

## David Cross

### Cornford & Cross

I began collaborating with Matthew Cornford while studying BA Graphic Design at Saint Martins School of Art in 1986, graduating from MA Communication Art and Design at the Royal College of Art in 1991.

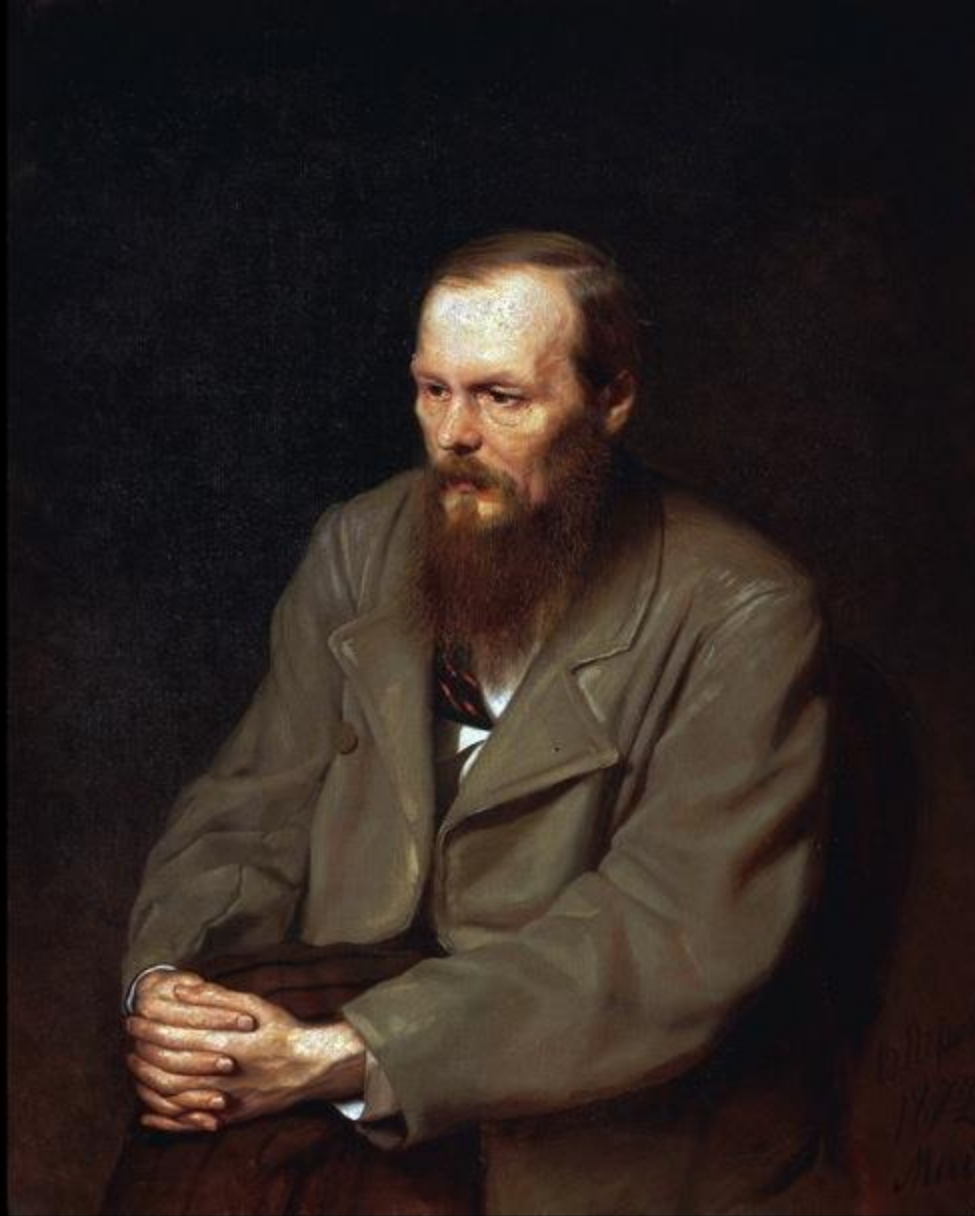
Since the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, the global environmental crisis has deepened in every way. Worse, the discourse of 'sustainability' as a progressive engagement with environment, development and social justice has been overtaken by a market-led, technocratic vision of resource management which screens the accelerating ecological collapse.

Recognising not only the complexity, but the paradoxical nature of human experience seems key to understanding the problem. Through a series of projects promoting sustainability, I gradually moved away from the problem solving, communicative practices of design towards the 'problematizing', reflexive tendencies of fine art.

# *The White Bear Effect*

For 'Everything Flows',  
a group show engaging with the 2012 Olympics  
Curated by Film & Video Umbrella  
De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill 2012;  
The White Building, London, 2013

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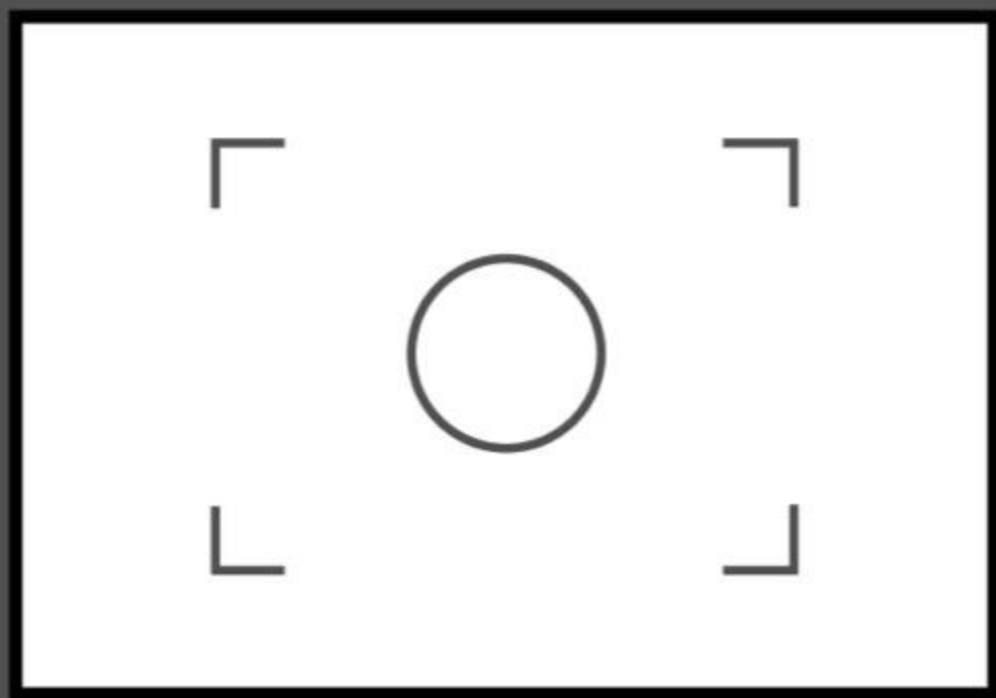
Five years before *Crime and Punishment*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky described 'The White Bear Effect': the attempt to replace negative images with positive ones paradoxically causes the unwanted associations to return.



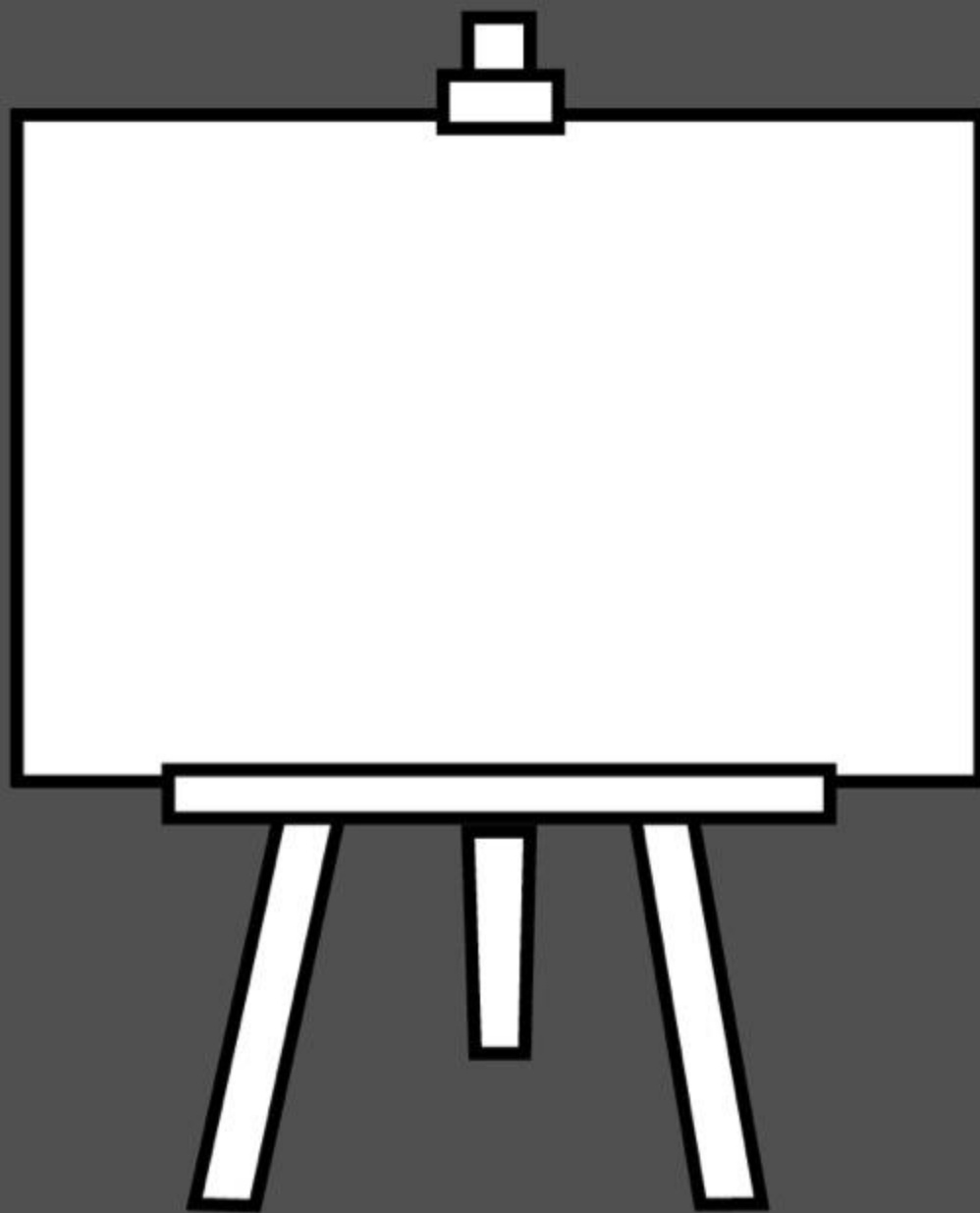
We worked with Dr Richard Ramsey, a neuroscientist who has researched 'mirror neurons: parallels between nerve pathways for visual perception, and physical action.



Watching sport brings people together, and provides excitement, but what is its ideological role? In a world full of injustice, sport sustains an image of fair play, with the outcome determined by skill and chance.



Artist and theorist Victor Burgin paid close attention to the camera viewfinder as a framing device that articulates social power. Burgin traced its origin back in time...



to the picture plane of the Renaissance easel painting, which in turn...



referred to the post and lintel construction of doors and windows in architecture. Here is perhaps the origin of the metaphoric connection between the perspectival image, with its illusion of space behind the picture plane, and a 'window on the world'.



The picture plane is a key point of access to the imaginary. But the access is two-way, and includes reversals and reciprocal interactions: by investing in the idea that we can enter the space of the image, we allow the image to enter us, and occupy our thoughts.



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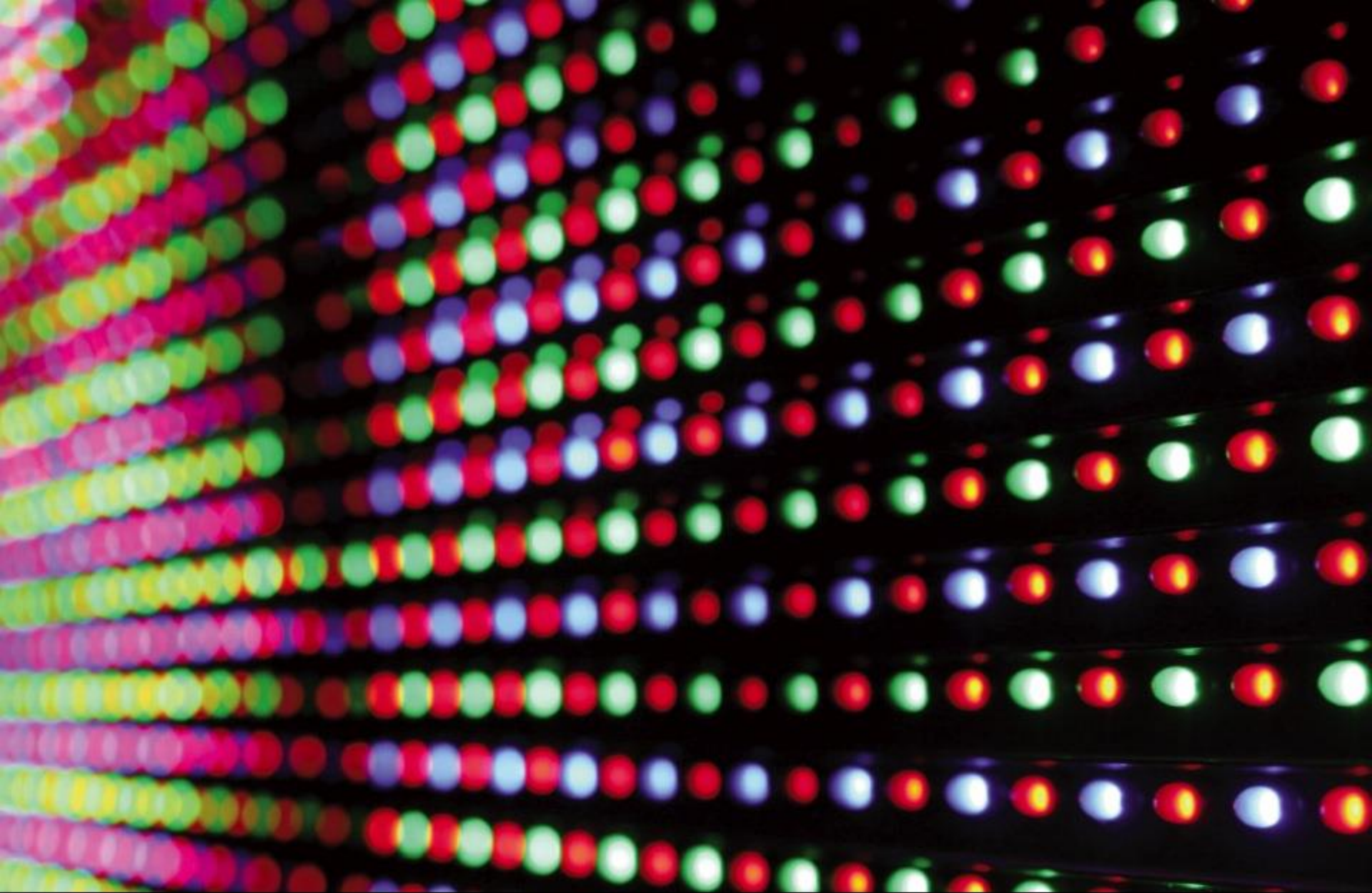
To screen is both to present and to conceal. But the image does more than simply conceal, or present: it may direct our attention, substitute one idea for another and overlay our perceptions and thoughts with emotions and desires that bypass critical reason.



Focusing on the LED screen itself, the project connected the mechanics of seeing to the technology of public spectacle. Each Light Emitting Diode functions like a pixel, a fragment of light that corresponds to the individual receptor cells in the retina of the human eye.



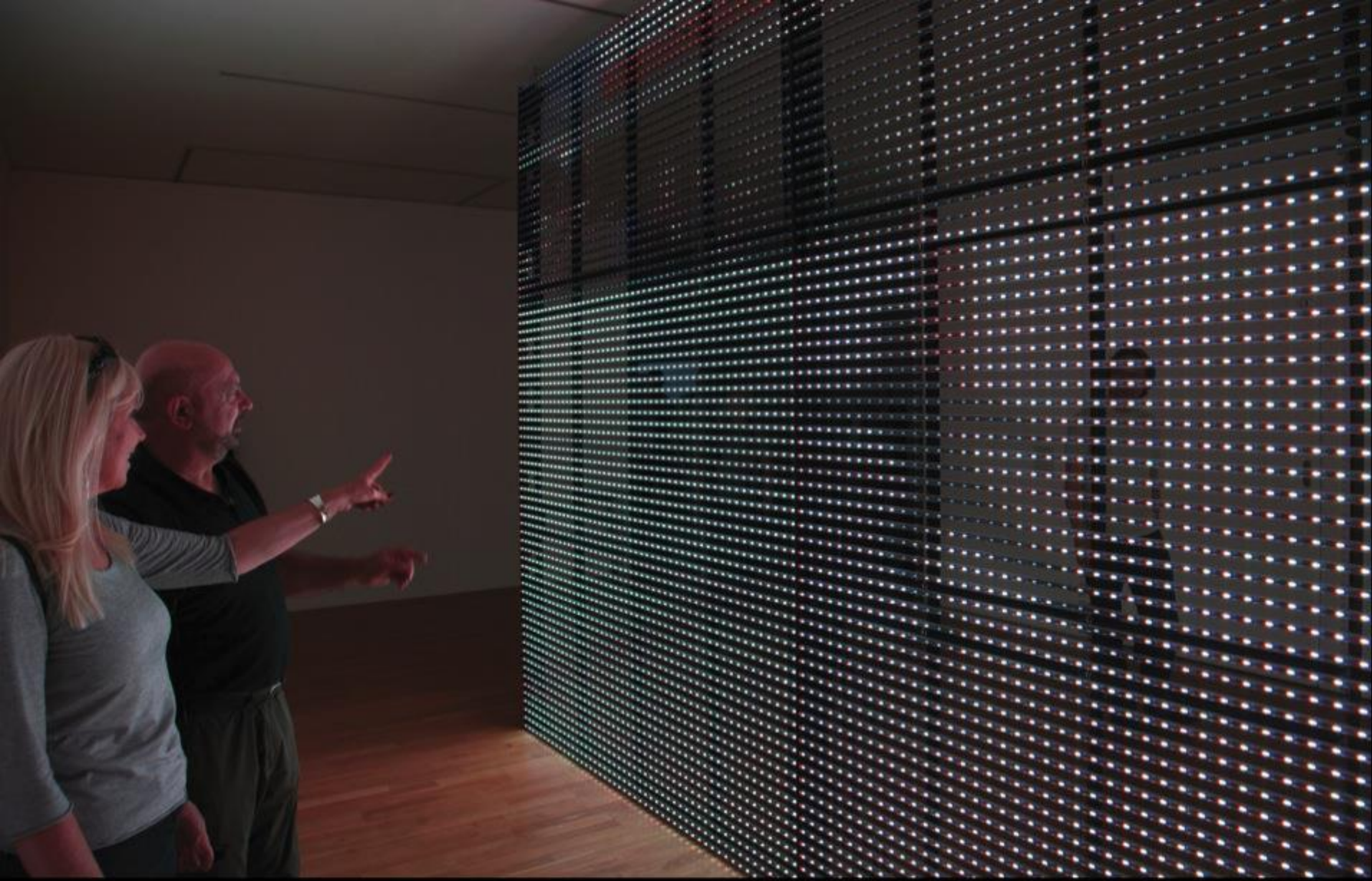
LED screens apply the phenomenon of additive colour. The 'RGB' of an image on a screen refers to the red, green and blue light that merge to create the sensation of white light.



Close to, the screen we used for the installation is experienced as a technological grid of pulsing, coloured lights



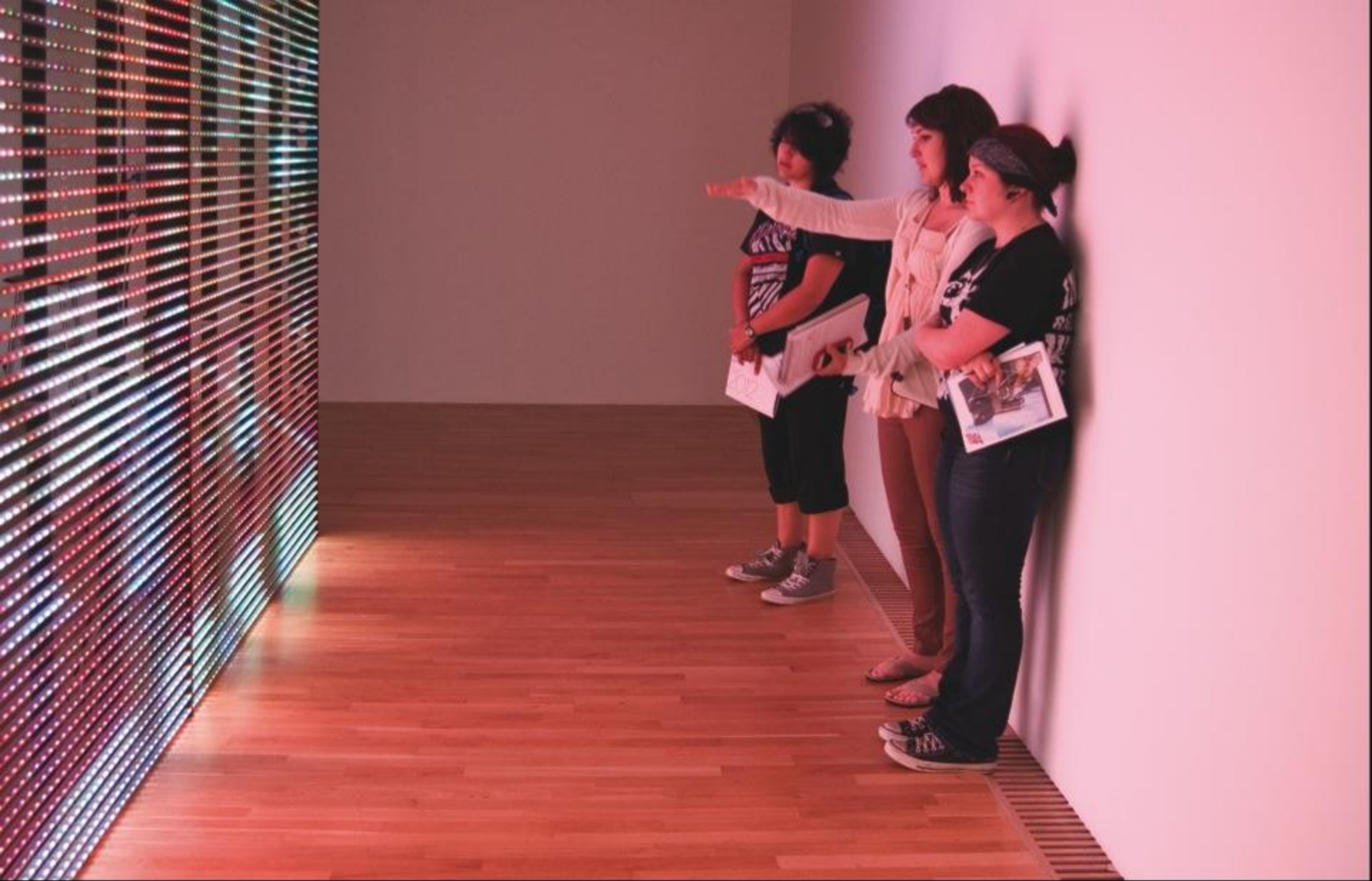
Further back, the points of light merge to become recognizable as an image. Between the image and the screen is a zone that corresponds to the liminal space in art between abstraction and figuration, and in science between perception and cognition.



The work invites viewers to shift their attention between the illusory transparency of the image and the actual transparency of the screen.



The experience keeps changing, depending on where you stand, and what you choose to focus on. Moving around the installation, you can take a range of subject positions, including spectator, observer and performer.



By providing an experience of vision as physically embodied, our aim was to engage people not as passive spectators, but active participants in the creation of meaning.



In September 2013 *The White Bear Effect* was exhibited at The White Building in Hackney, London, directly opposite the perimeter security fence of the Olympic Park.