

**American Artist  
"My Blue Window"**

Queens Museum  
6 October 2019 – 16 February 2020

The centrepiece of American Artist's solo exhibition is *2015* (2019), an eerie and ambient single-channel video shot from the perspective of the front seats of a police car. Overlaying the screen, an augmented reality interface discloses the date (June 29, 2015) alongside alternating statistics: Assaults are up 34.6% in the year since June 2014 while grand larcenies are down 1.6%. The car snakes around Brooklyn, humming to a halt at intersections and cruising along Shore Parkway. A brace of words, sometimes haloed by windshield glare, intermittently appears: CRIME DETERRED.

In *2015*, the NYPD adopted predictive policing, a strategy that uses a machine learning algorithms to estimate where and when offences might occur, with police encouraged to "proactively patrol" areas deemed susceptible to crime. Addressing this technology, Artist's work exists in a lineage of American

video artists concerned with surveillance. The video's dashboard camera captures passing pedestrians, superimposing red boxes onto their bodies, summoning Vito Acconci's canonical *Following Piece* (1969). Meanwhile, the work's title, timestamped with the year of algorithmic policing's implementation, brings to

imposing dark blue curtain, *Untitled* (2019), which blocks light from the gallery's entrance, evokes the threshold of the "thin blue line", the tenuous metaphor that Blue Lives Matter factions claim separates order and anarchy. Two rows of

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mind Dan Graham's *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974), which used mirrors, a camera, and a screen to make an infinitely delayed video feedback display. In a manner not dissimilar to Graham's incongruous architectural propositions, *2015* generates an uncanny slippage in its viewer, who, thanks to the dashcam perspective, is at once police officer and onlooker. A sculptural installation stiffens the uneasiness of this gesture: an

bleachers, reminiscent of sports arenas, provide seating for the cop/spectator, analogising policing with entertainment.

*2015* contends with surveillance's racism. It has been persistently and persuasively argued that predictive modelling, like other forms of artificial intelligence, reproduces – or even enhances – existing racial inequities, making predictive policing at least as problematic as the "stop-and-frisk" and "broken windows" models previously implemented by the NYPD. Parts of *2015* are set in the gridded streets surrounding Bed-Stuy's Weeksville Heritage



American Artist, *Untitled*, 2019  
Aluminium bleachers, scaffolding and velvet, dimensions variable  
Installation view, "My Blue Window"

Photos: Hai Zhang. Courtesy Queens Museum, New York



American Artist, *2015*, 2019  
Single-channel video, sound, 21:38 min  
Installation view, "My Blue Window"

Center, the site, during the nineteenth century, of one of America's first free Black communities. As New York buckles under the pressure of gentrification, the historically lower-income neighbourhood is being speculated upon by affluent white-collar homebuyers in a process that Spike Lee, whose films *Do the Right Thing* and *Crooklyn* are set in Bed-Stuy, has called a "motherfuckin' Christopher Columbus syndrome". Statistics trumpet that violent crime dropped here by 44% between 2000 and 2016, yet a nonetheless harrowing, and regularly unreported, skein of evictions, dispossession, and displacement inevitably accompanies rising property prices (which police are incentivised to protect). "It's not gentrification; it is ethnic cleansing," rejoined a local resident at a 2017 town hall meeting, buttressing Lee's words.

On a wall-mounted monitor, Artist presented *1956/2054* (2019), an app,

free to download, that collates news items about predictive policing. It comes with a notepad as well as a concise list of abolitionist literature. Its title refers to Philip K. Dick's 1956 short story "Minority Report", set in the year 2054, which imagines a criminal justice agency named Pre crime that apprehends and detains individuals for crimes not yet committed. Pre-crime is an ontological paradox: a crime theoretically shouldn't exist until it occurs. Yet this doublespeak is disturbingly normalised by the more harrowing paradox that civil society is founded upon the criminalisation and erasure of populations of colour. In response, writers like Jackie Wang, spotlighted in the app's reading list, have railed against politics that sanctify innocence. "What I wanted to understand was the everyday incursion of policing into our lives and how technology regulates us, sometimes

without our knowing," the poet writes. "I wanted to attend to the *intrusive-unseen* against the backdrop of dystopic cinematic projections of what policing could become. *Because the future of law enforcement is now.*"

After almost twenty-two minutes, *2015* loops, reiterating the same cycle of non-crimes that, having been prevented, don't occur. American Artist, like Wang, unveils structure, not event, and the video presents a cityscape that has long been sculpted by these oppressive forces. Driving this present continuous past, to repurpose Graham's capacious language, are the social relations of slavery, within which modern policing originated in America. These intrusive-unseen dynamics lurk deep in the US psyche and are perpetuated by technologies, from urban design to AR, that enforce the status quo.

**Harry Burke**