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Landscape is a foundational photographic genre that is informed by history, aesthetics, and ideology. In Nathan Kosta's work, an already fraught subject is rendered ominous when we consider corporeal experience in a vast virtual landscape.

Kosta identifies points of entry to a landscape not shaped by physical landmarks, but by the vast amounts of visual data we happily surrender as social media users. Every clicked link, every "like," every image posted to Facebook or Instagram feeds a ravenous data collection and analysis industry that, in turn, profoundly influences how we order our lives. Kosta's research-based practice centers on imaging technology—smartphones, satellite and traffic cameras, and WiFi security systems—the tools that both connect us to the wider world, and threaten personal privacy.

Mile 737-752, Mexico/U.S. Border (Redacted), a monumental composite image crafted from Google Earth screenshots, coalesces the pros and cons of big data. By turns, it conveys the marvel of digital capture as an aid to seeing and knowing, and reinforces state and corporate surveillance as a discomfiting fact of 21st

century life. By its size, the 12-foot-wide print gestures elegantly to the unfathomable amounts of data constantly aggregated and algorithmically processed. It also takes up early critiques of photography, specifically its affinity to science rather than art, and issues of authorship and creativity as signifiers of human experience. We know what the gaze is on human terms, how it is activated and who it dis/empowers. But, what is to be made of the anonymous, mechanized gaze, and the multiple agendas it serves?

In *Flashlights*, Kosta marshals customer video reviews of various flashlights that were uploaded to Amazon.com. Through these demonstrations, users inadvertently reveal the otherwise private spaces they inhabit, inviting Amazon's sophisticated neural network to analyze and extract data that motivates future purchases. It is an unbroken transactional cycle. The film is heavily laden with metaphor. Without light, we cannot see the multiple actors that benefit from our willful technological ignorance. We need light to expose the threat that comes when power is concentrated incorporate-political-military behemoths that weaponize our data and use it against us.

Nathan Kosta

nathankosta.com



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(1) *Ash Cycle*, 2019, archival pigment print, 42 x 64", (2) *Conduit V*, 2019, archival pigment print, 53 x 42", (3) Still from *Flashlights*, 2019, collected Amazon.com customer review videos for various flashlights, total running time 22 minutes, (4-6) Stills from *To See Here*, 2018, captured surveillance video from unsecured Wi-Fi security cameras, total running time 12 minutes, (7) Detail of *Mile 737 –752, Mexico/U.S. Border* (8) *Mile 737 –752, Mexico/U.S. Border (Redacted)*, 2017, archival pigment print, 42 x 138", (9) *Conduit VI*, 2019, archival pigment print, 57 x 42". (Back Image) *Conduit*, 2018, archival pigment print, 42 x 58"

Essay by Roula Seikaly. Design by Carolina Cervantes

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School of Art
Fine Arts Gallery
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VIRTUAL 2020 MFA Thesis Exhibition
18 June to 28 July, 2020
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