

# ARTFORUM

## CRITICS' PICKS

August, 2012

*Image Counter Image*, Haus der Kunst

This exhibition significantly updates a decades-long theoretical reflection on the relationship between the production of knowledge and its visibility. Investigating the past twenty years of visual representation of armed conflicts, the curators suggest that two events in recent history mark the shift in image technologies and the methods with which violence is depicted: the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991, and the September 11 attacks in 2001. The exhibition also proposes that, in contrast to those of the past, contemporary models of image production are rhizomatic, triggered by the development of the Internet and the Web 2.0 browser. The show also carves out a path through this relatively new language of media coverage and art using the terms “image” and “counter-image.”

The exhibited artists focus on a number of aspects of this order, including its means, the relationship between media narratives of traumatic events and individual experiences of these events, and the tension between the invisible and the visible. Alfredo Jaar, in his work *Real Pictures*, 1995–2012, questions the social usefulness of the portrait when deployed in the depiction of atrocities: He presents his photographs of the genocide in Rwanda, taken in 1995, completely concealed inside black boxes. As a result, the viewer is refused the visual experience and is encouraged to embrace the story behind the pictures, which is printed on the containers.



Trevor Paglen, *They Watch the Moon*, 2010, C-print, 36 x 48".

Significant retreat from portrait-focused photography also marks Thomas Ruff's series “Nächte/Nights,” 1992–96, as well as **Trevor Paglen's** extensive topographical atlas of restricted military installations, secret surveillance satellites, and “black spots”—all depicted in the series “Limit Telephotography,” 2005–, and “The Other Night Sky,” 2007–. In exploring deserted landscapes and the notion of the articulable versus the visible, the artist mines poignant sociopolitical issues of today. The exhibition shows that the seemingly uncontrollable production of images and counter-images in contemporary iconography speaks, in fact, to their strength.

— **Sylwia Serafinowicz**