

The word-fragment 'Gooog' stamps Greg Neville's works derived from the virtual globe as emblems of their time. It appears in several of his pictures, a found palindrome, the number of vowels determined by the size of the segment he clips, duplicates and mirrors from the world-sized image in which it originally appeared.

He is one of many contemporary artists whose primary material is Google Earth, an internet-based snapshot of geological, sociological, and architectural time; a matrix of images stitched to make a virtual world.

He treats the images as found objects, stitching them together, upending the usual orientations around a central point. The repetition of the technique is another step in Neville's long-held interest in found images and in automatic processes of generating imagery, whose outcome is only partly directed or predictable.

The matrix irresistibly evokes Persian carpets, and like a magic carpet, we use it to fly above the world through a virtual sky. Looking down, human concerns blur into abstraction, another detail in the landscape.

Roads carry associations in our culture with the promise of the future, the sense that things might be better somewhere else. But Neville's roads lead nowhere, in endless loops, ironically denying the possibility of progress. In conversation, he links this with information decay, of things running down, energy distributed toward a state of equilibrium, entropy. When applied to human endeavours, as it is here, the image is terrifying.

From the ground, towers thrust, but reversing the viewpoint strips them of their value as propaganda. The view from above diminishes all it surveys. The satellite is an eye without discrimination, pitiless. Even the turgid

aspirations of billionaires to claim possession of the sky, like frontier real estate, are reduced to Babel-like hubris; they are futile, flaccid. 'In Praise of Folly' might be this exhibition's subtitle. In this, Neville's work reveals kinship with Andreas Gursky, an artist similarly inclined to view human concerns from a distance, subject to forces beyond our control.

The digital artefacts heightened by the artist emphasise a reading of the world as image, an incomplete one. The best maps, even global positioning systems, describe the landscape imperfectly, as words describe the phenomenal world, with uncertainty. The image breaks when looked at closely enough. The disruptions technically indicate a failure of resolution. In a digital image, this has associations of clarity or sharpness, and when applied to human intentionality, it has the positive echo of resolve. But the double meaning is sourly ironic here. There might be resolve, but the insufficient resolution of the image shows the cracks where reality is imperfectly rendered.

In the light of recent revelations of domestic surveillance programs of unimaginable size and breadth, the notion that we are all being recorded from the sky feels more sinister than it once did. Lethal use of drones is now frequently reported, and the corporations that make them advertise their photographic and media potential. Certainly, there is a malevolent background frequency to Neville's often-beautiful images that we can detect when listening hard enough. There is less distinction now between the lens and the gun than ever.

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# Gooog

