



For immediate release
July 2009

ICI announces the traveling exhibition **The New Normal**

Curated by Michael Connor

An exhibition of contemporary artworks that reflect the state of privacy in the world today

Co-organized by ICI (Independent Curators International), New York, and Artists Space, New York, and circulated by iCI.

Touring April 2008 through June 2010

ICI announces the tour of **The New Normal**, an exhibition that brings together 13 artists who use private information as raw material

and subject matter. Each of the works in the exhibition offers access to the private sphere of the artists themselves, of strangers, and of public officials. The works take diverse forms—video, websites, novellas, found objects, and photographs—to question the forced and



Corinna Schnitt, *Once Upon a Time*, 2005 (video still)



Hasan Elahi, *Tracking Transience: Evidence*, 2007 (video still)

voluntary confessions that make the private sphere visible to the public eye.

The New Normal is co-organized by ICI, New York, and Artists Space, New York, and circulated by ICI. Curated by Michael Connor, the exhibition premieres at Artists Space in New York on April 25, 2008 where it will be on view through June 21. The exhibition will travel through July 2010 with presentations at Huarte Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Huarte, Spain, July 4 – September 28, 2008; The Decker Gallery, Maryland Institute

College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland, November 6 – December 19, 2008; the Bureau for Open Culture, Columbus College of Art & Design, Columbus, Ohio, February 25 – April 25, 2009; Pomona College Museum of Art, Claremont, California, August 25 – October 19, 2009; and the Art Gallery of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, April 9 – July 4, 2010. Additional venues will be announced.

The concept of privacy is widely invoked, but difficult to define. The private sphere, encompassing domestic spaces, bodies, thoughts, and behaviors, are rendered inaccessible to the public eye by legal, social and physical boundaries. The boundaries that separate public from private—like wearing clothing—are so much a part of the fabric of everyday life that they only become visible when they shift. Privacy, to put it bluntly, captures our attention only when it is under threat.

Today, privacy faces a wide range of threats. In the wake of 9/11, the specter of terrorism was used to justify an expansion of law enforcement powers in the US and around the world. This time of heightened surveillance, characterized by luggage searches and wiretaps, was dubbed 'the new normal' by United States Vice President Dick Cheney.



Guthrie Lonergan, *MySpace Intro Playlist*, 2006
(video still)

Alongside these political shifts, changing technologies and social attitudes have had a no less profound impact on the private sphere. The most shocking images of criminal behavior this decade were captured not on official surveillance cameras, but on the camera phone of a soldier stationed in Abu Ghraib. Likewise, much of the personal information that is collected online is offered voluntarily. Users of websites like Amazon.com sacrifice personal

information for the sake of convenience, while users of websites like MySpace offer tidbits about themselves as a way of expressing their identity. The artists make visible the conditions behind this new social reality. In a changing political and technological environment, the private sphere has never been less private. But the news is not all bad.

Our story begins in Florida, shortly after 9/11. The owner of a storage facility there alerted

law enforcement officials that a Middle Eastern man had left explosives in a locker and fled the area. The man was Hasan Elahi. Elahi, an American artist born in Bangladesh, subsequently found himself the subject of a six-month investigation by the FBI, punctuated by a number of lengthy interrogations. Although Elahi was ultimately cleared of any wrongdoing, the experience became the basis of an ongoing process-oriented artwork. At any given moment, Elahi's website displays his geographic location, recent photographs of his immediate surroundings, credit card activity and telephone calls. It's a catchall digital alibi. For this exhibition, Elahi will present this record of his daily life as a video triptych. Elahi describes the project as 'aggressive compliance', using voluntary disclosure of personal information as a tactic for political critique and self-protection.

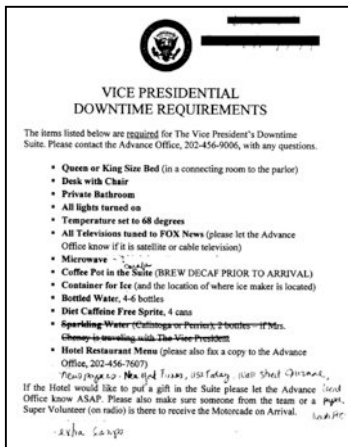
Jill Magid's project *Lincoln Ocean Victor Eddy*, (2007) begins with a similar eagerness to provide personal information to law enforcement: 'Last winter I came back to New York City after living five years abroad. I rented an apartment in Brooklyn and took the subway often. Everyone is in transit, except the officers. I recently approached one and asked him to search me.'



Jill Magid, *Lincoln Ocean Victor Eddy*, 2007 (detail)

The officer, whose job is to watch the cameras and people on New York transit, refused that request, but he allowed Magid to join him on his next shift. Magid's offer became the basis for an unlikely intimacy between an overworked, conservative cop and a liberal artist. The officer was flattered, but suspicious of her interest in him—wondering, at times, if she might be a terrorist. Their relationship culminated when Magid invited the officer to visit Taiwan to participate in an exhibition. He ultimately declined: he never sleeps anywhere besides his own bedroom in Staten Island, where he keeps a loaded gun under the bed. Instead, Magid recreated this private space in the gallery. Throughout the course of the show, the room stood ready to receive her officer if he should have a change of heart. In **The New Normal**, the story of their friendship will be told through a series of photographs and artifacts: an image of Magid wearing the officer's uniform; a page from his police notebook. A novella written by Magid about this relationship will be available for viewers to read in the gallery.

Magid's project re-imagines the relationship between the individual and the surveillance state as a romantic adventure. In romance, unlike surveillance, the exchange of personal information is a two-way process. In *Lincoln Ocean Victor Eddy*, (2007) Magid and the officer cultivate intimacy through the exchange of information about themselves, allowing one another access to their thoughts and histories. Several other works in the exhibition consider situations in which the disclosure of information is decidedly one way. These works include Sharif Waked's *Chic Point*, (2003). This single-channel video work begins with a series of images of haute-couture men's fashion: shirts and jackets pulled apart to reveal the body underneath. Following this montage, the artist reveals the inspiration for his work: photographs he has taken at Israeli security checkpoints, showing Palestinian men forced to disrobe as part of security procedures.



Jennifer & Kevin McCoy, *Vice Presidential Downtime Requirements*, 2008 (detail)

In Jennifer and Kevin McCoy's *Vice Presidential Downtime Requirements* (formerly titled *Band Rider Series: Dick Cheney*), (2008) this one-way exchange of information is inverted: it is a government official who becomes the subject of an invasion of privacy. The piece is part of a series of works by the McCoys based on rider agreements, contracts stipulating the hospitality needs of touring artists, speakers and musicians. These rider agreements are often leaked online through websites like the infamous thesmokinggun.com. Using rider agreements stolen from bands like Guns N' Roses, the McCoys assemble the required

foodstuffs and niceties as ready-made collections for gallery display: pizza, beer, CDs, fruit, flowers. Dick Cheney's rider agreement—used when he delivers lectures and makes public appearances—forms the basis of this work. In comparison to Guns N' Roses, his requests are spartan. Decaf coffee, diet caffeine-free Sprite, a queen-sized bed, and a television tuned to Fox News form the extent of his personal needs. These items are assembled in the gallery, along with a copy of the stolen rider agreement.

The *Vice Presidential Downtime Requirements* reflects the free availability of personal data on the Internet. From public records to consumer habits, private information is freely shared and exchanged online, and few are exempt—least of all high-ranking public officials. The web allows private information to be circulated more widely than ever, and it allows new

kinds of private information to be created. Web searches are a good example of the latter. In 2006, AOL released information on the searching habits of 650,000 anonymous users, thinking that withholding their names was an adequate protection of their privacy. Using only an individual's searching habits, journalists were able to identify and locate a number of these users, triggering a scandal. The artists Thomson & Craighead make public the semi-private behavior of Internet searching in the work *Beacon*, (2007), which lists web searches harvested from search engines around the world, shown in real time. The hypnotic texts range from the banal ('tire inflation') to the absurd ('flowers that start with a b'). An online version can be seen at <http://www.automatedbeacon.net>.

The New Normal creates a sense that access to private information is a kind of currency. The exchange of this currency is growing and evolving in bewildering ways. We all have a stake in this exchange: we may find it frightening or fascinating, but we are inescapably complicit.

About the Curator

Michael Connor is a freelance writer and curator based in New York. He is currently developing a permanent exhibition to open at the Australian Center for the Moving Image in Melbourne in late 2008. Formerly the Head of Exhibitions at the British Film Institute, he developed the BFI Southbank Gallery, a space dedicated to exhibitions of artists' work with film, video and new media. The first exhibition, featuring work by Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, opened in March 2007. From 2002 to 2005, Connor worked as a curator at FACT in Liverpool. He has also curated independent projects for such organizations as Futuresonic (Manchester), Sonar (Barcelona), and Art in General (New York).

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a 72-page illustrated catalogue co-published by Artists Space and iCI, and distributed by D.A.P. It includes essays by curator Michael Connor, Clay Shirky and Marisa Olson.

Artists in Exhibition

Sophie Calle
Mohamed Camara
Hasan Elahi

Eyebeam R & D/ Jonah Peretti and
Michael Frumin
Kota Ezawa

Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher
Guthrie Lonergan
Jill Magid
Jennifer and Kevin McCoy

Trevor Paglen
Corinna Schnitt
Thomson & Craighead
Sharif Waked

Exhibition Itinerary:

Artists Space

New York, New York
April 25 – June 21, 2008

Huarte Centro de Arte Contemporáneo

Huarte, Spain
July 4 – September 28, 2008

The Decker Gallery

Maryland Institute College of Art
Baltimore, Maryland
November 6 – December 19, 2008

Bureau for Open Culture

Columbus College of Art & Design
Columbus, Ohio
February 25 – April 25, 2009

Pomona College Museum of Art

Claremont, California
August 25 – October 19, 2009

Art Gallery of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
April 9 – July 4, 2010



Kota Ezawa, *Home Video II*, 2007 (video still)

The New Normal is a traveling exhibition co-organized by ICI (Independent Curators International), New York, and Artists Space, New York, and circulated by ICI. The guest curator for the exhibition is Michael Connor. The exhibition, tour, and catalogue are made possible, in part, by the ICI independents.

About Artists Space

One of the first alternative spaces in New York, Artists Space was founded in 1972 to support contemporary artists working in the visual arts, including video, electronic media, performance, architecture and design. The mission of Artists Space is to encourage experimentation, diversity and dialogue in contemporary arts practice, provide an exhibition space for new art and artists, and foster an appreciation for the vital role that artists play in our community.

About ICI

Founded in 1975, ICI is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art through traveling exhibitions and other activities that reach a diverse national and international audience. Collaborating with a wide range of eminent curators, ICI develops innovative traveling exhibitions, accompanied by catalogues and other educational materials, to introduce and document challenging new work in all mediums by younger as well as more established artists from the United States and abroad.

For additional information or visual materials, contact Michelle Jubin, 212-254-8200, ext. 21 or jubin@ici-exhibitions.org. Visit ICI's web site: www.ici-exhibitions.org