

# ***We Put The World Before You / Uncanny Valley***

Jane & Louise Wilson



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Installation view: *We Put The World Before You* (left) and *Uncanny Valley* (right) on display at MIMA, Middlesbrough, in 2017.

## STATEMENT

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This project comprises two outputs: the video installation *We Put The World Before You* and sculpture and video installation *Uncanny Valley* (both 2016), in which artists Jane and Louise Wilson explore the enduring impact of the First World War. In looking at how the conflict continues to shape our contemporary experience, the works are a development from – and have been exhibited alongside – the artists' earlier installation *Undead Sun* (2014).

In *We Put The World Before You* manipulated archive images showing the facial disfigurement of combatants are knitted together with digital facial reconstructions, and a recurring scene of actors depicting a TV- hypnotist's performance.

In *Uncanny Valley*, footage of a plastic surgery procedure on an injured soldier is projected through a 3D-printed sculpture of the artists' heads which sits inside a tank-like structure.

The works revolve around composite, reconstructed, and summoned images – referring simultaneously to the processes of plastic surgery, image manipulation, and hypnosis. The artists invite the audience to reflect on how we cope with violence and injury, and with loss and remembrance.

The project was underpinned by – and made use of materials from – archival research at the Wellcome Collection, BFI Library and Imperial War Museum; further developed through consultations with an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, and collaboration with forensic pathologists.

The artworks navigate unexplored links between early medical photography and modern digital imaging, and the role both play in relation to concepts of resemblance and facial recognition and reconstruction. *We Put The World Before You* was commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella in partnership with Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art and Wolverhampton Art Gallery, supported by the Wellcome Trust and Arts Council England. The outputs were disseminated through exhibitions at Middlesbrough (October 2016-January 2017), Wolverhampton (October 2018-January 2019), and a screening and panel discussion at Regent Street Cinema, London.

## OUTPUTS AND VIEWING COPY

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### **1. Video installation artwork: *We Put The World Before You* (2016)**

Video Installation (14mins 48 sec); wall elements:  
printed free-standing gauze structures.

Web audio Version <https://vimeo.com/185123825>  
**(Password: weputinternet)**

Filmmaker: Louise Wilson, Jane Wilson

Year 2016

Medium: DCP

Length: 16mins

Language: English

Producer: Ohna Falby

Sales: Film & Video Umbrella

Writer: Louise Wilson, Jane Wilson

Cinematography: Martin Testar

Editor: Daniel Goddard

Production Design: Nicholas Mortimer

Sound Design: Martin Pavey

Music: Anton Webern Six Bagatelles for Sting  
Quartet, Op 9

### **2. Sculpture and video installation artwork: *Uncanny Valley* (2016)**

Sculpture: wood, epoxy-based resin; video-projected archive  
film footage of 'Surgical Reconstruction of the Nose by  
Modified Frontal Method by Sir Harold Gillies' 1933, Courtesy  
of Wellcome Library (Dimensions variable 2m x 2m x 4m).

The outputs were disseminated through two exhibitions and  
a screening and panel discussion:

**1. Jane and Louise Wilson – *Undead Sun: We Put the  
World Before You*** at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art,  
1 October 2016 - 22 January 2017.

**2. Jane and Louise Wilson: *Undead Sun*** at Wolverhampton  
Art Gallery, 27 October 2018 - 20 January 2019.

**3. Jane and Louise Wilson: Screening and Talk:  
*We Put the World Before You*** at Regent Street Cinema,  
London, 18 December 2018.

The following contextual information presents images and  
text outlining the research background, artistic process,  
delivery, and dissemination of the project.





*We Put The World Before You* 2016 Installation view MIMA, Middlesbrough Single screen video 14 mins 48 sec,  
2 x Freestanding printed gauze sculptures (reference for inverted proscenium arch image of wind tunnel)



*The Uncanny Valley* 2016. Wood, epoxy-based resin, video projected archive film footage of 'Surgical Reconstruction of the Nose by Modified Frontal Method by Sir Harold Gillies' 1933, Courtesy of Wellcome Library. (Dimensions variable 2m x 2m x 4m )

Both *We Put The World Before You* and *Uncanny Valley* respond to a number of historic images of the violence and brutality of the First World War: in particular the looming, creaking presence of tanks; and the injured faces of young soldiers, brutalized by shrapnel, as recorded in contemporary medical photographs.

Both tanks and shrapnel wounds were a product of the development of artillery and mechanized warfare during the First World War. The artists' sustained investigation of this subject, and in particular its legacy in photographic archives, provide the work with its resonant imagery.

The increase in horrific facial injuries during the First World War led to the some of the earliest advancements in what is now plastic surgery; in particular, the work undertaken by pioneering surgeon Harold Gillies at a specialist hospital in Sidcup. Before-and-after photographs of the soldiers undergoing these surgeries from the Mortimer Archive at the Imperial War Museum are handled sensitively by the artists in exploring the theme in both *We Put The World*

*Before You* and *Uncanny Valley*. In the latter, the images are projected through the jagged angles and shadows of a tank structure. The footage projected in *Uncanny Valley* is of the only recorded film in existence of an operation performed by Harold Gillies of a surgical reconstruction of the nose.

Wounded soldiers were physically different people on their return home. Reconstructive plastic surgery could never bring back someone's previous countenance, let alone the person they once were. This challenge of repairing wounds is reflected in the images projected on screen in both artworks: as the processes of plastic surgery and modern digital face-morphing software are employed together in a sequence of continuously shifting images.





Installation view: *We Put The World Before You* (left) and *Uncanny Valley* (right) on display at MIMA, Middlesbrough, in 2017.

A recurring scene in *We Put The World Before You* shows an audience of women being hypnotised. This points to the rise in spiritual forms of communication, including séances, popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as an attempt to contact those killed, missing or distant.

The costumes of the female participants hint at period details, but more strongly indicate another, much later era: specifically, the 1970s. The artists draw a historic parallel between the séances of the first part of the century, and their later revival in popular television hypnotists. A particular inspiration is an episode from the 1970s ATV series *Ladies Night* in which the female audience were hypnotized by a male hypnotist. *We Put The World Before You* re-enacts this scene some 40 years later.

These sequences are included to highlight the collapse and distances between the different time periods: from 1918 to 1978 to 2016-18. They recall a popular late-night television show broadcast in the sixtieth year of remembrance after the First World War. There were still many veterans of the conflict alive in 1978, and therefore the War was an historical event that would still have been present in the living memory of the population.

Bringing these remote periods in time together simultaneously highlights the paradox inherent in commemorating an event 100 years later when those who were once present have all since departed.





Reference for *We Put the World Before You* (stills) early 19th Century photographic images of seances.



Research reference for *We Put the World Before You* stills taken from a tv episode on hypnosis from the ATV series *Ladies Night* 1978 made in the sixtieth remembrance year of WWI.



In addition to the historical and archival research which underpins both *We Put the World Before You* and *Uncanny Valley*, the artworks feature a range of references and motifs drawn from the artists' wider exploration of their subject.

The 3D composite head which sits at the centre of *Uncanny Valley*, reflecting images of wounded soldiers, is positioned inside a decoy tank model. This three-dimensional tank carcass is seen in the *We Put the World Before You* film sequence and forms a ghostly recurring motif within the exhibition space.

The 'Uncanny Valley' is a reference is to the work of Masahiro Mori, a robotics professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. Mori wrote an essay on how he envisioned people's reactions to robots that looked and acted almost like a human. In particular, he hypothesized that a person's response to a humanlike robot would abruptly shift from empathy to revulsion as it approached, but failed to attain, a lifelike appearance. This descent into eeriness is known as 'the uncanny valley' (Mori, 1970; Mori et al., 2012).

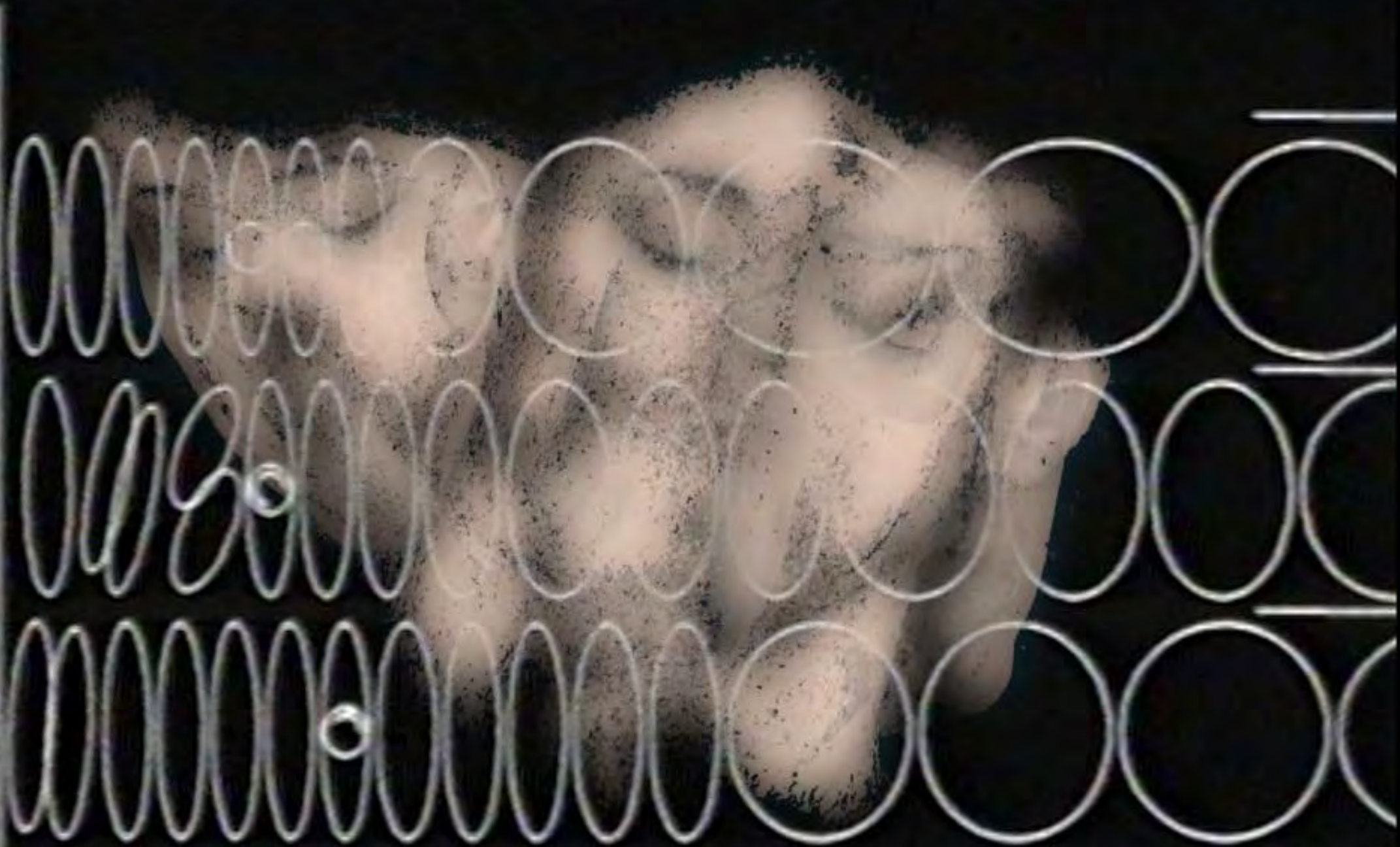
Guided by a charismatic mesmerist, the hypnosis sequences in *We Put the World Before You* unsettle the usual boundaries of the self and play with conventional notions of time. Punctuated by the apparitional materialization of computer-generated 'masks' of the artists' faces, the film is interweaved with the recurring refrain of the contemporary composition 'Six Bagatelles' written by the composer Anton Webern in 1914 and performed by the Brodsky Quartet.

A key component of the artists' exploration of the themes of reconstruction in both *We Put the World Before You* and *Uncanny Valley* is the use of computer-generated masks and models.

The final sequence of the *We Put the World Before You* film was made in collaboration with the forensic pathologist Caroline Wilkinson and Research Assistant Mark Roughley at the FaceLab at John Moores University, Liverpool. Utilizing Wellcome Trust and Imperial War Museum archival facial images from the First World War, and 3D image morphing software, the team created a composite portrait of the average soldier with their facial injuries restored. These faces become merged with the face of the Hypnotist at the start of the film and are layered with digital 'masks' taken from the artists' own faces elsewhere in the film sequence.

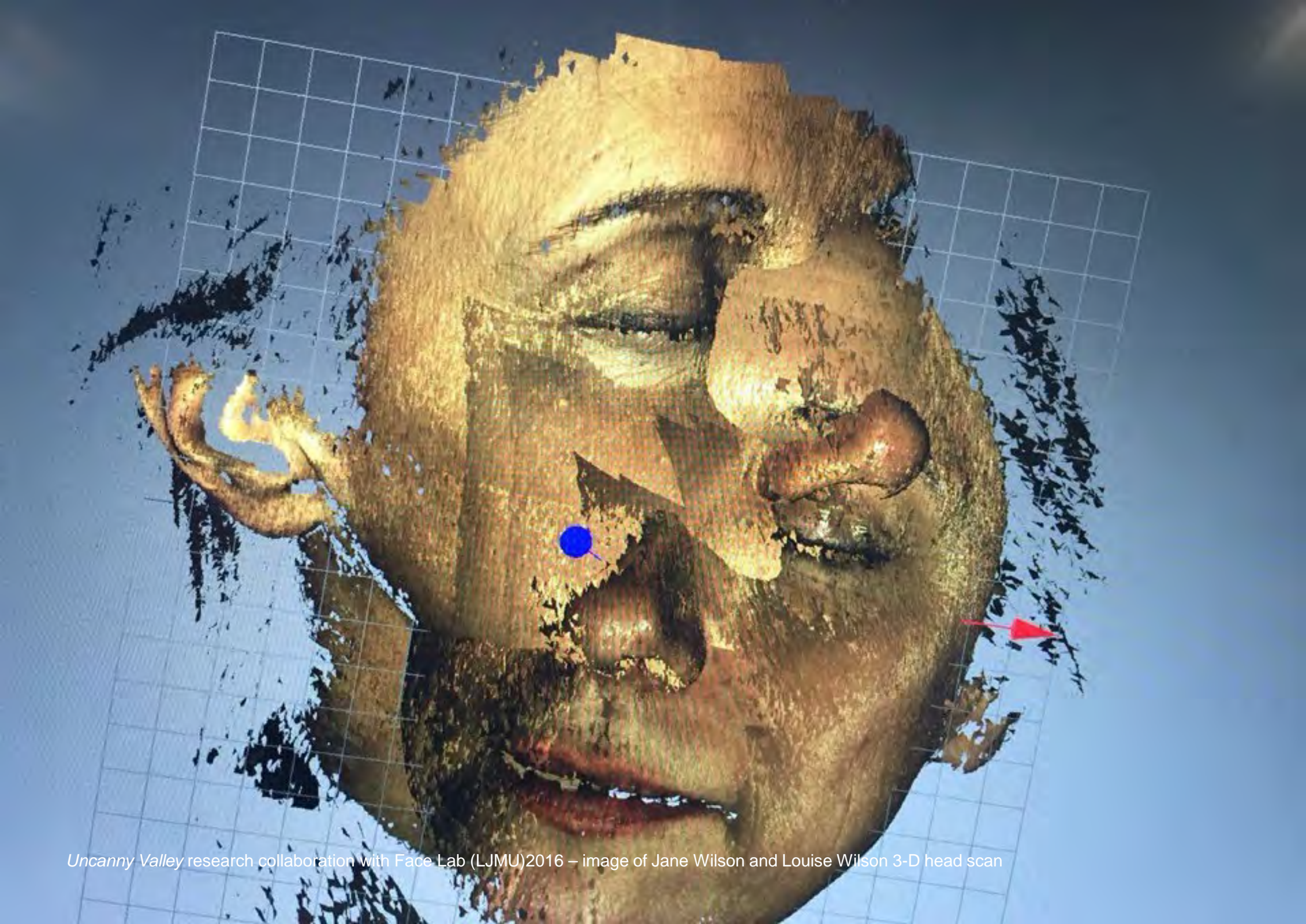
This concept was developed further in *Uncanny Valley*, for which the artists' heads were scanned with a 3D laser scanner to create a single composite model head, which was then printed in 3D in epoxy resin.

With this same software, making use of the photographic archives of wounded soldiers, it is possible to approximate – even replicate – the original likeness of an individual. And although the wounds have been smoothed over, the joins can still show. One occasion in which they surface is when confronted with facial recognition software. While biometric systems can distinguish between identical twins, or track an individual over time, the existence of foreign material in the make-up of a face can cause confusion. Plastic surgery, as a process of restoring or enhancing an appearance can, in this instance, be a type of camouflage.



*We Put The World Before You* 2016 Film Still Film excerpt 2: Cell Division in the Cartilage Plate, Bone Growth, a Norman Kimber Film, Producer David Clark. Courtesy of Wellcome Library, Moving Image and Sound Collection.





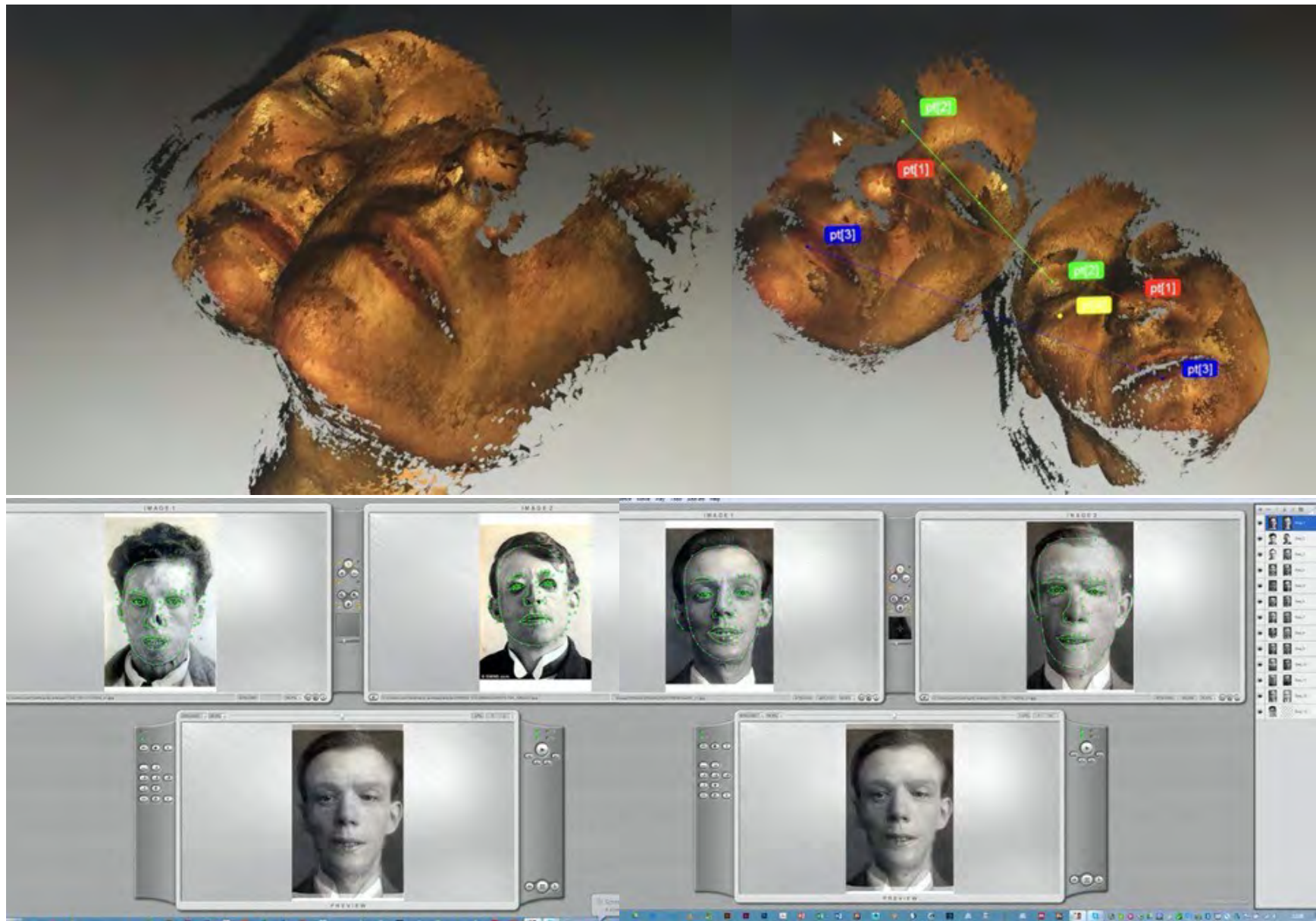
*Uncanny Valley* research collaboration with Face Lab (LJMU)2016 – image of Jane Wilson and Louise Wilson 3-D head scan



Working with Caroline Wilkinson and her team at Face Lab in Liverpool, the artists' heads were scanned with a 3D laser scanner to create a composite image of both heads – a Jane and Louise 3D composite model head, which was then printed in 3D in epoxy resin. The head contained the skull and nasal aperture and maxilla showing the average nose injury suffered by a shrapnel-wounded First World War soldier.

Current prosthetic production uses the creative potential of 3D scanning and 3D printing along with individualized, hand-crafted silicon parts that are designed to replicate the person's face before surgery. Modern prosthetic parts are often indistinguishable from the rest of the face.

The following slides document this research process.



*Uncanny Valley* research collaboration with Face Lab (LJMU)2016 – image of Jane Wilson and Louise Wilson 3-D head scans and WWI

Jane and Louise Wilson *We Put The World Before You* and *Uncanny Valley*

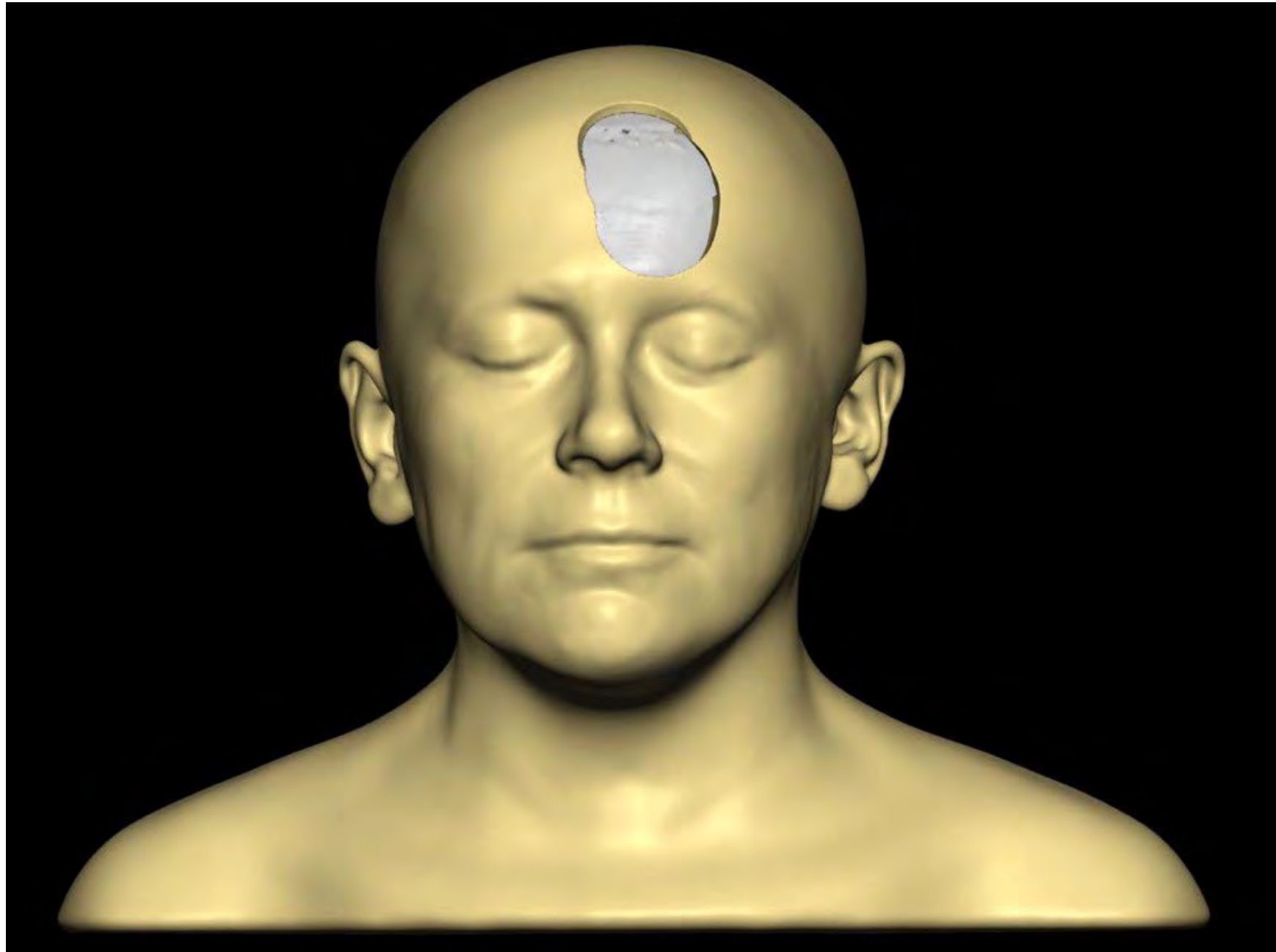


Applying a 3-D face morphing software and utilizing the photographic documents of WWI soldiers with facial injuries as source from the Mortimer archive in the IWM, showing the average face of a WW1 soldier with their facial injuries restored.

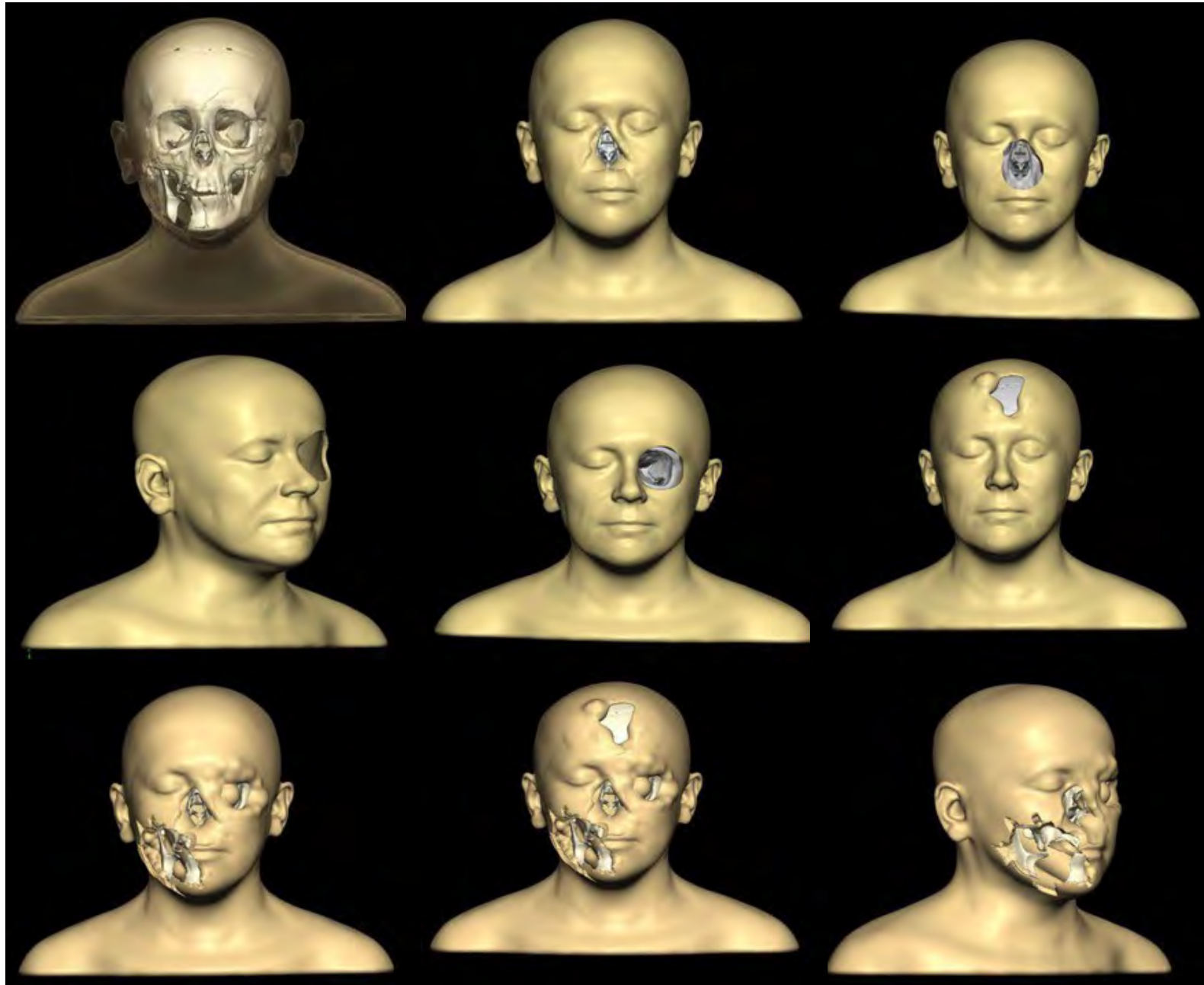


Applying a 3-D face morphing software and utilizing the photographic documents of WWI soldiers with facial injuries as source from the Mortimer Archive IWM

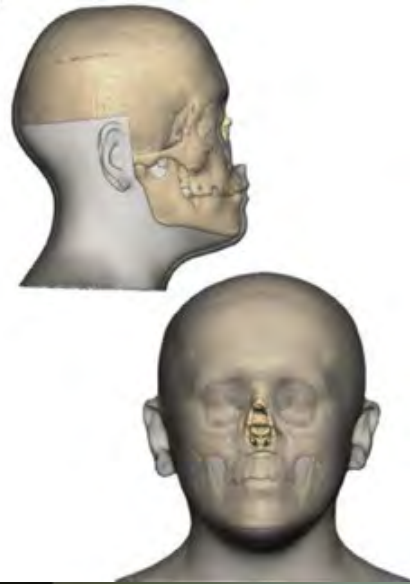




*Uncanny Valley* research collaboration with Face Lab (LJMU)2016 – image of Jane Wilson and Louise Wilson 3-D head scans merged with facial wound (forehead)



*Uncanny Valley* research collaboration with Face Lab (LJMU)2016 – image of Jane Wilson and Louise Wilson 3-D head scans merged with typical WWI head and facial wounds



*The Uncanny Valley* 2016 (detail) Wood, epoxy-based resin

Jane and Louise Wilson *We Put The World Before You and Uncanny Valley*





*The Uncanny Valley* 2016 (detail). Wood, epoxy-based resin, video projected archive film footage of 'Surgical Reconstruction of the Nose by Modified Frontal Method by Sir Harold Gillies' 1933, Courtesy of Wellcome Library. (Dimensions variable 2m x 2m x 4m )



*The Uncanny Valley* 2016 (detail). Wood, epoxy-based resin, video projected archive film footage of 'Surgical Reconstruction of the Nose by Modified Frontal Method by Sir Harold Gillies' 1933, Courtesy of Wellcome Library. (Dimensions variable 2m x 2m x 4 )

The outputs were disseminated through two exhibitions:

- **Jane and Louise Wilson – *Undead Sun: We Put the World Before You*** at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, 1 October 2016 - 22 January 2017
- **Jane & Louise Wilson: *Undead Sun*** at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 27 October 2018 - 20 January 2019

The exhibitions brought together three video installation artworks developed between 2014 and 2016, communicating a coherent seam of research explored by the artists around the First World War and its lasting visual impacts and contemporary correspondences.

Jane and Louise Wilson delivered a guest lecture at Liverpool School of Art and Design in May 2016, in conversation with collaborator Caroline Wilkinson.

*We Put the World Before You* was also the subject of a special screening and discussion at the Regent Street Cinema, where it was shown alongside the early short films of Charles Urban – and the works of early cinema with which the artists' research engages.

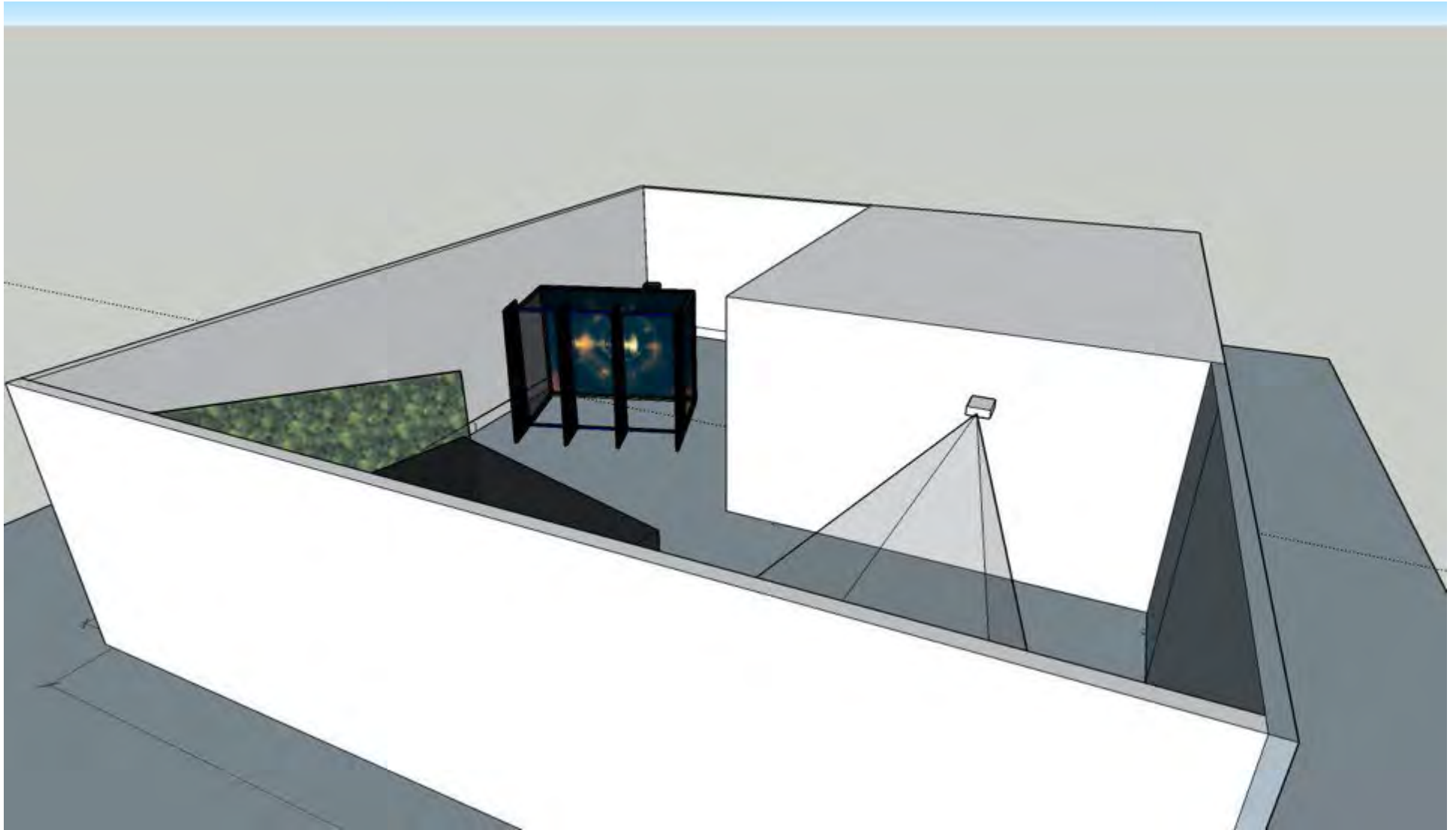
In a text published to commemorate the screening, the film historian Erika Balsom reflected that: 'today faces are just as likely to be scanned as they are to be filmed, stripped of their ineffable qualities and subject to algorithmic calculation for purposes of management and control.'

'Extending the bricolage of temporalities already suggested in the production design of the hypnosis sequences, the Wilsons periodically insert digital renderings of their own faces—mask-like surfaces without depth, able to be rotated 360 degrees, detached from fleshy life.'

'To close the film, recalling *Undead Sun*, the Wilsons offer a series of archival photographs of WW1 veterans with facial injuries that morph together to form the image of the "average" soldier. Individual particularity gives way to typicality, and the archival photographs begin to resemble the composite portraiture undertaken by Francis Galton in the 1880s, a technique widely understood as a precursor to today's mechanisms of biometric governance.'



The following slides give additional reference material for the installation and imagery employed in *We Put the World Before You*.

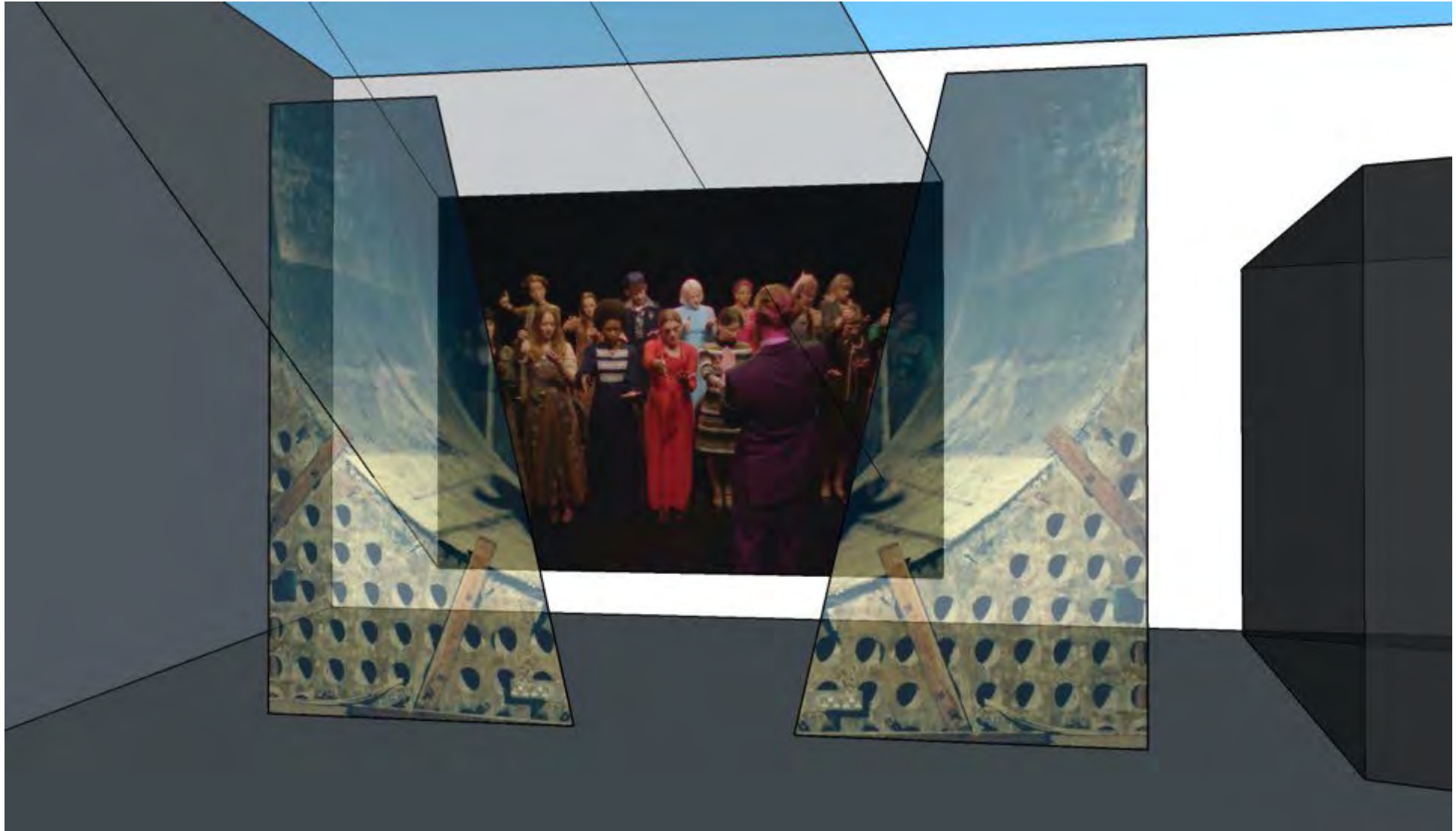


*Undead Sun: We Put The World Before You, Uncanny Valley 2016, Installation proposal, MIMA, Middlesbrough (Oct 2017-Jan 2017)*



*We Put The World Before You* 2016 Single screen video 14mins 48 sec film still





*We Put The World Before You* Installation proposal, MIMA, Middlesbrough (Oct 2017-Jan 2017) Single screen video 14 mins 48 sec, 2 x Freestanding printed gauze sculptures (reference for inverted proscenium arch image of a wind tunnel)



*We Put The World Before You* Reference for 2 x Freestanding printed gauze sculptural elements for inverted proscenium arch image of wind tunnel)

Jane and Louise Wilson *We Put The World Before You* and *Uncanny Valley*





*'We Put The World Before You 2016 2 x Freestanding printed gauze sculptural elements for inverted proscenium arch (imagery of wind tunnel)*





*We Put The World Before You, Uncanny Valley 2016, MIMA, Middlesbrough (Oct 2017-Jan 2017)*



*We Put The World Before You* 2016, film still





*We Put The World Before You, Uncanny Valley 2016, MIMA, Middlesbrough (Oct 2017-Jan 2017)*



21:55:03:09

Reference for *We Put the World Before You* still taken from  
a tv episode on hypnosis, ATV series *Ladies Night* 1978.

21:51:49:20



Reference for *We Put the World Before You* still taken from a tv episode on hypnosis, ATV series *Ladies Night* 1978.





*We Put The World Before You* 2016 Installation view MIMA, Middlesbrough Single screen video 14 mins 48 sec,  
2 x Freestanding printed gauze sculptures (reference for inverted proscenium arch image of wind tunnel)

Jane and Louise Wilson *We Put The World Before You* and *Uncanny Valley*





*We Put The World Before You* 2016 Installation view MIMA, Middlesbrough Single screen video 14 mins 48 sec, 2 x Freestanding printed gauze sculptural elements.

21:58:15:15



Reference for *We Put the World Before You* still taken from a tv episode on hypnosis, ATV series *Ladies Night* 1978.



21:59:30:10



Reference for *We Put the World Before You* still taken from a tv episode on hypnosis, ATV series *Ladies Night* 1978.





Reference for *We Put the World Before You* still taken from a tv episode on hypnosis, ATV series *Ladies Night* 1978.



*We Put The World Before You* 2016 film still





*We Put The World Before You* 2016 film stills

Jane and Louise Wilson *We Put The World Before You* and *Uncanny Valley*