



Since the camera is always watching, why not snap a surveillance selfie?

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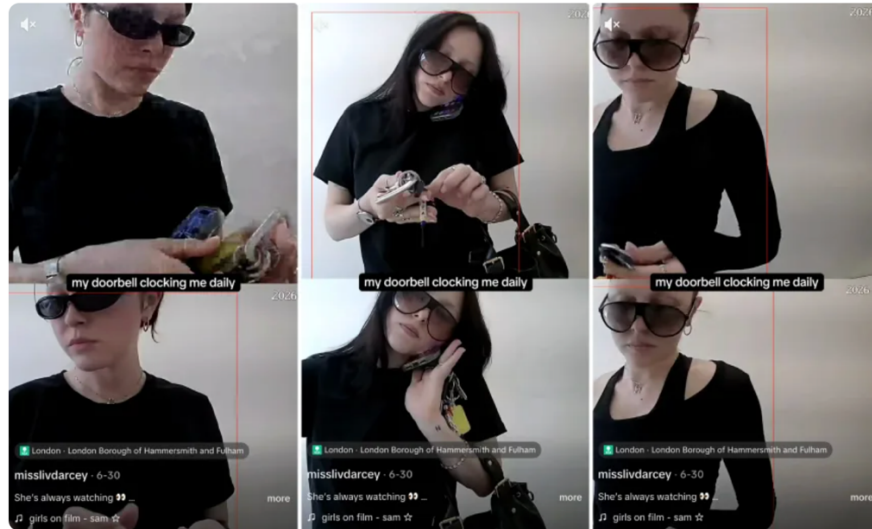
This week, the English model Alexa Chung posted a [carousel to her Instagram page](#) with a series of photos from a security camera mounted outside her home in London. Even through the tiny, grainy fisheye lens, she looks chic and unbothered by the glass eye watching her come and go. In one photo, she wears a green short sleeve blouse from Miu Miu — the label is discernable even in the photo's low resolution — and a taupe skirt with white ballet flats. Even though the camera is pointed out towards the street, the angle of the photo is such that the viewer can peer into her front room and see her welcome mat and floorboards.



It's become a series of sorts for Chung who has posted a few doorbell camera galleries in recent months. It is also, perhaps, a commentary on her life already being surveilled by hungry paparazzi and tabloid photographers. People are always watching her, so why not take a little control?

Surveillance cameras, like selfies, are everywhere, and it was only a matter of time before people started putting the two together. The surveillance selfie has started emerging everywhere: people take photos of themselves being watched by the self-checkout line cameras at Target, and others take self-portraits with their car's backup cameras. A programmer named Morry Kolman even set up [a website that helped people](#) use the publicly available feeds of New York City traffic cameras to take pictures of themselves.

About a fifth of American households have some sort of video-enabled doorbell, which has made those cameras an especially enticing medium for snapshots and fit check videos. Jada Warren-Evans, who works in influencer marketing in Los Angeles, posted a series of videos taken from her Ring camera in December 2025. The shots are unassuming; in one of the clips, she's coming home from running an errand, untroubled by the watchful eye of her doorbell. Warren-Evans said that when she and her roommates host parties, they will post a sign outside their apartment encouraging guests to pose for the camera.



A few weeks ago, Liv Darcey, a London-based content creator, posted a video on TikTok that featured footage taken from her own doorbell camera. “She’s always watching,” Darcey wrote in the caption.

“People might be reading into it a bit too much,” Darcey said in an email. “These posts are using something that already exists in a creative way. I don’t think it’s making surveillance aspirational, it’s more about playing with frames and angles that feel less curated.”

Ruby Lin, a designer and art director in New York, posted a Ring camera selfie series on TikTok back in 2024. Lin had originally purchased a smart doorbell camera after her car was broken into in front of her apartment. “It was about feeling safer, but I still feel really torn about it,” she said.



Lin said she originally got the idea of using her security camera for self-expression by seeing people post selfies from vehicular backup cameras. The perspective was aesthetically interesting, she thought. Like Darcey, Lin paired her video with a sarcastic caption: “daily greetings (and fit checks) for my assigned FBI watcher.”

Behind that joke is a widespread concern that all these surveillance selfies are helping to inure people to being constantly watched by cameras controlled by private companies. Ring, which is owned by Amazon, has sold tens of millions of smart doorbells, but has come under scrutiny for its use by law enforcement. Next-generation surveillance cameras like those made by Flock Safety have also been used by law enforcement to stalk exes. “Surveillance compliance core,” someone wrote in a comment under Chung’s post.

Warren-Evans said that the exchange between privacy and security gave her pause about her own decision to have a camera. “It does make me feel more safe, but I honestly don’t know who has information or access to this thing. I feel some sort of way about it. It’s weird,” she said.



The artist and computer scientist Judith Donath said that the trend is indicative of people only engaging with the half of their technology that is immediately appealing and apparent. “You have the footage and it’s yours and you can do what you want with it,” she said. “But it’s not just your harmless doorbell letting you know what’s going on. That information is moving out into the surveillance state.”

Donath, who founded the Sociable Media Group at MIT Media Lab and is currently a fellow at Harvard University’s Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society, compared the trend to the controversy surrounding Ring’s Super Bowl advertisement which used a family looking for a lost pet to show off how interlinked Ring’s camera networks are. The ad triggered an uproar, with Democratic Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts writing in an open letter to Amazon CEO Andy Jassy that “Amazon inadvertently revealed the serious privacy and civil liberties risks attendant to these types of Artificial Intelligence-enabled image recognition technologies.”

“This technology that has a hidden surveillance side, it’s not just for finding dogs. These selfies don’t really engage with that, and so in some ways it feels a little bit like they are pieces that are about a complicity in putting a happy face on a surveillance culture,” Donath said.

Darcey considers the recent release of Meta’s AI-enabled smart glasses significantly more worrying than her doorbell fit checks as it opens the door to nonconsensual recording of people’s faces and movements. The Meta Glasses were met with immediate backlash on social media after an ad campaign starring Kylie Jenner showed her using the smart glasses to record herself making a smoothie and talking to her staff. Many worried about a celebrity-endorsed campaign creating a mobile surveillance state rife with opportunities for abuse. In February, CNN reported on men using smart glasses to surreptitiously film encounters and create content about picking up women for social media.

“A lot of people wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between a pair of normal sunglasses and Meta Glasses. I think that’s more concerning,” Darcey said.

Privacy advocates like Donath are worried by the connectivity of all these cameras — Ring shares video data with the security company Flock, and Wired reported that Meta embedded facial recognition technology in its new smart glasses. Until relatively recently those systems were overseen solely by humans and not subject to the scale of analysis facilitated by artificial intelligence.

For Donath, that creates a vital issue, and one that these surveillance selfies aren't immune from even if people are just having a bit of fun. "It all turns into more imagery of who is where and doing what and it gets sucked into an unknowing database," she said. Donath said that presumed innocuousness of the trend also helps people feel accustomed to having their faces and movements filmed. "It's not really surveillance, it's just kind of a camera here," she said. "It's interesting then to think about that, then makes it so we don't think about that second, bigger, more sinister database."

The pioneering artist Julia Scher has focused on the different shapes and meanings of surveillance for decades. In a 1994 installation from her decade-long "Surveillance Bed" series, she placed cameras and CCTVs at each corner of a four-poster bed to create a live feed panopticon. The effect is something like a gang of glass-eyed vultures staring down at a piece of carrion.



Julia Scher's "Always There - Surveillance Bed" from 1994 brings the surveillance state into the bedroom. (*Julia Scher*)

"Young people know now what the camera sees. They look back at it. It can be a game," Scher said.

Scher sees the emergent surveillance aesthetic as something layered and self-referential. “It is not only accepting of ‘constantly being watched,’” she said. “It is something much more. It is announcing that they are not being victims of the surveillance state.”

For Lin, part of her goal in posting her surveillance selfies was a winking subversion of the all-seeing state. She understands how much of contemporary technology is dependent on tracking users, but she isn’t paranoid about her privacy and still wants to be able to express herself using different mediums. “I feel like I have this camera now, I might as well use it while also commenting on the fact that we’re all kind of being watched anyway,” she said. “I wanted to turn it back on itself.”