
2. *Iris*, 2021 8 stampe su plexiglass e struttura di alluminio / 8 prints on Plexiglas and aluminium structure 329 X 289,7 X 289,7 cm Courtesy l'artista e FMAV - Fondazione Modena Arti Visive / Courtesy of the artist and FMAV - Fondazione Modena Arti Visive
3. *Aesthetics of Information Ethics*, 2017 2 video su monitor / 2 videos on monitor Courtesy l'artista / Courtesy of the artist
4. *Street Ghosts*, 2012 4 Stampe su PVC adesivo / 4 prints on adhesive PVC Dimensioni variabili / Varying sizes Courtesy l'artista / Courtesy of the artist
5. *Overexposed*, 2015 4 Pitture acriliche su carta fotografica / 4 acrylic paintings on photographic paper 106 x 91 cm, 144 x 124 cm Courtesy l'artista e NOME, Berlin / Courtesy of the artist and NAME, Berlin
6. *Face to Facebook*, 2011 3 stampe su plexiglass / 3 prints on Plexiglas 150 X 150 cm cad. / each Courtesy l'artista e Galleria Giorgio Persano Torino / Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Giorgio Persano Torino
7. *Attention*, 2019 stampe inkjet su vetro / Inkjet prints on glass misure variabili / Varying sizes Courtesy l'artista e NOME, Berlin / Courtesy of the artist and NAME, Berlin
8. *Obscurity*, 2016 4 Stampe inkjet / 4 inkjet prints 104 X 84 cm Courtesy l'artista e NOME, Berlin / Courtesy of the artist and NAME, Berlin
9. *Capture*, 2020 2 Stampe fotografiche C-Print / 2 C-Print photographic prints 110 X 110 cm Courtesy l'artista e Galleria Giorgio Persano Torino / Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Giorgio Persano Torino
10. *Sociality*, 2018-2021 Installazione, pvc adesivo, stampe digitali su alluminio / Installation, adhesive PVC, digital prints on aluminium 75 X 60 cm cad., misure ambiente / each, filling entire wall Courtesy l'artista e Galleria Giorgio Persano Torino / Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Giorgio Persano Torino