

flows more freely than ever, faster than ever, across national and social borders; secrets are harder and harder to protect. And yet we live in a daunting climate of secrecy in the present moment, in response to increasingly complicated political and social circumstances. This statement necessarily simplifies the complexity of our global reality—from homeland security and domestic terrorism to foreign wars, and the network of global capitalism that affects the politics of every country in the world (and the relation between them). In light of all this complexity, certainly there are instances where secrecy is reasonable, justifiable, even necessary; but the politics of secrecy in the United States have fundamentally reshaped contemporary notions of democracy and federal law. Paglen's work channels growing frustration and suspicion of a great percentage of the American (and international) public, for whom the secrecy in question also seems to protect the government against accusations of arguably illegal and morally and ethically compromised activities.

Paglen's "other night sky" is like a shadow, reminding us of these recent modifications to democratic society, the culture of government secrecy, that have taken us an uneasy distance from the foundations of democracy upon which this country was built. And so, both in location and intent, it echoes the early scientific work of empiricists such as Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton, who hundreds of years ago looked to observable phenomena like the stars and planets in a quest for truth in the face of authoritarian institutions. The connections between the heavens and politics are hardly new territory; Galileo's invention of the telescope was contemporaneous to the Reformation, which marked a rise in literacy as people were encouraged to read and interpret the Bible directly rather than relying on the subjective interpretations of their clergy. And the existence of technologies like the telescope, which were both possible to build on one's own and relatively inexpensive to produce, allowed individuals to observe scientific fact for themselves, signaling a new paradigm of scientific, or empirical, knowledge beginning to supplant cultural, or subjective, knowledge. Galileo's explorations into verifiable astronomical fact implicated social and political change outside of a specifically scientific paradigm—the period of the Enlightenment offered us the metaphor of reason as a candle illuminating the darkness of the universe, bringing truth to light and empowering individuals to call for objective governance on the basis of shared and verifiable facts, thus linking empiricism and democracy. Paglen's mapping of the black world represents a similar effort, presenting the visible matter associated with secret programs in an effort to intuit truths about the invisible dark matter of the United States government's clandestine activities. Like Galileo, Paglen looks upwards to the night sky, one of the oldest laboratories of rational thought, seeking answers about secrecy, truth, and democracy in the present moment.



Trevor Paglen: *KEYHOLE 12-3 (IMPROVED CRYSTAL) Near Scorpio (USA 129)*, 2007; C-print; 59 × 47½ in.; courtesy of the artist and Bellwether Gallery, New York.

Trevor Paglen's work will be included in the upcoming exhibitions *The New Normal* and *Experimental Geography*, traveling through Independent Curators International. Previously, his work has been exhibited at Transmediale.o8 Festival, Berlin; The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; Kunstraum Muenchen, Munich; and Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, among other venues. He lectures frequently on his work, at venues including The Center for Advanced Visual Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; and 16 Beaver Group, New York. His work has been featured in numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *Wired*, the *New York Review of Books*, *Modern Painters*, and *Aperture*. His second book, *I Could Tell You but Then You Would Have to Be Destroyed by Me: Emblems from the Pentagon's Black World*, was published this spring, and his third book, *Blank Spots on a Map*, is forthcoming in early 2009. Paglen received his M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and his Ph.D. in geography from UC Berkeley. Paglen lives and works in Berkeley.

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Artist's Talk

Sunday, June 1, 3 p.m.
Museum Theater
Reception follows

IN THE MUSEUM STORE

I Could Tell You but Then You Would Have to Be Destroyed by Me: Emblems from the Pentagon's Black World, by Trevor Paglen. \$22.95, hardcover.

Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA's Rendition Flights, by Trevor Paglen and A. C. Thompson. \$23, hardcover.

An Atlas of Radical Cartography, edited by Lize Mogel and Alexis Bhagat. \$30, slipcased.

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TREVOR PAGLEN: THE OTHER NIGHT SKY

MATRIX 225 JUNE 1 — SEPTEMBER 14, 2008
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM AND PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

FRONT Trevor Paglen: *Four Geostationary Satellites Above the Sierra Nevada*, 2007; C-print; 47½ × 59 in.; courtesy of the artist and Bellwether Gallery, New York.

Photography is an act of concentrated seeing, and by extension an act of knowing. Its origins are intrinsically linked to the idea of the “document,” although our understanding of both the uses and abuses of photography has expanded over the years as its possibilities for recording image and event have been debated and manipulated. Trevor Paglen is interested in the idea of photography as a kind of truth-telling, but his pictures, with their blurry subjects and barely discernible detail, often stop short of documentation. Paglen’s nearly constant subject is the “black world” of the United States government, a catchall phrase encompassing various secret military and intelligence activities. Whether capturing secret military bases from the edge of public accessibility or imaging spy satellites in the heavens from earth, Paglen’s photographs embody the limits of visibility, imposed both by the realities of physical distance and by informational obfuscation, that keep us as citizens from seeing and knowing these subjects on our own.

Paglen’s practice as an artist is informed by his work as an experimental geographer; he recently completed his Ph.D. in geography at UC Berkeley. His research cumulatively maps the network of sites, individuals, budget allocations, technology, and activities of the black world—parsing the federal budget to discover through deduction the fiscal scope of unspecified black projects; applying geospatial intelligence to uncover and document clandestine sites, such as the Salt Pit in Kabul, Afghanistan, location of questionable activities relative to CIA interrogation of assumed terrorists; cross-referencing flight manifests and staking out obscure air bases to visualize the network of “private” planes used to disappear suspects in the CIA’s extraordinary rendition program; or trekking to the edges of secret military bases, primarily in the Southwest, and employing high-powered astrophotography techniques to image them from a great distance.

Seeing with one’s own eyes—viscerally experiencing—locations that are actively hidden from public view is an important exercise in Paglen’s geospatial mapping, verifying their existence and, in certain cases, establishing a record of activities. In

his series *Limit Telephotography*, the photographs he makes of classified sites such as the Tonopah Test Range in Nevada and Dugway Proving Ground, a chemical and biological weapons testing ground in Utah, prove little but allude to much. With these photographs, Paglen channels a history of landscape photography that has drawn artists to the vastness of the American frontier, primarily in the Western states of Nevada, Utah, and California. The unspoiled and supposedly empty landscape offered a metaphor for American manifest destiny and freedom (of course the native populations who previously occupied these lands would disagree). These lands still appear largely empty on maps, but in reality huge swaths have been historically and are currently purposed in the pursuit of American manifest destiny around the globe—for clandestine activities such as bomb tests, chemical warfare, stealth flight training, and other industries of war. Paglen is drawn to this contemporary frontier between natural land and militarized land, trekking to the edges of government-protected military bases to photograph them from as close as a regular citizen can get—be it eighteen, forty, or in some cases sixty miles away. Even with this kind of spatial buffer, Paglen endeavors to see as much as possible, availing himself of telescopes and other astrophotography technologies to enhance his viewing and his image-making. The distance between Paglen and his visual targets operates to blur, obscure, and obfuscate, but for all its investigatory intent, Paglen’s *Limit Telephotography* series is as much about what can be seen as what cannot be seen. The space between him and these objects of secrecy is equally the subject, embodied in the photographs in the form of atmospheric blurring or light pollution caused by the circumstances of the photographs’ making, that render visible the “empty” space between him and his targets.



LEFT Trevor Paglen: *Large Hangars and Fuel Storage/Tonopah Test Range, NV/Distance ~18 miles/10:44 am*, 2005; C-print; edition of 5, 1 AP; 30 × 36 in.; courtesy of the artist and Bellwether Gallery, New York.



RIGHT Trevor Paglen: *Control Tower/Cactus Flat, NV/11:55 a.m./Distance ~ 20 miles*; 2006; C-print; edition of 5, 1 AP; 30 × 36 in.; courtesy of the artist and Bellwether Gallery, New York.



Trevor Paglen: *KEYHOLE 12-4 (ADVANCED CRYSTAL) in Milky Way (USA 161)*, 2007; C-print; 23⅞ × 27⅞ in.; courtesy of the artist and Bellwether Gallery, New York.

The night sky is another kind of landscape; sometimes in images it appears above land, but mostly it appears in its own infinite vastness. It is one place humans can turn to contemplate ideas like infinity, as we look and literally see no end to it, no shape of space itself, only the map-like formations of stars and planets imprinted in our field of vision. Space, the so-called “final frontier,” is another site of emptiness to be filled with human destiny, from ancient inscriptions of mythic gods and their morality tales, to space explorations in their quest to both discover existing life in and promote the immigration of humans to otherworldly habitations. Much like the desert, which cloaks spaces and attendant activities of the military-industrial complex, the heavens shelter reconnaissance technologies, continuously orbiting in order to further covert activities on land. In his latest project, Paglen turns his telescope and camera to the cosmos to explore the proliferation of such secret satellites. He refers to these man-made constellations of audio and visual equipment as “the other night sky,” and works with data compiled by amateur astronomers and hobbyist satellite observers to track their movements. In the vastness of the cosmos, this physical manifestation of the black world hides in

plain sight, visible even with the naked eye. Paglen photographs barely perceptible traces of these vessels amidst vast star fields, in this way inserting a layer of human intervention into familiar celestial visualizations. The multimedia installation at the center of the exhibition *The Other Night Sky* gestures toward the popular presentation of scientific knowledge in space centers and natural history museums by offering a large-scale globe animated with 189 currently orbiting satellites. Their orbits are traced via complex algorithmic analyses of data. The density of satellites, each represented by a point of light, is surprising, their coverage of the globe nearly complete. But the evidentiary function of the work is thwarted—although photographs are named for depicted satellites, faint streaks verify their existence, and the projections track their real-time movements, there is no information to glean from the images about the satellites themselves or their particular roles. And so again Paglen points us to the physical manifestations of the black world, while the images themselves embody the impossibility of translating such an act of seeing into an act of understanding.

An interesting metaphor for the disconnect between visibility and apprehension can be found in the astrophysical concept of dark matter, a hypothetical form of matter whose presence is known not through its own visibility, but only indirectly by its interaction with observable astronomical phenomena such as stars and galaxies. Scientists hypothesize that 90 to 95 percent of the universe is made up of this “missing” matter, its form unseeable, as it does not reflect light, and therefore unknowable. Whether we are speaking of physical distance or informational obfuscation, Paglen’s tactics get him just close enough to the limits of visibility of the black world, tracing the outlines of this shadowy world by observing the rare moments when its means and methods come to light. The government sectors responsible for these activities don’t want us to see or know of them, but as they interface so often with the physical world, the people, places, and things necessary to their operations surround us. While still unknowable, the vast network of secret government activities connected to the black world can be insinuated by Paglen’s illumination of them. The parallel is uncanny, as likely 90 to 95 percent of this black world remains hidden as well, its intangibility only occasionally threatened by visibility of the kind Paglen’s work occasions. The long tail of operations to sustain a satellite in orbit, or the countless individuals whose activities are tracked, are the dark matter implied by the illumination of a single point of light on the globe Paglen has created for the *MATRIX* gallery.

On earth, the chilling reality of these reconnaissance technologies is that they can image nearly any building, locate individuals across the globe, and record conversations as a means to track and monitor suspicious activities. Their very existence encroaches on other frontiers—the border between public and private, the social pact between government and citizenry, the line between legal and illegal, moral



Trevor Paglen: *KEYHOLE 12-3 (IMPROVED CRYSTAL) Near Scorpio (USA 129)*, 2007; C-print; 59 × 47½ in.; courtesy of the artist and Bellwether Gallery, New York.

and immoral. The United States government has throughout its history kept secrets from its citizenry, ostensibly to protect us, or because secrecy itself is an essential ingredient in the success of particular missions or projects. With the proliferation of media and the democratization of platforms through the Internet, information