

# Esther Schipper

Julia Scher

**Let them know your scarlet heat, let them glisten**

November 1 – November 30, 2024



Video footage still with a view of the exhibition **At Your Own Risk**, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main (2003)

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce **Let them know your scarlet heat, let them glisten**, a presentation by Julia Scher who has had six solo exhibitions with the gallery. On view will be two important historical works from her iconic **Surveillance Beds** series, sculptural works integrating technological and surveillance equipment. The title, a quotation from Walt Whitman's **Leaves of Grass** in which the poet writes of bloody drops of desire and confession, refers to a central ambivalence in Scher's work between pleasure, pain, and intimacy.

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.

The artist's focus on the regulation and control of our private sphere is exemplified by her central works **Mama Bed** and **Papa Bed**, 2003. **Mama Bed** and **Papa Bed** are two of three installation works (**Mama Bed**, **Papa Bed** and **Baby Bed**) that made up the work **Embedded** (2003), which debuted in Max Hollein's era-defining exhibition **At Your Own Risk** at the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt. They are also part of the **Surveillance Beds** series that Julia Scher created between 1994 and 2003. Another work from this series, **Surveillance Bed IV**, will be shown at Centre Pompidou in early 2025 as part of their collection presentation celebrating the seminal French collector Jean Chatelus, who passed away earlier this year. Each work consists of four steel poles, a flat surface in the middle and various electronic components: cameras, monitors, microphones and cabling. Specific components of **Mama Bed** include children picture books (namely **Goldilocks and the Three Bears**) as well as a leather whip, common in BDSM practice, displayed on top of the bed. Specific components of the **Papa Bed** include uniforms of the US army, folded and placed on the bed. The original constellation of three works vaguely referenced Goldilocks, a fairytale in which three bear protagonists (the bear-father, the bear-mother and the bear-child) find their beds unmade by an unwanted human girl, a metaphor for the violence and trespassing that can occur even in the most intimate spaces.

Both works have functioning cameras that record what is happening in the exhibition space and send the live feed to monitors mounted on the steel poles. **Mama Bed** and **Papa Bed** have VHS and media players connected to switcher devices that interlace the live feed from the cameras with the pre-recorded 'fake live footage.' Some of the cameras and other electronic components are, however, non-functioning, incorporated into the work for the sake of deceit or disguise.

Created in the years directly following the Al-Qaeda attack on the twin towers on September 11, 2001 and in the early years of personal computing and reality television, the pieces speak to the tension between surveillance as a means of protection, exhibitionism, and state violence. While photojournalism during the Vietnam War was enough to incite the American public to protest and push the military to remove its troops, Scher argues that we have since become inured to the violence of war that we see on TV and phone screens. Restaging the piece today serves as a reminder of our contradicting desires and fears: to be safely tucked into bed and be sheltered from the world, to use screens to stage ourselves and reveal intimate moments of our lives, to watch and be surveilled.

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: MoMA, 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; 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.

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