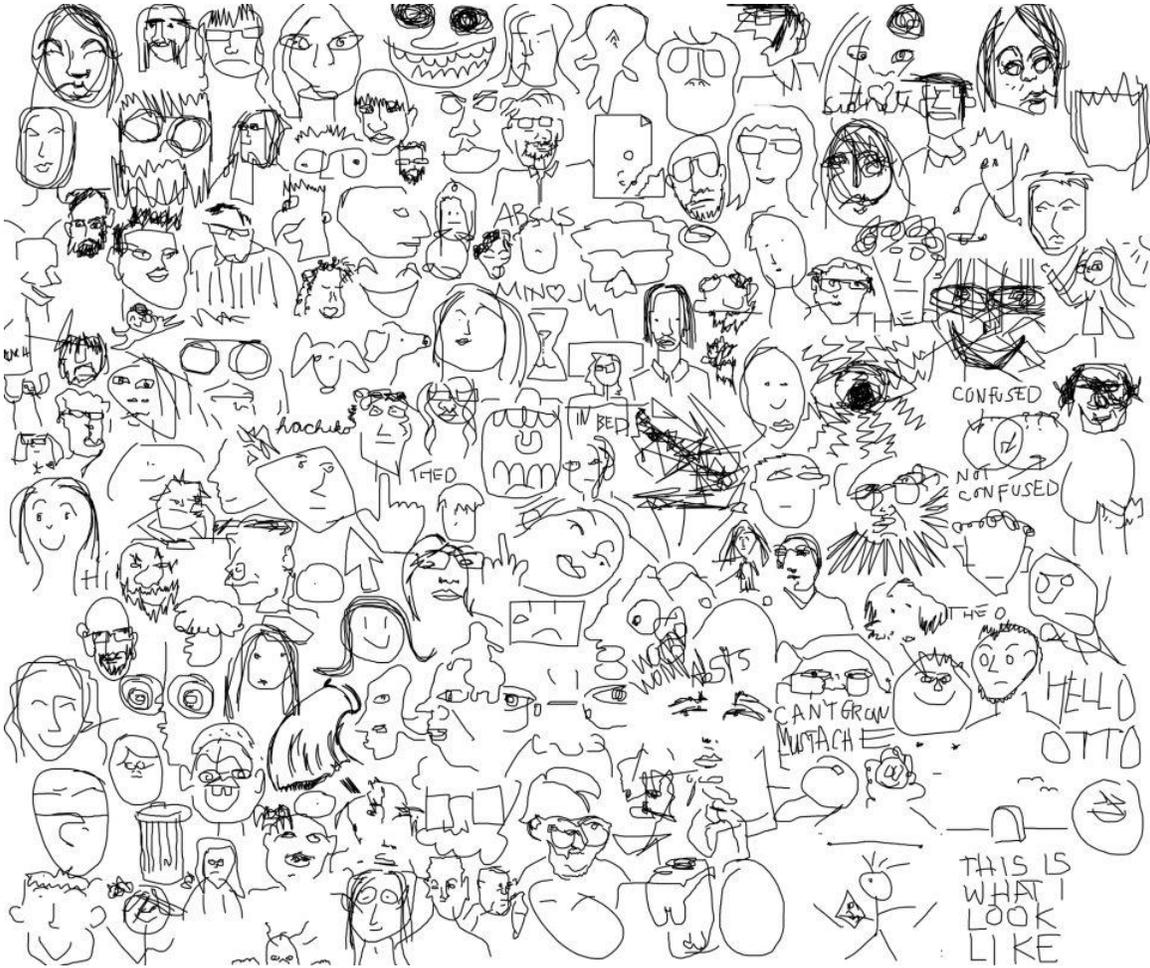


CHRIS COLLINS



"Blindskech.com Group Photo" (2013) crowdsourced digital drawing

The work of Chicago-based artist Chris Collins lingers along the margins of the culture of technological optimism. He neither condemns, nor praises, sidestepping the cheap moral phantasies of both the Luddite and the “early adopter.” Instead his artworks, events, and installations shift the focus from technological products to the drama of human engagement with these products, as can be seen in his concept-driven forays into video game design and satirical social media stunts. Biting, bizarre, and slyly heartfelt: the world of Chris Collins is an utterly awkward squirm in the second skin of a digital simulacrum that never quite seems to fit.

The approach is often curatorial or crowd-sourced, deflating the concept of authorship. Consider the gallery [“badpaintingsofbarackobama.com”](http://badpaintingsofbarackobama.com), or the [“Life Narrative Created From Default](#)

[Walmart.com Photo Album](#)". In the former, we are presented with a folk art pantheon dedicated to a single god: the politician as savior. In the latter, we are forced to look upon a life reduced to the poverty of "Hallmark moments". Collins reduplicates the banality of contemporary politics, consumerism, and politics as consumption, putting on display the appallingly narrow range of hollow images and themes that corral the human herd.

It's a shock doctrine of boredom. Collins cultivates that sense of ennui complicit in the relentless pursuit of technological novelty. He relishes the boredom, bathes in it, and challenges the spectator to love boredom for its own sake. The interactive online "[Bore Score](#)" pits one photo from Instagram (a popular photo app for smartphones) against another and asks the viewer to rank order them according to their relative banality. It's a sly wink in the direction of anyone who has ever posted a picture of his or her brunch spread to the internet. But, more than merely a petty jab at the self-involved wireless crowd, Collins intends for the participant to nourish the object of his or her ire, to become playful with boredom. This playfulness reaches its apex with the video game piece "[The Waiting Game](#)" in which the player taps on the keyboard to control a graphic representation of a hand tapping on a desktop. The absurdity of the exercise is compounded by "upgrades" (different textured virtual desktops) and "combo bonus" points that can be earned in the course of the game. Multi-colored confetti falls every 100 points earned and the wan flesh simulation of the hand explodes into flame when the player is on a roll. Compelling enough gameplay to warrant [a real review](#) from a real video game reviewer.

Collins's cover art for Issue 5.1, "[Blindsketch.com Group Photo](#)", remains interested in technological interface, but combines a tactual over a conceptual approach. How is the intimacy of line drawing altered by the mediating influence of digital drawing programs and instrumentation? We might compare this piece to the earlier "[50 Drawings of Bart Simpson Made on My Lunchbreak At My Boring But Stressful and Mentally Exhausting Office Job](#)", a series of 50 "free hand" digital sketches of the famous cartoon character. The drawing program supervenes upon the artist, scrubbing it clean of personality in a lukewarm bath of uniformity, gently mocking the cult of genius. Collins adds another layer of mediation in "Blindsketch.com Group Photo" by crowd-sourcing the content: it's a "group photo" illustrated by the group itself. The premise sounds like an opportunity for stylistic anarchy, but the leveling influence of the digital environment produces an effect of unsurpassed conformity.

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