

Eye in the Sky

By Nadine Wasserman

Blane De St. Croix and Danny Goodwin

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One of the most fascinating aspects of the recent assassination in Dubai of a Hamas military leader is that the movements of both victim and hit squad are captured on CCTV. Surveillance tapes both at the airport and in the hotel show the assassins changing disguises and tailing their mark. The videos are both riveting and disturbing. This event, and others such as the recent admission by the Lower Merion School District (in suburban Philadelphia) that they were able to spy on students at home through Web cams in their laptops, makes it manifestly clear that our everyday lives are being taped and photographed while we remain mostly unaware and/or indifferent.

Our paradoxical relationship to surveillance is literally brought close to home in Danny Goodwin's *Tree, Slingerlands, NY*. Viewed from above, the image could relate to a benign Google Earth search or it could represent a target for a drone. Goodwin uses aerial perspective in a number of works as a way to question our technologically mediated culture and as a critique of authoritarian power. He is interested in aspects of intelligence gathering and uses the tools of surveillance and satellite to question the "truth" of an image. Some of his images are grainy while others are crisp, and it is unclear whether they are real or fake. Is that really a bird's eye view of George W. Bush's Crawford ranch or the Tharthar Presidential Palace or Fallujah? Rather than deliver definitive evidence, Goodwin's objective is to insert a kernel of doubt into the viewer's interpretation of what he or she is looking at. If you go to Goodwin's Web site, you will see that his artist's statement begins with an inscription from the foyer of the Central Intelligence Agency headquarters: "And Ye shall know the Truth and the Truth will set you free." His critique is not only of the methods used for intelligence gathering, but of our willingness to accept both the process and the result.

In addition to his aerial views, Goodwin has created another series of photographs that explores surveillance and intelligence by re-creating items that have purportedly been designed and produced by the CIA. One such photograph, *Mercury-Switched Incendiary Device*, is included in this exhibition. The black-and-white photograph shows a tea kettle with its inside exposed to reveal booby-trap explosives inside. This piece relates to his more recent photographs in the exhibition based on improvised explosive devices (IEDs). *Suicide Vest #1*, *Suicide Vest #2*, *Running Shoe Incendiary*, and *Undergarment Incendiary Device #3* are all large format color photographs showing IEDs in crisp color on white background. Made from everyday materials they appear more comical than deadly, more *Pink Panther* than 007.

Blane De St. Croix takes a slightly different approach to addressing the geopolitical landscape. He culls imagery from satellite and photographic documentation as well as from site visits, interviews, and topographical maps to create landscape drawings. Included in this exhibition are a group of delicate ink drawings of embattled territories. Mostly in black and white, these landscapes are sites of contention, such as borders between countries or territories. De St. Croix's landscapes vary in their use of dense, dotted, or loose marks, some contrasted with plenty of white space, others crowding the page. Whereas the view of the distant hills in *North/South Korea Landscapes*, *Looking into the North's Forests* occupies only the bottom half of the page with plenty of white space above, the image in *East Jerusalem Israeli Wall* is a cropped view created by close linear strokes that fill the paper from end to end. Taking his cues from both traditional and non-traditional landscapes, De St. Croix experiments with perspective and technique in order to set an emotional tone. His two studies of Guantanamo are the only ones with some added color. *Gitmo: abandoned camp x-ray, #3* depicts a barbed chain-link fence with hills in the distance, framed by a proscenium of dense green foliage. The other, *Gitmo: abandoned camp x-ray, #4*, shows a fence overgrown with impenetrable aqua-colored greenery. Similar to Goodwin's aerial views, these clearly reference the effects of U.S. policy on both culture and landscape. While his drawings are lovely, De St. Croix is also a sculptor, and the inclusion of a three-dimensional piece in this exhibition would have complemented his drawings nicely.

Goodwin and De St. Croix are both interested in probing the nature of national security. Their work makes us think about borders, spying, and terrorism, but ultimately it gives us room to step away from our fears in order to assess just what it is that makes us feel comfortable and secure.



Seeing is believing? De St. Croix's *Gitmo: abandoned camp x-ray #3* (2009)