



THE SANTA CLARA

SCU'S Weekly Newspaper Since 1922

[HOME](#)[ABOUT US](#)[NEWS](#)[OPINION](#)[SPORTS](#)[SCENE](#)

MUSIC · SCENE

Babbling and Blinking at Local Art Institute

by *Ethan Beberness* May 13, 2018

All eyes on the audience in Chris Eckert's new, dystopian art exhibition

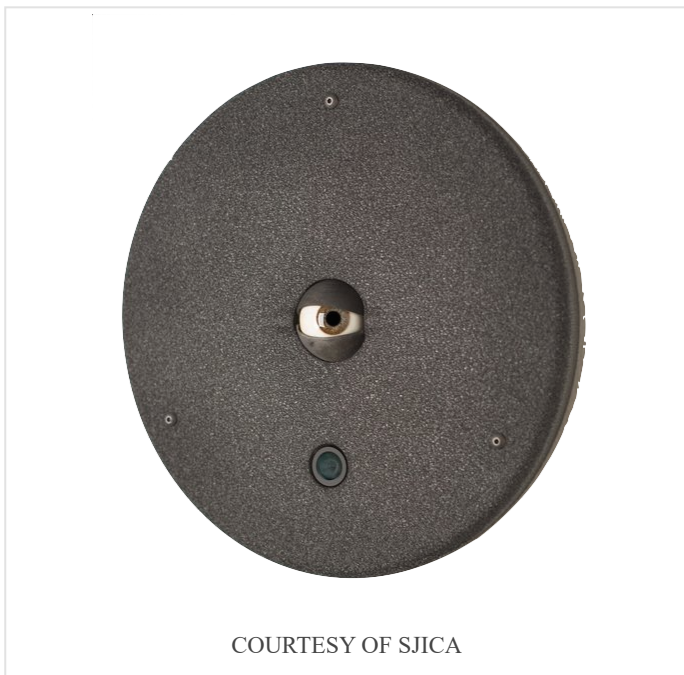
Ethan Beberness
The Santa Clara
May 10, 2018

MINOR IN JOURNALISM

Advertisement



Journalism matters. Now more than ever. The Journalism Minor at SCU gives you the skills you



I sat alone on the floor in the middle of the gallery, with eight independently focused eyes watching me from behind. In front of me, piles of paper spilled onto the floor as wall-mounted machines outfitted with pens scribbled in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and German.

The eyes squeaked as they darted between myself and two newcomers. The writing machines beeped, and the electronic grind of the pens mimicking human handwriting onto unravelling spools of paper was audible above the newcomers' conversation.

This surreal moment took place in the gallery dedicated to Santa Clara alumnus Chris Eckert's installations of "Blink" and "Babel," two works in which Eckert examines society's relationship with technology and the divulgence of personal information we casually agree to when signing up for media services such as Facebook, SnapChat or Uber.

"Blink" is a group of eight eerily realistic eyes installed in individual panels on one wall of the gallery.

Each eye has a set of eyelids as well, allowing it to express a range of emotions, including surprise, suspicion and boredom, according to Eckert's website. As visitors inspect the gallery, the eyes follow them using face-tracking software.

"Interacting with one eye is interesting, but imagine a public space populated with numerous eye sculptures—all of them following you, watching your every move," Eckert

need to investigate, educate, and enlighten.

[More Journalism Minor Info](#)

ORDER THE REDWOOD NOW

Advertisement



The Redwood Yearbook is your repository of SCU memories. Order now online.

[Buy Now](#)

LISTEN TO KSCU 103.3 FM

Advertisement



KSCU 103.3 FM is Santa Clara University's student-run community radio station.

[Listen Now](#)

RECENT ARTICLES IN THE SANTA CLARA

A New President and a New Era May 21, 2019

Cleaning Up Club Criteria May 21, 2019

CAMPUS SAFETY May 21, 2019

speculates in a statement on his website. That mental image is beyond unsettling.

“Babel” is another wall installation featuring twenty writing machines programmed by Eckert to mimic twenty unique styles of human handwriting.

Each machine uses a pen to constantly scrawl phrases specific to the country in which the language is spoken whenever the gallery is open.

On the piles of paper that writhe beneath the machines, visitors can see past sentences the machines have written after finding content through a program that scans for “phrases from the Internet that are pertinent to each language’s country of origin,” according to a statement by the artist.

Nothing in the exhibit’s description mentions the room around the corner of the end of the gallery.

In the room, a projector displays the video feeds of each camera with just enough delay that, when you enter the room, you briefly watch yourself experience the exhibit, unaware that you are being monitored.

Although I was not told that I was being recorded, I guess I shouldn’t have been surprised. I continued to sit and watch the people in the gallery walk up to the eyes and inspect them, even after I was no longer in the video stream.

Until I reached the unmentioned room at the end of the exhibit, Eckert’s work didn’t feel like a critique so much as an observation. The brochure that accompanied the exhibit made Eckert’s intention more clear with the following quote from George Orwell’s “1984”:

“The choice for mankind lies between freedom and happiness and for the great bulk of the population, happiness is better.”

For those unfamiliar with Orwell’s work, “1984” takes place in a futuristic, dystopian society where the government constantly monitors its citizens. “Blink” is a play on the surveillance system that Orwell’s fictional government employs, and “Babel” is a reflection of the records kept by the government regarding the activities of citizens.

While, obviously, the Internet may lead to a more saturated, cookie-cutter world full of people pursuing the same dreams

Mercy Beyond Borders in the Bronco Backyard
May 21, 2019

Bronco Ventures Accelerator Launches May 21,
2019

ASG Looks to the Past and Considers the Future
May 21, 2019

Get’cha Head in the Game for Serial Homicide
May 21, 2019

Bringing the Band Back to Santa Clara May 21,
2019

Fresh “love_stories” for Today’s Under-40s May
21, 2019

Beyond College Graduation: The Defining
Decade
May 21, 2019

Regulate Big Tech, Preserve Democracy May 21,
2019

Welcoming Nine New Hall of Fame Members
May 21, 2019

Face-to-Face With John Carpino May 19, 2019

U.S. Stomps South Africa May 16, 2019

Lecturers and Adjuncts Speak Up May 13, 2019

TWITTER

Tweets by @TheSantaClara

The Santa Clara Retweeted



Santa Clara Univ
@SantaClaraUniv

Exciting news from Santa Clara! SCU is thrilled to have been ranked No. 51 - in the top 10% - among 650 top-tier universities in the recently released America’s Top College’s rankings from @Forbes. Head to bit.ly/ForbesSCU2019 to see the full rankings! #SCUProud #FutureofSCU

the same way, there are benefits for rebels and nonconformists on the Internet as well. In using the above phrase to consider the effects of technology, Eckert is missing something very important—the role that social media has played in activism since the advent of Facebook and Twitter. Entire revolutions, such as the January 25 Revolution in Egypt or the Green Revolution in Iran, have been organized online.

It's difficult to resist technology and monitoring. Right now, I'm typing this article into a Google Doc. I just received an invitation to a friend's birthday party via Facebook. Last night, I posted a photo to Instagram and communicated with friends using SnapChat.

All these services have access to an enormous amount of information about me and my online behavior. I've consented to their possession of that information because I've chosen to follow the socially normal route to pursuing happiness.

At the end of "1984," the protagonist's hope for rebellion fails. Big Brother, the symbolic name for the government's surveillance system, is so pervasive and complete that any attempt at subversion is immediately spotted and thwarted.

Sure, you can delete your Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. But good luck trying to be completely untraceable, especially as a young person entering the workforce. You need all the connections you can get.

And while Orwell was worried about the government monitoring its citizens, we've gladly given corporations the legal authority to do just that.

Contact Ethan Beberness at ebeberness@scu.edu or call (408) 554-4852.

Aug 20, 2019

**The Santa Clara**

@TheSantaClara

#TSCalumni in action!

<https://twitter.com/scucomm/status/1151637332014977024>

Jul 17, 2019

The Santa Clara Retweeted

**SCU Communication**

@scucomm

Communication students and faculty work to promote environmental justice. "Environmental justice communities don't just want cleaner water and air. They want past injustices corrected. They want more democracy." scu.edu/cas/communicat...

Democracy and Environment...

SCU students are working with ...
scu.edu

Jul 11, 2019

**The Santa Clara**

@TheSantaClara

Replying to @TheSantaClara

Don't put too much on your plate, focus on what you love, and take classes that interest you. Santa Clara University provides its students with amazing opportunities to learn from top professors and take interesting classes.

-DJ Shakib, SCU Sophomore

Jun 14, 2019