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Wolfe, Alexandra. "Photographer Trevor Paglen Turns Surveillance into Art," *WallStreetJournal.com* (June 10, 2016).



Trevor Paglen, 'They Watch the Moon,' (2010).

From satellites to military infrastructure, the artist looks at the ubiquity of government surveillance in an exhibition called 'The Octopus.'

To get a picture of a U.S. military-communications satellite called PAN, photographer Trevor Paglen went to South Africa and set up his camera in the desert for a good view as the craft orbited above the Indian Ocean. The resulting photo, an abstract image of thin streams of white and blue, streaking through a black background, forms part of an exhibition about the ubiquity of government surveillance called "The Octopus."

"I can't imagine anything more beautiful on this planet than looking up at the stars and seeing a kind of artificial star moving through the night sky. But at the same time, you know that that artificial star is secret, and you don't know what it is doing, and perhaps it is doing something you don't agree with," says Mr. Paglen, 41, whose works sell for between \$10,000 and \$50,000.

Earlier this month, he won the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize for the show. (The award is fully funded by a philanthropy of the German stock-exchange operator.) Selections from "The Octopus" will remain on view at the Photographers' Gallery in London through July 3.

The title refers to a logo of an octopus taking hold of a globe, made for a 2013 satellite launch by the U.S. National Reconnaissance Office. The logo went on the rocket that carried the satellites, with the words "Nothing is beyond our reach." Mr. Paglen says, "The exhibition is looking at this allegorical octopus that is consuming the world."

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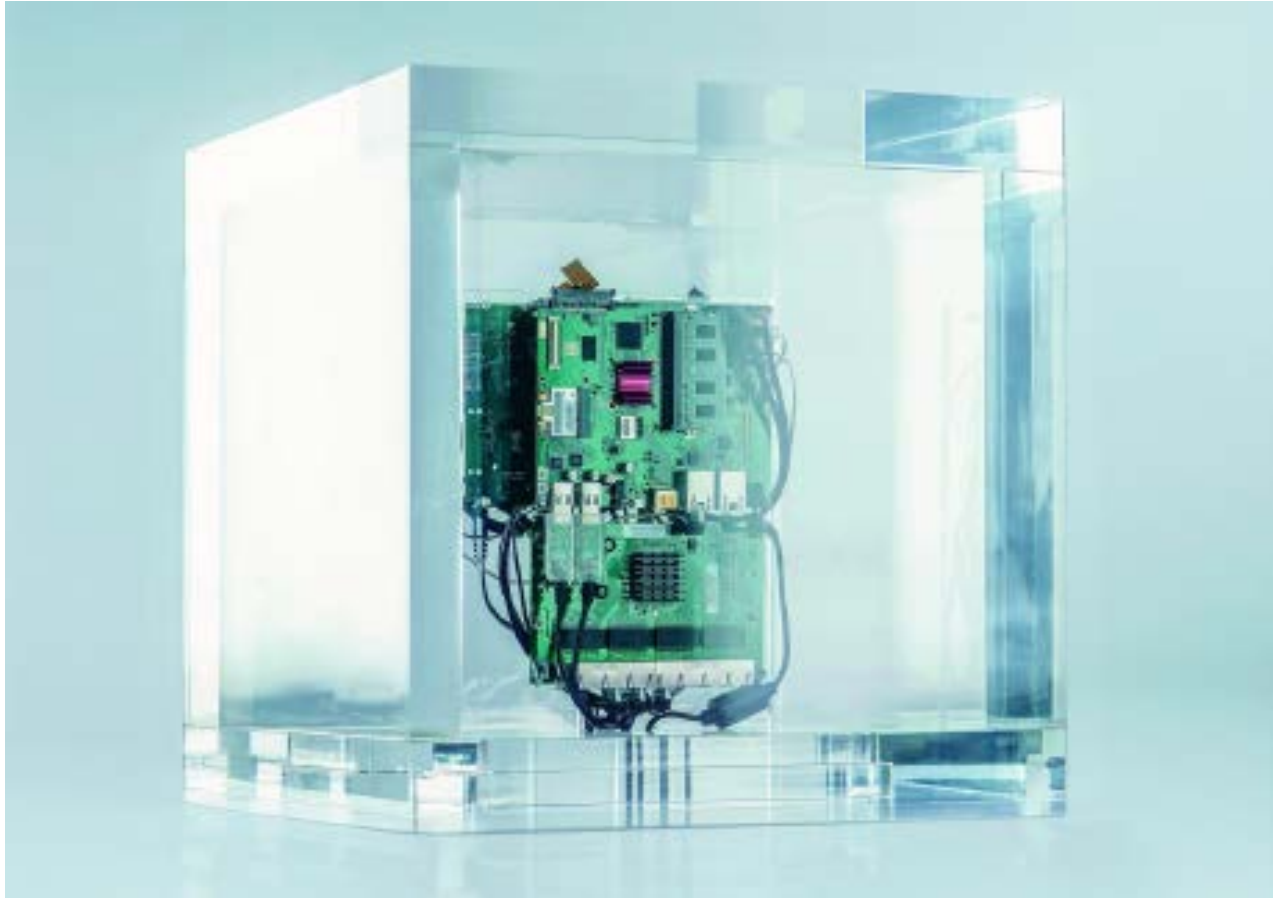


'National Reconnaissance Office, Chantilly, Virginia' (2014) | Mr. Paglen flew over this intelligence agency in a helicopter. The show 'Octopus' is named after its logo, in which an octopus's tentacles reach around the globe.

Born on a military base in Maryland as the son of an Air Force ophthalmologist, Mr. Paglen has been photographing intelligence and military infrastructure—often set in sprawling natural landscapes—since the early 2000s. The facilities include places where large amounts of fiber-optic cable converge and sites he identifies as National Security Agency listening operations. Mr. Paglen says he hopes viewers will wonder, “How has the sky been transformed by drones? How has the ocean been transformed by the fact that over 90% of the world’s information travels in underwater cables?”



'NSA-Tapped Fiber Optic Cable Landing Site, Marseille, France' (2015) | Mr. Paglen came across this landing site while working on the film 'Citizenfour,' a documentary about Edward Snowden. In Marseille, France, this landing site shows a 'choke point' where a huge amount of fiber optic cable converges in one place.



Trevor Paglen/Jacob Appelbaum's 'Autonomy Cube' (2015) | Displayed at the Berlin Biennale, this sculpture allows museum visitors to connect to an internet network that makes internet usage anonymous. By tapping into this network your IP address and search history can't be tracked.

Mr. Paglen's training is in art, but he also has a Ph.D. in experimental geography and often interviews historians and scientists to find and understand surveillance spots. "In today's world we have people with cameras everywhere...but [Mr. Paglen] is showing images we never see," says Art Collection Deutsche Börse managing director and curator Anne-Marie Beckmann, who was one of four jurors who awarded Mr. Paglen the prize.

This month, Mr. Paglen's work is also on view at the Berlin Biennale. Through Sept. 18, his "Autonomy Cube" there lets visitors connect to an anonymous internet network that doesn't track browsing history or web addresses. He thinks it's in keeping with the rest of his work by taking on government-surveillance technology in an artistic way. "I think that a lot of us subconsciously would like to live in a world in which good things were beautiful and bad things were ugly," he says. "But that's not how the world works."