BEALL

Donald R. and Joan F. Beall
Center for Art + Technology
University of California, Irvine

University of California, Irvine
Claire Trevor School of the Arts
712 Arts Plaza, Irvine, CA 92697
beallcenter.uci.edu
949-824-6206

Hours: Monday – Saturday, 12-6pm

Exhibition Press Kit

Christa Sommerer &
Laurent Mignonneau

February 9 – May 25, 2019

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Image: Fly Simulator (2018) – installation view)

Christa Sommerer & Laurent Mignonneau

A Retrospective

Opening Reception:
Saturday, February 9, 2019, 2-5pm

On view through:
Saturday, May 25, 2019

Holiday Closures:
Feb. 18, March 23-31

Curated by David Familian

The Beall Center for Art + Technology is proud to present a retrospective of work by intermedia collaborators Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau. The first of its kind in the United States, this exhibition will feature a selection of works from 1992-2018; a curated survey that highlights their joint practice of nearly thirty years.

With a shared interest in artificial life and intelligence, Sommerer and Mignonneau draw upon their disparate backgrounds to produce deeply engaging and sensory experiences. By wedding Sommerer's background in botany, anthropology, and sculpture with Mignonneau's studies in video and modern art, the duo design interfaces that generate open-ended, embodied encounters with living systems and science. For example, in *Interactive Plant Growing* (1992), the artists employ Erkki Huhtamo's notion of a "tactile gaze" to achieve both visual and physical interactivity with the viewer: a human hand needs to touch the real, living plants in order to trigger a projection of digital flora counterparts in the installation. Similarly, in *Fly Simulator* (2018) and *Neuro Mirror* (2018), the resulting artwork is unique visual feedback that is reliant on user input and activation (i.e. wearing and manipulating a VR headset, or gesturing in front of a video camera), as well as conceptual aspects of human sentience like memory, emotive perception, and creative visualization. Despite the number of years elapsed between the creation of these works, each piece demonstrates the essential quality of engagement that connects the artists' work to the physical world. As their research and art often posits, technology increasingly plays a fascinating and complicated role in the archaeology, imitation, and manipulation of nature – despite the generative qualities they both share.

Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau completed their PhD degrees from CAiiA-STAR, University of Wales College of Art, Newport (UK) and Kobe University (Japan), respectively. Sommerer and Mignonneau's works have been featured in more than 300 exhibitions, and are included in media museums and collections around the world. They are the recipients of several media arts awards, including the "Golden Nica" Prix Ars Electronica Award for Interactive Art in 1994 (Linz, Austria), the "Ovation Award" of the Interactive Media Festival 1995 (Los Angeles, USA), the "Multi Media Award '95" of the Multimedia Association Japan, and the 2001 "World Technology Award" in London. They have published numerous research papers on artificial life, interactivity and interface design, and have lectured extensively at international universities and events. They are Professors at the University of Art and Design in Linz, Austria, where they also head the Department for Interface Culture at the Institute for Media.

This exhibition is possible due to the generosity of the Beall Family Foundation. For more information about public events related to this exhibition, please visit our website at **beallcenter.uci.edu**.

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Exhibition Artworks
(descriptions courtesy of the artists)

Interactive Plant Growing, 1992
Interactive computer installation, live plants, projector
Dimensions and duration variable
Permanent collection of the ZKM Media Museum, Karlsruhe

Interactive Plant Growing is an installation that deals with the principle of the growth of virtual plant organisms and their change and modification in real time in the 3-dimensional virtual space of a computer. These modifications of predefined "artificially living plant organisms" are mainly based on the concept of development and evolution in time. The artificial growing of program-based plants is an expression of the desire to discover the principle of life, which is always defined by the transformations and morphogenesis of certain organisms. By touching real plants or moving their hands towards them, human viewers can influence and control in real time the virtual growth of 25 and more program-based plants, which are simultaneously displayed on a video screen in front of the viewers. By producing a sensitive interaction with the real plants, the viewers also become part of the installation. They decide how this interaction and growth is translated to the screen.

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Fly Simulator, 2018
Custom software, office chair, rug, and VIVE headset
Dimensions and duration variable

Fly Simulator is a VR software specifically developed for Ars Electronica 2018 and Speculum Artium in Trbovlje. The viewer experiences a simulation of a few thousand flies that organize themselves into swarms, creating interesting patterns when users wear the 3D head set. The user's head position influences the swarming of the flies and as the virtual space is based on a non-Cartesian world with unusual perspectives and timing, the user feels immersed in a strange world where she feels like she has become a fly herself.

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Neuro Mirror, 2017-18
Custom software, computer, monitors, and video cameras
Dimensions and duration variable
Collection of ITAU Cultural

Neuro Mirror builds upon the artists' longstanding interest in biodiversity, cognition, and dynamic art experiences, as it will use machine learning to represent the viewer in three different planes of reality: past, present, and future. Consisting of three monitors, the installation will appear to simply reflect the viewer's visage on all three screens. As the viewer spends more time in front of the work, they will soon realize that the first monitor displays their movements or expressions with a slight delay (the past), the second monitor is a real-time video feed of their behavior (the present), and the third presents their face engaging in movement or expressions that have not taken place at all (the future). This third incarnation of the viewer relies on an intricate machine-learning based program that the artists recently refined through participation in the Beall Center's Black Box Projects Artist Residency – through which they conducted research with UCI faculty. Their research relies heavily on data from cognitive science and psychology to present the correct level of uncanny reality and disruption to the viewer. UCI collaborators included three UC Irvine scientists: Jeffrey Krichmar (professor in the Department of Cognitive Sciences and the Department of Computer Science, with an emphasis in Cognitive Robotics), Gregory S. Hickok (professor in the Department of Cognitive Sciences, with an emphasis in neural plasticity), and Emre Neftci (assistant professor in the department of Cognitive Sciences and Computer Science, with an emphasis in neuromorphic hardware).

Portrait on the Fly, 2015
Custom software, computer, monitor, and video camera
Dimensions and duration variable
Collection of the ZKM, BEEP Collection, Borusan Collection, SAP Collection, and several private collections

Portrait on the Fly is an interactive installation that consists of a monitor that shows a swarm of a few thousand flies. When a person positions himself in front of the monitor, the insects build up the contour of the person. They begin to arrange and rearrange themselves continuously, thereby creating a recognizable likeness of the individual. Posing in front of the monitor attracts the flies. Within seconds, they invade the face - but even the slightest movement of the head or of parts of the face drives them off. The portraits are thus in constant flux, they construct and deconstruct. *Portrait on the Fly* is a commentary on our love for making pictures of ourselves (i.e. Selfie Culture), it has to do with change, transience, and impermanence.

![BEALL Donald R. and Joan F. Beall Center for Art + Technology University of California, Irvine]

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Portrait on the Fly (Digital Prints of Lynn Hershman, Christiane Paul, Jeffrey Shaw, Peter Weibel), 2017
Digital prints mounted on aluminum
36 x 36 inches
Edition of 5

Portrait on the Fly (Plotter Drawings of Erkki Huhtamo, David Familian, Frieder Nake, Christa&Laurent), 2018
36 x 36 inches
Unique work

These works are part of a series of portraits derived from the *People on the Fly* software, and largely feature international curators that the artists have worked with. Most recently, these works were shown in the 2018 International Digital Art Biennial (BIAN) at Arsenal Contemporary Art Museum (Montreal, Canada).

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Noise and Smoke, 2012
Two Bakelite telephones, mirrors, shelf, and custom software
Dimensions variable

This installation consists of two vintage Bakelite telephones from the 1950s. They are placed in viewing distance of one another. When visitors pick up their respective telephone receivers, dial a number, and talk into their mouthpieces, their voices are transformed into noise that echoes out from the receiver of the other phone. Additionally, spoken words are also translated into smoke that evaporates from the mouth piece of the other phone. "Schall and Rauch" (Noise and Smoke) is a German proverb for, "It is all hollow words." In the installation, this proverb is taken literally and visitors interact via noise and chaotic fumes rising up into the air. Communication through smoke has a long history, as it has been used by indigenous tribes to indicate one's presence, mark important events, or to signal danger.

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Life Writer, 2006
Typewriter, projector, computer, and custom software
Dimensions and duration variable
Collection of the ZKM and ITAU Cultural

Life Writer consists of a vintage typewriter that evokes the era of analogue text processing. In addition, a normal piece of paper is used as projection screen and the position of the projection is always matched with the position of the typewriter roll. When users type text into the keys of the typewriter, the resulting letters appear as projected characters on the paper. When users push the carriage return, the letters on screen transform into small black and white artificial life creatures that appear to float on the paper of the type writer itself. The creatures are based on genetic algorithms where text is used as the genetic code that determines the behavior and movements of the creatures. The algorithms were developed for a previous work, *Life Spacies.* Here, the text functions as genetic code for the creation of artificial life creatures, as the creatures' genes and body shape are dictated by the speed of the typist.

All of the artificial life creatures also need to "eat" text in order to stay alive; when users type a new text the creatures will quickly try to snap up these characters from the paper in order to get energy. Once creatures have eaten enough text they can also reproduce, so eventually the screen can become very full when creatures well fed. The user can also push the creatures around when using the scroll of the typewriter's cylinder. She can - for example - push the creatures back into the machine, which will crush them or scroll the creatures off the screen altogether, making space for new creatures. By connecting the act of typing to the act of creation of life, *Life Writer* deals with the idea of creating an open-ended artwork where user-creature and creature-creature interaction become essential to the creation of digital life and where an emergent systems of lifelike art develops on the boundaries between analog and digital worlds.

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About the Curator

David Familian is the Artistic Director and Curator at the Beall Center. He began working at the Beall Center in 2005 and was appointed Artistic Director and Curator in 2009. An artist and educator, he received his BFA from California Institute of the Arts in 1979 and his MFA from UCLA in 1986. For the past thirty years, Familian has taught studio art and critical theory in art schools and universities including Otis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Santa Clara University, San Francisco Art Institute and U.C. Irvine. Familian initiated Black Box Projects at the Beall Center, which produces collaborative exhibitions in which artists work with scientists and other experts in areas such as Cognitive Robotics, Computational Genetics, and Information Science. He has curated one-person exhibitions of artists Shih Chieh Huang, Golan Levin, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Chico MacMurtie, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, Nam June Paik, and others. He has also curated numerous group exhibitions that explore topics such as data visualization, new forms of gaming and narratives, real-time data, interactive installations, and sound art. He currently teaches the Beall Center's Digital Arts Exhibition course at UC Irvine's Claire Trevor School of the Arts.

About the Beall Center for Art + Technology

The Beall Center is an exhibition and research center located on the campus of the University of California, Irvine. Since its opening in 2000, the Beall Center's exhibitions, research, and public programs have promoted new forms of creation and expression. For artists, the Beall Center serves as a proving ground — a place between the artist's studio and the art museum — and allows them to work with new technologies in their early stages of development. For visitors, the Beall Center serves as a window to the most imaginative and creative innovations in the visual arts occurring anywhere. The Beall Center promotes new forms of creative expression by: exhibiting art that uses different forms of science and technology to engage the senses; building innovative scholarly relationships and community collaborations between artists, scientists and technologists; encouraging research and development of art forms that can affect the future; and reintroducing artistic and creative thinking into STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) integrated learning in K-12 to Higher Education. The Beall Center's curatorial focus presents a diverse range of innovative, world-renowned artists, both national and international, who work with experimental and interactive media. Many of these artists have shown their works primarily within group exhibitions or have a limited number of solo exhibitions in the US. The Beall Center is committed to exhibiting these artists in a way that more fully expresses their individual body of work. We strive to present a direct connection between our programs and the larger trajectory of the history of video, installation art, kinetic and cybernetic sculpture. Our approach is not to exclusively emphasize the technological aspects of works, but to present experimental media projects that are equally strong aesthetically, conceptually and technically. The Beall Center received its initial support from the Rockwell Corporation in honor of retired chairman Don Beall and his wife, Joan; the core idea being to merge their lifelong passions - business, engineering and the arts - in one place. Today, major support is generously provided by the Beall Family Foundation.

About UC Irvine's Claire Trevor School of the Arts

Times Higher Education ranked UC Irvine first among U.S. universities under 50 years old and fifth worldwide. Since its founding in 1965 as one of UC Irvine's original schools, the School of the Arts (renamed for actress Claire Trevor in 2000) has become one of the nation's leading educators in visual and performing arts. Awarded "Best Arts Organization" in Orange County 2014 by the Coast Community Awards, the School offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in Art, Dance, Drama and Music, a minor in Digital Arts and Digital Filmmaking, and one of the few university doctoral programs in Drama. The UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts is located at 4000 Mesa Road, Irvine, CA 92617. For more information, please visit www.arts.uci.edu.

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Holiday Closures: Feb. 18, March 23-31

Events:
Opening Reception: Saturday, February 9, 2018, 2-5pm
FREE admission

LASER Talk: "ARTificial Life + Intelligence"
Thursday, February 7, 5:30-7:30p
At UCI Applied Innovation
5141 California Ave., #250
Irvine, CA 92617
FREE admission with online registration (please visit website for instructions)

*LASER Talks are panel discussions produced in association with Leonardo International Society for the Arts, Sciences, and Technology; a full speaker lineup and registration information will be available on **beallcenter.uci.edu**. The Beall Center's 2018-19 LASER Talks series is generously funded by the UCI Illuminations fund.*

Additional events to be announced online. Join our mailing list at www.beallcenter.uci.edu.

Gallery Hours:
Monday - Saturday: 12pm – 6pm
Closed: Sundays
Free admission and docent tours

Location:
712 Arts Plaza, Claire Trevor School of the Arts, UC Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697

Parking:
Student Center Parking Structure: 311 W. Peltason Drive, Irvine, CA 92697
Mesa Parking Structure: 4000 Mesa Road, Irvine, CA 92697
  all campus parking requires payment; $2 per hour, $7 half day, $10 full day, credit and debit cards accepted
For maps, driving directions and parking information go to: http://www.parking.uci.edu/maps/imap.cfm

More Info: www.beallcenter.uci.edu
**Note to Editors:** Images may be requested from Catlin Moore: CMOORE@UCI.EDU, 949-824-6206
or Jaime DeJong: JDEJONG@UCI.EDI, 949-824-2189

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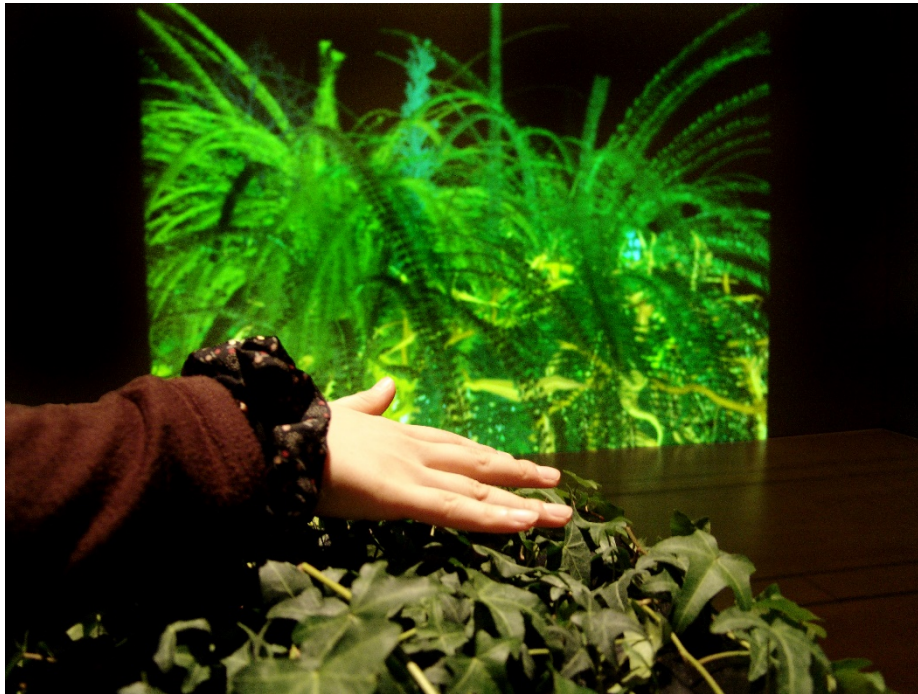
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