

Institute of Contemporary Arts show on gender, sexuality and celebrity culture

London exhibition focusing on mass digital culture will feature works from artists including Wu Tsang and Juliette Bonneviot

by Hannah Ellis-Petersen
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Stewart Uoo's You Can Come And Get It will feature in the Looks exhibition. Photograph: ICA

Mass digital culture and an examination of the post-human world will be at the core of next year's programme at the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

The London gallery will showcase a variety of young artists from around the world in its spring 2015 show, titled Looks. It will examine how they use their art to respond to the urgent social issues that have arisen out of technology and our online identities – focusing on gender, sexuality and the obsession with celebrity culture.

Look, which opens next April, will feature new works ranging from film installations by LA-based filmmaker and artist Wu Tsang – who examines social media's hold over society – to paintings by French artist Juliette Bonneviot made partly from xenohormones, a material found in silicon and the pill.

“This show is about acknowledging that we are living in a world where the digital and internet is our primary means of expression, that it's become very important particularly in terms of our identity,” said Katharine Stout, chief curator at the ICA. “These artists are exploring the themes of digital, and the presence we create for ourselves online, but not always in a digital artistic format. It also explores how new technologies are affecting the way gender and sexuality are understood or even shaped in today's society.”

One of the key pieces in the exhibition, said Stout, would be a video by Tsang, titled *A Day in the Life of Bliss*, which Stout described as extraordinary.

“It’s set in the near future and it almost has a sci-fi feel to it,” she said. “It follows this protagonist called Bliss, who is a celebrity performer. And in this future world there’s this phenomenon called Looks which is controlled by social media, where celebrities and their status is controlled by how many looks or likes they get. It’s an immersive film installation but it has this very performative feel, which speaks to the idea that identity is now constantly performed as well as being something innate.”

She added: “It may be set in a fictional future but it is a powerful piece that very much speaks to current celebrity culture and our own lives, which are very much controlled by social media.”

The installation will be showcased alongside works by a new generation of artists, including 20-year-old Andrea Crespo, Scottish artist Morag Keil and young American Stewart Uoo.

To accompany and draw on the exhibition, the ICA will also host a three-day summit in May, titled *Fear of Missing Out* – a direct reference to the social anxiety supposedly fuelled by social media. It will examine influences of the digital age. Chaired by Berlin artist and theorist Hito Steyerl, the summit is set to include discussions on everything from artificial intelligence and the dark web to digitising the Middle East and online pornography.

“It feels like we’ve been having discussions with artists about the embedded nature of technology in our lives for the past year, so to hold this summit seems very important,” said Gregor Muir, director of the ICA. “What we have noticed [is] that artists are more and more interested in discussions around technology and the impact it is having on their practice. What we are trying to do is to move the ICA from the world of mass popular culture to mass digital culture.”

Next year, the ICA will also stage the first British solo exhibition by Israeli artist Dor Guez, new pictures by fashion and contemporary photographer Viviane Sassen and a project by Chinese artist Zhang Ding, which will transform the ICA theatre into an installation, recreating rock concerts that had historical significance.

Jaffa-based Guez, who is of Christian-Palestinian and Jewish-Tunisian descent, will be exhibiting some of his highly politicised works that directly engage with the Israel-Palestine conflict. The show opening in February will include a new work titled *The Painter* – an installation based on the real story of a Jewish-Tunisian painter who emigrated to Israel before being conscripted in the Yom Kippur war and suffering years of post traumatic stress disorder afterwards.

Sassen, best known for her flamboyant fashion photography, will exhibit a series of mainly black and white pictures taken during a trip to a village deep in the rainforest of Suriname.