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Audio Description script for The Photographers' Gallery 2020, Sat 18 July

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Maxime Matthys, *Work #8* from the series 2091: *The Ministry of Privacy*

The first of Matthys' works that I will describe is titled *Work #8*. It was taken in 2019 and is a C-Print taken on a Ricoh GR camera. Facial recognition software has been used on the photograph. The photograph measures 50cm in height, by 70cm in width. Which is around the size of a standard size pillowcase. The artist has mentioned that the series has been printed at different sizes depending on the nature of whichever exhibition it is a part of.

The photograph looks to have been taken during the winter, on a cold but crisp day. This appearance is accentuated by the sharp definition of the image. As the viewer, we are looking at a small gathering of four people facing towards us. Three of them stand, and one of them sits next to a fruit and veg stand. Behind them there is a high wall. Buildings and trees can be seen on the other side of the wall.

The floor beneath the people and the fruit and veg stand is rough in texture. It seems as if it was once covered in concrete or stone, which has since been worn away by use. Odd pieces of stone or concrete remain in the ground ... particularly to the front of the photograph, but the majority of the ground in the distance appears to be covered in compacted rubble, scattered with tiny slate grey-blue stones and different brown-coloured sections of dirt.

Almost central ... at the bottom of the composition there is a metal disc or cylinder, with a circular top. It is difficult to tell what this could be. On the left-hand side, as we face the image and behind the gathering of people, there is another similar cylindrical metal object protruding from the ground. Again, it is difficult to tell what it is. They could almost be tiny metal barrels, or something left over from a building site. They remind me of painted scaffolding in their material. The tops of these objects are painted a light grey-blue colour ... similar to the chips of grey slate on the floor.

The majority of the background behind the four figures and fruit and veg stand is made up of a tall, stained concrete wall. The wall fills the composition on our right side ... tapering off at a slow incline to show more of what is behind the wall on our left side. It seems as if some rubbish has been burnt where the floor meets the wall. The floor appears charred, and the wall is marked heavily along the bottom with dark brown and black staining. The wall has been whitewashed. The paint has chipped to reveal small patches of grey along the top of the wall... below the capped top. Between the top and the bottom, the wall is dirty and aged. Patches of grey run from the top to the bottom. On the right-hand side, behind the fruit and veg stand the wall is a mud coloured brown, with small patches of white poking through underneath the staining.

The wall reaches almost double the height of the person standing closest to it. As mentioned, the top of the wall has a capped top ... the same grey-white as the majority of the wall. Barbed wire spirals along the length of the top of wall. On the left side of the photograph, the spirals of barbed wire merge with the bare, thin, stark branches of a tree ... or multiple trees. With their trunks hidden on the other side of the wall, their branches rise above. There is a cream coloured building behind the trees, with many windows. The windows reflect a clear winters' day blue sky.

The fruit and veg stand protrudes on an inward angle from the right side of the photograph. If the landscape composition was split into two horizontal rows of three squares each ... then the stand fills the bottom right square. A make-shift canopy covers the stand. The bottom of the canopy is made from a dark dusky rose-coloured plastic ... with a clear plastic pulled tightly over it. Both the plastics have been attached to natural straw roofing with a light green ribbon, and a bright blue clip. The clear plastic has been pulled so tightly that it appears to ridge and wave ... reflecting the blue of the sky in various points.

It is difficult to tell what the structure of the stand is made from, as one of the figures stands in front of it ... but it looks to have been put together using metal shelf-like braces. The stand is well stocked. Various plastic and cardboard boxes are filled with green mangos, plastic wrapped bananas, a small red fruit or vegetable wrapped in plastic, and other unidentifiable produce. There are two huge watermelons the front of the stand, at the very

right of the composition. All of these items in their boxes and crates rest on cardboard boxes with Chinese writing on them, in green and red.

There is a small, simple moped tucked into the side of the stand visible to us, with its mirrors on metal sticks poking out of the front ... like antenna on an insect. A small plastic pot of some unidentified brown sauce rests of the seat of the bike.

The figure in front of the stand is a man. He wears a dark navy tartan flat-cap, and a small amount of his grey hair is visible between the cap and his left ear. He faces the camera, with the right side of his body slightly further back than his left ... hence being able to see his left ear, and not his right. He wears a high-necked cream polo neck top, which pokes through his light blue shirt ... fastened all the way to the top. Over his top and his shirt, he wears a thick black leather jacket with a dense black shearling or fur collar and numerous pockets fastened with a silver zip and poppers. The jacket is fastened, and he stands with his hands clasped over his stomach. He wears dark black trousers, that look as if they could be denim. From his hair, stance and body, I assume that he is in his late 60s. The man looks to be just shorter than the height of the canopy of the stand. The bottom of his legs are not visible in the composition.

The second figure sits on a fold out, metal-framed chair ... right next to the stand, and partially in front of the bike, on the right side of the composition. This figure wears a large black furry beret style hat ... the hat is almost the same size as his face. He wears a dark grey almost-shiny wool coat, with a large collar. I cannot tell what the man wears under his coat, but it seems to be dark in colour. He looks to the camera, with the left side of his body slightly further away than the right side. Like the last figure, this man holds his hands across his stomach ... only this time he has tucked each hand into the opposite sleeve. Just looking at him makes me feel cold. His coat comes to his mid-thigh, and he wears dark blue worn jeans. His lace up boots poke out of the bottom of his baggy jeans. They look as if they were once black, but now they are either stained with dirt, or the leather has worn away. His feet rest just above the small metal barrel-like structure I mentioned on the floor.

The third figure stands close to the man I just described, but on the left side of the composition. This person appears to be a woman. She wears a lilac hat, pulled tightly over her dark hair. Her hair is either short or tied behind her

head. She faces the camera, but the left side of her body is further away than the right. Her torso appears to pull slightly away from the camera ... which could be because of the uneven ground she stands on. A bright red scarf is wrapped around her neck and tucked into her long black coat ... which reaches below her knees. The coat has five silver buttons down the front, and each is fastened. Her hands tuck into pockets at the front of the coat. A dark red skirt pokes out from underneath the coat. She wears black tights and black leather heeled ankle boots. This figure is the one standing closest to the wall, and she seems dwarfed by it.

The last person in this photograph looks to be a woman, but I am not entirely sure. This figure is on the very left of the composition, almost with their back against the left side of the photograph. The right side of their body is closer than the left, and they stand with their left foot turned towards the wall, and their right foot pointing towards the photographer. This person wears a dark maroon hat, which looks to be made out of a fleece material. They wear a red wool shirt ... the collar of which points out from beneath their electric blue jacket. The red wool, and the lightweight blue jacket contrast strongly. The jacket is fastened and looks to be a denim style jacket ... made out of either a very thin denim, or a plain cotton. The red woollen shirt hangs below the jacket. Underneath the shirt, the person seems to be wearing a dress or long top made from a red snakeskin-print fabric, which falls at the tops of their thighs. They wear tight fitting navy trousers, in a similar tartan pattern to the hat the man I first described is wearing. This person wears bright blue socks ... slightly greener in colour than their jacket, and blue leather shoes with woven detailing on the toes. Their hands are clasped just underneath their chest. In their left hand there is a long ...very straight broom that rests between their folded left arm and chest ... its bottom end is resting on the ground and the top end is high in the air behind the person's left shoulder, with long, gathered thick bristles.

The faces of each of these figures is completely distorted, which is why I have not gone into any detail in describing their facial details or expressions. Each of their facial features is mapped with a complex net of straight white lines ... covering their faces like a mask. The net of lines on each face are joined with straight white lines to each other person in the group. I'll tell you more about these lines shortly.

This photograph is from the series 2091: *The Ministry of Privacy*. This series delves into the workings of facial recognition technologies used by China to oversee and focus on minorities in Xinjiang an autonomous territory in northwest China ... a vast region of deserts and mountains.

To give some background from Maxime Matthys on the project:

"China is conducting a massive crackdown against Muslim-minority communities, essentially Uyghurs and Kazakhs, in its vast western Xinjiang region. Some of the most advanced surveillance technologies, such as facial recognition, are being massively deployed in the region so as to monitor every aspect of the inhabitant's life. The series *2091 : The Ministry of Privacy* is exploring the mechanism of facial recognition technologies used by China to monitor and oppress minorities in Xinjiang. To do so, I developed a facial recognition software with the help of an IT engineer, which I used while photographing the daily life of the inhabitants in Xinjiang. Once shot, I uploaded the pictures in the software, which recognized and drew the respective biometric facial informations directly on the faces of the people appearing on the original photographs, allowing us to see how facial recognition works and is used as a tool of oppression by the government. Through this process, the project reveals the intrusiveness and the dangerousness of this invisible technology, while documenting and paying tribute to the last remains of these communities' vibrant culture, before its planned disappearance."

Taken from the artist's website - (www.maximematthys.com)

This is a complicated series. If you would like to know more about it, the artist was recently in conversation with writer Orit Gat for The Photographers' Gallery over Zoom. This was recorded and is available on the Gallery's youtube channel. In it, the series that this image is from is discussed in great detail.