

Jody Zellen

Lives and works in Los Angeles, California, USA

An artist's statement

Jody Zellen is a Los Angeles based artist who works in many media simultaneously making interactive installations, mobile apps, net art, animations, drawings, paintings, photographs, public art, and artists' books. She employs media-generated representations as raw material for aesthetic and social investigations. She also thinks about ways to integrate interactivity and technology into her works.

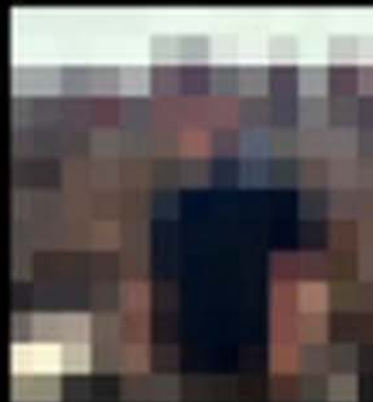
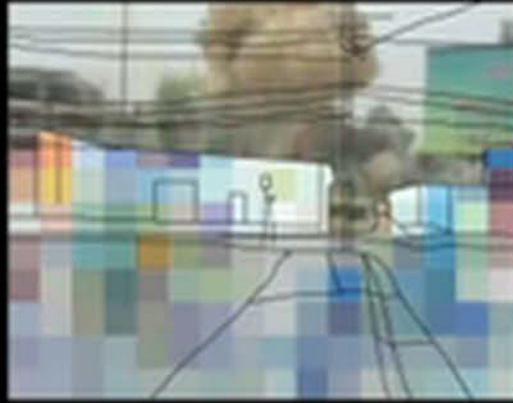
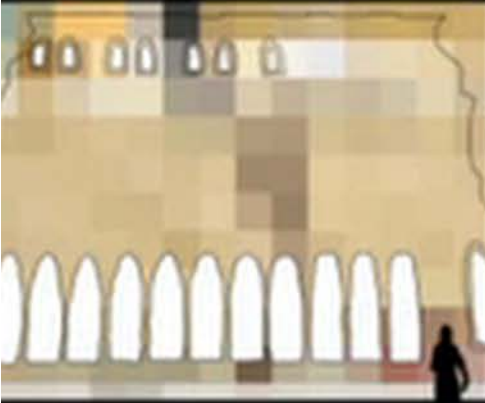
Her interactive installations include "Time Jitters," commissioned by the Halsey Institute for Contemporary Art in Charleston, SC, "The Unemployed" a data visualization at Disseny Hub Museum (Barcelona, 2011), "The Blackest Spot," (Fringe Exhibitions, Los Angeles, 2008), and "Trigger" (Pace University, New York, 2005).

Her net art projects are "Spine Sonnet," 2011 (commissioned by LACMA), "Lines of Life," (<http://www.linesoflife.net>) 2010

(commissioned by terminalapsu.org), "Without A Trace," (www.jodyzellen.com/WithoutATrace) 2009 (commissioned by turbulence.org). Other net art projects include "Ghost City" (ghostcity.com) 1996-present, an ever changing poetic meditation on the urban environment, urbanfragments.net, allthenewsthatsfittoprint.net, talking-walls.com and disembodiedvoices.com.

Recently she has been making iPhone/iPad apps. Her apps "Urban Rhythms," "Spine Sonnet," "Art Swipe," "4 Square," "Episodic," "Time Jitters," and "News Wheel" are available in the iTunes Store. (www.jodyzellen.com/apps)

Zellen was awarded a second Artist Fellowship from the City of Santa Monica, for 2015-2016. She is also the recipient of a 2012 California Community Foundation Mid Career Fellowship, a 2011 Center for Cultural Innovation Artistic Innovation Grant as well as a 2004 COLA (City of Los Angeles) Fellowship.



Time Jitters, Installation

Jody Zellen

An interview by **Josh Ryder**, curator
and **Dario Rutigliano**, curator
articulation@post.com

Multidisciplinary artist Jody Zellen's work explores a variety of issues that concern our unstable contemporary age, centering a consistent part of her practice on the integration between interactivity and technology. In her recent installation entitled "Time Jitters" she brings to a new level of significance the elusive relationship between photojournalism and the viewers' cultural substratum, to draw them through a multilayered experience. One of the most convincing aspects of Zellen's approach is the way it addresses the nature of the perceptual process to unveil unexpected aspects of our media driven era: we are really pleased to introduce our readers to her stimulating artistic production.

Hello Jody and a warm welcome to ARTiculation: to start this interview, would you like to tell us something about your background? You have solid formal training and after your studies at Wesleyan University, you attended the California Institute of Arts, from which you graduated with a MFA degree. You furthered your education attending New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program receiving a MPS degree. How do these experiences influence your evolution as an artist? And in particular, how does your cultural substratum inform the way you relate

yourself to artmaking and to the aesthetic problem in general?

I studied photography, art and art history at Wesleyan University. Perhaps the biggest influence on me was learning about conceptual art by studying the collection of Sol LeWitt. I was in a seminar that put together an exhibition from the LeWitt collection and that experience had a profound effect on my development as an artist, as it allowed me to think beyond photography. I began to make image/text works and artist's books at this time and no longer held the photographic object (or image) as sacred. I soon began to cut, tape and collage found images. In graduate school I continued this way of working. Things really changed for me when I began to make work on the computer — I learned not only how to collage using Photoshop but also how to make web pages and animations. This opened up new possibilities. Much later I returned to school to further my understanding of interactive programming languages and technology based approaches to art making.

I tend to work in many media all at the same time and one thing often leads to another. A series of drawn or photographed images can become an artist's book, an animation and a website and then be transformed into an interactive installation which then becomes an app. I'm particularly

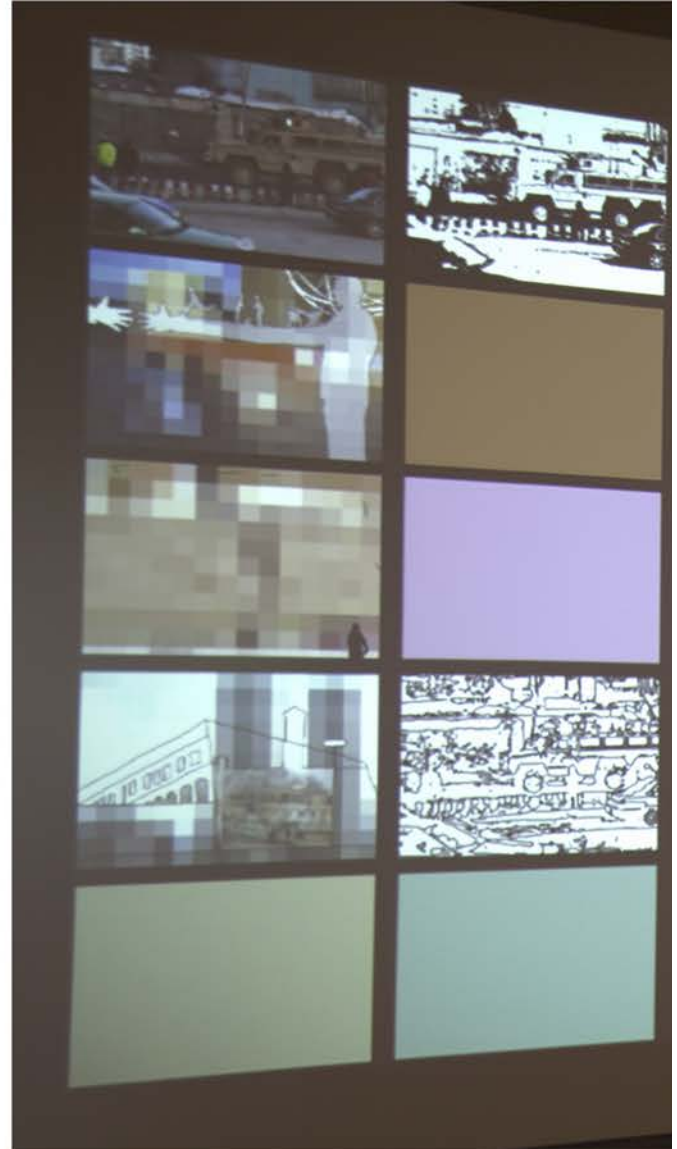


interested in the viewers' experience beyond the white cube. This is reflected in my public art projects, as well as net-art and my motivation to create large interactive installations in public spaces.

Your approach coherently encapsulates a wide variety of disciplines, ranging from painting and installation to video, public and net art and reveals an incessant search of an organic investigation about aesthetic and social issues. The results convey together a coherent and consistent sense of harmony and unity. Before starting to elaborate about your production, we would suggest to our readers to visit <http://www.jodyzellen.com> in order to get a synoptic view of your multifaceted artistic production: while walking our readers through your process, we would like to ask you if you have ever happened to realize that a symbiosis between different approaches is the only way to express and convey the ideas you explore.

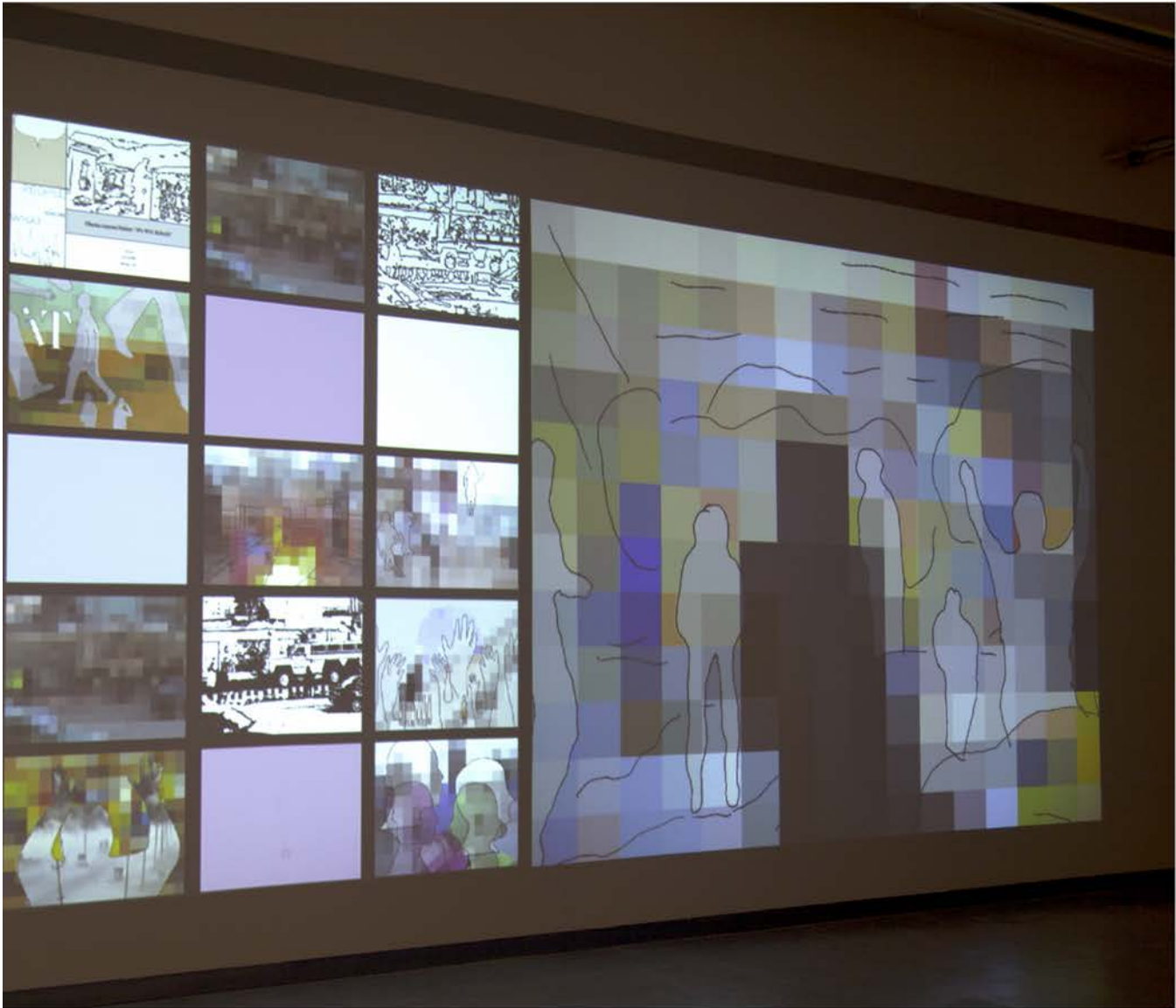
The trajectory of my practice over the years has not been a straight line. Yet in many ways it is a linear progression as my interests in photography led me to artists books which led me to juxtapose images and words. I went from making discreet images to room-sized installations and that led to public art.

My embracing of the internet as a viable platform for making artworks led to animation and hypertext as well as to the use of HTML. Seeing the power of interactivity on the web prompted me to expand those concepts into physical spaces where the viewer's movements could trigger changes to the environment. Having gone large, I have now returned to making art for the small screen. One way of working does not always lead to the next but in my practice, the ability to see how technology changes the form and



Time Jitters, Installation, Grand Central Art Center, Santa

content of my work has been the catalyst for ongoing experimentation. Some people are content to develop a particular idea or form very slowly over time, but I tend to jump from medium to medium because I see interesting interrelationships between them.



Ana, CA, 2014

For this special edition of ARTiculation we have selected "Time Jitters", an interesting project that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article. What has at once caught our attention of your inquiry into how the media presents world events is the way appropriating

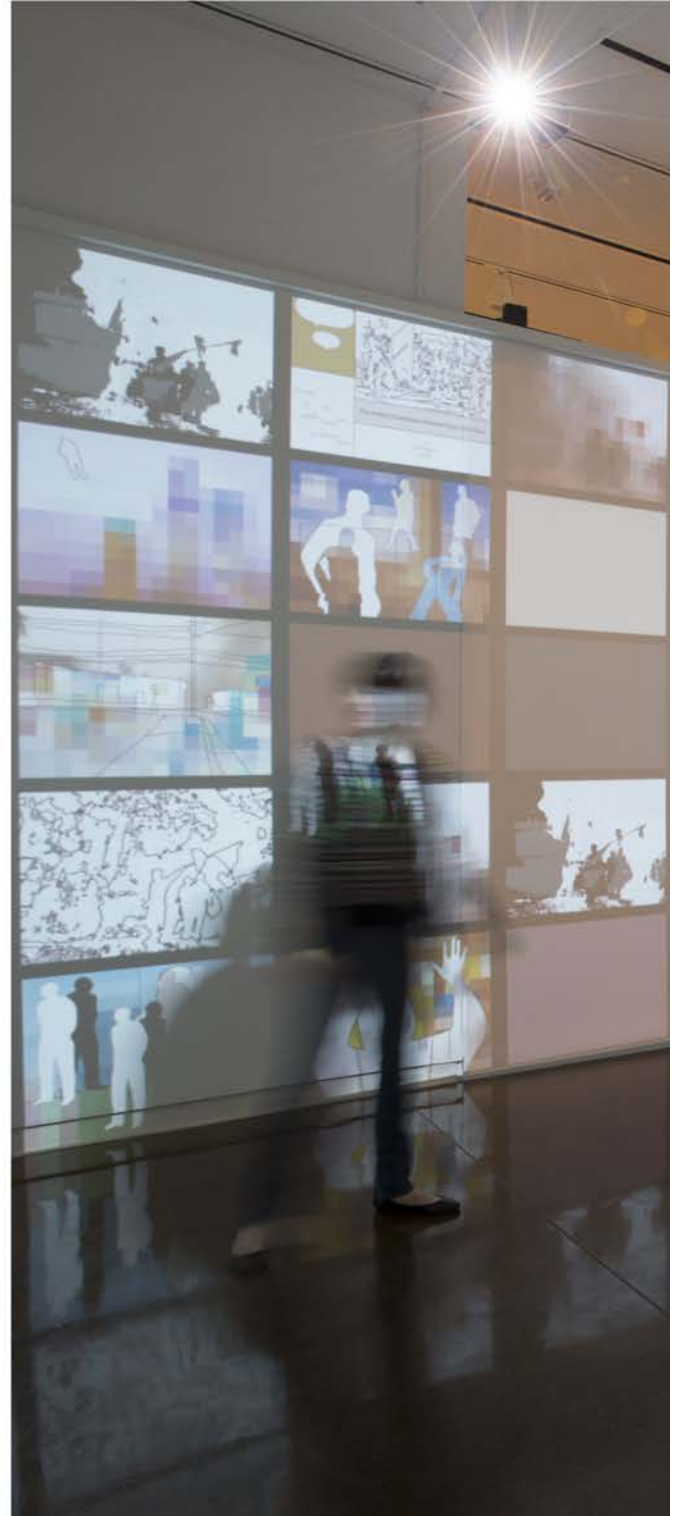
elements from universal imagery and changing the context, you have brought to a new level of significance the elusive relationship between communication and the personal substratum of the viewers, urging us to think about the elusive nature of our perceptual process: when walking our readers through the genesis

of "Time Jitters", would you shed light on your main sources of inspiration?

Time Jitters is in many ways the culmination of a project I had been working on for a long time. It started with the concept of daily rituals. Beginning in 2005, I committed to making a daily drawing. These drawings are spontaneous— a quick doodle using a black pen on a piece of A4 paper. In addition to the doodle drawings, for a number of years I also traced images from the printed version of the daily newspaper. These newspaper tracings were featured in my net art project *Without A Trace*.

(<http://www.jodyzellen.com/WithoutATrace/>). In this project I was interested in the relationship between my hand tracings and how the computer could be programmed to trace an image. This led to another daily ritual — saving a jpg image from the international news section of the online version of *The New York Times*. I digitally transformed this image in myriad ways— making it a line drawing, a high contrast black and white image and reduced it to a series of colored pixels. The colored pixel images were used as the background for a series of digital collages and paintings as well as the base image for the *Time Jitters* animation.

The linear sequence in *Time Jitters* runs about eighteen minutes. The work is a meditation on how the media presents these news worthy events. The animation is a sequence of over forty separate fragments each using a different news photograph as its point of departure. The original images are scaled back, diffused and subtly manipulated, yet what they reference never disappears. Images of war, crowds, man made and natural disasters are prominently featured in the

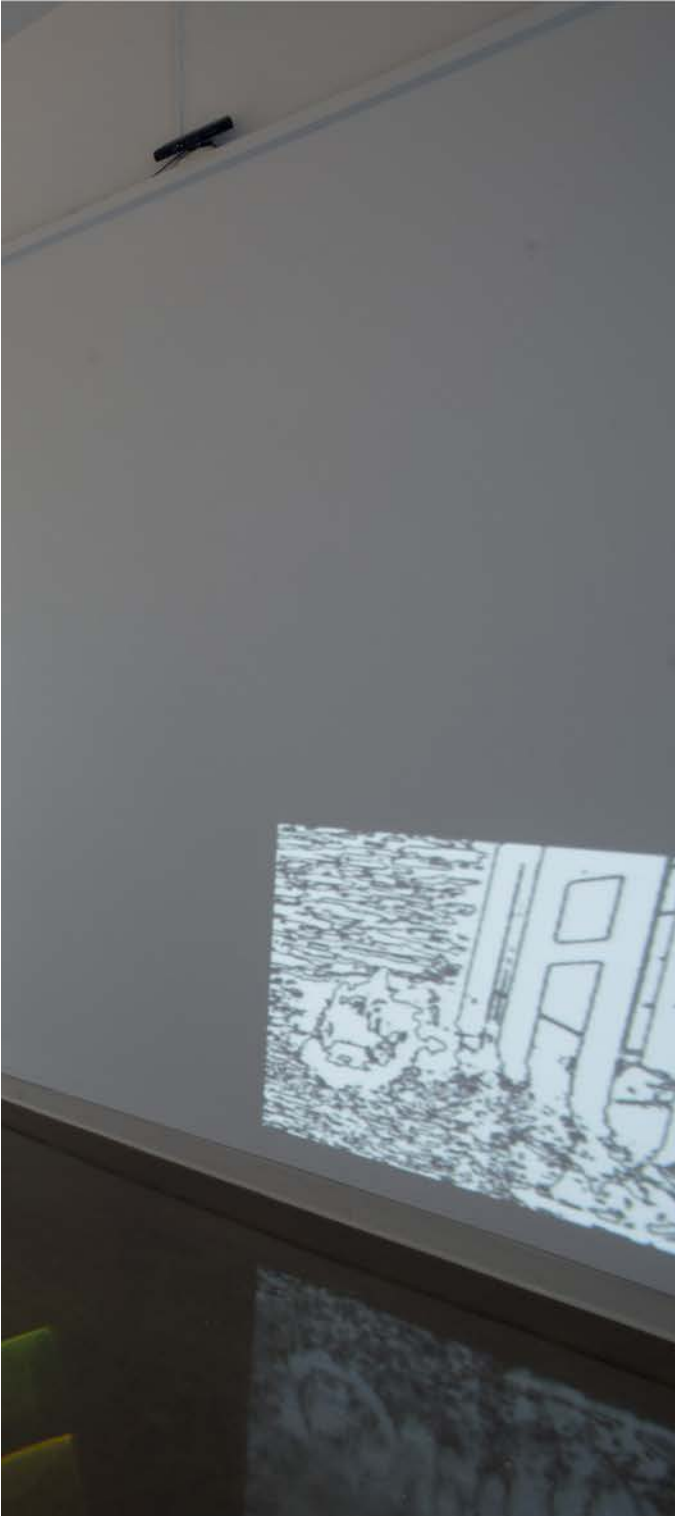




Time Jitters, Halsey Institute, 2014



Time Jitters, Halsey Institute, 2014



work. I want the viewer to recognize the tenor of the imagery yet also appreciate the way I have taken it apart and recontextualized it. I see it as a sequence of moving elements that coalesces in readable imagery that then breaks apart becoming another in an endless flow, just like the news.

The images I select are specific. There is a certain genericness to them. I gravitate toward photographs with silhouettes, buildings, and remnants of war as well as images that have a universal quality. When looking at a sequence of 365 images that represent a year I want there to be both recognizable moments as well as a feeling that this could be last year or ten years ago.

It is important to note that *Time Jitters* is also a free iOS app. For the app, I selected 12 clips from the longer animation and added a sound component. In the app users can scale and reposition these clips creating a collage of overlapping visual and sonic elements. Please visit www.jodyzellen.com/apps to learn more about this and my other free iOS apps.

For "Time Jitters" you drew from an archive of 365 photographs that you collected one for each day in the year: inviting the viewers to a multilayered experience that urges them to a process of deconstruction and recontextualization from the flow of information that you conveyed in your images. This allows "Time Jitters" to accomplish the difficult task of constructing a concrete aesthetic from experience, working on both subconscious and conscious levels. So we would take this occasion to ask you if in your opinion personal experience is absolutely indispensable as part of the creative process? Do you think that a

creative process could be disconnected from direct experience?

Most of my work is in response to that which surrounds me. I listen to the radio, read the newspaper, and remain fascinated by how meaning can be gleaned from the combination of unrelated things.

Your successful attempt to produce a dialectical fusion that operates as a system of symbols creates a compelling non linear narrative that, walking the thin line between conceptual and literal meanings, establishes direct relations with the viewers. German multidisciplinary artist Thomas Demand once stated that "nowadays art can no longer rely so much on symbolic strategies and has to probe psychological, narrative elements within the medium instead". What is your opinion about it? And in particular how do you conceive the narrative for your works?

The narratives in my works develop organically. I almost never plan out an extended scenario but create unrelated (or related) fragments that I weave together into a whole. Whether or not that final iteration deconstructs the way mass-media communicates with an audience is beyond my control, but it certainly could function that way.

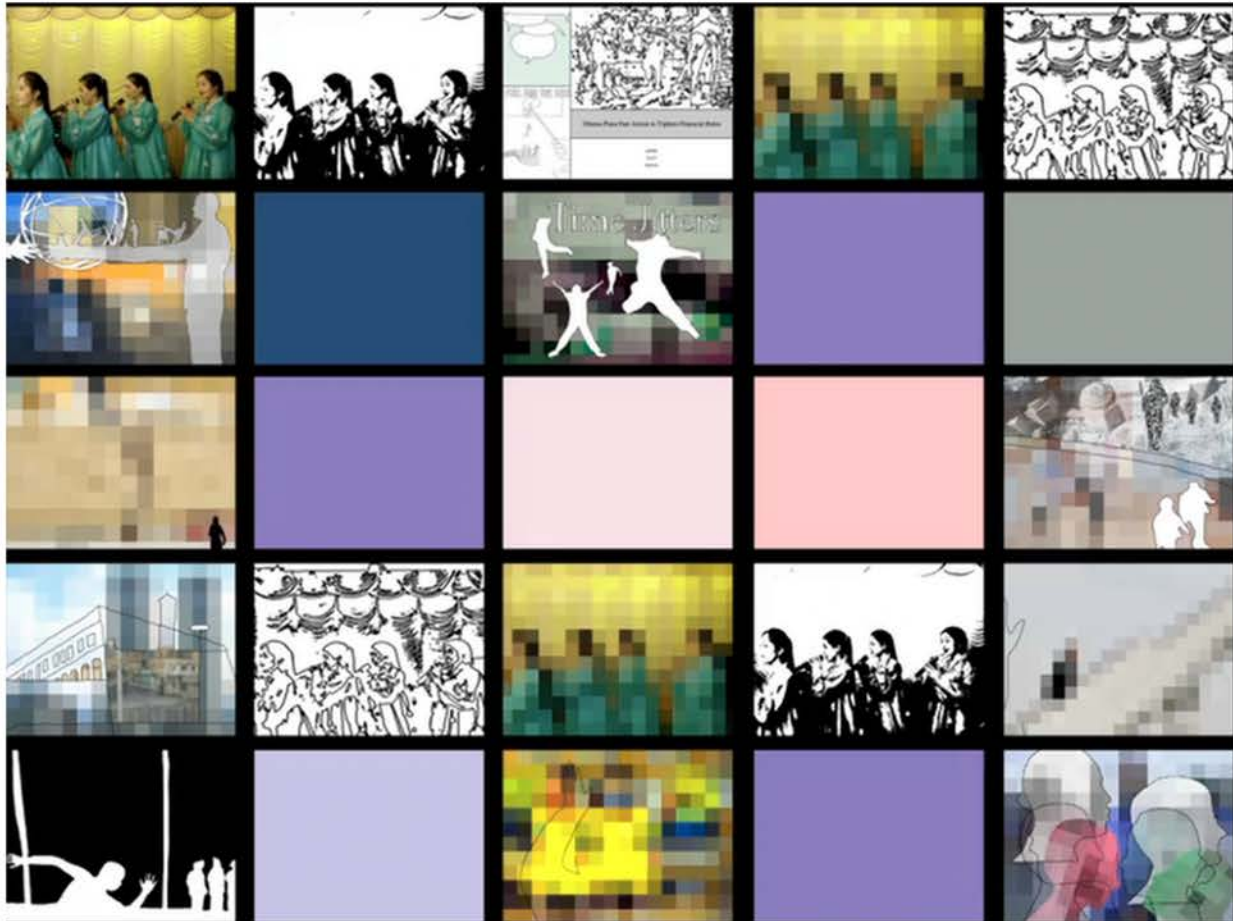
You regularly take part in projects in public space: your work provides the viewers with an intense, immersive experience: how do you see the relationship between public sphere and the role of art in public space? In particular, how much do you consider the immersive nature of the viewing experience?

When making public artworks, I like to take into consideration the site's location,





Time Jitters, Halsey Institute, 2014



Time Jitters, 2014, animated video (silent, 18:16)

history and function and often incorporate images of architecture into the final product. Usually my projects involve an integration or juxtaposition of historical and contemporary imagery. Both my studio and public art practices often deal with themes relating to architecture and urban life. By placing the work in the public realm, I believe it has a greater impact and reaches more people than when it is placed on a gallery wall. My "true" public works are not immersive at

all and while I would welcome the opportunity to create a full-on interactive and immersive public work, I have not yet been given that opportunity.

In many of my gallery installation, I have surrounded the viewer, bombarding them with visual stimuli from all directions. Often I have projected animations on all sides of a gallery space and even overlapped them to create an immersive environment of ever changing imagery. When the viewer interrupts a projection—



Time Jitters, 2014, animated video (silent, 18:16)

walks through the beam of a projector and the body casts a shadow— it becomes part of the piece. Life is immersive as we are constantly bombarded with sounds and images everywhere we go, and I would like my work to be experienced in that way— as representative of the dynamic nature of contemporary life.

Your practice is also centered on the integration between interactivity and

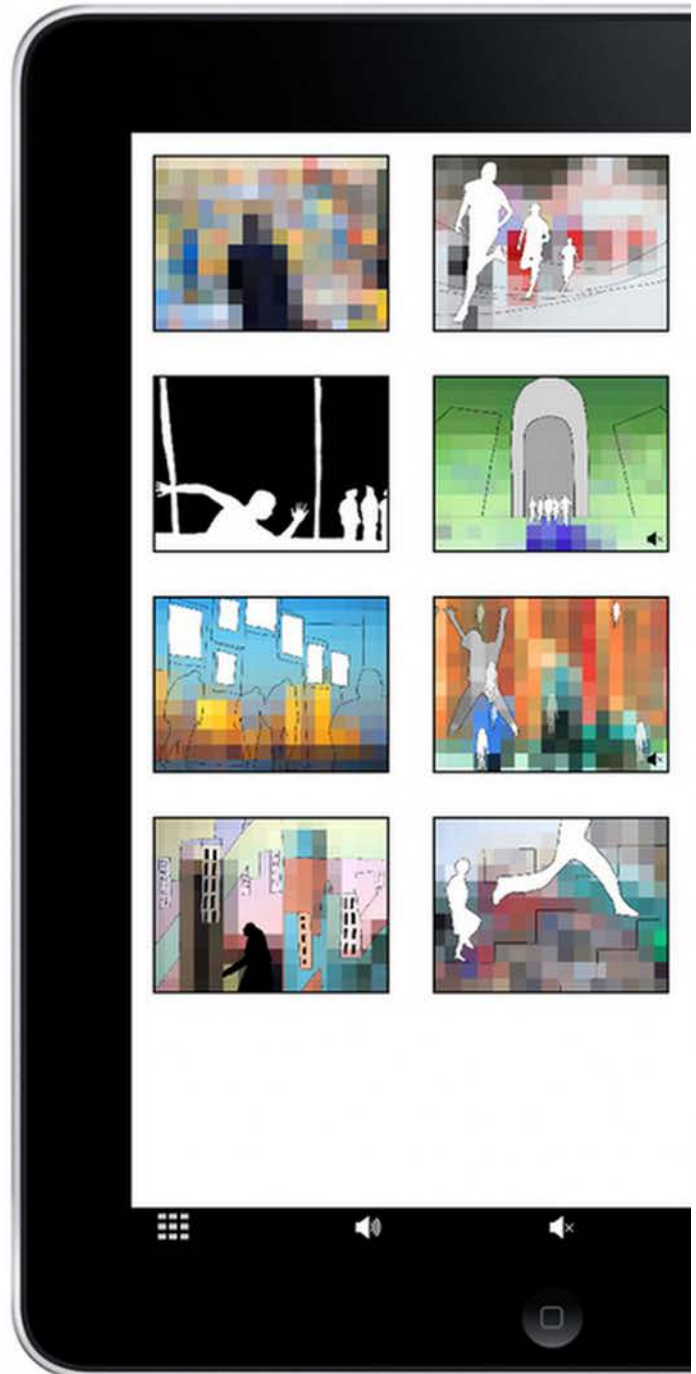
technology and also seems to question the impact of cutting edge techniques in our unstable and ever changing contemporary age. The impetuous way modern technology has nowadays come out on top has dramatically revolutionized the concept of Art: in a certain sense, we are forced to rethink the intimate aspect of the materiality of an artwork itself, since just few years ago it was a tactile materialization of an idea. We are sort of convinced that new media will definitely fill the apparent dichotomy

between art and technology and we will dare to say that Art and Technology are going to assimilate one to each other... what's your point about this?

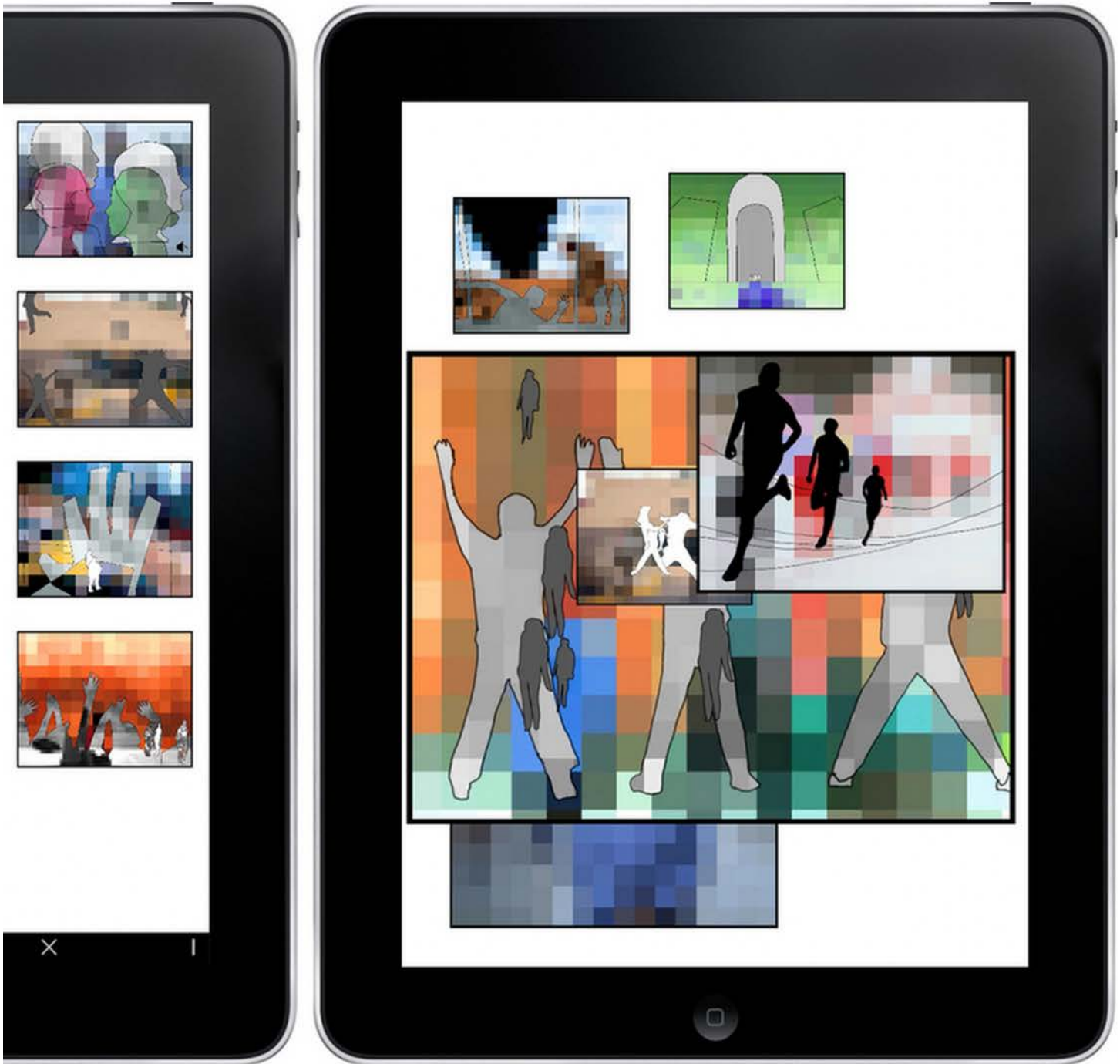
I am quite sure technology is not going to disappear. But also not all artists embrace technology in their works. In 2004, I created a net art project as well as an interactive installation entitled *Disembodied Voices*. It was created around the time when mobile phones were still new and not everyone had one. I noticed that those that did often spoke quite loudly and were oblivious to how their actions effected those around them. Of course nowadays this is understood but when I created the work it was not. At that time, I wanted to present a piece about the way cell phones were changing the nature of public space.

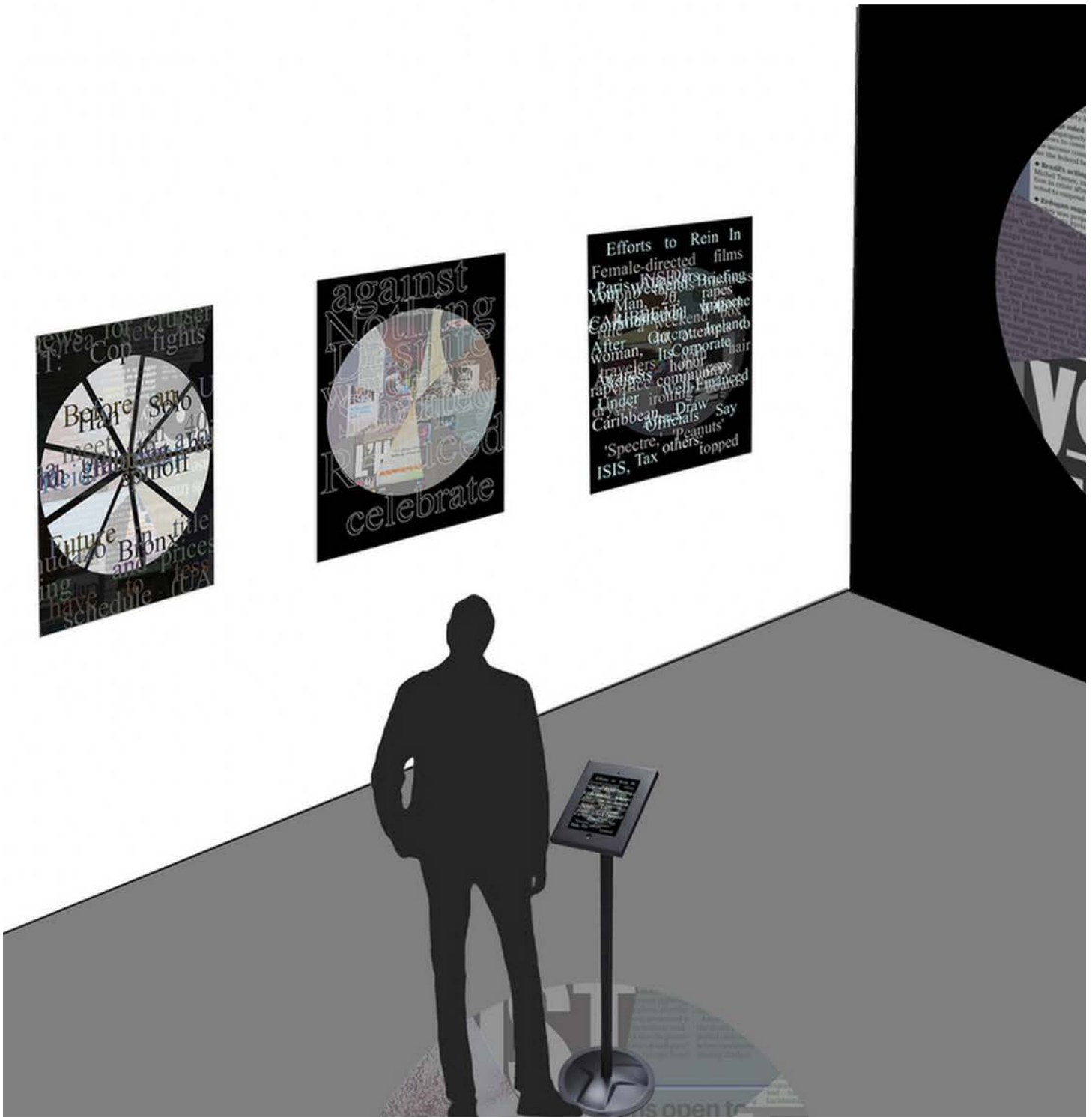
In continuing to think about the proliferation of cell phones, I wanted to infiltrate that space by making works of art designed specifically for iOS devices. I wanted to create something someone could look at and interact with in private — like when waiting in line or on a bus journey— when out in public space. Those artworks (I currently have 7 art apps, all free in the iTunes store) are interactive game-like works that explore ideas about public spaces as well as how meaning can be gleaned from the random juxtaposition of multiple unrelated elements.

Drawing from highly symbolic and evocative elements from contemporary imagery, your work provokes direct relations in the viewers and accomplishes the difficult task of going beyond the surface of communication. We find this aspect particularly interesting since it is probably the only way to accomplish the vital restoration you pursued in this work, concerning both the individuals and their



Time Jitters, iOS app





News Wheel Installation diagram



place in our ever changing societies: how do you see the relationship between public sphere and the role of art in public space? In particular, what kind of reactions did you expect to provoke in the viewers?

My latest iOS app, News Wheel, www.newswheel.info will hopefully address this issue of how an artwork can function in the public sphere, particularly in the installation format I have envisioned.

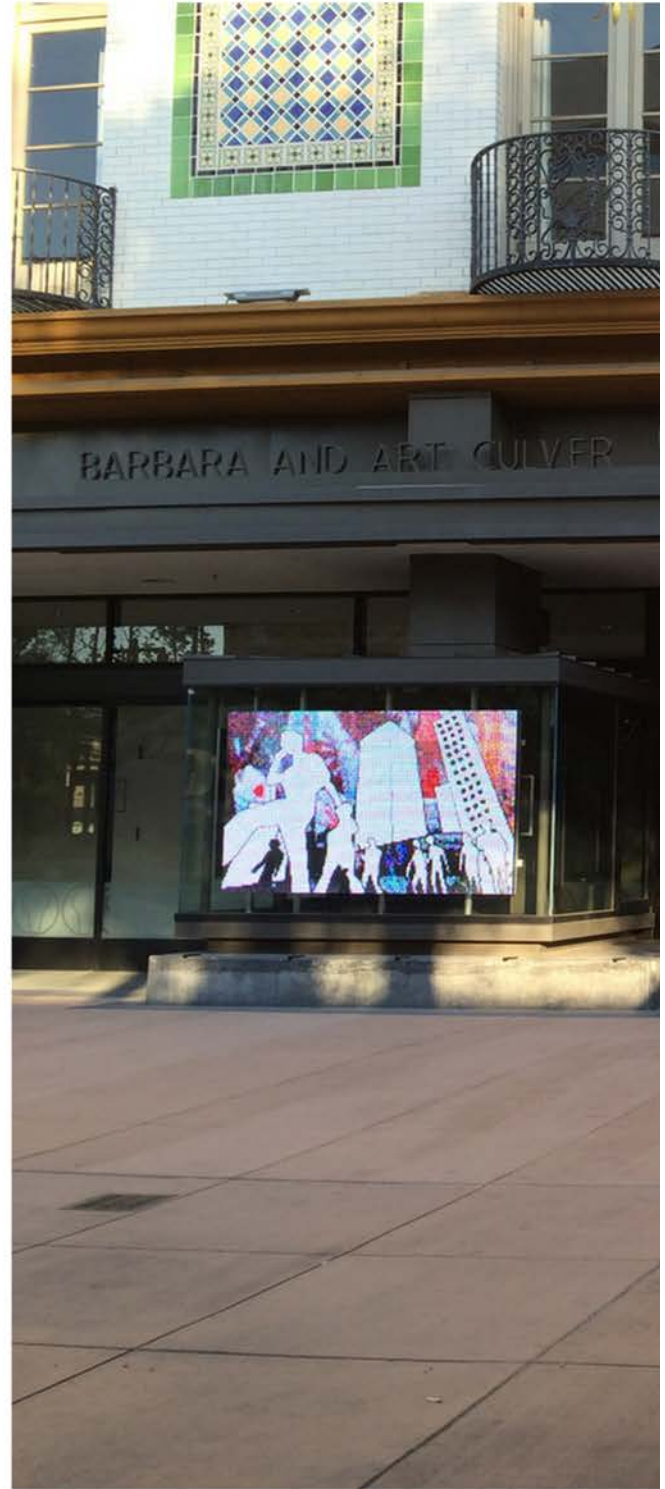
News Wheel is an interactive app that explores the charged poetics of ever changing news headlines. It begins as a static disk divided into nine sections each representing a different news source and tinted a different color. The sources include the english language publications *Asian Age*, *Guardian*, *Los Angeles Times*, *National*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*. On the iPad or iPhone when the app is launched, tapping anywhere on the screen causes the wheel to spin. Another tap stops the wheel and suddenly a headline in one of nine pre-selected colors appears on the screen. This playful interface invites users to start and stop the wheel eventually filling the screen with a collage of current headlines. Individual words can be deleted and repositioned so users can create poems from this content. In addition, dragging one's finger across the screen creates an animated chain of fragmented and poetic text derived from these headlines.

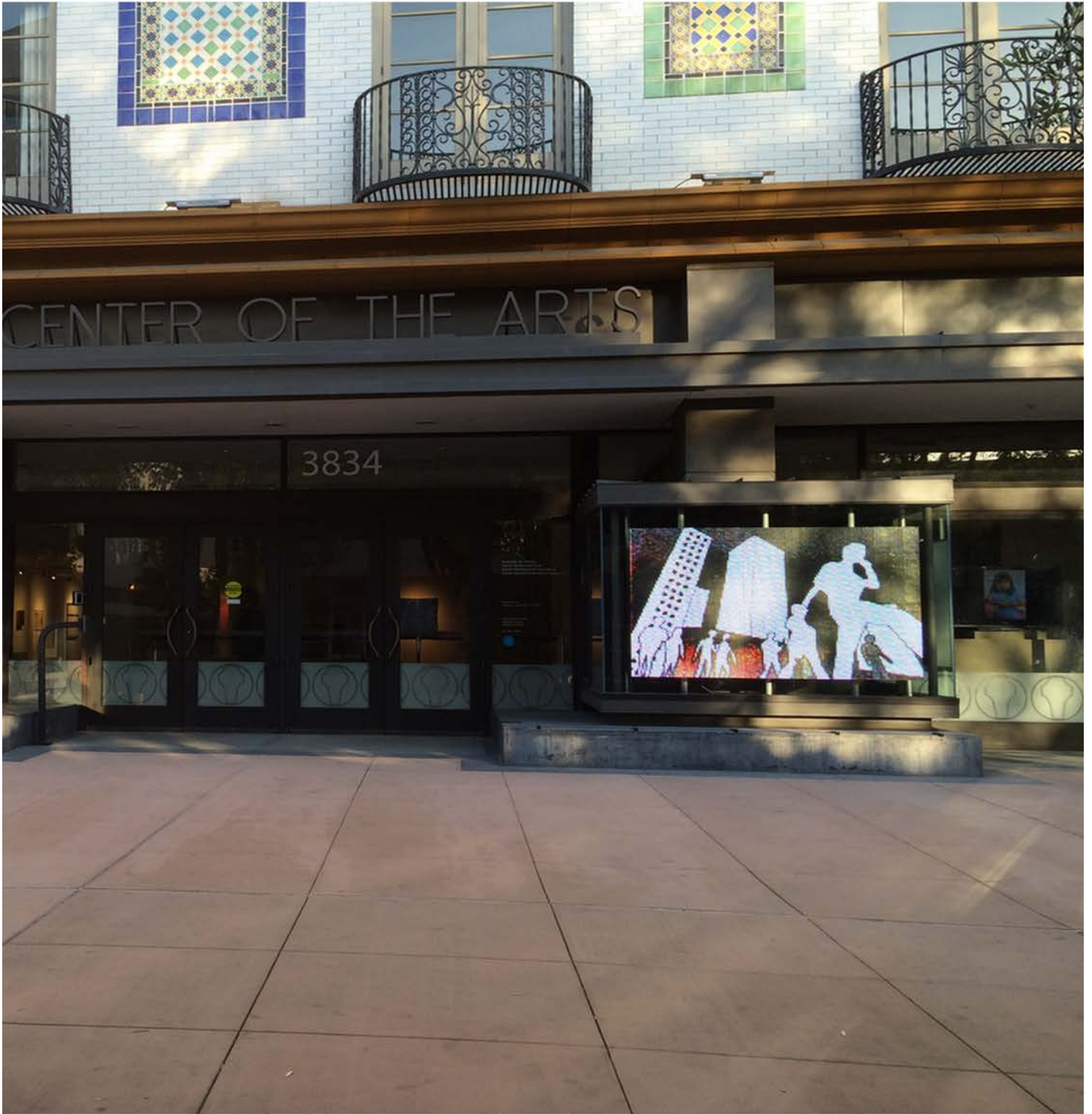
News Wheel is a creative and poetic way to view, juxtapose and interpret world events from divergent international news sources.

I am working on expanding the app into an interactive installation and would like to present it around the November, 2016 U.S. election. For the installation, an iPad station/stand would be placed atop a disk in the center of the gallery that mirrors the splash screen of the app. The iPad image will be projected onto the wall filling the space. As viewers interact with the iPad, the projection changes in real-time displaying current headlines. I envision people gathering around the user to watch the interactions and rotating who is in control or the 'player'. In a sense, the audience will have some idea of the player's political views based on which words are deleted or how they are strung together, and could even serve as a starting point for a discussion of how the headlines shape our expectations of public dialogue.

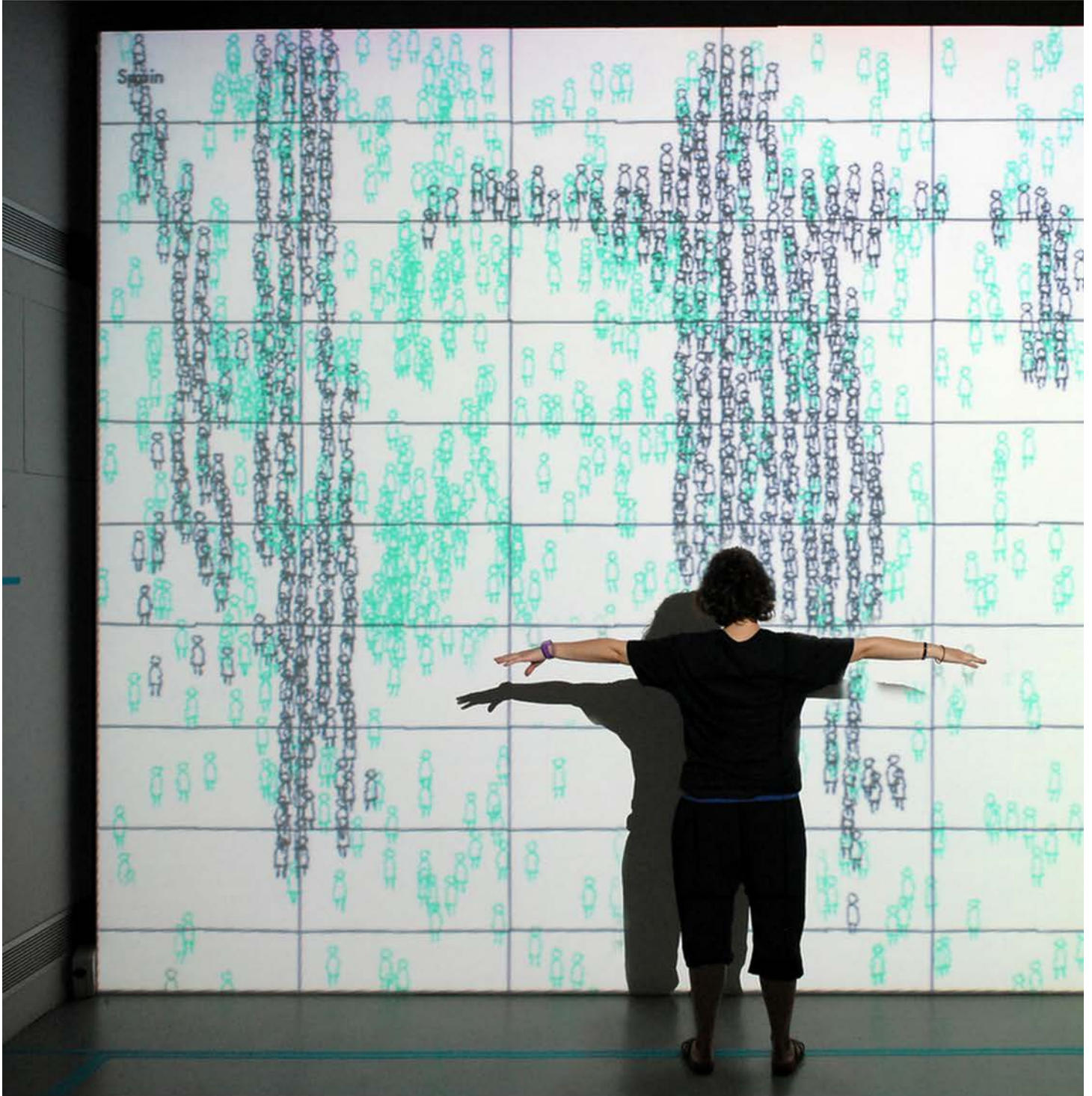
Over these years your works have been exhibited in several occasions, including "HERE AND GONE", at the Culver Center of the Arts. One of the hallmarks of your practice is the capability to create direct involvement with the viewers, who are urged to evolve from a condition of mere spectatorship. So before leaving this conversation we would like to pose a question about the nature of the relationship of your art with your audience. Do you consider the issue of audience reception as being a crucial component of your decision-making process, in terms of what type of language is used in a particular context?

One of the reasons I pursued net art was because it provided an alternative to the commercial art scene and its emphasis on unique objects. It was a place where I could create projects without interference or compromise and reach diverse international audiences without conforming to any rules. What also thrilled me about making art for the web was that it could exist outside a gallery space: I saw it as new type of public art.





Here and Gone, Culver Center of the Arts, 2015



The Unemployed, Interactive installation, Barcelona



I created my first public art project — again taking a sequence of images originally designed to be seen page by page in a book and enlarged them to mural scale to be installed on a plywood fence that encircled a subway construction site in Hollywood, California. I was especially interested in what happened when people walked around the work, how did the meaning change with the dramatic shift scale, or when it was viewed in the opposite direction? I began to pursue other public art opportunities as it was very satisfying to create works that would be on view indefinitely and became part of the urban fabric.

I think a lot about the different audiences who have access to my work and try to find or create opportunities outside of a gallery — like making net art, artist's books and apps as well as public art that can be viewed by anyone, anytime. Lastly, I am very excited by the possibility that the view completes the work, through their interaction with it, beyond the traditional means of simply looking at it. Choices made by the viewer become significant.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Jody. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving

What I hope to be doing next is presenting my latest app *News Wheel* (www.newswheel.info) as an interactive installation and in the next year I hope to be creating my first augmented reality app in which animations will be visible when the user's device passes over specific sections of an artist's book I will create for the project.

*An interview by Josh Ryder, curator
and Dario Rutigliano, curator*
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