

Zach Blas, *Facial Weaponization Communiqué: Fag Face* (still), 2012. Courtesy the artist

ARTIST INTERVIEWS

# A.I. Fantasies and Beliefs with Zach Blas

**Artist Zach Blas elaborates upon his explorations of artificial intelligence in the first interview of our new conversation series.**

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**Author**

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**Screening Room:** certainty is becoming our nemesis

Through Sep 5, 2020

**Exhibition:** Orlando

Through Sep 5, 2020

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*Guest curator and [San Francisco Cinematheque](#) director Steve Polta speaks each Wednesday with artists in the Screening Room exhibition [certainty is becoming our nemesis](#), which was interrupted by McEvoy Arts' temporary closure due to the coronavirus. The program is now available to view online in its entirety.*

**Steve Polta: Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your current artistic concerns or projects? Where are you answering this Q&A from?**

**Zach Blas:** I am an artist living in London, originally from the US, and I'm currently on lockdown in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. These days, I am making work on the fantasies and beliefs swirling around artificial intelligence.

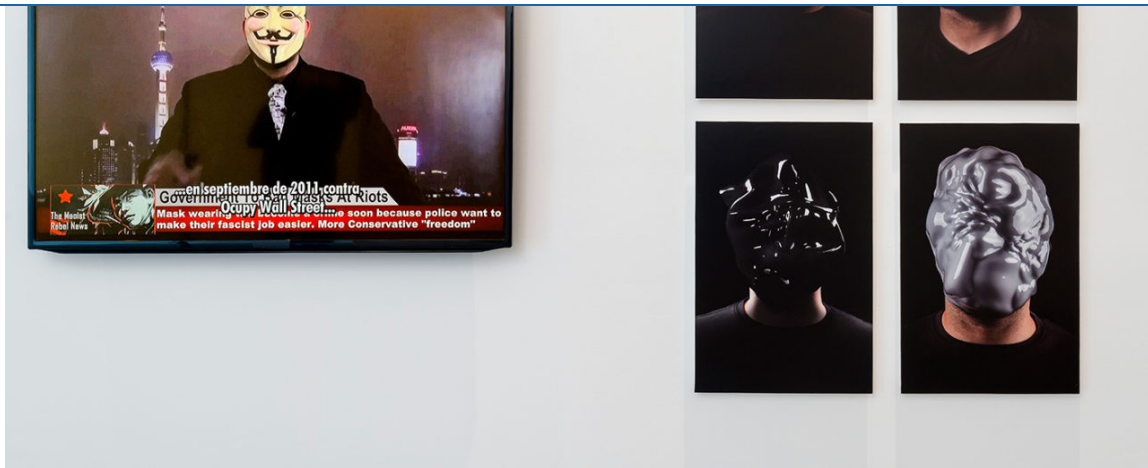
**SP: How does your film in this program relate to your ongoing practice or body of work?**

**ZB:** I have a long-standing interest in the cultures and politics around digital technologies. With *Facial Weaponization Communiqué: Fag Face* (2012), I started to question how biometric facial recognition standardizes and reduces the complexities of the face to a calculable identity. How very un-queer! Now that facial recognition and AI are so entwined, I feel that I'm on a quite clear path that can easily be traced back to this work, which was made about 8 or 9 years ago.

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Zach Blas, Facial Weaponization Suite, 2012. Courtesy of the artist

*I think of my work as conceptual, queer science-fiction.*

*Zach Blas*

**SP:** As you know, [certainty is becoming our nemesis](#) is inspired by McEvoy Arts' exhibition [Orlando](#), itself inspired by Virginia's Woolf's 1928 novel and Sally Potter's 1992 film adaptation starring Tilda Swinton. What, if any, is your prior relationship to the work of these artists?

**ZB:** I came to Tilda Swinton through the films of Derek Jarman when I was a teenager. Her performance in *The Last of England* (1987) has particularly stayed with me over the years. I've always wanted to work with Tilda. I even tried to get in touch with her to consider producing my 2018 film *Contra-Internet: Jubilee 2033*, which is a re-imagining of Jarman's 1978 film *Jubilee*.

*Zach Blas' Contra-Internet: Jubilee 2033 is featured in Cinematheque's online program, [I Hate the Internet: Techno-Dystopian Malaise and Visions of Rebellion](#), online now through May 16.*

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**ZB:** I think of my work as conceptual, queer science-fiction. I am interested and motivated by transformation into the unknown, the alien, the opaque. I'm not so interested in queer as an identity category. I do not think of my anti-biometric masks—like the Fag Face Mask—as simply hiding, disappearing or enacting a kind of individual privacy. I think of the masks as demanding a collective opacity through a gesture that I describe as informatically queer.

Zach Blas, Facial Weaponization Suite, 2012. Courtesy of the artist

**SP:** In what way has your inclusion in this program (or in conjunction with the larger *Orlando* exhibition) impacted your view of the work itself?

**ZB:** My work is rarely included in queer exhibitions but rather exhibitions concerned with digital technology, so thanks for making room.



collection of my essays and the other is an edited anthology on Donna Haraway's concept "informatics of domination." I'm also in the research phase of a new installation that focuses on AI and religion. In part, this work is a re-imagining of Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment*.

**SP:** Lastly, what is the last piece of art, media, or culture that exerted a profound impact on you?

**ZB:** [Lyra Pramuk's](#) new album [Fountain](#), particularly the track "New Moon."

*You can watch Zach Blas' Facial Weaponization Communiqué: Fag Face (2012) [here](#). For more from McEvoy Arts at Home, click [here](#).*

**Zach Blas** is an artist, filmmaker, and writer whose practice spans moving image, computation, theory, performance, and science fiction. He is a Lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London.

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