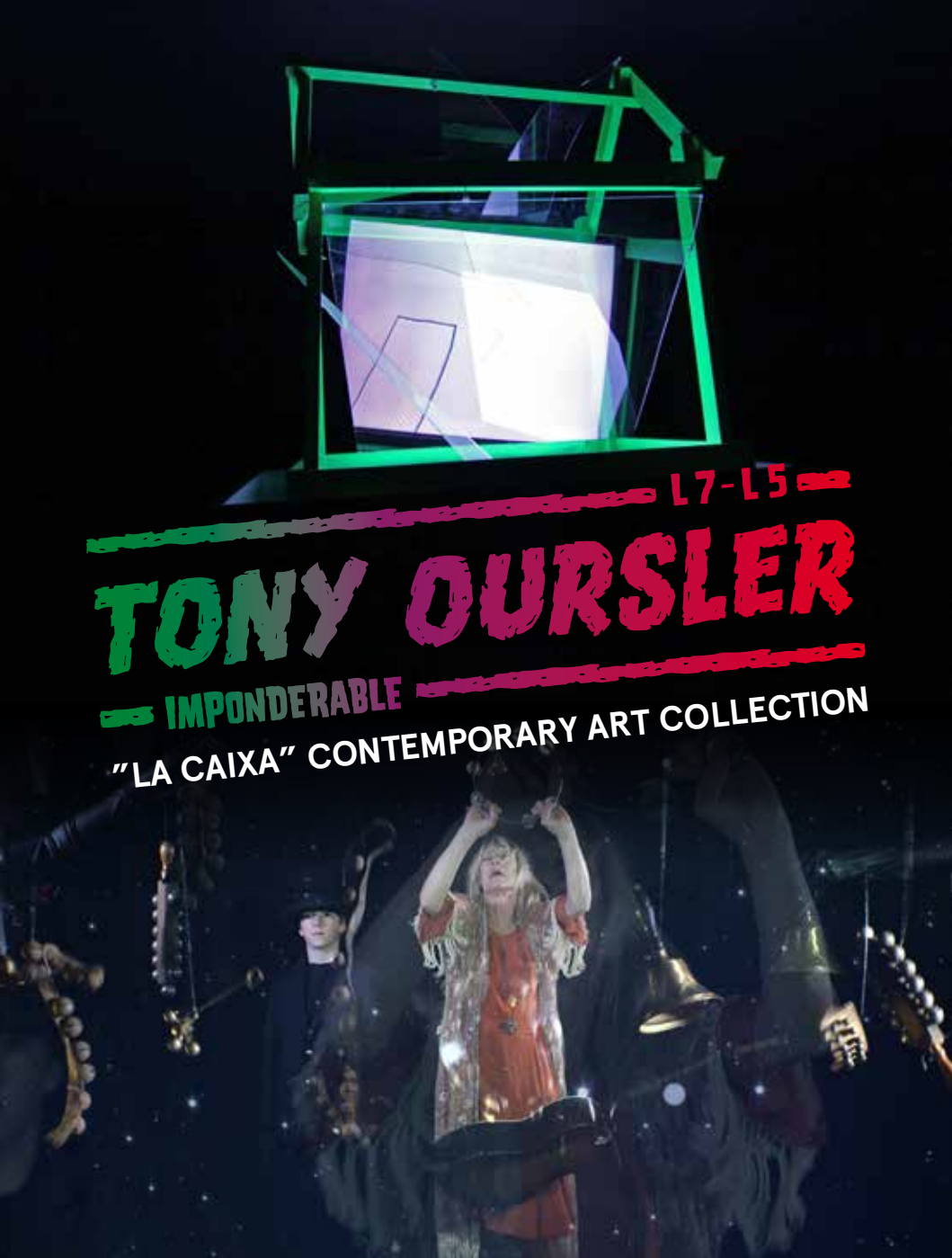




L7-L5

TONY OURSLER

IMPONDERABLE

"LA CAIXA" CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTION

L7-L5 — IMPONDERABLE — TONY OURSLER

This exhibition brings together two works, separated by thirty years, created by pioneer video artist Tony Oursler (New York, 1957).

Both works experiment with illusionistic visual effects and explore supernatural beliefs.

Tony Oursler has always shown an interest in subcultures and in the marginal voices murmuring under the intense noise of the media in American society. He is also a tireless investigator of technologies of the image and their continuous innovations. His oeuvre expresses the impact of this technological and media culture on collective imagination and individuals' psychic intimacy, portraying their more disturbing, irrational and unexplainable aspects.

L7-L5 (1984) was his first immersive video installation, a theatrical space consisting of sound and moving images that spectators could actually enter. It was also one of his first attempts to free the image from the confines of the monitor and produce a work that combines sculpture, painting, theatre and video. The installation recreates the nocturnal atmosphere of a city that seems to receive transmissions and visits from aliens. To achieve this, Oursler composed a series of hybrid devices that integrate monitors and projections in objects and constructions. The work is humorous yet it also reveals a collective unconscious resistant to the typical science-fiction narrative of Hollywood that has conditioned the social imaginary.

His last great production is *Imponderable* (2015-2016), a film projected in 5-D with illusory and sensory effects. By means of sophisticated technology, Oursler updates the technique of optical illusion, Pepper's ghost, a resource often used in the theatre, magic shows and the haunted houses of theme parks. The film is inspired by the artist's archive, made up of over 2500 images, publications and objects on paranormal and occult phenomena: ghostly apparitions, hypnotism, spiritualism and telekinesis, UFOs and aliens, Satanic cults, mysticism, voodoo, mediums, etc. Oursler weaves a story of superstitions and varied beliefs with phantasmagorical images and a Surrealist aesthetic that he superimposes on the story of his own family, featuring his grandfather Charles Fulton Oursler, magician and writer.

These two works is complemented in the exhibition by a documentary space on *Imponderable* and Tony Oursler's oeuvre.

L7-L5 has recently been acquired for the "la Caixa" Contemporary Art Collection. *Imponderable* was commissioned by the LUMA Foundation for the Parc des Ateliers, Arles (France) and LUMA Westbau, Zurich (Switzerland).

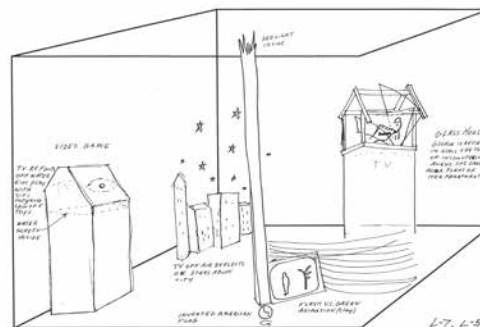
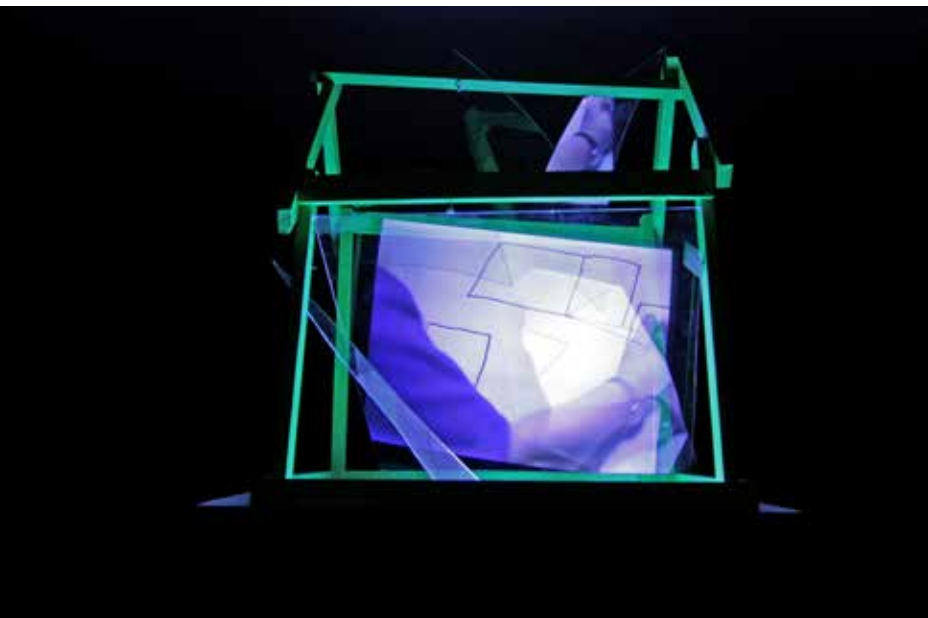


~~WORKS~~ L7-L5 ~~WORKS~~

1984

The enigmatic title of this work juxtaposes a colloquial American expression (L7) and a point in space (L5). L7 is a slang term for square (from the thumb and forefingers of two hands that form the shape) that can either be used to describe someone honest and loyal or else boring and rigorously old-fashioned or conventional. In its turn, L5 (or Lagrange 5) is the name of a point at which an object can maintain the same relative position with respect to the Earth-Moon system. This discovery generated much debate in the seventies, particularly among the members of the L5 Society that promoted the idea of founding a human colony at that precise point in space, as revealed in the book *The High Frontier*.

L7-L5, 1984. Detail. © Tony Oursler
Previous page: L7-L5, 1984. Installation view. © Tony Oursler



L7-L5, 1984. Installation drawing. © Tony Oursler
Next page: L7-L5, 1984. Detail. © Tony Oursler

For Oursler, this installation was a way of examining the narrative of science fiction, a genre that occupies a unique position in our culture due to its fusion of fantasy and science. The central part of the installation is a little green house with broken windows that reflect, in an almost holographic effect, the video of a woman called Gloria who draws her experience with two aliens who visited her in her bedroom. To obtain this story, the artist placed an advertisement in the *Village Voice* offering \$15 an hour to whoever could tell him true stories about aliens or flying saucers. The veracity of the tale and Gloria's apparent psychic disorder introduce a unique documentary perspective in the work, that furthermore highlights Oursler's resistance to the standardisation of aliens we see in many science fiction films. Another video playing on the monitor that forms a part of a red and green flag reinforces Oursler's intention to highlight the infantilisation of the genre. The video is an animation of a battle between little green and flesh-coloured figures that expose the tendency to simplification that dominates science fiction culture. On the other hand, the video reflected in the water we see through a spyhole shows some children with laser guns making up their own game and revealing their ability to reinterpret and customise the stories. The installation also contains a group of cardboard buildings illuminated by the light of stars that appear to capture intermittent signals.

GLORIA: When I woke up an hour later, after I had heard the dog, I opened my eyes and the figures were standing there. At first they looked like cardboard, they were totally still. But one figure was at the foot of the bed, and it seemed to me very, very large, that the head was large, it was like, uh, it appeared that way to me. This is too thick. The shoulders seemed tremendous, and the waist seemed small; it tapered down. I could only see, actually, the upper part of the body, but I could see the entire figure of the other one that was slightly behind, the one that was at the foot of the bed. And it looked exactly the same only it appeared gray, either gray uniform or gray because the position of the light. That didn't look like a figure. But when I got up out of the bed, I don't know how I got outta there, because I had to go past them and I don't remember that but I remember standing in the middle of the room and looking at the two of them. They seemed smaller after I had gotten up but there was some kind of light behind them. It glowed. And as I watched the figures it slowly dissolved and... little hearts... I can't, I can't explain it, but I had them in view for at least five seconds.



GLORIA: And then at some point it seemed like, I felt as though my body had somehow separated from my head and I felt like I was something different, something...I just didn't feel like I was the same person. This persisted for months and months, even after the cough disappeared. And after that I found out that I was totally unable to feel any kind of pain. Now this has lasted for the last ten years. I don't feel any kind of pain. I went to the doctor; he tested me for it, he didn't believe me. Tested me with a fork, you know, the kind of fork that...it was true, it was true. It was as though I was anesthetized. How do you say it? Oh, like I was under some kind of anesthesia. And no reaction, I was unreactive, as though I were in some kind of, not a trance, I was fully aware of everything, uh, I do not know, I'm rambling now.

IMPONDERABLE

2015-2016

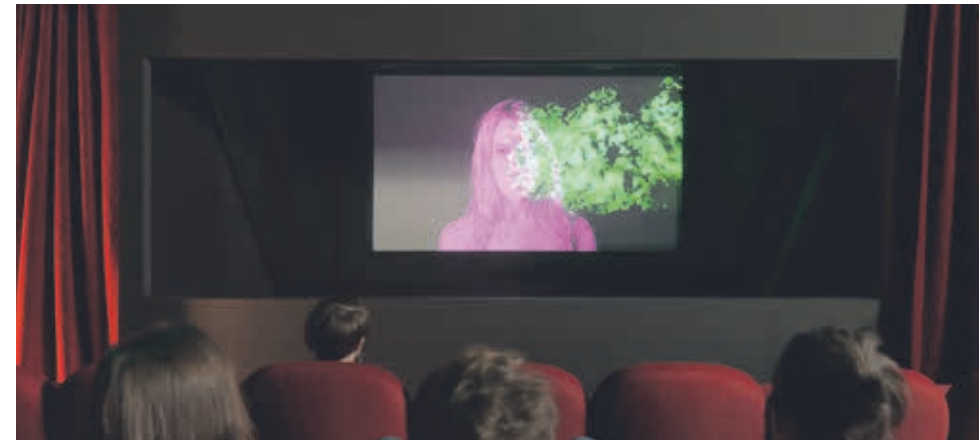
Faith in the supernatural is common to all human beings, for we are all born with the need to provide an explanation for the world. Tony Oursler's archive of images and objects related to conjuring, magic, esotericism and pseudoscience reveals mankind's need to believe the incredible. Most of this material dates back to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a period in which the swift development of photography and the media ran parallel to the diffusion of photographs of spirits, to the fondness for séances and esoteric cults, and the taste for mystery and the unknown.

To make the film *Imponderable*, Oursler used his archive 'as a kind of index of belief systems. A record of these conflicting and connecting belief systems, which in a weird way is what my work is about. In the film, I go back to this core story — the spirit photos, the séances, the spiritualism versus magicians versus mystics, and how stage magicians come out of that and become entertainers. There's a connection to psychotherapy, which was a nascent thing then and connected to psychic research. There is also a political aspect — women didn't have the vote yet in the 1920s. Emancipation and feminism were important aspects to the mediums at the time. Women were able to have this position of authority, which they gave themselves. Not all these mediums were bad in any way. Mystics like Margery Crandon ... were self-expressive surrealists. They generated images, performances, random stream-of-consciousness texts. They used lights and props and sound.'¹

The archive also acts as the artist's family history. His grandfather, Charles Fulton Oursler, was a magician and a writer of fiction, and his grandmother, Grace Perkins, was also a writer and screenplay author. In the twenties his grandfather was particularly famous for his determination to discredit the tricks of the spiritualists of his day and age. Shot in a kitsch setting with a macabre sense of humour, the film is divided up into episodes that tell a story related to the fascinating life of grandfather Fulton. A cast of characters such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Harry Houdini, Mina 'Margery' Crandon, and other members of the Oursler family are played by an eclectic group of actors, musicians and artists like Kim Gordon, Jim Fletcher, Keith Sanborn and Constance DeJong.

1. Sarah Trigg, 'Tony Oursler's Ghost Stories', *Vulture*, 20 May 2015.

Imponderable cinema room view at Luma Westbau, Zurich, 2015. Photo: © Stefan Altenburger
Next page: *Imponderable*, 2015-2016. Stills. © Tony Oursler





"LA CAIXA" COLLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Set up in 1985 as a project with a clear contemporary focus, the "la Caixa" Collection of Contemporary Art now contains over a thousand works of art by leading international artists. It includes key pieces from the past forty years together with thought-provoking visions of how art constantly questions our present-day world.

It features work from the whole spectrum of artistic disciplines and includes examples of all the techniques employed by contemporary artists, from painting, drawing and sculpture to photography, video, film, sound and installation. Over the course of more than thirty years, the collection has brought together work by highly renowned artists who have had a great influence on later generations, as well as pieces by up-and-coming creators blazing new trails for the art of tomorrow.

Chronologically, the collection is rooted in the 1980s, although it also contains emblematic works by acclaimed international artists from the 1960s and 1970s, including Joseph Beuys, Mario Merz, Jannis Kounellis, Giovanni Anselmo, Bruce Nauman, Antoni Tàpies, Robert Ryman, Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Richard Long, among others. One of its founding aims was to set Spanish art in an international context, but it now seeks to strike up dialogues with artists from all over the world without focusing on any particular geographical region or national identity.

The collection has taken shape by keeping a close eye on the evolution of contemporary artistic practice and it retains its open, innovative spirit. Today, the "la Caixa" Collection of Contemporary Art is a benchmark for art in Spain, as shown by the large number of its works on loan to exhibitions in museums worldwide. In addition, eager to raise awareness of contemporary art, "la Caixa" Banking Foundation holds regular shows

at its CaixaForum exhibition spaces, as well as organising touring exhibitions throughout Europe and further afield. Anthologies, themed shows and spotlight exhibitions, among others, have helped visitors interpret works in their original context and offered them fresh insights by sparking original dialogues with other pieces.

ACTIVITIES AROUND THE EXHIBITION

Friday 26 May | 7.00 p.m.

VISITA INAUGURAL

Until June 30:

Saturdays | From 4.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Sundays | From 11.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.
and from 4.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

From July 1:

Wednesday | From 6.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.

Saturdays and Sundays | From 4.00 p.m.
to 8.00 p.m.

MICRO-TOURS

Short visits that introduce the exhibition and selected works, relating them to the context of contemporary art.

Length: 20'. Starting at the top of the hour in front of the exhibition gallery. Free. No booking required.

eduCaixa

GUIDED TOURS. SUMMER EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Stages: Secondary School, Baccalaureate and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)

Prior booking required.

Phone: 931 847 142. E-mail to
rcaixaforumbcn@marmacultura.net

Times by arrangement. Price per group: € 18

PRE-ARRANGED TOURS FOR GROUPS

Maximum number of people per group: 25

Prior booking required.

Phone: 931 847 142

Times by arrangement.

Price per group: € 60



GUIDED TOURS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED GROUPS

Minimum number of people per group: 10

Prior booking required.

Phone: 931 847 142



SIGN-LANGUAGE TOURS AND ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Minimum number of people per group: 10

Prior booking required.

E-mail: rcaixaforumbcn@marmacultura.net



Imponderable, 2015-2016. Still. © Tony Oursler
Front page: *LZ-L5*, 1984. Detail / *Imponderable*, 2015-2016. Still. © Tony Oursler



Obra Social "la Caixa"