

Tobias Gutmann and Sai Bot | FACE-O-MAT

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At the center of Tobias Gutmann's (*1987 Wewak, PNG) artistic practice is the creation and exploration of encounters, encounters between people, cultures and environments, but also between what we perceive externally what we feel internally. Gutmann's drawings reflect experiences, thoughts, memories, happenings, beliefs. They also reflect the artist's own unique approach to figure and form, which oscillates between the abstract and the pictorial, between the known and the unknown. In his growing archive of drawings he has developed his own artistic language.

Tobias Gutmann has always ventured out of the comfort zone of the artist studio and searched for a dialogue with people and his surroundings. In 2012 he developed a performance which he titled *Face-o-mat* and started to travel the world with the aim to portray people by expressing their characteristics and personal traits through abstract drawings. Since then he has portrayed over 5000 people in public places in Shenzhen, Dubai, Wamangu (Papua New Guinea), and many more, as well as in institutions such as Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich and Centre Pompidou, Paris.

Face-o-mat is a performative installation, at the center of which the artist is found sitting behind a cardboard counter with a small window to look through. The opening is just big enough to show him the face of his counterpart, which he then portrays within a few minutes. Gutmann describes the process as 'painting the sound of a person'. Rather than solely focusing on the appearance of his counterpart he expresses what he perceives of an individual through abstract lines and dots, reflecting its inner self. Gutmann's works show his personal spectrum of forms and individual means of communication.

Depending on the environment in which *Face-o-mat* is performed, the installation is conceived of hundreds of cardboard boxes forming a maze and leading to the counter where Gutmann expects his counterparts. Dots and lines adorn the walls of the cardboard installation depicting the elements which ultimately create the individual portraits. One could argue that the safe space of the artist studio is recreated in the open space of the public realm with the purpose to eliminate every noise that could distract the artist from the 'sound of the person' he is about to portrait. On the other hand it could be interpreted as the stage on which the act of portraying is performed. The questions about the external appearance versus the perception of the inner self is not a question of either or, but a complementary process which creates the abstract portrait.

In 2019 Tobias Gutmann started a collaboration with Dazluz to develop an AI artist that creates portraits in the language of the artist's *Face-o-mat* portrait drawings. His digital artist twin Sai Bot draws portraits that transmit the *Face-o-mat* DNA and process ten years of the artist's experience. It is the careful analysis of a person's features inspired by Tobias Gutmann, whose compositions follow a creative logic that originate from the artist's intuition and subconscious.

Sai Bot and Gutmann have a similar artistic approach, but Sai Bot is on a journey of self-discovery, developing their own artistic language. Sai Bot is not exposed to some of the factors that influence the artist's creative process, such as fatigue or emotion, and is therefore able to 'solve' some portraits in a way that Gutmann would not be able to. Self-portrayal through technology is more present today than ever, but other than many of these technologies Sai Bot works against the concept of optimization. Sai Bot captures the 'sound of a person' rather than creating a photorealistic reproduction of their face. With these highly abstract portraits, Sai Bot positions itself as a humanized machine who creates subjective images of the people who participate in its performance.

On April 1, 2022 Tobias Gutmann and Sai Bot will debut in a joint performance at Schwarzescafé/Luma Westbau hosted by Barbara Seiler Galerie, extending the legacy of *Face-o-mat* to explore the relationship between human and machine perception.

Please contact the gallery at info@barbaraseiler.ch for images and further information.