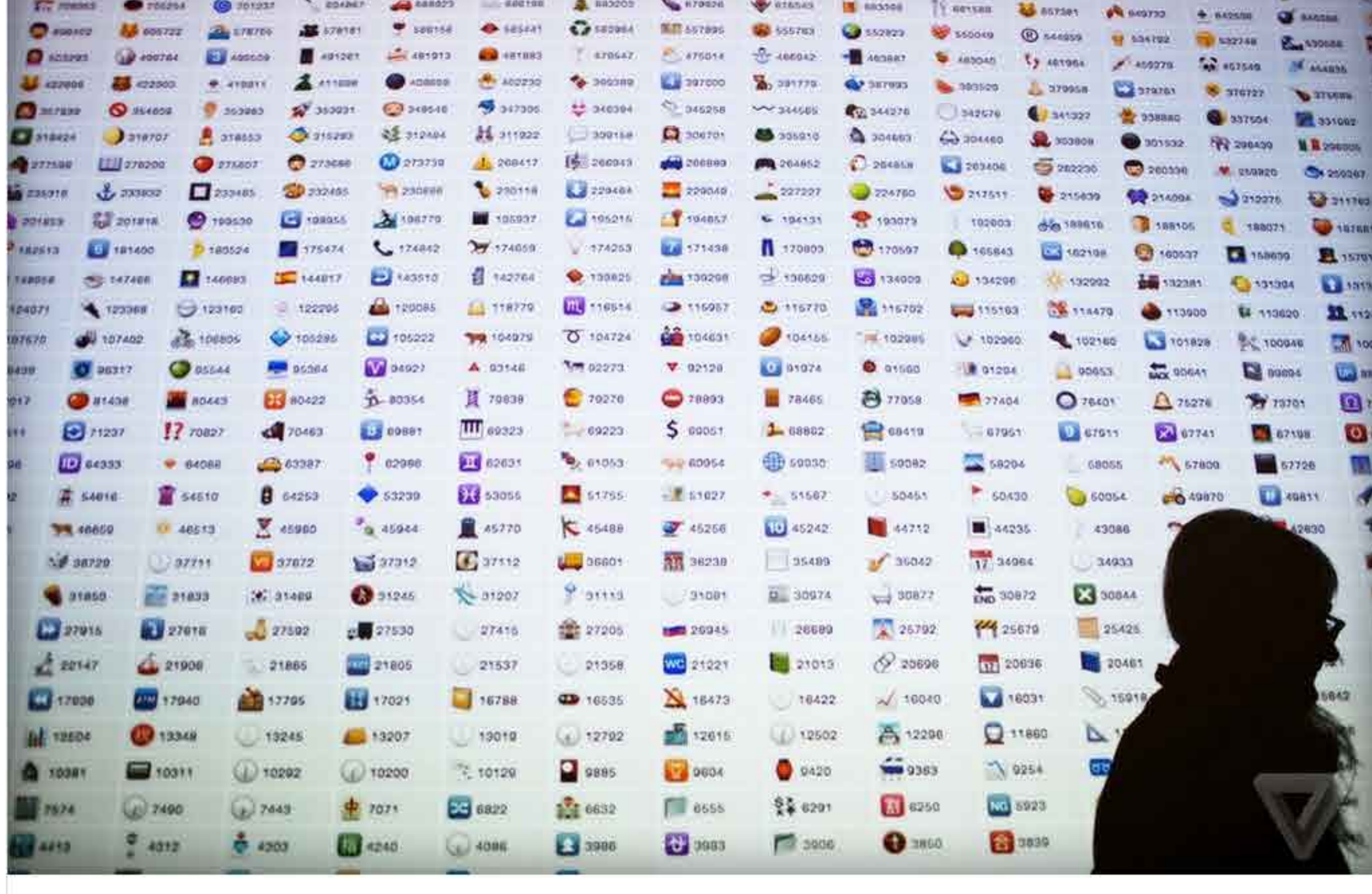


Celebrating emoji: artists get physical with the classic smiley face

By Molly Osberg on December 16, 2013 01:33 pm @molly_o



EmojiTracker.com, which updates the number of emoji being used on Twitter in real-time, projected on a gallery wall.

Back in the '90s, when a young employee at the Japanese mobile company NTT Docomo scratched out a series of 12-pixel-square faces and created the template for what would become "the body language of the internet," he could have never in his wildest dreams imagined something like the *Emoji Art and Design Show*, an event in which almost 30 artists gathered to pay tribute to the tiny, text-sized animators.

Since the Unicode standardization of the adorable pictographs and their subsequent inclusion on iOS keyboards, emoji have become a crucial part of the way we communicate. The symbols, which *NYT* technology reporter Jenna Wortham calls "an ever-changing communal form of cryptography," were used 1.7 billion times on Twitter between July and November of 2013 alone. And their popularity — as *sl* communication aides, flirtatious additions to texts, and fodder for weird removed *art Tumblr*s — is only growing.

Spanning mediums from video to composite posters, the works in the *Emoji Art and Design Show* treated our favorite smiling poo and flying rocket ships with all the ambiguity they deserve. Some artists interpreted them literally: Ramsey Nasser, who recently finished building a programming language in Arabic, created what he calls a "universal programming language" based on the symbols, which he says are far more intuitive for use by an international community. And *Emoji Dick*, a translation of *Moby Dick*, enlisted the crowdsourced labor of Mechanical Turk to transpose each of the classic book's 10,000 sentences. Others took a more sinister route. In one set-up, a collaboration between Emilio Vavarella and Flo Segura, Segura contorted his face into facesmiles of popular emoji, muscle stimulators attached to his face.

Emilio Vavarella

Photography by Michael Shane

Hint: Use the 'h' and 'g' keys to navigate



Based on the wildly popular Tumblr, prints from "EmojiArt" reimagine canonical paintings as, well, a bit more emotive.



Liza Nelson's "IRL: LOL" creates shrines to individual emoji. Says the artist: "They deserve to be observed and worshipped individually."



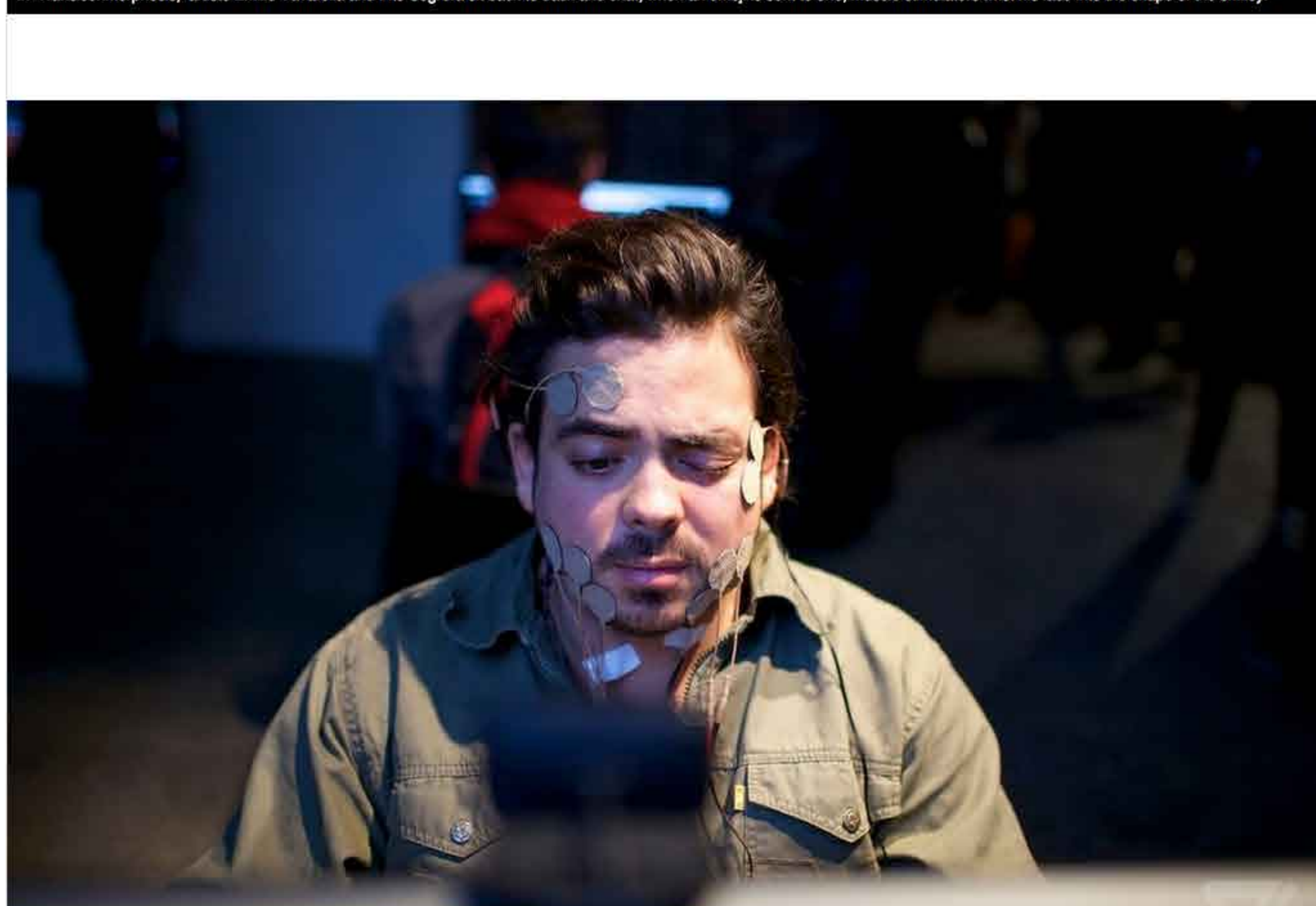
Jeanette Hayes' "Lichtenstein" reimagines a Pop Art classic in what she calls today's version of Ben-Day dots.



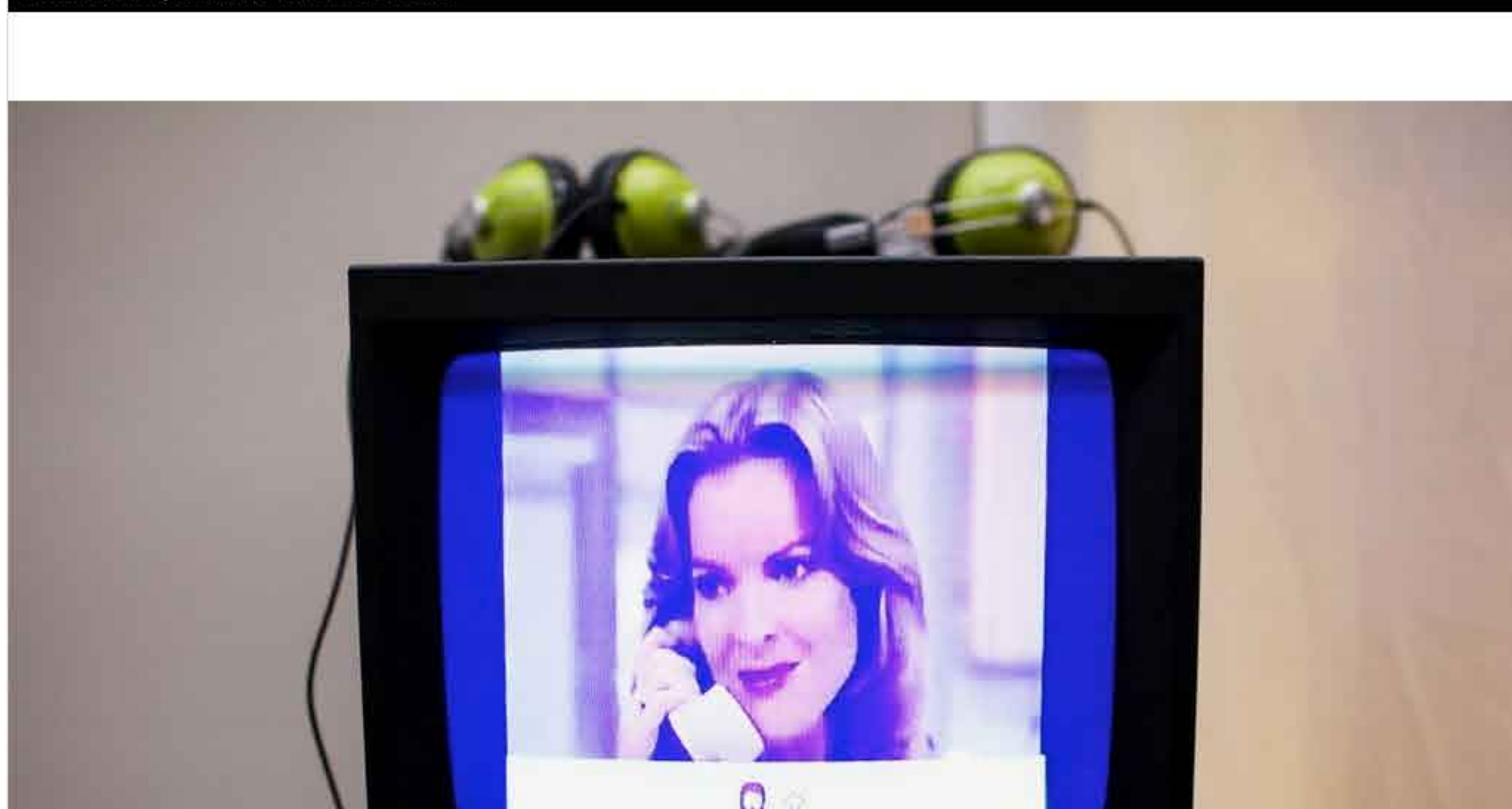
The create "Emoji Dick." Fred Benson outsourced the translation of each one of *Moby Dick*'s 10,000 lines to three separate workers, whose labor he crowdsourced on Mechanical Turk.



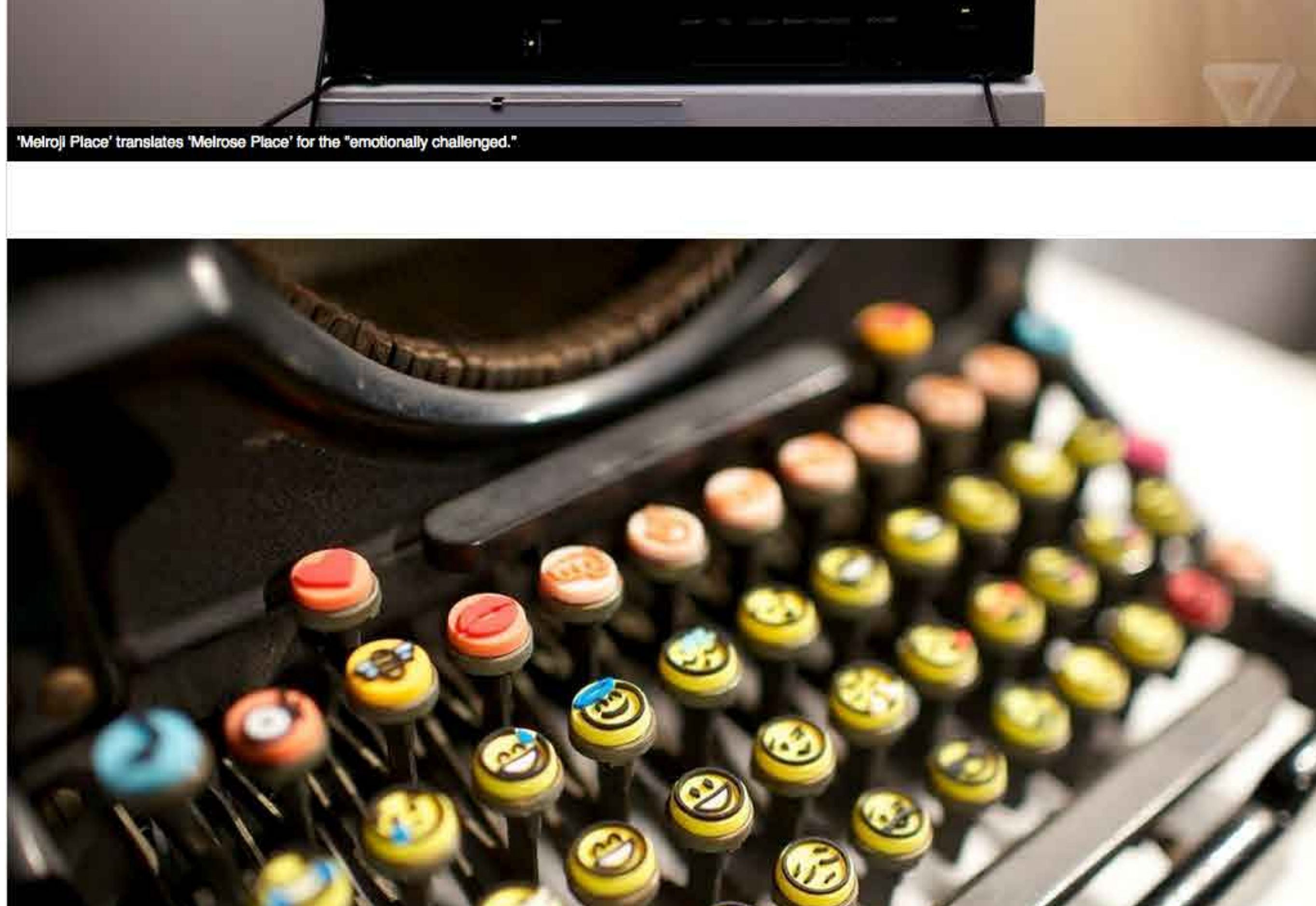
In "Transcomorphosis," artists Emilio Vavarella and Flo Segura sit back to back and chat; when an emoji is sent to one, muscle stimulators twist his face into the shape of the smiley.



"To be honest," says the artist, "the frown hurts a little."



"Memoji Place" translates "Melrose Place" for the "emotionally challenged."



Maya Ben-Ezer's "Shift Key" reimagines the typewriter keyboard as it may appear today.