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# Idiot Savant

By Marisa Olson

Freud described the id as the reservoir of our psychic energy and the locus of our personalities – a databank of instincts always battling the superego for expression. Beyond being a cute turn of phrase, it is ironic that the curator of Id/Entity, a recent group show at New York's The Kitchen, would choose to highlight the id in 'identity'.

The show, curated by Christina Yang (The Kitchen's director of new media), organised by MIT, and touring like mad, references a host of traditional scholarly themes in discussing self-portraits while exploring the shift in both the form and subject matter of such portraits, following new scientific and technological advances – a healthy remit for which Yang enlisted 21 artists, working on nine collaborative projects.

Ranging from net art to video, robots to kinetic sculpture, magic mirrors to photo booths, the definition of new media was – as always – problematic. Nevertheless, all of the work was somehow technology-based, whether it referenced technologies new or old. Fact and fiction, body and soul, invention and memory were but three of the trusty biographical binaries exemplified, whilst surveillance was the new factor in the old public/private couplet and art history was refashioned as an autobiographical trope.

Yet, to see how identities, and their representations have changed, one must consider what they initially were. The work in Id/Entity would seem to suggest that one's identity is an effect of the body: the way that one's body looks, is shaped, and navigates space. Many of the projects seemed concerned with the ways that we manipulate our bodies or, more significantly, manipulate the spaces through which our bodies pass. How do we build spaces and objects for our bodies to touch, and what traces do we leave in doing so? Similarly, our interaction with other humans (also manifest as largely spatial experiences) was a second defining theme.

In the case of Id/Entity, the id has – for once – beaten the superego where individual personality triumphs as the core conceptual content of the work. Yet, the superego ultimately wins out in the process of translating the contents of the id's great reservoir into a public performance. Function absolutely followed form: the work often read as media first, message second. Nevertheless, all of the projects – individually and in dialogue with each other – were more than successful in stimulating contemplation of the overarching curatorial theme.

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