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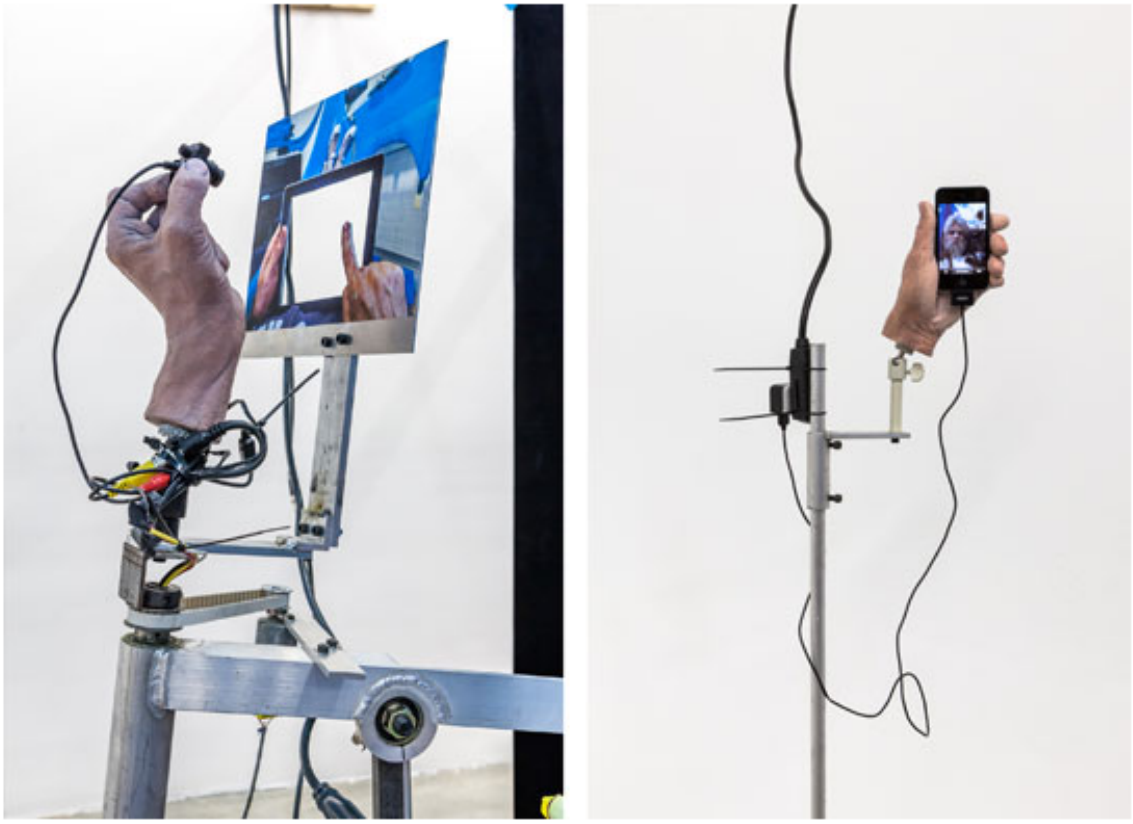
DON'T MISS: JON KESSLER AT SWISS INSTITUTE

Jon Kessler found inspiration for The Web, his new site-specific installation at Swiss Institute, two years ago, in, of all places, a subway car. "Three quarters of the people on the train were looking at their handheld device or playing games or answering emails or texting or reading," recalled Kessler. "It was my epiphany that that technology—more than the train, the radio, the TV, or the car—has absolutely changed the way we relate to one another."

Jon Kessler, The Web, 2013

Kessler created a physical (and virtual) maze of iPhone-like windows interrupted by walls of TV screens playing blue-screened iPad ads where viewers become the actors. There are also animatronic mannequins in hammocks — literally caught in the web — manipulating tablets (and themselves) and a nightmarish miniaturized merry-go-round, dubbed "the prison," featuring a panopticon of outward facing cameras and inward facing figurines meant to serve as the "buzzing hornets nest" of the entire show. And if that weren't enough, Kessler also draped the entire installation with a web of blue yarn —18 months in the making—attached to a working loom.

At the jam-packed opening you couldn't step a foot in any direction without being filmed by one of Kessler's cameras or the iPhone of the person next to you. "I'm using surveillance to expose our comfort level with it," Kessler said. At the after-party Tom Sachs admitted to snapping 100 pictures in the space.



Details of The Web

Naturally, Kessler also designed an app for the show. “I wanted everyone to be surrounded by a local social network, where you'd see people before you saw them,” he said. “Like Facebook meets OKCupid.” In addition to feeding images from your phone to Kessler's monitors in real time, the app works with a band of animatronic skeletons on the Institute’s mezzanine that activate the Apple start-up sound on a subwoofer and the phones of everyone who's connected. "This show didn't start out as an Apple show, but as I got deeper into the work I realized Apple products are untouchable in their fetishized package, and I wanted to play with that," Kessler explained. "It's a beautiful moment when the Mac start-up sound is coming out of 100 cell phones at the same time."

Open through April 28, swissinstitute.net

Photos: courtesy the artist and Métamatic Research Initiative. Photographer: Daniel Perez.

By Michael Slenske

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