

# METRO PICTURES

Schwendener, Martha. "Trevor Paglen," *The New York Times* (October 8, 2015): C23.

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What does a world under surveillance look like? The Cold War version had spies, information theory and classified documents. The current one fetishizes remoteness and invisibility — satellites in the atmosphere, untouchable drones and transmission cables hidden underwater. Trevor Paglen's work might be described as making these covert phenomena visible.

Mr. Paglen, who holds a Ph.D. in experimental geography, worked as a cinematographer on "Citizenfour" (2014), Laura Poitras's Oscar-winning documentary on the National Security Agency whistle-blower Edward J. Snowden. Mr. Paglen has photographed and written about drones, military black sites and satellites. Here he focuses on the underwater communications cables that the agency has been accused of tapping.

One of the first items in this show — a kind of artwork cum information display — includes a 1956 Western Electric magazine advertisement announcing an underwater cable designed for the United States Air Force that stretched from Cape Canaveral, Fla., to Puerto Rico and provided an "instant, secret, weatherproof way of transmitting" information. In front of the ad is a miniature model of the U.S.S. Jimmy Carter, a submarine that has used tapping devices on underwater cables.

Elsewhere in this exhibition are photographs Mr. Paglen took of underwater cables in the Bahamas and the Caribbean Sea; collages made with nautical charts revealing cables off the coast of New York and California; and a plexiglass "Autonomy Cube" (all works are from 2015), created with Jacob Appelbaum, a digital civil rights activist, which is connected to a Tor network that allows anonymous communication. "Eighty Nine Landscapes" is a beautiful video diptych of landscapes — some of Mr. Paglen's outtakes from "Citizenfour" — that look innocuous but are actually military and intelligence sites.

As art, the work can seem a little retrograde. The photos borrow largely from 1980s and '90s photographers like Andreas Gursky and Catherine Opie and the video's soundtrack suffers from Hollywood bombast: All it needs is a voice-over commanding viewers to "Be afraid. Be very afraid." Yet few artists are using such a platform to question the governmental uses of technology and how these affect policy, geopolitics and our daily lives. In his second exhibition at Metro Pictures, a gallery founded to showcase '70s and '80s Pictures Artists, who examined the nature and effects of mass media images, Mr. Paglen represents a new kind of pictures artist, working with captivating but incendiary images in a way that can truly be called critical.

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