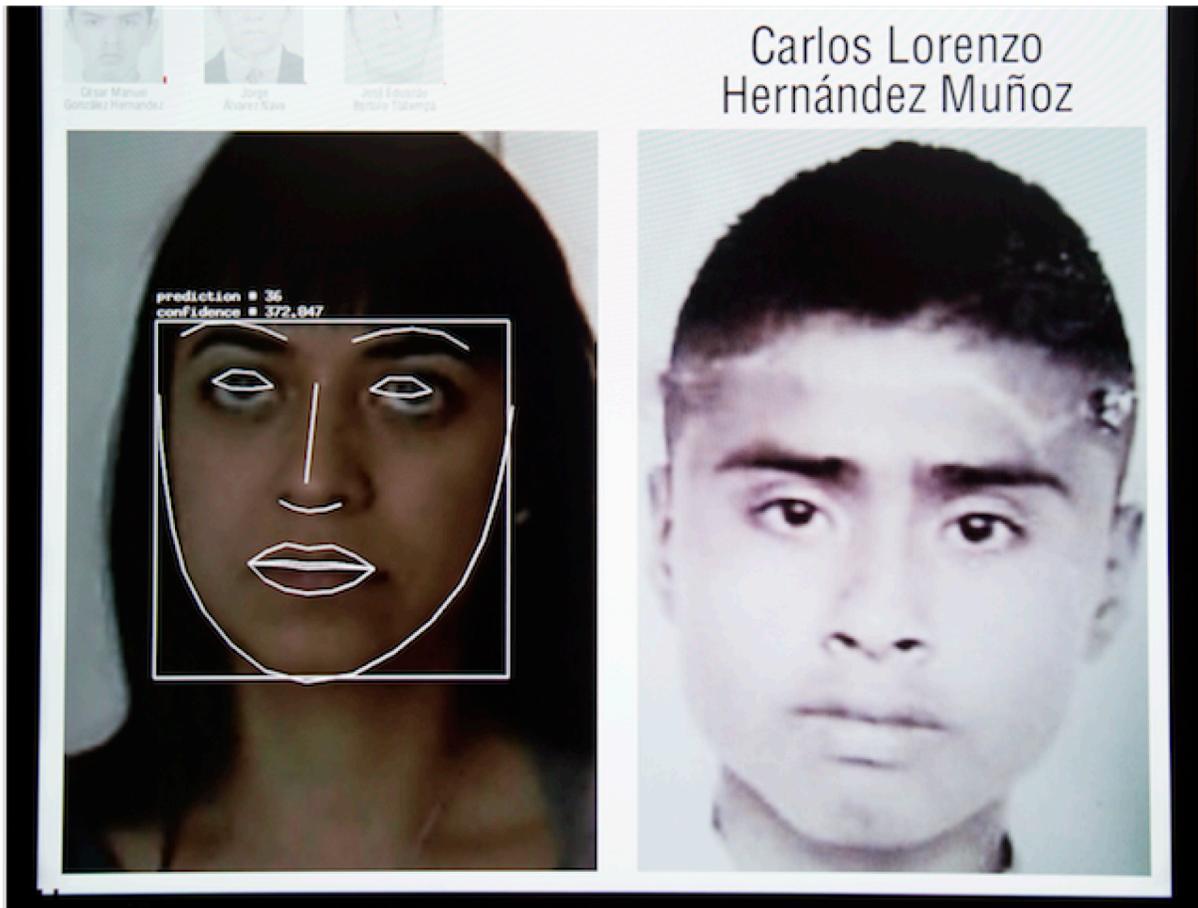# Artist Searches for the Disappeared with Facial Scanning

By Reuben Torres — Jul 16 2015

All photos by Antimodular Research.

The mass kidnapping of 43 students in Iguala, Mexico in 2014 — in which a group of students at the college of Ayotzniapa were abducted and presumably murdered by cartel members and elements (https://news.vice.com/article/mexican-police-accused-of-brazen-attacks-on-buses-carrying-students-and-soccer-players) of the Mexican government (https://news.vice.com/article/political-power-couple-wanted-in-student-massacre-arrested-in-mexico-city)— has become embedded in the local and global consciousness. The ensuing reaction to the events has snowballed into global mobilization, and continues to spur forth movements, protests (https://news.vice.com/article/video-shows-government-building-in-flames-after-demonstrations-turn-violent-in-mexico), slogans, hashtags, songs, and art works, serving as a reminder to Mexico and the world that the tragedy is still far from forgotten.

Six months after the tragedy, Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/) has chosen to commemorate the kidnapping with a project titled *Level of Confidence*. The work is intended as an incessant — albeit futile —search for the victims through facial recognition. Using biometric surveillance algorithms most often used by the military and police in their investigations, the work scans the public's faces and attempts to match them with that of the kidnapped students' photos, yielding a "level of confidence" that measures the accuracy of the match.

As the artist says on his website (http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/level_of_confidence.php), "The piece will always fail to make a positive match, as we know that the students were likely murdered and burnt in a massacre where government, police forces and drug cartels were involved, but the commemorative side of the project is the relentless search for the students and the overlap of their image with the public's own facial features."

Lozano's approach is both sober and outlying, running contrary to many of the expectations we commonly hold for a work of such an overtly political bent. And yet, it does more than rub salt in a still-fresh wound or serve as yet another nettled indictment of corruption. Instead, it uncannily places the lens on the spectators themselves, absurdly quantifying a difference that is notable because of its similarity. We are ourselves, it would suggest, just a few percentages short of being the disappeared.

Level of Confidence exists as part of a larger exhibition titled *Memory Burn* (http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/enter-mind-bending-simulated-realities-at-a-new-exhibition), which features works across a range of mediums and explores the subject of "mortality and death in relation to recording devices." The project is currently available as open source software for any institution to exhibit and/or modify and all proceeds will be directed to a fund to help the affected community – for example, in scholarships for new students at Ayotzniapa college. The exhibit will tour Mexican colleges and you can also download the source code at GitHub (https://github.com/antimodular/Level-of-Confidence).