An uncontroversial truism: airports are a required infrastructure for contemporary art. The international airport, with its elite lounges, expedited security screenings, and frequent flights around the world, ensures the globalism of today's art world. How else could curators, gallerists, and collectors attend biennials in Brazil and South Korea during the same weekend? Or even transport artworks to be exhibited? The art world strikes parallels with airport architecture, socially and spatially.

BY ZACH BLAS

IMAGE-FREE: ON AIRPORT VISION

Consider the hypervisible stratification of class: a VIP fair pass or premier lounge access. Airports and museums are intensified sites of security, integrating guards, agents, cameras, and computers to eliminate risk, whether to prevent artwork from being destroyed or a terrorist attack. Airports also, as it were, exhibit artwork. Public art installations grace the interstices of airport terminals and aesthetically soothe frenetic passengers arriving and departing, such as Michael Hayden's sprawling light sculpture *Sky's the Limit* (1987) at Chicago's O'Hare International. But airports, like artists, have learned to generate images. They have developed their own plastic means to see, to produce vision.

On a recent trip to the Städelschule, I found myself standing inside a ProVision®2 body scanner at Frankfurt Airport. I began to wonder what precisely happens during a screening procedure. My hands are raised above my head, which gives me a sense of vulnerability and surrender. I recall what feels like stock images of police encircling a suspect, and this person, with their arms up like mine, yells, "I surrender!" or "Don't shoot!" or "I'm innocent!" Almost immediately there is the whoosh of vertical bars moving, and my body is scanned. I wonder how my body is technically assessed as a potential threat. How do radio waves, software, and agents come together to make a decision, as I stand inside this machine? Are other people taking part in this judgment whom I cannot see, perhaps in some other location? I look at a man operating the device's touchscreen interface on the other side of this enclosure, and I think: is a body being produced inside here, rather than just being scanned?

Before passing through the body scanner, I stopped to take in the sights of the Terminal B security area: amid zigzagging lines of travelers, ProVision®2 body scanners extend across the building, looming like guarded openings into a fortress. Numerous monitors, interspersed throughout and placed at various heights and angles, play a screening procedure video on repeat. The entire security area—with its screens and apparatuses, workers and agents, security belts and luggage—began to resemble a multimedia art installation, like some Nam June Paik work gone terribly wrong. I was reminded of scholar Simone Browne's concept of "security theatre" at airports, in which appearance and gesture are marshaled through architectures of risk evaluation, profiling, and obedience.[1]

Waiting in line, I watched the security video broadcasting on a dozen monitors.[2] It dramatizes a young, white German woman and man's airport security experience. Adjacent to one another, they place their phones, jackets, liquids, and laptops in trays, all the while stealing lingering glances. They smile and flirt from a distance—who knew security could be so fun and sexy! The man takes off his belt. He puts it into a screening bin, but his eyes stay locked with the woman's while he removes it. Next, the video splits into three perspectives to depict the close inspection of their bodies: the woman's breasts and the man's groin are scanned, touched, and rubbed. As these sexualized areas of their bodies are prodded, the gazes of the man and the woman escalate with desire and intensity, as if, by looking at each other, they transform the administrative touch of the security agent into a sensual caress. Indeed, the man is so distracted he forgets to collect his laptop and keys. The woman is already in Duty Free, shopping for cosmetics and sampling lipstick and perfume. The man hunts for her in an expanse of gendered luxury goods. Passing wines, sweets, and sunglasses, he eventually bumps into her, and *he* leads the way to a restaurant, where they share an intimate meal together—all before their flights, no less! The video is strikingly unabashed in its suggestion that security can be a site for romance. Not *You've Got Mail*, but rather, *You've Got Clearance*.
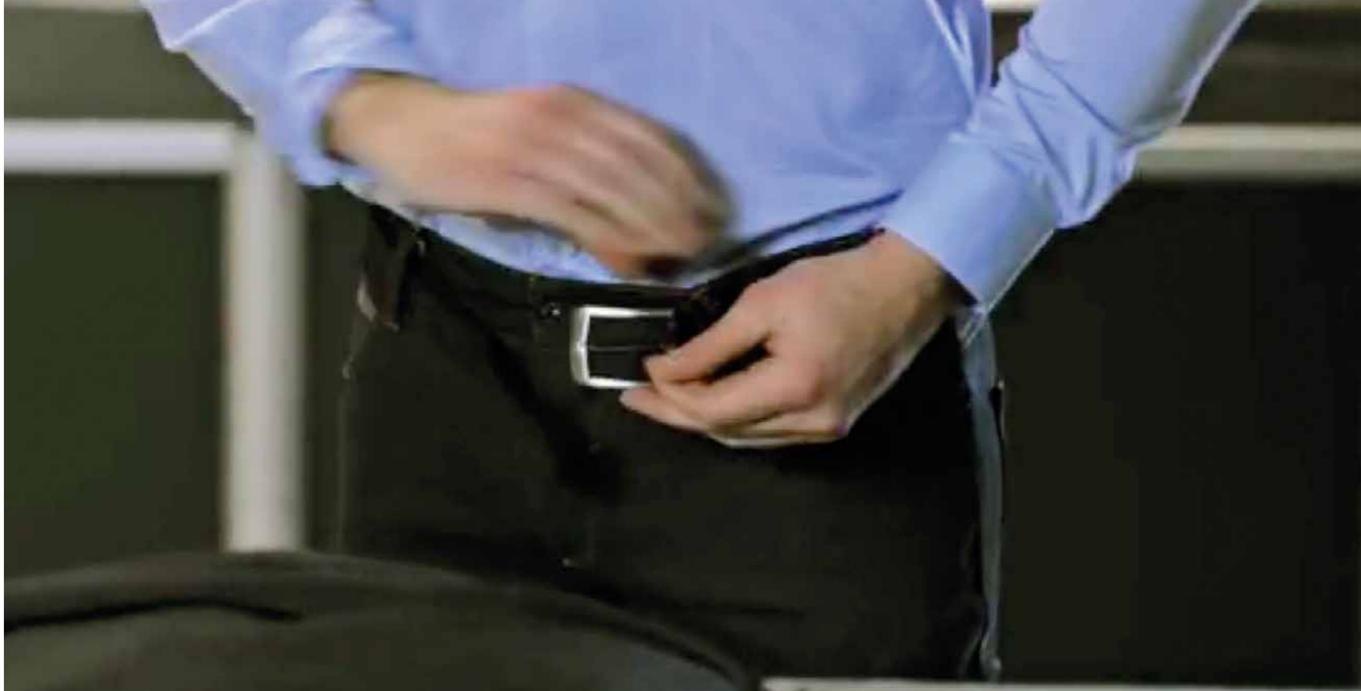

From lefto to right - ProVision® 2 airport security body scanner by L3 Technologies. Photo: L3 Technologies; Mannequin generated by the data processed by the software of ProVision® 2 by L3 Technologies. Photo: L3 Technologies
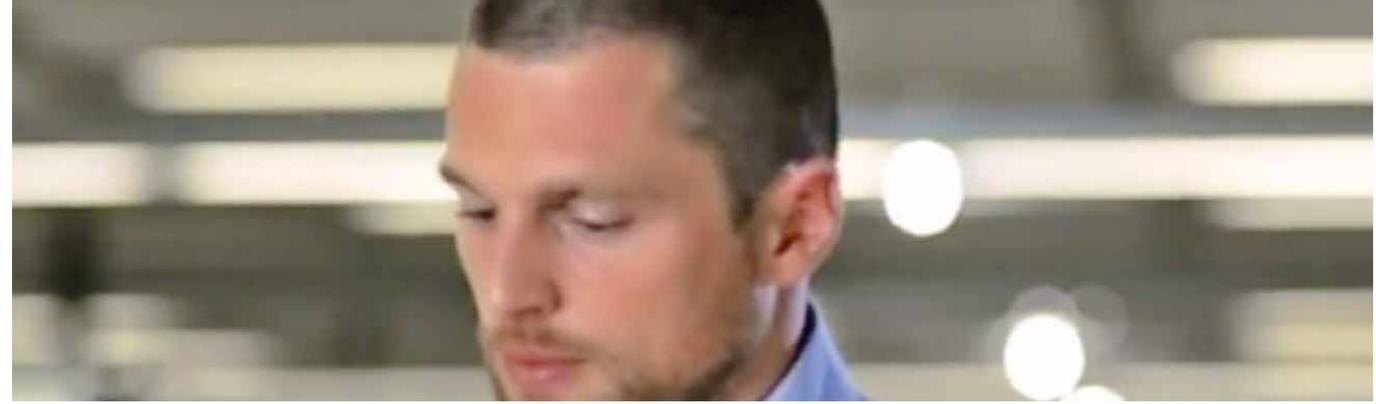
Above and two previous spreads - Screenshots from Panagiotis Malatakis's *Frankfurt Airport - Security Area*, 2013. © Fraport AG, Frankfurt am Main. Online at: https://vimeo.com/63083165

Below - Protesters block a road during a demonstration against the immigration ban imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump at Los Angeles International Airport on January 29, 2017. Photo: Justin Sullivan / Getty Images

Zach Blas is an artist, filmmaker, and writer whose practice spans technical investigation, theoretical research, queer and feminist futurity, conceptualism, and science fiction. His work broadly confronts the political unconscious of science and technology. Currently, he is a lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. Blas has exhibited, lectured, and held screenings internationally, recently at the 68th Berlin International Film Festival; Art in General, New York; Gasworks, London; e-flux, New York; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. His recent project *Contra-Internet* is supported by a 2016 Creative Capital award in Emerging Fields and the Arts Council England. His writings can be found in *Documentary Across Disciplines, Queer: Documents of Contemporary Art,* and *e-flux journal.* His work has been written about and featured in *Artforum, Frieze, ArtReview, Mousse Magazine, the Guardian,* and the *New York Times.*

As I approached a body scanner, I considered the placement of a monitor playing the security romance video directly above it. The scanner and the video shared an intimate proximity. In fact, the video was subtitled with the name of the body scanner—ProVision®2—which was also branded across the top of the machine. The ProVision®2 is podlike and light gray, with an opening on either side to maximize the flow of bodies. Bright yellow footprints indicate where to stand. Stepping inside, I took one last glance at the video—the man and the woman are toasting—and I could not help but consider that most security experiences are never so jovial and celebratory. L-3 Security & Detection Systems, the manufacturer of the ProVision®2, describes the body scanner as "compact advanced people screening."[3] Their website explains further that the body scan works by "harmless radio waves bounc[ing] off the body's surface."[4] I aligned my feet, while a security agent observed me from outside the machine. "Raise your arms and stand still," I was told. I could not see the interface, but when the agent touched it, I knew scanning had been activated. For a moment, I imagined a time machine from the movies or *Doctor Who*—the kind that dematerializes one's body and sends the particles elsewhere, usually to combat a villain. Not this time. Once I exited the scanner, I could finally see the touchscreen interface. It is surprisingly simple: there are two buttons, one light pink and the other light blue, each featuring the icon of a single generic figure. I watched the person behind me step inside; the agent touched the pink button. The screen visualized a simple outline of a body, what L-3 calls a "generic mannequin."[5] Something was flagged on the left arm, and this person moved aside for additional screening. The next person entered; this time, the interface turned green, and the word "OK" was displayed. As I put my jacket back on, I had but one question: what happens if you are not pink or blue?

Remarkably, L-3 proclaims the ProVision®2 to be an "image-free people scanner."[6] How is the mediation of a body into a visual interface not an image? What is clear is that the gendered buttons are undeniably images of people, and the generic mannequin is certainly an image of scanned people. "Image-free," then, is nothing but a marketing strategy. L-3 emphasizes that the ProVision®2 does not see through the clothing of travelers and expose their naked bodies as images to security agents, like previous body scanners. Inside the ProVision®2, to be image-free is to become a generic yet gendered mannequin—an image-free image—a kind of template that best matches the straight, white German couple.

What is ProVision®2? Not simply a machine, it could be understood as a vast security regime for governing human beings, comprising many private companies (not just L-3), governments, and militaries. While the "2" may name the technical upgrade from ProVision®1, it also signifies the reign of the binary— of pink or blue. At Frankfurt Airport, the ProVision®2 regime starts with the promotional video, as it normalizes security and bodily intrusion through the rom-com genre. The video's promise is that you too may be lucky enough to find love if you comply with *all* regulations, including airport security, heteronormativity, and white supremacy. In tandem, the body scanner demands that, in order to complete the security procedure, you must be able to "cohere" informatically as either a pink woman or a blue man. Paisley Currah and Tara Mulqueen theorize this as "securitizing gender," a system in which gender is forced to be stable and scannable in order to detect threats and preempt risk.[7] Like much feminist and queer theory, they demonstrate that bodies and gender are messy. But what is a body in ProVision®2? N. Katherine Hayles gives a helpful starting point for answering this question, through a theory of embodiment. Hayles argues that embodiment and the body differ, as a body is produced via a standardized grammar. For instance, when a biometric machine interprets a face by generating an abstract grid, this biometric image could be said to be a biometric body, or at least part of a biometric body. "In contrast to the body," Hayles writes, "embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture… at once excessive and deficient in its infinite variations, particularities, and abnormalities."[8] Does not scanning, the imaging technology at the core of ProVision®2, work by creating an "airport body" that is digitally secured and normatively gendered? Does not ProVision®2 eliminate embodiment like any other threat?

And is this not why transgender persons have been treated as potential risks when their surfaces are assessed and shapes are detected that do not conform to the ProVision®2 regime's body standards?[9]

ProVision®2 is security's visualization regime. Regulating the flow of airport populations, it decides who is authorized to have an OK airport body and who is not, who is permitted to move quickly past its enclosure and who is made to endure more inspection and detainment. It does not always end in Duty Free and dining, as there are other places in the airport—out of sight—where no toasts happen. Surrounded by unadorned concrete walls, airport detention is where pure nationalism thrives without the cosmetics of capitalism. I cleared the body-scan check at Frankfurt Airport, but for others, it is never so easy. Not everyone matches the generic mannequin, which looks more like the chalk outline of a dead body. I imagine them whispering, to whomever will listen, "We're not OK." Donna Haraway once argued for a situated conception of vision—a feminist understanding that does not split persons into this or that body, this or that calculated and arbitrary category.[10] Like Hayles, Haraway championed a vision that goes outside the body as normalized image, to the elsewhere and otherness of embodiment. This is a vision that does not scan but rather recognizes embodiment as that which is historically and materially specific, nonbinary, and not reducible to schemas of measurement and calculation. The next time I am forced to undergo ProVision®2's "1.5-second scan,"[11] I will ask: how can I get outside my airport body? Because rendering embodied human beings as airport bodies—or image-free generic mannequins— is political violence, simply put. Locating such an outside requires a feminist vision that sees beyond the cage of ProVision®2.

As airports increasingly become sites of mass protest, exposing cruel immigration policies and extremist security measures, a new public art commission for all airports is necessary: a proposal for security-free, not duty-free or image-free.

1. Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).
2. Bizarrely, this video (2:22 min.) is available on Vimeo. See https://vimeo.com/63083165.
3. "ProVision 2 In-Action Video," L-3 Security & Detection Systems website, 2:16 min., http://www.sds.l-3com.com/videos/video-ProVision2.htm.
4. "ProVision 2 In-Action Video."
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Paisley Currah and Tara Mulqueen, "Securitizing Gender: Identity, Biometrics, and Transgender Bodies at the Airport," *Social Research* 78, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 557–82.
8. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 196–97.
9. Alissa Bohling, "Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming People Among First, Most Affected by War on Terror's Biometrics Craze," *Truthout*, April 16, 2012, http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/8506-transgender-gender-non-conforming-people-among-first-most-affected-by-war-on-terrors-biometrics-craze.
10. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988), 575–99.
11. "ProVision® 2," L-3 Security & Detection Systems website, http://www.sds.l-3com.com/advancedimaging/provision-2.htm.