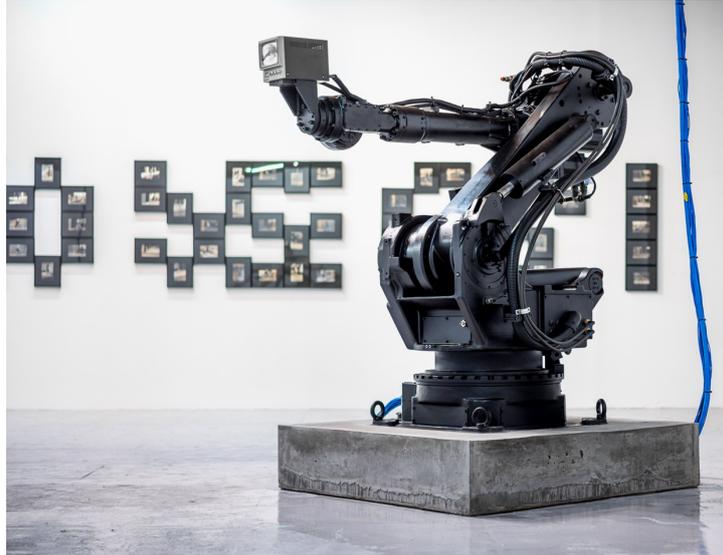


# BULLETT

Art & Design

New LA Exhibit 'The Earth Is Flat' Questions Technology's Role

June 16, 2016 1:01 am By Oliver Kupper



In James Georgopoulos' recent exhibition, *The Earth Is Flat*, at MAMA Gallery in Los Angeles, the artist asks a very simple, but jarring question: will the machines take over. Ten years ago, this question still hovered in the wheelhouse of conspiracy theorist rhetoric and the fantasies of Terminator fans. Today, though, this question is more real than ever. The machines are getting smarter and advancements in artificial life technology having taken frightening leaps and bounds.

In Georgopoulos' solo exhibition, the machines take on obvious forms – the skeleton of a vehicle, a refrigerator with a surveillance camera on top of it, and a welding robot from a defunct Detroit car manufacturing plant – the only edition added to the machine is a single channel video that projects a single human eye. Upon first impression, the works look scattered, remote, disconnected and without any inherent motivation, except for their frightening implications. However, it is only when you take a closer look that you realize the sinister interconnectedness of not only the works, but also a sense of ominousness.

Part of this portentousness may be emanating from a separate room in the gallery, where a single sculpture gives off a thumping beat, much like a heart beat – bum-pum, bum-pum, bum-pum. You realize later that it is the artist's heart beating in the machine that looms in the form of two black towers – it reminds you that one day we may all be immortal in the form of a machine. The piece, called *Zeus*, is perhaps the darkest and most prescient work of the show. Two 16:30 minute single channel videos repeats multiple lines of computer code. During a private dinner to celebrate the show, the artist reminisces about walking into a government building and seeing a similar thumping machine – a quantum computer – giving off the same dark and haunting vibe.

On another wall, you see what most familiarly looks like "art," but from afar you're not really sure. Organized in a fascinated Tetris-like grid, multiple photographs feature young women, some with beehive hairdos, walking hurriedly past vintage cars. Is it a film set? Are they prostitutes? Who are these "watchers" stealing these images? If you look even closer, you realize that were are at the intersection of Santa Monica Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue in Hollywood. It's the 1960s, presumably. The series, entitled *Human Behavior*, comes from a series of found surveillance photographs – not much else is known and that is perhaps what is most powerful.

Knowing the work and human behind the work, I can say with a fair amount of certainty that this is not the production of a frivolous tinkerer who wields and welds machines together with fancy abandonment. Nor is it the work of a conspiracy theorist – there is science behind what he does. The artist is obsessed with the theories of Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking. While most artists would turn to Picasso for their inspiration, Georgopoulos may turn to a science digest with the latest news that a new robot, a new machine and a smart algorithm has brought us one step closer to total annihilation.

The truth, though, is that the show has a completely different side to it. A sweeter, more saccharine side that is more beautiful than anything. It almost brings you to the future – after the machines have won. Realizing that all the works are neatly tethered by thousands of miles of wire, it gives you the sense that we are in a type of zoo for the machines. We have already learned to beat them. The war against AI has been won. It's three hundred years from now. In the end, there is one thing that machines can't give and that is love and compassion. While they are plugged in, there is warmth, but pull the cord and there is an eerie coldness. Inside of us is a real beating heart that can win all battles, which is the greatest message to take home from *The Earth Is Flat*.