

# METRO PICTURES

Moss, Hilary. "Inside Tony Oursler's House of ESP Cards (Among Other Ephemera)," *T - The New York Times Style Magazine blog* (June 9, 2015).

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"Sorry — this place is a total wreck," says the video artist Tony Oursler of his Manhattan home and studio, which is in a constant state of precariousness: Touch one thing and three more take a tumble. "But that's the fun of it! You're in the midst of moviemaking magic," he continues, and it's true. Ahead of the international photography festival Les Rencontres d'Arles, the sets and props for his upcoming immersive 3D film occupy part of the building's first floor and a model theater fills the rest. (The basement serves as an editing room for Oursler and his team.)

While the first floor is "redecorated" depending on the task at hand, the upstairs of the edifice he purchased in the late '90s contains many of the doodads included in the 600-page book, "Imponderable: The Archives of Tony Oursler," to be released in Arles next month. Boxes labeled "UFO," "Krampus/Demon/Satan/Theosophy," "Poltergeist/ESP/Irwin Moon/Flat World/Pseudoscience/DNA/Wilhelm Reich/Robert Cornish," and so on, pack a second-floor closet — opposite a Ping-Pong table and glass panes that overlook his Lower East Side neighborhood, which he calls a "hidden gem." In anticipation of his Arles outing (covered in T's annual Beauty issue), Oursler took T on a tour of his gorgeously eccentric space.



Seated at his dining room table inside his Lower East Side space, Tony Oursler skims a book of "psychedelic nun art" by Corita Kent. On the left is a photograph of his son, Jack, at 1 ½ years old by Adam Fuss, and on the right, a monitor by Nam June Paik. A bust of Edgar Allan Poe that belonged to Oursler's grandfather Fulton, a sculpture made from barbed wire and a figurine of the New Orleans Saints' quarterback Drew Brees mingle on the windowsill. "My interest in sports as an adult came from having a kid and thinking that you need some sort of normal activity to share," Oursler says.

519 W 24TH ST NEW YORK, NY 10011 T 212 206 7100 F 212 337 0070  
WWW.METROPICTURES.COM GALLERY@METROPICTURES.COM



Oursler's building began as an Irish tenement, then housing for Polish Jews and, later, a place for them to worship and study. "There's so much history here," he says. "It has character to it."



"I started collecting because in the mid-'90s, I started thinking about the history of multimedia art — being a video artist or multimedia artist, I felt like there wasn't an art history for it," Oursler explains. "At a certain point, I thought, 'How did I get here?' I made this timeline and picked up more and more stuff, some of it for specific projects and some for pleasure and amusement." Here, a photograph of Oursler's first-floor studio that contains the props featured in his immersive 3D film for *Les Rencontres d'Arles*.



Oursler stands inside a much smaller model of the screen arrangement that will be installed for *Les Rencontres d'Arles*. Citing his script's didactic elements — and long shots, medium shots and close-ups — he notes that the film is "a return to narrative." At right, an actor plays Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "a big promoter of mystical experimentation, and that's ironic because his Sherlock Holmes was supposed to be this scientific, rationalist guy and Arthur Conan Doyle believed in fairies and ghosts."



In the center of this display, a voodoo doll; at left, an illustration that Oursler received from a relative of Gerald Light — “he told me this story, that according to Gerald, these aliens came to earth and contacted the top politicians and religious figures and the smartest scientists and Gerald was also invited, and this is one of the alien beings he met.” Does Oursler subscribe to all of this? “It’s funny, because if you say to someone, ‘Do you believe in UFOs?’ Well, what is a UFO? An unidentified flying object, so, of course, I believe in unidentified flying objects. I believe that there’s probably other life forms in the universe — Stephen Hawking believes that, too — but to answer you as to whether I believe in this character: No, I can’t even say I know who this character is.”



“I like having my home and workspace under one roof because I can work when I want — in the middle of the night or early in the morning — and I can easily detach from it,” Oursler says. Here, his kitchen on the building’s second floor.



“When Jack was born, I took down some of my stuff — I had a Kenneth Anger Satanic motorcycle gang photograph that I thought I better put away — and I kept him out of the studio when I was doing big blobs with eyeballs on them,” Oursler says of his son, now 11. “Kids have fairly wide parameters; if you look at all of the video games they play, they see all sorts of weird stuff.”



Another view of the second floor, where Oursler and his family initially resided. “We eventually fixed upstairs, but the top floor was always full of friends who’d decided to move in,” like the video artist Tony Conrad, Oursler recalls.



Oursler, seated in front of a talking mirror of his own creation — and on a chair by the late Richard Artschwager, who designed the elevators at the new Whitney. “Richard was an old friend and professor,” Oursler says, “so I did a trade for this piece. I try to do trades if I can. It’s a nice way to work with other people, but it’s not as easy as it might sound.”



The space is punctuated by groupings that combine Oursler’s and his son’s miscellany. Among the items here: on the top shelf, a Bill Wurtz mobile; on the second shelf, an Odd Fellows crown that Jack would wear when he was little; on the third shelf down, a reliquary containing chips of the bones of several saints. “I had a religious upbringing and went to Catholic school, and I think that’s part of this,” Oursler says. “There’s still aspects of it that I like, but there are obvious problematic elements to it. If you’re brought up atheist, maybe you don’t have this kind of openness.”