

Trevor Paglen: *You've Just Been Fucked by PSYOPS*

May 12 – July 21, 2023
540 West 25th Street
New York



Trevor Paglen, *Because Physical Wounds Heal...*, 2023 © Trevor Paglen, courtesy Pace Gallery

New York – Pace is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Trevor Paglen at its 540 West 25th Street gallery. On view from May 12 to July 21, this exhibition, titled *You've Just Been Fucked by PSYOPS*, will mark the artist's first solo presentation with Pace in New York. Featuring photography, sculpture, video, and other work, this thematic presentation will examine the enduring effects of military and CIA influence operations on American culture. The show—which coincides with the 2023 editions of Frieze New York and TEFAF New York—will serve as the conceptual nucleus of a multifaceted project by the artist that also includes a Web3 project, set to be released by Art Blocks x Pace Verso on April 5, and related “speculative reality work” launching this spring.

Paglen, whose rigorous practice spans photography, sculpture, video, and installation, is known for his investigations of invisible phenomena and forces, including technological, scientific, socio-political, and historical subjects. Through his work, Paglen has explored artificial intelligence, surveillance, data collection, and militarism in America, meditating on the ways these issues influence modes of perceiving and relating to the natural world, from the landscapes of the American West to the cosmological realms beyond the Earth.

His upcoming exhibition with Pace in New York will bring together five new bodies of work. Issues of subjectivity and deception will course through the show, which will include a selection of photographs of “unids,” or “unidentifieds”—the many hundreds of unknown objects in orbit around the Earth that are monitored and tracked by the US military—captured by the artist using infrared telescopes in remote locations. In his methodical and highly technical process for creating these images, Paglen uses specialized software and hardware to locate and photograph objects in the sky. Atmospheric and mysterious, the resulting skyscapes show the light trails of “unids,” drawing out the abstracted, textural qualities of the cosmos. The look of the artist's photographs is inspired by the work of 19th century artist Gustave Doré, especially his etchings of *Paradise Lost*.

Paglen's presentation will also feature two large-scale sculptures that reflect his longstanding engagement with deception operations. One of the artist's new sculptures on view in the show is inspired by the “challenge coin” used by the US army's Military Information Support Operations (MISO) command, previously known as PSYOP. This

circular, wall-mounted work—composed of steel, bullets, resin, and other materials—depicts a haunting skull at its center surrounded by a Latin translation of a slogan widely used in PSYOP units: “You’ve just been fucked by PSYOPS. Because physical wounds heal.” A second message for viewers to decode on their own is inscribed along an outer ring of the sculpture. This work aligns with Paglen’s interest in the ways that psychological influence operations developed by the US military are utilized in advertising, political campaigns, social media, and artificial intelligence.

The second sculpture in the show is inspired by a class of objects developed by the CIA and US military to conduct unusual surveillance operations in foreign airspace. The shapes of these so-called “palladium” objects echo those of the many UAPs sighted and reported in the last few years. Bearing radar signatures completely different from their physical forms to spoof other countries’ surveillance systems, these objects have been used by the CIA and military to collect electronic signals from foreign radar and surface-to-air missile systems to learn about their frequencies and capabilities. Paglen’s mirror-reflective, freestanding sculpture takes its dynamic, abstract shape from an airborne radar reflector patent dating to 1945.

A new video installation in Paglen’s exhibition spotlights disinformation operative Richard Doty, who worked for Air Force Intelligence in the 1980s. In the film, Doty describes his work targeting UFO researchers as part of military disinformation operations as well as the “real” top-secret extraterrestrial technology program that he says continues to this day. During his time at Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico, Doty supplied fake documents to UFO investigators, purporting to tell the “truth” about government involvement with extraterrestrials. An unreliable narrator who oscillates between skepticism and certainty, Doty discusses the craft of disinformation and reports his encounters with crashed UFOs and alien beings in Paglen’s new film installation.

This exhibition anchors the artist’s new, multi-part, gamified project encompassing an NFT series and speculative reality work in the form of a mainframe computer interface and vinyl LP record, which can be experienced as part of the in-person presentation in New York. Like Paglen’s solo show, these interactive works center on themes of “mind control,” PSYOPS, and disinformation. To learn more about Paglen’s NFT series, please visit pacegallery.com/journal/trevor-paglen-preludes.

Trevor Paglen (b. 1974, Camp Springs, MD) is known for investigating the invisible through the visible, with a wide-reaching approach that’s pans image-making, sculpture, investigative journalism, writing, engineering, and numerous other disciplines. The clandestine and the hidden are revealed in series such as *The Black Sites*, *The Other Night Sky*, and *Limit Telephotography* in which the limits of vision are explored through the histories of landscape photography, abstraction, Romanticism, and technology. Paglen’s investigation into the epistemology of representation can be seen in his *Symbology and Code Names* series which utilize text, video, object, and image to explore questions surrounding military culture and language. Among his chief concerns are learning how to see the historical moment we live in and developing the means to imagine alternative futures.

Paglen has had numerous one-person exhibitions, including at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (2019); Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt (2015); Eli & Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing (2015); Protocinema Istanbul (2013); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands (2013); and Vienna Secession (2010). He has participated in group exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2009, 2010, 2018); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2014); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2011); Tate Modern, London (2010), and numerous other institutions.

In tandem with his museum exhibitions, Paglen is well-known for his site-specific public projects, among them, *The Last Pictures* (2013), an artwork containing a micro-etched disc with one hundred photographs into geostationary orbit around Earth via the communications satellite EchoStar XVI, produced in collaboration with Creative Time and MIT. In 2015, Paglen created *Trinity Cube*, a radioactive public sculpture made from material collected within the exclusion zone in Fukushima, Japan, and from Trinitite, the radioactive material made from molten sand after the testing of the Atomic Bomb at the Trinity Site in New Mexico. In addition, Paglen achieved critical acclaim for his contributed research and cinematography on the Academy Award-winning film *Citizenfour*, directed by Laura Poitras. Paglen is the author of five books and numerous articles on subjects including experimental geography, state secrecy, military symbology, photography, and visuality. His work has been profiled in the *New York Times*,

Vice Magazine, the *New Yorker*, and *Artforum*. In 2017, Paglen was the recipient of the MacArthur Genius award, and in 2014, he received the Electronic Frontier Foundation’s Pioneer Award for his work as a “groundbreaking investigative artist.” Paglen holds a BA from the University of California, Berkeley, an MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago, and a PhD in Geography from the University of California, Berkeley.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program— comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.




Today, Pace has eight locations worldwide, including a European foothold in London and Geneva, and two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace’s long and pioneering history in California includes a gallery in Palo Alto, which was open from 2016 to 2022. Pace’s engagement with Silicon Valley’s technology industry has had a lasting impact on the gallery at a global level, accelerating its initiatives connecting art and technology as well as its work with experiential artists. Pace consolidated its West Coast activity through its flagship in Los Angeles, which opened in 2022. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, as well as an office and viewing room in Beijing.

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