

TONY OURSLER
mAcHiNe E.L.F.

February 23–March 25, 2023



Tony Oursler, *SpEcTrUm*, 2023. Archival inkjet print on aluminum mirror, wood, acrylic paint, 4 digital screens, 45 x 47 x 2 inches (114.3 x 119.4 x 5.1 cm)

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“Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”
– Arthur C. Clarke

Lehmann Maupin presents, *mACHiNe E.L.F.*, an exhibition of new work by Tony Oursler. Based in New York City, Oursler has been a pioneering figure in new media since the 1970s. Over the last four decades, Oursler has explored popular culture through a diverse combination of multimedia projects, immersive environments, expansive outdoor installations, and dynamic dolls, ghosts, and bots that liberate video from its traditional two-dimensional format and bring it into the realm of sculpture. Often taking the human form, especially the face, as his subject, Oursler examines psychological states, the interaction between technological progress and society, and the history of science, pseudoscience, spiritualism, and religion.

For his latest exhibition the artist has created a series of “electrified” silhouettes that feature painted and printed collages interspersed with embedded digital displays, as well as an immersive, large-scale installation of optical crystal structures that act as reflecting screens for a kaleidoscopic digital projection of otherworldly performers and hand drawn and AI-generated animations.

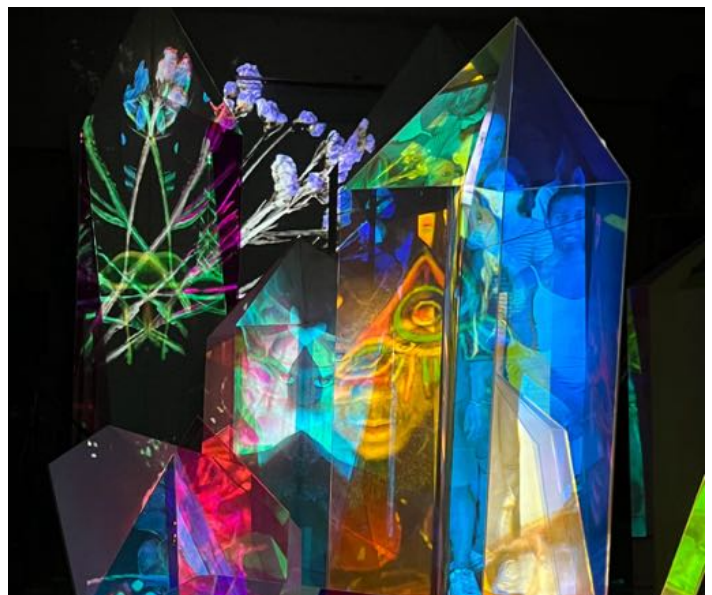
Using the classic form of the silhouette, the mirror-printed panels in *mACHiNe E.L.F.* contend with alternative contemporary worldviews—from Luddites and technophobes burning 5G towers to utopian dreams of cold fusion, moon landing hoaxes, and nautical equator crossing rituals. Each work invites the viewer to contemplate the visual culture of science and magical thinking, and Oursler identifies a creative space between scientific inquiry and occult belief where new paradigms can be generated, but where the risk of conspiracy theorizing is high. Across each collaged panel, the artist embeds iconography from conflicting conspiracies, environmental concerns, and subcultures—including in one instance the United Nations emblem, which is believed by some to contain a hidden version of the flat earth map. These “easter eggs” are identifiable by in-the-know viewers and simultaneously reflect the belief that a deeper truth is hidden just beneath the veneer of the conventional world.

In the second gallery, Oursler has created a large-scale installation inspired by the seven fundamental crystal structures that occur in nature. For the artist, these geometric forms contain two coexisting extremes: hard science and the mythic. In telecommunications and electronic circuitry, crystals are prized for their resonant quality, which allows them to synchronize signals with a high degree of accuracy. When used in mobile phones and computer CPUs, these organic structures coordinate timing, functioning as the “heartbeat” of modern technology. Crystals are also valued for their aesthetic and pseudoscientific properties, which some believe to have healing effects. In New Age discourse, different types of

crystals are assigned particular psycho-spiritual or protective properties, and are thought to carry specific energies that can be amplified by exposure to the light of the full moon.

In *mACHiNe E.L.F.* (2023) Oursler assimilates all of these references into one of his classic immersive environments. The large-scale crystal forest reflects whirling digital video imagery from an overhead projection, and the structures incorporate various transparent materials, such as shaped mirrors and dichotic refraction screens, which amplify and colorize the images depending on the viewer’s perspective. For this piece, Oursler worked with a large cast of characters, many of whom are longtime collaborators—artists and performers include Constance DeJong, Jim Fletcher, Jason Scott Henderson, and Katiana Rangel. Combining new and archival footage with interventions from AI technology, he explores a series of poetically associated themes in the work, including the digital sublime, melting ice, four-dimensional creatures, extremely low frequencies (ELF), 5G technology, intragroup dynamics, near death experiences, DMT, and Photo 51.

Across the exhibition, Oursler examines how as the average person becomes more distant from highly specialized scientific understanding, science is increasingly translated into myth by the general public. At the same time, he recognizes that the development of rationalism and rise in scientific thought has resulted in a process of societal disenchantment and a decline in spirituality. The artist draws inspiration from this paradox, which he describes as “the current re-enchantment of America,” and in this newest body of work Oursler aims to pull back the veil—revealing the science behind the spectacle while acknowledging space for the mystical beyond the edge of human knowledge.



Tony Oursler, video installation with projection, 2023 (detail)

Tony Oursler (b. 1957, New York; lives and works in New York) received a B.F.A. from the California Institute of the Arts in 1979. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at Photo Elysée, Lausanne, Switzerland (2022); K11 Musea, Hong Kong (2021); Kunstraum Dornbirn, Dornbirn, Austria (2021); Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaohsiung City, Taiwan (2021); Musée d'Arts de Nantes, Nantes, France (2020); Nanging Eye Pedestrian Bridge, Nanjing, China (2019); Public Art Fund, New York, NY (2018); The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2016); LUMA Foundation, Arles, France (2015); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2014); Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom (2013); Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, Brazil (2013); Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev, Ukraine (2013); Art Sonje Center, Seoul, South Korea (2012); ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark (2012); and Jeu de Paume, Paris, France, traveling to the DA2 Domus Artium, Salamanca, Spain, and the Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, Denmark (2005), among numerous others.

Select group exhibitions featuring his work include *Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN (2022) and Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY (2021); *Second Nature*, K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong (2021); *Les Citoyens*, Triennale Milano and the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Milan, Italy (2021); *Noire Lumière*, HOW Museum, Shanghai, China (2020); *Just Connect*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL (2020); *Trees*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, France (2019); *Almost Human: Digital Art from the Permanent Collection*, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA (2019); *Everything is Connected: Art and Conspiracy*, Met Breuer, New York, NY (2018); *David Bowie Is*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY (2018); *Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974-1995*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA (2018); *Creature*, The Broad, Los Angeles, CA (2016); *America Is Hard to See*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2015); *Mike Kelley*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France (2013); *The Royal Family*, Hayward Gallery Project Space, London, United Kingdom (2012); *Off the Wall: Part 1—Thirty Performative Actions*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2010); *Spazio: The Scene and the Imaginary*, Museo Nazionale delle arti del XXI Secolo, Rome, Italy (2010); *Looking at Music*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2008); and *California Video*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2008).

Oursler's work is in numerous public and private collections, including the Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Broad Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris, France; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, Montréal, Canada; Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona, Spain; Museum der Kulturen, Basel, Switzerland; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; National Museum of Osaka, Osaka, Japan; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK; Saatchi Collection, London, United Kingdom; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; and the Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA.

In 2000, Oursler was awarded the U.S. Art Critics Association ICA New Media Award.



Portrait of Tony Oursler, 2020

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since Inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity, and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.



Lehmann Maupin in New York. Photo by Matthew Herrmann