Predictive Engineering\(^2\) is a multichannel video and audio installation conceived for computer operation which is large in scale, critical in content, and narrative in theme. The sculpture offers an insight into contemporary information culture and investigates the space information technology creates and occupies. Julia Scher's installation of surveillance equipment is vital and contentious: she playfully tests the intelligence of communication media and digital technology. Presented at a moment that coincides with a crisis in culture induced by public disclosure of private matters, the artwork critically apprehends the world of surveillance and technological dominance that might otherwise, in its ubiquity, remain invisible.

Throughout the twentieth century, modern artists have identified their work with industrial production, and the postmodern artist, more particularly, with consumer culture. Predictive Engineering\(^2\) collects and circulates images and texts in methods reflecting those of the information industry where statistics are gathered and returned as data to markets that the industry itself formulates. Scher's madcap use of real-time and pre-recorded imagery, provocative spoken-word commands, and original graphical notation turns the instruments of surveillance outward to the museum as a social and authoritative agency, yet ultimately and humorously in on itself.

The controlled environment is a ground for prevarication and a rich field of inquiry for art. Air-travel advisories warning travelers that unattended bags will be confiscated and held by airport personnel, or similar voices announcing caution at the end of moving walkways might not provide society the safety and security it presupposes but rather in Scher's view the technological presence excites the experience.

Contemporary life is conditioned largely by forms of surveillance and remote interactions including familiar
warnings, telecommunication contrivances, television transmission, and computerized transactions. Predictive Engineering\textsuperscript{2} characterizes these conditions. The artwork saturates the museum with new and established forms of surveillance technologies to heighten our perception of controlled environments, regulated space, and the artifice of its mediation through electronic devices. As themes in the artwork elaborate, these same conditions simultaneously transfer leisure time to work, confuse consumer with producer, and identity with identification.

Scher immerses the art museum visitor into a world of synthetic pleasures, using the control and voyeuristic functions of surveillance as her subject. She indoctrinates the viewer with an immediate experience of surveillance systems exposing in her work the more prurient and seductive aspects in her work that the intention of surveillance is not solely to watch but more significantly to record.

Synonymous with the infiltration and intelligence policies that characterized cold-war agencies, surveillance devices were, as they are today, a means to obtain and collect information for spurious purposes. Data collected in fact-finding reconnaissance is measured and interpreted following predetermined criteria through which perceptions of events or images are moulded. Scher explores the intelligence conventions dictated by surveillance systems exposing in her work the more prurient and seductive aspects of these conventions.

The surveillance industry, Scher suggests, has achieved the remarkable goal of reflecting society's disposition while permeating the individual imagination so deeply as to provide an occupation for it. Scher uses the medium of surveillance in her work to stimulate voyeuristic intrigue as well as to antagonize incongruent social conditions she perceives: indifferent attendance to the phenomenal speed of its development.

Predictive Engineering\textsuperscript{2} evolved against the backdrop of emerging and discarded technology and has advanced in its form from its original presentation at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art—the work had its premiere in the 1993 exhibition Thresholds and Enclosures—to its current exhibition in the new museum facility. The logic of the operational system Scher creates is made explicit to the viewer within the space of transmission it represents and the condition it reflects. Predictive Engineering\textsuperscript{2} anticipates the problems of obsolete data in the context of the new: the work chronicles the lasting effects of instant obsolescence, the presence of invasive information systems, and the codes of a mechanical language translated to digital technology. Materials from the original work were retained in electronic archives, restored in emulator programs, and now recirculate in the current environment as a means to recognize the rapid advancement of information technology over a five-year span and to draw attention to the phenomenal speed of its development.

Robert R. Riley
Curator of Media Arts
Julia Scher

Selected Individual Exhibitions

1989 Occupational Placement (O.P.), The Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio
1991 I'll Be Gentle, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
1992 Buffalo under Surveillance, Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York
1993 Mystery Meat, Galerie Metropol, Vienna
1994 Don't Worry, Kölnerischer Kunstverein, Cologne
1995 Massimo De Carlo, Milan
1996 American Fibroids, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
1997 Securify World, Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Paris
1998 Wonderland, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

The Computer Kings, Schipper & Krome, Berlin

Selected Group Exhibitions

1990 Le Choix des Femmes, Le Constance, Dijon, France
1992 Galerie Rudolph Zwirner, Cologne
1993 The Speaker Project, Institute of Contemporary Art, London
1994 Internet, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria

Backstage, Kunstverein Hamburg, Germany

XL Venice Biennale, Aperto '93

Le Principe de Réalité, Villa Arson, Nice, France

Thresholds and Enclosures, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

1995 Coco y Crudo, Museo Nacional, Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia, Madrid

Temporary Translation(s), Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, Germany

Soggetto Soggetto—Una nuova relazione dell'arte di oggi, Castello di Rivara, Museo d'arte contemporanea, Torino, Italy

Typhonimics, Fundación "La Caixa," Madrid

Chez le Diamant, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

1996 The Telematic Room I, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin

Art with Conscience, Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey

Els Llims del Museu, Tapies Museum, Barcelona

Bos End de Avantgarde, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Munich

Fantastic Prayers, Dia Art Foundation, New York

Press Enter: The Power Plant, Toronto

Against: Thirty Years of Film and Video, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London

So You Wanna Be a Rock and Roll Star: Artists Interetst Popular Music, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

1997 The Art of Detection: Surveillance in Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Performance Anxiety, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

Suveillance, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts

1998 Performance Anxiety, Site Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Patchwork in Progress 3: La Nuit, Loubt (en souvenir de Gilles Dusein), La Fondation Mance and Le Musée d'Art Moderne Contemporain, Geneva

Fast Forward: Body Cheer, Kunstverein Hamburg, Germany

Selected Bibliography


Grants and Awards

1987 Art Matters, Inc.

1988 Jerome Foundation

1992 National Endowment for the Arts

1993 Art Matters, Inc.

1996-97 Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe/Harvard University, Cambridge, MA