Dries Depoorter
Back End

20 July – 23 September 2018

How naive can you be? To put the soundtrack of a day in your life online; to upload random daily screenshots from your computer to Instagram and Twitter for a whole month; to broadcast your exact location live using Google Street View: Dries Depoorter has done it all. Since then, his work has rapidly evolved into an idiosyncratic blend of privacy issues, artificial intelligence and digital connectivity. From 20 July 20 to 23 September, MU will show ten recent and new works. "You can say they are critical… and, well, I think they are not entirely without humour."

Evidently, Dries Depoorter isn't the one who's being naïve; the most personal fragments from his soundtrack are only available at a serious price. No, it's us, it's everyone who is careless with sensitive information, everyone who thinks they are aware of the risks. One of the installations in the exhibition, *Jaywalking*, shows live streams from traffic cameras at intersections with pedestrian crossing lights. When someone unsuspectingly crosses the red light, the installation offers you the opportunity to notify the police: one push of a button sends an email with a screenshot of the violation to the nearest police station. *Jaywalking Frames* exists of an entire wall filled with these screenshots, except that these were generated with the aid of automated image analysis. The prints can be purchased for the cost of the fine you would receive in the country where the violation was captured.

With *Seattle Crime Cams* Depoorter explicitly appeals to our voyeuristic nature. In this installation he connects publicly-broadcasted police calls in Seattle to online surveillance camera's throughout the city: as soon as anyone reports an accident or a crime, the installation shows footage from the nearest camera's. Arm chair disaster tourism, the events brought to you live on a whole set of monitors, with real-time comments from the police radio.

On the opposite side of voyeurism is this incredible stream of largely trivial images we produce ourselves: two billion photographs are being posted on social media worldwide *every day*. In response, Depoorter developed the *Trophy Camera*. Equipped with an artificial intelligence that compares each situation with a database of award-winning photos, this camera only captures images that are World Press Photo-worthy.

Surveillance Paparazzi addresses our fascination with celebrities. Images of more than a thousand surveillance cameras in public areas around the world are being compared to a database of over 200,000 famous people, by an artificial intelligence facial recognition programme. As soon as the software recognises a face

somewhere, the video images are being shown up on a screen, together with the location and the celebrity's portrait from their Wikipedia page. The hardware fits in a modest, transparent cube that allows us a revealing peek behind the scenes.

Facial recognition also features prominently in the new work *Face Detected* for which several artists will be modelling clay portraits live in MU, while a computer programme is following their accomplishments through a camera. As soon as the software detects a human face, the artist is notified that the work is finished. With this experiment, Depoorter brings about a whole new kind of interaction between humans and machines – perhaps we come to understand each other better this way? The work *Surveillance Speaker* is certainly trying its very best to give us some idea of how the software perceives its surroundings. A camera detects motion; a programme interprets the corresponding patterns and tells us through the speakers what it 'sees'.

Maybe the relationship between humans and machines is best illustrated by the symbiosis of humans and smartphones. In *Die With Me Neon* we can read along with the messages people exchange in a chatroom that is only accessible when your battery charge drops below 5%, through a special app Depoorter developed in collaboration with David Surprenant. Any moment of the day, over forty people try to connect in this chatroom before their battery finally dies.

In *Back End*, boundaries are being dissolved with a few simple interventions. Private and public, human creativity and artificial intelligence, pleasure and morality – everything blends together, becomes connected somehow. The actual connections are visible as well; the cables, the plugs, the way the software works. Depoorter's play with the opportunities of technology, access and data analysis does evoke a certain uneasiness.

During the exhibition, Depoorter will install another new work at MU: a flag that actually waves against the wind. *Reversed Flag*, a technical tour de force that he made in collaboration with Frank Kolkman, confirms the image of an intractable artist who knows exactly which way the wind is blowing.