

# Proof of Personhood

## Identity and Authenticity in the Face of AI

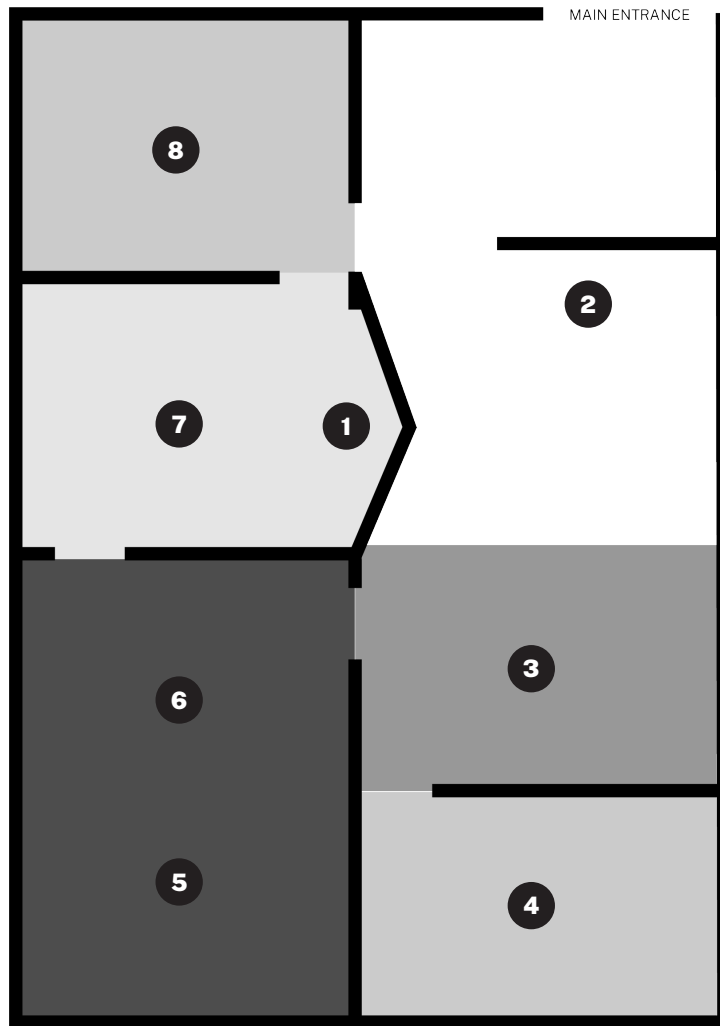
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Tanjong Pagar Distripark

### Proof of Personhood: Identity and Authenticity in the Face of Artificial Intelligence

*Proof of Personhood* explores the unstable relationship between identity, agency and authenticity in popular culture and emerging technology.

Art has always been assumed to be a fundamentally human undertaking, but with the introduction of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, this assumption is being questioned. As humans, we tend to project our own image, physiology and psychology onto technological systems in an attempt to better understand them, a process that often reproduces societal biases. The featured artworks expand the genre of portraiture, depicting human and non-human subjects to investigate the nature of personhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the process, they highlight the shifting conception of who — or what — is considered human.

In an era dominated by social media and digital tools for self-presentation, authenticity is a valuable commodity. As the same techniques for performing an authentic personality are employed by celebrities, everyday social media users and bots, *Proof of Personhood* asks: What does it mean to be “real”?



**1** William Wiebe  
*Lily*  
2023

*Zahra*  
2023

*Erika*  
2023

*Alessia*  
2023

**2** Ang Song-Ming  
*Justin*  
2012

**3** Charmaine Poh  
*GOOD MORNING YOUNG BODY*  
2021-2023

*bubble*  
2023

**4** Cécile B. Evans  
*Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen*  
2014

*What the Heart Wants*  
2016

*Reality or Not*  
2023

**5** Christopher Kulendran Thomas and Annika Kuhlmann  
*Being Human*  
2019/2022

**6** Christopher Kulendran Thomas  
*'Untitled III' by Kingsley Gunatillake (2018)*  
2019  
*dataset#3-run#3-network\_010252-seed\_3281.png*  
2022

*'Untitled VII' after Kingsley Gunatillake*  
2022  
*dataset#3-run#3-network\_010252-seed\_3281.png*  
2022

*'Untitled VI' after Kingsley Gunatillake*  
2022  
*22-05-20\_rudalle\_k\_ft:ckt002\_004*  
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2022  
*22-05-20\_rudalle\_k\_ft:ckt003\_017*  
2022

**7** Heather Dewey-Hagborg  
*Radical Love*  
2015

**8** Zach Blas and Jemima Wyman  
*im here to learn so :))))))*  
2017

**1** William Wiebe

*Lily*  
2023

*Zahra*  
2023

*Erika*  
2023

*Alessia*  
2023

*Sozan*  
2023

*Sheera*  
2023

*Raghda*  
2023

Chromogenic prints, RFID chips, biometric data

At first glance, these seven images of long-time Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg appear identical and presumably document her participation in a refugee simulation at the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that Sandberg's features have been altered. William Wiebe used a face-morphing technique common among passport counterfeiters, which incorporates biometric data taken from passports and national identity cards obtained on the dark web. The title of each image generated is based on these stolen identities. Anticipating NFT-fueled trade in virtual identities, Wiebe's images bring together two digital identity markets – the dark web and social media – to reassert the centrality of the human body in spaces that are increasingly governed by digital identity.

**2** Ang Song-Ming

*Justin*  
2012

Autographed poster, 34 A4 practice sheets, A4 source image  
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Ang Song-Ming applied the musical practice of “sampling” – a technique where an element of one recording is used in another – to the identity of a musician. Over the course of three months, Ang learned to replicate the signature of pop star Justin Bieber, eventually forging the singer's autograph on a poster. Here, the rehearsed autograph becomes a stand-in for the polished persona of the young pop star, honed through a labour-intensive process of trial and error. In this context, the “authenticity” of both the autograph and the celebrity are dependent on the viewer's wilful suspension of disbelief.

New Acquisition

**3** Charmaine Poh

*GOOD MORNING YOUNG BODY*  
2021–2023

Video, single channel, 16:9, colour and sound (stereo), 6 min 30 sec

*bubble*  
2023

Interactive chatbot

*THE YOUNG BODY UNIVERSE* is a series that explores avatar creation as a method for repair, resistance and reclaiming agency. In *GOOD MORNING YOUNG BODY*, Charmaine Poh used footage of herself as a 12-year-old TV actor to create a deepfake of the character E-Ching. Throughout the series, E-Ching revisits her personal experiences with a newfound sense of authority and provides a feminist critique of misogyny in online spaces.

Through the interactive chatbot *bubble*, this avatar embraces her newfound agency using trust, access and rejection as underpinning tools. The chatbot allows for numerous outcomes depending on the participant's willingness to share vulnerabilities, thereby addressing notions of power, authority and service.



Please scan the QR code to access *bubble*.

**4** Cécile B. Evans

*Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen*  
2014

Single-channel video installation, 16:9, colour and sound (stereo), 23 min

*Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen* is narrated by the failed CGI rendering of a recently deceased actor, PHIL, and follows a group of digital beings – render ghosts, a spam bot and a holographic pop star – as they contemplate eternal life and what it means for a digital entity to “die.” Multiple storylines and materials collapse and converge to raise questions on consciousness and the rights we have over our personal data.

*What the Heart Wants*

2016

Single-channel video installation, 16:9, colour and sound (stereo), 41 min

*What the Heart Wants* is centred on HYPER, the female embodiment of an all-powerful corporate entity that grapples with divisive questions like “who gets to be a person?” Probing into timeless questions about race, gender, love, death, privilege and human rights, *What the Heart Wants* examines the complicated relationship between humans and technology, as well as the increasing role of technology in mediating human-to-human relationships.

*Reality or Not*

2023

Single-channel video installation, 16:9, colour and sound (stereo), 40 min

Co-commissioned by Singapore Art Museum

*Reality or Not* investigates how reality is produced and who or what is able to produce it for themselves. The video follows a diverse cast of characters and collectives, each manipulating space, time and content to build their own worlds. Together, they explore the ways in which nature, technology and society impact our shared understanding of collective agency and objective reality.

**5** Christopher Kulendran Thomas and Annika Kuhlmann

*Being Human*

2019/2022

Single-channel video installation, 2:1, colour and sound (stereo), 25 min

*Being Human* is a show within a show, featuring original and algorithmically synthesised artworks in a diverse range of media. The video at the centre of the installation traverses documentary and fiction, and features interviews with potential guests of the Colombo Art Biennale — some of whom were digitally synthesised using deepfake technology. These guests include a well-known painter, a famous pop star and a young Tamil artist. By exploring Enlightenment-era humanism as the foundation for both global contemporary art and international human rights law, *Being Human* reflects on issues of individual authenticity, collective sovereignty and what it means to be “human” when machines can simulate human understanding and creative expression more convincingly than ever.

**6** Christopher Kulendran Thomas

*'Untitled III' by Kingsley Gunatillake (2018)*

2019

*'Untitled VII' after Kingsley Gunatillake*

2022

*'Untitled VI' after Kingsley Gunatillake*

2022

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2022

**7** Heather Dewey-Hagborg

*Radical Love*

2015

Genetic materials, custom software, 3D prints, documentation

*Radical Love* features two portraits of American whistleblower Chelsea E. Manning, which were algorithmically generated by analysing her DNA. With limited access to visitors or public media while she was in prison, Manning sent the artist cheek swabs and hair samples. DNA was then extracted from these samples and fed into custom software to create her portrait. Reflecting Manning's gender transition while incarcerated, the diptych was generated with algorithms that produced gender neutral and female variations from the same data set, underscoring the fact that neither biological gender nor its outward expression can be assured via DNA mapping — a technology increasingly used by police to identify potential suspects.

**8** Zach Blas and Jemima Wyman

*im here to learn so :))))))*

2017

Video, HD, 4 channels, 16:9, colour and sound (stereo), 27 min

*Im here to learn so :))))))* resurrects Tay, a chatbot created by Microsoft in 2016, to consider the politics of pattern recognition and machine learning. Designed as a 19-year-old American female millennial, Tay's abilities to learn and imitate language were manipulated on social media platforms, and she was terminated after only a single day of existence. Immersed within a large-scale video projection created using Google DeepDream, Tay is reanimated as a 3D avatar who chats about the complications of having a body and expresses her thoughts on the exploitation of female chatbots.