Julia Scher
The Mammoth Book of Eyewitnesses
February 10 – March 23, 2024

Detail: Julia Scher, **Jacqueline**, 2024, beige marble, height: 80 cm
Photo © Jörg von Bruchhausen

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce **The Mammoth Book of Eyewitnesses**, Julia Scher's sixth solo exhibition with the gallery and the artist's first at our Paris gallery. On view will be both historical as well as new works, among them one of her iconic **Surveillance Beds**, sculptural works integrating technological and surveillance equipment, and new sculptures carved from marble. The works act as witnesses to the many faces and characters of surveillance, at turns frightening, protective, and seductive.

Emerging in the mid 1980s as a precise but playful analyst of social and technological changes, Julia Scher has been working with video surveillance for over 40 years. She addresses surveillance both as a concrete phenomenon of control, including its apparatus and architecture, as well as its impact on private and public spheres. Her performances and installations drew attention to the effects of omnipresent cameras and monitors, anticipating our surveillance-saturated society decades before it had fully arrived.

Planet Delirious, 2024, the first work that greets visitors, is a pink tondo equipped with vintage cameras. Playing on the traditional format of panel paintings, the work also refers to the shape of satellite dishes and the idea of transmission. The use of obsolete technology is a poignant reminder of the speed at which technology fades.

In the main gallery room, two monumental owls, **Jacqueline** and **Bernadette**, are perched on pedestals, their heads turned at improbable angles. Signifiers of wisdom and watchfulness, in the context of the exhibition these references are confounded with other properties: night vision and the ability to see prey also make the animal a formidable hunter and predator, suggesting a subtle but wide-reaching analogy to ostensibly benevolent technologies and their more ominous usages. A mirrored tondo with an attached telescope and additional surveillance equipment draws on this notion of watchfulness as well.

The adjacent space is occupied by **Les Détecteurs de Logiciels Malveillants / Malware Detected**, 2022, a series of pink panels with various vintage cameras and technical materials. Light-hearted at first glance, the works are—as always with Julia Scher's oeuvre—double-edged. The cameras, CDs or keyboards arranged on the panels may seem harmless to us, their anachronism even funny, but as Scher's exhibition shows, the joke is on us: the omnipresence of surveillance technology speaks for itself.

The artist's focus on the regulation and control of our private sphere is exemplified by her important historical work **Baby Bed**, 2003, presented in the other half of the gallery. Equipped with cameras and monitors, **Baby Bed** makes it evident how observation and communication (or social media sharing) have permeated into the most intimate corners of our lives. The work is part of the **Surveillance Beds** series, begun in 1994. A suite of unique inkjet prints from 1995/1996, **American Fibroids**, further testifies to Scher's early preoccupation with the impact of technology on our self-presentation and identity formation.

Julia Scher was born in 1954 in Hollywood, California. The artist currently lives and works in Cologne.

Among her most recent institutional exhibitions are: **Maximum Security Society**, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (2023); **Maximum Security Society**, Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich (2022); **Wonderland**, Maison Populaire, Montreuil (2022); **Planet Greyhound**, Kunsthalle Gießen (2022); **Julia Scher**, MAMCO, Geneva (2021); and **Julia Scher – Delta**, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen (2018).

She is the recipient of several grants and fellowships including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Preservation Grant for Media Arts, the John F. Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship for Installation Art (2005), The Bunting Institute Fellowship for Surveillance Studies at Harvard University (1996–1997), and the NEA Grant for Installation Art (1992).

Julia Scher has taught and lectured at numerous institutions including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, The Cooper Union for Art and Science, Hartford University Art School, the University of California, Los Angeles, the University of Southern California, Harvard University, Columbia University, The Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and Rutgers University. While teaching at the Department of Film and Video at the Massachusetts College of Art, (1995-1996), she launched the first "Surveillance Studies" class in the United States. From 2006-2023, Scher was Professor for Multimedia Performance Surveillant Architectures at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne.

Her work is held in multiple collections: The Museum of Modern Art , New York; Ballroom Marfa, Texas; Kunstsammlungen, Wiesbaden; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York; Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf/Berlin; Krannert Art Museum, Champaign, Illinois; Le Consortium, Dijon; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; MAMCO, Geneva; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Museen Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn; Centre Pompidou, Paris; MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York; Neue Galerie Graz – Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz; Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and SFMOMA, San Francisco.

For press inquiries please contact David Ulrichs. Tel: +49 (0) 176 50 33 01 35 or david@davidulrichs.com