



COLLECTOR DAILY

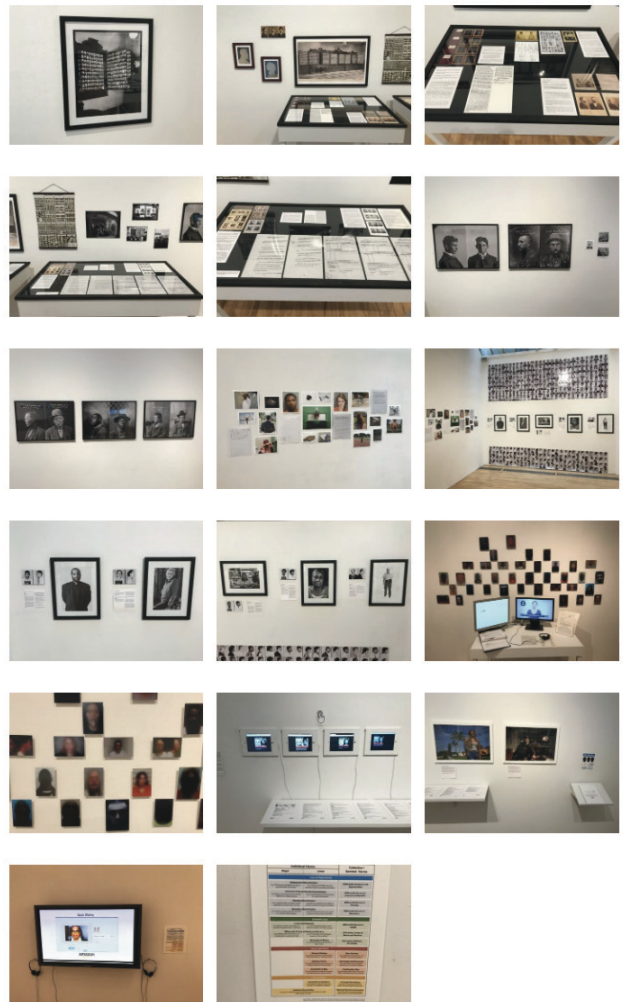
By Loring Knoblauch / In Museums / October 11, 2019

JTF (just the facts): A group show containing the works of 19 artists/organizations, variously framed, and installed against white walls in the main gallery space. The exhibit was curated by Elizabeth Breiner.

The following artists/organizations have been included in the show:

- Richard Hoe Lawrence/Jacob A. Riis: 1 digital print of archival image, original c1890, sized roughly 29×24 inches
- Francis Galton: 2 digital prints of archival images, original c1886, each sized 11×8 inches
- Photographer unknown: 1 gelatin silver print, early 20th century, sized roughly 13×6 inches
- Photographer unknown: 1 digital print of archival image, original 1899, sized 24×36 inches
- Alphonse Bertillon: 1 digital print of archival image, original c1909, sized 24×18 inches
- Jacob A. Riis: 2 digital prints of archival images, originals c1890, c1895, sized roughly 13×16, 8×12 inches
- Photographer unknown: 2 digital prints of archival images, originals c1910-1915, sized roughly 7×10 inches
- Arne Svenson: 5 digital reproduction of glass plate negatives from early 20th century, 1997/2019, sized 17×24 inches each
- Cesare Lombroso: 3 digital prints of archival images, originals 1897, each sized roughly 3×4, 5×5 inches
- Zora J. Murff: 23 digital color photographs, 2013-2015, dimensions variable
- Eric Etheridge: 5 digital print diptychs, 1968/2013-2019, each sized roughly 6×8, 20×15 inches, 2 digital images on vinyl, 1968/2013-2019, sized 50×150, 25×150 inches
- Paolo Cirio: mixed media installation including photographic prints on metal, digital video, paper, legal documents, 2016
- ProPublica: digital interface graphics, 2016, *Sample COMPAS Risk Assessment Questionnaire*, 2011
- Stephen Maturen: 1 digital photograph, 2016, sized 16×24 inches
- Josh Ritchie: 1 digital photograph, 2016, sized 16×24 inches
- Heather Dewey-Hagborg: 1 booklet adapted from *The New Inquiry*, 2015,
- Joy Buolamwini: 2 digital videos, 2018, 3:32 min, 4:59 min

(Installation shots below.)



Comments/Context: As artificial intelligence software systems used for facial recognition are being more widely deployed by governments, security services, large corporations, and even merchants, the potential failure points, biases, and power imbalances of such systems are starting to come into clearer view. Facial recognition software is essentially a pattern matching tool – “learning” from thousands of images of faces, the software starts to see patterns that are then analyzed and correlated, the resulting framework allowing new pictures to be assessed and categorized based on what the system already knows. Photography lies at the very heart this process – pictures of people feed the algorithms, and the relationships and measurements of visual characteristics are the metrics used to evaluate new images.

Using the shapes of peoples faces to determine their place in society should sound ominously familiar, and the smartly edited group show *The Criminal Type* provides a succinct summary of the evolution of this kind of thinking. Mixing quasi-scientific and artistic approaches, the show creates a framework for understanding how photography has been used both to attempt to define criminality and to indelibly mark those who have broken the law.

The story starts back in the 19th century, with the broad efforts to apply scientific observation to the prediction of criminality. Two silhouettes (one male, one female) from the collection of the British eugenicist Francis Galton mark the beginning of using "objective" portraiture to predict criminal behavior or "inferior" types. The Italian physician Cesare Lombroso took this idea further, making precise (and strangely surreal) measurements of the faces of criminals, looking for evidence of biological inferiority. And the Parisian police officer Alphonse Bertillon then expanded and codified these principles into a standard system in the 1890s, where the mug shot (front and side views) became the critical tool for assessing offenders. The show includes a densely illustrated poster with categories of eyes, noses, ears, contours of heads, and general hairiness that might be a match for criminal behavior.

One of the indirect consequences of this push toward formalization and standardized record keeping was that the mug shot became ubiquitous in the criminal justice system. An 1890s image from Jacob Riis shows the mug shot collection at New York City police headquarters – the so-called "rogue's gallery" of the convicted – and this public display soon evolved to include the accused and "most wanted". Fast forward to the present, and the digital mugshot has taken on an unwieldy life of its own. Paolo Cirio's *Obscurity* project tracks the problem, finding that Internet websites are scraping police precinct records, publishing the images, and then charging those implicated for the removal of the photographs. His installation blurs an array of mug shots (thereby returning a sense of privacy to those depicted) and exposes the rights infractions and scams taking place. With images effectively circulating forever on the Internet, the mug shots have become a form of never-ending punishment (regardless of whether the accused was guilty or not) – there is seemingly no escape or recourse from the negative exposure.

Two other recent artistic projects seek to get behind the physical facade of the mug shot. Eric Etheridge matches mug shots of the 1960s Freedom Riders with new portraits of the same people, adding in interview snippets that update their personal stories. The pairings unpack the idea of permanent criminality, showing how these activists went on to lead lives of purpose and accomplishment. And Arne Svenson approaches the legacy of the mug shot from a different angle, seeing aesthetic sensitivity in a group of early 1900s mugshots from California made by a local studio photographer. Enlarged and re-presented more as artworks, the faces of those marked as murderers or thieves are seen with attentive compassion, recalibrating our perception of their humanity.

The last work in the show most fully brings us into the uneven reality of an AI-controlled contemporary world. Joy Buolamwini's video *AI, Ain't I a Woman?* tests AI software with various images of famous black women: Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Serena Williams, and others, even a vintage portrait of Sojourner Truth. The software repeatedly identifies these easily-recognized women as male, exposing the biases of race and gender that have inadvertently been baked into the algorithms. And in a sense, we thus come full circle back to the problems of the mug shot and the so-called scientific profiling of people in photographs – the technologies may have radically changed, but foundation flaws with categorizing people based on their resemblance to (or adherence to) some abstract model are largely the same.

This small exhibit does a terrific job of succinctly connecting the dots between past and present, seeing the echoes of 19th century failures reproduced in the futuristic tools of today. It smartly reminds us of the limits of what a rigid photograph like a mug shot can actually tell us, and of the perils we face when we collectively use such photographs without enough nuance and understanding.

Collector's POV: Since this is effectively a museum show, there are of course no posted prices, and given the group show format, we will forgo our usual discussion of gallery representation relationships and secondary market histories.



Read more about: [Arne Svenson](#), [Eric Etheridge](#), [Jacob Riis](#), [Paolo Cirio](#), [Zora J. Murff](#), [Apexart](#)

<https://collectordaily.com/the-criminal-type-apexart/>