

Look into the box
Mixed media installation, 2002
(Olafur Eliasson/Luc Steels)

'Look into the box' is an installation piece with a strong AI component. When a viewer enters the darkened installation space, one sees in a corner a small box standing on a pole, looking a bit like a camera obscura with a hole in the middle. There is a magnifying glass before the hole and a light just on top of it. Below the box, there is a pedestal on which one can stand to look in the box. When the viewer does this, there is a clicking sound, similar to that of an old-fashioned camera taking a picture. Immediately after, the viewer's eye appears as a large projection on the opposite wall. Seeing one's eye this way is a revealing, almost shocking, experience, for there are few things more intimate and beautiful than the human eye.

Soon after, the eye appears, spoken sounds emanate, almost as if angels were whispering words in a strange language. One angel might say: "Ko. Lecefi. Guso," and the other one repeats it in a questioning tone: "Ko? Lecefi? Guso?" In another dialog, you might hear: "Ko. Lecefi. Lulke," or "Ko. Low. Gi." This language turns out to be invented by artificial agents that self-organize a shared language about the color of the eyes of observers. Look into the box thus explores how a population of artificial agents could invent and share a set of color distinctions and names to describe them. It therefore poses the fundamental question of whether machines can "create" new, perceptually grounded meanings and share them with each other. The names that the agents used for colors are not imposed by us and neither are their color distinctions. Nevertheless, we can observe in the experiment that agents gradually come to share the ways they categorize colors and the ways they name them.

This piece was originally developed for and shown at the Musee d'Art Moderne in Paris in 2002. It was also shown at the Festival dei 2 Mondi (Spoleto, 2003), the Intensive Science Exhibition in La Maison Rouge (Paris, 2006), the ExploraScience Museum (Tokyo, 2006) and the Borges Centro Cultural (Buenos Aires, 2015).

Literature: Steels, L. (2004) The color of your eyes. In Richard Torkiaie (ed.), Olafur Eliasson: Your colour memory, Glenside, USA: Arcadia University Art Gallery

BIO: Olafur Eliasson is a Danish-Icelandic artist known for sculptures and large-scale installation art employing elemental materials such as light, water, and air temperature to enhance the viewer's experience. In 1995 he established Studio Olafur Eliasson in Berlin, a laboratory for spatial research. Eliasson represented Denmark at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 and later that year installed The Weather Project in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, London. Eliasson has engaged in a number of projects in public space, including the intervention Green river, carried out in various cities between 1998 and 2001; the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2007, London, a temporary pavilion designed with the Norwegian architect Kjetil Thorsen; and The New York City Waterfalls, commissioned by Public Art Fund in 2008.

BIO: Luc Steels is a Belgian-born scientist currently mainly working at the Institut de Biologica Evolutiva in Barcelona, and Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg (2015-2016). His research field is Artificial Intelligence but he uses the methods and

techniques from this field for studying fundamental questions about language, particularly the origins and evolution of language. Steels has had extensive interactions with the arts, both in the visual arts (collaborating with Eliasson, Carsten Holler, et al.), theatre (collaborating with Jean-Francois Peyret for the Avignon theatre festival), and music (particularly operatic works).