

Tony Oursler : *Unidentified*

February 4th - April 1st, 2017

Opening reception Saturday, February 4th from 6 – 8 PM

“There is a split deep in this country that, paradoxically, might be fundamental to it, a divide that runs back to the theocratic Puritans on the one side and the rationalist Founders on the other. And these days, Revelation is outgunning Enlightenment.”

- Hal Foster in Artforum on Tony Oursler

For his first exhibition in Los Angeles in over a decade, Tony Oursler will present installations of three interconnected projects: *My Saturnian Lover(s)*, *Subz & Screens*. Within these works Oursler uses the visual and narrative tropes of speculative alien/human relationships to reveal alignments between cultural and technological advancements and our socially accepted belief systems. The artist's investigations begin with two points from within the murky histories of American UFO culture: its utopian beginnings in the 1940-50s and the dark shift in to abduction scenarios in the 1980-90s. Oursler uses historical examples that reference a belief in the unbelievable and act as a mirror in which to view our shifting society.

My Saturnian Lover(s) is a narrative multi-channel video installation set in Modernism's waning years, the late 1940s. The work is based on a loose group of real UFO enthusiasts: George Adamski, Ruth Norman, Howard Menger and Marla Baxter, who produced the first "Evidence" via UFO photography in grainy images of glowing white discs. These pioneers presented extraterrestrial life as benevolent gifters of superior technology and utopian ideals, an antidote to nuclear weapons and WWII. UFO photography became a new form of cultural content and also served as a means of upward mobility for its practitioners. Branden Joseph writes "Contact with aliens separated such individuals from their peers", empowering them to speak with authority to larger audiences, providing them access to mass media and in George Adamski's case, even European royalty.

As 1970s post modernism took hold, the embattled "self" rose to the forefront and cultural norms shifted away from grand ideologies, governing institutions and even the concept of a fixed objective reality. Oursler states, "the new alien abduction mythology followed this trajectory, filling the void of a broken American dream", as only a narcissistic self could channel intergalactic voices and only a self could be a victim of abduction. Oursler's polychromatic digitally animated *Screens* are based on drawings made by hypnotized "abductees" during the 1980-90s. In order to reconstruct these original "clinical trials" each subject was filmed while under hypnosis. The resulting videos present isolated body parts which utter, flinch, lick, tap and twist without the influence of voluntary action. Oursler notes these performances attempt to reconnect the human authors with their depiction of their alien counterparts.

Also based on "abductee" sketches, *Subz* is the only work in *Unidentified* that is sited here on Earth. With video shot by Oursler here in Los Angeles intermixed with moments of schizophrenic animation, the video installation features four humanoid figures who seem to appear and disappear within dystopic architectural landscapes.

Oursler is primarily known for his innovative combination of video, sculpture, and performance, often exploring the relationship between the individual and mass media systems with humor and imagination. Oursler graduated from the California Institute of the Arts in 1979 and has an extensive exhibition history with recent museum shows at; Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, NY (2016); LUMA Westbau, Zurich (2015); and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2014). He participated in the 54th Venice Biennale (2011); documenta VIII and IX, Kassel (1987, 1992); Whitney Biennial, New York (1989, 2006); and the Biennale de Lyon, France (2015, 1995). His work is represented in numerous public and private collections including the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Eli Broad Family Foundation, Los Angeles; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; MoMA, New York; Tate Modern, London; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Tony Oursler lives and works in New York. Oursler's last solo gallery exhibition in Los Angeles was in 2006 at Margo Leavin Gallery.

The Imponderable will be on view at Museum of Modern Art, New York through April 16th.