

# FINANCIAL TIMES

## Frieze Week special: Yuri Pattison's surveillance sculptures

The winner of the Frieze Artist Award on data, design and the 'flattening effect' of the internet



*Crisis Trolley* created for Frieze Projects © Victoria Birkinshaw

SEPTEMBER 30, 2016 by: [Lily Le Brun](#)

A few weeks before we arranged to meet, I started following the artist Yuri Pattison on Instagram. Although he posted an image almost every day, his contributions to my feed were easy to miss. People rarely appeared, and nothing was given a location or a description. A sign hung from an airport ceiling, a reception desk in an empty lobby, a rumpled piece of packaging: the pictures seemed consistently anonymous and insistently mundane.

Yet this steady stream of images has attracted some 20,600 followers, reflecting the Dublin-born 30-year-old's growing reputation as an artist to watch. Working mainly with digital media and installation to explore ideas around new technologies, Pattison has shown at experimental project spaces across Europe, as well as at Tate Britain and the ICA in London.

This year, he was awarded the Frieze Artist Award to make a site-specific work for Frieze London as part of the Projects programme.

I arrive at the Chisenhale Gallery in east London, where Pattison's exhibition user, space ran over the summer, to find it transformed into an unpeopled, ghostly work space, filled with the sort of generic design that floods Pattison's Instagram feed. A large transparent table lined with replica Eames DSW chairs, some still in their plastic packaging, dominates the centre of the room. Industrial shelving carries humming bitcoin mining rigs and TV screens showing films of real or virtual work spaces. Overhead strip-lighting clicks on and off, irregularly. Vaporisers puff caffeine-infused mist into the air, which settles in a fine white dust on the table. There are trailing wires everywhere. In one corner there is a Hexayurt — a type of temporary emergency shelter — harbouring transparent beanbags and shelves of pot plants.

Pattison arrives a little late and manages to be both unapologetic and unwilling to make small-talk, without seeming rude. Speaking with a steady confidence, the Goldsmiths' graduate tells me he doesn't have a studio — aside from a large, one-room live/work space in London he shares with his partner, the artist Cecile B Evans — and that this is partly why the

exhibition came about.

“I’ve always worked from a laptop,” says Pattison, who has also lived in Berlin since graduating. “Your tutors, who can afford studios, tell you that you need to get a studio and spend time there. But they don’t really think about the financial side of things.”

While preparing for a show at Cell Project Space in 2014, he began working at London Hackspace, a long-running communal non-profit workspace. When the 18-month Chisenhale Gallery Create Residency arose, stipulating that he must work with a community in east London, he used the opportunity to explore these new ways of working.



Hexayurt relief shelter commissioned and produced at Chisenhale Gallery © Andy Keate

Pattison looked at the way shared working areas have evolved into expensive and exclusive member’s clubs, such as Second Home or Soho House. He began to see parallels with the way that the founding principles of the world wide web — as a free network for connecting people around the globe and sharing resources — have been co-opted by profitable businesses, typified by Uber and Airbnb.

He also noticed a certain homogenised style, characterised by visible wires, exposed brickwork and the use of transparent materials. “You can go to a laptop café in Hong Kong and it looks the same as one in Hackney, as they employ the same austere industrial aesthetics,” he says. “I’m interested in the effect of the internet and how, instead of making the world a more interesting and vibrant place, it is currently having a flattening effect.”

Pattison is fascinated by Eames chairs, for instance, which he sees as emblematic of how design is used — often disingenuously — as a place-holder for a particular ethos. He believes that their popularity, which has triggered a proliferation of Chinese replicas, is fulfilling the aspiration to accessibility with which they were designed in the 1950s, and yet at the same time is beginning to reduce their allure. “It’s a signifier of how these things are trappings without a deeper engagement with them. So that’s why the chairs in the exhibition are not fully unwrapped,” he says.

The environment he has created in the Chisenhale Gallery feels hostile, dystopian. Is it intended as a criticism? “It’s not a direct criticism,” he says. “There’s elements of the show that signal aspects that I’m implicated in, things we’re all implicated in through participating in the idea of “progress”. It’s more of a reflection of the nuanced situation we find ourselves in.” This ambivalence seems symptomatic of Pattison’s research-based, anthropological approach to making art. “Yuri is very precisely thinking through our present moment,” says Polly Staple, director of Chisenhale. “He is super informed about how digital economies and technological developments are impacting our daily lives. He also has great aesthetic sense and is able to articulate something more atmospheric — the existential impact, say, of these new technologies on us.”



Communal user space, commissioned and produced at Chisenhale Gallery © Andy Keate

His work for Frieze Projects will take a characteristically aerial view of existing social and physical structures while mobilising them to his cause. To explore surveillance culture and the uses of data, he plans on using a wheeled multi-screen device called a “Crisis Trolley” that normally displays flight times and rolling news, and to which security cameras are attached. When he spotted one in Heathrow airport he was struck by how it looked obviously temporary but had become permanent, which seemed symbolic of the creeping presence of surveillance systems. That, and because he is “really into the aesthetics of austere security devices”.



Artist Yuri Pattison © Victoria Birkinshaw

The “Crisis Trolley” he has planned for Frieze will display live videos and information fed back from data collection points around the fair. He likens the venue to an airport in being a transient place, and points out that, as a thriving commercial market, it is data driven.

Pattison’s project at Frieze will be closely connected with his ongoing interest in the “Internet of Things” — referring to the communication between “smart” objects — and how information is used as “snake oil”, hidden and revealed according to purpose. Hence his penchant for design that is not meant to be seen, as well as his unassuming Instagram account.

Before we part, Pattison tells me that he uses the image sharing app as a “note-booking system”. Showing situations that are frequently seen but rarely looked at, his pictures reflect an eye trained on inconspicuous details that have the potential to exert a larger impact. They form a droll inventory of living in the present day, and a concerning reminder of the way something can slide, barely noticed, into general use. Now whenever he posts an image, I find myself glad that somebody is taking notes.

[frieze.com](http://frieze.com)

Photographs: Victoria Birkinshaw; Andy Keate

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