

n.b.k.

Ausstellungen — Diskurs — Publikationsreihe —
Artothek — Video-Forum — Residency-Programm

www.nbk.org

Press release

Berlin, May 19, 2021

Laura Poitras. Circles

In collaboration with Forensic Architecture and Sean Vegezzi

June 18 – August 8, 2021

Curator: Marius Babias

Press preview by appointment only, please contact Michaela Richter. Phone: (030) 280 70 20 or email: presse@nbk.org

Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.) presents *Circles* – the first European solo exhibition by artist and filmmaker Laura Poitras. Her works expose state power by focusing on specific individuals confronting it.

Circles includes six prints from the *ANARCHIST* series (2016) – describing a chain of interception in which drone and satellite footage has been hacked by the GCHQ (British Government Communications Headquarters, the UK's signals intelligence service) which was in turn hacked by the NSA (US National Security Agency, responsible for evaluating and decrypting electronic communications), including images from Israeli armed attack drones, the existence of which Israel has denied. This story that Poitras was instrumental in exposing, represents a signal ecosystem of nationstate hacking, surveillance and violence.

The exhibition premieres two new video installations. *Terror Contagion* (2021–ongoing) an investigation by research agency Forensic Architecture and an accompanying film by Poitras. The work is an in-depth investigation of Israeli cyber-weapons manufacturer NSO Group and the use of its Pegasus malware to target journalists and human rights defenders worldwide. In *Terror Contagion* (2021), Poitras documents Forensic Architecture's ongoing investigation into NSO and interviews journalists and human rights defenders targeted with NSO software.

Edgelands (2021), a collaboration with artist Sean Vegezzi, in which Poitras and Vegezzi continue their explorations of how state apparatuses exert control over civilian life. Beginning in 2020, Poitras and Vegezzi began examining deliberately obscured sites of police, surveillance and carceral infrastructure in New York City, including a covert surveillance unit to monitor political activity in the city, and a giant prison ship off the coast of the South Bronx in the city's East River, on which a medical crisis is unfolding.

n.b.k.

Together, these works expose how the ubiquity of surveillance shapes the material infrastructure of our world, and the way surveillance intersects with physical violence and psychological terror.

Biographical information

Laura Poitras

Laura Poitras (b. 1964 in Boston, lives in New York and Berlin) is a filmmaker, artist, and journalist. She has taught at Yale University, New Haven/Connecticut, and Duke University, Durham/North Carolina, and is a board member of the Freedom of Press Foundation and co-founder of the journalistic documentary platform, *Field of Vision*.

After receiving historic disclosures from then-anonymous NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, Poitras broke numerous news stories on global, illegal mass surveillance by the NSA (responsible for intercepting, decrypting, storing and analyzing the communications of hundreds of millions of people around the world) and documented the events in her film, *CITIZENFOUR* (2014). In 2016, Poitras and her colleagues Henrik Moltke and Cora Currier reported on further disclosures in the Snowden Archive revealing Operation Anarchist, a top-secret program run by GCHQ (the U.K.'s signals intelligence agency): From the top of Troodos Mountains on the island nation of Cyprus, two antennae operate twenty-four hours a day, intercepting signals from satellites, drones and radars in the Mediterranean region.

Poitras's cinematic language is committed to the tradition of *cinéma vérité* as well as the effort to trace structures and conflicts that fundamentally shape political and civil life, but which remain largely hidden. Her work focuses on complex developments that circumvent democratic processes in the United States and other countries in the name of counterterrorism measures. With her award-winning films and journalistic research, Poitras has made significant contributions to a broader understanding of the long-term societal implications of the so-called *War on Terror*. Her reporting on the NSA scandal led to a German parliamentary investigation into the NSA's mass surveillance in Germany.

Laura Poitras's work has deep connections to Berlin. In 2006, her film about the US occupation of Iraq, *My Country, My Country*, premiered at the Berlinale film festival. Soon after, the US government placed Poitras on a terrorist watchlist; for the next six years she was interrogated every time she crossed the U.S. border. In 2012, she relocated to Berlin to protect her sources. She was in Berlin when she was contacted by Edward Snowden. The resulting film *CITIZENFOUR* (2014) won an Academy Award and the German Film Award. Poitras is the recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship (2012), Guggenheim Fellowship (2008), and Peabody Award (2003). Her reporting on the NSA's illegal mass surveillance programs received a George Polk Award (2013) and Pulitzer Prize for Public Service (2014). Recent exhibitions of Poitras's work include: Onsite Gallery, Toronto (2018); Manifesta 12, Palermo (2018); Whitney Museum, New York (solo, 2016); Artists Space, New York (2014); and Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (2010).

n.b.k.

Forensic Architecture

Forensic Architecture (FA, est. 2011 in London) is a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London, investigating human rights violations including violence committed by states, police forces, militaries, and corporations. FA works in partnership with institutions across civil society, from grassroots activists, to legal teams, to international NGOs and media organizations, to carry out investigations with and on behalf of communities and individuals affected by conflict, police brutality, border regimes and environmental violence.

FA's investigations employ pioneering techniques in spatial and architectural analysis, open source investigation, digital modelling, and immersive technologies, as well as documentary research, situated interviews, and academic collaboration. Findings from FA-investigations have been presented in national and international courtrooms, parliamentary inquiries, and exhibitions at some of the world's leading cultural institutions and in international media, as well as in citizen's tribunals and community assemblies.

Sean Vegezzi

Sean Vegezzi (b. 1990 in New York City, lives and works there) is an artist who has examined New York City's topography through image-making, sculpture, writing, and performance art since the September 11th attacks of 2001. Vegezzi's projects tend to take place in spaces of a transitory nature such as municipal infrastructure, construction sites, vacant commercial real estate properties, and under-utilized waterways.

Vegezzi's first book of photographs, *IDWGU*, was published by Fourteen Nineteen in 2012. The images in this early collection articulate how urban redevelopment and counter-terrorism measures have impacted experiences of adolescence. In later works *Scott* (2015), *Joey* (2015), and *Snow Cab* (2016), Vegezzi expanded his practice to include architectural, spatial, and performative interventions on the fabric of the city. His most recent project (*DMYCC*, 2017) took place over the course of 11 years, in which Vegezzi and a collective of friends secretly occupied a disused underground space in Lower Manhattan to build and enact a private recreational space and social forum. Over time, the group found communal purpose in the appropriation of non-inventoried real estate while testing the boundaries of a semi-developed territory. Vegezzi's practice continues to examine the effect that both public and private spaces have on the individual, using the concept of spatial citizenship and its techniques of visibility-making. Vegezzi blends personal experience with narratives of autonomy, privacy, and security, creating work that dreams of alternative models of living in cities, where undefined areas give a semblance of solitude, the limitations of the city-as-bureaucracy are exposed, the all-encompassing damage caused by over-development is reversed, and the mission-creep of security apparatuses into everyday life is undermined, reconfigured, or even inverted by its subjects.

n.b.k.

Yoni Golijov

Yoni Golijov (b. 1990 in Philadelphia, lives and works in New York) is a producer at Academy Award-winning Praxis Films, Laura Poitras's production company. His producing work includes Poitras's short film, *Terror Contagion* (2021); her collaboration with Sean Vegezzi, *Edgelands* (2021); her collaboration with Forensic Architecture, *Triple-Chaser* (2019), which premiered at the Whitney Biennial; her video installation, graduate film clinic, and reporting project *Signal Flow* (2018), exhibited at the Manifesta biennial; and her feature film *Risk* (2016), which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival. He served as studio manager for her 2016 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum, *Astro Noise*, and the accompanying book, *Astro Noise: A Survival Guide for Living Under Total Surveillance*. He has been a consulting creative producer at *Field of Vision*, working across short films, series and the fellowship program in both creative and administrative capacities. He was a co-producer on Jonah Greenstein's debut feature, *Dedalus* (2018), and is co-directing/producing a short film about the recent Los Angeles teachers' strike, *When We Fight*.

Discourse program online

Friday, June 18, 2021, 7 pm (CEST)

Livestream: Artist talk

With Laura Poitras (artist), Eyal Weizman (director, Forensic Architecture), Shourideh Molavi (lead researcher, Forensic Architecture), and Sean Vegezzi (artist), moderated by Heba Y. Amin (artist, professor at Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart).

In English

For further information and images please log in to the site www.nbk.org under "Press".

Username: presse, password: n.b.k.2021

For any query please contact Michaela Richter. Phone: (030) 280 70 20 or email: presse@nbk.org.

The exhibition is funded by
Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg.

medienboard
BerlinBrandenburg

Neuer Berliner Kunstverein is funded
by the LOTTO-Stiftung Berlin.

