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New Museum to Present the Exhibition and Artist Residency “Paul Ramírez Jonas: Half-truths” This Summer



Paul Ramírez Jonas, *Alternative Facts*, 2017 (detail).
Installation and performance. Courtesy the artist

New York, NY...The New Museum will present the exhibition and artist residency “**Paul Ramírez Jonas: Half-truths**” as the second iteration of the Department of Education and Public Engagement’s annual R&D Summers, a research and development initiative that emphasizes the New Museum’s year-round commitment to community partnerships and public dialogue at the intersection of art and social justice. “Paul Ramírez Jonas: Half-truths” is on view on the Museum’s Fifth Floor from July 5 to September 17, and also includes a series of public programs. The exhibition is curated by Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement; Shaun Leonardo, Manager of School, Youth, and Community Programs; and Emily Mello, Associate Director of Education.

With “Half-truths,” Ramírez Jonas (b. 1965, Pomona, CA) employs the mechanisms of bureaucracies and law as a starting point from which to consider truth. “Half-truths” explores the contours of social contracts, without which institutions meant to uphold collective governance become arbitrary while remaining powerfully consequential in people’s lives. Ramírez Jonas will continue to pursue a body of participatory work focusing on aspects of trust, the exhibition including two pieces defined by transactions between the audience and the artist, *Fake ID* (2017) and *Alternative Facts* (2017). The conditions of these encounters are devised by the artist and informed by the site, but also require the open-endedness of direct engagement with a voluntary public. The project also includes related public programs and, adjacent to the gallery, a Resource Center presentation that explores pseudonyms, identities, and modalities of naming employed by artists, writers, and other individuals for various political and creative reasons.

Fake ID invites visitors to empty their pockets of materials containing information that determines currency, credit, access, membership, and citizenship status. Through a process of exchange and inquiry with each participant, a facilitator deconstructs photocopies of their documents—school IDs, transportation passes, credit cards, and licenses—to create a new identification card. Through human exchange, Ramírez Jonas aims to enunciate the possibilities of self-determined constructions of identity within the datafication of state, corporate, and social systems.

Alternative Facts turns lies and fantasies into ostensibly truthful public documents. The first untruth designates the facilitator, often the artist himself, as a notary. Each subsequent certification process yields two documents, one for the viewer to keep and another to be collected in the installation. The cost of this legal transformation requires payment of a gold coin, which the facilitator will assist in creating by chemically altering visitors’ spare change.

The poetics of these works speak to a political climate in which authoritarian tactics seek to delegitimize the participatory checks and balances of democratic truth by pronouncing the media’s dishonesty and declaring the falsehoods of public servants to be “alternative facts.” Relative meaning, the plurality of truth, shared authorship, and the equal right to free speech were once more commonly employed to assert marginalized

voices. But with such sentiments of alternativeness being co-opted by oppressive forces, “Half-truths” asks: is it possible to collectively create and agree upon truth?

Members of the Teen Apprentice Program (TAP), a summer youth employment internship, will facilitate *Fake ID* and *Alternative Facts* during the Museum’s daily open hours. Ramírez Jonas will perform *Alternative Facts* on Thursday evenings from 7–9 p.m., during pay-what-you-wish hours (with the exception of July 20 and August 24).

Each R&D Summer includes public programs expressly concerning issues of social justice. Artists and activists will offer tools for understanding and protecting information online during an afternoon of “Digital Self-Defense and Empowerment” workshops. “Manufacturing Truth: Machine Learning and Bias” will bring together presenters from fields including art, journalism, and sociology, investigating how algorithms shape our lives in realms as disparate as criminal justice, online shopping, and social media. “Between Illegality and Personhood” will include artistic interventions that consider how legal and bureaucratic systems and borders construct misconceptions of personhood. In addition, the Fifth Floor Resource Center will present “Legal Fictions,” a collection of critical texts, historical facsimiles, and artists’ projects that explore the politics of identification.

Paul Ramírez Jonas is a citizen of Honduras and the United States, born in 1965 in Pomona, CA, and raised in Honduras. He lives and works in Brooklyn. He has had solo exhibitions at institutions including Pinacoteca do Estado, Sao Paulo, Brazil (2011); the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2008); the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas (2007–8); and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK, and Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK (2004). “Atlas, Plural, Monument,” a twenty-five-year survey of his work, is on view at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston through August 6. In 2010, his project *Key to the City* was presented by Creative Time in cooperation with the City of New York. In 2016, his project *Public Trust* was presented by *Now and There* in Boston. He participated in the first Johannesburg Biennale (1995); the first Seoul Biennial (2000); the 6th Shanghai Biennial (2006); the 28th Sao Paulo Biennial (2008); the 53rd Venice Biennial (2009); and the 7th Bienal do Mercosul, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2015). He is currently an Associate Professor at Hunter College, City University of New York.

Public programs

See newmuseum.org for registration information

Digital Self-Defense and Empowerment

Saturday, July 22, 1:30–6pm

This afternoon of workshops extends the exhibition’s inquiry into the complexities of determining identity and truth to the online sphere. Addressing increasing vulnerability and participation in surveillance, artists and activists will offer tools to learn about how data is mined and fed back to us, as well as strategies for self-protection, particularly for members of vulnerable communities. Workshops will support the demystification of hidden processes through both tactile, hands-on experiences and analytic software.

1:30–3pm Handmade Computers with Taeyoon Choi

3:15–4pm Data Selfie with DATA X

4–6pm Digital Self-Defense with Equality Labs

Manufacturing Truth: Machine Learning and Bias

Thursday, August 17, 7pm

Bringing together presenters from fields including art, journalism, and sociology, this panel will investigate how algorithms shape our lives in realms as disparate as criminal justice, online shopping, and social media. Algorithms affect everything from healthcare and insurance premiums to job opportunities and recidivism prediction. How might we resist discriminatory artificial intelligence and become informed digital citizens? Panelists include sociologist and cultural critic Katherine Cross, artist and professor Stephanie Dinkins, and journalist Jeff Larson and artist and engineer Surya Mattu, both members of ProPublica’s investigative team for the *Machine Bias* series.

Between Illegality and Personhood

Thursday, September 7, 7pm

This panel discussion will consider how legal and bureaucratic systems construct misconceptions of personhood regarding race, citizenship, ability, and gender.

Sponsors

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ABOUT NEW MUSEUM

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum is a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding building on the Bowery designed by SANAA in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.

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