

Eyes Wide Open: Surveillance Series

Frequent use of digital technology like cell phones and computers plays such a seductive, pervasive role in my life (and nearly everyone's), especially during this pandemic. Embracing the latest news, message, app, or software, I capture, link and distribute what interests me. Also constant, but less obvious in our lives, are networks of digital surveillance that invade our privacy with virtually every online activity. In tandem, surveillance by digital cameras has proliferated, providing an endless loop of doubtful examination and ultimately revealing critical threats to freedom, civil liberty and identity privacy. On average, one surveillance camera operates per every eleven citizens, as we are recorded an average of 75 times per day. Among the targets of relentless surveillance are our email, phone calls, texting, online activities like personal finances, photographs, social media and business communications, political preferences, and location/movement tracking services.

My art looks back at these government, corporate, and personal cameras --especially at the vast insertion of surveillance cameras into the natural world --and focuses on the secretive relationship between subject and spectator. Using a diverse range of media such as 14-foot-long graphite drawings, watercolor, frescos, mixed media, 3D printing, video and installation, I examine the tangled, complex and hidden aspects of this intrusion. *Proliferate* consists of 12 recycled Altoid peppermint boxes, each housing a miniature fresco painting of a different eye watching back. Are these eyes of the victims, of the all-seeing state, or of anyone with the means to watch? For the floor installation *USofA Drone Carpet*, I learned 3-D design software in order to print 105 tiny drone sculptures (based on the Black Hornet military surveillance drone) using selective laser sintering on nylon powder. Arranged in the pattern of the American flag, but in grayscale color on camouflage, the drones offer a somber critique the United States.

Our current administration overturned the FCC regulation that banned internet service providers from selling our private information without our permission.* And here in St. Louis, government/police surveillance with no oversight is an ongoing issue, threatening the civil liberties of all, but especially those of people of color, immigrant and refugee communities, and local activists. In July, an alderman made a resolution for St. Louis to contract for limitless aerial 'spy plane' surveillance. The Missouri ACLU websites states that when mass surveillance systems are deployed by local police, they are frequently used to target communities of color. "While the nation is discussing the demilitarization of police, St. Louis is considering turning wartime specific technology on its own citizens. This is a threat to liberty. This summer, Americans have taken to the streets to protest police brutality and demand change. During the protest surrounding the death of Freddie Gray, officials in Baltimore quietly and secretly turned to the very surveillance technology now before the (St. Louis) Board of Aldermen to track protestors. "***

The word surveillance comes from *sur* (French, -over) *veiller* (French, -watch; Latin, *vigilare* – to keep watch): literally, *to watch over*. My hope is to increase awareness of government/corporate intrusion into our personal and civic lives.

Margaret Keller, 2020

* NPR, March 28, 2017

**The River Front Times, Luz María Henríquez, 7/13/2020