

Trevor
Paglen

The Octopus

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FRANKFURTER
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Wall texts **Trevor Paglen: The Octopus**

Through his work, Trevor Paglen seeks possible metaphors for ubiquitous mass surveillance and data collection and the systems of power connected to these activities. His projects focus in particular on the infrastructure of the United States' surveillance activities, the so-called 'black world' hidden from public view. Using advanced technology and models for gaining collective knowledge, Paglen is able to photograph remote restricted military areas, the secret flight paths of reconnaissance satellites and drones and the topography of transoceanic fiber optic cable networks. Traces of the repercussions of government-mandated control and military surveillance unfailingly remain inscribed in his photographs. Their production thus becomes a political project with aesthetic consequences. Paglen's work is preceded by broad-based research in collaboration with scientists, amateur astronomers, computer scientists and human rights activists, whose documentation Paglen shows in his comprehensive exhibition for the first time.

National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Springfield, Virginia;
National Security Agency, Ft. Meade, Maryland;
National Reconnaissance Office, Chantilly, Virginia (2013)

The triptych of nighttime aerial photographs shows locations from which the American government's covert intelligence agencies operate. The structures' size alludes to the enormous scope of surveillance activities carried out under their control. In his portrayal of National Security Agency (NSA) headquarters in Fort Meade, Paglen deliberately chooses the very same perspective used in a photograph from the 1970s, which the agency still uses as their public image.

Untitled (Reaper Drone) (2013 und 2010)

Traditionally thought of as an extraterritorial space and a symbol of freedom and boundlessness, the sky takes on a different connotation in the photographs of this series. Paglen addresses the sky as a politicized space through his depiction of its colonization by surveillance technologies, such as those used in drones, in the service of national authorities.

Everyday Landscape: Sportsflight Airways, Richmor Aviation, Dyncorp, Central Intelligence Agency (1996 – 2006)

The work "Everyday Landscape" is a sustained investigation into a network of aviation companies, private intelligence firms, state officials, and monied interests behind several covert government actions, including aspects of the CIA's rendition program. Culled from several years of research into legal documents coupled with painstaking, paparazi-like photographic work, the piece points towards some of the most violent and secret programs undertaken by the American government. The piece asks questions about the nature of visual evidence, and asks the viewer to question their assumptions about the aesthetics of violence.

Seventeen Letters from the Deep State (2011)

The seventeen documents were made public during a court case between two transportation companies working for the U.S. government. Upon closer inspection, one can see that different signatures have been used under the same name. As a matter of fact, the shipments often have been linked to 'black sites', secret prisons run by the U.S. government. These sites have come to be known through the democratically contested practice of 'extraordinary rendition': the unauthorized detention of individuals and their transfer to places where they are no longer under United States jurisdiction.

Drone vision (2010)

Surveillance technology and drones send data over wide distances and long periods of time to personnel stationed in the U.S. The images are often transmitted without encryption to reduce delays within the system. The source material for Paglen's video work "Drone Vision" was intercepted by a hacker from one of the channels used for these purposes and leaked, thus made available to the public on the Internet.

Reaper Drone (Indian Springs, NV Distance ~ 2 miles) (2010)

Large Hangars and Fuel Storage; Tonopah Test Range, NV; Distance approx. 18 miles; 10:44 am (2005)

The Fence (Lake Kickapoo, Texas) (2010)

A number of military sites are located in remote parts of the U.S., shielded by dozens of miles of restricted areas. They are so inaccessible that there is no standpoint from which one could see them with the naked eye. To produce images of these remote and hidden places, unconventional visual and imaging technologies are necessary. The immense distance between camera and subject, as well as dust particles in the atmosphere and the resulting thermal light refraction, dissolve the boundaries of what can be depicted. The series "Limit Telephotography" includes photographs of landscapes that, using the technology of high-power telescopes, are similar to those resulting from astrophotography. Controlling visibility through military activities is explored here allegorically through the moment of seeing.

They Watch the Moon (2010)

The photograph "They Watch the Moon" was taken by moonlight in the forests of West Virginia using a long time exposure. A communications intercept station is located there that benefits from the so-called 'moonbounce' phenomenon. The station intercepts communications and telemetry signals from all over the world that escape into outer space and are reflected from the moon back to earth. For this purpose, a National Radio Quiet Zone of 34,000 square kilometers has been established, within which radio broadcasts and Internet connections have been almost completely prohibited.

USA 193 Near Alioth (Code Name Unknown) Next-Generation Reconnaissance Satellite Shot Down by Navy in February 2008 (2007)

KEYHOLE IMPROVED CRYSTAL from Glacier Point (Optical Reconnaissance Satellite; USA 186) (2008)

KEYHOLE 12-3 (IMPROVED CRYSTAL) Optical Reconnaissance Satellite Near Scorpio (USA 129) (2007)

The project "The Other Night Sky" makes classified American satellites visible through the use of telescopes and large format cameras. At the work's core lie observational data collected by an international network of amateur satellite observers and used to calculate the satellites' positions and the timing of their orbits in the sky. Through its appeal to a specialized and critical formation of civil society, the project utilizes the power of collective research.

NSA-Tapped Fiber Optic Cable Landing Site, Norden, Germany (2015)

NSA-Tapped Fiber Optic Cable Landing Site, Mastic Beach, New York, United States (2015)

Paglen deals with the materiality of the Internet and the massive data monitoring occurring over its channels. While a metaphor like 'cloud' suggests that the Internet is a ubiquitous entity without place, it nonetheless requires a real and physical infrastructure. The photographs of coastlines point to the places where undersea cables connecting the European and American continents meet the mainland and are tapped by the NSA for the purpose of surveillance. Maritime maps visualize the locations of fiber optic cables to prevent ships from colliding with them. The works are supplemented by NSA documents from the archives of Edward Snowden, corporate documents and photography of the sites.

Autonomy Cube (2014)

The "Autonomy Cube" is a sculpture that Trevor Paglen developed in cooperation with Internet activist Jacob Appelbaum. It contains a number of mainboards connected to the Internet that generate a freely accessible WiFi hotspot. Visitors can use the network to surf the Internet. The sculpture routes all data streams to 'Tor', an anonymity network that hides connection data among those of other users on the network and is sustained by a global network of thousands of voluntarily operated servers. The "Autonomy Cube" itself becomes a relay within the network that helps other users around the world render their Internet usage anonymous. The sculpture, the Kunstverein, and the visitors thus become part of a privacy-oriented and voluntarily operated Internet infrastructure.

Eagle-Eye Photo Contest: Landschaften der Überwachung

As part of the exhibition, Trevor Paglen and the Frankfurter Kunstverein initiated the Eagle-Eye Photo Contest. During the past few years the documents, reports and analyses made public by Edward Snowden among others have made the extent of mass surveillance known. Still, we lack the imagery and metaphors that would help visualize the individual and societal repercussions of omnipresent mass surveillance. Contestants were encouraged to make use of the principle of 'Panoramafreiheit' that exists in Germany. The exemption clause in copyright law allows that which can be seen without aid in the public sphere to be photographed. The resulting "Landscapes of Surveillance" have been considered by a jury including Trevor Paglen, Franziska Nori (Director, Frankfurter Kunstverein), Ditmar Schädel (Chairman of the German Photographic Association DGPh), Nils Bremer (Editor-in-Chief of Journal Frankfurt) and Luminita Sabu (Former Head of the DZ Bank Art Collection and Spokesperson for the RAY Photography Project). The photographs selected by the jury will be on view in the exhibition and will be published in Journal Frankfurt. Additionally all entries, together with their corresponding research, will be collected in a dossier and put on display.

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